

## 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 the performance you are working on for *Contingency of the Now #1*?**

Nanna Lysholt Hansen: The performance I am presenting for *Contingency of the Now #1* is a continuation of the performance *Dear Daughter / Organic Cyborg Stories (After Donna Haraway)*, where I re-examined Donna Haraway's Cyborg figure from her text, *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985). Fragments from the original text were modified so that instead of talking about the cyborg in the 3rd person singular, the text was re-written in the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular/plural as a way to say that I/we are cyborg(s). This new text was then interwoven with my own experience of being pregnant with my first child and how I prepared myself physically and mentally for giving birth.

It is the same method I used when working with the text for this new work titled *Dear Daughter / Motherboard Theories of Evolution (w/ Braidotti, Plant et aliae)*. The text acknowledges that now my daughter is born there has been more than one other (female) writer/text, who has influenced this work. The text takes the form of a speech and a conversation with my 6-month-old daughter and is performed using audio video playback technology.

I have made a patchwork of text fragments on the subject of women in relation to history, technology and language. Whilst inspired by several female writers the text draws specifically on the work of Rosi Braidotti and Sadie Plant, whose voices are the most prominent in my final collage. From the beginning, when I started reading and researching, I knew that I wanted to mention a writer as my main influence, just as Donna Haraway was referenced in the previous work. It was a way to create a kind of mother-daughter relationship I think. But, as my reading for this work grew, so did the 'mothers' who have influenced this

work, including writers such as Ursula K. Le Guin and Sappho, a Greek horoscope reader – and then of course, I am a mother now, who is thinking about language and experiencing new sounds and words in relation to my new born baby.

**RHR: In your previous performances as well as the performance you are presenting for *Contingency of the Now #1*, you have been working with very complex text material. How would you describe this turn towards text and how do you see it in relation to your work with the body?**

NLH: Working with text and language is something relatively new to me (since 2009), although I have always seen linguistics and semiotics as part of my performance work, which addresses my body in relation to its surrounding objects and space.

My first work with text was directly related to my body and how it is written into society. There are things in society that we get so used to, that we don't see it anymore or bother to question it, because that is how it is. So I am interested in how language and speech create subjects. How some subjects talk about others as objects. I wanted to explore how to use text and words as objects that I move in relation to the body – the same way I had previously been working with everyday objects, architecture and furniture.

As my work is very influenced by research on the relationship between women and technology and language, I think it is also evident in the text that I work on a computer and using the Internet as a tool in the process. Writing using a computer is much more flexible in terms of chronology. I can jump in and out of different places and times. I can sculpt the text; moving text fragments around via copy-paste. It is somehow messy, but there is still somehow a thread through it. Using the Internet for research I see as creating a sort of rhizomatic chronology. Its like when you Google something and read Wikipedia, which leads you to the next thing you want to know about, and suddenly you have 10 windows open with information that you are scanning/zapping through. And then you don't know which (question) came first and what (newly acquired information) was leading to what.

With this way of physically spending time with the computer I dive deeper into some of the stuff found in all that surface information, and I copy and paste information into a word document, which I can then later modify and mould afterwards: maybe I then save my document in the 'Cloud'? The symbolism associated with technological engagements including water, fluidity and the deep ocean in conjunction with the airy outer space is something present in my text and the audio/visuals I use for the performance.

**RHR: Throughout your practice you have been using your own body to explore the relationship between objects and subjects, which is often influenced by a feminist discourse. With the transformation of your own body and your role as a mother, I wonder how this has affected your practice, also in terms of your discussion of the body?**

NLH: Becoming pregnant and experiencing my body transform so drastically within a short period of time is like being an object, a thing that I can not fully control. Constantly my ego was challenged. There were places I wanted to go to and things I wanted to do, but I was restricted in doing them.

Last year I was working on the project *Dear Mary (Memories of the Future)*. I was building a giant pinhole camera disguised as a beach hut which I then used it to photograph my own body at a public beach. The project was inspired by the Danish photographer Mary Willumsen, whose work a 100 years ago was censored on the grounds of pornography laws of the time, mobilised due to the content of her photographs (naked women at the beach). One of the main reasons that she had trouble was the fact that she was a woman authoring work containing naked female bodies. When I performed half naked and 5 months pregnant on a public beach in Denmark in 2013 (this was in connection with *Sculpture by the Sea* in Aarhus) I experienced people being very provoked by the way I was placing my half naked body in public space "in my condition". Some people were even disgusted by the exposed pregnant body, meaning the female body in public space in terms of belonging is still a huge problem. You can see it in the recent breast-feeding debate here in Denmark. By law a café is allowed to exclude a breast feeding woman from its premises. I experience this law myself now every time I go out. There is a anxiety of, "oh am I allowed to breastfeed my baby here or there?" but then at the same time a bus might pass by with an advertising from a private hospital showing a pair of exposed breasts with the text asking "New breasts?" So it is only a specific type of female body who is welcomed in the public space for everyone to share or consume.

When I made *Dear Daughter / Organic Cyborg Stories (After Donna Haraway)* I was getting close to my due date. Preparing myself for the birth, I was reading a lot about birth: culturally, scientifically and historically. The procedure of the national health care system made me feel like a birth machine and the hospital as a baby factory. I re-read *A Cyborg Manifesto* and I thought about being a cyborg. As part of preparing myself for the fight of giving birth I gave a kind of speech to my unborn daughter in where I (with the aid of Haraway's words) prepare her for a political technological future in which she will take part or is already taking part in, through me.

In the upcoming performance *Dear Daughter / Motherboard Theories of Evolution (w/ Braidotti, Plant et aliae)* the speech continues. These days, while I am working, she is always with me. She is still so

dependent on me, as I am depending on her in the sense that being away from her can feel like missing a body part. It is evident that she becomes part of my work. Even in her absence, she is present. I do my work, but I do it very differently now and certainly in a different pace which is full of interruptions. I believe there are many interesting bodily aspects to explore in my work with this new condition of becoming a mother.

**RHR: Approached in many different ways, time seem to have been a significant element in your performances in general. How have you worked with notions of time in your performance *Dear Daughter / Motherboard Theories of Evolution (w/ Braidotti, Plant et aliae)*?**

NLH: I am interested in the gaze on the body over time. What I instruct is my own position in a specific space and moment and in relation to the surrounding subjects and objects. I am creating a context and a frame, and then I leave it up to the viewer to position her/himself in relation to actively viewing/listening and being in that space in that specific moment; not in a kind of forced or instructed way. I have actually never been interested in instructing the audience or participants, but rather use the performance as a way to consider what it means to share time and a specific space together and then to see what happens. Elements of change are very fruitful and potential I think, I pay attention to the shifting between stillness and movement.

Working with live performance means that there is a question of repetition. I like to explore making variations of the same piece, so it is a repetition with a difference. This has happened in my practice without thinking about it. Bringing the same material into a new space and situation, or approaching the same, but in different architectural sites.

The same thing will happen with the work I am presenting for *Contingency of the now #1*. I present the same speech in 3 different ways, creating 3 different - but very similar - works using the same material. This method calls for endurance, from myself as well as from the audience. It allows me to work with the presence and absence of (technological) bodies as well as the attentiveness of the moment and the presence of the audience, but with the possibility of interruptions and interventions depending on the presence of my daughter or other unpredictable beings during the speech.

**Thank you.**