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[Episode 73: Jo Hauge](#) - (July 2016)

Transcript edited by David Turner – 2/3/2017

Host: David Turner – **DT**

Guest: [Jo Hauge](#) – **JH**

Conversation:

DT: Hello, my name is David Turner and this is another Lunar Poetry Short. Today I'm in Peckham in south-east London with Jo Hauge. Hello Jo, how are you doing?

JH: I'm good.

DT: We're going to start with a reading then get on to some questions.

JH: So, this one is a really really new one that I've written about Ana Mendieta and it came out of the protest that the Where is Ana Mendieta collective have been doing. It's part of a series that I do called Alternate Universes where, basically, me and some female artists, like save the world and it's beautiful. This one is called;

Ana

150 of us stand outside the Tate and let Carl Andre know, in case he had forgotten, that he killed Ana Mendieta. Carl Andre comes outside and says "shit, that had totally slipped my mind, thank you for reminding me" and instantly dies of a guilt induced heart attack. He has a small nosebleed and then disappears completely from every collection, gallery and memory. The blood pools and forms the shape of a small woman's body. From the puddle, Ana Mendieta gets up. She says: your shouting and crying over 20 years has brought me back to life and I'll live long enough now to make more art and then more art until the art I make is not a big deal because what I was fighting for has long since been accomplished and I live and live and fuck up and embarrass you with my conservativeness the way all parents should be allowed to live long enough to do. We meet up with Ana for drinks every few weeks and get kicked out of Wetherspoons after Wetherspoons for laughing too loudly, which just makes us laugh more.

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JH: This one is called;

Chicken

I'm speaking in front of a hundred children who don't know that last night a man paid me 150 pounds to lick my feet
I'm talking to them about being a queer artist and telling them they can do it
they can do everything survive everything
but I'm surviving by having a middle aged man pay to lick my feet
which I prepare for him like chicken

I dim the lights to hide the plastic of my wig
I hide my hairy legs in stockings
I put my feet into plastic bags filled with cottage cheese to make them smell

laugh all you want, there's an art to whoring
we take on apprentices we glue each others eyelashes on we put each
other's feet into plastic bags to marinade

my mum taught me how to marinade chicken

put the chicken in the bag with herbs and oil
then rub the bag with both of your hands, tenderise the flesh
stick the thigh with a knife to see if it is done

I make a mean chicken but there were gaps in my education
I have a masters degree in art which I use for perfect eyeliner
I have become very tender, but like chicken not like love
I love less because sharing is expensive

So the kids ask me how much money I earn being a performance artist
So I reach them to make chicken and how to glue on eyelashes
Because at least those are transferable skills

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DT: Thank you Jo, I'd made some notes and still completely forgot to say in the introduction that you are a writer, a performer and activist. Which I suppose by listening to those poems may have already come across. Yeah, I was going to ask you to say a bit more about your work in general but maybe because you started with the Ana Mendieta poem would you like to just elaborate a bit on that and how that came about?

JH: So, we've been doing... Last week, I think it was last week, we did two protests at the Tate Modern because they've included Carl Andre's work in their new building. Their slogan is, I think, "Art changes. We change", which obviously isn't true because they keep prioritising the voices of violent white dudes over marginalised voices. And that's basically what we're protesting. And I think some people think, "Oh, shouldn't his art be shown. The work is not the same as the man". It's not really about his work which is really boring, have you seen it?

DT: Yes. It's bricks.

JH: Yeah, it's bricks on the floor. That's not the point but it's, kind of... Choosing to highlight his work over the much more interesting work of Ana Mendieta, who he murdered. We did two actions last week, the first was a more traditional sort of protest where we went outside and shouted and had banners and you know, "Where is Ana Mendieta?" On Friday, we did a more sort of performative action where we had a flyer...

We had three things happening at once, we had flyer distribution and then we had someone holding up a 'Where is Ana Mendieta?' banner and then me and some other people put a banner over his artwork, the bricks on the floor, saying "Carl Andre killed Ana Mendieta" and stood around it with paint on our hands which is a reference to one of her works. It's been really good and it's got quite a lot of attention. I've just met really cool people through it as well so, personally, I'm quite happy about being involved in it.

DT: It's quite difficult and stressful when you're involved with protesting in that way isn't it? Because there's such a fine line between being allowed to protest and actually getting

arrested and stuff. So, I'm sure it was quite a stressful event even if it was positive but did you get much of a chance to gauge people's reaction to it?

JH: It was quite divided. So, some people who were... The one on Friday was part of their 'Late at Tate' event and the sort of people who go to 'LaT'... There's some cool young artsy people and then some of the people are, sort of, 'Carl Andre' people. Some of them came over and said something to me like, almost like prove it or something.

DT: Did they?

JH: And I was like, "That's not the point mate". Some people, kind of, saw us as entertainment, I think. That felt quite weird that they were not... Some people thought that it was just performance art which is fine, because it's within the institution and that's what happens. Then some people were like, "Oh, look at these girls! Look at them, well I must tell Hugo.

JH: That was a bit annoying, but actually a lot of people said, "I know about this". Or on the other hand like, "I knew nothing about this. Thank you for telling me". And we had some really great people who were not involved in the protest itself but who were in the space, who knew about it and then went around talking to people. When I was standing there, I could hear that and it made me feel so happy that it's not just us who care about this. Others just took it upon themselves to do that and that was really great.

DT: Yeah, and if anyone is listening and wants to follow what you're up to, there's a Twitter account isn't there?

JH: It's [@anamendietauk](#).

DT: Yeah, I'll put a link to that. Oh, and one other things I forgot to mention as well, if you can hear some bubbling, there's a fish tank in the corner. That's all that is and there will be some trains passing overhead. I've only seen you read once and that was just last week at The South London Gallery for a retrospective of Astra Blaug and her life and work, where you wrote in response. I was just wondering, is there a divide in your writing between personal and activism or does it all blend into one?

JH: I think it's pretty much the same thing for me. I feel a bit funny about you calling me an activist because I think I haven't done a lot of activism and also, I haven't done a lot of writing.

DT: I have to say that you said activist first.

JH: I said occasional activist! I think it's something that I didn't do for a long time for loads of different reasons and then I've come back to which feels really good. I think my, quite early on my poems were very personal and a lot about, you know, like teenage poems like a lot about relationships and stuff. Then I realised that that was political, I think. And then when I got a bit older and I discovered a lot of [19]70s feminist performance art and stuff and they're all like, "The personal is political!"

I realised, "Oh yeah. That's the thing that I've been doing this whole time!" which felt pretty cool. But I find it hard to see like a... Because it's obviously very much through my lens and I think for a while I was worried about coming across as really subjective. And I think, especially, when you're read as a woman that's something that's always, kind of, in the air. Like are you being hysterical are you taking this too personally. And I guess I worry about that or I did worry about that but now I'm just like, "No, I'm just going to like do some poems about someone who has actually assaulted me.

DT: Actually, I should have said political rather than activism, you know, it probably suits much better doesn't it? I actually had this discussion with Travis Alabanza and SA Smythe when they came on together. We were desperately searching for another word other than activism because it doesn't quite fit properly with what they both write, individually. But, certainly, from what I've seen of your work, the 'personal as political' is probably much better as a description.

Do you tend to read at mainly Queer themed events? I'm just thinking about the audience and how much you have to think about being read as a female as opposed to non-binary.

JH: Oh that's a really interesting question. That's a really good question. I think when I do my performance art stuff that's usually in Queer spaces and also a lot of stuff that I do... I have a poem about gender but I think my performance, kind of, incorporates that to a larger extent. I, kind of, don't worry that much about how I'm read because my performance speaks to it and so do my poems. Like, at The South London Gallery I had one where I just go, "I'm not a woman" and I did that first so you know.

DT: It's a pretty good opener, yeah.

JH: Rudy Lowe who shares this studio space with me has these t-shirts where... Have you seen those t-shirts that have...

DT: You were wearing one the other night, weren't you? I love Rudy's t-shirts, they're great.

JH: I have one that says non-binary/femme and then a 'heart' in the middle and then sometimes when I go to the straight spaces I wear that, just to be like, "Hey I'm here! I'm Queer! Look at me!" But my poetry, I read it a lot in, sort of, more... I did English Literature as my BA [Degree] and I read a lot of stuff in quite straight-male dominated spaces so I did a lot of poems about being in male dominated spaces.

And I have a lot of poems about something I call 'the English boy' which... Also, another word for it I heard is 'theory bro', these boys are like, "Well, I've read Nietzsche so that makes me really clever now and nothing you say has any value. Because I'm so clever and I can quote all these theorists". And 'literature bros' are, kind of, the same but with [TS] Eliot or whatever.

DT: Actually, one of the reasons the podcast started was to counter the 'theory' or 'literature bros' because I so fed-up of the being at poetry events and people... And this isn't exclusive to poetry, it exists in all the arts, unfortunately. This, making everything overly academic. Because all it does is, anyone who hasn't read those books or done that course is immediately excluded and it has nothing to do with intelligence or comprehension. It's just a way of saying, "I've been in this club, you weren't in this club. You can't talk to me".

JH: Yeah and I think that's why I stopped writing for quite a long time because I had this idea that because my writing is very personal... A lot of the stuff I wrote was very personal but then had a lot of literary references which is, kind of, natural when you're doing an English degree. But, also, I think was something I was doing in order to justify my own existence in a way being like, "Oh it's fine that I write about my cunt because I also quoted James Joyce. So, it's fine now".

Those poems are quite I quite like them, they're nice poems. But I feel like it's problematic that I was giving in to this expectation that you have to do something really clever with poetry.

DT: This is something that comes up a lot with guests actually, especially with people that have come from non-arts backgrounds or working-class backgrounds. There seems to be, in a lot of their earlier work, an attempt to excuse the 'normal language'? Yes, that is what I'm trying to say. You know, if you are using conversational language, or whatever that means, or language you use in the everyday.

There seems to have to be something that's obviously clever. [**JH:** Yeah.] Or obviously studied in order to get away with that and it maybe takes people a while to get out of that habit.

JH: I, basically, had a wonderful English teacher and she taught me about poetry, you know, when we were just having like, "This is what poetry is. This is the definition of poetry". We got a, sort of, checklist of things that could make something a poem. I don't remember what any of them were but there was one that was like 'check careful choice of words'.

And before that I was like, "Oh, I can't write poems because I don't like poems that rhyme", I hate poems that rhyme. Actually, [Liv's](#) [Wynter] occasionally rhyme and I do like those but I don't like rhyme, in general. I always thought I couldn't do this because it's for clever people who like rhymes and then she was like, "No, it's careful choice of words". I immediately thought, "I can do that!" And then I did!

DT: Maybe now would be a good time for another reading and then we can move on and talk about poetry, specifically.

JH: Right, I'm going to do my gender one first and then my angry one.

Someone asked me not to explain my gender to their child because they're too young for it to have occurred to them that gender can be different than boy/girl.

And I remember standing up peeing in kindergarten
being told not to stand and pee
and making up new names for myself in crayon

My dad thinks queerness and non binary gender is a modern thing we do in the big city but it's not a new thing or a city thing.

At 14 I read about George Sand, Frida Kahlo, the story of the Norse God Thor dressing up as his own wife to get his hammer back
the images of him with his beard braided with flowers in it

I saw a thin, short man with breasts on the bus once and I stared the way children on the train sometimes stare at me.
I watched tipping the velvet and started stuffing my trousers with hankies but I did no tipping of any velvet.

My teacher told me I would fail life drawing if I drew the breasts and vulva with too much attention to detail, but no one else got this warning
And I thought, even though I'm alone in this right now
I'm descended from people like me, even fictional ones
I always prided myself on my badass grandma but I have other, more distant relatives.

Pope Joan is my great great great great something.
I'm a direct descended of Herculine, Josephine, a hundred Robyn's and Mollies and those women in sailor suits in black and white photographs.

We went on gaycation to Malaga and we met an old lesbian couple and they were our aunties, we said HI WE SEE YOU THANK YOU and they said HI YOUNG ONES and to the kid on the train platform and especially your kid I say YOUR DAD IS A FUCKING DICK AND IF YOU WANT TO PEE STANDING UP YOU SHOULD TOTALLY DO THAT

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JH: This one is called;

Killjoy

Sam says look at her arse look at her huge fat arse
Was it fat in a good way?

Nah the biggest arse I've ever seen

Sit down Sam sit your skinny arse all the way down

So I say something, carefully, I bring up his entitlement but I don't blame him
I don't explain the intersection of gender and race
I don't say men like you
I don't say yes all men
I don't say men at all
And I don't say how men like you have been saying this stuff to me and near
me since I was 11 and I'm so tired
And I don't say you remind me that no one is safe

Because when I fall asleep next to my male friends I tend to wake up to their
breath in my ear their hands on my labia their weight on me
my face in their mouldy pillows their narrow dicks in me

He has the face of one of these men
I sense a kinship
a fraternal bond
But I don't tell him any of this because that would kill the joy

That's one of my tasks as someone who inhabits this body
Keep the mood nice keep the conversation flowing the drinks coming on a
little tray make sure no one is unhappy except me and people like me
make sympathetic eye contact with people like us talk to them afterwards to
make sure we are ok, roll our eyes gently
Come on, let's all do it together
Let's roll our eyes gently because no one wants to make anyone feel bad

When I told John what Piers had done John said "oh but he's a nice guy and
you did sleep in his bed"
And when I told John what Joel had done he said "oh but that's gonna be
really awkward because he's going to live with us for a while" so I didn't tell
him what Charlie did in case he was invited to live with us too, and in case it
caused more awkwardness.

I'm so sorry you feel awkward!
I'm so sorry you feel awkward!
I'm so sorry you feel awkward and that I told the internet what you did!

But if me telling the truth about something you did makes you look bad
maybe the problem isn't me.
I know I'm the one who makes things awkward when I say "no one cares
what you think about that persons arse Sam, no one asked you"

And it takes practice to be a killjoy and it's lonely as fuck and I walk home alone that night which is meant to be dangerous but we all know it's the devil you know it's Joel and Piers and Charlie they're not anonymous I'm friends with them on facebook still as are all of my male friends

It takes practice to say "sorry I shat all over your sausage fest I'm practicing being a party pooper and I'm getting better at it because if this is your joy then I'm happy I killed it.

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DT: Thank you very much.

JH: You're very welcome.

DT: It's so different listening to poems one-on-one like this, it's much more affecting than when you... I saw you read that poem the other night and... Perhaps as a defence mechanism the audience is bound to try and find any humour that you put into it and lock onto that but one-on-one that's impossible.

JH: That's interesting because it was a little weird because I'm used to people laughing. Maybe I shouldn't say this? I'll say it anyway. When I was in therapy the other day, my therapist was like, "Do you notice that when you talk about this thing..." I was talking about this sexual assault thing... "Do you notice that every time you talk about it you giggle? It's fine but just notice that you're doing this as a defence mechanism". "That's a thing that you do and I want you to be aware". I thought that was really interesting because other people do that as well. And I think...

DT: That's definitely something that I do.

JH: My whole family do. We laugh when we're uncomfortable, which makes arguments very difficult because there's nothing more infuriating than if you're shouting at someone and they just laugh. Then you're like, "I will fucking end you", we've had so many arguments about that. I think, on some level, I put little quips and stuff into my poems, partly because I think that would be funny and I want to make myself laugh and I really hate when things are too serious.

That's why it's nice when people are like, "Oh, are you a performance artist? Do you, kind of, do like these really, kind of, slow motion very po-faced sort of serious things?" and I'm like, "No. I wear really funny costumes". You know, the last thing I did, I gave birth to some beetroot and then ate it and then threw it at people and then just smeared cake all over myself.

It was a bit silly and I think it's good to have silliness, I don't think it's, kind of, apolitical to be silly or to laugh. But I see what you mean about people [laughing in the audience.

DT: The last person I interviewed was the poet Sophie Cameron and she runs a night where performers talk about things that people wouldn't normally talk about or would feel uncomfortable. A lot of people discuss sex really frankly as well as sex work. But we spoke about how the best way probably to talk about that in front of a group of people is to give them something to unify with. If you shock all of them but don't pick people out individually...

Unless that's the point and you're trying to call someone out or check someone... If you're just trying to get a topic out in the open, probably the best way is to unify the audience and allow them a release. If that releases a giggle, as a performer you shouldn't be scared of it, should you?

I can remember doing gigs where people have giggles and I just thought, "Fuck, I hadn't written that as funny", and it put me off a lot at the start but then you realise it's just a way that people can still engage with your work and not zone out, isn't it?

JH: Yeah. I think, also, sometimes it can be difficult because I feel I really want to make people laugh and I think sometimes I'm like, "Oh I can't write that because no one will laugh". I think it's useful but I think also it's good to know... Am I doing this because I'm uncomfortable? Because it's fine if the audience do something because they're uncomfortable, because I would be uncomfortable listening to some of the stuff that people say. like it's hard.

But I don't want to be uncomfortable I don't want to feel like I'm squirming, do you know what I mean? I don't want to avoid what I'm actually saying.

DT: It's also a very important message to put across, as well. If you are talking about something that people assume would just be horrendously traumatic, it's important to show that it is possible to laugh, isn't it? [**JH:** Yeah.] Your re-telling of these experiences is positive thing for you. I suppose it's just awkward for people to put themselves in that position, isn't it? [**JH:** Yeah.] For them to see how you could one go through a thing, come out the other side and laugh in front of a room full of strangers.

JH: Yeah, I think that's how I deal with things is that I talk about them in front of increasing amounts of people... At some point, I'll just be doing like public therapy at Wembley with a megaphone, just like, "Ah, I feel sad guys!" Actually, that would be great performance art, I should totally do that.

DT: So, as extension of that. What is it about poetry that allows you to talk about these things? What attracts you to write in this form?

JH: I think, partly, the reason I start writing poetry is because you can create a lot of emotion in a very short amount of time and also because I have a really short attention span. When I was a teenager I tried writing all these novels and it went terribly wrong and I think... Well poetry is short I can cope with that!

It sounds like such a flippant answer but I genuinely think that most poems are quite short. I don't think I've ever finished any like any epic poem, where you open a poetry book and it's like fifteen pages long. I'm sorry I can't. Because it's quite intense.

DT: Yeah, it takes an enormous amount and you give so much to it as you read if it's good.

JH: Yeah if it's good. There are a couple of longer poems that I like but usually if they go... You know, if you open a book and they go over like three pages then I can't maintain that level of concentration. And I feel much more so then, when it's just a narrative and it's that thing that I said earlier about the careful choice of words. That thing where you...

Because I'm dyslexic and dyspraxic I skip bits in poems and then I make my own, which is quite nice. So, I guess I have to concentrate a bit extra because it takes so much focus and I think that's what I like about doing it as well is that it's very like condensed, like a little shot.

DT: Yeah. Do you feel that, sort of, forcing yourself to be so careful about your selection of words and going through that process of making a poem rather than flash fiction or short stories or whatever the next slightly longer version or alternative might be. Do you think that helps to cap your emotions enough to really face things head on as well?

JH: Yeah, I definitely think so and I think the reason why I like... Because I used to do theatre and I used to try to write novels and then I was like, "Do you know what? I'm really interested in plot. I don't really care about what happens and in what order things happen". I care about like, the snapshot, I care about like what was that exact... You know, sometimes when you read a novel and there's like a paragraph and it just perfectly describes everything? I'm always like, "Just do that... Just do that! You don't need any of this fucking journey shit!" I'm coming across as such a...

DT: "Finally, you got to the point!"

JH: If my dad listens to this he'll be like, "Tsk-tsk-tsk..." but I think I like it when it's like that moment, that's when it happened, that's the thing that mattered. Not so much, "Oin, son of Loin" and then eighteen pages of... As much as I loved Lord of the Rings when I was eleven. Do you know what I mean? I don't need that to feel something, I just want the pure [emotion].

DT: And how does this form of writing feed into your performance? I haven't seen you perform in a performance art kind of a way but I have seen some stuff on Youtube and it's very different. Clearly, it's the same personality and the same feelings and such but it's very... Correct me if I'm wrong but it seems like it's a different writing process. [If that is the case] How do the two fit together?

JH: I don't know what you've seen of my work but a lot of the work I do I write...

DT: I've seen some stuff you did at [Duckie](#).

JH: Oh yeah. A lot of the stuff that I write when I do performance stuff is, for some reason I feel like I'm more allowed to steal when I do performance. Sometimes it's, like, literal quotes off the Internet. I have a performance that's almost just Youtube comments that I've just copied and pasted and put into Google Translate and then Google Translate reads them out.

I think, when I write for performance... And this is why I got back into writing poetry because I wrote poetry for a long time and I did this little collection that I self-published and then I didn't write for like two years. But I [still] made performance and then I realised that the thing performance allows me to do is to not have this, kind of, little inner "English boy" on my shoulder telling me that it should be more clever.

So, now I write more and for performance I do a lot of free writing where I, kind of, just go for it and that feels really good. [As a result] I, kind of, allowed myself to do that more with my poetry where I'm just like, "This thing happened to me. I'm going to write about it". So, my sexual assault poem I wrote when I was at the hairdresser, on my phone, because I just had that idea and that happened. Not to be like all, "And then then magic and the inspiration happened" because, obviously, it's labour.

But, yeah, I think I allowed myself to be a bit less clever and that felt really good [DT: Yeah.] and also a bit more direct about what I was saying. I think before it was kind of like, you'd have to read my poem four times to understand that it's actually making quite a strong political statement but is quite like veiled, words now I'm just like, "Fuck you Carl Andre.

DT: Yeah. Since we're talking about your performance stuff. What have you got coming up in the future?

JH: I am performing at Steakhouse Live which is at The Live Art Development Agency in east London on the 6th of July [2016] and I'm doing a new thing that's about an... What is it about? It's about femininity and this idea that if you're a man and you become feminised that's the most humiliating thing that could ever happen. And it's about, like, the kink practice of doing that, like feminisation. So, it's basically about sex work and femininity and I have a really good outfit for it so you should all definitely come.

DT: Yeah, it sounds good. I mean the mention of a new outfit swung it for me. [INAUDIBLE] Before we go we should mention where people can find you on the Internet and other points of access.

JH: So I have a Twitter which is [@jo_hauge](https://twitter.com/jo_hauge). I have a website which is <http://www.johannehaug.com/>.

DT: As always there will be clickable links in the description. [INAUDIBLE] Thank you very much Jo and yes, definitely check out Jo's work and catch them if you can somewhere. Check out the dates, don't come asking me! Thank you, Jo.

JH: Thank you.

End of transcript.