

Shonaugh, Java Street Community Garden, Brooklyn
June 19, 2021

Rachel (00:00:00):

I'm recording. Awesome, cool.

Shonaugh (00:00:00):

Great.

Rachel (00:00:04):

I'm really excited to talk to you.

Shonaugh (00:00:04):

Oh, thanks.

Rachel (00:00:06):

Thanks for participating.

Shonaugh (00:00:07):

No, thanks for inviting me.

Rachel (00:00:12):

We're here at the Java Street Garden, Community Garden in Greenpoint. Would you mind telling me who you are, where you're from, what you do, how old are you? What might people want to know about you and your demographic?

Shonaugh (00:00:29):

Right, yep. My name's Shonaugh, I live in Greenpoint, but I'm English so I grew up just outside London. I'm 35, I worked as a curator at a museum in London called Somerset House, where I used to curate large-scale fashion exhibitions. Yeah, so I worked there for five years as a curator, and then I left in 2017. And then I've kind of formulated my own practice, I'm writing mainly now, now really curating so much at the moment. I have a faculty post at SBA, and I teach fashion photography. So, I wrote a book about it. But, I specialize in fashion, I'm very critical about it, and analytical. But yeah, based in the theory and the history of it, yeah. And then as I said, I've been working on a project for the last year about fashion's relationship to sustainability in inverted commerce.

I don't think it really means what... I think it's taken on a new meaning, that word, especially in relation to fashion. The framework is people, planet and profit, and fashion's relationship to those three things, because that's the framework of corporate sustainability, which I find interesting. I don't necessarily think it's the answer to measuring things, but I thought it was a good framework, yeah. So, it's really interesting, your project, because I felt there were definitely alignments with what you're doing, your practice.

Rachel (00:02:00):

What are you learning from your project? Or I guess my first question is, what questions are you asking?

Shonaugh (00:02:05):

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Well, what I do is I, every two weeks... It's a newsletter, I like that format because I like the way you subscribe to it, you signed up to it, you want the information, there's a lot of information out there. And I have almost 70% readership every two weeks, which is a huge number.

Rachel (00:02:24):

That's very impressive.

Shonaugh (00:02:26):

I don't have a lot of subscribers, I have 220.

Rachel (00:02:30):

That feels like a lot to me.

Shonaugh (00:02:31):

I think so as well. But they're all people who've found it, I've done no marketing, it's all word of mouth, people have found it. And I'm starting to get feedback after doing for nearly a year, people saying, "I really, really like what you're doing." So, that's been really validating. The questions I'm asking, so every two weeks I find a different expert. I think the conversations around fashion sustainability are normally materials-based, so often I don't really... I mean, I have interviewed a few designers or people who have design practice, but I'm not really interested in that, I'm more interested in the ideological elements of fashion. So, looking at consumption, looking at why we buy things, the psychological elements of that, or waste, and where does our waste go?

So, I interviewed someone who deals in that, and she's an expert in that. So it's like, finding people who are experts, and then asking them what I want to know. And so, because of my background I am an expert in certain elements of fashion and the system, 100%. But this is not my expertise, so I find people that I really want to know the answers to stuff, that they've got the answers to. So, I'm almost coming from the same perspective as the reader. I'm interviewing someone coming up who wrote a book about fur, and the kind of sensitive history around fur. So, I'm going to go into depth with him about the history of fur, which I don't really know. When did it become a kind of animal rights issue, fake fur, and how terrible that is in terms of landfill and does not degrade at all.

So, all these really interesting things, but fake fur was positioned as this kind of, "Oh great, because you're not killing animals." But it's still a less evil, a bigger evil, or the same kind of evil. He's great, because he's got this knowledge on this tiny bit that I want to know about. And I'm not very... I think people are limited in their view of fashion, and I'm not. I think people get confused by what fashion really is. And so, yeah, it's been really amazing. And what I've learned is that Fashion as it stands, capital F, the western construct of fashion, and I don't mean clothes. I mean fashion, so sort of planned obsolescence every six months, or every two weeks, or whatever it is now, the marketing around it, and styles and trends, is totally a crock of shit.

And that's been interesting and quite difficult for me, because I, as an 18-year-old have studied this, and kind of held it on a pedestal, and really that's just the aesthetics. And so it's been quite a journey for me.

Rachel (00:05:23):

Yeah. I mean, that's fascinating too, because I'm not in fashion, but what I know about fashion and what I've read about the culture of fashion, it feels like it's very self-important. There's a lot of people in

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fashion who believe that it's an incredibly important and vital art form, and that fashion in its current structure is still vital and important. It sounds like you are kind of going against that, and-

Shonaugh (00:05:53):

Yeah, it's not, and it's just a capitalist construct. And so when you hear people like Anna Wintour talking about its relationship to identity, what I've started to do is started to formulate quite a well-thought out critical arguments against that. And I interviewed an amazing person the other day, I asked him about identity, he's a journalist. He just wrote a book, *The Day The World Stops Shopping*, which has blown my mind. It's a really great book about consumption, which has surpassed population growth as the biggest evil against climate crisis.

Rachel (00:06:28):

Wow.

Shonaugh (00:06:29):

Yeah. And so it's a brilliant book, I really highly recommend it. It's by a guy named J. B. MacKinnon. And I asked him about identity, and he said, "No, it's not related to identity." Because if you look at the most potent and powerful identities, they were constructed in times when we bought way little, we hardly bought anything. Think of people like Marilyn Monroe, James D., these kind of figures that we still ape and reconstruct in the current system of fashion, very much referential. No, it's to get you to buy more, and it's really good at that. And it's done it very well for the past 50 years, very... The '70s was a huge bust, a boom time for this, and thinking... Yeah, it's interesting, because people, yeah, they would argue with that quite fiercely, protectivism on that front.

But actually, the people who are outside of fashion, who've probably... You've probably always thought about fashion, that's been hard for me because I think I was a myth-maker. I was working in the space of saying, "Wow, look at this beautiful dress," and kind of putting it on a pedestal quite literally. Design at Leeds, the intricate nature of the making process. And so, I don't know. I was part of the problem, honestly, and some people say, "Oh no, you were." I kind of was. When I interview people like this, and there was someone from my interview called Kate Fletcher, who's been working in fashion sustainability spaces for 27 years. And she said, and several people have said this but I really remember her saying it.

You start to think like you, but then you'll go to an exhibition and you'll go... And so it's a big distraction technique. And so I had been trained in that space, and I mean I've been on a big journey the last few years anyway to change a lot of my life. Everything, really, about it, and so it's been another part of that, yeah.

Rachel (00:08:48):

Okay. Wow, cool.

Shonaugh (00:08:49):

But I stopped buying clothes in 2018, and I haven't bought anything new since then. So I've bought some second-hand things, but not much, yeah.

Rachel (00:09:00):

Okay. Oh wow, cool, I can't wait to read your newsletter, this is fascinating.

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Shonaugh (00:09:04):

Thank you, thank you, yeah. I talk about my personal journey as well, and how I used to buy a lot of clothes, especially a lot of fast fashion. And so I have a lot of compassion for people who still do that. I mean, I am judgmental sometimes, I really try hard not to be. I don't need to be. I think I feel quite passionate about it, but yeah.

Rachel (00:09:29):

Oh, cool, okay. Well, we will get all of that, because I'm really interested in this.

Shonaugh (00:09:33):

Thank you, yeah.

Rachel (00:09:36):

But, I want to go back and talk a little bit about your childhood, and your relationship to nature and weather and seasons. So, you lived in England for 30 years?

Shonaugh (00:09:47):

Yeah, a little over that. I moved here when I was 32 I guess, yeah.

Rachel (00:09:53):

Okay. When you were younger, what were the seasonal rhythms that helped you mark time when you were growing up?

Shonaugh (00:10:03):

I don't think I had a very good relationship to seasons or nature at all, I grew up in suburbia, and I really believe that that's one of the big things I've learned over the last few years, is to really sit with nature and think about it. I think what I was always taught to do, and part of my childhood, I don't know whether it's the time as well that I was growing up, kind of late '80s, '90s, was to kind of push out those external factors and try and live a kind of consistent life as possible at all times. And therefore very much segregating yourself from nature, pushing it away. I hate the winter, and I've always loved the summer. And so yeah, I think I have those kind of nostalgia memories, as I think most people do when you talk to them about playing in the paddling pool outside in your garden, things growing.

My dad used to grow rhubarb and make rhubarb things, and that was a kind of marker of summer. But yeah, winter. Yeah, and also certainly a lot of extremes here. I mean, the growth in the summer is magnificent, especially actually spring in the UK. But, we don't get as harsh winters, they're just gray and rainy, no snow really. But I think it's been getting colder, and it's been getting warmer, and that's been really noticeable in the UK.

Rachel (00:11:32):

Can you talk to me about that?

Shonaugh (00:11:34):

I mean, the year before I moved, or when would this be, in 2018. So, 2017, 2018, there was a really, really cold snap. Beast from the East, is what they called it in the press, and it was so cold. And it's been

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really cold there again this winter and stuff, and that's really surprising for people, that... I mean, it's so normal here, but it's not normal to get those kind of minus temperatures there. And then the winter has been colder, and then the summer's been boiling hot. They've had scorching heat waves and stuff, and they don't have any air con, they're not set up for it, so it's really uncomfortable for people.

Rachel (00:12:16):

Right. Europe is really not set up for extreme heat.

Shonaugh (00:12:21):

No, no, no, not at all. I mean, other places in Europe like Italy has shutters on the window, is built in these kind of very thick kind of walled buildings. But the UK didn't have anything like that, so didn't need it. It doesn't have air con, although I hate air con.

Rachel (00:12:48):

Yeah, me too.

Shonaugh (00:12:48):

I think English people hate air conditioning. But, nobody really has it unless it's like a big office building, something like that.

Rachel (00:12:52):

Do you remember when you started noticing different weather, or changing patterns in the seasons?

Shonaugh (00:13:02):

It probably was that kind of... I mean, it's quite recent, but again, living in England it's a bit more subtle. But England's had a lot of flooding, but again, I mean it really is a testament to how I used to live my life. It always felt quite far away for me, living in London in this bubble. 2016 was a really important year, I think, for a lot of people, Trump being elected and Brexit referendum, realizing like, "Oh my God, we just live in a total bubble," and we thought everybody felt like us. And actually, a majority of people don't. And I think that was really surprising for London, especially working in the arts. But yeah, going back to what you asked about the seasons, I think it kind of was in line with that in 2017. I started looking around like, "What the heck's going on?"

Rachel (00:13:49):

And it was that recently?

Shonaugh (00:13:51):

It was really recent, yeah. But I think that's about me-

Rachel (00:13:51):

So, what did that feel like?

Shonaugh (00:13:51):

... I think it's about me.

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Rachel (00:13:59):

But it's all individual, I mean-

Shonaugh (00:13:59):

We weren't talking about it though, we weren't really talking about it. I did a project in 2016 where I included an activist who's called Glacier Girl, I don't know if you've ever heard of her. But she's like an... She was working with Instagram at the time, as her medium. And she was taking a lot of self-portraiture, and I learned a lot from her, talking to her. But she was a young person, she was in her early 20's, she was like 22 or 23. And I think at the time the conversation was like, "Wow, these young people are coming along." And then Greta Thunberg came at around that time, or slightly later, and then Extinction Rebellion was 2019. And I think those things in the UK, which I am very much a product of growing up, those are when people started to talk and think about it.

We had rumbling conversations about plastic, but when I was growing up you had conversations about the trees, like don't use too much paper, don't print out too much paper. And I remember the plastic conversation being like, "What about the trees, are they okay now? Just use as much paper as we want." But it's interesting how people just latch onto one thing, and it's always material focus, because it's something that you can see. Like, I spoke to a student the other day who's studying Masters in Curation, which I studied, she was asking me some questions. And she said, "Yeah, you know, because there's so much waste when people make an exhibition, and they take down..." And I was like, "Don't think about the materials in terms of exhibitions, because it's a drop in the ocean, it's nothing.

"Think about the theoretical concerns of making an exhibition about fashion, it's not about how much would you use and what you do with it after." But I think people latch onto that more, but I think that certainly, when I started to think about it, probably would have been around 2016. I was talking to that activist, and became a hot topic I guess.

Rachel (00:15:46):

When you started sort of thinking about climate change, and also when you started physically feeling weird weather, do you remember having an emotional response when you were sort of in that moment?

Shonaugh (00:16:04):

I think there's a big... I don't know if it's an emotion, I think it probably is frustrated, I think. And I think the more I started delving into it and learning about it, firstly I think I grabbed the knowledge, that would just be what I would do. Ask something difficult, okay, we've got to find out more then. And it seems to be because I know a lot of people have felt helpless and very sad and grieving, that's an Extinction Rebellion thing, is to deal with the grief. I must admit, I didn't feel any of those things. But I've always had a strange, I don't know, just sort of like... You know how people are really scared of death, and stuff?

Rachel (00:16:51):

Yeah.

Shonaugh (00:16:52):

I'm always like, "Oh, well." It's the only thing we know that's going to happen. And yeah, I mean, I've definitely been thinking about, should I have kids or not. Not that I'm going to have kids necessarily

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tomorrow or something, but I don't know about that, because I don't know about bringing another generation into this planet with what I know is set to happen, for sure. I guess a bit helpless, really.

Rachel (00:17:21):

When you were experiencing weird weather, I'm just going to push a little bit more on this. And it's kind of, the answer is still no, but when you're experiencing extreme heat or extreme cold in a place that once felt consistent, yeah, did you have any other feelings?

Shonaugh (00:17:50):

Honestly, and I'm going to be really honest, and I don't think this is a very... I don't know, but actually just reading this book, and they mentioned something like this, it felt quite dramatic. And I am drawn to drama, it's something I've tried not to and I'm working towards not being. But I grew up in drama, and so when you do that feels quite normal to you. So it felt a bit... Especially in the UK where everything kind of just is gray every day, to have really hot times, it feels like it breaks the norm or the boredom of it. And I think Rebecca Sommers talked about this in terms of the earthquake that she experienced, and just kind of how people come together in those times, and there is kind of renewed community, and that can be really nourishing.

I think I felt that, like if it snows in England people find that quite exciting, everyone goes out and sleds. They don't go to work, you don't go to school, because people just cancel everything, and it's called like a snow day. I remember having a snow day in maybe 2008 or something, it was such a fun day. Everyone went to the pub, and yeah, classic English. Kind of life stopped for a day.

Rachel (00:19:08):

Right. So there's something that felt outside of your day-to-day reality that felt exciting?

Shonaugh (00:19:16):

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And you're not necessarily connecting it to... I think we do live in our small spheres.

Rachel (00:19:24):

Absolutely.

Shonaugh (00:19:25):

And many people don't really think about the bigger picture. And so I think now I would think about those things, but also that's probably a technique and a device, to kind of other yourself from it. Perhaps I haven't really ever sort of sat with these things and really thought about them, maybe I've always tried to kind of push them away.

Rachel (00:19:48):

Yeah. I mean, the emotional experience of thinking about unregulated warming is really uncomfortable.

Shonaugh (00:19:58):

Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah.

Rachel (00:20:01):

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And I think there's a funny way of living in your day-to-day reality and having an experience of unseasonal weather, but connecting that to something bigger than the singular experience of it, I think is kind of abstract as well.

Shonaugh (00:20:20):

Yeah, definitely. And thinking maybe like foreboding something, or worried about what's to come. Because you might cope fine with the day, you might just put on a warmer jacket, or go to the beach. But you're like, "Ooh, this is worrying for the future," rather than the present.

Rachel (00:20:43):

Right, right. Has your thinking around climate crisis shifted since 2016, and you really started diving into now?

Shonaugh (00:20:52):

Yeah, massively, massively. I mean, completely changed, I cannot understand why everybody's not putting this to the forefront of every conversation. It is the problem of our time, and everything should be forefronted with this.

Rachel (00:21:07):

What catalyzed that shift for you?

Shonaugh (00:21:11):

As I said, I changed my life and everything. I was going through a very big personal change, and I started to think more politically about everything. My body, my existence, my place in the world, my relationship to nature. But then also, firstly I stopped smoking, I used to chain smoke cigarettes, which I read the other day in this really shitty novel I was reading, that anybody who smokes just wants to die. And it is true, and that's how I think about smoking. It's like you're just so up for... You just so don't care about yourself, and so yeah, I used to smoke a lot, and to drink a lot, and I stopped drinking alcohol, I stopped smoking. I think then I sort of stopped shopping, stopped buying clothes. So it's kind of stopping these things gave space to think really seriously about my place in the world, and my work, and what I was going to do in terms of moving forward in the space of fashion.

Which is a massive part of the problem, not only materially but ideologically, so the way we think about things. And so, I think that's how I started to really think about things differently, was I'm pretty obsessive as well. So, I'm a really good researcher, so I started really reading about not only the science, but also thinking about how fashion says like, "Oh, we can green everything." And many fashion people, I don't know if you've spoken to many people who work in and amongst fashion-

Rachel (00:23:00):

Nope.

Shonaugh (00:23:01):

... it'd be interesting for you to, they're very passionate about things, and they will know, and they will persuade you that they really want the best for the world. And I don't disbelieve them actually, and there's quite a sweet sense of naivete, actually, in that. And it's an ever-evolving space, is what is built on, is to be changing, constantly changing, selling you something new. "Wow, look at this world. Ah,

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everyone's into nature, oh, everything's got flowers on it, everyone..." It's kind of like that, it mirrors the times we live in, the zeitgeist. And so that's the function, the springboard that it's built on. But then at the same time, this academic called Sandra Nielsen has called places in the global south, for want of a better term, it's not really a good term.

But there are whole swathes of the world that we have... They're sacrifice zones, so we've not only pillaged them for their resources but also their labor, and it's a product of colonialism. And fashion is the main perpetrator of that, it's up there, it's so in bed with oil and stuff but nobody talks about it. And so, I was really interested, could I change or shift the conversation? You had everybody up for it, you had everyone interested, everyone was going, "Oh, plastic's bad and we should circle economy, or we should make things out of bloody plastic bottles." And as soon as you start to chip underneath it you realize how much greenwashing there is. And so as an academic who works in the space, and someone who likes to stand on a soap box for their job, part of curatorial work is saying, "Hey, look at this, look what I can see."

I thought this was a really interesting time to jump in, and that was around about 2018 that I started researching this space. And I thought, I've always done this with something. So at one point I looked at the body imposing, and I wrote a book about that. And so Utopian Voices, the show I did in 2016, was about utopia, imagining new utopias, and in the kind of shadow of Brexit, and then just before Trump, it was really about identity politics. So it's really about thinking about, "Oh, what's going on," and then presenting something that kind of shifted people's thoughts around it. And so I thought, "This is what I'm going to do, I'm going to look at this and see if anything sticks." And the funny thing is I couldn't get any of them to work with me. And everyone wanted some sort of compromise, it was too problematic, so I just did it on my own.

Rachel (00:25:43):

What kind of compromise?

Shonaugh (00:25:45):

You know. At one point I was trying to work with a brand, or a shop in London called Matches, and they sell high-end, luxury goods. And I thought, "I can't really work with these people, because they're still selling you shit you don't want or need." That's what they do, even if it's made out of some organic cotton. And so that was kind of a process I worked, on trying to kind of get them to work with me for a bit in 2019. Because it was financial really, I didn't have any... I still don't, actually, for this project, I didn't have any funding. And then a publisher wanted to work with me, but they wanted me to do an exhibition. I was like, "I just want to do a book." And then actually when the Coronavirus hit I was like, "I don't want to do a book, why would I do a book? I could just do it online, this is silly."

So, I just did it alone. And they also wanted me to interview people who I know have nothing to say on this subject, but they're famous, like [inaudible 00:26:44] or something, do you know that designer?

Rachel (00:26:46):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Shonaugh (00:26:47):

He's famous, and it's like, [inaudible 00:26:51]. But I don't feel like there's anything... I'd rather speak to other people who you've never heard of. So, I just went and did it alone.

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Rachel (00:27:02):

Cool.

Shonaugh (00:27:02):

I can't remember what your original question was.

Rachel (00:27:05):

Gosh, what was my original question?

Shonaugh (00:27:05):

Never mind.

Rachel (00:27:10):

Oh, my question was about... I remember, because I wanted to circle back. My question was how your thinking about climate crisis has changed since 2016 until now.

Shonaugh (00:27:24):

Just beyond, but then I'm also two different people, I'm not the same person, but it's not in day how I thought about the world, how I viewed the world, how I viewed myself, yeah, in that time. In 2016 I still partook in all the bad things I used to do, like drinking, smoking, buying fast fashion. So I think it's an out [inaudible 00:27:49] thing.

Rachel (00:27:52):

And as you learn more about climate crisis, and as you delve into the research, how does that change the way you see yourself in the world? How does it change the context for how you need to step up to the moment, which you have talked about but I'd like to know a little more about how you understand yourself in the world now within the context of an accelerated climate crisis.

Shonaugh (00:28:24):

Yeah. I mean, I've tried to live with the best values I can, and I'm definitely not an angel, I'm definitely not perfect, hello. But I try really hard. So, the consumption thing's been really helpful, and also joining places like the Community Garden has been an act to fill the void. If you stop consuming and everyone else around you is continuing to consume, I don't know that many people in New York still, and all the people I do know are from similar spaces that I work in, don't have the same values as me. So coming here was like, I really wanted to meet like-minded people, I really wanted to be part of the community in a different way. And I think those are really tangible acts to show that you think differently about the space you live in.

You can go and get takeout every night, for example, you don't know where any of the things are coming from, you haven't prepared your food, you've had no part in the growing process. I think those are really big acts of kind of standing up and saying, "I know I can't..." Because I think there's a white savior thing in all of this as well, like being like, "Oh, I'm going to save the whole..." And being really mindful of the ego. I don't think that's the case, I don't think I'm going to save the world, because I don't want to. But collective action being part of something where with like-minded people, that's been really great for me. But yeah, I think it touches everything of your life. I mean, I try to think about everything.

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Rachel (00:30:11):

What kind of collective action have you been a part of?

Shonaugh (00:30:14):

Well, I'm part of Fashion Act now, which is part of Extinction Rebellion's fashion arm. So, I've been working with them for like six months, and we're working on direct action in the fashion space. Also, I mean, my newsletter is a form of action, it's very educational. For example, my mum subscribes to my newsletter, obviously, she's my mum. Well, not necessarily. But, I've noticed how she has really enjoyed the format, much more than my exhibitions, because she gets to sit and read it in her own space, on her own time, digest it, form thoughts. Because I'm a teacher, so I think about that very much. How do we share knowledge, and how do people reflect and learn, genuinely learn, instead of you just point your finger and telling them.

And my mum's completely changed her outlook. She's like, "I'm not going to buy anything new. I never thought of that," she said, "I never thought about it." And she also had really derogatory views of Extinction Rebellion, because she reads one of the worst newspapers. I mean, let's not go into that, but it's annoying that she does that, she reads the shitty paper, the Daily Mail. And she had a very negative view towards Extinction Rebellion, and I was like, "I don't know, Mum, they're just sticking themselves to buildings. It's kind of cheeky, it's kind of funny, it's very British. They're not hurting anyone, and they're asking you to think more deeply about our existence and the looming, impending climate crisis."

And my mum was like, "Oh right, okay. Well, I'll be open-minded," because I interviewed one of the co-founders for my newsletter, an amazing woman called Claire Farrell. And my mum's like, "Wow, I've completely changed." She was like, "I don't think I'm going to go out on the street." And I was like, "But neither am I, I'm not really..." I wouldn't stick myself to a building, it's just not me, it's not my kind of action. But with Fashion Act now, we're developing a talk where we're going to go into Vogue, which I could go to because I have connections there. I'm going to make the talk about the climate crisis, and we'll get them to really think about the facts, and what we're going to do to make change. So, that's my form of direct action, I think. And this community garden, I think, as well.

Rachel (00:32:46):

And how does it feel like to engage in direct action?

Shonaugh (00:32:50):

It feels really good, and it feels really good to meet like-minded people. Because sometimes you think you're a bit crazy, because I get really into things, I've been really passionate. And my partner, he is too, he's really similar, and he taught me a lot. He grew up in California, in northern California, he has a totally different outlook. I think there's much more knowledge about it there, just living through the wildfires, and seeing them, and seeing that this is happening. And I do think Californians have more knowledge because of their location.

Rachel (00:33:24):

It's right there in front of them.

Shonaugh (00:33:25):

It's very tangible, and I think in England it's not the same, it's not the same at all, especially in London. But Extinction Rebellion, people quit their jobs, change their life. Do you know that? They heard this

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lecture, they just quit their jobs, they left to work for Extinction Rebellion. One of the people who I work with, Sarah Om, she quit what she was doing and just joined the Rebellion. And so I think it sounds boring to do that, and I would have done that if I lived in London and I'd heard that talk, I would have done that, I definitely would have. Maybe I wouldn't have been in the right space at that time, 2019, maybe. But yeah, kind of came to it a bit later.

Rachel (00:34:05):

It's so interesting. I mean, I talk to a lot of people who are engaged in important work, who are doing and thinking about making the world better in a variety of different ways. And something that they say is that, "If I really, really looked at the climate crisis, if I really looked at what was happening and I really opened myself to learn about it, I fear that I would lose everything. I fear that I would lose all of the things that are important in my life, and I would have to make a radical change." And it's scary for people because they feel like everything that they've built they've lost, they would lose. And at the same time we're sort of looking at a future that has enormous loss.

I mean, we're looking at a present with enormous loss and we're looking at a future with innumerable loss, but there's this relationship between your individual life and our collective fate. And I'm just curious about, if you've had those kinds of conversations with people, if that thought ever crossed your mind, and what happened when it did.

Shonaugh (00:35:34):

It's a weird one, because in 2017 I feel like I lost everything. But in my own design, like looking back on it now it was me, I was in charge, I was doing that to myself. But I had a big breakup relationship-wise, I lost a lot of close friends through such disaster. But I just, if you look at it in a kind of over-arching way, I was changing and that, and they, and that situation wasn't. So I quit my job, broke up with my ex, I was homeless. I wasn't homeless, I'm so privileged I was not homeless at all, but I was uprooted, I didn't have a home. So I was jumping around, and it was a very difficult time in my life. And so from that, from the ashes of that, I was like, "I lost it all once, and I can do it again."

I had no money, I was really broke. I couldn't work, because I didn't know what I wanted to do. And I was so privileged, and I do come from massive privileged, and I wasn't broke, I wasn't poor. And I [inaudible 00:36:55] really important, and why, and I had all sorts of opportunities available to me. And actually, loads of successful things came out of that time, but it was how I felt. I felt like it was all gone. Or what I had known and what I had built for myself in my kind of early adult life, and it wasn't working for me. In a very dramatic sense, it was not working for me. Drinking, all these kind of things. And so, I changed. And from that came this bigger sense of purpose, where it's kind of the idea of the wounded healer.

If I'd kind of been through that, how could I work in something that aligned now with these new ethical values? And working in some elements of fashion, they really align with those things now. And so I've been moving, shifting, and I've been thinking about doing some retraining and doing some other things. And that's going to be really great, I think, and a new path. But I think when you think of what you would lose... I think I realized the fragility of it all, and how it's so fragile anyway, and it makes me quite emotional to think about. Because I know I didn't lose everything, what's to lose? But it felt like that at the time, it really felt like that. And then moving, starting again. When I moved here, I actively didn't meet anyone, I was such a hermit.

And I was so vulnerable, hiding away. And it gave me this time to heal, like lick my wounds really. I ran away from that situation by moving here. But, I took it all with me of course. So, everything I've got now, I'm so fucking grateful, because I know what it looked like from the other side. And some

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people don't, some people never have that. I don't know if that is lucky, because it changed everything about the way I look at... Some people say that they have someone who dies and this happens, and they reassess everything. It was similar, it was similar, it's just my journey was a bit different.

Rachel (00:39:16):

It's interesting, because you're really talking about, discontinuity allowed you to rethink what was important.

Shonaugh (00:39:24):

Yeah.

Rachel (00:39:24):

And I wonder, thinking about other people who I've talked to, they talk about the importance of the continuity of their life.

Shonaugh (00:39:32):

Yeah, definitely.

Rachel (00:39:32):

And climate crisis is the ultimate in just continuity.

Shonaugh (00:39:36):

Yeah, and that's really scary, especially if you've never had it discontinue. And I think I've probably... Maybe I'll be a bit more nimble because of that period of my life, where I felt such hardship in my mind, really don't want to paint a picture of me. And compared to other people's hardships I don't, but in my mind I had a rocky time. And it was related to other things that had happened in my life, as a child and things like that, like classical therapy 101, obviously. I just hadn't dealt with them, and then it all came pouring out at this moment for myriad reasons. And the continuity was continually interrupted, and that's a really great way to put it because that was the hardest thing for me, the continuity.

And I remember walking around London, London was like a ghost town for me, I felt so alone, so lonely. There's that Olivia Lang book about Alone in the City, I felt so alone. Even I wasn't alone at all, I wish I could go and hang out with my best friends that live in London. I felt so alone, and every corner was a memory of a past existence that was no longer available to me. And that's why I say it was my own design, it was me, I was driving that ship, I was making those choices. Even though it didn't feel like that at the time, like such a victim, which was part of the problem. But yeah, it was very destabilizing, and I think yeah, you're right. I mean, I can't imagine what it's like to live in the wildfires, I cannot imagine what it's like.

I mean, I'm not comparing my time. Mine was mental, I had a mental episode. But people losing things through that potentially could evoke a similar feeling, maybe.

Rachel (00:41:39):

Do you think climate crisis will affect you differently because of your race, or class, sexuality, gender, ability?

Shonaugh (00:41:48):

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Of course, of course.

Rachel (00:41:48):

Yeah. Talk to me about that.

Shonaugh (00:41:52):

Every kind of thing you look at, especially in this God-forsaken country, is pitted at people who are lower income, people of color. It's so fucked up, it really... And I know I've got white privilege, and I've done a lot of learning since last Summer, and people say... I remember they were saying at the time, this time last year on reading and learning. No they weren't, a lot of people didn't learn. I did, I really did, I joined the book club as part of School of Visual Arts, where I teach. And I've been going along to that for the past year, we still meet. And I've learned loads, and in England it's very different. It's not better or worse, there's still so much racial inequality, and inequality across the board.

But people don't talk about it in the same terms, and I think what I learned here is like, you look at any kind of urban planning, zoning, pollution, anything, and it's all geared towards people... And I know I'm so privileged, cisgender, white, heterosexual woman, you know?

Rachel (00:43:00):

Right.

Shonaugh (00:43:02):

Yeah, incredibly lucky. I don't think lucky's the right word, but privileged.

Rachel (00:43:08):

And does thinking about climate crisis impact how you plan for your future?

Shonaugh (00:43:12):

Yeah, I was saying that I'm not sure about having kids, I don't know. Yeah, and I-

Rachel (00:43:20):

Do you feel like in another world you would have kids?

Shonaugh (00:43:27):

Yeah, I mean, I sort of really wanted them when I was younger, and I was in this relationship. It was such a bad relationship, I'm really glad I didn't have kids with that person. But you live and you learn, don't you? But I really, desperately wanted kids, I think for all the wrong reasons at that time. And England's very traditional, you know?

Rachel (00:43:45):

Uh-huh (affirmative).

Shonaugh (00:43:46):

People just get married and have kids, it's the sort of thing they do. Get to a certain age, and it's just what they do. And it didn't happen like that for me, because I went on a different path. And so now I

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think... Well, I also think like, thinking about my values and how my values align, there are lots of children that really need a loving home, and I had a difficult upbringing, and a really, really difficult childhood. So, I'd love to change the story for someone else, maybe. And if I could offer that with my resources and my... I haven't really got much money, but I've got enough to get by. I'd love to do that, and support someone, and give them a safe home, and share with them. So, why you have to have your own kids, I'm not sure about that.

But I don't know, never say never. But, I definitely think about that. Also buying a house, owning a house is pretty... I actually have a flat in London, Dad's inheritance, and I bought it like 2014. And yeah, owning stuff's pretty stupid, isn't it? If you think about it, it's really odd. But if I was to kind of invest, because it's an investment, isn't it, and it's how the system's set up. I was saying to my partner we should buy up in the North Dakotas, you know?

Rachel (00:43:46):

Yep.

Shonaugh (00:45:11):

So people like Bill McKibben, who lives up in the [inaudible 00:45:15]. You've really got to get up north if you want to grow stuff, if you want to be comfortable. That's the reality, I would think about. Other people think I'm a bit mad when I say that, even my partner, who's like, "Whatever." Or, do you just enjoy the moment, and just get somewhere and just not worry about it? Because it's all fake anyway. I don't know. But if this real apocalypse is coming, it's not going to bloody matter what you own, or whatever. Or maybe it still will, I don't know.

Rachel (00:45:46):

Also I hear from you kind of an acceptance of the future? I mean, not that you're not fighting for a better future, but like an acceptance for yourself that your life will change, and you will sort of move with the currents.

Shonaugh (00:46:03):

Yeah, I have such an adaptability that could have come from that [inaudible 00:46:06] of time in 2017 and 2018. I think that it's not what happens to you, it's how you cope with it. And after coping really badly with a difficult time, I think I've got a lot of different tools now. I have an acceptance as well, this is happening. A lot of people you speak to say, "Oh yeah, maybe." No, no, no, no, no, no, this is coming, and it's coming whenever, and you could just make it a little bit better, and take a little bit longer. But that's why it baffles me that people aren't being active ASAP. Net zero, heck, net zero is not even a thing. Other people, that's their focus. Or greening the economy is also, I don't think is the answer either.

But yeah, I have acceptance, I think, because... I don't know, do you think that's sort of arrogance? I just feel like I've read it, and it's sort of all there for me. So, also I think from going through a hard time, you've got to live in your reality, and that's been something really hard for me, is I've got to live in my reality, accept who I am as a person, [inaudible 00:47:26]. But I do try and make change as well, I do hope for... Maybe I hope for more acceptance, and a lot more learning. I'd love it if I didn't have to have conversations with people who got quite annoyed with me or something, like someone said that I was judgmental in the past because they were talking about their stocks and shares, and someone else said that stocks and shares are really bad.

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And I just said, "Well yeah, because they were funding the fossil fuel industry." Someone said it was judgmental, that was a bit... Oh, I didn't want to be judgmental, it was just the truth. I'm not judging you, you can have all the stocks and shares you want, it's just the truth. But if you're worrying about these things, it's funding fossil fuels. So, something to consider. But maybe I am a bit... Maybe that's a bit shocking to people, that I am so matter-of-fact about these things, yeah.

Rachel (00:48:21):

Yeah. I mean, I don't think it sounds arrogant, I think it sounds brave. I think it's really hard, I mean, this is something that I've been struggling with for like, 20 years. I mean, I'm having these conversations with people because I'm desperate for some answers. I struggle with acceptance of the facts, and sort of moving forward into the future. So, I think it sounds really brave.

Shonaugh (00:48:51):

Oh, thanks.

Rachel (00:48:51):

How do you contextualize this moment of change, within the broad... The deep time of history?

Shonaugh (00:49:03):

This is a great moment, as a historian working in fashion, this is a very interesting moment. We're seeing a lot of innovation, technology, seeing massive... I mean, the pandemic, obviously. But we're seeing mass adaption and adoption of certain things, I think we'll look back on and think, "What the heck were we doing?" This is a moment of mania, it's crazy. The consumption, the materialistic kind of nature, the marketing, social media. I tried to stop using it, it was so addictive, it's so bad for people. I think we're going to look back in fascination on this moment. I did do, and it's not an expertise of mine, but I think it's interesting, a little bit of work. And there is an interesting historian...

There's a Smithsonian article about it, about the fall of the Roman Empire. And there were similarities in the moment we're seeing in the kind of... Certainly in the Western world, the way that we're behaving and acting, this kind of political grandstanding, and yeah. But, a lot of inequality. And the fall of the Roman Empire, that's what was going on at the same time. So, I thought we were living in the fall of the West at some point, but it seems-

Rachel (00:50:32):

You don't think so anymore?

Shonaugh (00:50:39):

Yeah, I think the West has a difficult time ahead of it, I think. Because you've got China almost surpassing in terms of both economy, but also I'm a degrowther. I don't know if you know much about degrowth, it's really interesting. Degrowth is an economic movement focusing on, stop putting importance in the economy. So yeah, you kind of degrowth, and GDP, so that's not the focus anymore. I'm not really describing it, it's not-

Rachel (00:51:17):

No, I understand, I just read Bill McKibben's Growth, and he talks about the same thing, yeah.

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Shonaugh (00:51:22):

Oh yeah, he'll definitely talk about that. And this kind of idea that we've put all our eggs in this economic GDP basket, and we have done for a long time. And even the person who came out with the theory of GDP said, "This is not a good way to measure things." And you see other countries looking at... In New Zealand's one well-being instead, and it's actually... New Zealand's actually stopped measuring GDP now, and it's started measuring on other things.

Rachel (00:51:49):

Interesting.

Shonaugh (00:51:49):

But I think that because we've put such importance in these things in the West, we're going to have a real big fall now when we start to see, that's not going to save us from this situation. In fact, it only makes things worse. What are we going to do? We're also so segregated, this is a gorgeous example of community. But most people aren't, they just live in their little bubbles, and yeah, I don't know.

Rachel (00:52:16):

What do you feel hopeful for?

Shonaugh (00:52:19):

I feel hopeful for my own little sphere, my own self. And that's very day-to-day, I really just take each day as it comes, and I feel really hopeful for sort of my own little pocket of existence, which I've come to terms with lots of different things that I used to really struggle and battle with, and they're just getting not so hard anymore, and that's really amazing. Yeah, what am I hopeful for? I guess I would be really hopeful that fashion could do a big turnaround, I mean on a really big scale. Fashion's got such innovative thinkers, and they are annoying people, and they're very focused on the wrong values, you know, aesthetics and stuff like that.

Rachel (00:52:19):

Right.

Shonaugh (00:53:08):

But, they're very compassionate people, they're very empathetic people. Well maybe they're not, all of them. But they're feeling, they have a lot of feeling. Could we get them to really think about and engage in turning around fashion, dismantling that, and really looking at clothes, and how clothes can be really exciting, joyful and fun again? There's this woman, this awesome woman, I don't know if you've ever come across her, called Rebecca Burgess. And she has this thing called Fiber Shed, which is all about regenerative farming and fashion. She works in Marine County in California, she looks at how much wool is produced in California, how much cotton. And you can make 20 shirts per person a year for people in California with the cotton that's grown there.

Rachel (00:53:53):

Wow, that's amazing.

Shonaugh (00:53:54):

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Yeah, there's none of the next bit of the production cycle, they don't have the right machinery and stuff. And so she's really working on local agricultural plans to come up with ways that we could grow our own clothes, and those fiber sheds, she calls them like a fiber shed. And they're spreading all over the world, we've got them in the UK and India, and they're all about local. Can you imagine that? You go to England, and people would be wearing the heritage wools, or the linens that they could make, the Irish linens that they could make in their place. You'd go to California, and have incredible cotton.

Rachel (00:54:32):

Well, I can imagine that-

Shonaugh (00:54:33):

It would be awesome.

Rachel (00:54:33):

... because that's the way the world used to work.

Shonaugh (00:54:38):

Right, and that would be so exciting. And I think that's why I'm really hopeful for fashion, I can really see that. And as a fashion person, that seems very rich to me, and much more exciting than the globalization crap that you've got now, where you've got H&M in Hungary that's same as the one in Times Square, it is. I don't know, that's boring.

Rachel (00:55:02):

Yeah, it is boring.

Shonaugh (00:55:03):

It's really boring.

Rachel (00:55:03):

It is boring.

Shonaugh (00:55:04):

Yeah, dull. And I think our consuming fashion particularly comes from this kind of carrot dangle, you're just not going to get it. You can't get it, you can't get any satisfaction from it, so you keep going back for more, you just keep trying again. And I see that a lot, especially around here. Have you noticed that people are just selling their shit on the street now?

Rachel (00:55:26):

Yeah.

Shonaugh (00:55:27):

They've got so much shit that they're like, now, everywhere in this area there's about... You can count, there's about 10 or 20 bloody soup sales in this area every weekend.

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Rachel (00:55:37):

Yeah, oh yeah.

Shonaugh (00:55:38):

You go to that intersection where the Five Leaves Café is in McLaren Park, there's just clothes, it's just clothes everywhere. It does trouble me that I think about clothes all the time, because I think it's really destructive and damaging. So, I have been looking to find retrain, because it's not good for me, really. As someone who stopped consuming, to have to think right, and teach myself new things all the time, is almost like having to work in a bar when you're an alcoholic. It's like, you can do it, but it's probably not going to be that pleasant, yeah. But yeah, so I've been thinking about doing different things.

Rachel (00:56:14):

This is a question that I ask everybody. When you think about climate crisis, what do you think about and how do you feel?

Shonaugh (00:56:24):

When I think about the climate crisis, I think a lot about apocalyptic doom. That's what I really do think, I think of the end.

Rachel (00:56:41):

What does that look like?

Shonaugh (00:56:42):

Like mass migration, they can't grow crops, like shortages of food, really bad stuff. That's what I think about, and that comes from Extinction Rebellion, and [inaudible 00:56:59], who people have kind of disputed now. I think that's good, because I think he got off thinking, especially in the UK. Got people really shocked, and people shocked out of their existence to do something, and I'm definitely one of those people. But that is still what I think about.

Rachel (00:57:19):

And how do you feel?

Shonaugh (00:57:19):

How do I feel? I don't know, like you've said, I feel quite accepting of that. It's interesting, because you think about the future. I started thinking a lot, I haven't thought about it so much lately, but maybe about a year or two ago, before the pandemic, we used to think about the future as never-ending, just laid out in front of us forever, and we could continue to reimagine it, and I did that Utopia Project and stuff. I think what the climate crisis has done is said, the future's not never-ending, there's an end to this. And I think that's quite interesting, and so I feel acceptance of that reality. But I do feel quite a bit of frustration that people aren't on the same perhaps radical wavelength as me.

But someone the other day, oh my close friend, he said, "I don't think you're a radical, I just think you're realistic." But yeah, yeah. I'd like to make some big changes, but I'm also mindful not to be cross with people if they don't really agree with me, because that's no good either, is it?

Rachel (00:58:34):

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Right. Are there any questions that I haven't asked you that you wish I had asked you?

Shonaugh (00:58:44):

I don't think so, I think it's been really interesting to focus on a different element of it than I focus on, and think about these things that honestly, I haven't really asked myself, yeah. It's been really good, thanks, yeah.

Rachel (00:58:56):

What are the questions that you're asking yourself right now, that may or may not have answers?

Shonaugh (00:59:04):

About this, or?

Rachel (00:59:06):

Yeah.

Shonaugh (00:59:11):

I think what I really ask myself is... Well, this is a good example. Recently, I've been thinking, and I think it's just a phase. But kind of to earn money, but also thinking like, I like challenges. And also I've been thinking a lot about capitalist production, and not being just, what about if you just had enough money to live, and that was just... Just happy with that. But sometimes I do fall down into a, "I've got to make something everybody sees." And I'm like, "It's just your ego," or is it? I don't know, I ask myself these things a lot. But I've been thinking about writing for like, I don't know, like... I don't know, this is kind of a dream, and I don't know if I'll ever end up doing it.

But The Times magazine, or The Guardian, do a long-read section, I don't know. Never New Yorker, I don't think I'm a good enough writer. But I think what I was thinking is, I've got all this research that I'm accumulating from my interviews. Could I write some long reads that would share the knowledge that I'm learning? And I'm finding firstly, I don't know if it's like I'm not presenting something that they want, or it's just not a good enough idea, because this is new to me. But I'm not getting any pick up, people don't really want to talk about fashion in this way. They want fashion to be fun, it's levity, it's silly, it's like novelty, and it's linked to their advertising and stuff sometimes.

I don't think that's always the case forefront, but it's a mechanism and I think people are used to selling things. If even you look at The New Yorker, every fashion story is linked to a consumable product and a business. It's never about the ideas about fashion, ever. It's never cerebral, it's always like, "Oh, Reformation, they do... It's like [inaudible 01:01:08] thing, or they do something that's a bit sustainable, and here's what happened when I went shopping there." And you're just like, "Okay, I guess that's okay. But, where's the rest of it? It's not just about that." So, I kind of thought maybe this is a niche in the market, I don't know. There's a reason why they're not doing that.

But what I've been thinking is like, then I started thinking like, I read a lot, so it's like reading all the articles. And I was thinking, "Maybe they're like this article, maybe they're like this article." And then I was like, "No, you've got to forefront the climate crisis at the forefront of what you're doing now." And it's a values thing, but it's hard because sometimes you spiral down into thinking about, oh look, in Williamsburg everyone's doing this, this is a trend. And that's actually what they want more than anything, but... So, I think I've been asking myself what are my values, and kind of linking that to what

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I'm doing. I mentioned a few times, I've been thinking of training as a yoga teacher, and even though there's a lot of yoga teachers out there.

But, that kind of more aligns with what I've been working on. I know I feel like, who needs another white woman yoga teacher? I don't know, it's like a personal thing. I think it would be enjoyable, and you can make a bit of money from it, not even really that much. But yeah, that's what I've been kind of asking myself a lot lately, it's what I do, how I spend my time, and being really precious about that, and not think about just making money, or some sort of strange fame. I think people often forefront fame nowadays, in some sense, you know?

Rachel (00:59:11):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Shonaugh (01:02:48):

Not in the traditional sense of celebrity, but notoriety, and your name in lights. And I think curatorial work is very like that, it's incredibly egocentric. Because I've sort of tried to break myself away from that. But yeah, I guess that's what I've been asking myself lately. I don't know if that's related to what you asked.

Rachel (01:03:12):

Absolutely, yeah. Cool, Shonaugh, thank you. This was so interesting.

Shonaugh (01:03:17):

Oh, you're welcome, thanks.

Rachel (01:03:18):

I love talking with you.

Shonaugh (01:03:20):

Oh thanks, yeah, it's great to meet you. And yeah, keep me in touch about your project.