

My Body Asking Your Body Questions

VestAndPage (Verena Stenke & Andrea Pagnes) interviewed by Valeria Romagnini & Karlyn De Jong
(Personal Structures | GAA Foundation)

Karlyn De Jong: Your work seems to address various themes related to the body. Marina Abramovic is nowadays possibly the most well known performance artist. In our 2009 Venice Biennale symposium, she has spoken about the moment of 'now' and she told us that being in the now requires to be present 100%. To her this 'presence' means not only a physical presence but a 'mental' presence, too. 'I am here' means being consciously present, including body and mind. When you address the body, what do you refer to? What do you mean?

Verena Stenke: In Arab language there are three distinct words to define the English noun 'body': *Gesem*, which is the body-body, the concrete biological, mechanical substance, the tangible, anatomical structure, consisting of flesh, bones, muscles, blood. *Gesed*, the mind-body; the brain; for the Latin- *intelligenza*: the mental structure, which supports and controls the *Gesem* (body-body). Finally *Beden*, which indicates the psyche-body, the psychosomatic element of soul movements and true, transparent and subtle emotions, equally are expressed through the *Gesem* (body-body), and also influence *Gesed* (body-mind). The 'three bodies' reciprocally influence each other. For me to be present, not only as a performance artist, but as a person, requires making this tripod-structure standing stable, to count on openness and alertness of all 'three bodies': corpus, mind and psyche. Discovering this concept through my studies of Sufism and its rituals, has taught me a lot. Since then, I've been working to strengthen equally each single of the three bodies, and keep these three legs of the stool steady, reciprocally supporting one each other.

Many times arts or artists focus on or give evidence to one body only, instead of all three, ending up in a physical virtuosity such as it often happens in dance, or a conceptual work which implies the mind only. I am more interested in creating works that intersect and unite these expressions of body, mind and psyche likewise, as I'm aware that only in this way I can profoundly touch inner cords – mine and the others' - for advancing something pristine. To be a whole, to be complete, inside and outside, is vital for being 'present'.

Andrea Pagnes: James Joyce once wrote, "*hold to the now, the here, through which all future plunges to the past.*" To be 100% present in the now is the required condition not only for a performance artist, but more for a human being in general, and not just when s/he is called to make a work at her/his own best, but always, I'd say: an athlete when training and then racing; an actor or a musicians learning a monologue or a score and then acting/playing it on stage; a worker climbing on a scaffolding to repair a façade of a building, and if in those moments they're not into their action full being, they might irremediably compromised their task.

In life anything is a pure matter of awareness and consequent understanding, and when we enter into a state of deep concentration, the 'now' commonly stated it as if it expands and dilates.

I'm personally interested in searching what does mean and where leads me this state of deep concentration which stretches the 'now' as we intend it, even if the dilation of the now could sounds quite a paradox. In other words, a state of deep concentration allows me to unhinge one by one gates inside myself to reach and touch that deepest centre inside me where my ungraspable, ineffable inner void resides: a place yet unknown, probably my real place, where unexpected chances and learning are offered, or maybe nothing. Yet, this is not enough, because there is always the factor of

unpredictability to consider, which any situation and circumstance can present (in life, as well as during a performance), and which, for it, a constant readiness to adapt and respond to those unpredictable changes and circumstances is required.

Deep concentration, then readiness and alertness, elements of necessity and visceral attraction (relating to deep inward feelings rather than to the intellect), because what is going to happen, will happen, and in the moment it happens it is as if is somehow already happened: it is, “it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness is all” (Hamlet, 5.2.218-20). I adopt this sentence because it shows Hamlet's realization that fate is in control, something that for me it is crucial: it tells of *prudentia* and *kairos* (the supreme moment, which for a performance artist is obviously the moment when s/he performs). As humans, we have a tendency to strive and be always in control of something; we are inclined to state upon things as if we knew them already so well; we presume hypocritically or elusively to know, but this is not. I prefer instead to ask myself what can I do to be ready to face unexpected changes, with my full being, and, by being ready, to act with/through my being. I say this because for me only the act is true, for nothing that was ever said, is said, or will be said is truth.

To be conscious or, preferably, acknowledge all this (to try, at least), requires a constant exploration of the inner Self and the whole being, and that I remain clearly present in the situation I am in any case. In this way I can better perceive and understand my inner Self, which moves and acts through my full body (biological, physical, mental, and spiritual), and in turn is also a tool of perception, intuition and expression, with all its limitations, and also it may indicate me how to overcome those limits.

Though I train physically, mentally, and spiritually, when I perform I'm still surprised how I tune myself to by my body reactions when I encounter 'failures and mistakes' which may occur unpredictably i.e. during extreme risk-taking. I take failure and mistakes as an opportunity, because they have often demonstrated me where the most interesting art resides: an art stripped off by intentions, as “all bad art is the result of good intentions” (Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*).

The question of being 100% present in the now, physically, mentally, and also spiritually, raises a number of sprawling further reflections. It can be seen also as an experiential dimension of Zen-seeing: if I plant my feet in the 'here and now', ready to make a whatsoever performance action, I have to set myself in a position of 'not one', otherwise I could be stuck in the stillness of meditation and, “while suspending judgment for action, falling into one-sidedness, misunderstanding reality, and perceiving wrongly what is inside and outside myself”, ending with loosing awareness and power of alertness. So, “how far and wide is 'Here' and how long is 'Now'? Are they each limited by a present perceptual experience?” In the case of 'now,' for example, is it an internal phenomenon of consciousness that allows the Performance artist “to experience time sometimes as a 'memory' (or retention) and some other times as 'anticipation' (or protention) in the ever-flowing stream of the 'present' (and the being present as well)?” And in the case of 'here', is it delimited by performance artist's spatial range of perception within the sensory field, situating him/her as the point of reference? “And what about the involvement of the autonomous activity of the unconscious?” Of course, as a living being, the performance artist cannot depart nor recede from the 'here and now', because s/he is ingrained into it, as well as, on the other hand, time and space are always unavoidably experienced as 'here and now', “thus the perceptual model implies always an ego-logical 'human, all too human' stance with its attendant limitations, and the consequent attempts to overcoming it.” (Sentences quoted and re-adapted by: Shigenori Nagatomo, *Japanese Zen Buddhist Philosophy*. Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy).

Similarly to the everyday human world, the moment of the performance is 'here and now', and to the performance artist this can become available through a constant practice, which involves the body entirely, again physically, mentally, and

spiritually.

To try, find and reach a condition, a state of harmonious balance among these three aspects, it is part of our investigation as artists and researchers, but I'm also personally interested and fascinated in feeling moments of imbalance, and see where they lead me, probably driven by my innate rebellious need of being out of any rational schemes and sense of belonging.

Finally, I look at my body primarily as a means to produce meanings and live images, and to communicate my urgencies through it. When I clearly came with the decision to use my own body as pure mediator of expression, I had firstly to consider its biological laws, acquainting them, re-studying them, equally paying a constant attention at my psyche, analyzing it in depth: how, where and why it moves in such ways. For me, it is also a matter of responsibility towards myself, of being intellectually honest, and consequently sincere with the others.

If I use my body to produce metaphorical images of nullification, presumable truths, hence, in a sentence, to make art, I have always to have present in my mind that when my body lies, it always confesses.

Valeria Romagnini: Do you see the body of the other as a tool to question your own body?

VS: Not directly, at least not in the corporal sense. Of course the (body-) mind and the (body-) psyche of the other/s are questioning each other's positions continuously. Any physical body in a shared space is another subject to relate to with open senses: not as a tool, but more as an occasion, a potential to generate something new.

What inspires and challenges me is the mind-set and spiritual reach of another being, might it be my partner, or the audience members: there lies the library of experience, which can be accessed to draw and present something.

The physical body is the one to encounter more easily, but also the most superficial, while encountering the mind and spirit of the other is demanding, and much more full of expectations.

AP: A mass of people is a 'collective body', which is always composed by individuals. I have found the quote "*My body asking your body questions*" that performance artist Helena Goldwater wrote in the occasion of her participation at the first *Venice International Performance Art Week* of which we are the curators, very pertinent and indicative.

I've worked for quite some time in Social Theatre, training, writing for, and playing on stage with differently-abled people, Down syndrome affected and psychic patients. I've learnt from them firstly how lucky I am to be born as I am, and then how important is to become outgiving and humble, strong and tender at the same time, and more, how precious is the gift of authenticity and how difficult is it to reach it, keep it, and metabolize it. I learnt from being close to and looking after bodies of people I loved while they were decaying and dying. I watch and observe, wherever I am, bodies, hands, faces, eyes, postures. Bodies distressed, shaking, relaxed. Ways of talking, arguing, screaming, looking, glancing, moving, walking, running, eating, drinking, spitting, spewing. Sounds and cries let out by infants. The hoarse complains of pensioners, while asking myself which dreams still they may have. The people: my, your, our own realm of organic belonging. Anais Nin wrote "I am the other face of you, you are the other face of me", but how far I am from your face? How close I am to your face, your body and with it to people?

What is that actually happened inside me when I run into people's bodies suffering because of hard life, with their injuries inflicted, encountered or inherited. Bodies hammered by the age, bent over, serene or angry. Bodies scared, excited by stamina, bodies in rut, stoned by cheap alcohol, or smashed by street drugs. Small, tall, slim, fat bodies. Anorexic bodies. Bodies built with steroids. Bodies willingly manipulated against nature, tortured by blades, inflated

and swollen by silicon attempting desperately to make their own and some others' bodies happy, more and more baggy with the year passing by. Empty palms, dirty frozen finger tips begging for a dime, smiles full of joy, smirks manifesting hypocrisy, lifted cheeks, lips pumped with Botox, hearts beating, hearts poisoned, lovers. And yes, by seeing the body of the others, I can't cease to question who I really am and what does mean 'to encounter the other'.

VR: Does the presence of your partner have any influence upon your own physical and mental limits?

VS: Physical and mental limits are two different things. We train and work a lot for keeping our physical limits - which are imposed by nature and we cannot overcome our biology - as small as possible, for having more possibilities of movement in the literal sense, and to be geared up to put nearly every vision of space - body relation into action. But even so we work with our limits, and accept and reveal them as what they are, for we think there lays the compelling component, in our limits and imperfections, rather than in virtuosity. We don't search for virtuosity: if I fall down stiffly on the floor, I really and simply fall down, and I will have blue spots for the next weeks. In one of our durational performance *Without Tuition or Restraint* held at The Exchange Gallery in Penzance in 2011, Andrea remained closed in a dog crate for 5 days and 4 nights, and I engaged myself every day in a 24 hours single action. On one day I run around the gallery space for the entire day during the gallery's opening hours. I trained before, and had been an athlete all my life, but running 8 hours straight within a closed gallery-space is a liminal exploit for anybody, and this limit for me is interesting to come into contact with, also because it raises inevitably the question: why do we have this imminent tendency of wanting to go further, instead of accepting a limit? But these limits don't depend on the partner, rather on nature, action and time. For me it's important to work with them instead of against them. We try, we fail, we hurt, and we stand up and fall again, to fail better and go forward again...

Mental limits instead are an intriguing area. We have worked intensively on the concept of 'Loss of Control', where control in any sense is considered an obstacle, a mental and physical limit, hence the task is to un-control and thus un-condition ourselves as much as possible. We have been conditioned, and always continue to be conditioned, by our family, partners, society, politics, religion, life situations we have to deal with and we are responsible for, and also by the nature. Considering these conditionings as forms of manipulation, there are various schemes that we simply copy and overtake. But if i.e. a child falls down, instantly the body learns and the muscle-memory will remember forever that once it falls, the brain is immediately stimulates and involuntarily triggers the impulse of activating the movement of an arm to smoothen the crash. The difficulty is to get rid of this sort of self-conditioned physical reflexes that are precipitated by the brain. They are useful for survival and protection in many cases, but not in all. If we observe children, drunk or drug-addicted people, or diversely physically and mentally abled people, we can see that there is a whole variety of possibilities to un-limit ourselves. We work for being as much as possible zero-conditioned in our work. This does not mean that in daily life we don't have any schemes into which we fall and condition us. Yet, we put them under examination and observation all the time, so then in the moment of the performance we free ourselves as far as possible from all those schemes, to be the most possible neutral, like a blank canvas.

AP: The presence of my partner influences me undoubtedly. I tune to her to increase my energy and concentration also, or to soften my compulsive temperament, and consequently it helps me to overcome some of my physical limits I encounter and have to face in a particular moment of a performance, i.e. when performing blindfold on a massive amount of sharp glass shards, fire, ice, or when I suspend myself upside down with a rope from a ceiling. Yet, there is

more to be said on this regard. In his book “How to Stay Well”, Christian D. Larson rightly argues that “it is through the law of vibration that the mind exercises its power over the body, every mental action is a vibration, and passes through every atom in the body, modifying both the general conditions and the chemical conditions of every group of cells.”

To perceive the vibes of my partner, it means that they are influencing also mine, and this consequently produces an effect inside me. Again citing Larson “extensively, everything in the universe is what it is because of its rate of vibration. When a rate of vibrations influence another, a change is produced, and as nature is constantly changing the vibrations of its elements, similarly we do we humans, only that we are not always fully aware of it, we don’t realize it,” as we are too much projected on the outside.

After years of performing always together, I’m aware that the direction that my actions take during a performance derives also from a change that occurred in my body and mind vibrations for an exchange (positive or negative) with my partner’s bodily and mental vibrations. This, consequently, always produces a new range of effects in both of us. It is a vast and fascinating subject. Additionally, mental vibrations act more deeply in chemical life than the physical vibrations. Therefore I have the chance to entirely change the latter because of this, no matter how strong the latter may seem to be.

This is how the encounter of the mental vibrations of a couple as we are, act into our bodies. These changes are sometimes imperceptible, of course, but after years I can easily feel and distinguish them. Aware of this, I understand why the power of our minds over our bodies becomes greater in proportion to the depth of consciousness and feeling that we enter into during any performative process.

This is also due to a desire, a spiritual need of togetherness I feel for Verena and I, given that the desired vibrations are invariably produced by positive, constructive and wholesome actions, provided those actions are deeply felt.

All this works beneath the elements and forces of our physical bodies, and influences them to almost any extent within the sphere of natural law accordingly to our personal limits.

VR: The theme of freedom is part of many of your works, although often in different ways.

In an interview you stated, “The fact that we always work as a duo, involves that we form a bipolar sphere. What exists together reciprocally influences each other, it infects each other positively and negatively” and this thought could be enlarged to a social system. Martin Luther King stated “your freedom ends when my freedom starts”. What do you think about this statement, do you see tis similar or can you redefine your and the other’s freedom?

VS: That phrase is quoted from German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk’s investigation about Micro- and Macrospherology in the trilogy “Sphären”, which inspired us significantly for our performance-based film trilogy *sin∞fin The Movie*.

I agree that there is no freedom at any stage of life, also considering the discourse about conditioning, manipulation and dependence mentioned before. No decision is taken liberally. I personally am very fine with this, I enjoy my responsibilities that inter-crossing spheres bring along, and those that I don’t enjoy I try to avoid in life.

Our investigation about freedom courses mainly around the question if freedom actually is fundamental for happiness, or better, to ensure a state of wellbeing. We have met and worked with poor people, physically or mentally chained people, and people with different abilities. We experiences that some of them are more serene than any so-called free, normally abled man. They look like – and perhaps they really are - considerably freer on a spiritual level. Freedom of the

heart and soul can bring serenity, but if we engage our souls (and only oneself does this, no one else), all outer freedom won't help.

AP: I agree with Verena, thus I personally focus more on the sense of what to feel free actually does mean, on that which that, sometimes, abruptly makes you say 'I feel free', rather than exploring the state of freedom in itself, which I find too broadly abstract. Etymologically, freedom is composed by two words: 'free' and 'dom', being 'dom' the abbreviation of the noun 'domain', which implies exerting power onto someone or something (see, i.e. the word 'kingdom'). The Online Etymological Dictionary, at the voice 'freedom', reports a sentence of John C. Calhoun from his speech at the U.S. House of Representatives (Jan. 31, 1816): "that it has been also said by some physicians that life is a forced state. The same may be said of freedom, a forced state too. It requires efforts, it presupposes mental and moral qualities of a high order to be generally diffused in the society where it exists." To me it sounds more like an act of total recall, thus just. I'm actually not investigating to find where my supposed freedom is or resides; I'm rather questioning myself 'if there is actually something that makes me feel really free, and how it makes me free'.

VR: *In 2012 you have organized the first edition of Venice International Performance Art Week at Palazzo Bembo in Venice. In this circumstance, can you explain us your experience to be curators of a performance event rather than being live performers?*

VS: For the first edition of the biennial live art exhibition project *Venice International Performance Art Week 2012* titled "Hybrid Body-Poetic Body", we have worked for presenting an original, experimental exhibition method, through bringing together the people and the art we believe in. It was a performative act in itself, a vision of ours, another prolonging of VestAndPage general line and activities, made possible thanks to the enormous support and help of many others. We wanted to open a discourse, to give space to human exchange and international encounters, to question limits and conventions, to create common spaces, to un-condition and un-frame. This is also what we do with our performances, films, writings, and any other projects, including finally also the *Venice International Performance Art Week*. Therefore I did not feel any real difference, as the core was the same as with all our other works, our method and style are the same too, only the context changed. This time we put on the heat 'Curator', but we could have been called 'Facilitators', or 'Event-making artists'...

AP: ...'Dream-, or vision-, or idea-makers'... The *Venice International Performance Art Week* is a real people project, a reunion also. Lee Wen (one of the participating artists) said something exemplary to describe this collective experience: "This is not a circus, this not a show, this not a biennale, this is a meeting of artists and people who looked for the pearls in the rivers of human civilizations and came to share what they found." Verena and I have just "pulled the trigger", so to say. Everything came up then because of the commitment, dedication and the hard work of all the people that agreed to be involved in the process.

VR: *Performances of Abramovic and Ulay seem to explore the extent to which the need to be united is incompatible with life while being alone in the end anyway. The two artists feel on their own skin the meaning and implications of having a physical link almost until the paralysis, they seem to explore and invest the time needed to make a relation to work, feeling the hard work and dedication that certain acts require much in life, as in art, even touching the experience of unconsciousness.*

At the end Abramovic and Ulay, with their performance on the Chinese wall, decided to separate and continue each alone. In a

way, their attempt to unify failed.

Do you have between you the same desire to unify? How you think you will fail by trying this?

AP: There are many different ways of being dedicating to life, love, art: each one has his/her own, with their wealth of different lived experiences and stories carried within, which are equally intense. In this moment of our life, Verena and I are animated by a clearly compatible, if not almost similar *charge pulsionelle*. I don't know what will be the future. Failure is part of the human condition, and when it comes, it can be also something interesting to be lived; but then, who's the one that failed, and why?

We are together, and for us to be together means union in the highest sense, this, by being willingly accomplice to one each other. I don't question myself too much with what all this could imply, which consequences can bring tomorrow, because the field of investigation I'm inclined to explore is pretty much different from those questions.

I'm more interested in growth and transformation, life and death also, rather than stretching links of unification at any costs till they breaks, and that, in the end, I consider just virtual, a mere mental picture.

Verena and I have started our common path together although moving from different perspectives and cultural/educational backgrounds. We met and initiated a life project – with no pace or greed –, where all our experiences and memories could be openly expressed to find a sense for our life shared together. Art and Performance art arouse naturally as our common ground of mutual confrontation and acknowledgment, a territory of wide-open dialogue and sincere, fertile communication between us. We don't feel the need to render our life into a piece of art: this would be an aberration that desecrates the holiness of life itself. Rather we fully live our life through it, intending art (and our art) as a vital flux that imbues our lives and personhoods.

VS: There are an endless variety of rituals to be performed in life and art. The idea of union to me is a complex and conflictive one, as history proved and proves on small and big scale. On one hand we long for it, but rarely we can nurture and maintain it. If we don't accept the idea of the unchained individual, union is the ultimate goal, but it is a delicate structure, just as foam that is made up of many small bubbles connected on their outer sides with each other.

They have one point on their surface in common, and inside they are individual. They are flexible as individual and collective, but the common points are delicate breaking-lines, that can uphold an entire structure or make it collapse in a second.

We are just ourselves. There is nothing written on paper. Our life is not an arrangement. Our art springs out of life and all our life is dedicated to art, they are intrinsically linked together. There is no difference between us as the artists, and us as the private persons. We are married, we live together since years for 24 hours a day, we work and travel the world together, find each other in all sort of situations and circumstances. This is our union. It's a life project. We have undertaken this life journey together. We do not force anything, neither do we coerce our relation to be the one of 'the artists', nor do we pressurize the artists to be in a relation at any cost. Our performances are a natural consequence of the life we lived and we are living.

VR: In case you would be forced to, what would your solo performance look like?

VS: We have done extensive series of solo performances for our movie trilogy, where Andrea and I each perform individual actions. My solo actions very often include notions of waiting, falling straight, connecting to the ground,

calling for something/someone which is lacking, or testing to connect to the surrounding.

AP: My solo actions mainly speak of endurance, tension and release, abandoning protection, reconciling with my inner Self, and overcoming suffering, grief and pain by getting through them. And some self-irony too, sometimes, which is always healthy.

VR: Marina Abramović and Ulay decided for their performance practice to form a collective being, a unique being, and they called it "the other": their own existence, originally filtered by each of them through their own body, thus found a new home in one body, but two heads. Do you see yourselves also as one unified body with two heads? Or are there differences in how you perceive yourselves? How does this is reflected itself in your performances?

AP: Well, about us I prefer to say *two hearts sharing a same space*.

VS: I perceive Andrea and me as twin brother, connected mentally and spiritually in an impressive way, the way I don't share it with anyone else. It was not a decision for our practice to form this 'being', it is something that life gave us: it sent us the partner with which to talk without using words. We can communicate through walls, so to say, and this of course facilitates working together intensively. So I'd rather see our union as a liquid container in which two soul-bubbles are swimming. In our Latin America performance tour (2010-11), people told us that they perceive that our relationship is our home. This is true also, as our life consists of travelling for 10 months a year. Though we feel connected to our homelands, and can't neglect the influence of our cultures on our mind-sets, the world is our studio, and our home at this moment is our relationship.

VR: You are performing together as a couple since many years now. Tehching Hsieh explained us in an interview with Karlyn De Jongh that he was looking for somebody to perform with in "Rope Piece" in 1983-1984, and that's how he got to know Linda Montano, whom he did actually the performance for one year with. What was the process that did make the two of you decide to perform together?

VS: We didn't decide it. I don't know if we're particularly fortunate or only very responsive to that 'which' life offers to us. In 2007 I moved to live in Italy with Andrea and his daughter (now we are based also in Germany). It was still an arduous period as we were both following normal working contracts, too. One day we had dinner (the situation in which most of our performances are being conceived, as we love to eat good food and talk about our ideas), and we envisioned an action of me inviting people to write with a feather or an old long rusty nail on Andrea's naked back reversed on a pile of stones, where as from nowhere would appear the writing in a blood-like effect, which then I would wash away with a sponge, and collect the water with the essence of this writing in a glass container together with labels reporting the actual sentences the people wrote on Andrea's back. This was the starting point of our first performance series *Speak That I Can See You*, which in the following years had been presented in Tirana, Pristina, Skopje, Bogota, Venice, Lisbon, Bologna, Prague, New Delhi, and Taipei.

AP: That first performance art piece originated for having had together a vision for a collective action, an experience to be shared. After its debut, all of a sudden we had more and more invitations to present and conceive works. Finally we

ended up dedicating ourselves fully to performance art, investigating methods and theory more deeply, to shape our own conceptual and aesthetic line and to create a strong and inspiring global network. Of course, our previous experiences in visual art and theatre helped us a lot to build our theoretical armature, but what we really experienced was that performance art 'came' to us as if somehow it had to: a found treasure, a reward, the perfect common ground where we could meet together to explore, share and implement our creativity, and gradually it became a main reason of life.

VR: What was the necessity for you to perform with a partner together?

VS: We did not decide nor search for it. When we first met in Berlin in 2006, we were both already working as artists with experiences in various fields, but we didn't say: "Hey, let's make performance together." We fell in love, lived together and at one point our common work started to take more and more shape.

AP: 'VestAndPage' was born because of what was growing around us and within us: the necessity of dedicating ourselves to one each other, to feel, fulfil, and challenge ourselves to staying open continuously to and for each other.

KDJ: You are an artist couple, performing together. What is the meaning of 'the other' in your performance? Is the other an object, a moving attribute in your play? Is there a difference for you between 'the other as performer' and 'the other as viewer'?

VS: The other is the other. Everything else is everything else. The human presence is the essential element in performance art besides space, time and objects. We perceive the other as performer as the constant mutual connection to maintain, to listen to, to reply to, and to relate ourselves to. An invisible twine a priori, and we meander like the ∞ .

AP: The other as viewer, the audience, is a strong, ever-changing and unpredictable energy-field: curious, sceptical, committed giver and receiver, from which we don't expect anything, and which often surprises us. The other is something new to discover every time, new doors to open, new arms to fall into, new eyes to watch, and new stories to listen to. The other deserves always our respect, and I say here respect as spiritual attitude. If I have to find a meaning, in our performances 'the other' represents a source of interchanging ethics and aesthetics values, emotions, feelings, thoughts, moods, etc.

VR: Is there any wish within you to be seen as one single individual performing with another single individual?

VS: People know us as VestAndPage, but they know that they have to book a room for two when they invite us to perform. The idea of union is more than just a romantic illusion, in the area of life and work. The more expectations we put into it, the more it is likely to disappoint us. We both have responsive characters that go with our fortune's flow, being attentive and ready, without pressuring. Things fall into their place by themselves with time.

AP: We know far too well each one of the two of us qualities, as well as irredeemable cons. At one point we combined them. I can do this only with Verena.

VR: Since you do performances together, what does it mean to you to be human both as individual and as a collective entity?

VS: I perceive myself as a human in a constant spherical interchange with and influence of others, humans, surroundings, conditions. I try to respond to this, through being open to all encounters, collisions, and embodiments. Being human is a very 'human' idea, however. I don't seek for perfection, rather of making the best out of our time, for the others and us.

Mistakes are part of being human and it takes us long time to learn. When we are born we are completely impeded, dependent, hindered. The moment when we exit our mother's womb we are the less developed species among all. Any other species can stand up and walk after a short time, but it takes years for us human to learn the very basics of independent survival. And we're still questioning about freedom and independence maybe because we are born so dependent. It is as if we are continuing and nourishing the illusion that this could be changed later, once we will know how: but when?

AP: Questioning the meaning of life is human. When we were in Antarctica at Esperanza Base, we saw some penguin babies attacked ferociously by Suka birds, and we felt the impulse to save them. But the Antarctic treaty prohibits any intervention or impact of humans into the natural course of things on the Antarctic continent. So there we had the sweet, wretched and bleeding penguin babies lying in front of us. Neither the biologists of the base could facilitate or accelerate their certain death. This is to say that in a way or in another we always have the impulse to control things, even with deliberate good intentions; still we need to accept our position in this universe, because we still hardly understand it.

VR: *Can you find space for yourself when you are performing?*

VS: Performing is being in my space...

AP: ...Which is my space too.

KDJ: *Does the public audience affect your action somehow and how do you want them to get closer to your performances?*

VS: In our interactive performances the audience is crucial, because we undertake this voyage together with them. It's an unforeseeable, startling way of making art. It is no more the artist/idol to be watched, admired and consumed, for the audience is attributed an active part in the process.

Christoph Schlingensiefel's *Kaprow City* at the Volksbühne Berlin was a crucial experience for me. Schlingensiefel's himself not only invited, but screaming and pushing also forced the audience to enter into his enormous whirling octagon installation, full of sound and fury: it was like entering into a sick brain. I perceived this as a very aggressive action, as he shouted and channelled the public quickly, the movement creating a sense of panic to many. Later I was talking with other members of the audience about their experience, I had a strong headache (I very rarely have headaches), and I understood how deep interactive, participatory works could penetrate an audience member in one way or another. It goes beyond the pure intellectual approach or understanding of a piece of art. This is where I finally lost faith in the traditional spectator-observer scheme. This counts for theatre as well as for visual art, and it is not an easy thing to do.

AP: It has become state-of-the-art to break down the fourth wall since years, but not always the artist really knows how to touch the most inner cords of the audience members by doing so. It is a complex issue that requires experience, decisiveness and attentiveness to the viewers. We cannot know in advance which will be the audience response. In a performance, we try always to reduce the distance with the audience not because of pre-established schemes or proven strategies, but intensifying our actions at the maximum level we can reach. And yes, when we feel the audience attentive, tense, it is a beautiful sensation (at least for me), even thus human, too human.

VR: What are your intentions to express with your performances?

VS: In our work and also in our workshops with the participants we exert to reduce the intention to zero degree. Intentionality is an ego-motivated and -centred attitude: it means that we already know where we're heading to, which to us is quickly exhausted, and, let me say it, also boring. We wish to examine and offer a space for something to happen. We give ourselves into the action, and intentions or calculations would hinder the flow, as the more neutral and free of premeditation we are, the more possible outcomes an action can have. We respond to the objects, to the other/s, to the space, we listen attentively to all the suggestions already offered there, and are surprised by the potential that emerges, which is often far beyond what would have been our forethoughts.

AP: Our experience is that the more intention is put into an action, the more likely this action is deprived by its vital force. Too much plan can produce a mechanic sensation, and a non-genuine approach, because the action loses its direct emotional impact. This does not mean that we don't know what we're doing, but we avoid imposing intentional meanings a priori to our actions, to let them possibly open to different interpretations.

Performance art is a wide-ranging and yet enigmatic artistic activity. The permutations of an individual action are endless. It is the place where the lived – ephemeral – image is released. Everyone will always seize something from the living image, but perhaps never the image in its entirety. Intuitively, we are keen to say that a performance may allow the viewer and the performer also to come in touch with something unknown, where, through a modality of declared actions, the conventional aesthetic norms are subverted. Consequently, it also provides clues for deciphering the configuration of the things of the world in several different ways, deconstructing them, highlighting certain differences on the basis of sensory stimulations.

Someone may interpret our performances as essential for comparison between Man and the environment. Some other can be more interested on how we explore interrelationships and relational issues along the process, where there the common definitions of object, space and time fall, by the very ephemeral nature, though real, of the performance itself. And there will be also someone who won't feel anything at all.

We perform because we also aspire to our personal growth therefore transformation, and we don't know if we ever succeed, but for us it worth always a try. For us, the world without the live human presence would probably be a static framework, but we feel also a profound urgency: the necessity to communicate in a non-ordinary way, where the spheres of life, experience, emotion and thought are forged by different expressions of a probably same thing. The story always shows itself as history of forms, where the form is the substance that lies beneath its same qualities. However, a performance is never a simple story to tell or represent (as occurs mostly in the theatre), or an idea or concept to be returned by conclusive/defined devices (as for the visual arts). Performance art praxis main task is to reveal to the others, new possible signs that tell of a real emergency, where the performer is also sign him/herself.

Then of course there are also specific issues, which interest us more than others: impermanence, enabling memory, loss of control, knowledge of the Self and of the human constitutional limits, fragility, nomadism, reclusion and forced displacement. Ultimately, in our performance we speak to enhance our ideas on what does mean the presence of Man in this world (which is always more than just a condition), transmuting the space of the action into a free place of negotiation of social, political, civil, hence poetic meanings.

VR: To what extent are you aware of the audience when you are doing a performance?

VS: The perception of audience varies from piece to piece. In some performances we work explicitly and interactively with the audience, we invite them to participate in some way or the other. There I perceive every single notion as in any human encounter: it's a place for meeting.

AP: There are surely moments that when we are fully concentrated to make an action at its best, it may happen that we slightly perceive how much audience there is around or in front of us. However, we know that this concentration serves also to stimulate more their attention by giving the maximum intensity we can to the action we are doing. By being fully into what we are doing, we become like a sort of a magnet. In many performances we act blind folded, consequently we have to rely to other senses, perceiving heat, smells, noises, whispers, murmurs. Hence it happens that this way of performing blind folded leads us a level of concentration, decision and determination that allows us to enter in empathy with the others, conveying, receiving and giving back energy because of being in an unconventional state of awareness, more sensorial and less rational.

VR: Do you take photos and do you make videos in order to be able to communicate what you experienced for the public? Or you use it perhaps as a documentation material for yourself?

VS: Documentation photographs and videos are not for communicating what we experienced, as experience is something very intimate, personal and different from person to person.

Documentation can be in form of archive and presentation of an aesthetical cypher through time and for reference, but I agree with Botho Strauss when he outlined in an essay about Gerhard Richter's over-painted photographs: "Every photograph is a dead moment. An insect of time, stabbed and prepared."

No documentation can ever bring us back to where the real experience happened, it remains a memory-hint, and here visual memory activation is never as powerful as the sensorial experience that happened in the present moment of the live performance.

Sandra Johnston, performance artist from Northern Ireland, recently shared images of her work with us, which is very minimalistic, and from the images we could see that she has a strong presence and concentration. Later she wrote about her breath and the rasp of the charcoal over the old stone floor in nearly darkness. These are elements that an image and even a video can hardly return.

We are very interested about this conflict of ephemeral performance-documentation, and this was one of the motivations of the research in our performance-based movie trilogy *sin[∞]fin The Movie*. We felt the need to examine to which point we can go through image and sound only, and what this stabbed insect of our action can still generate within a spectator – and it is something new, it is no more a performance, neither a documentation, it is a completely

original, new thing.

AP: Documentation is essential to archive, process, and study certain historical contexts. At the same time, documentation should be secondary, and not take the overhand in the workflow. Some footage, and few good images are more than enough. For us, the main factor in our work always remains the live moment, with all its ephemerality and ineffable magic, as it is in life. To plant a seed into a heart, it will flourish and be the most fascinating document of that which that has happened. Imagine of telling to your friend of a performance you've seen: you describe and tell it with your own words, what you remember of it. You begin to tell your own story of the performance, re-visualising in your mind the images you've seen through a sequence of actions, the sensations you felt, some details that grasped your attention more than others, and so your friend will begin visualize in his/her mind the performance s/he hasn't seen through your words: something else, valid, but something else, almost another performance.

KDJ: How does the concept of your performance develop from the fist moment of thought of creating it?

VS: This is an enthralling process really. Often people ask us: "Whose idea was this or that?" and we really don't have an answer. Through the process, an initial vision I had is being transformed, improved or enriched by Andrea, to be then varied again by me, to be executed in the end by Andrea... or vice versa. This is what we like to call 'organic'. Stiff things don't appeal to me, as life itself is in constant in movement. It never happens to us that an idea that we have conceived is executed exactly in the way we have though of it.

AP: We have an idea and a vision, we talk over them together, we analyze them and evaluate their clearance and executability, but already in their set-up has to be adapted according to the space, and during the action it becomes again something different, to be read by the audience finally in their personal way. It's a never-ending process of change. This is also why we usually do not replicate our performance twice, or if so, why they will never be the same in two different places and times. Our conditions change, and therewith the original idea changes. It is an endless procedure, and we really enjoy observing how things instigate and evolve over time.

VR: Did you make rehearsals before you do performance?

VS: No. Rehearsals would compromise the authenticity, which for us is essential to the performative experience. You can't rehearse life, so you can't rehearse a performance.

AP: We always train a lot, corporally, mentally and spiritually, to be ready for anything, to be confident, though we work within failure and impossibility many times. We don't rehearse a performance: it would be like a grammar mistake for us. We don't want to imitate, nor we represent, we look for producing new meanings, which can spring in the moment of performance.

VR: You have organized so far different performances in different places in the world, how do you see the different public and the different culture reacting to your work?

AP: Performing internationally and in various contexts, also outside of the usual art-circuit, is a magnificent venture. We have encountered compassion, curiosity and disclosed hearts anywhere we worked. Outside Europe, sometimes questions come up towards topics that our work relates to, though mostly the motifs we work on are so universal that people of any culture can identify with them. We aspire to make works that don't need language or art history studies to be understood. We point straight to the heart, where any human is the same, no matter if in Singapore, Helsinki or Buenos Aires. Cultural, historical, social and individual backgrounds are divergent, and sometimes symbols are read differently for cultural reasons, or single elements might cause queries, but the essence has been transmitted anywhere.

VS: We continue to learn and acquire new perspectives by living other cultures. We always try to stay for longer periods in the country or continent to develop the work in situ, as we don't like to import a pre-made concept into another context, as if it was a sculpture that remains the same no matter if placed in Covent Garden or Tiananmen Square. Our works mount up thanks to the inspirations that a culture grants us. For example, the performance cycle *Balada Corporal* was originated in Latin America. It consists of four chapters related to the (physical) body, its poetics and possibilities of encounters, something very inborn in Latin American cultures, which in the field of the body are much more 'relaxed' and open than in Europe or Asia. In Asia instead we came up with the seven-parts performance cycle *Panta Rhei* about the concept of constant change and transformation, which is exceptional to investigate while being in contact with oriental cultures that are so deeply connected to their heritage and tradition, but that at the same time are facing radical fast social changes caused by an almost uncontrollable run-up economy.

VR: Does the habit of the public have an influence upon how you create your performance?

AP: It does not influence the creation, but surely it has a fierce impact on the execution and the development of a performance. We are responsive to the public, we listen – for what we can – to where they stand and come to take them from there. We sense if there is already experience with performance art, or if a culture has a corporal tradition or less, and what are the codes for communication.

VS: To take them by the hand to a place, which mostly is unknown to them. This has to be done gently, especially when producing visually strong or extreme live images. We don't want to scare nor offend anybody, and the impact of a live performance is mostly fervid, in one way or another. If we want to open an oyster to reach the pearl it carries, we have to use a proper tool.

VR: You develop live performance actions in outstanding locations around the world, it seems that location within space and time has an important value in your performance. Which are the criteria for the choice of a specific location?

VS: It is like as if the locations have always chosen us. We just attempt to be vigilant and approachable to that which is offered to us. As we don't follow a pre-written script, neither in life nor art, equally is with the places where we perform.

AP: This means that we don't passively wait for a call, on the contrary we are very active in the network and production, and it is probably this way of operating as such that entails also the geography of the places where our performances take place and are presented. We have had already many determinant experiences, which we would have never imagined

before, and we are constantly open to be surprised by the new ones to come.

VR: How do you perceive time passing during your performance?

AP: Dilated, as if liquid.

VS: As with anything worked on with deep concentration, commitment and passion, time loses numbers. It's fascinating how a seemingly unmanageable 24-hour performance passes just in a wink, once the intensity raises. People tell us that for the audience the experience is similar. It's a matter of condensing intense restless sequence of actions, I believe.

KDJ: Does your performance run after a specific time schedule or are there no specific duration periods for each segment in your performance?

VS: This depends on each project. At times it's vital to work durational for allowing the action to develop, evolve and take shape through time. In other projects we are explicitly testing the limits so there is no end until natural exhaustion.

AP: We follow each segment as long as we perceive it fulfils the sense of what we are doing.

KDJ: Is there any kind of spiritual dimension within your performance and if so what is this spiritual dimension? Is there a specific ritual that you do before or during each performance?

VS: We don't represent. We offer what we are. We do not represent ourselves in a state other than the one we are in, here and now.

The spiritual body is as essential as the mental and physical one for us, in life as well as in our performance, and so is the acceptance of the unabridged state of the moment. In this way we can trigger elements that are already stored inside our inner library, we activate them, and therefore open up and unveil hidden treasures. Many times we are impressed of what this process makes clear, in ourselves as well as in the public. It is like digging within a sort of genetic memory, the memory of the subtle 'bodies'. In Sufism culture, memory is considered a sense, just as sight and taste.

AP: I perceive my spirit as my saviour, guardian, engine, protector, maybe my closest friend. I've learnt how to listen at it, and still I have to learn better. Paradoxically, I feel like to be my spirit apprentice. I've learnt to trust through my spirit, and more, to trust it. Therefore, for what I can say, especially when I perform, it is as if I am somehow in a spiritual journey. I also must say that while performing I have many times the sensation that the actions I make derive from some fragmented memories of rituals, which come from very far. Before a performance, I do dynamic breathing exercises, though not always, I try to reach a state of emptiness and deep concentration, as many times we use dangerous materials and objects.

VR: You do performance since many years, probably during that time your physical condition has changed. How do you experience this change of your bodies over time?

AP: We keep training because it is important for the way we perform. The human body is a complex thing. Today I must say that I also do things, which I couldn't imagine to do years ago. Over the years I learnt how to use my body better, to care more for it and experience different corporal possibilities. The key is to be compliant to what my body tells me that I can do with it, and not vice versa.

VS: My body fortunately has grown stronger over the last years, also due to the variety of trainings undertaken on the course of my formation. These new teachings allow me to work on duration or exhaustion without causing myself severe physical complications. We avoid this not only for professional ethics, but also for the amount of live performances that we present. Our schedule is tight and we avoid requiring long recovery times.

In Taipei we made an extremely physical performance for 2 successive days with 2 replicas a day. This was exhausting, and we were happy to have some weeks off after to recharge. Organizers, especially those not yet accustomed to Performance art, sometimes ask us to repeat a performance, just as to repeat a show. Still and all, once they have seen our work live, they understand why we usually decline replicas, and not just for the injuries, but because the magic of the moment cannot be the same two times in a row.

VR: Did your approach towards your performances change over the years?

AP: Today we focus also more on particular social issues, in collaboration with humanitarian organisations, like recently with the project "Fear is Fear. Love is Love", consisting of an intensive workshop and a subsequent live art exhibition project we have made with the street girls in Mexico City.

VS: I have learned that Performance art is such a wide field, and there is no right or wrong, just a variety of possibilities. Political and social performances in certain contexts are a priority, and we recognized as inevitable to explicitly express voices through art activism, too, and not just circulate around the art-for-art. In my opinion, autocratic art does not fulfil its duty; it has to be related to the context always and consign hope to people. This can be done in many ways, by speaking out loudly that which is evident in the world today, and at the same time proposing alternatives.

VR: Has there been in your oeuvre a performance that has been crucial?

VS: Each one has, just like bricks; each work in some way is built upon the experience of the previous one. However, for me personally, *sin∞fin The Movie*, our recent performance-based movie trilogy was a decisive work. The endeavour to transmit the authenticity of performance art in a static and flat medium such as filmmaking was enormous and we gained many new insights into performance art and film.

AP: This project also brought us to work in some of the most challenging places and environments in the world. Having been shot in great parts outdoors, in any condition, this was a liminal undertake, not only physically: in a refugee camp and the military zones in Kashmir, in the searing winds of Tierra del Fuego, or the icy, merciless emptiness of Antarctica.

VS: We understood that we couldn't stitch our ideas over a place. Sometimes we saw a place and thought we could do this or that there. But when we watched the footage, we realized that we were just unaware, that we didn't respond to what the place was actually already offering, but just egoistically enforced a precast idea onto it. Nature and society are already full of art. The duty of an artist is to find and spot these moments or places to make them visible, to underline and reveal them, humbly and gracefully.

VR: In an interview with Karlyn De Jongh for the Personal Structures book Antony Gormley stated: "my body isn't mine either, it's a temporary tenancy, so yes, I'm in my body at the moment, but I think it's a mistake to be saying "my body". We call it my body like we call it my house or my city: that's a convention, not a truth". How do you perceive "your" body, what does it mean to you? And does it mean something different during a performance, when it seems to become part of the viewer too.

VS: As said in the beginning, I cannot prescind the idea of the 'three bodies'. So relating this question of yours only to the physical body, I'd say that my relation with it has always been a technical though respectful one. As an athlete and martial artist I know how to use my body as a machine, a functional element guided by my brain's stimulation, and limited in its natural condition. But I know that I have to treat it responsibly and respectfully to allow it to function. That's why I care for my body (or better: bodies), for the simple sake of maintaining its forces, as gratefulness for what possibilities have been attributed by nature to me. The body is a superb thing, in all its oddities. But once one stops to think of the body as a mere *hyle*, shell, envelope, but as an integral compound of physics, mind and spirit, it turns even more precious: the source of an experience to be shared.

AP: I convene with the expression 'temporary tenancy', but I'm actually interested in scouting what happens there inside, in the given temporality. About the convention of using the possessive adjectives there would be a lot to say, it depends on which point of view we want to tackle this type of argument. The idea of possession varies from culture to culture, from what level of acknowledgment about life you've reached, and basically also from the needs you have in the moment. I think we cannot avoid considering that we are basically humans, with everything that this word implies. Also to perceive 'my' body there are many ways. I realize the importance/gift of walking not just when I walk everyday, more if my knee hurts, because it tells me that I cannot walk properly. I realize how much I need to breath when the air is missing. Physical pain is always something hard to sustain, to the point that all the discourses of this kind around the body may fall. Our body tells, and we have to tune ourselves to it, because we live life through this very body of ours: without it we couldn't tell anything about life.

In a performance I'd rather say that the body is almost everything, as there arise chances to activate a wider emotional sphere with the actions I make thanks to it, and this is absolutely poignant for me, as a performer as well as when I am a viewer.

VR: Marina Abramovic once said that her personal life always had to suffer for art. Is this for you the same as for Marina Abramovic or do you see it totally different? How do you actually live your personal life in relation to art?

AP: We have to constantly face how to solve our economical beings, for instance. But 'suffering' is a big word for this; it's a hitch, a difficulty to face. I prefer to use the term 'striving' instead of 'suffering'. There are always great obstacles to overcome by doing anything committedly, and in art, no matter how hard you work, it is not said that you will obtain

satisfactory results as you imagined. Art is a possibility: sometimes it compensates the efforts to make it, sometimes not. Art, as life, is suffering, but a joy also, a tool to use for the good, but if I look at orphan children on the street with nothing to eat, biting the dust, begging, no hope, and crying for help in several parts of the world where we've been, or at terminally ill cancer patients, adolescents constricted on a wheel chair, unemployed family fathers and mothers, well, at least for respect to these lives, which are part of the world we live in, I would not feel entitled to use the word 'suffering', about the difficulties and distress I encounter for living as an artist. Of course artists suffer for many different reasons, for instance by perceiving the suffering that echoes from every corner of the world, and for private reasons too as all the other human beings. Yet, I think that suffering for an artist is something to be dealt with intimately, because then there is the ring of art at his/her disposal to express it openly. What I can surely say is that I hardly see my life without art, with everything that art involves in good and bad times. To make art we must be ready to give up many things, and relationships, and love.

VS: My life would suffer without art. Art as philosophy is always inspired by life; it grows out of life to be redirected towards life. Life is art, and all life is full of art. And in the best case, art is life. Our art project is a life project, with all its difficulties and favours. I think people suffer in their personal life no matter which profession they do, and for those who are profoundly sensitive, the lack of a true love, always gives suffering. Perhaps this is the kind of suffering that Marina Abramovic meant.

KDJ: You use your body as a material for the creation of your art, but when the performance is over, you use your body for other things. What is the effect of these different moments? Is there for you a difference in the meaning of your body between the moment of being in the performance and being out in the supermarket?

VS: I try to be always aware and conscious of my body. I don't change states or put on another 'sleeve'. Of course during daily life there are moments in which I might not always succeed to be absolutely present, which in a performance we keep as crucial.

AP: During a performance we are only placing ourselves into more abstract or unconventional conditions.

VR: Tehching Hsieh once said in an interview: "I wanted to do one piece about human beings and their struggle in life with each other. I find being tied together is a very clear idea because I feel that to survive we're all tied up. We cannot go in life alone, without people. Because everybody is individual we each have our own idea of something we want to do. But we're together. So we become each other's cage, also if we want a relationship and independence at the same time, that creates a double struggle". Many people seem to have this feeling to be tied to a job, to a person, to a place, to a situation. Do you feel being tied to anything or to your partner?

VS: Peter Sloterdijk thinks that the idea of the individual is something that society wants to uphold for confining ourselves into bubbles, but that in reality is an illusion, as what exists together, influences each other – good or bad, wanting or not. I too think that the individual is an illusion, but less than perceiving this as a cage or being tied up, I perceive this as a being tied together. It's a vital thing to have a connection, to share and be linked (really, not just virtually).

AP: It's crucial to try and bend this union and all these influences in a positive direction. If unions are constrictive conditions based on manipulation for the benefits of egos or illusions, hence they are cause of dissatisfaction and frustration. We have to understand to what we are tied to and why, as the reason for the tie lies mostly in ourselves and in our own decisions. Many times people cut all ties in fright, without analysing that the actual problem is not the tie itself, but to what they tied themselves to. Then they fall back into searching again for new ties and the same plot starts over again.

VS: We work for strengthening the ties in which we trust, which we see part of our lives and which we wish to be part of it as potential of mutual growth, a fertile and fruitful connection. I have these connections with persons I love because we heighten each others spirits and give each other strength, with places all around the world, with animals, with dead ones, with my masters to whom I'm thankful.

VR: The request for recognition, attention, love, like the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan would consider it, is the core of human activity: the capability-possibility to love only once you get to know the love of another for yourself. According to this, then, an individual, I am able to do anything to be loved and to understand the extent to which the other is able to pull him- or her to 'me'. According to this point of view, in what extent do you see certain behaviours and the need to control the body, and possibly the control of other people's bodies in you and in your performance?

VS: None of us two has to pretend. We don't exercise any form of control in our performances, and neither do we in life. The need to control (and to be controlled) is a poison both for the ones who want to exercise control and the ones that have suffered it. Utopically, I'd wish we all would loose control from time to time, not to fall into a destructive chaos, but to liberate ourselves from stiff and oppressive schemes.

AP: We don't want to pull anybody to us forcibly, but invite him/her openly to come closer; neither do we want to push anybody a priori away from us. It would far too much the result of an intention, and would ruin any organic notion in art; it is just a lousy play of manipulation. This is already happening globally in politics and business, and should not affect art at least.

VS: We are not interested in seducing people, as any recognition based on this factor would be just a temporary comment. We are searching for the eternal notions contained into the ephemeral, not the superficial, affluent, rapid ones. We want to touch the bottom of the well, open the boxes and tear out all the hidden treasures and secrets, and this can be done only through mutual trust, not through manipulation or control.

We are interested in creating a common ground together with the public, to openly confront ourselves with ourselves, with our true Selves, and discovering something previously unknown about ourselves – in the best case something beautiful, or fragile, a notion of compassion or liberation that we were not able to unleash before, or even a negative notion which we face more clearly now, to reflect upon and maybe transform into something positive.

AP: It happens that in our performances there are moments of mutual inter-dependence and concrete human interchange, but even then it is up to the other to come with us, let it be or let go: we don't force anyone, and nothing is

taken for granted. We are not interested in who's the player and who's the pawn.

In "*Terra Nova (AmundsenScottOates)*, I was immersed in a huge transparent tank filled with white cold liquid and had a rope tighten to my ankles. The light in the space was very low. Verena offered the rope to two men in the public to pull me up from the tank. They did pull up the rope, but once I was up about 4 meters of height, they just let the rope and I crushed down again into the tank. Of course we had anticipated this eventuality (knowing how to fall and crash properly), otherwise this could have ended badly. Here the question pertains to the existential notion of responsibility, participation and compassion.

VS: We wish primarily for sincerity. We do not create works that catch attention gratuitously. There are moments, which one might find terribly boring, and which essence might reveal just after time. We're not making shows to merely entertain, nor do we use tricks with words or fake smiles or sights. What you see in our performances is profoundly us, to encounter that which is profoundly you.

VR: Were there ever any frictions when it appeared that one of you was not able to carry out a part of the performance that was planned? How do you deal with such a situation during a performance?

AP: We work with failure. It's one of our main topics. There is nothing 'planned'. The solution is not written on paper, and sometimes there is no solution. Between each other, we do roughly agree on frames beforehand, but we don't determine timings, as we know that each one of us needs the freedom to dwell inside an action if the process needs it. Hence it is necessary to be at the same time concentrated on one's own action, while being alert to what the other is up to – a 360° vigilance, cognizance of everything that is happening around, plus the centre in the middle of oneself, too.

VS: What goes, it goes. When we perform, we're on a journey, a shared adventure between us and with the public, we take and show a direction, but we don't know where we will end up to.

Many times the most arresting and poignant moments happen when something unlooked disrupts the surface: just as the sun breaking through heavy clouds on a rainy day, or a raindrop falling from a blue sky.