

Ditzcourse – 2. Pleasure

Megan Hoetger, Sands Murray-Wassink, Radna Rumping

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(introduction sound)

This is episode 2 of Ditzcourse, a series of conversations with painter, body artist, writer and perfume collector Sands Murray-Wassink. Ditzcourse as in: ditzzy, as in silly, but still making discourse. Thinking out loud. Sharing information. Meaning making in relation. As informal as possible. I'm Radna Rumping, and Sands and I have been in conversation for some years. The gift that keeps on giving. How to edit? For each episode of Ditzcourse a guest is invited, and we keep a keyword in mind. We all bring a power object or reference to the table.

*This time Megan Hoetger is joining, and the keyword is pleasure. Megan Hoetger is a performance researcher, curator, historian and hard femme. She grew up in California, and now lives in Amsterdam. Sands, Megan and I met at the end of 2019 to start a collaboration, commissioned by *If I Can't Dance*, that became *Gift Science Archive*: a database which archives relations and nearly 2,500 studio objects from the art/life practice of Sands. *Gift Science Archive* is also, as Megan puts it, 'a fierce feminist demand to centre the messiness of feelings and thoughts and sharing in our processes of meaning production, knowledge transmission and history-making'. We are in a continuous exchange. Now we meet at the home of Sands in Amsterdam, where he lives with his partner Robin and cat Duman.*

In this episode, recorded on May 23th 2024, we talk about the too personal, vulvic space, anal space, being a feminist killjoy, noticing, a bad behaviour boat, and the pleasure of interpersonal connection.

Sands: Pleasure is practically a word which equates with life somehow. Also because there's a flip side of pleasure, and there are things that relate to pleasure that are less pleasurable. You can't have pleasure without the things which are not pleasurable. So I think that the combination of things which equals pleasure was always taught to me by people like Carolee Schneemann, who was my teacher and had such a huge influence on the course of my life. She used the word pleasure a lot, and that it was kind of denigrated in the art world that pleasure also in a feminist art context, that if there was too much pleasure in the work, that perhaps it wasn't effective or it was pandering to the male gaze or, you know, there were all sorts of things. So pleasure is also quite a contentious word.

Radna: Yeah. Megan, you are a performance historian, a curator, a hard femme, as you describe yourself, and also a friend. Pleasure also plays a role in work and artistic work. That, that resonated a bit

with me when I thought of the way we worked and what came out of that, which was, for me, often very pleasurable. Not always, but, yeah, when I think of it, yeah, a smile comes on my face. So it's still something that gives me pleasure.

Megan: Well, I thought I just wrote it down because I didn't want to forget. Because you did put a little emphasis on the hard femme as something I identify somehow. Somehow it's related to pleasure, but I wanted to cite it. There's a really good text by [Jackie Wang](#) called *On Being a Hard Femme*, and it's in her book [Alien Daughters Walk Into The Sun](#). So just to say that. Yeah, but maybe I start. I brought two objects, but one of them, I think, actually is very related to what you were already saying Sands, about the pleasure as being controversial in some way. And one of my objects is a book. So it's the book [Eros and Civilization](#) by [Herbert Marcuse](#), which I think I must have read when I was 21 or 22 for the first time. And the way that he really talks about how pleasure has to be suppressed in order for efficiency in the capitalist system. And so not only suppressed, but also very singularly located in sort of, quote, “genital pleasure”. And the proposition that he makes about polymorphic perversity was something that really ‘woo’ in my head when I was at that age.

Radna: Polymorphic perversity?

Megan: Yes. So the idea. Yeah, what if... You know, what if our pleasure, sexual pleasure that way, but just maybe even the flattening of pleasure into being about as kind of a sexual pleasure and then that being really reduced to genital sexual pleasure. But what if we were to think of our, you know, the way pleasure moves in our whole bodies or in relation with other bodies, is something that has to get written out for the efficient body in a kind of. Yeah. In this kind of mode of production. So he introduces this term, and when I was young, I didn't really understand what it meant. I mean, I think I read this around the same time I learned what feminism even was. So it also gives a bit of... how I entered into thinking about what feminism is or could be, what pleasure is or could be, what femmeness is or could be. So that was my first object. My second object is an old manila folder that I used to keep copies in. In 2016, I wrote a manifesto called [I Have Had 99 Dicks, And I Am Not The Problem](#), but I carried copies of it in this manila folder for, I don't know, five or six years, and would just give them to people who wanted it. Many don't. They're uncomfortable. It's a bit too provocative to go back to that, too personal. That was another thing I had written down to come back to this. What is too personal? Because what you were saying about the [Gift Science Archive](#), these conversations we had in triangle or different constellations of us. They were always a bit too personal somehow. And this is one of the things we were trying to not edit out and include into the database itself, so that the too personal becomes part of the objects, in a way. Yeah.

Sands: I have a question. I got very excited about both of these objects because the first one. This was one of Hannah Wilke's favorite books. I don't know if we ever talked about that, but this was very, very important to Hannah Wilke. This Eros and Civilization.

Megan: Beware of Fascist Feminism.

Sands: Beware of Fascist Feminism, which is from the mid-seventies, I think. I can't remember the exact date, but..

Radna: Sorry. That was something she referred to?

Sands: Referred to yes, and the book kind of galvanized her to...to move further with what she was already doing. So everything. I think there was a kind of confluence of...there was another book, and I'm having trouble remembering it wasn't Marcuse. There was a related book that Carolee had mentioned and also the writings of Wilhelm Reich about the orgone accumulator that was very genital based, as I understood it. But this kind of accumulation of energy in the body as a kind of revolutionary force. Sexual energy, I guess it was in Wilhelm Reich.

Megan: I always thought it was because all of the energy had been genitally focused. This whole process was about getting it in the whole body with the screaming and all of this.

Sands: It could be. I don't know that much about screaming.

Megan: Well, I only know what came through the Viennese Actionists mostly, which is a bastardized form of Reichian therapy.

Sands: Right, right, right.

Megan: But, yeah, you would kind of lay and get kind of shaken.

Sands: Yeah, get kind of shaken so that the whole body would become energized in a way that it would. I see, I see, I see. Yeah. This is something as well that I have to and want to admit. And you both know this. I sometimes get the wrong end of the stick with historical information. And I kind of think that I know something that I don't actually know completely somehow, but just have kind of an intuitive feeling about. And this other book that I'm thinking of, maybe it will come to me because it wasn't Marcuse, it was someone else...Norman.

Megan: Oh, Norman Brown. Yeah, there was, I think, Norman O. Brown.

Sands: Another Norman O. Brown.

Megan: Yeah, yeah. Sort of between the Freud and Marx. Norman O. Brown.

Sands: But what was the book? Do you remember the name.

Megan: I know the words life and death are in the title, but I don't know.

Sands: So I have that book, the Marcuse, but I've never read the whole thing. And this is something that happens a lot with me. I buy books, and then I read small pieces, and they end up. Well, Megan's sitting next to them in our messy library. They end up, oh, I think we've got the...

Radna: Oh, Monty is helping us. Life Against Death.

Sands: Yeah, Life Against Death.

Megan: I thought that might be it.

Sands: That's what I was trying to think of, because that was another one that Hannah Wilke had mentioned from around the same period.

Megan: Super interesting.

Sands: Yeah.

Megan: Because I didn't know that Life Against Death... No, that her kind of approach to Marxist feminism was really rooted in these figures.

Sands: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, she did a lot of research. This is the thing with Hannah Wilke as well, is that I think while she was alive, because she dealt with pleasure. I mean, that was the whole driving force when she would speak intellectually or theoretically, it always came from an angle of pleasure somehow. In the first instance, like the chewing gum sculptures, she made puns on words like mastication, the chewing as masturbation...

Radna: And the chewing gum sculptures...for people who don't know that work, maybe we should say that the chewing gums that she puts on her body or face, for instance, and made portraits with were in the shape of vulvas. Right. So they are small vulva sculptures made out of chewing gum.

Sands: Right. And she used to pun on that, even, and say that it was “starification / scarification” so that the beauty became kind of...that pleasure is not only something that is giving us lots of good feeling, but there's always a flip side. For Hannah Wilke, there was, anyway, so it's quite involved. And I think that was something that was misunderstood during her lifetime for a long time, until she died and did the work about cancer as she was dying, that the work was just narcissistic and that it was hedonistic, even – that strange word, which I've never really understood why that should be a bad thing... Well, what Megan just said, that capitalism needs the repression somehow of the energy, the life force somehow.

Megan: The bodily.

Sands: The bodily. Yeah. And I have that...You gave me the text, the 99 Dicks text. You remember? That was one of the first things you gave me. I have it in my room and I just. Oh, yeah, yeah. Well, I found it amazing and fascinating, and I never read anything like it. Until then, or since.

Megan: I don't know if that's a good thing, Sands.

Radna: I think that is what people say about you usually.

Sands: (laughing) Yeah, that's what people say about me. And we don't know if that's a good thing either. But I kind of think that it opened up a conversation because your text is also about a private-public divide, in a way. Maybe you could say something about that.

Megan: Indeed. I think there was a lot, because we were talking a bit before we started about the too personal, and I think a lot of people were quite offended because it's too personal, but I think there was also. Yeah, a lot came up also around gender, sexual orientation, and pleasure, and the reading of it, which I did a reading once in San Francisco, and somebody asked me, what if we replaced dick with clit? I can't remember exactly, but they had asked me this. And I thought, well, you didn't seem to hear the beginning because, I mean, the dick, we know how this works, the phallus, you know, that it's sort of, it's incredibly material, but it's also very much metonymic for kind of broader structures of violence. I think maybe this is, you know, the “scarification/ starification”. There's this side of pleasure that also has a kind of violence in it sometimes, or that these two things come really close and rub together in really uncomfortable ways. So a lot of people were really not excited. I think I tried to sell some copies at some point, but nobody bought them. So that's when I started giving them away.

Radna: People refused even the gift. Yeah.

Megan: ‘Oh, thanks’ and then they leave it behind.

Sands: And they leave it behind. Well, that reminds me of Carolee's Cezanne, She Was a Great Painter because when she was selling those in the mid-seventies, they sold for \$2 or something, which even back then wasn't that much money, because she just thought no one would buy them otherwise. I have that tendency too. I did that for years. I would give things away because I thought nobody wanted to pay for anything.

Radna: What was your motivation to make... Yeah. Make this almost too personal text public? Why put it out?

Megan: Yeah. Well, so at the time, I was living the majority of the time in Rome, and a friend of mine there, my best friend, ran a poetry night every Wednesday, called Suddenly Every Wednesday at our local gay bar. And everybody was invited to read. And so I was like, oh, I want to read some. Then I started, oh, what would I write? And I actually immediately came, this is one thought that came to the idea of using it as a space to claim my pleasure. And in all of the complicated and maybe not good feminist, I'm doing air quotes – “good feminist” ways that one is supposed to experience pleasure. I think this is something that comes up with Schneemann or Wilke also, right. Is this sort of refusal of pleasure as being part of a feminist project in this refusal, the anti-porn debates, let's say, of the eighties, but this goes back much before that. So I thought, ah, you know what? I'm in a space where I feel very safe, so I'm going to work through how I would articulate what my pleasure is in really, really bodily ways, and also that I have a right to my pleasure against what most people, many people would have us think. So that's where it started from. So I wrote a few demands every week over the course of two years. Yeah, not every week, but, yeah, over...

Sands: The course of two years. And this became the 99. There are 99 of them, right?

Megan: Yeah. In the manifesto, there are 99 demands. I think there was more as I was doing it, but I edited.

Radna: It's a great title.

Sands: Yeah, it's a good number as well. It makes sense. It seems to fit somehow. I wanted to say before I forget that the phallic, what Megan was talking about before, and this relates to what I have to show and share, is also so pervasive. It's like a kind of invisible constriction. It just kind of is almost like air in our patriarchal world. So, I'm wearing. I'll start by describing what I'm wearing, and then I'll get the objects which directly relate to this idea of pervasive phallicism and a counterbalance. I'm wearing a T-shirt, which I specifically chose because it fits me quite well. I have this annoying relationship to things like, in the United States, Fruit of the Loom T-shirts that, for “men” – air quotes, again – are cut very boxy, so

they don't taper to the body. They're just. And this one's from Hema, actually. And it's a bit form fitting. It's even called slim fit so I chose it and I had it printed with a phrase in Dutch and in English. The phrase in English is... Well, on the front, it says the Dutch phrase 'denk aan parfum' with a perfume bottle, a kind of classic looking perfume bottle with a little squeezable ball and a tassel on it, all in hot pink on black. And then on the back, it says the same phrase in English: 'Think of perfume'. At least this is how the women... It was actually a bit difficult to translate in my mind, so I had the people at the copy shop help me. They also searched for the typeface, the font. It's called Fiolex Girls. It has little hearts on it, and it's a very romantic, very romantic typeface. And they also found the perfume bottle for me. They were very helpful at the coffee shop.

Radna: Co-designers of the T-shirt.

Sands: The co-designers of the T-shirt. So this was printed. And the reason I wanted to wear it today as well is a sentimental reason, because it was hanging in the studio where we worked on the Gift Science Archive together as a kind of just almost a background object, part of the scenery. So, yeah, I decided to put it on today. It smelled clean enough, even though it had been down in the storage for months. I'm gonna try to stand. Maybe I should take off the headphones. Yeah. I'll just be right back.

Radna: Okay.

Sands: The bag is here.

Radna: Oh, he's coming from the hallway.

Sands: A little bag. So this is. This is actually a question for both of you as well, because it's an unresolved issue in my work, and I don't know if we've ever talked about this one before. I will start by... so there's some photographs and a printout and the photographs to move to the inside of the body, I brought three things, I guess, are these works, which are from the year 2000. They're nude photographs of myself, which were very based on, like, my influences from mainly Hannah Wilke, Carolee Schneemann and Adrian Piper. The idea of the body as the force field again. But I asked a photographer to photograph me in various poses, as if I was an insect. I want it to be not as an erotic body, but just as a... almost like a crime scene. They're a bit more glamorous than that. But this was the impetus, and three of them in this photograph. This was actually the installation from the show that I had with Carolee Schneemann in 2001 in Rotterdam at Cokkie Snoei gallery. Three of them are on red satin, my body on red satin, which was a relation to Marilyn Monroe's photographs, nude on red velvet. I was 26 and I was still trying to discover for myself what pleasure meant to me or what eroticism was, what embodiment was, all these related subjects, so I started with the T-shirt for today and then moved down to the surface of the body, the outside, what people see, what we can never get away from, our fate, in a way, as humans. And then I'll

move to the most, the most controversial side. And I can't remember if you two know this work or not. It's called Me, Clitoris, Dildo. Does that ring a bell?

Radna: Not really.

Megan: I don't think so.

Sands: Okay, so first I brought...I have a few images. It's a...it's a rather large vibrator, which I think was in use also in our household around this same period, around the year 2000, with my husband when I was about 26. And he's a few years older than me, two years older. And it's in a box. To me, it always looked a bit like a cake, a cake box or a box of sweets or something. Again, it's a vibrator in a kind of light skin color. And it has the word 'me' written on it in red, quite large. And on the other side, I have some.

Radna: And you are having a black and white copy of it...

Sands: Right, because I couldn't find it.

Radna: This is the reference to the object.

Sands: I couldn't find the object, which really frustrates me. Normally I can find everything, and this isn't a small thing, but I couldn't find it anywhere.

Megan: I was going to ask, does this work still exist?

Sands: Yeah, if it still exists? Yeah. Yeah, it definitely still exists.

Megan: But it's location unknown.

Sands: But here it is on photographs in the show with Carolee, because on the other side of where it says 'me' in smaller letters, in blue, it says 'clitoris' along the whole length of the vibrator. And like I said, it's in a kind of plastic case. And in the exhibition, it was shown standing up, together with some cigarettes in a kind of pastry case or glass box. And on each cigarette is written either 'die' or 'scum', so they're called Die Scum Cigarettes. And this is one of the few things that actually sold in my early career. Someone bought this. But this was a really difficult work for me and also for the person who wrote the text about the show that Carolee and I had together, Kathleen Wentrack, who's a feminist art historian in New York, because she asked me, we had a long email conversation about it. And this is. This would be about the interior of the body, because Carolee used to talk about vulvic space as though vulvic space was

something that could be materialized. So I was thinking about anal space and thinking about this vibrator as the interior of my body, like a mold of the interior of my body. This is the most difficult work that was in the exhibition, and I wish I'd found it as an object, but you can get an idea from the photograph.

Radna: Did it have a title or did I miss it?

Sands: Me, Clitoris, Dildo.

Radna: Oh, that was the...You said it in the beginning.

Sands: Yeah, because I'm very anally focused also in sex, and have really tried to give that pleasure and experience life in a similar way that Carolee wanted to talk about the vulva and the vagina and the clitoris, for that matter. So.

Megan: Well, there are two demands that I have written now that come to abide. Maybe I'm just going to read them as an initial response. This number, 51: "Dicks that cannot tell the difference between my vaginal and anal openings." 52: "But then dicks that do not understand them on a continuum of my erotic pleasure either". I don't know why, but it's immediately because, yeah, I have to come back again to this kind of the focus on the genital. I mean, what's interesting here is it is a focus on the genital because it's a dildo, but it's also anally focused. And so this sort of. It's the kind of genital focus that I was talking about earlier, cuts off the possibility of a pleasure, like an anal pleasure. You see what I mean? And I don't know. For me, this was also a really important one, as I was trying to claim space for what pleasure could be. And that's where it started, was trying to understand the relation between the pleasure of these two zones before I even got to other parts of my body. If this makes sense. With the work, I mean, I'm curious, did this art historian ever articulate to you why she struggled to be able to write about it

Sands: She did write a kind of response; this is her words. She wrote "Me, Clitoris, Dildo from 2000 crosses borders and taboos in complicated ways. A purchased and used dildo lies in its original clear plastic box, with 'me' written on one side in red marker and 'clitoris' on the other in dark blue marker. In making this work, Murray-Wasink was thinking about his own sexuality and it representing his interior or rectum. When questioned about the motives and effectiveness of the work, he responded that it was an experiment in pushing the envelope. After long discussion with his sister about life, women, and equality, using the word clitoris could be viewed as a simple reductionism of female sexual organs, equating the penis with the clitoris. However, the artist's motives were different. She quotes me and I say, "I feel that writing clitoris on the dildo with me refers to something that I do often, commenting in the first instance, more on the ignorance I see in men and trying to make men relate to anatomy outside of their own. I think it relates to my own conditioning and frustration at not being adequately informed about the female anatomy and my frustration at how this limits my emotional and communicative response to an

understanding of women”. And then she finishes. Kathleen Wentrack finishes, “For Murray-Wassink, the work addresses a reverence for what women, lesbian and straight, have done and their own uniqueness. He is clearly aware that he has crossed the line, but it is part of his experimental process and helps him deal with questions he feels need to be answered.”

Radna: It feels like a work that almost begs for discussion or text or context aside from the object itself, because I think, you know, when I see dildo or phallic object on one hand, you can say, ah, it's so present as air that we don't notice, but some people do notice.

Sands: Yeah, yeah.

Radna: And it can kind of ring an alarm also, like, ah, not another phallic object.

Sands: Yeah, yeah.

Radna: And like, I was also thinking about, you know, sometimes people say like, oh, we should separate the art from the artist. I don't really follow that, with me it's sometimes the other way around. Like, I cannot separate the art from the, like, knowing you Sands for a long time is that if I see this work that I didn't see before, but I read it...more with a curiosity, like, ah, what were you thinking about back then? Or. Well, if it would be someone else, I might be in my alarm state, you know, in this kind of like reactive state where I would have a different response. So it depends, I think also on where, how you show it, how you bring it in in public, I'm not sure, because I think this anal pleasure, that wouldn't always be the first reading I think.

Sands: Right. Well, it's funny, Radna and to talk with Radna about this, because I actually took me 20 years, more than 20 years, but I finally got to, I've done a few things over the course of those 20 years that come closer to an answer about anal space and anal pleasure. But I think the cherry on the cake or whatever was the Anal Collage, I think, from a few years ago, which I didn't bring as an object, but does exist as an object. And Radna, you said that was even in a text that you wrote about my work, you said... Said that was even a bit difficult to look at.

Radna: It's very fleshy. It's close ups of your anus and there's like many. Fleshy. No, fleshy.

Sands: Yeah, yeah. Fleshy.

Megan: It's also quite shiny because you put the varnish.

Sands: Yeah, there's a varnish on it as well.

Radna: I mean, how many images?

Sands: There are 103 images of close ups of my anus, of the outside. In a kind of grid. Yeah. On a...on a large stretched canvas. And then there's a piece of brown fabric with silver stars printed on it, hanging on the edge of the canvas, which I had actually. Everything I do to bring it back to why I wanted to talk with the two of you specifically today. It's in an art context. I mean, we're having this subject pleasure talked about in an art context and art is a tool for me to get through life, in effect. And one thing that excites me is to cite and pick up works of other artists, or, you know, refer. I refer constantly to other artists. And I had seen David Hammons drape fabric on kind of painting structures, like stretchers and, you know, like a classic painting structure. And I got so excited about this. That's where the fabric came from. And the fabric had actually been used in a performance in 2004, where I wrapped it around my body as I walked around holding a banana in a condom up my ass, which wasn't really visible, but I knew that it was there. And so this has been an ongoing that even refers to, again, the concept of the anal. And the last thing would be in 2008 when Robin and I did. My husband, Robin and I did a performance in Switzerland, in Bern, where I showed the interior of my body through a proctoscope. Robin filmed what it looked like as I was on my hands and knees reading a text about my first anal sex experience. Anal sexual experience. And Carolee Schneemann and Annie Sprinkle were both in the audience.

Radna: And that was a reference to Carolee's performance.

Sands: Interior Scroll and Annie's performance Public Cervix Announcement. Well, it was part of Post Porn Modernist but getting back to art, I wanted to. Because Megan has just been to see Sarah Ahmed talk yesterday, and I want to kind of touch on what's going on now as well, in terms of. Because Megan posted about it on Instagram, and I saw the word killjoy. Right. Did I see the word killjoy?

Megan: So this is Sarah. She has a book, The Feminist Killjoy Handbook, but she's been writing with it, as it. For years.

Sands: Yeah. About Killjoy.

Megan: Feminist Killjoy.

Sands: Feminist Killjoy.

Megan: Really specific Feminist Killjoy.

Sands: Very important. And could we talk about what that. What that represents, what that means?

Megan: Before I actually say anything, I wanted to just one last thought before we move on from the Me, Clitoris, Dildo, is that there's also, I don't know, something of a lurking essentialism in the difficulty. And the difficulty to also approach what's almost a kind of a nascent queer inquiry, but to want to read it in a very binary, gendered way. And this idea of claiming clit or vulvic space or. These are sort of reserved for women. And this is what I mean, there's something. Yeah. Essentialist lurking in that.

Sands: Yeah.

Megan: But with the Killjoy, we're going in a very different direction in relation to pleasure. I mean, I think that's maybe something just that, you know, do you want to. Pleasure is not only sexual pleasure. And I think this is maybe, like, we make a bit of a turn when we...When we talk about Ahmed, because I wouldn't think of it as being about sexual pleasure.

Sands: No.

Megan: And a lot of what she talks about is actually not pleasurable, because being a Feminist Killjoy. I mean, one of the slides that I had posted on Instagram is, like, you know, a Feminist commitment to being okay with unhappiness. Right. Being okay with, like, making holding space for discomfort for all of the things that we actually distance from an idea of pleasure. What other ways pleasure happens if it's not through something that feels happy or joyful or, you know, maybe I touched on it a bit earlier that the way that pleasure rubs up against violence, because this is one of the things. There was actually a question in the audience last night, like, to Ahmed, how do you deal with hurting people around you, you know, because maybe you say something and you hurt someone around you. And what she said and most of what she says really resonates – but I really remember that, you know, we. One has to remember also that hurt. It didn't start from you, actually. What you're doing is you're kind of touching on a kind of a hurt or a pain or a violence that was already there that nobody wanted you to notice, which was another one of the words that came up. And as soon as you do, well, then somebody else feels hurt. But to not kind of carry a guilt as if you're the one that created you the Feminist Killjoy, the one that created that violence in the world by just pointing out that it exists. Yeah. So I think Feminist Killjoy is a lot about this. Right. It's a lot about noticing the ways that things are happening wrong, about the ways that sort of systemic power happens, and, you know, about the ways that bodies we would imagine as allies, carry it in them as well, and how this is actually something that, you know, that she talked about a lot last night, the way that white feminists really attacked her when she quit her teaching position and the kind of a breach she saw in a phrase that she's now taken up since then, because she had a colleague who had said that her actions were unprofessional. And so she's taken up as a kind of phrase for herself as an unprofessional feminist then. Because I think within a professional environment like the university, you know, you can write about being a Feminist Killjoy, but you shouldn't do that in the meetings. It's a sort of a performative

when you are doing it in the work, but when you bring it into the actual infrastructures you're working in, that even the people you imagine to be allies, because they say it's sort of hindering, that it's causing too much discomfort, and we're not going to get anywhere with this. But in relation to pleasure, I would say it's a push back against a certain way of imagining what pleasure is, because we could also say that it can be quite pleasurable to call out. I mean, even as, you know, you're going to get kind of screwed at some point for calling out power. There can be a moment of pleasure in the claiming space. And maybe I come back to that phrase, right, even if it's really momentary. And it doesn't make, you know, systemic change. You might want it to, but there can be a pleasure in that moment of not being willing to take it anymore.

Sands: Yeah.

Megan: And allowing yourself to speak out, because we're really trained to not do that sort of thing if we want to be professional and make it.

Radna: I stay a bit with the unprofessional-professional word...I think there for me, is also a relation with pleasure. I don't know. I think I have been often called professional. I know I can be very what is seen as professional or assumed as professional. And for me, it's a personal goal to be more unprofessional, actually. And I relate it to pleasure, I think. So what can be ways to still organize or to still make sure things happen and you build on something, which I relate also to being professional, or, you know, that not everything is falling apart, but that you can build on something with others while at the same time not pushing pleasure out. That's a question for myself. And. Yeah. Something I became more aware of for quite some years already, but even something like working with friends, which is partly a taboo because you can say that's not professional, you shouldn't mix the two, but it can also be very pleasurable. Or what are ways. Yeah. To do that, to be both? I don't know. What are other ways? What are other words even for professional? Like maybe constructive, or maybe we can come up with other words that can live with, be present at the same time as friendship, pleasure, fun, whatever.

Sands: Affinity. I like the word affinity. I love the word affinity. And it reminds me of. Was that Marx? That said, because I get this from Hannah Wilke, but elective affinities.

Megan: Oh, I don't know, maybe...

Sands: I think that was. I think that was a Marx quote from her she put it in a photo work once. But affinity is a good one, I think. And I wanted...I have various things to say all the way back to what Megan was talking about, about the Feminist Killjoy. I made some notes. When I was studying, when I went to de Ateliers, when I was here in Amsterdam, a sort of secondary art residency program. One of my main tutors was Jan Dibbets, a Dutch conceptual artist, I think he would describe himself, but a painter as well. He used to call me a professional amateur. To be personal is. Yeah, it's considered unprofessional.

But exuberance any kind of exuberance is also considered unprofessional. Enthusiasm is considered unprofessional. Any kind of extreme.

Radna: Spilling over.

Sands: Spilling over. Abundance, joy.

Megan: But I'm gonna throw the word out. Excess.

Sands: Excess. Yes.

Megan: Because pleasure is often seen as being excessive. Excessive, yes. Because it's, quote, "unproductive".

Sands: Yes, yes. Unproductive, yes, exactly. I still feel, in an art context, that people often lose sight of the fact that we're talking about humanity, for lack of a better word, because I even had an idea for a show title, or just, I guess it would be a show title or a performance title. I wanted to call it humyn interest. And with the a in human as a y, like, spelled back in the seventies format of when you could do that with women and different spellings like this. Because I'm thinking that what interests me and what gives me a lot of pleasure, actually, is to consider the fact that all of these things also the difficult, the difficulty that we have in relationships between each other and strife in life and pain and psychic pain and disappointment and frustration and confusion. All the things that are kind of also seen as somehow almost shameful. I mean, I can speak as a person who's been raised and seen in a cis male body that I felt – and also a queer cis male body almost for many years – I felt that confusion, frustration, disappointment. I wasn't supposed to express these things. It's conditioning. I mean, I think everyone feels this conditioning, but it just feels like in that way, being a Killjoy, for instance, or expressing these emotions which are seen as shameful or unwished, somehow, it's a release, it's a liberation to me. It's a kind of... And another thing is that once you get it out of your body, my theory is that when you put all this stuff into your work, when you get it out of your system, as they say, if, whether it's blowing off steam as another metaphor or whatever it is, then it doesn't exist as much in your personal life, which I think that in my case, that's been a huge misreading of my work, is that my work is all about myself, my ego or whatever. Whereas actually I think that the negativity and the focus on the self that I put out into my work, into public, means that in private, if there is a public private divide, in that way, I actually consider myself a very social and interconnected person. In a social sense. Exactly. Because, I mean, I'll put it this way. The most narcissistic people I have ever known in the art world usually make monochrome paintings. Simply that.

Radna: Sand's wisdom.

Sands: That's Sand's wisdom (laughing). Listen closely. Next time you see a monochrome painting..

Megan: (laughing) ...ask yourself.

Sands: Oh, and one more thing, one more thing. Radna, I love what you say also about this connection between the person and the work that we're not supposed to...to disconnect like the person in the work because I used to always do that and I still do it, but I've thought up a new system. So you've got Picasso, for instance, who I don't mind mentioning because I have a softness for his aesthetics. Totally, fair enough, totally against my wishes. But I like his...

Megan: We don't always get pleasure in the places that we're supposed to...

Sands: But I've thought of a new... I've thought of a new kind of way of looking at this. I have a bad behavior boat. So in the bad behavior boat are artists like... Mike Kelley is another one. I've heard from various people that he was quite nasty as a person. I don't know this. I saw him once. I didn't ever interact with him. But the bad behavior boat is a boat in the art context, where people sit who are actually quite horrible as people, but somehow make interesting or compelling or significant work. So this is my solution to that problem, because for years – the bad behavior boat – because for years I thought, how can I do this? If I say that a good person is a good artist, and then I think of people like Picasso or other people who have terrible reputations, and were probably horrible people, there has to be a solution to that, that there's always an exception to the rule or something, or for lack of a better way of understanding it.

Megan: Yeah, I mean, I don't have an answer, but I like the idea of a bad behavior boat.

Radna: I think you came up with the...

Megan: Somehow I'm like, what kind of boat is it? I think it's a yacht.

Radna: There's just some work that you think, I kind of like that work, because there are people that have and bad behavior and you don't like their work. So then it's very easy.

Sands: It's very easy.

Megan: There's also people you really love, and then you're like, don't like the work. That's difficult. Like all of these. So you want them to match up, but they don't always.

Sands: No, they don't always. And what do you do with that? That's the confusion that I was talking about, the word confusion, when you get in these situations where you don't really have a definitive

answer. But I just want to stay with that for a moment, that all of those feelings and sensations connect with the same body, which at different times or different moments, experiences, sensuality and pleasure as well. I find this utterly fascinating that we, you know, that I... Before we started recording, I mentioned the quote I'd read recently of Georgia O'Keeffe, where she said that, why want to be happy all the time? Happy is a momentary emotion, and it's dependent on a relationship to things which are maybe unhappy. How do you solve this? I don't know if there's a solution. This is an existential conundrum or something like that.

Megan: I mean, one of the things that Ahmed talked about was also, you know, one of the...She has a blog, so she has a book every few years. Pretty amazing. But she also does a blog where she works through a lot of the thinking or does things more immediately, but that...That became a really important space because of its immediacy, but also because of the ways that it made connections, because. Yeah, it's important to remember that one isn't alone.

Sands: Yeah.

Megan: Like, it's not easy being a Feminist Killjoy. You're gaslighted, you're made to be isolated, you know, in all of these ways, but so that this kind of...That...That you're not doing it alone. And so the blog was, like, an important site for her for that, but she also just talked about it in general for the audience. But I think that's also something. There's something quite satisfying, because it's possible to have conversations that can move and be a little uncomfortable and then move again and be laughing. The way that we're able to speak to one another and hold space. I mean, this is a phrase I keep coming back to. Right. Holding space it's not that often that that actually happens. This is, like, the difference between being personal and being too personal. You know? It's not so often that people hold space for the too personal without wanting to distance, without feeling uncomfortable, without wanting to dissociate in some way from it.

Sands: I have to say that that touches on something that I find very important also in relation to this conversation, is the feeling of feeling less alone, because I think that's maybe the greatest pleasure of life, actually, because I... I often feel incredibly alone, and I felt, you know, Radna and I met in 2016, Megan and me, in 2019. And before that, I probably had seven or eight years, which we talked about in the last recording with Saras as well, when Robin was practically my only audience, there were so few people interested in what I had to say or what I had to offer, that I felt incredibly alone, and I felt like I was screaming and no one was listening. And it's a terrible feeling. And the feeling of connection with other human beings is... And this is the thing that I think the art world constantly forgets, that we are human. My cat, Duman, as much as I love him, he doesn't care what I do in my studio. He's not even allowed in there because he eats photographs. That's the main reason.

Megan: Specifically photographs.

Sands: Specifically photographs. He loves glossy paper. Shiny, glossy paper. He likes to chew on. But that feeling of feeling less alone is kind of why I do it. And when I was interviewed for the very first time, when I was 21 or 22, for a magazine interview, they asked me what I hoped for, for the future. And I remember saying something like, as long as I meet people that I can somehow psychically and intellectually and pleurably connect with, that's all I want. Humanity and connection. And it frustrates me that the art world puts premiums on objects and makes them more important than people. They make anything more important than people. It's all about people. And this is the last thing that actually gets taken care of. Or do I see that in a totally upside down way?

Radna: Nope.

Megan: I agree. I was just. I can't remember who I was talking to about this, but we were talking about the way that actions or gestures like 'care' get taken up, but not in a way that's related to actual people.

Sands: No.

Megan: You know, and that...

Sands: That's instrumentalized...

Megan: Exactly. I had proposed that this...Walter Benjamin, the German theorist, I think it's a... Well, in any case, he wrote at a certain point, you know, that the aestheticization of politics is what leads to fascism, and what we should really be working towards is like a politicization of aesthetics right in the other direction. And I was talking with somebody about the way that something like care or even pleasure sometimes, you know, the new...

Radna: ...or the new buzzword, 'love' in art...

Sands: ...or 'kinship' is another one.

Megan: But that all of these things get taken up in a purely aesthetic way. And it's, for me, becomes very much an aestheticization of what is really a political commitment. Right. Care, love. These are...these...These are intrapersonal political commitments. These aren't sort of like aesthetics. It comes through my head often when I think about these kinds of keywords, let's say, that are so much about the body and the relations between bodies, but seem to be completely evacuated of that when we enter into an 'art space'.

Sands: When you talk about it, I think the push in aesthetics to me is towards things like beauty, which is a very subjective word anyway, and harmony and actual dissonance is avoided. And I think the too personal touches on that kind of actual dissonance, when you actually want to name names, as I increasingly want to do, and increasingly also want to see people in the cultural field or the art world as artworks in themselves. I even made a little joke that I would say about people's personality, someone's personality. Oh, you could use a little yellow in the upper left-hand corner of your personality or whatever. Like Blinky Palermo, I was thinking, or like a Sigmar Polke reference to the upper right-hand corner of a painting, why did that have to be black. So my aesthetics have always been secondary. As far as I see it, the message comes first.

Megan: I mean, it has a particular aesthetic to it, but indeed, that it's not the aesthetic that's driving.

Sands: Someone said to me once on our first meeting, another artist said, you're trying to make it like the 1960s again, and it's not going to work. And I thought this was a challenge that I will gladly accept. I think. I don't know why we have to leave anything behind. In any decade. We can go right back to Lascaux. As we talked about last week and the paintings of hands on cave walls and things, we're still human. We're not cyborgs yet.

Megan: Yet.

Radna: And we're also not coming out of nowhere. It's not like the 1960s anymore, but it doesn't mean that everything should stay there.

Sands: No, no.

Radna: I didn't share my object.

Sands: No.

Radna: But it's not. I didn't know when to bring it in anymore. But I think I will still do it. Right?

Sands: Yeah, do it.

Radna: Otherwise it's weird. I don't know if it will. I brought a sound. It's a messy sound recording that I recorded with my phone, so maybe I'm going to play a little bit. I don't think it's immediately clear what it is. So then I will reveal it in speaking about it. Okay, let me see if this is going through.

Sands: Very mysterious. Exciting.

Radna: Yeah. Because I was really thinking, like, what should I bring? And I thought, I really don't know. And then I was just laying down for five minutes, and then this came up, so I just. It's. Monty says, yes, I can play it.

(sound fragment plays, sounds of people chatting, water, park atmosphere, music being played)

Radna: I made this recording very spontaneously with my phone. Do you have any clue? No. You both look at me.

Sands: It sounds like. It sounds like in a bar or something like that. In a way.

Radna: It was outside.

Megan: Sounds like a street life.

Radna: It was kind of street life, more like park life.

Megan: Park life.

Radna: So it was close to a lake in Berlin where I was last summer. Krumme Lanke, the lake is called. And it's a very nice place where you can just go for a swim. So I was there. I went there for a swim with my friend Romy, who you hear a little bit on the recording as well. It was a really great day. Like, one of my pleasures is also, really, to be in water somehow, which I don't do often enough. And then we walked out, and then some guys were just standing there, drinking beers, having a picnic kind of park situation, and they had this music on, and it's quite a macho song. It's from Ice Cube Today Was A Good Day, but it just came on at the moment where I thought today was really a good day. And then I heard that song, and I was like, of course. And I think kind of at the same time on my phone, I got a message from someone who was sending me a lot of messages at that time last summer that I was quite excited about. And my friend knew of this person, so like, ah, another... And so she was like, ah, he's back again. And it's so it's kind of on the... On the recording. And for me, it was this kind of moment where I was like, ah, yeah, swimming and having a bit of fun with a friend and then this song. But then also when we talked about loneliness or excess, the contact I had with this person who was sending me a message was...it wasn't a romantic contact or maybe there were some romantic undertones, but it wasn't the main thing. But especially last summer. He was making me a lot of mixtapes of his own music, but also of other music. But the amount was a bit ridiculous. You know, it was really...

Sands: a lot.

Radna: Yeah, it was like 30 different mixtapes throughout the summer, and each was like a zip folder. It was not really mixed together, but it was sometimes 1 hour of music but sometimes 3 hours. And then there were also long emails, films, and images, you know, so it was this overspill, this overflow of content, but still it was sometimes a little bit too much, even for me. But I do get great pleasure out of... Yeah, when you talked about productivity or like, this didn't make a lot of sense because we were not really going anywhere, but then still this kind of. Yeah. Reaching out or making connection, giving something to someone without knowing. But I was also, I think I became a listener to this, what he was writing, but also to what he sent me. And it brought me pleasure. I do have pleasure also when, yeah, I think this little recording, it's a moment just for me, a memory to keep. That's why I recorded where I was like, ah, now I'm just pressing record on my phone. But I like that it brings together the here and now of being in that moment with my body out of the water with a friend while also having a connection with someone in a different country. That's more like stimulating in different ways, for no productive reason. Like, yeah, yeah, we do a lot of productive.

Megan: Productive in the way that Marcuse is...

Radna: Exactly.

Sands: That's beautiful. That's like synchronicity and meaning, but it's just life. Yeah, it's just life, which is the best thing we have when it's flowing. Yeah, I wrote down the word synchronicity. I was just thinking of the word of synchronicity.

Megan: I have to appreciate that you decided to record in that moment that you're kind of... That that's also the way you think to remember is by this confluence of different sounds with the... I mean, it recalls the memory of the lake and this person, but this snippet of a conversation with the general, like, tones of the kind of park, lake party with Ice Cube, you know, that there's this... The confluence is what you record, and then something about a memory emerges from... From all those things, you know?

Sands: Yeah, well, that's why I never liked the word visual artist or the phrase visual artist, because I think art is something which is kind of like an atmosphere, or it's like a confluence, like a synchronicity, like a slice of life. It's so much more than that, and it's also so beautiful. I always think with art is that I try to describe things, what it is and what it means to be an artist, and it always slips away. It's like a slippery soap or something that you can't quite grab. And I think that's the beauty of it. I think in the end, I just like that feeling of connection, and I think that's the ultimate pleasure. I mean, we started with the genital and everything, but it's really not about that. It's about that in relation to other... It's about everything in relation to each other.

Megan: That's only one side, actually... but I want to bring back the word, Ahmed's word, the noticing. Yeah, because we all have to be in this life, this world, this system. But there is a level at which noticing of the interconnections and these things has to...Has to be of interest, has to be pleasurable for somebody. Otherwise you don't notice. And that's maybe also what artists do. The word that I use in the manifesto a lot is interpersonal. The pleasure of the interpersonal and the different kinds of temporalities that, that happens at. That some are very long interpersonal pleasures and some are not, but that they're all equally important in the way that we understand what connectedness is.

Sands: Yeah, significant. Yeah, very significant. And that's a form of noticing as well, isn't it?

Megan: Yeah.

Sands: Yeah. Beautiful.

You just listened to Megan Hoetger, Sands Murray-Wassink and Radna Rumping in conversation for Ditzcourse, a series initiated and edited by Radna, and recorded by Monty Mouw, for Ja Ja Ja Nee Nee Nee. The other episodes attend to Spirituality, with Saras, and Glamour, with Martín La Roche.

A full transcript and list of references is available at jajajaneeneenee.com.

Reference list (in order of appearance):

Carolee Schneemann

Jackie Wang, *Alien Daughters Walk Into the Sun* (2023)

Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (1955)

Megan Hoetger, *I Have Had 99 Dicks, And I Am Not The Problem* (2016)

Gift Science Archive

Hannah Wilke, *Beware of Fascist Feminism*, (1977)

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Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death* (1959)

Carolee Schneemann, *Cezanne, She Was a Great Painter* (1974)

Suddenly Every Wednesday

Fruit of the Loom

Hema

Fiolex Girls Font

Adrian Piper

Cokkie Snoei

Sands Murray-Wassink, *Me, Clitoris, Dildo* (2000)

Kathleen Wentrack

Vulvic space

Anal space

Sands Murray-Wassink, Anal Collage (2020)

David Hammons

Carolee Schneemann, Interior Scroll (1975)

Annie Sprinkle, Public Cervix Announcement / Post Porn Modernist (1991)

Sarah Ahmed, The Feminist Killjoy Handbook (2023)

Jan Dibbets

Picasso

Mike Kelley

Georgia O'Keeffe

Walter Benjamin

Blinky Palermo

Sigmar Polke

Lascaux cave

Ice Cube, Today Was a Good Day (1992)