

CONTINGENCY OF THE NOW #1

June 2014

In addition to the performances presented for *Contingency of the Now* each artist is asked to participate in an interview that aims to share some of the thoughts and ideas behind the performance and their practice.

Rie Hovmann Rasmussen: To begin with, could you tell me a bit about your performance for *Contingency of the Now #1*?

Maline Casta: In my performance *We're in this together* I want to explore the attentiveness when we play or daydream. Often considered as absent-minded activities, these kind of engagements are commonly seen as the opposite of being present. Still, both playing and daydreaming require a very special kind of concentration that can easily be disturbed by outside factors like hunger, stress or fear. I am interested in what happens in our minds, when we play and dream, and how this state of mind can be used in a conscious way, and how it might be linked to our every day lives.

In the performance I will create an open invitation for the audience to interact with me and the work. By doing this I hope to make it possible for the audience to come closer to my experience and break up the division between the inside and outside.

RHR: In your performance for *Contingency of the Now #1* you return to imagination, something you have worked with on several occasions in your previous performances. What is it that is so fascinating about imagination, and what does it have to offer in the present moment?

MC: One fascinating aspect of imagination is that it allows us to exist in two places at the same time. We can be physically present in a room and yet we can exist in another place in our minds. We can have our bodies in the now and our minds in the future. This ability to dream is, according to Karl Marx, what defines us as human beings. ¹

When I was doing research into play during my time at Konstfack University for Arts, Crafts and Design, I found that there is a direct link between imagination and the reality we live in. What we daydream about, and long for, in many ways becomes the benchmark for our civilisation. Our ability to

formulate our own dreams is crucial for the development of our society. Today, we live within an economical system that sells us pre-fabricated dreams and dictates our longing to fit into the wheel of constant growth. I believe it's more important than ever that we stay in contact with our imagination, not the least as this gives us the tools to see that everything can be different.

The British psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott has stated that the best ways to activate your imagination is by playing. Play has also been described as imagination in action. When we engage in play nothing else matters. We forget time and place. There is no right or wrong in play, no competition, and the result is always a subordinate process - the end result does not matter. Yet play makes us feel very good as the play system in our brains is directly connected to the feeling of joy. One could almost argue that when we play, we are free. Winnicott even claimed that play is the only place where we can fully be ourselves. I find this interesting in comparison to our constant strive to live in the present moment.

RHR: To explore the possibilities of imagination in your performance, *We're in this together*, your own body becomes an important element. But as you have worked in many different roles in the production of performances, from performer to set- and costume designer, I wonder what draws you to working with your own body, and how it came about?

MC: I first started working with my own body in my photography projects, mainly out of practical reasons - to use myself, as the model, was simply the cheapest and most efficient way to get the projects done. From this point on, my own presence in performance was not such a huge step, even though I never really considered myself as a "performer" - I don't have any physical training and I am often much more interested in the overall project than to achieve perfection in my physical presence. Still, the risk that is connected to the processes within performance art, compared to theatre where everything is quite "safe", really attracts me. I guess it has to do with challenging myself, to push myself to do what I fear the most.

I also really like living images and tableaux. Even when I try to work with still images - like photography or paintings - I often come to the conclusion that it would be much more interesting and complex as a live performance. But there is one question about performance that I am currently struggling with: how does the act of *doing* a performance in comparison to *watching* a performance effect the experience? For instance in my work *Not Playing by the Rules* presented at Konstfack in May 2014 I explored this by removing myself from the performance, giving that space to the audience. There are of course many ways to experience a work - to play on emotions as often done in theatre might be one way. You can also get a strong experience just from activating more senses: your tactility, your smell, your taste, your hearing etc. But I believe there is a very special kind of experience operating within creativity, simply attained from activating the play system in your brain.

RHR: Your performances often develop over a longer period of time, even several hours. Why this work with durational performances?

MC: To me, performance art has always been connected to play in the sense that it gives me a certain freedom. It has been the only place within my practice where I've allowed myself to follow my intuition and try out new things without really knowing if it would work or not. I think you could say that performance art can be a very painful, yet a very good way to test things out and look for answers.

The lengths of my previous works have in many cases been the result of a natural development. When you play you easily lose track of time and space. I think you could say that play has quite a loose relation to the present now. Children often shift tense while they play, and they often talk in the past tense. This is a kind of situation that we very rarely experiences as adults. To work with durational performance gives me a bigger freedom to dig deeper into my own artistic process, and it allows me to stay in the present moment, or rather to move away from that moment and into a deeper concentration.

I am also a slow person and a slow thinker. I like it when thoughts are given time to progress in a natural way. Everything else in our lives is so much squeezed into schedules. When you are allowed to stay in an image for a long time you automatically start to see new things, and new opportunities unfold.

Thank you.

¹ Karl Marx stated that the most species-specific ability of humans is the ability to dream. Nina Björk, *Lyckliga i alla sina dagar: Om pengar och människors värde*, Falun 2012, p. 6-7. The Dutch cultural-historian Frederik L. Polak has further written about the human ability to exist in two worlds simultaneously. Ronny Ambjörnsson, *Fantasin till makten! Utopiska idéer i västerlandet under fem hundra år*, Stockholm, 2004, p. 10