MayDay

VestAndPage Workshop Concept, Theory and Practice

The backbone VestAndPage Performance Art Workshop theory is focused on the human body (and its own signs) as peculiar/predominant mean of communication, and explores the human fragile limits (psychic, physical and spiritual). The investigation of the human body is principally conducted throughout its own reading: the human body and its own ways of expression; real body, virtual body and hybrid body; its own interactions with the others, within reality, with auxiliary tools (objects), and/or technological media (video/sound). This is an explanation of activities and overall delivery that introduce the participants to new ways of developing their own ideas and concepts into something more, which in turn can be changed and developed as well.

To be a performance artist means also to acknowledge the cutting-edge existing between “what I want to do and what someone want to do of/about me”. A performance artist must primarily recognized him/herself as a “tool” of his/her own work. In fact the physicalisation of simple ideas is a priority. Actually, today it is more or less accepted that Performance Art cannot do without the human form. The “body” is in fact the hot topic du jour, required reading for the tweedy and tenured as well as for new practitioners eager to incorporate (pun intended) the latest cutting-edge theories into their performance art practice. From this perspective, the development of VestAndPage workshops has been motivated from the study of natural gesture, posture and, the sound of silence and progressed into different areas of body investigation. This is the platform for a string of workshop sessions in constant evolution and transformation, where the essence is not what is said or shown, but how and what is communicated throughout the whole body as membrane of spirit. Voices, sounds, said or written words, and video images, during each workshop session are adopted only as vehicles to reach pure expression. Therefore it is consequential to identify the body as an unknown landscape that invites one to search for its hidden manifestation, while emotions, feelings, movements and sensations are the unstoppable flowing stream that traverses it.

One of VestAndPage workshop aims is also to offer keys to freely analyze the many human existential conflicts, as well as the often hidden but truly existing relationships between Man and his discomforts/diseases (social-psychic-spiritual), which derive from one each other. This, always having in mind that more than a technical one, it is an aesthetic control and a manipulation of space (holy but empty space at the same time) that can drive the spectator through creative and sensitive imagery and body language, into an open confrontation with him/herself. Nevertheless, to shape – only and just only – the effects on the human body that an action produces, in performance art is not the main subject. The focus is also to explore and lead the vital capability of the body (at whatever condition it is left or subdue) to interact with reality and become a true visual place where new meanings (social/individual/spiritual) can be produced.

The essence of this particular kind of work is not to elaborate new models or icons through some demonstrative uses or arid performances of the human body, but through the body outline new possibility to understand performance art as distinctive discipline: a practice that can lead people to a more profound consideration about what is destiny in our time, beyond the same boundaries of body representation, beyond what is enrooted into the collective imaginary, by bringing back to simplicity what our deceptive mind sees as hybrid, synthetic, troubled, diverse, different.

Reality, personal history and contemporary visual culture are the common ground of investigation where to follow the traces of mutations, transformation (of someone’s own Self) and conflicts: cultural, spiritual, and corporal. However, this chosen direction will necessarily lead all the participants out of that configured space, inviting them to enter into the real and virtual space where each one of them lives, feels, thinks, into the so-called exhibition/production spaces of their own.
social and hybrid bodies, the full space of body experience where the “melting pot” is a cosmogony that is both analogical and digital: le lieu d’habitude of our daily life.

Now, considering aesthetics itself the basis of ethics, the performance artist ethical core developed through history is very influential in his/her later ethical choices. How and where can one evade an uncomfortable truth without doing wrong, is not only a question to seek for a common sense, or to determine social issues and values; it is more a matter of personal decision.

A performance artist is a creative person in action reconciling ethics and aesthetics. Hence it is necessary to give this specific theme some priorities, which the workshop participants have to consider carefully (and then debate) before starting the working session: what is the ethics of the performer; which values should s/he determined (normative); how an outcome can be achieved in specific situations (possibility); how his/her capacity develops in different situation and how his/her nature transforms (spirit/psyche); what indications people actually abide by (action and representation); the retraction of the performer’s ego, by working on the inner Self as instrument of Self-knowledge.

A performer must never interpret something a priori assumed, but act in accordance with his/her own human nature, to realise his/her full potential, as “a self-aware person must act completely within its capabilities to their pinnacle, to become aware of every fact (and its context) relevant to his existence, if he wishes to attain self-knowledge” (Socrates).

Actually it is completely useless to imitate or interpret something a priori: this will cause distraction both for the one that acts and the one that watches. A performance action is successful once it discovers/unveils the Self, which hopefully will arise renewed and transformed. This means to stir up and provoke emotions (inside us, inside the others) to externalize what is hidden inside someone’s own heart, soul, and life experience. It is only through the reconciliation with the inner Self that is offered the opportunity to re-establish a contact with the mystery that each one of us carries within (him/herself). To reach this condition, the work must be silent, patient, concentrated, and meditative.

Jean Baudrillard theorised that signs and symbols (or simulacra) had usurped reality, particularly in the consumer world. Post-structuralism and postmodernism are both heavily theoretical and follow a fragmented, anti-authoritarian course which is absorbed in narcissistic and near nihilistic activities. Out of this perspective, performer’s actions seem today at once obligatory and at the same time un-enforceable. Issues such as “what are human rights, and how do we determine them?” or "if someone else can make better out of his/her life than I can, is it then moral to sacrifice myself for them if needed?" are vital when to start to perform. Without these questions there is no clear fulcrum on which to balance law, politics, and the practice of arbitration, so the ability to formulate questions are prior to rights balancing in the performer work. For example, making ethical judgments regarding questions such as "is lying always wrong?" and, "if not, when is it permissible?" is prior to any etiquette.

People in general are more comfortable with dichotomies (two choices). However, in ethics the issues are most often multifaceted and, actually, the best-proposed actions address many different areas concurrently where the answer is almost never a "yes or no", "right or wrong" statement.

Also relational and interactive actions are related to an ethics of care. In performance art topics such as the ones that involve the mind and are relevant to that issue: respect, responsibility, development, character, virtue and vice, altruism, egoism, disagreement, evolution, behaviour, and finally all the technical questions, are assumed with a value-free approach to ethics, which examines reality not from a top-down a priori perspective, but rather observations of actual choices made by agents in practice.

A performer doesn’t play or interpret, but gives and delivers. His/her work – and with it the process of making – is an instrument of creative freedom which leads to a poetic action, no matter if political, social, sexual or of any other genre.

Basically, VestAndPage workshop session begins with exercises to seek for archetypes (his/her own), by working on concentration, breathing, voice, sounds, body movements, objects in a
dynamic crescendo. This because it’s necessary to bring the soul impulses, the mind disposition and
the spirit to a minimum degree, in order to re-direct the Self to discover unknown territories, only
relying on an absolute creative freedom.
The conductors have the duty to stimulate each participant to adopt and form a new own
methodology (individual and/or collective); to search for the most profound, primitive soul
qualities, as anything new that is personally discovered is useful for the performer to externalize
his/her own story.
A string of different exercises aimed to confront each participant own story with the ones of others,
are also useful to create a non-casual synthesis between the many different self-biographies, such as
working solo and as a group; developing quality of presence and state of mind; creating intimate
solo action/ritual material by looking at his/her own experience and daily life; devising new rules
and then contradict them; improvising chances to transform obsolete techniques; relating objects
and actions in a given space; transforming the space by assuming more confidence in using the
physical self as a vehicle to produce meaning, as well as personal objects; analyzing different levels
and modes of interaction to investigate a possible multiplicity of audience-performer relationships;
exploring the role of time and pattern: duration, speed, repetition to produce a proper art action.
All this having clear in mind that the result of work mustn’t be a staging (mise en scène) narrative
or self-celebrative, rather a revelation from which a number of different experiences can be
organize trough mutual relationships, in order to arrive express something different out of them. It
is like saying: one must know then the grammar of the performance, but perhaps not respect it too
much. The grammar is in fact something that belong just to the performer (him/herself): this not
less important than a technical issue. In a sentence, a performer has a duty to make use of irregular
forms, not to act according to the rules, not because certain performer ignores them, but in order to
eexercise a free choice, but always consciously and responsibly.
During any exercise, participants are told that it is necessary to get completely involved, directly and
personally, to get off the ground, to put themselves over the barrel, to bring into focus and
undermine their own beliefs and prejudices, to arrange, to tune, to compare, to confront, to offer, to
sharpen, to bare, to uncover physically and emotionally, to arrange, to put away, to tweak, to put at
risk, to hazard, to lay it on the line, to hit for, to strike down, to ground, to dump, to put on, to banish
their own credo, to try out, to tax to the limit, to meet, to collect, to edge and hive, to drop down
their own arms, to hammer away at something, to get started, to break into, to sleuth and get forth, to
enjoy whatever state of being, and rely also at weakness. For this, narcissism and egocentrism are
obstacles: if during a particular exercise the participant (performer) is subdued by personal
ambitions, he/she’ll never deepen one of the most profound secret of creativity: to see, understand
and comprehend his/her own heart. He/she’ll never become the “man/women of his/her own side” if
his/her heart is busy with other personal things, such as the desire of showing off, of becoming
exceptional, unique etc.
For instance, an exercise like the dynamic creative breathing stimulates the retraction of performer’s
own ego, and allows him/her to be re-born as “new Self”. Here, the psychic action that the
performer expresses is not just the result of a profound experience, neither a genial representation of
his/her inner life. It is the full concordance of his/her own inner imagination with the context around
him. In this moment each participant’s private personality is put aside and forgotten, while a range
of completely different moments emerge. It is out of these moments that his/her new Self arises.
This means to get close to the truth, as only the Act is truth, nothing that was ever said is truth;
nothing that was ever recorded is truth, only the Act, more so when it purely derives from the
psychic universe. Therefore to work on truth is very important to reach a certain level of pure
expression. For it a performer must never be artificial, or pretentious, if so it is much better to make
mistakes, to be wrong, even banal.
Outlining elements for an open dialogue with the workshop participants, such as the importance of
direct encounter, confrontation and exchange of ideas, sources of inspiration and statements
analysis are essential to stimulate participant commitment to the workshop. As there are many
different languages spoken around the world, within the world of performance art there are many
languages spoken, many different styles of expression, many different poetics. Bringing them
together, crossing and combining them, means to provide and create a common ground where to
live and work within.

The investigation focused on performance art and its praxis nowadays is surely necessary. It offers
to the human being in it's cocooned global village the possibility to come back to his/her roots, to
get in touch again with his/her very basic existence, to explore his/her body and spirit, and finally
inquires in overall reflection, flexibility, sincerity, open confrontation, creation and progress, for the
individual as well as for the social surrounding. In performance art, whatever chosen topic is
relevant, even the ones that are very current all are perfectly legitimate subjects. This is also for the
short time given today between conception, consequent corruption, and performance. Unlike
conventional theatrical work, performance art doesn’t rely on a rigid script, demands spontaneous
creativity, and seeks to make the audience think.

On this basis, VestAndPage conceive each workshop sessions as a moment of pure experience that
offers - both conductors and participants - the opportunity to understand and determine a given
space as an open laboratory, where it is possible to produce free culture, extend personal knowledge,
and set a true, sincere work in progress. For this it is extremely important a constant but positive
reciprocal confrontation between conductors and participants, avoiding mere statements just
conceived a priori.

Actually, to focus the investigation on a basic, fundamental common ground means to explore the
useful territory where concentrating a free, but responsible experimentation.

Firstly VestAndPage specific workshops give the chance to the participants to relate humanly and
confidentially between each other, by leading the group to a considerable level of mutual trust,
which is prior for whatever process of making, the sparkle to set forth a high level team work.

To reach a productive and mutual flowing of energy, VestAndPage (as conceivers/conductors) have
put up with the research on the Self and memory-activation, looking forward to provide the
participants with different tools of investigation, to locate their bodies in relation to themselves, the
space and the whatsoever human-social surrounding.

The approach of each participant is a very personal one, not just in terms of exploring the artistic
expression out of the own Self, in fact each participant has a story to tell, an interesting story to be
told, o matter which. Hence, to set up a workshop of performance art is to offer the participants an
intense moment to live freely their differences, and invest on their talents; to meet with a wide
range of personal and private expressions to be experienced, individually and collectively. If people
differ, so do their stories: this is a pure beauty to share.

The personal, human, emotional stories told, expressed and communicated during the various
exercises and artistically synthesized in the final resulting performances of the participants, are
always powerful and inspiring: a variety of expressions reflecting an intimate, sensitive, private
and/or social soul, while, at the same time, producing a spiritual/intellectual/emotional growth.
All this is possible only when a workshop becomes a laboratory where each participant gets
confidence to unveil his/her own individual poetry and interlace it collectively.

On this matter, besides a first theoretical approach (with examples inferred by contemporary art,
experimental theatre, and contemporary performance art in general) and before starting the practical
work, to each participant are offered some elements/concepts to consider and use at will during the
session:

- **Translative poetry**: the interface that exists between an action that just refers to itself and the
  performance/show intended as a possible instrument to create or decipher a particular experience.
- **Inner shifting**: a transfer of the Self to another dimension (only in appearance) to communicate
differently - but thoroughly - through gesture or instinctual actions, establishing a relation between
performer and spectator with no obligations or forced intentions. In fact, performer and spectator
are interdependent between one each other, but, in different measure, always reciprocally impressionable.

- **Sensorial perceptions**: to shape an itinerary that evokes non-ordinary stimulations. At the same time offering a whole range of information to awake the inner sight, and realize what it may be the ineffable that everyone carries inside him/herself. Actually there is something inside each individual that seems to be still impossible to define with precise words, but it exists and acts: someone calls it mystery, some others psychic-spiritual experience.

- **Sounds and video images**: often they can represent the background of some performatic “minimal movements” and ritual actions. They are aimed to generate and evoke associations and concrete modifications that refer to something “different”, and they explore the performativity of cyberspaces out of ordinary conventions pushing them at the boundaries.

- **Daily rituals**: they can activate and indicate different processes of social relation, provided that it is not invasive or constrictive. They can be simply used like a sort of invisible instrument of recognition.

- **Images produced by mind, dreams or visions**: they change throughout clear physical actions, and - as mediators of the ineffable - they become pure impressionable sensuality.

- **Remembrances, ideas, actions and interventions**: when they find a common space to flow together, they can give birth to an experience both individual and collective at the same time. An experience that is civil, social, primarily poetical as part of a creative intention, that is finally the result of an aesthetic course which carries within clearness and significance.

All these are useful elements to comprehend that a flux of lasting energies is created throughout physical and real images that the body - being inside a given space or surrounded by technological medias - implements in a fixed period of time. The “becoming” itself turns to be a practice aimed to research new codes of expression and relation, so that possible truths and reality can interfere. More than the five human senses, the heart is the foremost sensor that allows us to look inwardly and profoundly to get a more pure and concentrated perception of the things. To understand is always a question of profound feeling and harmonic flow of energies: it represents the extreme limit of the artistic process; as well as, in the same way, it happens when an intuition occurs for the activation of the memory, may it be genetic, collective or individual.

The exercises are conceived to touch the most inner and profound human sensors in order to activate memories, to open perception, to find out where the real expression arises, to transform pure ideas into a concrete, primarily real action.

Further, a specific goal is also to get distance from the mere being “virtuous” by establishing, valuating, and energizing the personal action in se. If to investigate means to look for and find out new, unexpected possibilities to strengthen the process of making, to see means to indicate how to look at things from a different - still responsible - perspective. If to stimulate means to help to touch and overcome personal fragile limits, to express means to transform one self’s ideas and emotions into a performatic, not theatrical action. If to give means to offer keys to understand how a performance artist can approach the social environment and the spiritual development, by touching the fragile limits of his/her own Self, to experience is to comprehend that those limits are not limitative at all, but rather purely constituent of one’s own human nature.

Usually VestAndPage workshop sessions have duration from 3 to 7 to 15 days from early morning to late evening each day. The last day of the workshop session, each participant will hold a performance/action as result/final step of the work he/she has made, although the basic idea is always the one to create a real performances itinerary inside the physical space where the workshop has been held. For those who like to work strictly politically, some possible theoretical keys are given on topics such as the loss of ideologies, ecology issues, economy precariousness, idioms of mass culture.

The participants are always required to bring comfortable clothes, some objects they feel related to, one blanket and one cushion. The exercises are innovative, other are inspired by Social Theatre,
Martial Arts, Panic and Sufi theatre precepts, some other inferred from a range of performance techniques and approaches, which blur the boundaries between fine art, live art and contemporary performance practices. During the workshop sessions it could be required to produce and re-elaborate video and visual material, to scout a variety of “natural” sounds and the possibilities of their application, the use and combination of light and darkness in a given space, working always on movement and stagnation, constriction and freedom, to explore and shape the consequences inferred by following the individual poetry, and to individuate the source of honesty, grace, and inner beauty. A collective feedback will be the conclusive part of the workshop, this also (as Live Art states) to strengthen and sustain the ambitions, diversity and vitality of the performance art form through challenging orthodoxies of fine art practice.

Note:

Revisited excerpts from:
