

## Practice

If I don't commit to representation what is it that I am visualising as an artist? Am I then a non-visual visual artist?

'Stage of Recovery' is the size of an average small stage. It is 250 centimetres by 250 centimetres in size, and 65 centimetres high. Four large, thick pillows are placed on top, attached to the base, stable, covered with cotton fabric. It can hold the activities of one participant and sometimes myself, and it is only used during the one-to-one sessions. During the sessions the participant is on stage, mostly alone, they are exposing themselves, their condition, on the stage, as they are so used to doing in daily life, with one small difference: here they are working on the condition that made them feel pain. I am around the stage, and I can see what is going on, how the movements are progressing. Sometimes I will ask the participant to repeat a technique, to continue, to take time and to rest. The soft stage is there to remind them that there can be a place that can be soft and easy, a place where, instead of performing a social role, they can release the tension created by that same role that they have constructed for themselves to perform in their daily life. Instead of creating even more difficulty than they have already, the process helps them navigate the ways of releasing the difficulties. The structure is made out of wood, it is installed in a room, it is warm, but sometimes I need a blanket; especially during the breathing techniques, I have noticed that the participant's circulation is altered and that they feel colder than usual.

What in the past started with my need to prepare and to recover from physically and mentally demanding performance pieces, has gradually become a research into the physiological and pathological conditions of the body in the hyper-capitalist era which dooms us to autoimmune illnesses, stress, discomfort, asthma, insomnia, panic attacks, anxiety, fatigue, nausea, food disorders, mania, paranoia, arthritis, depression, addiction, to name a few. Over the years I recognised that some of my own techniques (breathing, movement, voice) could help others to build their own

routine of self-recovery. If in the past this practice was a way to build technique within the medium of performance, now it is a shared practice that is open-ended.

Through 'Dynamis', my contribution to documenta 14, I was able to share my routine within the limitations of an exhibition format, it was blocked in a fixed time of presentation, execution and production and this made me feel constantly defensive. I felt that I was betraying my entire practice for the sake of one artwork and one exhibition. It was difficult to find a way out when I was pressed to contextualise ten years of developing personal techniques into a solid artwork. Those same reasons made me abandon working with a group, there was no time for me to work with the particularities and conditions that each participant was bringing to the work. There was no space to focus, observe and learn from the steps of seeing my personal technique evolve in the bodies of others. There were requirements and limitations in order for the presentation to take place, which didn't allow for anyone to be aware of what their bodies were able to give in the group and in the work, and I was extremely sad that I wasn't able to do what I desired most, which was to help the participants physiologically through my practice.

Some bodies, which means some voices, are under shock and there is a need to form steps for recovery. There is no such thing as recuperation and a healthy, normal state. There is a stage that allows the person to recognise, explore, and learn from their physical condition, illness and pain. How and in which way an organism becomes well is not really definite. In Greek the word *ἰαση*, in English 'iasi', means 'recovery', it is the time it takes for a body to recuperate from illness back to what it was before with the information that has been acquired by that illness. By altering the tuning of the voice, the body starts to vibrate differently, and some of the organs in pain can be touched. Through training I follow and support each participant to tune their voice differently and to realise another interiority of their body. By that tuning they

can become stronger and physically better. The diaphragm is not really an organ but a muscle, it lies between the upper and the lower part of the body and establishes the balance of the interior and exterior of the spine. It sets the balance and it distributes the air, thus it tunes the voice throughout the whole body. Every breath is a tone to the interior and exterior of life. While taking care of the breath the voice starts to sound as it is formed, and the whole world starts to vibrate differently. We can just breathe and we are there, we don't need to make declarations and statements, we can also just be there; so many people forget that breathing in a place is enough. Everything else becomes an extraction from someone else's breath.

The treatment evolves according to what the participant reveals on stage, there is not so much talking but breathing, movement and voice. The techniques came about from 2009 until today while preparing (recovering) for demanding performance works. They evolved mostly through observing people in different places. I started by following and memorising the walks of friends: their movements could tell me how they were, how they felt. If I felt their walking alter, I would ask how they felt, what was going on, and then I would take this information and work on it, day by day. I observed how it translated to my body. I tried observing people in offices, different workers, women in the 1950s presenting cars on rotating platforms, their smiling faces; how they behave is how their bodies are formed through their work, consistently repeating the same routine. I realised that I had to prepare and decompress out of my observation exactly as I hoped their bodies, the workers' bodies, would escape from this physiological manipulation. I find in all of these activities that there is no voice, only executions, bodily executions, there is no time for an articulation of passions: there is no laughing, no crying, all of that happens in a break with self-control. I was observing the builders while real estate was booming in Williamsburg, I recorded the sound of the subway workers,

the hipsters waiting for the train – their postures were similar to the workers during the break – everything was mixed up, collapsing in a huge hyper-capitalist bubble of bodies without voice, only postures, posing, doing everything on-line, texting, but not speaking. I started to record and mimic their sounds and giggles, and through this I started working on voice techniques and on training my diaphragm as an interior muscle. I never liked to go to the gym, all the techniques happened in bed, on the carpets of different houses, in whatever place I was crashing. None of the techniques are supposed to happen in a particular environment but in one where there is some comfort and time to observe and focus on your body and how you feel.

In 2011, when the Occupy Wall Street movement happened, the voice became a tool and a threat; the public assembly was our power and turned into a criminal act. The oppression and isolation I experienced in the years after brought me to confront the fact that, to know that, the voice is where I needed to focus the most. How we come together on the softness of the stage can recover the pathologies of the social stage we are put into, to play out perfectly made roles without escape, and with no cure, except that of medication and meditation designed, at least, to maintain our efficiency as workers.

For each case I write protocols based on expression, manifestation, then treatment and recovery. Expression is what the participant tells me they feel, the manifestation is what I see happening and what they describe as the cause of their pain and discomfort. The manifestation, which is mostly revealed during the participant's time on the 'Stage of Recovery', will tell us what is happening in general to the participant's body and how they are presently taking care of it. The way they take care of it will tell us how I need to navigate the treatment with them. It is always in the last phase of the sessions that I combine breathing, movement and voice, which becomes the practice of recovery.

The mechanism of paid sick leave is activated only when pathologies, stresses, panic attacks, autoimmune disorders and so on are turned into medically described conditions and are medicated. I try to resist this mechanisation of the body (sick or healthy) and to create a space and time, that they already have, for each participant to find ways to take care of themselves. Through navigating the pathologies that, until this point, seemed insignificant to them, they can recover and continue and prepare for a moment when the body will need to be strong.

How do I write all of this with such conviction? My only imperative as an artist, which is transmitted through my actions, is that no one should lose faith in their own momentum, their power, their personal capabilities. Artists are already aware that no value can be attributed to this momentum, since nature and existence cannot be classified into wage labour, profit and money. I take my experience as an artist, who for many years has worked through performance in demanding bodily and mental states, into a knowledge that is shared, with the hope of helping others to create techniques of self-determination and recovery, 'IASI'. Three art institutions aligned and hosted this practice, allowing me the space and time to expand it into public research.

Each session is between thirty and forty minutes long. It starts with a greeting, a small conversation with the participant. How do they feel, what's been happening recently, do they feel pain and if so where? Then they take off their shoes and they go on stage.