

One & Other Project

[Interview recorded from Skype to Skype without video]

My name is Verusca Calabria and I'm here today on the 13th of March 2010 at 10 a.m. to interview Klaus Kruse on behalf of Random House Group as part of some follow up research on the One & Other project. So Klaus tell me where you are at the moment.

In the moment I'm in my lorry up on Kingsbridge hill in Devon.

And what are you doing there?

It's like a mobile home and wherever I work away from London I live in it.

What are you doing there at the moment?

Well I'm having my interview with you. I've waited in the morning for you yes it's really like I mean I do, everything is in here I've got a little kitchen and the table and the bed so it's my station.

Lovely, so what work are you doing down in Devon at the moment?

I work as a theatre lecturer for university college Falmouth at the Dartington College of Art campus.

Okay and what subjects do you teach at the moment?

At the moment I do contextual theatre practice so I work with students off campus and we are working along the river Dart exploring the idea of water circles and the interconnectedness of water because our college is moving from Dartington to Falmouth in the next year. So as part of it I thought it would be nice to kind of reflect on this kind of, this move through this interconnectedness of water because we've got the river here in Devon in Tautness; we've got the river Dart and in Falmouth off course there's also a river and they are both connected through the water system.

Are you developing some kind of art project as part of that?

Yes, the students are going to have an exhibition in the end of it and so they are looking at different aspects of land art and the kind of psycho-geography and with that they will in the end by themselves they will make a performance exhibition of sorts so I'm in a way preparing them and giving them some ideas we are having sessions and kind of preparing them for them to do their own work.

Okay, thank you for that, I just want to bring you back to the time when you went on the plinth and talk a little bit more about your experience in retrospect, you mentioned that your performance was called Biosphere and that it was about a person living in isolation.

Yes.

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Why did you come up with this idea, where did the man in isolation come from?

Okay, I mean in a way that character that I embodied on the plinth incorporates some of the very essential aspects of what it means to be human, yes, with what I did I attempted to stage an intimate encounter or to open a voyeuristic window through which the basic needs and desires that I can recognise in myself and others can be investigated. The piece is called Biosphere, like you say, and as part of it I eat broccoli and that broccoli is then digested and then excreted as faeces and a cutting of that original broccoli is implanted on the excrement and it grows into a new broccoli so in short I grow broccoli on my own shit yes? And that is how I survive and this is very basic and to me ultimately true representation of the circle of life and decay, yes?

In my performance on the plinth I explored the needs and desires that we have beyond this physical survival and it's like the desire for sex, love, intimacy, the search for reason and meaning and also our demand for patterns and rituals to structure our lives in order to give our existence a more constant predictable format and my intention was not so much to comment but to observe rather maybe one step further. I'm letting myself being closely observed why I'm closely observing myself and in the context of the plinth this piece that already existed before took on another dimension and it became somewhat like politicised in a way which I didn't even recognise before it's like we all share this essential aspect that makes us human it's like Nelson, the Queen, the Pope, out pop idols or heroes or you or me or Antony or you know all of the homeless people that were camping on the benches of Trafalgar Square.

We all need to eat, yes, we all need to shit and we all have experience desire for intimacy or love or sex and we must also surely all have struggled over our reasons for existence and meaning of life and maybe unless we have been driven mad. Also we found a place of karma, even purpose in the patterns and rituals that we put in place in order to structure our lives and for to recognise that I have this in common with everybody around me means for me to recognise the other as myself and this is the moment in which One & Other turns into us and once revealed how wonderfully vulnerable we all are, how simple our needs that somehow in the light of this, to me, the complexity of life begins to dwindle away and the desperation that we have to aspire that we have to become something else than what we are falls right away. And we are all born without instruction manuals, we are exposed to a multitude of different interests trying to influence us, promising us satisfaction or success or salvation if you follow certain recipes and I think that somehow anything we might seek in our very own simple make up is already there and funnily enough very attainable or maybe already inherent within us and beyond the many other different interpretations of this piece, this fundamental equality beneath our different appearances in personality, status or even gender is what I think *Biosphere* is ultimately about. And in a way I think for me it finally reflects what One & Other is about as well and yes that's ... I think what I found from myself in a way. I brought something to the plinth but it kind of came back to me as something more.

Okay, thank you for that, to bring you back you mentioned in the previous interview that you first tried out this show at a festival in Germany.

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Yes, yes I showed it in the Dubt [?] Station in Germany.

Yes and I'm just wondering how much it may have changed from the very, very first idea that you had if you can try and trace back what it was like to begin with and what changed along the way? Even in your own personal perspective.

Well in my personal perspective I think what changed for me is really that the context of the plinth, the really very overarching meaning that in a way before this piece was more about a person and through the plinth I really recognise that it is very much about everybody.

Okay I can hear some sort of buzzing sound in the background, have you got any other technology running at the moment?

Oh no, I turned my phone off, let me see, does that help, is that better?

Yes slightly, thank you. Okay so basically just to get some more context from the time in which you were on the plinth, how did you plan, how did you devise the whole show?

Well although it existed already in some sort of format I had to change it quite a lot because the original piece relied on changes of light that of course I couldn't achieve on the plinth and also of course the space was much smaller than what I usually have. So I just kind of taped out the size of the plinth in my living room and I re-rehearsed the piece on that and I kind of made some adjustments in order to compensate for not having the change of light in my control.

How about the choice of music and the tune you were singing, I think it was white Christmas wasn't it?

Yes I mean in a way this character yearns for more than just a simple day in day out of life that's why he looks towards Christmas. I mean this is like for me the symbol, we all live towards it towards these kind of moments in our lives that are special and that's in a way how this character represents this so he lives towards Christmas towards something greater than his daily life.

And what was it really like when you went on the plinth, just to reconstruct your feelings and perceptions when you were actually performing?

It was so much more isolated that I had ever imagined it to be although I never had planned to interact with the people at the bottom of the plinth. I felt like although I could hear their voices I felt like it was a world like in a babble of its own and it was quite a strong sensation of loneliness and isolatedness up there.

And what happened immediately afterwards when you came down?

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Yes it felt, it was like a landing really a landing back to earth and obviously this kind of trouble with on the JCB they brought me down yes it had a kind of surreal feeling that I had kind of come back from some kind of moon landing.

Did you interact with anyone straight after your performance and if so what sort of feedback did you get?

Yes, I had some friends and my partner that had come with me to support me as my supporters they were there and yes it was like very beautiful welcoming home after this experience to get this.

And also I noticed about your Living Structures collective and did you then manage to develop a show as a result of this performance?

Yes there is, I mean really like the piece I did on the plinth is a small extract of a much bigger show that we developed out of the solo piece and we did this in Area Ten project space in Peckham and we made a Christmas show it became a big piece with twenty performers involved in it and a lot of music I've written I actually got one of the songs here as a poem that I maybe can read out to you if you would like.

Yes of course.

Yes, it goes:

Where beginning and end
Reach each other the hand
And they dance and dance
And the wheel it rolls on

So reach me your hand
And give me this dance
And they dance and dance
And the wheel it rolls on

Yesterday I was water
You were a goat
And when you drank
I poured through your throat

And they dance and dance
And the wheel it rolls on

Tomorrow I am stone
You are water
And your soft hand
Will wash me through sand

And they dance and dance
And the wheel it rolls on

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Yesterday I was a seed
You where the wind
You carried me over land and see

And they dance and dance
And the wheel it rolls on

Tomorrow I am earth your' seed
And you'll see you beauty full
Flower you'll grow out of me

So reach me your hands
And give me this dance
For how I am now
You might never have me again

Oh that's beautiful, how did that develop?

Well we make devised theatre so I work as a director and performer and as a writer of lyrics and songs and I collaborate with different people with our vocal director Verity Stand and with all the performances and producers. And how we work is that we make material through improvisation and then we will choose certain moments and cut and paste them together and we really develop pieces together. And one of the great aspects of the work that we do that wasn't represented on the plinth is that we build objects in which the audience can enter and the whole environment that we create becomes a very active participant in our performances. So for *Biosphere* we created a giant hessian maze in which the audience could roam and yes that was for this who what we made.

Okay and you also mentioned that your work is immersive performance can you explain more about what that means?

It means that the performance doesn't just happen before you like in a theatre where you sit and you watch before you but it happens all around you and in a way also the audience becomes a part of the whole event they are, they become active participants by them roaming the space so it means in a way that it becomes a real experience rather than when you are removed from it so you are not sitting and watching but you are walking through a space. And in a way we open up the eyes in the back of the audience and the kind of whole sense that we are in a three--dimensional space rather than a flat space so we often experience the world as like in front of us and rather than two-dimensional ... but the world of course is all around us and this is a very important aspect of our work.

Okay, thank you. So now just to bring you back to your life story, of course this is an oral history interview, and you talked in the previous recording about your passion for dancing and that you became aware of it when you were dancing to techno music back in Germany.

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Oh yes, yes it's true.

So I thought maybe we could just unravel some of that, you could perhaps tell me what happened after that when you realised you like dance and your journey into your art practise.

Yes it's true for me out of this, well in a way I realised that I was not dancing introverted but I was dancing extroverted. I enjoyed to make performance to be rather than to go into oblivion or to dance myself into dance. I was interested into making lines in working with the space, working with the people around me, the interaction rather than disappearing into myself and this is kind of what brought me to Holland because I heard of a school there for new dance development. I joined the intensive course there in order to kind of find out what is dance about today and obviously I didn't have like a classically trained background and this was a road that was open to me and there I found a lot of different aspects of movement practises of contact improvisation of movement improvisation, modern and classical dance as well as contemporary dance and yes I explored this for a good three years in the Netherlands and then I felt at some point that my way was beyond dance.

I was also interested in the theatrical aspects of multimedia and a great teacher in Holland, Kate Duck, pointed me towards Dartington College of Art in Devon and she said "This is the place, Klaus, you should have a look at" and I started to study there a year later. It's really where my journey as a theatre maker began. I did my BA and MA there and I met a lot of the people there that I'm collaborating with today and we all have a similar kind of language that we developed there in devised theatre which means you make it, it's not made from script it's not made from a written text necessarily but we use all this aspects but we create our own work.

Okay, thank you, so just to bring you back when do you think you began to have an interest in your life in art looking back even before you went to the Netherlands?

When I was a kid I always said I want to become an actor and I think I don't even know if I knew really what that meant because I didn't want to be a TV actor or like a film actor that's what I was quite familiar with as a kid and I knew what these people did. My parents didn't really very often taken me to the theatre but I wanted to become an actor, then I joined a theatre group for young people. I went there once or twice a week and I very much enjoyed it and that kind of set me up but at some point during my teens I got more interested in going out and girls and drugs and so on and I felt all this and I kind of started to travel and to do to techno parties and go dancing and then I found my passion for dance.

Okay, how old were you then when you began to travel?

Eighteen, I mean I travelled also before but when I was eighteen we bought a little campervan, me and a friend, and we said like okay off we go and we went to Spain and lived there in a community in the South of Spain for some time and we just lived the travelling life style.

What was the name of the community in Spain?

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Beneficio.

And where?

It's near Granada in the mountains.

And where do you come from in Germany?

Stuttgart, south of Germany.

All right so tell me about your family, have you got any other people in the family doing art?

Well my brother is really a life artist. He does lots of things. At the moment he's into pinball machines, so he restores all pinball machines and then he also does a kind of starting up a pizza baking business with like a wood fire pizza oven and yes apart from this my father is an aid worker he's retired now but he worked as an aid worker and my mum is a psychologist.

Okay, thank you and what links do you maintain with home since now you live abroad?

I speak with my parents very frequently and also with my brother. I speak and I would go there like once or twice a year to visit over Christmas usually you see Christmas is very important like in my show it's something we look towards as a moment of meeting and yes apart from that sometimes in the summer or so if I can manage.

Thank you Klaus, just to bring you back now to your time on the plinth, we always ask everyone about their motivations for going on it, the importance of it, what did it mean to you personally to go on the plinth and do your Biosphere show?

In a way it's kind of ... I think I really felt like it fitted so very well. I mean I had this solo piece and then I realised when I was thinking what should I do up there, I realised, oh my god it fits so well, it felt into place there. It felt like wow it's such an isolated place and it's about this character and how he's in isolation and so I was really like very curious to explore how it is to actually do the show in such an isolated environment. It's quite funny because the encounter through the camera becomes a time of more intimate or seemingly real than the removed impression of the person on the plinth if you perceive them from the square they are somehow dwarfed by it. And often I could see when I watching other *plinthers*, how they would struggle to make an impression sometimes a very beautiful and a real struggle and these two different viewpoints of the camera and the view from the plinth it reminds me of how I perceived myself and others sometimes a unique and outstanding and the next moment merely like an insignificant part of a much greater complex system and yes all these aspects I found so very interesting and yes.

You mentioned that you've done this show very much for the web audience in your previous interview so I'm trying to see whether you had any way of telling what

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impact the performance had on the online audience, either via the One & Other profile or any other social networking site that you may have used?

Yes, I mean that I think a lot of feedback I got from the Sky Arts interview that I had where they kind of made a summary of my show they edited a very beautiful little sequence of it and also I had some feedback from, on the One & Other website, where I had some comments and they reached really from somebody saying “Oh my God finally you are gone, the JCB are taking you away, I’m so glad” to other people that really appreciated this really, yes, as a sensitive performance. And of course I know that some aspects might be challenging for people because what I show is what we often hide about ourselves and what is regarded as very private and so I can see that people might struggle with it but my intention is not to shock, it’s really just in a way to reveal myself but not only myself but to reveal also that we all are like this.

Okay, thank you, did you use other social networking to talk about this performance?

Well obviously we use our website and we have a *Facebook* site this is like www.livingstructures.co.uk is our website so we did expose what I did on the plinth also on there, yes.

And what sort of comments did you receive?

People in general really liked it and they thought it was brave, very beautiful and I know for example my parents for sure they struggle always with this show a little bit although they like parts of it. They say, “Does it need to be so explicit?” and I think yes it does because everything is represented very directly but yes, I had a controversial range of feedbacks.

Which brings me up really to the question whether you think the experience changed you in any way?

It changed me in the way that I think for once I started to understand my performance in a different way. Also I started to understand the whole project in a different way so I kind of, it removed my understanding of what was happening through One & Other on to a different level and I really saw, yes, that it is so much, that the whole event for me was so much about that we are all actually so similar you know beneath our you know our appearances we are all very similar.

And how about your friends and family, do you think it provided some sort of change for them?

I don’t know, it’s very hard to say that. I mean I think, I mean all the people that I worked with, my friends, we all revelled in the experience because we all very much enjoyed the after thing with the sky arts interview and so it was all for us in a way beautiful but also bizarre a bit strange, yes.

So how about Living Structures, you mentioned that you had a performance following this that related to the show, what impact did it have on Living Structures?

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With *Living Structures* we are struggling to make our art work funded and obviously this kind of exposure is nice for us because we can mention it but I mean also the experience of doing the show on the plinth might have fed into that aspect of the performance of the solo part and it has slightly transformed, it's hard to say so, but by removing it like by carrying it to the plinth and then removing it from there you know it has transformed in a way. It's very hard to put your finger on what exactly it's more the understanding of it which then has influenced what we built around this solo piece when we made the bigger show.

Okay so tell me more about the history of Living Structures, you mentioned on your One & Other profile that it came about in 2007.

Yes that's ... basically we've come out of my on-going research into immersive theatre and object manipulation that we use in order to create a change of spatial experience for the audience. And in 2007 we made a show called *Cart Macabre* in which we had eight wooden carts in which audiences, four audiences in each cart, were moved through a multimedia environment. They were sitting in complete darkness and we would move them around and open the carts and we could dock carts together and remove sliding walls and suddenly people were in a room with like thirty two people so basically we would dock eight carts together and remove all the walls by sliding them upwards and you were first in a room with like four people in complete darkness and suddenly you were surrounded by glossy light and shadow puppetry and you were in a room with thirty people. In a way this prompted us to say "Okay, we want to start a company" with that specific research at heart and this is how funding for *Living Structure* came about.

And what's happening now, what are you working on?

We currently have two applications for funding with Samuel Becket Oxford Theatre Trust and an Arts Council application and we have some support in making this application from the Arts council and we are making a bid to show *Cart Macabre*, this original show, at Area Ten project based in Peckham. We hope to show that in the summer and yes we are working very hard to try and get funding to do more work; everything we've done so far before has been self-funded or done with support from University College Falmouth and obviously other venues like Battersea Arts Centre and Area Ten and Chant Volts [?] that have supported us as companies. But we are now starting to make serious funding bids so we can start to perform to pay our performers.

That's fantastic.

Yes we hope it all goes well, we'll see.

And what about you personally at the moment, how long will you be staying down in Devon?

I'm teaching here the whole spring module until Easter and then I'll come back to London and then I have another month left and then I will see. I might get some more

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work after that I teach here part time I'm kind of, it's just like, it changes on how many hours I will have.

Okay just one more question about the Sky Arts interview.

Yes.

Did you have it straight after your performance or after a while?

No I had it the week after.

Okay and how was it?

You know it was very short because I felt like I had a lot of things to say but obviously they had run out of time and because I'd spoken with Chloe Potter about, she had told me the kind of questions she might ask but in the end we didn't have so much time. But I really very much enjoyed it and also enjoyed the kind of talk after. It was very funny in a way to see what other people made of it.

Okay, thank you I hope you have enjoyed the interview today.

Very much, thank you Verusca.

Is there anything you'd like to add?

No thank you very much to Antony for making this project possible, I think it was great.

Thank you Klaus, bye bye.

Bye bye Verusca.

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