

Re: Horse" by Jon Mikel Euba, Stedelijk Museum Bureau
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Suppose you do not know anything. Suppose you did not have access to any preliminary information. Suppose you just walk into this space unaware of the occasion, the circumstances in which this performance took place, the reason why and the context in which the artist decided to stage this 'moment'. It is very unlikely that anyone will ever enter an art space unintentionally, by accident on a Sunday evening, randomly scanning the city for an event to attend. But let's just suppose - let's suspend the disbelief, let's not take the fact that this will most possibly never happen into account. Would this suspension result in the ultimate, accurate and objective description - a 'pure' description that does not contain elements of hineininterpretierung, analysis or reducing the whole process to the supposed intentions of the artists who caused the event? Is a 'sec' factual description the most accurate rendering of this type of performance or do we need the filter of 'informed' subjectivity to access the core and the nature of the performance. Should an impression be written out of 'disconnectedness' or out of involvement?

I personally however cannot dismiss the fact that I have just yesterday been part of a performance, actively contributing to it, partially constructing it by my active presence on stage, by dancing spontaneously as if I was encapsulated in the privacy of my own living room. The setting was the result of a simple 'transplantation' - pretend that the white cube is a black box, pretend that the people on stage are professional dancers out there to entertain the spectator and simultaneously deconstruct the audience's notion of what entertainment entails or even in a more ontological sense what entertainment is, how it operates, what the mechanisms are. A sudden awareness of the situation struck me while passing through the airport on my way back home, on my way to 'Re-Horse' when a muzak-version of the song I danced to the night before was emitted through the central sound system of Basel Flughafen. Was I performing again while rhythmically moving to the music in hurrying towards the gate? Did I not have an audience at that moment? Later on tonight after entering SMBA I was just an (informed) viewer, part of the logistic

and conceptual system that made this event 'Re-Horse' possible. In which way is that position different from me on stage in the Kunsthalle, from me talking to professional acquaintances after the show in the disguise of 'the director of de Appel who just a brief moment ago was just a dancer, hopefully a good one', from me walking while humming and swinging my hips involuntarily to the plane that would talk me back to Amsterdam? Have I been more than four different people over the past 24 hours, have I been performer, just a body in space and an active viewer or is the differentiation between those 'stages' and 'positions' irrelevant? Is that switching between who you are and what your 'constructed' position is just a natural fact of everyday life?

I equally cannot refrain from relating this situation to a strategy that de Appel has deployed in the past two years. Being essentially frustrated with the standardized ways in which 'all of us' document performance - through video or photography - and taking into account my personal conviction that the experience of a performance can best be rendered through oral transmission, through the memories of a member of the audience, the decision was made to invite a 'witness' for every performance and ask this witness to preserve his or her 'experience' for posterity through a written text that does not have a fixed format.

Currently sitting in the deserted space we are expected to perform, to produce. We have no audience apart from ourselves. Being part of the projected history and thus future of this event.

Pretending that I am the passer-by entering the space through sheer coincidence, what did I see: a simulation of a photographic studio in which a white horse was centrally positioned, two human characters posing next to it. Two cameramen capturing the thus created situation on film and immediately transmitting it to two screens. On a third screen I saw a 'black and white documentation of what seemed an extended jam session in a non-descript space' abruptly dissolving into a situation where people were just hanging around waiting for instructions. People in SMBA were seated, some of them moving around, a massive amount of them taking snapshots.

Remarkable: What struck me was that almost no members of the audience were looking at the 'real' horse, all were transfixed by the filmic rendering of the horse, by the moving image, by the live digital transmission of the reality that was taking place just next to them. They focussed on the filmic image rather than taking the living, breathing and slightly stinking animal presence next to them. The fact that we are in an exhibition space might have something to do with that, you focus your attention on what might be the artistic part, or the 'artificial' part of the situation. Do we prefer mediated images to the realness of physical presence, how voluntarily do we construct our perception?

There was a weird striking similarity between the ethereal presence of Nico - her excessively blonde/white hair, thick fake eyelashes and absent gaze into space and the calm, almost sedated pose of the horse, its fluttering eye-lids and huge black eyes and fuzzy, white ponytail. Most possibly unintended but it made one question what the presence of the mysterious sphinx-like woman in the band obsessively but distractedly though focussedly banging the tambourine and the strange presence of a white horse in an exhibition space actually have in common. Are they wanted aliens, desirable mute strangers, intended to be gazed and looked at while engaged in intense self-absorption?

The white horse is and unavoidably will be the horse of the prince-protagonist in any romantic fairy-tale, destined to be the one who rescues and kidnap the female character to an unknown but blissful destination. Did the horse have to be white - if so; was it because of aesthetic or because of symbolical reasons?

And what does Kounellis have to do with all this ?

On a more psychological level I presume, I was fascinated by the presence of a toddler in the 'original' film - a simple registration of a musical session or a staged documentary? Ignored by all of the musicians, the child occasionally shook a percussion instrument and on and off looked into the camera. Nico in an affirmative and slightly aggressive way took the 'toy' away from him and used it in her accompaniment of the band's drone. Whether or not she was or is the mother of the child seems irrelevant, taking away a 'toy' from a child in order to use it for personal

pleasure seems problematic in every circumstance. An unwanted reference to the unequal power relationships between children and adults? It immediately made me think of Saint Exupery's *Le Petit Prince* - essentially a meditation on the 'unfairness' of adults and their lack of imagination.

Only after more than half an hour did I notice that the cameramen were imitating the camera movements of the 'black and white film' - I was amazed by the precision of their imitation, by the exact sense of timing. What kinds of skills are required to perform this act of imitation?

It turns out that this 'report' will consist of a series of unanswered and potentially rhetorical questions.

When does 'acting' happen? A group of people standing quasi undeliberately in a corner of the exhibition space were captured by the camera and suddenly became 'actors' or at least acting bodies. I know - being informed about part of the procedure even if I would like to pretend not to be - that they were instructed to 'be' in that part of the room, that they were aware of their function. Despite of that, they were not performing, or at least not acting out a certain specific role, they moved about, positioned themselves in an almost natural way and were registered by the camera as if by accident.

Does performance only reveal itself when it is being processed, either through spoken words or through text? Its meaning seems no longer situated in the immediacy of experiencing it, but in the delay after that - when it is being processed in conversation or in writing. I assume that this is part of the still very disturbing nature of performance, it is an adolescent genre, continuously refusing to adopt itself, and continuously rebelling against the criteria and parameters it has set itself.

Ann Demeester