

SL: There's Chi Gong out in the parks in Chinatown. The old people are all together. That's why I'm talking about practice. It could be like that as a practice. Same thing with yoga's supposed to be free. Not \$250 for a private! No money touches yoga! And now they've sold it. The difference between selling shit – it's like with money too. The moment you sell something, it becomes salable, it's for sale.

MRPJ: What is practice, to you?

SL: Well that's the thing. For me it's a lot of different things. Because I feel like we're The Muppets or the misfit toys or the bad news bears. Whoever shows up, we'll see what we're gonna do. And we're gonna work on this number, and maybe we're gonna work on this number today. So and so didn't show up so, so and so doesn't know this number – I have to be really adaptable every single time in the moment.

MRPJ: And are you in every number? Like, what's your role as a leader? Or as Stanley Love? Of Stanley Love Performance Group?

SL: It's to keep myself ready to do whatever needs to be done. So I call myself the Ace. If someone doesn't show up – or the Joker.

MRPJ: Where in the parks do you rehearse?

SL: On the playground area like where the basketball courts are. It's a huge cement area. But I call it playground cement. So it's—

MRPJ: Soft. It's ok for the joints.

SL: It's a lot, lot better. They make that for kids to exercise on. And it is a lot different than the sidewalk. I call it museum quality cement when it's really smooth and really solid. That's one of the reasons why we had the new Whitney because the people that worked at the old one were getting back problems. And that is so solid. Also slippery and slick. And of course when we were there they forgot the dance floors so we were on the cement for five hours two different days. But I was thinking, "It's just an honor to be at the Whitney!" That was through Charlie Atlas 'cause Charlie Atlas is a big fan. I love Charlie. I was happy to be there. That was after Whitney Houston died and that's where I made the Whitney Houston dance. Whitney at the Whitney.

MRPJ: That was the piece? That was the idea?

SL: That's what I would say. It was to Whitney Houston, to honor her. But the audience was like upper east side ladies. And we were leaving there, one was saying, "Was that the BeeGees?" She must have been in her eighties. And I was like, "Yass," we did a BeeGees song. Did you have any more questions?



Photo: Miana Jun

Open Performance: Invitation and Practice

by ANDRÉ DAUGHTRY

I am a visual artist who works primarily in photography and film, though I have been interested in the body and movement since my first artistic investigations from behind a camera. I was introduced to experimental dance while getting my MFA in Photography and Media at CalArts, and sought out opportunities to collaborate with the artists who were studying dance on campus. I am originally from New York, so upon returning to Brooklyn after finishing my MFA, I began regularly attending Movement Research at Judson Church in order to feed this new desire to see works that pushed my understanding of the medium. Monday nights did indeed provide an easily accessible platform for me to visually engage with dance, but I was missing the element of verbal engagement that I had developed with the student dance community back in LA. I looked on MR's website and discovered Open Performance (OP), which is described as "A program of non-curated shared showings of experimentation and work-in-progress, for artists at all stages of their development. The events are centered around an audience discussion." Reading this, a huge wave of excitement encouraged me to make my way to Eden's Expressway in SoHo on a Tuesday evening.

As someone new to the dance scene in NYC, when I first visited Eden's, it appeared to be simply a nondescript dance studio – it did not feel as though it was loaded with a particularly significant history. Upon my arrival, I saw the evening's performers warming up while I found a seat amongst the other audience members, who were mostly chatting familiarly amongst each other. Eventually the OP coordinator introduced the evening's moderator, who in turn introduced the performers and their work. True to the description I read on the MR website, the performances were pieces at various stages in their development. After the performances were done, the feedback portion of the evening, which was conducted with everyone sitting in a circle on the floor, maintained the same air of casualness that was present when I first arrived. So, as a result of the ever-present and encouraging spirit to share for my first time at a dance talk back, I entered the conversation that



Photo: André Daughtry

ran all around the circle, and I have made a weekly practice of it ever since.

Having made a point to attend OP every week, I've come to recognize what I see as the two core values of OP: Invitation and Practice. For most artists I know, emotion is what drives us to make, and an environment where open exploration is invited and nurtured is fundamental to starting a new practice. OP, in my experience, fosters this feeling of invitation for all who show up. It is not only the performers who put themselves in a vulnerable position by sharing work that is in progress, but the audience is there participating in the journey into unsure and unknown territory as well. The audience understands that the works are in process and invites the performers to take a leap of faith and present new ideas through movement. The performers on the other hand have invited the audience into their process and are asking the audience to make a leap and to be courageous in sharing thoughts and impressions about what they saw in a medium that is quite difficult to talk about. This form of sharing if engaged on a routine basis is the foundation of what I consider to be an enriching artistic practice. While on my journey to getting into CalArts, I could be caught at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the painting wing at least three times a week, becoming familiar with new works that I had never seen before and deepening through sustained observation my awareness of already seen works. I applied the same method of practice to OP when it came to the viewing of a work and the sharing of my thoughts in the feedback circle.

I was also curious to find out how those values were understood from the perspectives of the other frequent participants. I spoke to Kay Ottinger, who is a former Open Performance Coordinator and the current Movement Research at the Judson Church Coordinator, about the idea of invitation from the point of view of the performer. She noted, "Yes, since it's not curated, I feel that already puts the event in a non-judgmental space and fosters feedback the artist needs. We're not there to say if the work is good or bad. Are you working on how to stand on one foot for ten minutes? What do you want to know from the audience about that? It's a practice for artists to learn how to talk about their work or to listen to talk about it." Coming from a visual arts background, I am very familiar with the skills that need to be developed (for both the artist and the audience) when dealing with language. The practice of sitting in a critique class, where normally three works of art are discussed for 4 to 6 hours every week, helps develop language that can lead to more ideas around a work. Even though OP does not last as long as an art school critique class, the group is always encouraged by the coordinator to continue the conversations afterwards.

An important aspect of OP that reinforces the value of invitation is the discussion circle. In a typical feedback session after a performance, the performers sit in chairs in front of

the audience – basically the artists maintain the positions they occupied when they were performing. Utilizing a circle, OP's feedback setup eliminates this dichotomy between artist and audience – all share the space equally, creating a more inviting place for informal sharing to happen. When I mentioned to Kay that particular feeling of sharing that I get at OP she simply said, "Of course. OP is a conversation."

The moderator also has an important role with respect to the value of invitation. I was curious about the moderator's experience of holding space for three very different works that they have most likely never seen. Generally, OP is moderated by a current Movement Research Artist in Residence (AIR). Kay noted that these artists often have intense schedules, consisting of rehearsals and meetings which require a significant amount of their time. That being considered, being a moderator at OP has the potential to be seen as one more thing asking for the artist's time. Nevertheless, Kay observed that "when they do come, they always have a great time, because they realize a) how important their role is and b) how much of a challenge it is. It's humbling. It's a service. AIRs are helping those performing at OP get feedback about their work and let them feel comfortable about doing that." The moderators exercise a role that goes from listening to the performers and the audience, to gently giving advice, to helping questions that have been posed become better articulated. It is a true challenge because of all of the variety of responses that can be shared.

One time, I was given the responsibility to be a stand-in moderator at OP because the scheduled AIR had to cancel at the last minute. This experience showed me the huge weight of responsibility of providing something for everyone who was present – this was extremely different than when I was an audience member speaking from my own perspective to an artist about their piece. It was what my art school professors must have felt every week – the work that was required to maintain a space of respect for the artists, while also looking for how to use the observations of the audience to widen the artist's awareness in a productive way. It is a challenging role, holding both the artist's intentions and the perceptions of others in an interactive and informative exchange. I felt as if I were a conduit of language, and it forced me to think about work that I might not normally speak on, to find the thing that needed to be said on each piece. The moderator's main challenge is a practice in maintaining the presence of open and constructive sharing throughout the entirety of the discussion.

In coming full circle back to my initial role as audience member, I believe that these explored values of invitation to join a practice around talking about dance ultimately encourages a widening of the variety of voices around the circle. The differences in backgrounds of each voice enriches the experience for all who attend. It is inevitable that the

various backgrounds of participants who are present have a quality that can enrich what we see and what we say that is beneficial for everyone present at OP. As a visual artist I tend to engage what I see through the lenses of critical theorists like Walter Benjamin, Cornel West, or bell hooks. I am also an African-American male whose family was raised in the projects in Jamaica, Queens, and speak from those experiences as well.

One time at OP there was a work involving a duet with an African-American male and a white female. During the talk back session I immediately spoke to the performers' race as a huge factor in how I interpreted the work. Another person from the audience did not see my point and said that the factor of their race was pretty banal and did not stand out because of all of the numerous interracial couples that he sees on a regular basis in New York City. Interestingly enough, the performer of color voiced his own concerns around the perceptions of race in the work while his partner was more concerned with the dynamics of power and how that concern was presented through the work. I also spoke with Martita Abril, the current Open Performance Coordinator, and asked her about her experiences hearing the variety of opinions that the circle discussion encourages. "I appreciate people who come from different disciplines and the way they describe some of the work. As a coordinator, I often find myself saying, 'Oh Wow! This is another way of seeing things.' And it's not just about the movement, but also 'What is this piece about? What did it make me feel?'" Continual conversations over time with Martita and Kay have augmented my understanding of the significance of OP for all who participate. OP's foundation as a welcoming site that engenders a form of practice around the looking at and talking about work is what maintains it as a precious treasure for many who are in the dance community, and for those non-dance background performance enthusiasts like myself who want to be a valuable part of the conversation as well.

—
André Daughtry is a visual artist who is currently the community Minister of the Arts at Judson Memorial Church. André holds an MFA in Photography and Media from CalArts and an MA in Theology and the Arts from Union Theological Seminary in the city of New York.