

Meg Wolfe
in conversation with Clarinda Mac Low

Clarinda Mac Low: Here we are again! I'm fascinated by the title of your piece. *watch her (not know it now)*. There's so much going on in the title that I feel like it sets this strange tricky terrain for watching the work. Can you talk about the title?

Meg Wolfe: What you just said about how it sets up a tricky *terrain* is an important part of what I'm trying to do in the piece. The general sort of making work and the levels of, "what I'm going to try to do is this." Fitting the puzzle pieces together; throwing this away and bringing this back. A puzzle-nature. Things that you try that maybe you don't need right now, but you might need later. How things fit together in that way of being a solo performer, watching yourself and trying to sew the layers of that. "Okay, here I am looking at what I'm trying to do and here I am in it and here you are looking at me".

Clarinda: Right, a self-reflection. But it's interesting because looking at it as an audience you get a command first. Watch her! And then, not know it now. Not know it now? And then, *watch her not know it now!* You spoke about that before, a not-knowing. It's interesting because watching you; you are actually full of authority. Your movement! There's no sense that you have any doubt. It's very interesting and I don't know whether that's because you're moving constantly?

I saw this constant carving of space with your hips, hands and head. It was very specific. I don't even *know* if it's what you chose to do, but I'm wondering how A; you chose not to stop moving and B; how the vocabulary fit together. Where it came from? And how you decided to repeat what? Is it totally choreographed or do you take sections...

Meg: It's not.

Clarinda: Ah, okay.

Meg: I build modules of vocabulary and improvise within those. I set out certain goals: for this area I'm working with these sorts of types of movement or action. Like the whole striding back and forth thing, I know I'm going to do, but I don't measure it out, "I'm going to do six steps. I'm going to do four steps." So that's the patterning.

Clarinda: But do you know the progression of the modules? Or, can you switch it up?

Meg: It's gotten more set in that way as I've been working on it. Or the kind of giving a, "Okay, I know I need this later, but let me just present this little chunk here, so I can come back and pick it up and..."

Clarinda: Put it there.

Meg: Put it..." I can't remember what I was saying...

Clarinda: I mean was there anything impetus that you started out with that you said, "Oh! This is where I'm going to start and see what comes out if I do this."

Meg: Yes, that would be working with Aaron [Drake] on sound. There's a lot of working with tones that approach, depart and deal with sound in a spatial way. We were talking about the larger kind of space in the sense of presenting in a larger space. Thinking about things in a sort of symphonic way, but then also as a solo performer. I was trying to mess a little with, what's the expectation of being a solo performer and why should people be watching a solo performer? What are the heroics? What is the expectation of some kind of virtuosity? There's something particular that this character is...

Clarinda: Did you come up with an answer to that?

Meg: What came around was dealing with the fear about that. It became a piece about dealing with the

fear of that and presenting these movements that are heroic and painting my nails blue because it felt like it gave me more energy.

Clarinda: Yeah, but it's funny because it's such a.... Well I mean, maybe that's just the way that you move your vocabulary, but it's very delicate in a way. It's strong, but very... It's not heroic in the sense of "Ta Da!" It's heroic in it's on goingness and it's complexity and maybe that's what your saying like this non- heroic heroic. It's not about... It is virtuosity, no question! but I don't know...

Meg: It's not the point.

Clarinda: Right! It's like oh I happen to be virtuosic, so anyway. (Chuckle) But you can't help it and that's an interesting thing because I could see that that wasn't the connection. That there were things that you probably didn't even know that you were doing and that's just an interesting thing about being a dancer for a long time and having a lot of skills. You draw in skills that you don't know you have, so even when *you're* working on something else, something else is revealed. We see something.

Meg: Yeah, that's kind of the title in a way. Its always interesting to me, putting something together and not having an idea, like "What the hell am I making!" And putting it out there and having people come back to you and say, "Oh I saw this or I saw that" and being like, "Oh that's interesting, I didn't know that was there."

(Laughs)

Clarinda: Yes, that's the essence of it to me. That's what drew me in the first place to make dances. The fact that dances reveal parts of yourself that you don't even know. You're revealing *it all!* That's interesting to start out with not knowing and let it become what it is because it reveals anyway whether you decide to reveal something or not, it's going to.

Meg: Yeah, it's just a general confusion. Confusion of making.

Clarinda: Well actually that's the thing, he [Aaron] has so many different sound sources and I really like that we get the list of the credits. We get Strauss and The Doors and The Kings...

Meg: That was also what we were talking about. The first one was Beethoven's Sixth Symphony: the thunderstorm section and talking about that kind of programmatic music or music that supposedly means something. Or the other, the kind of psychedelic stuff where there are all these lyrics about certain spaces and places and so the kind of... not that maybe you're getting that in this piece, but that's kind of a source too. Setting imagination off by...

Clarinda: Quoting.

Meg: ...the lighting with black curtains without actually having them or Debussy's *La Mer*, putting you into these places.

Clarinda: And then I wondered, it didn't seem like it, but are you sourcing sound from other places? Like movement from other places or....

Meg: No, but I was working with those particular songs when I was in the studio, generating material. Thinking about the lyrics and stuff and kind of set things in a certain place.

Clarinda: Yes, It's definitely like one of those intertwined music and dance, not in an obvious way. But the sound and movement become really integral to each other.

Meg: Yes, I really love collaborating with Aaron. It's a very complimentary kind of way that we work together.

Clarinda: Have you worked with him before?

Meg: Yes, we worked on a couple of pieces together before this one. We are developing a really nice working relationship as far as building stuff.

Clarinda: Is this particular solo something that would expand? Would it be part of a suite? How do you see it? Is it like it's itself and it... Meg: I feel like it's itself and it doesn't, I don't think it needs to expand.

(Laughs)

Clarinda: I don't know how you could physically do that... (Laughs)

Meg: Yeah, I think it just is what it is and it doesn't need to go any... I don't know.

Clarinda: Yeah, it was interesting because watching it, the fact that your ankles are taped is very striking. Because it makes it feel like something is going to happen.

Meg: Right. That was another like the details... Well actually, I was talking something about resources.

Clarinda: Oh, that's right.

Meg: And so I was like, "Oh, you know how they tape their ankles." That's what I did.

Clarinda: It's not actually something...

Meg: It's not.

Clarinda: Oh, it is a costume element!

Meg: It's a costume element.

Clarinda: That's so interesting.

Meg: Although, it does keep me from braking.

Clarinda: That's really interesting because I was like, "Oh my God. This is really dangerous." You know, so that's really clever.

Meg: The preparation of the racehorse to go.

Clarinda: It's funny because of the way that you set yourself up at the very beginning. The way you're standing. It actually leads to a different expectation because it's very starwort and then you go into this very tricky refine movement. I mean, not that complex, but it's certainly not that "Ah ha!" kind of movement that's being lead. Do you feel like this comes from somewhere and will go somewhere? You know what I mean? In the line of how you're working.

Meg: Well, I feel like I've been working with this one a lot, well not a lot. But before this I was working with text, video and narrative, a little bit. This was a clearing out and getting back to the movement that's always been there. But it was nice to clear it out and we're going to start working on a new piece, a quartet, when I get back to L.A. Yeah, I'm not sure where it is going yet.

Clarinda: A palate cleanser.

It was interesting for *me* since I've seen you dance so much, in so many different capacities. I saw a lot of echoing; which is different from watching your other work where each one is particular. I don't see echoes of other choreographers you've worked with [in past work that you've made], but here I see so many

echoes that became completely fragmented in a way. From your foot moves I see an echo of Vicky Shick! And within one movement I see five echoes. I think that's interesting and that's why you haven't done the movement...

Meg: You can't help but be influenced and have all that. I mean, that's part of who I am as a performer is all the people I've worked with. It's all in there. It is kind of... "is that me?" or oh, "whoops! that was from Vick or that was from Melissa.

Clarinda: Right.

Meg: And just sort of coming to terms with that. Well that's just...

Clarinda: That's just how it is. But that's the thing about being a dancer is that you...

Meg: That's from when I was 13!

(Laughs)

Clarinda: You can't help but contain every movement you made in your personality and it's in your physical life, your physical is your art, so that's that. The more intent and focused the physical information, like from a choreographer, the more it's going to stick. It is something that is very interesting and why it's sometimes important for people who have performed for a lot of people or, especially a lot for one choreographer to veer off in an entirely different direction for a little while so they can kind of find and then come back and let those echoes [come out]. That was a great expression echoes because it's not like you've subsumed them in your own language, but they're now so assimilated that each one echoes completely -you can't hold it down so it's different and I think that that's really a great thing for performers who have performed for a lot of people or for one person, is that they do hold that echo and it's like a little bit of history in your body.

I wonder if I'm talking too much since it's an interview with you?

Meg: It's okay. It's like... (Laughs) I think it's better. 'Cause you saw it and I didn't.

Clarinda: Is there anything that you feel really strongly about the piece itself or about making work that you now feel like you want to verbalize with us now?

Meg: I feel like being in L.A. has definitely been really good for me in a way. In that sort of clearing and being, well... partly there's not as much to see there or much that I want to see, so that puts me into my own head more. The isolation actually serves well I think.

I was completely terrified [to move] at first. I was like, "Oh shit! What am I going to do?" But it's helped me grow in weird ways that I wouldn't have imagined. [In L.A.] There was a need for (on a very basic level) supporting artists with a place to present their work in a low-tech way and to put stuff out there. I've been producing, curating, co-editing Itch Journal and I started up a series of class for more experimental work. It's nice because it's starting to trickle out into the world and when people come visit from other places I can get them to teach, or sometimes they perform. [I'm] extending the community a little bit.

Clarinda: Do you find that has fed your work?

Meg: Yeah, it has given it a context. I needed to build a little environment to put my work in, that wasn't quite there because L.A. can be such an entertainment industry focused place.