

Andrea Pagnes, from the performance art duo VestAndPage, presents a reflective piece that will become essential reading for anyone interested in durational and related performance practice. The particular focus on research concentrates the importance of the insights in this piece. Pagnes demonstrates the use of performance as a form of personal expression that leads to a greater capacity for sensitive interpretation and understanding.

—Ross Woodrow

Executive Editor

Studio Research Journal

TWO BODIES IN SPACE

DURATIONAL PERFORMANCE:

THE QUEST FOR AUTHENTICITY IN THE VESTANDPAGE EXPERIENCE

By Andrea Pagnes (VestAndPage)

We see that all that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is still profaned, and we—a man and a woman—are at last compelled to face with sober senses our real condition of life, and even more, our presence in this world.

—VestAndPage

As the performance art duo VestAndPage (figure 1)¹ we adopt and re-adapt the well-known “all that is solid melts into air” quote from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels’s *Manifest of the Communist Party* ([1848] 2014).² We do so because it sounds like a poetic call for authenticity, while at the same time striking a chord with the urgency of performing durational art today—hinting at its interior cause, necessity, and emotional/impulsive drives.

Our performance art is underpinned by pursuing what ‘authenticity’ means in this century, a time where humankind’s needs are increasingly artificial and induced. Participating in producing this obscure activity and elusive entity is even more complex when time-performing lapses are considerably expanded.

Searching for authenticity is an issue often disguised by or hidden behind related but secondary matters in theoretical analysis, such as methodology, spontaneity, and hybrid working strategies. However, the measure of authenticity is not something intrinsic to its form. As a category relevant to the sphere of ethics, it implies, among other things, the theory

of recognition and perception, consistency, coherence, and even stamina.

Authenticity is not determined by anything prior. To fully understand it requires deep self-awareness, constant application, and humble dedication; one needs to comprehend “Being-in- the-world” (Heidegger 1927, quoted in Mehta 1971, 95) and to practice “courage and more courage” (Sartre 1948, 230)³ so as to recognise and acknowledge the significance of one’s existence. Authenticity contributes to implementing our emotional intelligence (Goleman 1996) and, with it, the ability to sense and understand the value of our inner actions on which, for instance, Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards developed their theatre performance praxis (Richards 2008).⁴

Because of our present perception of art and culture, authenticity cannot be initiated or pursued with intentional exercise and neither can it be claimed presumptuously (thus romantically) as a special unique status for performance art itself. For us, performing is a profound necessity, since we incessantly ask ourselves to perform in the most honest, sincere way, abandoning all pretensions and imitations.

To function at our best, while being a couple (in life and work), we have the duty of being fully truthful towards ourselves as single individuals,⁵ and trustworthy towards each other. By doing this, we take and accept only what is given—life and art—not by stealth, but by means of ‘Self’ that may become inwardly sensitive. We believe that to achieve complete authenticity, one must fully dedicate themselves to it through deep concentration and self-awareness. It is a continuous practice, and it ought to be the urgency of every human being.

For us, performing durational art actions as a duo represents ‘another chance for encounter’ in an unusual situation—the ideal, ever-lasting moment before the long goodbye, the edge of longing—where we can strip off our dispositions from any individualistic intentions, opening ourselves towards a new process of creative endeavours, even by fully accepting our most intimate fears and fragilities.

By breaking through the sensitive membranes of possessiveness, infighting, ownership, and all that unites and separates us, the space into which we perform metaphorically transmutes into an elastic diaphragm. It is like moving through a blurred hazy path, sharing the same shield, investigating a labyrinth where our cultural identity is not reflected in the fixity of the aesthetic canon, but rather in the metamorphosis, the process of making, and a continuous exchange that tells of transformation and spiritual-psychic growth.

TOTAL RESOLUTION

Our actions reflect who we are, and since 'what we are' is generally disjointed (be it the ever-changing midpoint between the many 'I's' that speak in us or the inner voices that encourage them), our actions express what and who we are. However, there is still a lack of unity, cohesion, and resolution. We never operate at our best, and performance is a good exercise to practice awareness, and to clearly comprehend what the word 'everything' means: to act in total resolution.

The Self awakens with the effort, not the chatter. While the effort feeds it, the inertial drift rocks it to sleep. In the beginning, we can't resist inertia for more than a few seconds. The secret is not to fight against, but to move ever forward in activating the awakening of the Self. Once this action is metabolised, it enriches our being. It is an action that honours life. Even to pick up something from the floor becomes a gesture that has the flavour of a kind of prayer to the infinite. After some time, we will still clearly remember our simple gesture made with total resolution.

For example, as part of the performance *Thou Twin of Slumber: Cocoon II* (figure 2), a durational piece that formed part of the 2013 performance cycle *Thou Twin of Slumber*, I walked, blindfolded, on a very narrow rough edge of an ancient well, which we had previously filled with sharp broken glass pieces and spiky stones. I balanced seagull feathers on my fingernails, while my partner, Verena, wrapped the space around me with fishing lines, shaping a net to cage both of us inside. The aim of this action was to enhance our concentration on the main action to the point where we acted without thinking while simultaneously reaching a higher sensorial perception and activating of an inward atmosphere of confidence and serene peaceful force. By the end of the action, we were no longer pointing out the limit between time and space; we were dancing on it.

Practice teaches us to distinguish between being awake and sailing into oblivion. Acting with total resolution is to enter into the sphere of the inner silence, while awareness changes the automatic sense of time created by the surface of the mind. This means to wake up, honour, and make our presence sacred, because this is of primary importance. We don't need anything else to enter into the abode of darkness to achieve and increase our essence. We only need to practice relentlessly, inflexibly, and inexorably. It can take time to transport ourselves to this new and achieved state of being, but, once done, everything becomes bearable, simple, beautiful, and even unfinished as all that is True.

DURATIONAL WORK AND THE INNER SILENCE

Context is the overall situation in which an event occurs. It can also be defined as the set of circumstances in which the act of communication occurs. In performance art, context is paramount. During the process of a durational performance, it is as if the context is a live component/entity that flexibly expands and shrinks back, repeatedly.

It consists of sequential phases that unfold and shape the time-space situation in which the act of communication occurs. Within this dynamic/situation, the actions are structured (in an almost definite way) and stimulate the cognition, the perception, and the psycho-affective sphere, both of the performer/s and the audience members. Attention, memory, reasoning, processing sensory information, applying knowledge, changing preferences, and expectations (which can be conscious or unconscious) are activated between the parties (individuals) involved (each in their own way), and contribute to shape the image that one has of the other.

While performances should be organised in a precise way, unexpected accidents may arise. In a durational performance, it is often during these very moments that the hidden meanings of the work emerge. Informed by the lesson of artists such as Tehching Hsieh, Alastair MacLennan, Marilyn Arsem, Marina Abramovic and Ulay, and others in matters of patience, endurance, isolation, time, suffering, imbalance, permutation, transformation (here as elevation from suffering), and understanding that a pure, intense creativity can be accessed also through grief, pain, risk-taking, and failure, we have deepened our research on those issues.

Thus, we have performed blindfolded many times—such as in *Terra Nova* (2012, figure 3); *La Promenade du Sceptique* (2011, figure 4); *A Morphologic Journey (On the Borders of Our Bodies) II* (2014, figure 5)—or in almost-complete darkness, such as in *Panta Rhei II: Thoughts* (2011). We did this because we are interested in exploring what it means and what can happen when only relying on perception, therefore limiting the tricks that the sense of sight can cause by transmitting impulses to the brain that can be erroneously elaborated by the mind. For us, it is like playing with the lightness of the dream and the density of a dark blindness; to visit the limit that runs along the sleep and nearby the dying, along the remembering and next to oblivion. Of course, we allow ourselves to be vulnerable to accidents, but in our performances, we play the most serious game. For example, during the twenty-

four-hour performance *FEAR vs LOVE vs FEAR* (2012, figures 6 and 7), we exerted ourselves to produce change by shifting and transforming a situation produced by a constrictive situation.⁶

To be its best, a durational performance requires enormous risks, and performing durational works helps us increase our potential on how to look at and ‘see through’ things with a concentrated eye. For this, we rely not just on our mental and psychic strength, but also our hearts. This way of practicing is like resurrecting unlive energies. For us, it means constant experimentation, training ourselves to understand what it means to activate the Self and to explore new possibilities to broaden our life perspective. All of this is not only concerned with the mind, but also with the physical body, its own memory, and the body-spirit. In our view, the body-spirit is a quiet, intact, conquerable space that we access through non-reactive expression of negative emotions and the resurfacing of the profound mind. As we noted in our performances *Speak That I Can See You* (2007), *Fratres* (2009), *SUITEnovus* (2009), and *One Earth’s Dreaming* (2009), this space of pure observation, accessed through time extension, creates the fertile ground where the fundamental power of the human as evocative being—weakened and turned into an easy prey due to the emotional currents induced by the challenges of the external world—appears and grows. This faculty brings us back to being what we really are, and the pure observation—which is, however, an action—is the space of the inner silence, a peculiar state of being in which all thoughts are erased and where it is possible to live at a different level of everyday awareness. Because the inner silence means suspending inner dialogue, it is a peaceful state to be in. In this state, any attempt at identification triggered by the superficial layers of the mind literally disappears by reaching the acme of deep concentration.

However, this is a state of extreme vigilance and awareness produced by an absence of thoughts in the form of words, consequential images, and associations. Here the superficial mind is effectively disconnected from the perception of its own existence; hence, it has no more power to determine and establish the ego. The field of energy is now the one of the hyperconsciousness. While Descartes thought he had discovered the fundamental truth when he stated: “I think, therefore I am”, he had contrarily given expression to the error key: identify thought with awareness and identity with thinking. While performing durational works in a state of inner silence, any attempt of distraction caused by the mind is instantly recognised and let go. As performers, we believe that if we are able to transform the inner silence into our greatest ally throughout the whole creative process (the quest), we can achieve

the unexpected, previously unknown, and therefore new.

In 2010, we travelled to Patagonia to shoot the first episode of our performance art movie trilogy *sin∞fin The Movie* (figures 8 and 9).⁷ Due to the isolation and ruthless conditions of the location, our usual prosaic daily thoughts progressively ceased to exist. Living in those remote lands for weeks, we had to circumscribe the source of a stinging sense of melancholy and astonishment that we felt and were slowly drowning into. The tangible realisation of the human frailty, the solitude, the silence, the emptiness, the merciless beauty that shines from a nature so immense and desolate, helped us to set the parameters for the performances we did for the movie. Moreover, it helped us to crystallise what would become one of our main objectives as a performance duo: expanding the perceptual space of inner silence.

By performing durational works in the perceptual space of inner silence, we work to become aware of things through the full activation of our senses (and not just the five ones) and to comprehend situations in non-conventional ways. In our work, we sense and perceive by physical sensations (i.e., with our skin, nerves, muscles, and organs) and we also feel through our emotions, intuition, and in terms of a past experience (i.e., memory). Following Sufi philosophy, which is very clear on this matter (Bayatly 2001), we try to awaken and activate our own 'inner archives' of visions, remembrances, and sensations through our work.

For the durational work *Endangered Species* (2008), we performed inside a three-cubic-metre glass cube. I lay naked on top of 350 crystal glasses, with my whole body covered in river pearls. I kept my eyes closed while Verena delicately began to remove the glasses from underneath my body with her hands and the pearls with her mouth. After three hours, only my spine, arms, and legs were lying over a few lines of glasses—just enough to sustain my weight—and my body became numb. I not only had the feeling of being held precariously by few fragile supports, but I also had to think about how to get up gracefully and naturally without touching the ground or breaking the glasses. The only option I had was to entrust myself completely to the glasses, as if I was made of the same matter, as if my whole body could acquire the transparency and lightness of glass. What I felt next is hard to explain; it was as if I had become liquid, soft, weightless. This allowed me to stand on my feet and thus end the performance. From this moment on, we decided to explore this working 'method' in depth. In fact, for Verena and I, being a performer is about an attitude towards the world, oneself, and others; a settled way of thinking and feeling about someone or something to be transformed creatively into action. Our art expresses this.

Sometimes, we perceive what is not there; consequently, we have illusions and misinterpretations of reality. These often trigger a new action in response. To only perceive by the five senses can be misleading. Even if using them feels more immediate and recognisable, there are also other senses that operate more subtly and ineffably and bring us to perceive our state of being in a specific condition or place. Other elements that trigger this process are elements of risk and fear. We also use dynamic breathing practices as a fundamental part of the way we conceive of and design performances. For instance, during the five-hour outdoor durational performance *In.Sight.Out* (2008), we repeatedly dived into a circular pool filled with artificial white liquid. This action lasted almost all night and was conceived after a session of dynamic breathing. We work this way since we believe that to perceive is an action that allows us to become conscious and instinctively aware. Through our work, we aim to realise, see, or understand a situation mentally, emotionally, and spiritually at the same time as the expansion of the inner silence entails the expansion of a consciousness and a reconfiguration of our energy.

To make space for the inner silence during the durational process, we have to gradually focus our attention to what is happening in each moment. Detaching our thoughts from the superficial layers of the mind, we bring our attention to the confines of the present—doing this as much as possible, for as long as possible. It is like remembering that we are alive and present. Moreover, we give our whole attention to the action we are doing while we collect information about the environment and ourselves: What is our posture? How should we breathe? Are we acting quietly? Do we inwardly perceive a sensation of discomfort? What about our body, and the place where we are located? Deep focus is key.

For the seven-hour performance *Thou Twin of Slumber: Imago* (figures 10 and 11), another piece from our 2013 performance cycle *Thou Twin of Slumber*, we tried to avoid re-enacting by eliminating almost every kind of installation setting—which has since become a feature of our work—and opted to assemble scenic elements while performing. In this process, the deepest layers of the mind resurfaced. Decoding reality through perception, the mind is an ally that allows us to come into contact with our field of consciousness, and this razor's edge of the present moment creates a barrier that is, or aims to be, inaccessible to distraction. As long as we remain in this state, the superficial layers of the mind can't distract us, because, to do so, they need us to believe in what they produce and say. In other words, they need us to fall back to the energy level of useless listening and automatic identification with them, therefore degrading the level of our emotional intelligence.

Inner silence is crucial while performing: forms of control cease to be, which consequently frees our space for the perception of those inner sources that are what we really are—the expression of our lives and what we really want to express. When we perform durational work in a state of complete inner silence, we walk, hand in hand, towards the door of the infinite, as we experienced in *Without Tuition or Restraint* (2011, figure 12), a durational performance that dealt with the idea of freedom, held in a gallery space for five days and four nights. However, we have concluded that reaching the inner silence is not the prerogative of one practice over another, but the prerogative of a determined intent of those who want to achieve it. Expanding the inner silence during the durational process means to progressively deactivate all of our automatic instincts, and convert them into a set of forces allied to our need to communicate and express our quest for the meaning of life. To perform in this way is to act to awaken in us the power of awareness that is our heritage and our right as human beings, without distinction. This choice is in every breath we inhale, in every little thought that we have, in every word we say, and in every little action we make.

AUTHENTICITY, FAILURE, AND SELF-AWARENESS

Socrates suggests that “a self-aware person must act completely within his capabilities to their pinnacle, to become aware of every fact (and its context) relevant to his existence, if he wishes to attain self-knowledge” (quoted in Sahakian and Sahakian 1993, 32–33). As such, we have begun to perform proceeding from the premise that we should never interpret something a priori assumed, but primarily act in accordance with our human nature to realise our full potential. Consequently, for us, it is useless to imitate or interpret because this could cause distract us, as truth-seeking performers, and the viewer.

Of course, many others aside from Socrates have offered poignant philosophical arguments, which continue to be sources of inspiration for our performative practice. For instance, Sartre, when reflecting upon Heidegger, examines the concept of authenticity, taking it to the extreme. By discussing different ways of living abstractly, he comments on the detachment of the individual from factual reality. For Sartre, this is not a fallback to shy away from the problems of the world and to avoid external influences in order to preserve one’s integrity. Rather, this represents the only ideal situation from which to critically and radically engage with social and political conventions that people have created but that have proved to

be a complete dramatic failure (Martinot 1991). Additionally, Eric Fromm writes extensively on “genuine individuality” (1942, 208), suggesting that an authentic person is one who attempts to live their life according to the needs of their inner being, rather than letting themselves be influenced by the demands of society or early conditioning. Nowadays, Fromm’s notion of authenticity as genuineness, openness, and self-disclosure has become a common definition in psychological science (Wood, Wood, and Boy 2010). We believe that authenticity refers to art as an expression of the artist’s self (see Kivy 1995), while a personally authentic performance is faithful to a performer’s individual genius and interpretation (text, score, concept, etc.) (Young 1988).

Nevertheless, it is important to note that Fromm’s idea of genuine individuality also represents an “illusion” (Fromm 1942, 221). People are social beings who are often under social pressures that continually interfere with and affect their authentic being. In fact, distractions come from internal and external sources, which can cause a state of mental confusion in performers that can mislead them during their action, resulting in losing the necessary, required, and intimate attention to their main task: unveiling their own Self. If their energy level drops, the action will progressively lack intensity and the communication will be impoverished; the whole work might fail. However, there are other ways of reading an apparently unsuccessful, unsatisfactory action without considering it as a ‘mistake’ or a ‘failure’. Something of this nature happened during our performance *Thou Twin of Slumber: Chrysalis* (2013, figure 13), when I badly cut my middle finger with a sharp knife. This was a technical mistake. The blood streamed down, but instead of interrupting the piece, I took a book and kept it open on my wounded hand. With the other hand, I started writing words with my blood poured on the floor on an old Victorian door we had previously installed in the space. As part of the performance, I burnt the book while my hand was still dripping blood. These series of events, which were the result of an accident, created an unintentional but very powerful image.

The notion of failure is ingrained in human nature itself, and the promise of modernity for freedom from fear has tragically failed. Our Western philosophical tradition abounds with anticipation, consideration, and affirmation in this sense, and, as Kierkegaard indicates in his *Fear and Trembling*, “one must make an active choice to surrender to something that goes beyond comprehension” (Kierkegaard, quoted in Holt 2012, 6). Sartre’s concern with the vertiginous experience of absolute freedom also implies the concept of failure, since people are incapable of maintaining such a level of freedom for the great anguish that it causes (see

Crosby 1988). István Mészáros comments on Sartre's importance "as a thinker whose lifework is manifestly representative of our time" (2012, 141). And, as Dominic (2012) notes, "In demonstrating Sartre's strengths and integrity, Mészáros also reveals how his very failures are also sources of illumination." Lacan stated that "the object is failure (un raté). The essence of the object is failure" (1998, 58).

This concept takes on remarkable connotations in modern psychology: the conditions of barely succeeding, of always failing, lead us to learn how to live, to the point that it is through failure that love may approach the infinite (Webster 2009).

More recently, according to some later pedagogical/psychological analysis (by theorists such as Michael Nagel, Brian N. Goldman, Michael H. Kernis, Stephen Wright, Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who were part of the new era of Positive Psychology in 1998), the concept of failure has begun to be interpreted as a positive force for social/personal progress, because it allows the individual to move into other territories where their creative resources can be more productive and highly valued.

In our performances, these ideas translate into actions. For example, if we have to move on a slippery surface, we need to adapt our movements to that surface without trying to dominate and resist it. This will help us to avoid repeatedly falling over and to discover new movements. Failure opens up new possibilities. By practicing and finding ways to render through our performative works' concept of failure (and using the memories of our personal failures as creative material to produce art), we have realised that we are operating in an original and, most importantly, an honest way. For example, if, at a certain moment of one of our performances, the act of falling on the floor becomes necessary, we will create situations that actually make us fall—rather than pretending to fall. Thus, we will pour a huge amount of oil (or liquid soap) onto the floor to make it slippery; we will set huge ice cubes that make us slide or lose our balance; or we will suspend large, thin, glass plates some inches above the ground, and perform over them until they break under our weight, either by stepping, running, or dancing on them.

Performing by being in accord with the true Self—that is, expressing what one really thinks, feels, and believes (Harter 2002)—leads to achieving and expressing personal authenticity, and also contributes to reaching a higher level of self-esteem. For us, a performative work acquires authenticity, originality, and consistency when the performer accepts both their strengths and weaknesses (Kernis 2003) as natural constituents parts of their being. When the performer tries to overcome their limits without fully succeeding, it is

vital that they continue the action with the same level of energy and attention, by letting themselves be completely guided by their internal values instead of by external threats, inducements, and expectations (Ryan and Edward 2003).

An example is Chris Burden's work *B.C. Mexico* (1973), which he describes in the documentary *Chris Burden Documented Projects 71–74* (1975) as a project that grew out of a utopian fantasy and conceptual turn. The only thing viewers found when they arrived at his Los Angeles gallery for his scheduled exhibition was a note describing his absence; he was paddling a small kayak from a town on the Sea of Cortez in Baja California. He spent eleven days on a beach before declaring the end of the performance and paddling back to town. For Burden, this project was about isolation and about 'being gone'.

To respond and adapt to unpredictable contingent factors that can abruptly change the contextual situation in which one is performing (i.e., public or open spaces), a performer needs a flexible mind, a blameless heart, courage, humility, and adaptability. Considering that a performance action works once it discovers/unveils the Self (of the performer and of the audience), which hopefully will arise renewed and transformed, to be a performance artist means to stir up and provoke not just reflections, but also tensions and emotions (in ourselves and in the others)—to externalise what is hidden inside our own hearts, souls, and life experiences.

WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE IN THIS WORD 'AUTHENTICITY'?

The word 'authenticity' is usually used in relation to objects. For example, the authenticity of a work of art is judged by the fact that it was produced by a reliable author or a person who is recognised as being genuine, sincere, and spontaneous in his being and behaviour. In legal terminology, authenticity is related to the truth of a legal act, not for its content but for the form and the origin of that act itself. A document is authentic when completed in the manner prescribed by law or by those who have the authority to draw it up, not for the reasons contained therein. Any well-compiled dictionary can provide comprehensive definitions of the word 'authenticity'.

On authenticity, the philosophy of existentialism refers to the kind of existence that reflects the inner Self of the individual and the true reality it shapes, which is characterised by uniqueness and by possible anguished choices, as opposed to the false security of an existence

based on repetitive, externally imposed, quotidian social schemes that tend to cause superficial and hypocritical behaviours, and disrupt the possibility of having a mindful life (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy 2004).

As VestAndPage, we believe that in performative practice, existential authenticity is determined by the embodiment of the action—action made, filtered, and given back through the body of the performer—which makes feel the performer alive, and gives a full meaning to their ideal of life as a human being. Consequently, if the existential authenticity is made possible by the embodiment of the action, it can be also said that through the performer's body, the concrete existence of the action is achieved, and that this way of existing claims the unity of the being with the act. Theoreticians, critics, and performance artists tend to agree that the performer is the tool, the neutral agent of the action, and that the action, once completed, is positioned beyond the performers who performed it, which is as if to say that the action (and not just once it's over) is no longer the performer's.

Hypothetically, if we take into account an audience (even a super-audience) called to identify and determine the 'degree' of authenticity of a performative action by means of the senses and knowledge, the result always implies each audience member's (the perceiver's) and performer's (the doer's) motivational state and emotional mood in the here and now. In fact, even when more people share the same place/space, their motivational state and emotional mood may differ considerably from one another, given that the sensorial information that each brain receives is often incomplete, fragmented, and fluctuating. To remain authentic, when we perform, neither of us plays or pretends to be what we are not.

If the concept of authenticity has an objective and a subjective connotation, a coherent external behaviour has to correspond with a spontaneous and genuine interiority. There must be an agreement between one's true inner characteristics—what someone makes and does—and their relationship with others. Translated into our performative practice—and, assuming that to perform means life in itself—coherence to oneself means facing and showing entirely who we are. As Beuys said,⁸ it means not disguising our wounds, or finding easy ways out.

As in life, performers who work as a pair or in a group can become destructive to the other(s) and a prison for themselves. Because of this, a higher degree of humility is required to set the Self into an experience that is mutual and authentic. This level concerns the quality of the ideal that attracts and shapes the vital energy of the one who performs in that particular period/lapse of time, and then in the extension of its duration. When we perform as a duo, humility allows our actions to be sober and measured, and lets us enter into a dimension of

fruitful reciprocity, positive confrontation, and continuous dialogue. For these reasons, in the last four years, we have mainly chosen to work on performance cycles, investigating one concept through several actions, and then performances that progress from one another. This choice gives us sufficient time to evolve and deepen the investigation through performing, just as a writer who writes the chapters of their book. At the same time, we confront ourselves more rigorously and we give more free space to each other, without excluding or overlapping our actions. In other words, observing these parameters, a collaborative durational performance work allows an encounter between two or more individuals (each other) in a common territory of opportunity, where it becomes possible to give up and change personal beliefs and passions, in order to harmonise ourselves to what is true and right, not only for us personally, but also for others. In this way, the subjective dimension is deepened: we leave ourselves to find something higher or more profound, bigger than ourselves, which then deserves to be activated into proper actions (as it must be lived in the moment), which acquire a particularity. It is like delivering our beings to something unknown, which doesn't annihilate because it is there that we become truly who we are. For Levinas, sincere behaving and sincere attitude according to one's Self—in term of ethics—represents a moral responsibility for the well-being of another, as “there is something more important than my life, and that is the life of the other” (Levinas in Wright, Hughes, and Ainley 1998, 172). Indeed, for the French philosopher, subjectivity itself is constituted through bearing witness to the existence of another, and it is constantly put into question by the force of that ethical obligation. In terms of self-reflexivity and specular recognition, and by assuming the risks that exposure involves, to be authentic for oneself is also to be authentic for others, because a being for itself is a being for others, a being concerned for others (Levinas 1981).

According to this, a whole series of factors come into play: mutual respect, vigilant presence, and compassionate commitment. These are fundamental to our performances if we are to be totally present and “in there” for one another, to support and help each other, particularly in potentially dangerous scenarios. To reach this state of togetherness, we constantly train ourselves to perform with ‘listening eyes and listening hearts’, for being fully operative not just with the action that each one of us is completing in a particular moment of the performance, but for one another always. As Levinas remarks, there is a transcendent, ineffable, almost inexplicable quid in all this that exceeds our phenomenological existence and can neither be reduced to formal representation or statement (Hanna 2013).

All these insights lead both of us to a more authentic interpersonal dialogue. The

empathy that develops between us may also deeply involve the audience, shifting them towards a more participative and less passive habitual level of watching. For us, a performance must always be a moment of sharing, and, even more so, a gathering and union.

CONCLUSION

A durational creative (performative) process suggests principles such as consistency/coherence and interior unity/integrity. It may be intended as an expression of an inner transformation; that is, a return to someone's own essence. On the external level, however, are the concepts of enlightened action—clear and honest communication, coordination, and harmony with each other (and others) and with reality. The inner and external dimensions are closely connected. Pure creative drive can be intended as an expression of consciousness and as a way of being that deeply resonates with us. For every performer, reaching a level of coherence, unity and integrity within their artistic expression is a very complex and arduous process. However, it is achievable if one actively strives for it. Accepting and integrating aspects of ourselves, we reach a state in which there is coherence between the internal and the external, and the equilibrium of reality is altered. Hence, the concept of integrity is not a reference to some moral precept that stops only at the surface of the mind, but rather has to do with the re-encounter between us: two beings who attempt to complete one another by being and acting together on the same ground.

A chance is offered to understand that our habits and mechanical reactions are no longer the expression of rough and crude programming induced by an unbalanced cultural system, or even worse, by intention. Mechanical reactions are replaced by creative interactions, where each outer event matches a manifestation of its own uniqueness. To cross the threshold of our essence, recognising its strength and spreading it in the space-time dimension contextualised by the creative (performative) process, along with the performed actions, means to be able to act existentially, intensely, and with meaning. For VestAndPage, a performative durational work is primarily intended as a path of research: we move together and we look for new approaches that can effectively accelerate the necessary steps towards our personal rebirth and transformation. It is a new dimension of self-expression.

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ENDNOTES

1. VestAndPage are German artist Verena Stenke and Italian artist and writer Andrea Pagnes. Please see the website, www.vest-and-page.de, for links to all the performances discussed in this paper.

2. The original is “All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.”

3. Sartre’s definition of authenticity from an existential viewpoint is: “Authenticity, almost needless to say, is having a true and lucid consciousness of the situation, in assuming the responsibilities and risks that involves, in accepting it in pride or humiliation, sometimes in horror and hate. There is no doubt that authenticity demands courage and more courage. Thus it is not surprising that one finds it so rarely.”

4. For Grotowski and Richards, to understand and identify the inner actions (and their source) helps to clarify the uptake of the process of energy transformation and individual permutations, at the same time counting on a wider range of possibilities to create poetry outside the conventional, and be original.

5. According to Rebecca Erickson (1995, 139), authenticity is not just a question of “being true to self”, but also of being true to “self-in-relationship”. Authenticity also has to do with the “self and world” (Terry 1993, 141).

6. The twenty-four-hour durational performance *FEAR vs LOVE vs FEAR* took place in an abandoned two-storey villa in the heart of Mexico City in summer 2012, as part of Proyecto Liquido, organised by Fundación Alumnos 47. In each of the twelve rooms of the house, we created a different situationist installation, which we would perform twice (one hour during the day, one hour during the night in each room, moving in a circular pattern). The performance also involved about fifty young street girls sheltered by Yolia Youth Residence, who had participated at our preparatory workshop during the two weeks preceeding the performance (see <https://fearisfear.wordpress.com/>). The performance began with the girls writing their names on my naked back with pens without ink, scratching my skin until it bled. Blindfolded, and wearing a white bridal skirt, I then lay over four large blocks of ice for some time. My partner arrived once my mouth was almost blue and my body completely rigid and cold. She invited some of the audience members to touch my back with their hands, to feel

and acquaint themselves with how cold a body can be and how it is possible to warm it up again through merely hand contact, which is one of the most powerful vectors of energy. Once I stood up again, I invited the people who helped me, one by one, to experience a dance with me on the slippery ice (exacerbated by the fact that I was barefoot). In another situation within this same performance, I entered a room we had filled with a few tons of broken glass pieces the day before. Some audience members followed me and helped bury me in the glass, using some shovels. I stayed underneath the glass for as long as I could. After half an hour or so, I slowly tried to extricate myself, moving my naked body carefully so as not to cut myself too much. Verena came to assist me, removing the broken glass, piece by piece. Once I was out, she cleaned my skin of the glass splinters with a sponge and water. Then she turned on some music from a small device, and invited me to dance with her on the broken glass pieces. Some members of the audience joined us. The room was no longer an imaginary graveyard, but a real, though unusual, dance floor. These descriptions exemplify that in our performances, components and elements expand, dilate, and amplify, not just for a mere change per se, or by means per se, but to possibly reach a catharsis (See <http://www.vest-and-page.de/#!fear-vs-love-vs-fear/c18lz>).

7. See http://www.sinfin-themovie.de/SINFIN/sinfin_The_Movie___Trilogy_Project.html.

8. In the installation *Show Your Wound*, Beuys said: "And when I say: Show it! Show the wound that we have inflicted upon ourselves during the course of our development, it is because the only way to progress and become aware of it is to show it" (quoted in Borer 1996, 25).

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