

SHIFTS/ INVESTIGATING SCORES IN PERFORMANCE ART PERFORMANCE AND EXHIBITION

curated by Katie Lee Dunbar and Anaïs Héraud as part of Month of the Performance Art Anthology 2015



interview #4: Katie Lee Dunbar

Katie Lee Dunbar was born as a direct result of the miners' strikes in the 1980s in the north of England. Her mother was an activist and artist and her father was the fifth generation of a mining family. After growing up in this artistic and political climate Katie studied at University of Falmouth (B.A. Honours) and at Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California. Katie has travelled considerably and for the past five years has resided in Berlin. Katie's passion has been in combining her art with political topics. COMMON is a project inspired by first-hand experience. Is at the same time an autobiographical reflection and a social political research. She started collecting material from the unemployment situation in the ex-coal mining region of the Northeast of England where her family is from and she ended up dealing with the issues of post-industrial societies. What she shows is a personal story, yet it is universally, common. Her aim is to draw a link between all the post-industrial areas around the world. <http://www.katieleedunbar.de/common.html>

Johanna:

Within the work that you presented as part of the show, *Shifts/Investigating Scores in Performance Art*, you worked with materials of coal, cardboard and a transparent frame as well as your body. The audio and text that you presented on the wall of the gallery illuminated part of your research and experience around the topic of the unemployment situation in the ex-coal mining region of the Northeast of England and the mining strikes in the 1980's. In the different conversations that I have had with artist who presented work at this exhibition there has been a recurring question of score in relation to narrative. In your piece you were bringing up autobiographical materials from your family history but presenting them in a way that to me was not a clear narrative. I am curious about the ways that you chose to introduce this particular history in the form of a score.

Katie: First I want to un-pick this idea about narrative and the difference between narrative and score. For me the narrative part of this piece is the story that I am telling and also not telling in a way. I am relating this topic of unemployment and the situation in the northeast in industrial downs in England with the rest of the world. I am talking about that, hopefully, in a way that does not remove me from the fact that it is my personal story, but is also talking about it in a way that more people can relate to.

So I split up the information in that way. I separated the audio from the last piece and used it as a score for this performance: a piece that came from the first iteration of the project, Common #1. What I created in this piece will become a part of Common #3. So basically my answer to the question, *where does performance end and score begin* is that it doesn't. Often I see artists using scores as tools or as manifestos or as a game, clearly - there are many different kind of performance scores.

I am interested in this continually developing. It's almost like a bigger score. The circle continues which is the work that keeps going. Within that there are smaller scores like 10 minutes of 2 minute statues. It's a method. A method can be a score. And so when I started thinking about my work in terms of score I found an incredible amount of different types of scores within it. I got completely fascinated. Also, I realized that it is important for me that there is this continuous string.

One of the texts that I exhibited was a found score. It was very inspirational to me. I found it in a tomb in Rome. It was a whole tomb made out of bone! As you walk in the first quote that you see is: *What we are now, you will be. What you are now we once were.* Within the context that I am talking about I found this quite humbling. It was not scary or creepy as one might expect. I had an overwhelming feeling of: what connects us as humans is often death. I want that aspect to be in my work. That is what I am sharing when I am using my voice. It's almost this free space of humanity in its broader sense.

One score that I used was a score that I took from a piece of my visual work which I made long before my father even died, before I even started working on the Common Series. The piece was called, *I want to work in Demolition.* That was in reference to the fact that I had already been working for a long long time on these topics. Life events happen. I think for a lot of artists the work becomes a way to talk about what is happening in your life. It's about a conversation. It's about sharing something. I am not fixed in the moment, I'm not trying to communicate one specific thing.

J: I'm curious about this strategy of taking the previous work and using it as a score for the next iteration. It creates a reciprocal process, something like the content becomes the form to be filled with new content. It has a nice resonance with the quote from the tomb, *What we are now, you will be. What you are now we once were.* It's like some sort of reincarnation or recycling: form, content, form, content...until you can't quite distinguish between them anymore.

K: I think a score is something, or some-*things* that a person sticks to. Anything that is a result of that score is possible. A score or set of scores that I use are almost methods. It's almost like I set a frame. One of the frames that I set is 10 minutes of 2 minute statues. They are not actually a 2 minute statue but it's a frame that I am setting for myself. There are different frames like the text that I put up on the wall consciously beforehand are frames through which you can choose to view the work. I got really into the idea of *private* verses *public* scores. What are the scores that I make obvious and what are the private scores that are mine? And what is communicable?

I got really interested in this because one can think something is a private score and it is actually public. Someone can think that a score is public but it is actually private. And so there is always an element of how people chose to view things. What are the frames that the audience is using to look at the performance? Are they focused on the fact that my father just died? Or are they looking at it through the lens of unemployment? Or am I

experiencing the performance through my ideas about performance and voice? So no matter what scores you have it always becomes something else in relation to the people you share it with.

For me, narrative has less space for it to become something else, whereas a score has more space. But then depending on the practitioner you can look at them in completely different ways. So for example John's score was extremely fixed. He was doing one action and he wasn't going to change it for nobody, no money, no time. If it was going to take longer it was going to take longer and completely screw up the program and I loved him for it. He says that he doesn't know what a score is but he is using the most clear score in the program actually. But for me what really happened in viewing his work was that I noticed everything that happened around the score...everything that happened in his face and his body, his intent and what he was communicating. I found it really powerful. We got to witness his struggle. It wouldn't have been there without the score but if he didn't have his own private score it wouldn't have existed either. If he was simply just crossing off numbers of on a sheet of paper and didn't have his personal content, history, or *narrative* it wouldn't have been the same. What I loved was that his action edged into the corner where my exhibition was. The first thing he said to me was that he was sorry that his action edged into my space. And the first thing that I said was that that was one of the things I loved the most about it. Some people were getting uncomfortable but for me I loved that...that those two worlds were colliding.

J: Thank you Katie.

K: Thank you.

-interviewed by Johanna Gilje

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION:

“Some scores might be the core of the performance, others are the remaining traces. Sometimes they are material for improvisation. Scores can remain private and help to reach a certain state for the live act, others might be artwork in them-selves. Where does script end and the artwork begin? What is the shift from concept to performance? We invite performance artists: Nathalie Anguezomo Mba Bikoro, John Court, Katie Lee Dunbar, Camilla Graff Junior, Leena Kela, Anaïs Héraud & Till Baumann; all of whom have developed a practice of score writing. Throughout the 19th of May the seven artists will share their methods and enter a dialog; showing visual, textual and audio scores as well as the relevant performances. *Event scores - instructions for a performance. Widely known as a result of the Fluxus movement.” -from the curators*