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OPEN PRACTICE

C O N V E R S A T I O N S

I have also been intrigued by the relationship between chaos and control: disturbing usual patterns, ideas etc. (CHARLES BALL)



SNEAK PEEK...

Inside the process of **Charles Ball**, facilitator of this weeks Open Practice session, conversing with **Emma Wilson**

*Hello Charles,
I'd love to hear about your experience of facilitating Open Practice today, given that it was your first time...*

My experience facilitating Open Practice was enjoyable and engaging. Most of the effort went into the preparation, trying to construct a 2 hour session which would be intellectually engaging (most of my teaching experience has had a stronger physical focus).

Once I had decided upon a theme I found this process quite smooth, being able to draw from a variety of influences including my own attendance at OP in the past. I found everyone present to be very open to the activities I had prepared and engaged fully in the discussions, which I tried to keep a little bit more free.

I was particularly interested in the responses to a task which required focusing attention on all except your partner. Many seemed to find this more challenging than I had anticipated, highlighting the strength of the connection we often share with a partner. I also found it interesting and enjoyable how far people will push the boundaries within each task.

Were these new questions you brought to Open Practice or something that you have been working with for a while? And how did you arrive to this interest of disturbing the connection between people working together?

These were new questions derived from familiar concepts. I have always had an interest in the performer-audience relationship and the methods we might employ to manipulate this relationship. In the past I have focused on this from the performers point of view, changing proximity, breaking the fourth wall etc. It isn't very often that you can tell an audience how to view something, but this half of the relationship is equally important. Performers can really only make suggestions. How these are interpreted / responded to is completely up to the viewer.

As viewers, we bring so much of our own personal experience into each performance that we see. We also have a lot of control over what we choose to focus on / ignore, so this practice was merely restricting that particular variable.

More recently I have also been intrigued by the relationship between chaos and control: disturbing usual patterns, ideas etc.

I think for me the focus was more on establishing or exaggerating the focus on the background / whatever we usually brush over, as opposed to merely breaking / disturbing the connection between people working together - any disturbance was a bi-product rather than the sole focus.

This last point is interesting, as I would have loved to have the opportunity to observe this exercise of ignoring. My experience through doing is that it felt like a disruption in the relationship but I was thinking as a viewer it would probably generate some very different meanings.

I'm curious what thoughts you had in observing - did they resonate with your original questions of how to shift perspective of the observer to the 'background' of what was happening, or did other meanings/interpretations/questions arise for in you through the watching? I'm also curious, did the gaze of the person who was ignoring their partner also direct your gaze as a viewer?

Viewing the exercise as a whole I wasn't looking for meaning myself. I was far more interested in how the viewing participants would observe and engage with the moving participants. How was it to ignore what was (most of the time) right in front of you? How was the relationship (or lack there of) between dancers viewed? What crossed over vs what was separate?

My role as a viewer was never restricted, but I did try empathise with the viewing participants particularly... though without letting their gaze dictate what I was watching. I was always more aware of those moving in the space, but constantly cycling through how each other viewer might see the interactions. How would I view those 2 dancers. How would I ignore my partner if they were making contact with someone I was watching?

As I mentioned earlier, I was surprised at the difficulty people had at disengaging with their partner. It seemed like most people still felt a stronger connection to those they were directing rather than those they were viewing. I wonder if this is because of the investment they are making by offering text / direction. Maybe it would be worth trying multiple variations on the task with manipulations to time and the amount of direction offered.

It also raises the question of what is truly meant by 'background' - is this based on physical proximity or focus. If I am intently focused on someone in the distance, can another, closer person be considered as focal background? It might be interesting to have each person intently watch their partner, but then write a response to the others movements...

Was there a wow! moment for you, a particular moment that left you with a feeling of curiosity or excitement to want to explore further?

These tasks were tailored toward the viewer, rather than the mover. As such, the wow moments came more from the discussions and hearing people's experiences within the task than they did from my viewing. My expectations were that the viewers would each see a unique performance / relationship between the two dancers that were not their partner. The biggest wow was the strength of the connect that people held to their partner. Is this the usual level of connection we feel, or was the task of not being allowed to watch them heightening the desire to?

I would be interested in exploring this audience - performer relationship further. It seems as though the artificial restriction of this relationship can manifest a sort of defiant strength. I would be particularly curious to explore ways that we as performers could manipulate this relationship without explicitly stating it to the audience. Would intentionally framing the stage so the only certain people could see certain performers elicit similar responses from those who feel they might be 'missing out'?