



Shifting states with Meg Stuart (2014)

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SPEAKERS

Meg Stuart and Frank Bock

(Introduction: Renée Bellamy speaking in 2021 over spare guitar chords)

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This is a field recording of variable quality with a live audience at Siobhan Davies Studios.

(2014 audio or video file begins)

Frank Bock

Hello, hello. We were just talking about the strange thing of not talking about work or not showing work here.

Meg Stuart

Yeah, normally if there's a talk, there's, people have just seen a piece that I've made. So there's always this experience or reference points. So, to just talk, talk without that thing is different.

Frank Bock

I know you've used the word 'authentic fiction'. There was something about that thing of working with the imagination and states and kind of concretizing them or sort of living them in a certain way. Is that relevant?

Meg Stuart

Yeah, like living in a set of sort of circumstances or, like this, I know to be true for right now. But maybe in the next moment, there's some other set of rules, or? Yeah, it's a call them micro narratives. I guess when I also started dancing, it felt like, you know, it was a situation like partnering, it's like, I lift you, you lift me, we lift each other, we do this, we do that. It's kind of like there was this whole, beautiful when it's intended, like democracy and like equality of like, we do this. And then I was like, wait, let's just keep, I mean, this was a years ago. But let's, let's set the set of conditions as you might do in a more theatrical scenario, like, you know, I'm okay, I'm the dead body on passive and you have to move me and it's not going to change until we get out of this situation. So that creates a kind of, you know, you look at time differently, of course, there becomes another kind of urgency, one move matters, because that's the next move. And that's, you know, brushing more on the edge of fiction and theatricality, because the past has weight, which affects the now as opposed to like, we're in this endless loop. So I think I really wanted to kind of create this set of conditions so that things hang there with more weight, and then there's, then it's harder to resolve also as a choreographer, but in general, I can't say that's true all the time now from my work, but that was something specifically, that was really important.

Frank Bock

And that's the kind of creating histories on stage that you work with through accumulation. You don't work with narrative but you work with, with accumulating?

Meg Stuart

It's hard to say, you know, like, every piece you feel like you have to, I don't know, you have to question like, how are these people? How do they move? Like, what's the normality of their movement? And like, how stylized are they? Are they more people? Are they more? You know, are they more sort of in an ethereal or ephemeral world and more energies? Like, I don't think the conditions of who's moving is clear right away like that. Like, a lot of work goes into that, like, how are we and then once that is established, and other things appear? But I don't know I think narrative has a really bad rap, like the word like, and anything that gets like that dangerous, like the word contact is a bad one, I kind of want to gravitate to things that are a bit like, we don't do that. This idea of micro narrative, which means like it happens, it could be for just a spot in time, it can be over an hour but it can also collapse I do that appears. I'm reading this book called the *The Ontology of the Accident* by Catherine Malibu. That was my assignment to read this book for tonight. And it's on destructive plus, plasticity. It's pretty dark. She talks about like Marguerite who ages in a moment like that, she just, she's really fine. And then just ageing isn't that something that happens continuously, but like, there's a moment of it just a moment it like it can all sort of happen instantly that was. But I think why you wanted to bring it in, is because I, I mean, for me, I always thought that plasticity is something positive that we can reinvent ourselves and that we can shape shift, and we can change and channel or we can move, we can really have this. This freedom or maybe even the pressure, but the freedom and the pressure of reinvention. And this, this destructive, as I understand now, plasticity is like, you get Alzheimer's, or somebody, there's a trauma in your family, there's a death, and then things change, and they're irrevocably never the same. And then you're a new person, it sounds a bit simple but right? And I'm wondering what? Yeah.

Frank Bock (5 minutes)

I was curious about it because we'd been talking a bit about trauma, or we touched on the idea of trauma. And this was this negative idea of plasticity seemed to refer to the idea of being so altered by something, you don't have a relationship to your old self, like a kind of break. So you're kind of other to yourself. And there was, yeah, there was something I was just interested in as a kind of counterpoint to this self development, self creative process that we constantly talk about. The rupture of trauma in a way. And I was just curious, what, just what your response might be.

Meg Stuart

I mean, that's why I think she says like, there's gonna be always a limit to this and sense of reinvention or remaking, transforming, like, it stops. And at first I was like ahh that can't be possible. But then I was like, okay, it stops. And then what? She's talking about 'life can be defined as a harmonious agreement of the movement of the body. Like, this is the definition of the health of the organism, assuming an accordance between its parts. On the other hand, death occurs when the parts have their own autonomous movements, thereby disorganizing the life of the whole, and breaking up its unity.' It's funny, because I, like when I started, I was somehow quite certain I was working with trauma. And I don't know if I just thought, like, aesthetically, it was cool. I mean, I also coming from a kind of punk path, and I don't know, it was kind of like, Okay, put my arm out here and I don't know what my on my hand is doing. So my head is no, this was like the class of movement like, this is happening, but I'm not, I'm not here, or I'm completely vacant, and you know, this, which was completely against just purely against training of being a harmonious whole, it's like, lets fragment it, and like, I don't know what's going on. But now, if I read that, and death is like that, all these like, dis harmonious parts, then certainly, I felt like I'm much more interested in recovery, because maybe some parts are numb or dead or not there or not functioning. But we're still moving. Because we have to, and we're figuring out how to move and we're actually in dialogue with other people and we're still communicating, we're still. And actually things sort of twinge and get excited when they're in, in a kind of proximity with someone else and things like rub against, you know. So, I found that like, super interesting. And I also had that experience, because I have this exercise which in my workshop we'll do tomorrow, but it's always talking about changing states. So you're in a state, and then you radically change to another one and then you change. And I was always convinced, it's about how our ability to like, you know, cut from one, you know, around the line or this like just, but actually I realise it's not about changing it's about staying, it's not about it's like staying with something more than you want to more than you like, the idea of like committing thing you don't know what it is, you let it linger you, you feel it, you still can't name it. It's just a way of thinking about things. And it's the same like I thought it was an obsession with trauma. But actually, things have changed. And also I think in general, you know, I feel things lighter anyway. But things are more integrated, but not, I can't say I'm necessarily fascinated in this harmonious, integrated body.

Frank Bock (10 minutes)

But when I hear you talk about states, I think there is something of trauma in that, in that sense of where something can start from zero and go to 10 really quickly and into something else. Trauma is a coupling up of say, fear and anger are something, that two states can be completely locked into each other. And can be quite arbitrary as well. That things get over coupled in a very powerful way that they have their own intelligibility but don't necessarily fit in a everyday narrative.

Meg Stuart

When you don't have any memory, like what do you dream about? Because really, actually, it's funny because this line is in my solo, this is very concrete. Is everything just blurry? Or do you like it's like, you get the day all wrong, like you have the day but you just get like, the titles are wrong. They're just like, fuzzy like, what kind of memories? What kind of dreams do you have when you're don't have memory? Do you know that? I'm really curious.

Frank Bock

But memories based on image and effect, based on some experience that has some affective qualities. So, whatever, if there's anything that has some quality of emotion in it will stay in the system will somehow be there. So, we can't remember things that don't have any quality or any lymbic, any emotional or felt sense to just doesn't get retained. So we need things that have some kind of felt quality.

Meg Stuart

I just mention it, because I actually I talk about the people that influence me and people like cultural heroes, I don't know, like I mentioned Trisha Brown. And I mentioned that I know that she's losing her memory, you know. She's losing her memory, and then I kind of go off on this tangent, but it's the kind of whole section around just blogging it's one moment, but I have just experienced often that I feel I'm remembering things, people I haven't met or maybe I have met them but I don't remember. Or maybe I just want them too much. Also what's fantasy like? Because I had this sort of path. Like if I started with a kind of absent that was maybe aesthetics like, I don't know my hand is doing and I'm not here. And it was super yeah, dark, I would say but then over the years, it was like, well, I'm not there. Okay, well, other people can be there I can channel other energies, I can actually filter other wow I can be like a channeler I can like be a psychic, like other bodies are you know, which I guess any you know, what is acting anyway but like you're somebody you're embodying but to willingly do that as a dancer which is like let's be true and authentic. And I know that my body is gonna fall and I'm gonna get tired and out of breath and I know that I can carry the weight like there's something so grounded often but then you're like yeah, so I think that started like what cleared a space started through this started to happen or to play with as material. Yeah, and that can be also energies and that can be something more abstract or that can be people like, you know, not only like doing seances on stage, but just that sense of

Frank Bock

It's a very potent idea of taking in other people's memories or working with your sense of self that's much more porous and much wider, your body is much. I remember reading somewhere recently about idea of the word that every time we use the same word, we're always we're always altering it. We're always every word that we utter somehow changes, because it's been said by somebody else, and then it's passed on. And there's, there's something about

Meg Stuart (15 minutes)

You mean like, any word? Or every word? Like if you're repeating it?

Frank Bock

Yeah every word, every utterance of life somehow, is has a carrying forward, there's a kind of carrying forward of experience.

Meg Stuart

Do you think dance is like, healing? No, I'm really serious because maybe you I mean, you obviously you have your practice. And you're involved in dance, but then you decide like, okay, I'm going to talk people through things. Do you feel like dance, don't bother because it's? Yeah, you can be honest, I don't know I'm just curious

Frank Bock

It's a good question. I mean I think there's something about experiencing art that I think is healing. That allows a kind of re experiencing of life for this, there's something about what we do as artists is to bring people into more connection or more relationship. So yeah, I would say it is, I would say dance has the potential for not getting up and just dancing and then you're cured. Do you see that in what you do? Do you feel like you're making a difference?

Meg Stuart

I mean, I feel really grateful to be able to have this release, and to kind of expand, like, the borders and the container of who I am and to meet people in other forests, and I guess it keeps me sane. And I would say, you know, like years ago, I couldn't even be sitting here because I had really problem with talking and very shy and so I'm, it's been a whole, like, you know, step by step. You know, but it would have happened with my work to be more open but yeah, I think making issues, making questions, making making them physical like, putting them like spatializing them, putting them in the world, like putting the

questions. I don't know I said the word map today, but I think like, splaying them out, just that without like, even judgement, laid out like, but also like, I like dance because it doesn't pretend it has solutions. Like it doesn't pretend that's like, and this and that, which means we're gonna you know, so it. Maybe that gets us off the hook often, but I also feel like it's pretty honest that way.

Frank Bock

You also have had a lot of collaborations. So it seems that there's a real interest in meeting another human and working out how they work or there's something about

Meg Stuart

Yeah I don't know I think I like to think together with other people, I don't know or to be in that space with other people. It's hard to say I would be curious to go back and like if I had to only work in a room and then I only worked with myself like I guess I would have produced things but I don't know. Somehow I find people fascinating or I've seen artists into their work and I or maybe they're the script or the text so I imagined their over or their work and then I try to put myself in it and I try to meet them. Yeah, related to skills as a dancer, perhaps that's just projected out in a meeting process.

Frank Bock

But in Hunter, you probably weren't on your own or were you on your own?

Meg Stuart (20 minutes)

I am the only one on stage but I had a lot of midwives. There are a lot of people involved. I mean, there was a video person and a sound person and a dramaturg. So, yeah, people asked, I mean, it wasn't just me slugging it out on my own, working it out. I've had those moments for sure.

Frank Bock

Do you have a sense of the other bodies that are in your gestures, the accumulation of other bodies?

Meg Stuart

Definitely, I feel like my work is made through the other people. So all these years, people that come into the work, they there's a task or a score, and they shape it by their own interest in their work at the time. So they also are making the work. So then if I connect or they or we've connected, it's like you've met them and then.

Audience

I had a question about the title of your company Damaged Goods? I suppose just listening to you speak something about, I don't know, I just wondered about that name?

Meg Stuart

Yeah, so it was the final line of the first review that I got of a piece that I made called the Speaker Study. I don't know that review was very good, actually. It was okay. But at the end, he said, and everyone was shown as damaged good. at that particular moment, in time the dance was quite virtuosic, and quite full bodied and energetic. You can imagine it was just like, felt a bit anti and I liked the idea that someone would be having selling a dance company or dance as damaged goods. Yeah, just chose that title. It stuck and I still like it, but I sometimes think hmm should I still call it Damaged Goods but it's still there. And it's still transiting, still moving. So it's part of that's part of the work also. Yeah, and that company is still going I mean, you still get support in Belgium and Brussels, from the beginning.

Frank Bock

Good place to end?

Meg Stuart

Okay. Thank you.

(Outro: Renée Bellamy speaking in 2021)

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