

Marina



Roots
Performance, 4 hours
Cappadocia/Turkey, 2008

Ephemeral Art – Psychophysical
Training in Performance

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'The search for personal development is one of the central principles of the art of live performance. The work is not considered a profession, but as the scene of experience or awareness of use in life. There is not a strict separation between art and life.' (COHEN, 1989: 104)

In performance art, the training is conducted through various techniques and liminal characteristics in order to create a preparation for efficient acting performance. The risks, the unexpected and meditation are valuable tools for the artist. The proposal of psychophysical training (working the body and mind of the actor-performer) was based on Renato Cohen's studies from 1989 and 1998 as well as and performance pieces from the 1960s and 1970s. The act of fasting has been described by many performers as a preparatory stage for the performance, expanding the perception and the state of daily attention. The similarity with meditative practice is necessary, and that from the 60s (1960) have been extensively tested by artists. Such as the ability to remain silent during daytime, blindfolded and walking long urban spaces.

Pieces like *Roots* and *In Between* remind me of these searches for attention and true interaction, putting the body through a challenge similar to some tribal rituals. Similar to pieces we performed in Brazil, they are very influenced by the habits of Indigenous and African rituals. It seems that they are not trying to please the audience – if there is an audience – they are looking for another state of mind and presence, provoking a deep change in the environment and a deep change within themselves. If we consider contemporary art as a puzzle, we can take the risk of not being understood and not being seen. Nonetheless, the world itself has become a big puzzle, with all its intolerance and crisis, thus, once again we can call back all the artists, not economists, to show us the way.

Description of classes

Students in the third year of the course, Communication and Arts of the Body, specializing in performance, were submitted to these practices from August to November 2005. We made a compilation of some procedures established in the area by artists such as Marina Abramovic and Ulay, Tehching Hsieh and Joseph Beuys, to name a few. The group was required to write about it and report their impressions to the class. In addition they were also required to prepare a presentation based on their experiences. Outside the classroom, the process required much more. Within a work of close attention, which Renato Cohen called *Day Life* (1998: 75–78), experiments were held over a period of days, for example, forty-eight hours without talking, seventy-two hours tied to each other, all of which required changes and adjustments in daily lives. From the beginning the goal was more explicit: a systematic training in psychophysical performance from the art-life approach. In fact we focused on stage performance, where the body becomes an essential part of the research, an attentive body to the demands of the contemporary scene, the unexpected events and possible risks.

'The body, trying (the performance) takes risks, related to the unpredictable and to face our own limits. (...) A proof of that are the experiences of *Day Life* that put the body in an unusual situation, causing a change in body-mind state interesting to be seen.' (Testimony of student Isabel Soares, report of activities.)

The first classes were marked by active meditations, wheel rituals and exercises in pairs. The altered states of consciousness and body perception also focused in shamanic visions, whose acts inform the fabric of the performance scene. In addition, the second stage of work was marked by ritual wheels from Brazilian indigenous people such as *Mariri* and *names of Power* – learned from a shaman and used in the beginning and end of classes – getting used to ritual structures. The *Mariri* wheel is native from Brazil, named a power plant. The ritual involves all turning counter-clockwise, arms intertwined,



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speaking Mariri, and according to the steps on the floor, right foot forward, marking the 'ma' and left foot behind, the 'Ririe'. *Name of Power* wheel evokes the name of power of each one, according to shamanism – vowels taken from the first name – without turning, hand in hand and the circle wide open. Alternating a person in front and one behind in the same circle, one jumps back and forth screaming his name of power. For example, the name may be Patricia, the person will scream 'AIIA!' Jumping hand in hand with his partner. It is important to move men and women in both circles, female and male energy.

'I confess that I was a little afraid of that discipline because it seems to be the most radical of practices. But the Mariri wheel soon attracted me and made me feel comfortable. And that is how I felt about that period of psychophysical training.' (Testimony of student Isabel Soares, report of activities.)

In training the intensity of spontaneous movements may arise, seeking the non-rational and aesthetic. Inclusively we tried non-vision, an experience that left the boundaries of the classroom: a student led the other through the campus, eyes covered. Furthermore, the group was divided into pairs and had practiced tying one another with a meter long rope. This training was based on a famous performance of 1983 in which Linda Montano and Tehching Hsieh were tied to each other in New York City for a year.

'The whole time I thought it was almost impossible to be tied to someone for a year. It is a very intense training to give up wishes, desires and time. We were not alone at any time! At the University people came all the time inquiring curiously. We took part in body classes without problems. We felt that people were more open to help when they saw someone else's limits. But that brought me another reflection on real people with physical disabilities, who have no chance amongst "healthy" people. We do not want to give up our time to help someone with difficulty.' (Testimony of student Paula Barros, report of activities.)

Prior to fasting, the vigil, tying up, non-speaking and non-seeing, a colorful diet was proposed that lasted six days. This training was carried out individually by seven students who

ate only green food for two days, yellow food for two and finally red food for two days. There was free meditation at the beginning and at the end of each color that lasted the time of the burning of an incense stick of the respective colors. Intake of animal protein and carbohydrate was restricted and only bio-rice and honey were permitted.

Of the twenty students involved, eleven attended only one psychophysical training session. Six made two and three made three training sessions, totaling thirty-one extra-class experiences.

An important event was the fifteenth edition of the Videobrasil Festival, which took place in São Paulo in September with the theme of performance, showing a great display of international video performances, discussions and live performances. We saw the records of the Fluxus group and Trisha Brown among others. The great similarity between the content we studied and festival theme enriched the artistic process of the discipline, considering the scarce audiovisual material on this subject in Brazil.

These experiences amplify our perception and enable our contact with personal aspects neglected in day to day living. In addition, this performance has had a great impact amongst the students, as described from their personal reports and experiences. The training extended the repertoire of preparation in performance for students, in the interaction of their daily lives, increasing awareness, expansion of perception – vision, hearing, touch and spontaneous creation. It is believed that the education of performance, beyond experiences in the classroom, need to be extra-class experience. Art and life, within and without the classroom.

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In Between
Performance, 4 hours
Castello di Rivoli/Italy, 2008

Letter to Buba

Why am I moving like this?
How am I choosing
a route for a walk? How am
I choosing a person
to talk with? Why did
I choose you? How did we
choose each other?

In Between

Holland, April 2008

It lasted too short. I tried
to be aware of my steps, and
distance between Buba
and me. At one point I felt as
if we became one – alone
with all these blurry colorful
movements of the human body
in the corner of my eyes.

We met, we embraced,
and we split. It was not like
real life, was not like previous
performances. Even though
there were people, I felt
if though I did something for
the camera, and I didn't
like this feeling. Which was
the moment when we met?

Roots

Turkey, June 2008

Cappadocia.

12 o'clock. We found a place
and sat opposite each
other. From some reason,
some 'silent agreement' we
always do this – look to
each other for a while and
then we start.

We did not have an audience.
Hidenori was the only
person present. He helped
us document our work.
We started. Warm air made
a strange sound in the dry
grass. And even though we
did not have an audience,
I felt that all the past of that
place was present. It seemed
as if every cave around us
had a pair of eyes which were
looking to us.

We started to dig a hole in
front of us. It was really hard

work. Soil was very dry
and it was almost impossible
to dig without some tool.
We used our hands and small
stones we found. While
we were digging my energy
changed. At one moment
I was high and had a lot of
energy, but at another moment
I was so slow. Then I realized
which position of my body
is the best for me. I found my
own rhythm, slowly repeating
the same movement. Addition-
ally, I noticed that Buba's
hole was wide, and my hole
was narrow, but deep.
Moreover, I started to think
that this was connected
with our own personality and
the way we were searching
for these things. On the one
hand, she looked left and right,
spreading around and
grasping everything she could
and on the other hand I was
more introverted, diving deep-
ly into myself.

Digging was such hard
work, but I'd never doubt we
would reach each other.
Maybe I was thinking that soil
will fall down on our hands,
but still I knew that we will
come to each other.
Finally, we were both very
persistent in our own way, of
course and I'd really never
doubt ...

After 3 or 4 hours I touched
Buba's hand. I knew that
I would do it ... At this moment
I felt so calm, so safe.
We lay and held hands under
the ground. Our bodies were
as still as statues.
Hands were connected.
The soil was pressing hands.
Bugs were walking over my
face. We were looking to

each other. I felt the smell of
dry soil in my nose while
I was breathing. The sun's
rays were too strong and be-
cause of that I felt like I
was melting.

With 'silent agreement' we
decided to finish. I never know
how we do this, but it is
related to eye contact which
we have most of the time.
We get up, look at each other's
eyes for a few minutes like
at the beginning and we walk
in the same direction.

Did we grasp our fears,
our roots? When the subject
of the ritual converted into
the performance art, I wonder-
ed after these.

In Between

Italy, September 2008

It could be felt in the air.
We were preparing ourselves
7 days for that work. Very
simply we learnt how to stand
for a few hours.

Beginning was around
4 p.m. or 5 p.m. It was hot out-
side. We were standing in
the front door of the museum
and looking to each other.
Concentrating. Breathing.

On the work where are
no movements, I try to concen-
trate on every part of my
body, being aware of my feet,
knees, legs, hands, relation-
ship among Buba and me, and
in relation to the surrounding.
I was looking into Buba's eyes
and I felt that I had to move,
but I could not. My body was
still, I was not. Inside of myself
I was going up and down ...

I was spinning, moving,
running, but body was still.
After the first hour of
standing my blood went down
into my foot and my hands.
I felt inner peace, but I felt
dizzy too and hardly succeed
to concentrate. I was look-
ing to Buba's eyes. People
were walking around us. I was
aware of them but just
with corner of my eye. After
the first or second hour, with
very slow movements we
came closer to each other.
We embraced and I felt relief.
At the moment when we
started to pull each other's
hair, I felt better than when
I was standing alone for a few
hours full of tension.
Movements of pulling a hair
made balance between
bodies, contrary to hours of
stillness.

Who was pulling stronger?
Who was pulling longer?
Every movement, every reac-
tion, question and answer,
the way we share things, and
how we give, and how
we take from the other person
is the visual expression
of our thoughts, like perfor-
mance is.



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The Publications Project

This booklet is part of a growing collection of artists
publications issued by the Dutch Art Institute (DAI), produced
in collaboration with the Werkplaats Typografie and
edited by artist/curator Delphine Bedel.

The 2009 edition consists of 15 publications by
different artists, varying from printed matter, book and artist
edition to performance artefact. For each project, the
artist teamed up with a graphic designer from Werkplaats
Typografie, and invited a guest author to contribute. Over
the period of one year, various aspects of publishing –
concept, editing and design, production and distribution –
were addressed, while the artists were invited to see
the publication as process, as a way of generating work or
conversation, rather than just representing it.

The DAI is an MFA program that provides emerging
artists with an international platform for exchange, collabora-
tion and dialogue with peers as well as with established
practitioners and theoreticians.

Gabriëlle Schleijpen, Course director
DAI / Master Programme ArtEZ Institute of the Arts

Colophon

Concept:
Buba Čvorić, Marina Tomić

Texts:
Samira Borovik
and Marina Tomić

Images:
Roots (p. 1, 5): Hidenori Mitsue
In Between (p. 9, 16): Nemanja Ladić, Boris Stanić

Concept + Layout:
Marc Hollenstein, Werkplaats Typografie
/ ArtEZ, Institute of the Arts

Copy-editing:
Steve Rushton

Printed by
Drukkerij De Rijn, Velp

Published by
DAI / ArtEZ, Institute of the Arts

Head of the Publications Project:
Delphine Bedel

Contact:
www.dutchartinstitute.nl
www.werkplaatstypografie.org

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ISBN:
978-94-90294-13-7

Buba Ćvorić and Marina Tomić
Enschede, 2009.

Dutch Art Institute

DAI private / DAI public / DAI project
Research & Practice in Art

Master Programme / ArteZ Institute of the Arts

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