

**Conversation between Julia Kouneski, Nor Hall & Sandra Teitge.  
Monday, 23 November 2015.**

Nor Hall: You were going to tell me about Lygia Clark.

Julia Kouneski: I was telling you about the relational objects that she made. They each have a different physical quality to them. Some would be a bag full of sand or a plastic bag full of air, stones, shells... all very easily obtained materials from her immediate environment. They were all made to be experienced by a body, so some may be scratchy or heavy. Towards the end of her life she started to do one-on-one sessions with people where she would place these objects on their body. I think a lot of it was intuitive and she developed her own way of working with the objects. What happened is that a lot of memories would come up for people based on the sensations they were feeling or where they were feeling them. So it seemed to really trigger these –she calls it the memory of the body. And a lot of images were coming up for people. Memories, images...

NH: What did you do with those ideas?

JK: I was just really fascinated with it. She had taught this to a couple of people at the end of her life. And there are only a few people who still practice it in Brazil. I sought out one of those practitioners because I was very curious to experience it. You can talk about it and read about it, and you can sort of understand it but you also can't fully understand without experiencing it.

NH: What's the scene of the practice?

JK: Now it's strictly a therapy practice. Hers was a bit more experimental, although she started to have amazing results, especially with people with schizophrenia and these kinds of things. That's why it's called "Structuring of the Self." A lot of her thinking about it was this boundary between the Self and the Other, the Other being the object. People with schizophrenia have trouble distinguishing between what is their Self, and what is not their Self. These objects helped them feel their own boundary in a way. It's very interesting.

My work doesn't necessarily do what she was doing, but I'm really interested in that question of boundaries, and the Self and the Other.

NH: You were putting yourself within or at the mercy of this huge object when you were doing the crawl [*Scaling Copan*, 2009], really the opposite of having something placed on you. You placed yourself on this thing and are interacting with it in that very slow penitential way. I don't know if that was part of your thinking. I once saw near Chimayo, a chapel north of Santa Fe, at Easter, people crawling on their knees in pilgrimage. When I saw you doing that [crawling] this was an association I had.

JK: Slowness is something that comes up in my work a lot. The piece we just did in the skyway involved this very slow movement. Some people commented that their sense of time changed, especially within that skyway in which people usually go back and forth quite fast, getting somewhere. That slowness was [confusing].

NH: So slowness was already conceptually there as an interest when you were doing the crawl [*Scaling Copan*, 2009], too?

JK: I'm seeing that as a thread. Sometimes it's more intentional than at other times. For the crawl [*Scaling Copan*, 2009], we *had* to be slow. So sometimes it's circumstantial or a limit that's imposed. This one in the skyway was more intentional.

NH: I'm really interested in that because part of the project when I was working in the archive is that – I really wanted to slow down. (...) I wanted to write by hand because of how you can manipulate the form. I think it's interesting for a young person to be interested in slowing down.

JK: Several years ago I started learning a type of bodywork called craniosacral. And I think it has influenced that slowness for me because it's so slow in this really pleasurable way. I really love doing it because you are feeling these really slow rhythms in the body. For this piece, I worked with another performer [Sarah Petersen] who also has experience doing somatic-based movement practices. I wanted it to be slow and she was wondering where I wanted the slowness to come from. And I realized that I wanted it to be that craniosacral rhythm; that slow fluid movement that is coming from a very internal place. So that's what we were doing for this piece in terms of the movement part of it. And then there was another aspect of viewing while we were doing this. We were looking through binoculars the whole time, which for me was an interest as a limitation for the performance, where we can't see everything. We can't see peripherally. We can only see straight ahead. And things that are close are really blurry. But you can see farther away. And so we were trying to find people in the audience with our vision, and staying with people, moving slowly until we would find another person but really focusing on the audience in terms of where we were directing our vision.

ST: Did you feel vulnerable in that space?

JK: Yes and no. It was interesting to be using the binoculars as our vision because in a way it becomes like a mask. People are aware that you are viewing them, also. In a way you feel protected with those. I was interested in us being on the ground, in more vulnerable or awkward positions. We definitely looked vulnerable, wouldn't you say?

ST: I think that you looked much more vulnerable than Sarah [the other performer]. Sarah seemed very comfortable. She was spreading out, claiming the space.

NH: I would have identified much more with Julia. Your vulnerability would have made me feel more comfortable, although it certainly didn't in the horse piece [*Kairos*, 2011]. The crawling [*Scaling Copan*, 2009] made me nauseous but the horse piece made me stop breathing.

JK: I'd like to hear more about the vulnerability making you more comfortable.

NH: I started to think about it when I watched your balloon piece. I thought, if I were on the street – a passerby – I'd be interested, but I would not want to do it. I'm introverted, so my reaction is to back away from intimate involvement like that because I want to see it from a distance. So even though I adore extroverts and want to see people who are really comfortable with their bodies and their expressions in public I am much more empathetic with the person who is more vulnerable and *in-drawing* in a way. That would permit me to be there in a more participatory way as an audience member.

JK: I understand.

NH: That would be more of a performance. And it sounds like what you were doing. You were really there.

JK: I always have trouble with the word *performance* actually because I'm interested in something that's a little different. But that's the only word we have right now. I'm more interested in... what do you even call that? It's something that I've thought about a lot.

NH: I'm sure. [Georgia Sagri] said the same. People don't want to use that word [*performance*]. And maybe it is because it has been distancing. I don't know.

ST: Isn't it that *performance* [as we understand it] is something that is preconceived? And if you are in a space and you are reacting to the space and the audience and the atmosphere, it is not preconceived. You are in a state of reacting and developing in situ. The notion of *performance* has this connotation that it's a finished piece and you are acting what you have learned.

JK: Yes. The inclusion of the binoculars was part of that [thinking] for me. The audience isn't just watching us performing this [piece] for them. We are also watching them and responding to them and it's more of a relationship.

NH: I have been interested for many years in the mythology of the Greeks, [particularly] in the figure of Dionysus who was really involved in theater. Dionysus is this natural force that drives things. And after a performance in classical theater a character would come out on stage and would ask the audience, "Was Dionysus present?" in order to gauge whether or not what had happened felt alive. That's really interesting. [Anyone] can answer that after any performance. "Was there something alive here?"

When you are done with a piece, do you make notes about what happened or tell the story of what happened to yourself and others?

JK: [*Scaling Copan*] was nice because it was shared with Michelle. We shared that [experience] and we have spoken about it together in a context in which this video was shown, in an artist talk [at de Hallen Haarlem Museum]. The horse piece [*Kairos*] ... I spoke briefly about that in a panel discussion in the show where it was presented... usually there is some small opportunity to talk about what happened. It's a really good question because I think the experience of these pieces is really important.

NH: Do you write as part of your process when you are developing the idea?

JK: Yes, mostly thoughts and ideas, but usually not too structured.

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NH: Do you record dreams?

JK: I do, sometimes.

NH: Because I can really imagine you developing that as part of your practice, to write down what happened afterwards, because they are so dreamlike. Those two pieces [*Kairos*, 2011, and *Scaling Copan*, 2009] particularly are really dreamlike performance moments. But to write down what was happening in you at that moment...

JK: Well, I've actually been experimenting with a different kind of writing. For a period of time I started to write after I would give a craniosacral session because I would be in a different mind state. In a session, I'm very focused on feeling these rhythms in someone else's body, and this rhythmic writing came out of it. I guess you could call it poetry. I wasn't necessarily setting out to write poetry; it was more experimental. I feel like there is more to explore there, and I would like to keep working with that practice. It feels to me like that writing would be a piece in itself, instead of combining both [performance and writing] but maybe there is a way of combining both at some point.

NH: I can also imagine your performances as sites for writing, for other people, how they are feeling and how [the performance] affects them. That would be interesting, too.

ST: It's interesting in these situations to observe who feels comfortable and who doesn't, who is used to them and who isn't. (...) It forces you to slow down if you accept that [position of the viewer and participant], if you accept to engage. One group of men just stood in the back and talked.

NH: You see that at music venues. Some people listen to the music and others just talk the whole time.

ST: In this case [*Skyway Performance*], there was also a gender [divide, in terms] of who got close to you and who didn't.

JK: Maybe, yes.

ST: Was one experience more satisfactory than the other [gallery space in L.A. versus skyway/public space in Minneapolis]?

JK: I think this [Minneapolis] was more satisfactory for me.

NH: It looks like you were much more physically involved here.

JK: Yes, that's part of it. I think it's also nice to do it in a space where you know that you'll get other people, not only the invited audience. I'm always interested in that. Art spaces can be really closed off sometimes. And I get a little tired of that, of the same audience.

Thank you to Nor Hall for leading this conversation.  
St. Paul, November 2015.