

Reenacting Bas Jan Ader (1971)

Broken Fall (organic)

Previous week I reenacted the performance 'Broken Fall (organic)' of Bas Jan Ader twice. Once during the evening, once during daytime. Both times at different locations in Amsterdam.

I drew some conclusions out of this reenactment. In all of the performances by Bas-Jan Ader there is a sense of self-destruction in the act. This goes along with a very present physical risk. This risk presents itself as a kind of fear and gave me a lot of awareness of being in the present.

At first I hadn't expected this reenactment to be such an effort. Because I knew I could climb trees and fall in the water. But while doing this for real, different aspects showed up. The first thing is that I was rationalizing the risk in questions as these: 'How high is the branch where I am going to hang on? How deep or shallow is the water I will fall in, what is in the water (in Amsterdam a lot of times there are drowned bikes in waters.)' All these questions started even to become more present at the moment I first hang on a branch, during the evening, and this really frightened me. But the moment I'm hanging there the possibility to climb back up diminishes by every second. My strength gets weaker and weaker the longer I hang, but also the fear of the water and what's in it got bigger. Until the moment I realized that there would be no way out, but to let go. But even then there was another realization; I should have enough strength that after I had dropped in the water, to reach the shore and to climb out. All these risks were somehow consciously and subconsciously taken in consideration. Then I compared my own experience with the image of Bas Jan Ader and it seems that he has a very different position on taking this risk. It seems that he doesn't bother at all, he shows no hesitation. From the image it looks like he really doesn't care about the risk and only wants to experience this falling and hanging, without making any estimation of the risks he's taking. And this also shows in the legendary boat trip from where he never returned.

I concluded that there is a big difference in person with Bas Jan, although I tried to live the same experience. But the essence of this performance is for me about taking risks in a setting that is very common. I mean there are trees and water everywhere. It doesn't need any extra objects but the body, the tree and the water. It's also about the tension that's in the endurance of this piece. How long can I hold on to this branch that separates me from falling in the (cold) water.

I'd like to find away to translate this tension, this physical and mental experience of the body, into a new setting in The Hague on Saturday the 8th of December. And it should involve risk, not lethal, but it should also not be safe.

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