

## Transcript for 'What is a lump?'

### **About:**

With a focus upon 'lumps', Poppy hopes to draw your attention to words which might slip in without clear intention. She states: 'Lump' reminds me just how crucial deep and active listening is; the importance of distinguishing something from nothing, of being hyperaware not only of sound or speech but the noise which surrounds it. I think it is essential to pick apart words or phrases that we use in passing, and consider what we are really paying reference to.'

### **Text:**

My practice is centred upon lumps - sculpture, photography and musings discussing that which is lumpy, lumpish or lumpen.

Every lump I make stems from research - a reading, or compilation of readings. articles, parables, novels, essays, poems, papers -

I tend to lift the page that contains 'lump':

seizing, pilfering, decontextualising - and then re-appropriating, reimagining

how 'lump' is situated within these readings, often influences my treatment of a material - the process is organic, the reading and the making work in tandem.

Yet beyond these readings and sculptures, I record other instances of lump - screenshots of maps, youtube videos, Facebook messages, recipes, BBC dramas, eBay - anything and everything.

The variety extends beyond the traditional and readily-recognisable 'lump', fuelling my questioning of

'what actually is a lump?'

'what does it mean to be a lump?'

'When does a lump stop being a lump?'

and 'how might it feel to be a lump?'

My practice continually shifts, with various nuances of 'lump' arising and grasping my interest for a period of time. I often wonder how 'lump' has sustained my interest for so long.

For the purposes of this talk, I thought a return to basics might give some clarity, and so I have compiled the most common definitions of 'lump', taken from the Oxford dictionary, the Longman, the Cambridge, the Collins, the Urban, amongst others.

I will cite a list of definitions while images of my found lumps appear on your screen - please feel free to tune in and out, to listen, watch, or read as you choose,

my voice may just simply set the pace for your viewing, or you may not want to view at all - the choice is yours.

To begin, I think it is important to note that not only does lump emerge within idioms and wordplay, but its meaning shifts depending on its use as a noun, verb or adjective,

A lump is most commonly seen as a compact mass of a substance, especially one without a definite shape.

It is a bulbous swelling or protrusion, especially one caused by injury, illness or disease.

You may encounter a lump of coal, or clay, iron ore,

a lump in your custard, yoghurt, cake batter

A small cube of sugar is a lump.

A heavy, clumsy, lazy, lethargic person may also be called a lump.

In the UK, being a 'Lump worker' means to be self-employed and paid without deduction of tax, especially seen within the building industry.

Lump is the sausage dog who lived with Picasso for a number of years

to lump people together is to disregard individuals as an indiscriminate mass or group; to treat without regard for particularities.

but the lump may simply refer to the mass majority of people as a united bunch or even just the lump sum of something.

you might feel a lump in the throat - that feeling of tightness or dryness often caused by upset.

to take one's lumps means to be attacked or defeated, to walk away with your tail between your legs.

to lump is to carry, to heave a heavy load somewhere with difficulty.

i guess you might like it, or you might lump it

Lump is a word that sometimes has informal written next to it in dictionaries

A word that many people have a grasp of without question,

it often evokes very particular imagery,

a word that when you try to outwardly describe you feel inclined to use hand gestures, as though trying to manifest something tangible

lump is a something that is also a non-thing, but not a nothing.

When thinking about the long stream of inferences just cited, it becomes clear that almost all of them evoke negativity - feelings, actions, states of being which are lowly, unworthy, wretched, unwanted, painful - and this is just within the English language.

Carl E. Pickhardt's 2007 parenting book 'The Connected Father' speaks of 'developmental lumphood'; this is said to be a stage that adolescents enter into where they just lay around, 'frustrated and complaining that there is nothing to do', they reject themselves and any positivity, they are in waiting to become energised and productive again.

It seems that to be a lump is to be without any immediate use or purpose, lumps need to be activated in order to be of any worth - you must ignite the coal, dissolve the sugar lump, mould the clay - otherwise these lumps sit in waiting, in nothingness, in lumphood.

Lumps are ambiguous and people do not tend to like ambiguity - that which challenges conformity, is uncomfortable to acknowledge, that which crosses boundaries or sits between two bounds. Whatever this may be, it is often seen as a threat, a danger, as something abject - to draw upon Kristeva's 'Powers of Horror' - something that produces an adverse reaction and must be eradicated. In some way or another we all clean and purge ourselves and our homes of inert lumps - Mary Douglas is famously cited in reference to 'matter out of place', referring to dirt or debris which is threatening to power structures or normality, that which opposes the good or the right or the pure. There is no doubt that lumps, in terms of bodily cysts or tumors can be life threatening, but why are we inclined to demonise harmless lumps of fat, clumps of hair or acne? Why don't we like lumps in our custard - who told us that this was wrong?

It amazes me that a word which often goes unnoticed can be so loaded.

'Lump' reminds me just how crucial deep and active listening is the importance of distinguishing something from nothingness, of being hyper aware of not only sound or speech but the noise which surrounds it.

Pauline Oliveros' speaks of 'encountering the vastness and complexities' of soundscapes, of being thoughtful and open. To practice deeper listening may be disconcerting or perhaps meditative, being so aware of yourself in relation to others, of your thought processes and breaking down usual habits (like automatic replies) may all be pretty disconcerting. But, it is important. It is important to know how and when to use your voice, and when to be quiet - to step back and make sure your voice is not filling valuable space that others need in order to voice their own thoughts, feelings and experiences.

I think it is essential to step back sometimes, to really listen to ourselves, to pick apart words or phrases that we use in passing, and consider what we are really paying reference to.

And so I ask again, 'what is a lump?'