

Julia Rubies (2018)

Dec. 2018

Dear Paz,

I write you a few traces that were left with me from the workshop. I transcribed some notes that I took in my notebook during the process (besides the more theoretical ones), together with what I remember, what was difficult for me, and what I have kept thinking about.

I would like to say that if we would have done the practice for longer, the information would have settled in a different way and we would be speaking about different points. So what I am writing about has less to do with the practice per se, but more with the reception of your practice on my body in those 5 days which we spent together with the whole group.

There is also the possibility that, after I spill things out, it turns out I have been working differently with the practice, that misunderstandings become evident, in which case it can be interesting.

This text is comprised by many sections because many things happened during the course of the workshop. I do not know what can be of use for you, so, for that reason, I tried to be brief but still include as many of the notes as possible.

If there is anything that is written in a weird incomprehensible way, let me know and I will clarify.

I remember this workshop as a very beautiful week which left me with a lot of *food for thought*.

On a general level, I have to explain that from my position as a student, after having passed through various dance institutions - more and less regulated, each with its logics and directions - this practice was like a (photography) **negative** which revealed many important aspects of doing the thing we do everyday. The encounter with the practice, which puts into question 'from where' things are done, was absolutely (and paradoxically) *useful* for me, in this moment in time in relation to my personal process.

It was important to find myself in the action of leaving behind, turning away from a known type of dancing-body into another type of body which leaves the logics of production of value and dis-placing instrumentality and finality. It is very alleviating operating away from what a contemporary dancer's body in the West that passed through many institutions and that has been constantly inputting into her system, to find something that repurposes the instrumentalization of form into something else.

Placing oneself in this practice allowed me to change my positioning in relation to what the body is producing, being released from having to relate everything that is done from a situated position, always referencing the same styles, tendencies, histories, the same people, in the same way.

This practice, in principle, proposes a concrete alternative. To me it has been a tangible proposal to rethink, which opens doors to another alternative in which the continuity of different values can come through. All of these are very refreshing notions to be working with, although actually practicing it was initially very challenging for me.

Does your practice have a name?

WORKSHOP:

Beginning:

I appreciated being able to read the essay you sent us prior to starting the workshop, so that we could start to situate ourselves and understand what this practice is concerned with. It was also helpful to have more of a speaking session at the first day, and start to piece the puzzle together, digesting the information together as of the first day.

Later as you remember, I found that way of entering the practice more challenging.

In some moments I had difficulties understanding how we were speaking about particular concepts in relation to the practice; this, having to do with how people relate to certain words. After further speaking with you and the group, I had a better picture of the orientation of those words and how they were weaving the landscape within which the practice existed.

Note: Language. This point is not to suggest a change in language, but to highlight how a lot about learning is understanding how to decode, translate, and specifically use certain vocabulary in relation to a specific object.

Some of these questions // observations I had at the beginning:

- ! *Why / from where does this body move? Is it whatever?*
- ! *From where do I perceive?*
- ! *How do I move to perceive?*
- ! *What does it mean to move to perceive?*

I encountered the feeling that *the doing* interferes with perceiving because motion triggers sensation which can interfere with the perception (more 'noise' is generated).

-*to perceive*: It was not obvious to me, at the very beginning, when we were speaking of perception, on what level of perception we were speaking about. Is it action-perception, performed-perception, conscious-perception, suspicious-perception, unconscious-perception?. I had to enter the realization that the body is already always perceiving all the time (one can not not perceive) and then relate to perception on that level. Nothing else has to be done, nothing extra has to enter perception, nothing at all has to enter because perception is always happening. Instead, paying attention or listening to what is already happening is enough.

- *bring to the surface*: I remember having to give up my bodily sensation that I associate with the word **dancing** and get into something much more pedestrian, which at the level of sensation falls on another plane.

- Initially, the word *superficial* did not feel obvious because it connected me even more in relation to a certain value -ironically. Later on, once I was entering more the thing, *bringing it to the surface superficially* made a lot more sense. The day you commented that: "this is moving as a child would move" helped me find that head-space / attention-space needed. The reflective analytical conscience is left in another place.

In general it has to do with this passage from language to body, and locating that translation.

It was not so useful for me in this practice to ask the how's and why's (where is the movement coming from, what is making the body move...) from a cerebral place or a needing to understand, rather than entering a more trial-and-error basis. In retrospect, I would try a more approximation based strategy - entering or attempting the practice without the need to know the answers of what the practice is, or whether it is being achieved; but instead *remaining with the questions*. Although, I would have needed to know to not pay attention to these, that decoding them cerebrally would not bring the solution.

Entering practice:

"Imitation" was a helpful entry point into the practice. I understood a lot when I watched others. I wonder however, how can this be expanded? How can the practice, once it is found, find other forms so it does not turn into a new aesthetic paradigm. Also, how to know it is NOT happening?

But not for aesthetics or stylistic reasons, but in an attempt to reverse-engineer the process; by imitating their physical expressions, being able to tap into what kind of thinking could produce that. It would be nice to try and define collectively some of these concepts, and find, with a group what it is that we identify as value. (This guessing was backed with the knowledge we had, knowing the whole background of what is being sought, and looking for that in the motion).

I was missing the actual command that would articulate and trigger all the logics we spoke about in theory, into the practice.

At one point, I had to ask my peers what they were thinking about whilst doing the practice; what was their inner-command. One of them told me they kept repeating a plane to themselves: 'touch touch touch touch' constantly, while moving. Then, in my interpretation, I saw that it has more to do with a type of attention than with a type of sensation: an attention that moves the *self-gaze* (or place of consciousness) almost outside the body. Each plane of activity has a specific intuition to it. It is almost a more than a task-based activity, a way of entering different planes of attention.

In this sense, when it became articulated as *the form of the activity* it became very clear to me, which is also why it reminded me of a task. Because these perceptions in these planes are always already happening, what one is doing is tapping into them in a particular way, leading me to think about them as *types of attention*; a type of observation, a particular reception of information.

I will explain through the example of touch:

I will ask myself: "What does *touch* (as a thing) feel?"

Another command could be: make *touch* go through all those places and gradations it can go through, without me having to register its journey, without me needing to know where it went. It's almost *touch* experiencing *touch* in a **state of constant present through constant change**.

On the plane of weight, I thought what could help me might be to think about: the gradation of change of weight from one instant to the next. However, in this logic, phrasing it as the gradation of change "from one instant to the next", indicates the appearance of events: *one instant* and *the next*, with a transition in between, where the weight change happens. This gives already a structural understanding of what is being produced (events vs transitions), which requires a certain legibility and a different value being placed in an event and in a transition. This is where we enter what I call the compositional problem, where things are again becoming composed, aware of themselves and inscribed in the apparatus which it is trying to escape from.

But what would happen if everything that is happening is understood as if it were a constant transition, and the gradation of weight is always continuous? Events being always transitions? Weighing ourselves in an eternal transition, playing, volume-ing ... The sequence-shot example would be useful in this case to situate oneself in this constant present, always actualizing, where directions are taken based on constant present conditions.

I am very aware of the word *mirada*, which I relate to gaze (as a portal) - without a lot of the performative and social connotations the word “gaze” has. I see the gaze of each of the planes as being their sensory landscape, the filter through which information circulates through as sensibly intelligent information which seeps in and through, without having any opinions on it but just allowing it to come through.

There is something that has to do with the word “continue” in this action, that always pulls forward from a present that is self-actualizing.

This state of eternal transit was challenging to tap into. It was hard to leave a compositional or self-reflective mind; **to not recognize or name** what I was doing, becoming estranged and to dissociate oneself from things that have been so familiar for so long. In the back of my head, something is always keeping track, and that interfered in the action of receiving without decoding or interpreting.

When I entered the *thing*:

Suddenly all the language started to sink in, and I could start to understand the reason behind the choice of language used, a posteriori, from the experience of movement towards the language.

The exercise that helped me a lot was the day we moved in any way while we had a whatever- conversation, having the attention be neither in the motion nor in the conversation.

This activity connected me with the kind of attention we were searching for as well as with this thing of not having to register what had just happened.

When we presented it, invited spectatorship:

I had a very difficult time being observed during the practice due to the kind of attention it requires from the dancer.

The external observation placed me in a dramaturgical situation of responsibility and value, and again a compositional mind entered, needing to organize the information that the body produces, to respect the audience member, whilst at the same time NOT-doing that in order to respect the practice. This two-fold situation placed one in a conflict of interests, a contradictory psychological place which made it so I couldn't fulfill either desire. It would require more practice and experience to learn to manage this expectation.

I found this situation vulnerable because it confronts each one of us with our sense of wanting to deliver, of control, of wanting to be faithful to both pulls and having to manage. Experiencing oneself in this moment and seeing how one handles it is

extremely informative. I imagine that each one will have different relationships with this position, though it is nevertheless interesting to witness yourself in it. I would love to try it again and develop different strategies around it.

Things that I kept thinking about right after:

I find the information that the practice carries with itself to be vitally important. However, seeing how hard it was for me to practice it at first, caused a lot of contradiction and confrontation about *how* I practice the craft in general, what I am reproducing and to what I am giving continuity to. Not with moralistic spirit, or to say that other practices or ways of seeing are not valid, but it did lead me to become aware of the extent to which certain tendencies are found in my way of doing things, what I have practiced a lot of, and what I have had very little practice of. How have I practiced up to know certain types of thinkings and usages of the body in relation to certain realms of representation, questioning who am I working for, and becoming aware of the socio-cultural apparatuses that align those intuitions.

I relate the movement produced with a residue of another activity that occurs, that decentralizes what is seen from the main activity. These are bodies that are in an action of doing something illegible, murmurous but yet specific. Acting within a logic of the *thing*, constant and unpredictable to the external eye. Doing this feels very de-constructive. One must let go of their own strategies that they have built for many years in order to “keep going” through time. *When one is disarmed from it all and has nothing to grasp on or to relate to, what does one hold onto?*

I would have loved to have more time to be with this practice as well as with the group. I believe that from the situationality of this practice a lot can emerge and enter into other important reflections and compartments.

What have I done with all this information?

For some weeks around your workshop I was studying with Quim Bigas, and I found thematic similarities in your ways of working and what you are working with, information that interconnects very well, and that made me rethink big.

After finishing my study time in Barcelona I returned to PARTS where I had the opportunity to continue thinking and spending time for this information. It seemed important to me to digest it all in my own way, to let go through the practices and go to other places.

As I said, your practice proposes very important aspects for me, as a student in a regulated institution with very prescribed directions, expectations... which influence one's aligning. These institutional values can be blueprinting in ways that one is not even aware of. It was vital to encounter ways of becoming aware of them. These blueprints and modus operandi are intensely present in how one feels the need to find oneself, define oneself, see how we practice themselves, call themselves, use themselves in reference to a value system that is very real and very economical. Most students transit through these positions as we project ourselves and take decisions in relation to the market-system.

For me your practice was a fantastic way of proposing the erasure of these, which highlight and bring to our awareness their presence and embeddedness. Nonetheless the practice really aims to find an alternative way of conceiving **doing** and **spectating**, which escapes such logics, and speak of something *else*.

From both your and Quim's practices and learnings, multiple doors opened up from which to keep on playing and speculating from. Particularly in relation to your information, I kept working with the following: I have been interested in using some of the planes from your practice in my technique classes, as another perspective from which to access movement. This has helped me distance myself from form through entering a different state of disposition. Despite the fact that form is already there, written in movement material, my way of understanding and relating to the form can replace the relevance of form altogether. For example, sometimes I will decide beforehand what kind of attention I will use when I put a form into action; what kind of filter I will approach the form through. This changes 'from where' the form emerges. It would be like a reversal of the practice. In my opinion, this also modifies the experience or content of the form, from the dancer's perspective. What is being activated is something else.

I have had the privilege to be able to spend the afternoons of two weeks in a studio in which I could investigate more, practicing what was interesting and difficult from this time. I also brought in many things that came out during my time with Quim, things from the workshop and other things that interested me and made a mix of these intersections.

Personal Application:

I used those principles that were difficult for me about your practice and I expanded their application to a more general situation. My "thing that did itself" (instead of the body in the state of dance) was 'spending time in the studio'. I wanted to suspend certain logics that were associated to how one would usually use studio space (with all its implications and projections) and see what would happen.

I set myself some general tasks. Some of them were:

- I spend time in the studio, without the need to do anything. In a moment where the rest of the building was working almost as a production-house (preparing repertoire, rehearsing a million things, preparing showings... etc), I spent time in a studio without doing anything.
- I let myself be guided by a *feeling sense*, instead of an internal voice directing me what to do through an image of what I think I had to be producing, or an idea of something.
- Whatever it is that I encounter myself doing, following the *feeling sense*, I try to think that everything is equally useful and equally useless. I try to **find** myself in situations instead of producing them, I think that I put myself in a *state of disposition*, and from there I see what happens.
- I make use of the word 'continue', in order to keep spending time in something useful/less, in order to not drop the second my head decides that the action is finished; but to continue, insisting on it and seeing what else emerges out of that.

(I try this strategy of externalizing an action and putting myself as a receiver of this action - similarly to your practice). This helps me as a way of delaying instrumentality to the point of being OK with things not even being a thing, or not even being.

It all became a very phenomenological experience.

I spent a lot of time observing and perceiving.

I rapidly enter into the world of tasks which bring different types of attending. The attentions / gazes / planes becoming the driver of the whole logic-system of what is happening. It has been interesting to transit through many different types of these.

I have been encountering myself a lot in this thing of *cosificar*, or "thinging"; this thing we were saying of *ser roca y estar roca*. (*Ser* and *estar* are two different forms of the verb *to be* in Spanish, *ser* speaking of permanent and lasting attributes whilst *estar* is speaking of temporary states or locations). The inclusion of both uses (being-becoming in a rock or inhabiting rock-like states) was useful in order to feel that this was enough of an occupation. Feeling like one is already in "a state of, or in the becoming of anything" was a way of already feeling occupied in the nothingness, and it psychologically helped, at times. I am always already busy (breathing and sensing, for example).

Something else that has been calling my attention has been finding a place from where

to move from which has not so much to do with the performer as material, with the subject or the ego of the body. The logics of the movement come from somewhere more implicit and in a way more basic, exiting certain plains of cultural representation.

Not using the space in a productive way was difficult, especially thinking that soon I will not have much access to studio space and I should be using this time to create something productive, making a work, doing something useful thus entering this plain of instrumental logic. Instead, I am busy with being in a room doing things that are “nothings”, but that at the same time are.

Although sometimes this state of not needing to do anything, or experiencing the nothing can bring one to a certain form of nihilism, I managed to find it to be somehow a positive nihilism that worked in contrast to, or as an emptying out from the habitual order.

It brought me to really ask myself:

- If there is nothing that I have to do, what do I do?
- If I try to separate my activity from a system of production, what do I do and in what way?
- What becomes valid and in terms of what?
- What are the value systems that I relate to, and when all of that is taken away, what remains?
- If there is no structure to be fulfilled, nothing to be fulfilled, what do you do with your time?

I try not to ask myself WHY I do what I do in this case, although it is a very difficult question to avoid.

Quickly one enters many thoughts around work-unemployment, universal basic income, project venus, AI, some kind of utopian futurism, as much as reflecting on the human condition, labor, life-cycles, cultural dramaturgies, the psychology behind occupation and how the use and waste of time dictates our well-being and in what way. All these thoughts were not at all merely conceptual, but have very material and tangible effects on the body and the person.

I also experienced that different people might relate very differently to this particular situation. Many people might try to spend time doing absolutely nothing and will have no problem doing it, they will not have an existential moment at all, but might already be experts at handling this situation, or not even read it as a situation. Personally, it brings me in a state of confrontation with how I use time and resources in the now and what

are the different ways and possibilities of doing this in the future; but not everyone will experience it like this. Some people might still feel resistances in this process but not feel the need to resolve it. Maybe there are people who find it super productive to not have to feel like there is the need to produce anything.

I keep researching with this and it evolves to several other places, I will be curious about sharing this further with you when more has developed.

I would love to have the opportunity to re-search all of this again and spend more time with these questions, building more thoughts and practices with you and other people in the future.

I hope that what is shared here has been of use to you.

Looking forward to speaking with you soon.

Warmest of hugs,

Julia

Further questions:

- What is this practice NOT in relation to the theater space, but in relation to the materiality of the performer itself?
- Has this practice become aestheticized? How could this practice expand in its form?
- How to give further keys to the readability of what is happening when this is presented in a performative situation? Is that it's main objective? What comes next?