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## [Episode 82: Show Me The Money](#)

Host: [Paula Varjack](#) - PV

Guests: [Liv Wynter](#) - LV & [Dan Simpson](#) - DS

Producer: David Turner - DT

### **Introduction:**

**DT:** Hello, this is the Lunar Poetry Podcast. My name is David Turner. Today's episode deals with the 'thorny' and 'sticky' but er... you can't be thorny and sticky at the same time, can you? Anyway, difficult issue - for some - of getting paid as an artist. Whether that be work in institutions, in schools or performing at events. It can always be tricky when you're

quoting your fees, or sending invoices out. Or the worst of all, chasing invoices that haven't been paid.

Today's episode is hosted by the wonderful Paula Varjack whose practice currently or in the last year or so has been heavily involved with talking about how 'we' get paid, how much 'we' should get paid and how transparent 'we' should be in these matters as artists. She's joined by Liv Wynter and Dan Simpson. The plan was to have [Rebecca Atkinson-Lord](#) join us but she couldn't make it and Dan jumped in at the last minute and did a very good job. I'm going to put links to Rebecca's writing because a lot of her writing is very relevant to this discussion.

A big thank you to the [Arts Council \[England\]](#) for making this episode possible. We'll be going into just what role the Arts Council funding played in this episode during the discussion. And thank you to [Spread The Word](#), who really kindly let us use a room for recording in. Paula is going to be performing her show, *Show Me The Money* at [Camden People's Theatre](#) on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of October, 2016. So, hopefully by the time you've listened to this there will still be a chance to get tickets for that if you're able to make it. As always, you can find us on [Facebook](#), Soundcloud and Tumblr at Lunar Poetry Podcasts and on Twitter, [@Silent Tongue](#) and now on [iTunes](#).

I can't remember exactly when I started this project but it was some time in the first week of October in 2014 so this week sees us celebrate our two-year anniversary or birthday. So, I think for the next twelve months we're going to go walking round like a stropky toddler.

And as with last month's discussion about poetry in schools, the writers involved with this episode are all quite keen to keep the discussion going, so if you've got any points to be made about transparency and artists' fees and how honest we should all be with each other, then I think the best place to start is probably either with our Twitter account [@Silent\\_Tongue](#) or to get hold of Paula Varjack on her [Show Me The Money](#) blog or on [Twitter](#). And then depending on how many people want to chime in, we'll work out the best place to centralise that conversation. But do get in touch if you've got anything to say, it's an important conversation. One that as artists we should all be part of. Enjoy the chat.

## Conversation:

**PV:** Hello, you're listening to the Lunar Poetry Podcast and my name is Paula Varjack, I'm the guest host for today's episode. Which I guess we're going to call, *Show Me The Money*, I'm getting a nod from silent David, the genius behind this podcast who invited me here. So, I am joined by two guests, Dan Simpson and Liv Wynter. Say Hello.

**LW:** Hi.

**DS:** Hello.

**PV:** We were meant to... Dan has actually very kindly come in last minute and saved the day because we were meant to have Rebecca Atkinson-Lord, who unfortunately couldn't come today, but because we feel her work has been so relevant to this subject of art and

money we very much encourage you to read some of her writings on the subject which David is going to post alongside a blog and other social media for this podcast. Dan, Liv how would you like to introduce what you do and what you're about as artists.

**LW:** My name is Liv Wynter, I'm a working class, Queer, female writer. I do a lot of work about gender and sexuality but also about class and also about survival. How to survive in the Arts as a woman who is broke.

**DS:** I'm Dan, I'm a middle class sounding, straight, white [laughter]. I label myself as a poet, performer and producer.

**PV:** Great. And I guess I should... So, what am I? I think the easiest answer is that I'm an artist, which is like a really brilliant, like, meaningless term. Though, I quite like the ambiguity of it but I'm an artist working in video, theatre and spoken word and I have spent the last two years of my life investigating the very question that Liv mentioned, which is, how can you be an artist and still survive? That led to me interviewing forty-four people in twelve cities around the country. Some of them were artists, some of them were parents of artists, some of them were programmers and some of them were in funding.

I interviewed a six-year-old little girl who wanted to be a singer, I interviewed a fifty-year-old actress who finally felt stable about her practice two years ago. And, although... It's interesting about that because she said, that's not a reason to be concerned and I'm starting to believe her. But the end of the show resulted in me writing a [manifesto](#) and David said it would be a good idea to open with that, so this is my;

***Manifesto For Artists In A Crumbling Arts Economy:***

**Hustle the system, but not each other. Be open, be honest. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Know your worth. Stand up for yourself. Share resources, create opportunities and galvanise. In order to survive you are going to need a phenomenal amount of self-belief. believe in yourself. Surround yourself with those who believe in you. Support others when they have doubt. Give feedback and criticism... constructively. Look out for one another. There are so many solutions for survival. Talk to those who work differently, know what works for you. Play the long game. Find ways to create and perform and display outside of allocated art spaces. Live in a place that feeds you. Know what you need from that place. If something is missing be part of creating it. But, also be open to settling elsewhere. You don't have to be in London, or even in this country, but if you want to be you need to fight for it and find allies. Find allies. Fight. Speak up when you're spoken over and left out. Speak up for those spoken over and left out. Make those with privilege aware of their privilege. Check your privilege. Share your privilege. Know it can be crushingly hard. Know that it can suddenly change, we all have different access, we all have different abilities, we all have different advantages. Don't judge, but don't be afraid of being judged either.**

**PV:** So now we're going to do... So what I did when I was making the show, is I asked a series of something crazy like, thirty-five questions and reduced it to, I think, about fifteen here, and what I'm going to do is, throw the questions into the room and either Dan or Liv will jump in first. And my first... The first one is always my favourite one which is, if money was a person, a person that you had some kind of relationship with like a partner or a friend or a teacher, what kind of person would that be and how would you describe your relationship?

**LW:** Mine would be like, really over-bearing parent who never lets me do anything remotely fun or exciting. You know, [laughter] that would be mine.

**DS:** I think when you asked me this question, a while back, for the show I think I remember saying they were a kind of casual friend. But like, a quite distant friend that you see maybe a couple of times a year if you're lucky. You have a hard time meeting up with them [laughter]. They're ah... They're a little bit unavailable, you know they're there, you know if you probably really needed them that they'd find you, maybe. I think... I don't know if that's still quite true. It's probably still about right for me.

**PV:** How do you feel about the question, what do you do when you meet people who are not artists?

**LW:** Well, I'm a barmaid so when people ask me what I do, I say I work on a bar. Then if I think that they're interesting I might start talking to them about being an artist as well. But, the thing that pays my rent at the moment is bar work, so I'm a barmaid. So, that's kind of how I feel about it.

**DS:** Yeah, I'm at the stage where poetry is paying my rent so I say that I'm a poet to people. You do get such mixed reactions, normally when I talk to other professionals in, sort of, teaching or the sort of professional class of work, they say, "you can make a living from that?" like a little bit incredulously. You have to kind of break it... It's almost, not like you're quite proving yourself, so you shouldn't feel like you have to. You do feel like you should say, "yeah, you know, just about." And then you kind of break it down into what that really means, which is like teaching in schools or running projects and it's not actually writing or performing that provides your living. It's the kind of admin stuff and the production stuff, and the behind the scenes stuff that kind of works for that so, yeah, there's a little bit of justifying, I think, to certain people. When you speak to other, sort of, poets and other artists it's like, cool. It's like *done*, it's just accepted, it's nice. Yeah, very mixed response though.

**PV:** How much do you feel er... How much do you feel you sort of, rate or judge someone as being a real or professional artist by virtue of whether you get a sense that they make a living from it?

**DS:** I think that to a degree. I'm not saying that you have to make your whole living from art to be a professional, at all. I don't think that's... That is a stupid criteria, but I think, I guess it's two things. It can be money but it's also probably quality and obviously that's pretty subjective. And I know we're gonna talk about quality a little bit later with this new

Arts Council framework weirdness. But, yeah I think to a degree money is important in terms of figuring out... but what does the term professional mean? I know brilliant amateurs who don't earn money from it but are fantastic performers, poets. So, yeah, that was a really rubbish answer.

**LW:** I think I'm interested in ideas of professionalism because I think that the hardest thing about trying to do a career in arts is, how much of your own admin you have to do. How much of your life is consumed by like, arguing with people about invoices and sending fifty emails a day. Applying for things that they're not even going to send you a confirmation that they got your application. All of this stuff takes so much time. That for me is the professional side of my practice and it is part of my practice. Doing business is definitely like fifty percent of my art practice. All of those negotiations, the way in which I, like, speak to certain people or the way in which I word an email. That's totally part of my writing practice entirely.

I think that... It's difficult, we were saying earlier, like, some months I can totally pay my rent and survive just off of my art. Another month I might have nothing, like literally, not a show. You don't know, you don't know when you're going to be up and down so I don't really know whether I can think about professionalism.

I think it's a really Capitalist thing to think about professionalism and money as, like, equalitive [sic] in some way because, like, I know really professional people who spend their whole life living in a squat doing activism but are the most professional, business-minded people I know, because they have to be. So, I don't really know if there can be many lines drawn between money and professionalism.

**DS:** I wish fifty percent of my time was admin! [Laughter] That would be lovely, it's more like ninety percent. That would be nice. So it's weird isn't it? Like ten percent of what I do, fifteen percent, is probably actual art. And then the rest is like you say, funding applications, admin and emails. But I think that is kind of part of it, that's what sort of makes it professional. Like, most jobs don't, I don't know. My partner's a midwife, so like all she does is practice. It's literally called practice. You know, she's practicing midwifery all the time, a hundred percent, she has to write stuff up and that's part of the practice. For me, I see that admin side as part of being a poet.

**LW:** Yeah totally.

**DS:** Yeah, I certainly didn't when I first started, like when you're doing this as a hobby - which is where I think art starts for most of us, or for a lot of us anyway - you do it on the side and it's the passion, that's all. You're just doing it purely for the love of it and you're not thinking about the spreadsheets you're going to have to make later [laughter], you're not thinking about the amazing fifty-word bio you've tightly written that has the best credits and is a little bit cheeky and 'oh my gosh' and all of that sort of stuff. But it kind of becomes part of it when it becomes a job as well as the thing you love doing and it's very much a job.

**PV:** How does it change when it becomes a job? For you guys.

**DS:** I think you get the usual job burnout, which you don't get, I don't think so much when it's just something you do, sort of, on the side of your main thing that gives you money is. So I certainly, definitely get disenchanted with the whole thing, probably more regularly than I would if I was dipping in and out of the open-mic circuit, for example... I think that's OK though.

**LW:** When I first started, I first started performing maybe a year and a half ago, and did, like, my first gig and spoke to my mum about it and was like, "Mum, I'm doing this thing, I've been writing rap, I'm doing this now, it's ridiculous," and she was like, "yeah, it's ridiculous but it's fine," and then she was like, "are you being paid?" and I was like, "well I've only done one show and I haven't been paid," and she was like, "right, what day was it on?" and I was like, "it was a Friday," and she was like, "right, so you've taken the night off work... so you've lost fifty quid to do that... You've had drinks at that show... so you've cost yourself a hundred pounds to stand in some place in Peckham and shout... That's not cool... You can't do that."

So, I've actually only done one unpaid show that hasn't been for charity because I never did an unpaid show after that. I just decided that I just didn't have the time. But people will only treat you as professionally as you put yourself out. I think that have to talk yourself up way higher than you actually are, like. I definitely put my foot down because I do so much voluntary stuff for like [Sisters Uncut](#) and like lots of the activist's collectives I do and I wouldn't be able to take the time to do that unless I was making sure everything else was paid. Also, like, sometimes I do work in private schools and they pay really well which means I can go and do the same workshop for free in a youth club and not, like, put myself in any stress about it. So, yeah, I don't know. My mum pretty early on [laughter] was like, "this is not how it works, babe. You're doing work, you should be paid." I've just, kind of, always kept that in my head I think.

**PV:** Yeah, that's something that I, I make a real... I mean, Dan and I work together and we produce events and both of us feel really strongly about, I mean, we tend to do events that have so many artists it's ridiculous, we can't really pay people properly. But, within that, at the very least we always get a couple rounds of drinks. And for me, that's something that... cos I used to live in Berlin and, like, in Berlin it's just like a basic thing. If you're doing an event, even if you're doing a poetry slam, you get a drink ticket and you don't pay to get in. That is just a given, you know? I appreciate it's a little bit harder to do that in London sometimes because of the cost of drinks and because sometimes because the promoter is paying for hire.

But for me, I don't know, I think also that when I was... I trained as a film-maker before I was performing, and it was a given thing on an unpaid set, at least all the ones I worked on, that you would cover expenses of the performers who you were working with. And just this understanding that, OK, I might not be able to afford to pay you, I may not be at a level where I have a budget, but I certainly don't want anyone that is giving up their time to be losing money on the project for me when I'm developing further as an artist.

There should be some form of exchange and so, for me, one of the things that gets under my skin about some unpaid work is, well it's two things, it's the organisers not thinking

about everything that your mum brilliantly delineated but it's also about artists being so grateful for the opportunity of having a platform that they're not thinking about the entire mechanism that they're working in. Like, how much money is the bar making, what is the money they're putting aside for their time, what is the other work they're not meant to do? All that stuff. And, I think there's reasons to do unpaid work and not, which, I think could be interesting to go into next. But, I think it's really important to think carefully about, are you losing money for someone and is that worth your time.

**LV:** Yeah totally.

**PV:** So following on from that, when would you guys now do unpaid work, if ever?

**DS:** Ah, yeah, charity stuff for sure, like, I did a commissioned poem the other day for [The Children's Society](#), a great charity I think. I'm doing some voluntary work for Christchurch Uni, but that was to help a family friend out. But it certainly has to be limited. I think that when you're giving up your time voluntarily I think you have to put quite strict borders around it. Because otherwise you just end up saying yes and yes and yes and suddenly you have no time for the professional money-making stuff, or even just to relax, you know, sometimes down-time's nice!

For sure, as a promoter as well who's trying to make nights happen without any funding, usually, and fluctuating audience numbers, you know, you might be building something new... It's always risky putting on a gig, you can't predict the audience necessarily, so nights would be, like, for us, impossible to make without artists' goodwill and artists performing voluntarily and giving up their time to help out. And sure, you can treat them nicely in terms of profit share and buying a drink and all that sort of stuff and that's integral, but you're not really paying them for the time they deserve if they're professionals, if they're high quality and all that stuff. But because I book people I will happily go and do that as well, it's *quid pro quo*, of course, I will do your night for nothing because I've asked you to do mine, so, I think that kind of swap and exchange is really good.

**PV:** And it's recognising, as a favour, because I think also with both of us, I mean I would like... I would like to, far more, be in situations where I have a budget where I can pay people, but I think for me one of the things is, as soon as I'm in a situation where there's a bit of a fee or a really decent fee, the first people I'm going to go to are those people that are regularly doing me favours, doing it as a profit share.

**DS:** Absolutely. Yeah, that thing builds up. But that's also partly the trajectory of going from amateur to professional, it's like an apprenticeship, in a way. Obviously in a lot of professions apprenticeships are paid, at least a basic wage, you're gonna get a bit of money coming in.

The thing that doesn't necessarily work so well in art, particularly if you're over twenty-five or over thirty, there aren't, there isn't that income as you're developing. You have to somehow reach this... I was talking to someone recently, and it's that kind of thing you're saying Liv, about stepping off and starting to demand money for yourself and saying, I'm not

open-mic level, I'm better now. I need to be paid for this because I'm good enough and I deserve that.

That's a really hard decision to make and there's this weird... I'm thinking of poetry, there's this grey area between stepping off the open-mic, particularly if you're not under twenty-five, and going into that, kind of, 'I want a fee now, I wanna do a twenty-minute set so I can get a fee for that,' [where] you're too good for open mic but not good enough for that, or you don't have experience of that, or no one's seen you do that. So, it's kind of, how do you step yourself up to that level without that self-belief, or without that training, you know?

**PV:** I totally blagged it.

**DS:** Of course you do, you have to, me too. You say yes to your first school workshop. You go yeah, totally I can do that - never worked in a school in my life. You just go, yeah I'll figure it out and hopefully it'll work out. But that doesn't work for everyone, you know.

**PV:** Yeah, it's one of those things but I feel like, if you're the kind of person who has... who has the confidence to blag it, you might have the wherewithal to prepare yourself properly. To be able to handle the situation, when you're given the situation. And obviously, however you get the opportunity there are only further opportunities if you smash that first one. So, however you get in the door, you get in the door but then it's still going to be like hard work and determination to get, and luck, I think so much of it is, is luck.

How, how honest do you think people are about other income streams they have as artists? Because one of the things I find really interesting over the last years is, I feel like, at least in this country, the arts become increasingly professionalised to a level where more and more often you'll meet people who say, like, you know, this is, I only do work for X, I don't do unpaid gigs and this is what I do.

But within that since moving back to London a few years ago, I discovered more and more often that there are other income streams that people wouldn't tell you about, and then when you got to know them better and later you'd find out about a job that maybe you don't mention, or a partner or the fact that they live with their parents. Or all kinds of stuff and I'm just wondering within, not your friends but just within your general art peer groups, how honest do you think artists are about that? And you can also say London against the rest of the c-

**LW:** Well I went Goldsmiths innit.

**PV:** Me too.

**LW:** And that is the home of not being honest about [laughter] who pays your rent. Like, they invented lying about their income as an artist. Everyone turns up, like, speaks like they're from south London, dresses like they're from south London.

**PV:** And you're from south London.

**LW:** Yeah. And then all of them, have incredibly rich parents who are painters. I don't know, like, I did this residency in Liverpool called [\*How Much Are They Paying You?\*](#) And it was in retaliation to the *New Contemporaries* show, which is the art show there that you have to pay £25 to apply to be in, there's no fee... So, we went to Liverpool where the show was taking place and I employed lots of people, just, not even artists, just lots of people to come and flyer for me and do workshops with me. We paid them all like £15 an hour.

But one of the things we did was I printed the entirety of where my three-grand budget had gone. Like, everything including how much I paid myself, my rent, everything. Like black and white, this is what it was. And we also worked out how much £25 was in Liverpool for your rent, how many bus rides that would get you. We did a £25 food shop, and stuff. I personally feel like the only way to like, actually be able to have decent conversations about money is total transparency and that involves even when you feel like you may have done something a bit dodgy, maybe. During the Liverpool show I had this three-grand budget which like, for a two-and-a-half-week residency is not a lot of money at all, I was really having to stretch. It meant that that some of my friends...

I decided I was going to pay students who'd applied for *New Contemporaries* from the Liverpool art school and not got in, I refunded them the £25 and they came and performed with me instead. I also paid some of my friends who are established, very good artists £25 to do videos for me. And at the time, although the point was it was this 25 number, I felt really weird about the fact that I'd paid artists that would normally be paid £150 for something, £25. I was really worried about the backlash of what that would be but luckily everyone kind of got the project and was invested in it.

But I do think it's really important to be totally transparent, like, I will always tell people where all of my money is coming from all the time, because people should know about that. Because, also, people should feel uncomfortable when I say to them, I'm £15 over my two-grand overdraft right now and, like, today after this I'm running to the bank, like, that's what's happening. Especially because I look successful on Facebook, I look like I'm doing really well. My friends are always like, "you're so busy, you're so busy," and I'm like, "Yeah, but also, I'm broke!" [Laughter] You know, it's totally, you have to drag it out of people like where they're coming from and what they're doing.

**PV:** But what I'm interested in is, going back to questions like, how honest do you think people around you are? So you said that at Goldsmiths you think maybe not, but since leaving there, just the artists that you generally interact with, do you feel like people are generally straight up with you about... I'm talking specifically about people who say to you when you say, "what do you do?" and they just say, "I'm an artist." And I'm not saying anyone... I also don't believe that anyone has to say at that point, "...and I have a bar job." If you're an artist, you're an artist, end of. But I'm just wondering how much you think people might be shady or uncomfortable about saying "oh, but actually, these are my other income streams."

And I put them all together, I mean I think if you're, I don't know, this might be controversial but obviously if you're being supported in some way or you have another job... but I even think if you're living with your parents and your parents live in London, that gives you a

massive privilege over other people in the country [DS: That's how I started.] who would love to be here. That is an income stream too. Like pretty much any situation where you're not paying rent puts you at an advantage to most people in the country, I would have thought. I don't know, what about in your circles how honest do you think people are about whatever those other income streams are?

**DS:** Most people I think I talk to, there's not a huge amount of people, sort of, making much of a living from poetry, I think that most people you'd know they were [BLEEP]. You know, maybe their income from doing their art, I think it would be pretty transparent. Also, I don't know, most people seem to have pretty nice cool jobs. Like in the arts world, most people aren't working in banking or working in advertising for cigarettes or something ridiculous so they don't have anything to hide in a sort of Liberal-Left-leaning sort of general... amongst their peers. I don't know, most people are pretty happy in their jobs-

**LV:** I think the thing that I really enjoy is the kind of clause that comes with it when people do finally tell you... The classic one I used to have at Goldsmiths was like, "er, yeah I did go to private school BUT my parents worked really hard," [Laughter] And I'd be like, OK I don't doubt that that happened but... or like, "I live with my parents but I pay them £50-a-month rent," OK I don't care. It's not about that.

**PV:** But that's interesting for me because. So, OK for my full disclosure as someone who went to Goldsmiths. Because one of the things for me, there is a series of events that led to me making this show and I... So, I basically never considered being an artist because it just seemed like, I didn't want to be in a situation where I was a freelancer and I didn't want to starve and that's what artists did from what I understood.

So, I went to film school and then I just had bar jobs and shop jobs because that's what a film school graduate 'does'. Then eventually I somehow blagged my way into a career as a production manager for an animation company on a fairly inflated salary and because I was making really, really good money for the first time and benefitting from rent being very, very low in east London, like, fifteen years ago, I bought a flat with a substantial amount of help from my parents and it was only because of that that when I started to, kind of, go, 'I hate my life, I don't want to do this work anymore,' I could go, 'I know, I'll rent out my apartment and go to Berlin and see what happens.' At the time the exchange rate was so drastic between the pound and the euro I could pay my mortgage by renting out the flat. I could also pay my rent in Berlin and for the first six months I had a little bit of money, like another €150 on the side just to live.

And that's pretty much the only reason I have a practice, like, I never felt I could take that leap in London. But having that freedom and having that time and being in another place opened all that up to me. I mean, I then worked really, really hard, I went back, I came here and I did a Master's but again, my parents paid for that Master's. I couldn't have afforded it on my own, and I think that one of the things that got me moving back was, I thought I had all these friends in London that were full-time artists, poets even, surviving as artists.

And then when I graduated I, kind of, was able to make that work for about five or six months and then I just couldn't and I felt like, god, what am I doing wrong? Like everyone I

know... and I'm like, I'm in such a privileged situation and, if I can't make it work, how is anyone else making it work? And I'm applying for these schemes and I'm doing these workshops and I'm starting to charge a fee and like, higher fees, and I'm performing at the places you're supposed to perform and it's not working. And then I discover that the reason it wasn't working is because most people I knew were not honest to me about these other income streams. [Laughter] And then they'd go, "oh my god, of course..." And I'd be like, but I moved back to London because I thought this was possible!

**LW:** When I was choosing my GCSEs and A-levels and that, and I wanted to do Art, I wanted to do Music, Drama and Art at GCSE, my parents were like, "no, you're not allowed. You can only do it if you have a part-time job. Because if you want to do art you're going to have to do [BLEEP] jobs forever," and I was like, "OK, cool." So I got a part-time job and started working and then did my GCSEs... same rule for my A-levels, "right, you can do that but you need to get a bar job," so I got a bar job and did my A-levels, then I wanted to go to uni and do it... "fine, right, as long as you're working, as long as you're working."

So for me, there's never been a question of... I wouldn't see myself as more successful if I didn't have my bar job. Like, that doesn't... In my head, I'm not thinking I can't wait to not have to do this thing. Because in my head they're quite a good balance. Also like, for me, like, I don't want to get too lost in, kind of, the crazy unreliableness of the arts world. I really like the fact that I know that, minimum, three days a week I have somewhere to be and I have to go speak to some regulars and watch [Millwall](#) on the football. It's fine, I actually think that's quite a nice thing. But yeah, I think I'd had it so instilled in me from when I was like fourteen that like, cool if you want to do this you can do that but you have to work the whole time because that's the only way that you'll survive.

**PV:** But then the only thing... I really, really respect you for saying, yeah I'm an artist, I've got this bar job but that doesn't mean I'm less of an artist. But then I would challenge you a little bit on why earlier when I said, what's your answer to the what do you do question, and you said, "I'm a barmaid," like, why is the first thing you say, "I'm a barmaid," rather than an artist? And I get that it's because you make a living from being a barmaid but I mean, for me, I'm also interested in unpicking this thing of...

Most professions involve your being successful because you make money from it, you make a living from it. I think, Art is in this weird parallel universe so I'm also curious about challenging this idea of why can't you be artist because you make art and claim being an artist? Why is a thing we do defined by the fact that you make money from it?

**LW:** I think I like saying that I'm a barmaid because, for me, barmaids are like storytellers. So, I'm like, I'm a barmaid which means I'm quite funny and I tell good stories and I can pull a pint, which is not dissimilar to my writing. So I quite like it as a cross-over, I think, but I also don't think that you have to be making money off of your art to be an artist. I don't think you have to go to art school, I've got lots of friends who do, like, Queer performance art who never went to uni and who do lots of unpaid work just because they love it. Because they want to get on stage and jump around and they're just as much an artist as anyone else. Like, I don't think it has to be your career in order for you to use the term.

**DS:** Yeah, it touches on something which is definitely true in poetry, which is the kind of uses of it. For mental health, for wellbeing, for expression, for ranting, for all this stuff which can be entertaining as well, so there's definitely grey areas and it crosses over. Then you also have it as entertainment for an audience, less about 'you' and more about people. I think sometimes it gets confused, and I think it gets confused in events you see which are more about the performers than they are about the audience.

I think it happens for us as well, so I think where people start calling themselves... You don't do Accountancy as a casual thing on the side, probably. Unless you're an artist, in which case you do. I think that this is where the difference comes around, sometimes I get a little bit defensive about calling yourself a 'thing' if you're not earning money from it because I think in a way you feel like you are having to prove yourself to people who aren't artists, all the time, that what you're doing is proper.

**PV:** But, but, but, isn't that earning money or is it about craft and taking it seriously? Because, for me, the division is, you know, I have friends for example who, they definitely don't make a living from, say, poetry slams. But they're very clear about saying, "this is not a hobby, I have invested time, there has been training." And I think, you can have craft and you can have professionalism but not necessarily be making a living from it. That, for me, is a distinction. Having just written something and going out and doing it which is also cool but it's just a different thing. Or is this something that you've invested like, serious energy and heart from your life and that you're continually developing. Do you see what I mean?

I guess one of the reasons I get worked up about it is, if I think about one of my own points which, as I said, was, oh my god, why am I failing at this thing? Like, I'm doing everything right and I seem to be, on paper, doing everything right and really successful. But, I'm in my overdraft all the time and I'm mounting a credit card debt and I've got everything laid out for me for it to be easy so what am I doing wrong? And then when I started making the interviews a lot of the people I interviewed had so much shame around the fact that they had these other income streams and that just, like, makes me want to break things. Because it's not. But seriously it's not right. Especially because I know, especially through the interviews I know that a lot of people are just not up front about stuff.

So, it's much easier, like if you have a bar job you can't hide that you have a bar job. But, I mean, if you have a work-from-home admin job or if you're being a bit cheeky being on the dole or if you're living with your parents or if you're being supported by a partner with a job that makes more money, you can hide all those things, or not hide, you just don't have to bring them up. So why does the person that has the bar job, why are they less of an artist? Just because you have to say, oh I have a bar job and the other person doesn't have to.

**LV:** And I get that at work when people come in who know me and they're like "oh... How are you... Aren't you doing art now?" And I'm like, yeah I am. And they'll be like, "oh, it's going well then isn't it?" Like being well shady at me, and I'm like, yeah! Actually it is going really well, I'm doing all these really big things but it takes up to six weeks for an invoice to come through babes. I get that backlash all the time from people that are trying to be like, "but you still work on a bar, though," and it's like well yeah! What's wrong with that?

Also, like I don't know, people are so secretive and that secret-keeping is really damaging for us as a community. We should all be telling each other our secrets of how we are doing it and how we are surviving. I put on Facebook, because, I don't know, I'm only like just into doing this more legitimately and so when I'm doing applications and stuff I still don't know what I'm doing at all. So I always put on Facebook, like, "Facebook, please tell me your secrets," and ask these questions. And it's so nice that loads and loads of people now, it's become a bit of a thing, loads of people will write on it and give each other advice and people post their artist bios on there and like swap stuff.

The same thing I had, one of my best mates Travis Alabanza, we're kind of both are like similar age, started at pretty much the same time started doing these shows together and we're constantly asking people that we know like, "How have you done that? How have you got there? How did you do that? Please can you read this for me or look at this?" That's such an important part of being an artist because if you want to share your practice you should share the ins and outs of it. It's like when you go and see an artist's talk and they only show you the things that have gone really well. It's not a fair representation, like whenever I do an artist's talk I always try and read things out that sound awful [Laughter] that I've written. Or tell someone a time when I did something that went really wrong, and I'll be like, this went really wrong, don't think that I'm only doing good things, like, I've definitely made loads of mistakes. That's part of it too.

**PV:** But then I think of two things. One is that, I mean I totally agree with you and I think that the only way to have any clarity about what your rates should be and how to go around things and how to negotiate situations is to talk to other artists. And I definitely think it's happening more, Dan's been really good about it recently, I've noticed, and I want to talk about it more.

**DS:** About what?

**PV:** About sharing information online around rates and stuff because otherwise, the funny thing I learned as someone that also programmes is the only way you really find out what someone's rate is, is if you offer them a gig. [Laughter]

**DS:** Absolutely, that's so true.

**PV:** Suddenly the people that you'd be like, oh there'd be no way I could afford-, are like, oh damn!

**DS:** "Oh yeah, I'll do it for that." [Laughter]

**PV:** Oh, OK. But again, it's like this kind of projection thing. But, one of the things that came up when I was interviewing people, I think Bridget Minamore might have actually talked about this though. Is there's also like, there's a certain... We're both art school graduates, and Goldsmiths as well, which is like a special universe in and of itself. [Laughter] But there's this sense of entitlement that comes from going, oh I'm going to reach out for further information.

Because the other thing I've realised is, for a lot of people... You know, Bridget talked about the fact that, and I'm sure she'd be OK with me saying this because I interviewed her for the show, even having been invited to the Arts Council for a meeting with emerging poets around 'how can the Arts Council make this process friendlier for you,' she still felt like someone who is not going to be funded.

And when I interviewed Stella Duffy she also talked about the fact that as a working class woman and someone that has 'credits' as like, a writer, as an actress, producing projects, it's only until, literally the last few years, that she's "Ok, now I can apply for a grant." And for a lot of people there's just this sense of "this is not for me" or maybe people will apply for something and then if they don't get it they'll just assume "oh this is definitely not for me." Whereas for me, I was really blessed by the fact that I had a lot of friends, for example, who had been having Arts Council funding for shows for years.

**LW:** But the language is so exclusionary... Because I was going to, when I did this residency in Liverpool, originally I was going to apply for the Arts Council myself. Honestly, I'm really dyslexic, and that form is just not doable. Then I met up with this person from Luton, this wicked working class woman and she was like "come on, we'll try and do it together," I said OK. In the end I ended up not having to do it because the space did it for me and they applied as part of their yearly programme.

I can honestly say, hand-on-heart, I've never got anything I've done an application for, ever in my career. The only things I've got have been things where I've contacted spaces and been like, "you haven't put a thing out but I'm telling you that we should do this thing together," and they've said OK. I just sent them a proposal with no holes in it and it's worked, but I've never got an application. I don't know how to do them, the Arts Council is so tied up in horrible language that I do not speak.

**PV:** But I think it's difficult because it's more complex than that, there's something around the language for sure. But I think, and it's weird because this is something that seems to relate to class somehow, there's so many people, and it's not the fault of the Arts Council, who just feel it's an institution that is not for them. And it's really painful because I've spoken to enough people at the Arts Council where that is absolutely not what they're about.

**LW:** That's what I mean, about that language feeds into that idea because you read it and you feel like it's not aimed at you so you just immediately go, oh that's not for me.

**PV:** Yeah, it's really tricky. I'm really interested actually, in the last year I've noticed the number of artist-run initiatives like Buzzcut for example, who in addition to having routes of application through forms allow people to send videos. I think that would be difficult with something like a *Grants For The Arts* but I think it says something about... It's true, just filling out a form... Even just assuming that you're going to have Broadband access, it kind of denotes a certain level of privilege already.

**DS:** It's also mostly time.

**LW:** Yeah, the time is too much.

**DS:** It totally ties into the whole, you know, coming from a family that supports you financially, having to not pay rent in London. These are all things that all add up to hours you don't have to do another job. And not just hours but the rest you need, the brain-space you need.

**PV:** I think the first time I applied it almost felt like it was the Arts Council's mistake that I didn't get the funding [**DS:** Wow][laughter]. No, but it was just like, I knew I could do this. Clearly I'd got it wrong. But if you don't know anyone who has had funding before and you have no relationship to those institutions... And even for me... We were talking about forms. You know what taught me how to fill out forms? Doing a Master's at Goldsmiths. That's kind of ridiculous that I kind of had to do a Master's at Goldsmiths to be comfortable enough around 'artspeak' and about talking about my practice in that kind of way. So that I could confidently apply for things. It doesn't make any sense.

**DS:** I'm really lucky, I'm first-generation uni, my dad's a Black-cab driver. It was that university experience that got me into performing to begin with but then that uni... that stuff, like the performing stuff on the side got me my first job which was in a business consultancy which worked in the Arts. That's the only reason I know the behind the scenes stuff of the Arts, I never grew up with that sort of thing. I think if I'd not happened to fall into these things, if I'd just done my degree and not fallen into drama, if I'd decided to be a poet like five years after not doing that job I would have massively struggled. I wouldn't have known nobody, I wouldn't have known the jargon, I didn't even know what the Arts Council was at uni.

**PV:** But I don't even think it has to be about jargon... It's more important to learn how to be clear about talking about your work because there's also, I've seen horrific, I'm sure if we had someone from the Arts Council here they would tell horror stories of wading through jargon. And I've met people who are at the other extreme, where we're talking about, where I'm like, oh wow, you naturally speak as if you've written in 'artspeak' for a gallery. Because you've been in that system for so long, and that's not helpful either.

I'd definitely, I would encourage anyone listening to this who feels overwhelmed by it to reach out to both people you know and people you don't know and just say, "I'm trying to navigate how this works." And I have noticed that the Arts Council have, more and more, is holding sessions through other organisations. For example, negotiating getting through your first *Grant For The Arts*. Also if you know other people who want to apply for funding, doing it at the same time super-helps. [**LW:** Yeah, yeah.] If you're stuck you can read things back to each other, I would really advise that.

But I want to ask one more question and then spend fifteen minutes on a few things that have happened in the last six months. Because I also want to say that in making *Show Me The Money* I created this development blog and you can find it on [www.showmethemon3y.tumblr.com](http://www.showmethemon3y.tumblr.com). The *E* in money is with a 3 because, LOL? But the blog

is really important to me because it continues to further this conversation that we're having above and beyond this show.

I want to quickly ask about rates. How do you guys decide and determine your rates? For me, a fun way into that conversation is to be transparent in this very moment and state that this podcast actually comes from an Arts Council funded series. Thank you, Arts Council. So we're all being paid to be here, which is pretty cool. I'm getting paid £152, we don't know what the £2 is for [laughter] But I needed a cup of tea on the way? [laughter] And Dan and Liv?

**LW:** We're being paid £75.

**PV:** So, that was the rate that was given for this but what is your rate generally? And how do you deal with that question?

**DS:** It's so nebulous, there's no... There doesn't feel like there's any offic-... There's the [Society of Authors](#) there's [Apples and Snakes](#) they'll have their daily rates. It's so tricky because you're always weighing in, kind of, experience, perceived level of reputation, you're working in how much time it's going to be. It's so hard to decide.

**LW:** I don't know, I've got pretty flat rates. [**DS:** Do you?] Yeah, I don't really mess around with it. [**DS:** What do you...] If I'm doing a twenty-minute set, I won't do it... Between £60 and £100 is what I would ask, if it's something with loads of money I might ask for more. If I'm working... If I'm doing a set in a big art institution, like if I'm doing the V&A or the Tate or something like that I'll probably ask for £150. If I'm doing a daily... If I'm doing like a four-hour school workshop, £250 minimum, probably like £200 if it was, I don't know, like a poorer school or something.

But yeah I don't know, I think I've got pretty flat rates and I post them around everywhere, I'm like, this is how much it is if you want me to come and do this thing with you. And I also run a series of panels called [Lessons in Anti-Apathy](#), which is getting together activist groups to talk on panels and be completely transparent about how they organise and how they get all their work done. And so for that I normally pay myself like £100 and pay everyone else £75 to come and do it. So yeah, I don't know, I've got pretty standard rates.

Obviously they are lenient, obviously the situation will always make a difference. But yeah, I think £250-a-day is a good for an artist considering it's incredibly draining doing that work with young people. Particularly because of the content of my stuff's really heavy. It can be a really, really emotional day. The amount of labour that goes into the behind of it, because when I started doing poetry I was only charging like £40 I think, when I started, for a twenty-minute set. But now because I'm much aware of how much labour goes into writing and memorising that stuff... I'll practice for an hour-and-a-half every day, and like, you know, that will never be paid, never show. So I don't feel guilty now if I'm like no I'm not doing it for less than £60 to £100 because it's all of my life, you know.

**DS:** Would you... I agree, everything that you've said is... That kind of chimes pretty much with me as well in terms of rates and stuff. I also kind of do a lot of... If I'm doing project

management side of things or for a funded project that'll be less than my poetry because I think that's a more basic skill. There are more people that are project managers than there are poets so I rate that as less money. So that's like £200-a-day for that.

In terms of gigs though, this is what I'm really interested in... If it's a funded gig, if it's a popular gig that I know is going to sell a load of tickets and I know there's money coming into the promoters I will ask for a fee. But if it's like a mate who's organised a gig and they're just starting out... And there's just a couple of drinks in it then, like, yeah of course. It's still the same effort.

**LW:** Yeah, yeah. I think because I don't do, I'm not on the... It's weird because I'm a poet but I'm not on the poetry scene, I haven't really done any poetry gigs. I've done a couple of features and stuff, but my poetry CV... I haven't done any poetry stuff this year, I'm kind of, much more in the Fine Art bracket so I think it's quite different. And I feel like I would still like... I'm not saying that I would never ever... Like, you know, I'm the same as you, if I had to do a favour, I would do a favour.

**DS:** What I also find interesting is there was a period where I went through that, I went like, I'm not going to do... I deserve... This is about three years ago or so when I first started out freelancing. I was like, "I'm not going to do a gig unless it's paid," no to everything, I started saying no to everything, and all my other work dried up. [**LW:** Oh really.]

So for me, what I realised was that gigging, while it's my lowest paid thing, when it is paid. But what stops happening is I stop meeting teachers which means a £300, £350 day in a school. I stop meeting other poets or promoters that might book me for a paid gig or book me for some facilitation work or whatever. So I kind of started putting, in my business language kind of head, put gigs down as business development. Networking, all that kind of stuff, it's my shop window. So I kind of started going, "Oh no, I have to start saying yes to every gig!"

So one thing I wanted to go back to a little bit was, and it does touch on charging fees for gigs and stuff like that, is when we talk about rates and stuff, I think that's a great conversation for us to have with each other, I'm a little bit hesitant to widen it to people making festivals, people booking events. Because they have an eye on the 'bottom line' as well, they have their own budgetary concerns. And I think there's a danger, maybe it's just me being paranoid, that we drive our rates down. Because, "I can get you for £100 but I can get this person who I think is as good for less."

**PV:** No! I think it's actually the reverse. Because I've been in a few situations in the last couple of years where someone... I've been booking different people... Well OK, both sides, I've been booking different people on behalf of, say, someone else or an organisation and it's like this person costs this, and this person this, and the perception is, someone has a higher fee and they're immovable about it and you start to go, "Oh, why is their rate like x," and on the flip-side because... I sort of do things in stages and I said I don't do unpaid gigs anymore, a few years ago. I do actually sometimes but it depends and it has to be particular circumstances. And what I've found, ironically, is I've said to people, "Oh sorry I don't really do unpaid gigs anymore," or even increasingly, "I won't do a gig for this amount of money

because it's too little to be worth my time," and then they've come back to me six months or a year later and they've offered me that gig [**LW:** At what you asked for?] at that fee, yeah. Because they've kind of gone... Or they've written to me and gone, "Oh, we can't afford you. But"... And then they've come back.

So it's about when you do it as well. Because I feel that in my first year or so, if I did that then I would just never have heard from them again. But now I think that it might be that I've built a profile to a level where people kind of go, "Oh, fair enough," you know?

**DS:** But what's tricky is you'll never know what work you never got offered. Because they have a perception of you and it might have been like, £25 short and you go like, "You know what, that week I was quiet and I could have done that work".

**PV:** Yeah but then, for me, it's always... I always go in and say, "This is what I charge given the situation. But if that's an issue, come back." Because I think, I think if you say, "This is what I charge but if that kind of knocks it out then let's have a conversation," then the person... I've never had a situation where someone's like, "Well then we just can't do it." [**LW:** Yeah, same.] Generally, what they say is, "We can't do it now," and they come back to me. Or they go, "We can't do it for that but we'd really love to have you, would you consider it for this?"

But if you don't even come in... And think you're right, if you just come in and say "Lock-down, this is what..." And sometimes that's true too, it depends how you feel about the gig. And sometimes you do that, you know, like, "Oh right, they're actually giving me that rate. Amazing." But for me, the golden space is saying, "This is what I normally charge but you know, up to having a conversation. Tell me what your budget is," and then people will say, "Great, OK. Could you do it for this?" and then you bring it back and forth. But if you just... I don't know, I feel like if you don't do that, the person booking you is always going to try to get you for as little as possible.

**DS:** Oh, of course [**PV:** Because that's what they're trying to do.] and I think that's fair. As a promoter, like of course, I'm trying to make sure that things will actually be affordable and give as many chances to as many people as possible.

**PV:** But I think there's also something really difficult about like having... Because I'm even thinking right now about a rate... And I can say off the top of my head that £250-a-day would be a day-rate, like that for me, would be a fair full-day workshop you know. It would be what I would charge for, say, editing or like videography stuff for a day, that's like my old rate from back in the day. And that probably could go up.

There have been a few times I've done hosting for corporate gigs and I've charged around £400 for compering. I even think now I know that's low by some standards. But when you start getting into like rates for, say, spoken word performances or what I would charge as a show fee then it starts to get very complex. Because it's based on so many things, it's like what is the budget of the institution? What am I going to get in terms of exposure? Who else is on the bill? Like, what is the ticket price? And then be kind of like weighing up this rubric of like, well so...

It would mean that I'm performing in this space and I could maybe leverage that against this. Maybe it'll mean I can promo something else that's important. Maybe I'm going to develop artistically for these reasons. And so I find it almost impossible to go, "It's this." Within that kind of realm.

But what I can say is... I think one thing that's a real division is, because over the last three years I've been making the decision to move more away from spoken word and more into live art and theatre. In theatre I'm much more like, I see myself more as an emerging artist as a performance maker, because I've only been doing it for three years. I see myself as an established spoken word artist because I've been doing it for seven years and I've been doing it internationally in quite a high profile way. And those gigs don't stretch me as much so it's easier for me to say, "If you're not going to give me this fee then it's not really worth it." [LW: Then I can't be bothered. Yeah, real.]

Whilst with theatre, and cabaret I'm just really keen to be developing that skillset and be building a profile. So I'm much more likely to be like... Yeah a gig that say I wouldn't do... I don't know, I wouldn't do like ten minutes for less than £50 at a spoken word gig. I totally would do a cabaret set because I'm just [LW: Yeah, yeah.] trying to get paid gigs within that. So those are things that it's kind of hard to put out.

Which might be a really great way to segue into... I want to give a little shout to an artist who I think has been doing really interesting work around all this called [Harry Giles](#). Harry Giles who is... who you should definitely follow on Twitter. I think he's [@HarryGiles](#), he jokes that he's good on Twitter, he is actually amazing on Twitter. [laughter] And he is someone I interviewed early on for *Show Me The Money* and he recently did this brilliant thing where he has posted an annual report of all of his finances as an artist, on his blog which is at [www.harrygiles.org](http://www.harrygiles.org) And it's *Workings and Earnings as an Artist – My Annual Finances*. Dan and Liv have looked at this. Is this something that you would consider doing yourselves? Why or why not?

**DS:** I have... I've really looked into it recently. I was going to do an Edinburgh budget breakdown after coming back from the Fringe and I thought well if I'm going to do that I should do my year. I haven't done it yet. Why not?

**LW:** I'd be scared of like of how much... It would be so revealing. I spend eighty percent of my money in the pub, [laughter] and my mum would see it and everyone would be like "Liv, this is not good!" [laughter]

**PV:** But wouldn't that be an artist's expense? [laughter]

**LW:** It's just a life expense. I think it would be interesting to show it. Also because my bar job's cash-in-hand but then some of the art stuff I do, like if I get a big fee it looks like I'm earning money that's more than it is. It's really confusing like... Yeah, I don't know, I feel like I would show it. Also though because I'm currently living in a four-bed house with ten people and we all pay like 'no' rent and it's hell but it's the only way to kind of do it. And then before that I was squatting for a bit so like, there's some kind of...

There's costs that I don't have to pay but a massive compromise to like my existence and mental health and general well-being and whether I'm sleeping in a bed or the floor... Those kind of things that aren't represented... Like someone could look at my fee and be like, "Oh, she doesn't pay her rent! That's good!" But it's like, at what cost?

**DS:** Yeah, exactly. The detail... The level of detail you put into it is really what's...

**LW:** You'd have to really pick it apart for it to be a fair representation I think.

**DS:** Yeah, I think that's partly what's made me hesitate. It kind of goes back to the rates thing as well. If schools look at it and go, "You've charged that school £250 and this school £100," that other school's going to feel ripped off, even though that maybe was a fare rate for them, or maybe actually it was a private school so I thought I'll bump my fee a bit [**PV:** Which is totally reasonable]. But I don't think the person that booked me at the private school would necessarily see it like that. Because they be like, "Well you're doing the same eight hours, whether you do it in a state school or private school."

Anyway, so I think there's an element of that which is why I was talking about the rates thing as well. And maybe you went, you know what, it's my old school and that's why I charged them £100 because I thought that's all they could afford, whatever. There are reasons for us to do things that aren't transparent to people on the outside. Other artists, we understand that, not necessarily other promoters or also people on the admin side of things in schools, wherever.

Yeah, I'm partly... When I do, I do like, professional development stuff and try and get people to think about, if they want to start earning some money from their art, how they can practically make that happen. And we do stuff like budgeting and we do stuff like... Where are you earning money from? Let's talk about who that is and that sort of stuff. I kind of, I talk to them about how my income is over the last five years or whatever. Because I think that's useful and illuminating and at the end of the day that's the income I know about... Except for Harry and Bryony Kimmings. Would I do it? I'm really tempted.

**PV:** There's a really, actually... We should go into this. There's a really, really, really good podcast about this on [Planet Money](#), that we'll link to this, about a company, I think in San Francisco, that decided that they were going to do total... Because I didn't realise like, pay transparency, especially in the start-up sector, is like a whole movement anyway. Which is just super relevant for us as artists to be paying attention to.

**DS:** The thing is, again in more established businesses, more structured kind of jobs, when it doesn't happen it does mean that, this is why women are paid less, this is why people of colour are paid less. It's also one of those all-or-nothing things. I mean you've got to have people setting the pace for it, like Harry and Bryony and stuff. But, I don't know, you've got to reach a critical mass with it. Maybe I sound too scared?

**PV:** I wonder you know, because I've often been thinking about it. Like, I feel... I feel like what I want to be able to do is have total transparency with, with other artists. But not

necessarily, and for all the reasons you just said, with organisations. Because there's so many things where it's like... And I've recently been in situations a lot recently where I've said yes to work and then, you know, like significantly higher paid work has come along. And I've been a bit like *argh!* This is actually what also comes to agreeing to something being locked down by...

I'm starting to think maybe, maybe those like hard and fast gigs should be reserved for when you are really getting paid properly-properly for something. And with things where you're kind of doing a favour there should be room to be like, "Well I'll do this. But I should be able to pull out a month before because of x." And explaining that in a document? I don't know. It's like... There's probably like, for me, such a huge variance between what I would charge in different situations and also...

I think what's heart-breaking, for me, is I'm beginning to realise that almost all my income which is *nothing*, I made like £9000 last year, is basically spent on my practice. I see pretty much all my money is spent on going to theatre, going to exhibitions and seeing films. Having drinks with my friends about the exhibitions, theatre and films that we're seeing. [laughter] Which I actually think is still working.

**LW:** I'm like that because I've got a studio now, for the first time ever because I... After just coming back off my residency I was like... The moment I had my own space I realised that I made much, like, more exciting work. The whole time I had just nowhere to go and was just writing in my phone or on my laptop, I thought that was my practice. The moment I had a space I was, oh-my-god. Do all this other shit as well.

So when I came back I was determined to get this studio. So I've got this studio, it's £150-a-month which is quite a lot of money for me. [**PV:** It's great though!] It's amazing and it's completely like, re-energised my practice and made me so excited. But, the other side of that is, now that I've made this decision that I need this studio so I will be living in shit situations for like the whole time I want that studio then my housing will have to be less. And it's OK because in my head I'm like, I can still go to my studio if I'm going to be living in a house with ten people, it's alright. But it's at that cost you know?

It's the same, like all of the money that I get in is going straight back out all the time into my practice and into doing the things that I want to do. Into research, all that kind of stuff you know. Travelling to have a coffee with someone who may or may not book you for something. [laughter] Right? It's just endless. And they always want to meet at the end of the line and you're like, cool alright, like... It's just a disaster. It's endless.

**PV:** So I want to, I want to round up with your quick thoughts on things that have happened recently, so, what do you guys feel like talking about first?

**LW:** Can we do [artist's zones](#)? Because I'm raging about it. [laughter]

**PV:** Go for it!

**LW:** I'm just so annoyed about it.

**PV:** This is great also because I met Liv... David booked Liv for the show but just before that I met her because we both did this thing for [The Midnight Run](#) which was a mid-day run in Hackney Wick, looking at how gentrification is affecting Hackney Wick. So it seems quite appropriate for you to jump in on that.

**LW:** Yeah. I just like... Because I've just squatted a building with *Sisters Uncut* for a couple of months.

**PV:** You should say who *Sisters Uncut* are, because people might not know.

**LW:** Oh yeah, *Sisters Uncut* are a feminist direct-action group who campaign against the cuts to domestic violence support systems in the UK. They're doing loads of stuff, they've got a big action... Oh no, this won't come out today... They've just had a big action. And there was another big action, they were on the roof of Hackney Council yesterday with giant flares and loud speakers. They're really amazing, we squatted a building in Southwark on Peckham Rye to demonstrate that there's 1,270 empty buildings currently in Southwark but only 26 available beds each night for women seeking refuge. Which boils down to like three houses.

But we did that because Southwark Council is particularly really bad, but also in terms of opening up these artists' spaces I find that really frustrating because there's like this kind of annoying thing that the, kind of, government do where they understand that the arts are really important and that culture's really, really important, particularly in our city and how we exist.

They also understand that most of this culture comes from marginalised groups and marginalised communities. And they want to look like they care so they do things like this and they say it will be an affordable space to live but... Even that, if that was to be created for me, that makes me feel really uncomfortable. Because why is an artist more deserving of secure, secure home than a working class person or someone who's on *Job Seeker's Allowance* or any of these things. Or a family who has disabled parents, anything like that. These people are already not being given anywhere safe to live.

And to bring it back to *Sisters Uncut*, there are so many people, like women that need safe housing that it is not available for. And like, why is it because you're an artist you're more deserving of a cheap place to live? Than a woman who's seeking refuge and a safe space to exist with a family, like? I just think it's a really unhealthy way to look at how to make this city survive. I don't think it's right. Sorry that's quite a rant!

**PV:** No! They're all valid points. Dan?

**DS:** All that! [laughter] And slightly in addition, it does feel... Not necessarily... It feels like that gentrification thing of like, "How much is that going to add to your house prices?" Because you've got a lovely little artist's block next to you. Like great, wonderful. And also, how... I'd be really interested to know what they're proposing in terms of how you get into this. Because again, if we're talking about how difficult it is to fill in an *Arts Council*

application, because you need to know... You need the time, the jargon – a little bit. Just the, I don't know, the knowledge and the self-esteem to be able to think you deserve that. Who's going to, what artists are they going to be looking at?

**PV:** Yeah, that's such an interesting point because I mean, I think that I don't know... I feel like, it's really difficult because I respect the fact that the issues I've been looking at around the precariousness of being an artist, especially how complex it is being in London, the fact you have no job security, you're not making money, that you're making less than the tax bracket... And it gets harder the older you get, and all this sort of stuff. And I think it's really great that the information around that is hitting fever-pitch where we have the government going, "What do we do to actually... So we don't completely lose out on having an artist community in our city?"

But you're right, they're also because of this thing of... Even if you support this idea of, we need to support artists' communities, and if we don't in the hyper-capitalist city we live in there will be no more artists in this city anymore. Then you start to question, which are the artists that have access to these safe zones.

**LW:** Exactly. And also there are things like housing cuts, you know?

**PV:** And what are they talking about? Like, you know what I mean? It sort of becomes... Because that's the other thing, I think, that makes me really anxious about 'who can afford to be an artist?' because as artists I think there is a really important role of being a mirror to society and like contributing to society. And not being part of the establishment in that way. But then if you get into one of these schemes? I don't know, so it's a bit... It's a bit tricky. We'll see what happens with it.

And then the last thing we'll end on is... I have nothing to say about this, just because I literally don't even know where to start! [laughter] But I'm sure... I have really strong feelings that anyone I've met at the *Arts Council* is horrified by this as well, but who knows? So, the *Arts Council* is going to try and impose 'quantitative measures of arts quality.' What I will say is in my research I've noticed there's a lot of really confused conversations around, how do you measure the value of art. Which no one really has an answer for. And people are very like, I think insecure about. So what do you guys think about this? And maybe you could explain what this is going to mean, [The Quality Metrics Pilot](#).

**DS:** Do they even know entirely?

**PV:** Dan is going to try to understand what it is, without complicating it.

**DS:** In bunny-ear quotes, a meaningful measure of artistic quality that yields consistent and comparable findings across different art-forms. [laughter] A national organisation, let's compare this opera to this piece of street graffiti. [laughter] Yeah! That's going to be easy. "That street graffiti's 4.2 and that opera's 10.9," Like, what? What?

**LW:** And it's annoying isn't it because, like I don't know, as much as I feel like my art practice is really invested in like, social ideas and like wanting better for things and people, I

don't necessarily feel that all artists should have that responsibility. Not every artist has to be [DS: Yeah.] making community work all the time or has to be making work for young people.

And the problem with the *Arts Council* is that's kind of what they can get away with funding really. It's stuff where you have to have the outreach, don't you? They ask you in your form, "How many people is this going to affect? What's the outcome of that?" And then what does it mean? Like, who can say that someone doing a really beautiful heartfelt poem to a room of ten people is less valuable than someone who's got a theatre of three hundred people. What, because that's more? I just don't understand...

**PV:** But do you have to understand... You know I agree with you but I think what's tricky from their perspective is, they have to justify them funding us. You know, it's like we think it's... And this is where it gets really, really tricky also on transparency. It's like, I think, I think... You know fees we're given, for example, to be here for a couple of hours are reasonable, or good, could even be higher actually. Someone else would go, "What? You're getting paid £50 to like sit in a room and talk about art and money?" Like... Why should you even be paid for that?

And social engagement. This is where I think they get backed in a corner a bit. Like, social engagement is a much easier thing to defend in terms of funding. It is a public good, I mean there's even an argument of, maybe the work that as funded work should have to be socially invested because it's a public good. I don't necessarily believe that but...

**LW:** I think what I mean though is, someone talking about something... Like to talk about it in terms of poetry... Like, for example, I do poetry where I speak about like, being a survivor of domestic violence. You could put me in a room with a hundred people and maybe that will only affect, ten? Or like, statistically it'll be a lot more, but say it affects ten people, then what does that mean? Does that mean that my like ,grading on this score is less because not everyone in the room can connect with what I'm saying because I'm not speaking about something that everyone can identify with? Do you know what I mean like? Is it seeking like mass blanketing of let's all talk about one thing?

**PV:** I mean, I just. I would like... I really wish there would be more, there were more... One of the things that kind of came up is there's like this whole new strand of like, economics that looks at culture and measuring intrinsic value through economic theory. And like one of the reports I remember reading was in Australia. And it would be things like... I found this super interesting. They would ask people for example if they felt it was important that there was a national opera. And then almost all of these people would say yes, and then it's like, okay but have you ever been to the opera, and like ninety percent of people would say no.

And things like this I think are quite interesting because it's like, measuring the value of something and the worth of something is a lot more complicated than just a subjective response, like how many people is it reaching? And also I think that the arts are a really intricate ecology where like I... Okay yeah, fair enough, like I might see a piece that is very, very experimental and like, left-field and wouldn't make sense to the general public but it

might inspire me in a way when I'm running a workshop with young people. It might also make me create a piece in a different way that does reach a big audience. And you need all of it, like all of that needs to be supported, you know?

So, I don't know, I feel like there must, there are different ways of measuring value and I feel like I'm nervous that this is not the best. This is a very clunky way. But I also appreciate what an incredibly vulnerable, difficult position they're in to defend what is like such a tiny part of the national budget. It just makes me so furious, the money we put into the automobile industry or like the arms industry. Which I personally would not like to have any money behind. But everyone just accepts that, I mean the government supports pretty much every kind of business I can think of. Why not the arts?

We should wrap up but as an end question, how has it made it different for you guys being paid for your involvement in this show?

**DS:** So, I obviously was called in last minute today. I had a whole day of admin planned. Thank you for rescuing me. [laughter] I wouldn't have. No, if this was an unpaid thing I would have gone, "Oh that sounds nice! But I've actually got a lot of admin to do." But this is a paid gig so you say yes to it. That's part of... I like the word hustle in arts as well, I think 'hustle' is a good word sometimes. You do have to hustle a bit and that means saying yes to everything. Particularly if it's paid work. So yes, thank you. [laughter]

**LW:** Yeah, I don't know. I guess, for me, because I'm still really new I just like the fact that people rate what I chat. [laughter] It's nice. But yeah it means I can go and get out of my overdraft. [laughter]

**DS:** By £60? [laughter]

**LW:** Yeah, perfect!

**DT:** Actually, could you explain if it's allowed you to be more professional about turning up today as well?

**LW:** Well I know you though innit, so I just did what you said.

**DT:** Yeah, I was worried about you coming to be honest. [laughter] No but does it enable you to be... Because you know you're being paid, does it enable you put... like Dan were you able to put your admin thoughts aside today?

**DS:** Yes. Very much so, very much so. Like I mean, like I said, in all honesty and as lovely as this is I probably wouldn't have come if it wasn't paid. If I'd been in Deptford, maybe, if I'd had or was coming from a workshop around here or meeting or something then it's kind of convenient. But it's an hour-and-a-half across London for me so it's three hours of my day travelling today. Plus, the two hours we're here so that's kind of five hours. I wouldn't have taken that out not paid if it wasn't convenient. In terms of it being a professional decision, definitely it was worth my time professionally.

Has it changed what I've said today? That's like, that's a *Schroedinger's Cat* question, isn't it? [laughter] I don't know. I don't think so. I hope, I think. No, I'm going to say no because I think that when you do give yourself over to something if it's a voluntary thing or a charitable thing, your own time you're giving up. You should dedicate yourself to that as much as you would have done paid work, otherwise you shouldn't say yes to it because you don't really believe in it then if you're just doing it because you think you should.

**PV:** I would have... I don't think it's changed how I related to the work, being paid in that sense. Also, because I really respect you David so I would have gone, "OK. I'm going to take this seriously because it's for David."

But maybe what it definitely does is it probably makes me a little bit more present. Because I'm not here worrying about money. Although I am actually worrying about money but I'm not worrying about... I haven't been worrying about money as we've been recording this because it's like, OK this is a gig and it's for David and we're being paid. And it's with Liv and Dan and they're being paid too which also makes me feel good. I'm much... That's an interesting thing, that, I think I would say that. I definitely feel that there's an increased level of comfort knowing that I am involving other artists who I am paying. That's very different, yeah. I feel that in a very strong way.

But in terms of that, if it changes what I say? Mainly the only thing I feel particularly sensitive around ever since I got funding for *Show Me The Money* and knowing that this is also *Arts Council* funded is, I definitely was much more critical about the *Arts Council* before I got the funding. But I think the funny thing is that what's made me a little bit more sympathetic was not even so much getting the funding but it was, bizarrely just a total coincidence, I've met so many people that work for the *Arts Council* in the last year and all of them have been really courageous like, committed, warm, over-worked, caring people who are just as frustrated by the things that artists are frustrated about. And so now I feel like even when I say things that are critical I always have to kind of like counter with like, yeah I feel this, but... It's important for us to mention that, you know? Because I also know there are a lot of people who just get really angry and wound up about the *Arts Council* and have gotten incredibly... I would not want to work there. I can't imagine it, really.

**DT:** I didn't want to get too involved today and I've sat most of it out but since you've made that point, I think I was really sceptical in the same way that Liv... Because we were going through the forms at the same time. [**LW:** Yeah, we were doing it together weren't we babe?] Lots of coffee at [The Peckham Pelican](#) which is the best place in south-east London to go. [laughter]

But, having met people who work within the *Arts Council* socially, and a more official way, and they've been named on my application so that's all official and above-board; but when you meet people that work within there and you realise how passionate they are about supporting the arts, there's a very big difference between... I think it's an important thing to say that the people that work for the *Arts Council* and the measures that are being brought in now, as an organisation, the way the *Arts Council* feel obliged to justify how they're using public money, these are different, these are important differences in the conversation that needs to be had...

I'm eternally grateful to the people that have given me advice, both those that have had funding themselves and people that have been knocked back and people that work for the *Arts Council*. I would not have gotten the money for this podcast project if it wasn't for transparency from people and that's why I wanted to have this conversation. Because had people not been honest with me there's no way I would have finished that form. [laughter] I probably wouldn't have even started the form!

**PV:** Yeah, it's so overwhelming and I have to admit, like as you said, it took me... Maybe it's worth saying? It took me two rounds of applying on two different projects to get funding.

It took me the first time, probably the better part of three months like around other stuff. The second time maybe I got it down to around a month-and-a-half, two. I had four people look at my first application, I went through at least six or seven drafts on my second application, it was read by five or six other people. I had two artists share successful applications with me the first time around. I had four-to-five artists share with me successful applications the second time around and I've shared my successful application now with probably nine or ten different artists.

And for me, I actually think that's the only... if you're doing it for the first time that is literally, I think, the only way. If you don't live in London you're really lucky, you can probably actually get a meeting with someone and talk it through. If you live in London, you might not. But there are lots of organisations like, for example, [Artsadmin](#) that organise sessions where they come and they help you talk through stuff.

So we should wrap up but I just wanted to say, thank-you to David for inviting me to guest-host this, thank you to Dan and Liv. You can check them out on links that are going to be posted online. And also if you want to follow this conversation further I would love, love, love for you to get on my [Tumblr](#) which I guess there might be a link for, and to come and see one of the next two London performances of *Show Me The Money* which will be at *Camden People's Theatre* on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of October at 9pm.

And actually all that week from the Monday, which I should know off the top of my head but I don't, I've been invited to curate two of the windows for *Camden People's Theatre* and so in each of these two windows there's going to be a different artist who is using it as their artist studio for the day. Dan is going to be one of those artists to answer the question of what we do all day. But also to kind of look at this crazy question of how ridiculously expensive and important studio space is to London artists and how actually having a window for a day seems like a pretty good gig for most of us. And the idea for me came out of being in the window for the [Whose London Is It Anyway?](#) project and having the horrific realisation at the end of the day that if it was affordable I would actually totally be up for having one of those windows that I could barely fit in.

I'll leave it there. Goodbye.

**End of Transcript.**