

## **Rules**

*An exchange of ideas with director and performer Paul Clarke*

**Dear Barry,**

I'm writing a paper about Optik's work both from the perspective of exteriority, as a spectator at the Union Chapel event and as a participant in the workshop. I'm wondering if you would mind responding to a few (rather unformed) notions and if you have any preset texts on your training technique and responses to the process of performance.

In your workshop very few rules were verbally expressed and yet it appears in performance that there is a recognisable Optik way of being in a space. I am interested in where this comes from and how the rules of 'the game' are learnt. It seems to me that the rules relate to what works in performance and that they are, in a sense, policed by the gaze of other performers and the audience. Due to the minimal number of actional possibilities permitted by the Optik system, differences between performers are microscoped, hence what is appropriate seems to me to be a neutrality or economy of movement approaching that of neutral mask work. This 'economy demands that both motion and rest be unpremeditated' (Eldridge, S. and Huston, H. in Zarilli 1995), essentially losing oneself. As Wittgenstein suggests, you cannot give the boundary of a language game, 'the game we play with [the word] is unregulated, it is not everywhere circumscribed by rules' (Wittgenstein, 1953). What the game is is shown in practice, all that can be said is that this and similar things are possible, it cannot be told because no boundaries have been drawn. Perhaps the language analogy can be taken further to suggest that there is an Optik vocabulary and an Optik grammar of movement. In such an apparently open system, why is it that to go here works when to go there does not?

How does your work relate to that of Eugenio Barba? Is your urge a similarly ontological one, an almost structuralist search for the essence of performance or the origin of movement by a cutting away of layers to reach the pre-expressive? Perhaps an Optik

performance is only form and the content is pre-expressiveness itself? I wonder what is represented, are the performers entirely presenting or do they represent past Optik performances, or the technique itself? What is there for an audience to believe in? Perhaps we believe in the performer's mastery of the technique itself and that is why we remain seated, waiting for the mastery to slip and reveal a mistake.

Is there really a distinction between stillness in your work and movement, or are they both dynamic even without intention? As John Cage suggests, there is no silence, there is only noise, equally there is no non-action, there is only purposeless action which is regularly a purposeful purposelessness. This seems to relate somewhat to Schechner's definition of ritual as an action serving no practical purpose, the purpose is in the action itself.

Through the extreme restriction of the field of possibilities for the performer which perhaps frees them to act on impulses are they not in a sense objectified, becoming nothing more or less than mobile objects? The word impulses seems to imply events requiring, as Derrida suggested in his lecture 'Perhaps or Maybe', an equal openness on the part of performer and spectator to all possibilities. In order for an event to happen, which by its very nature is unpredictable, the performer/spectator must be equally prepared for all eventualities and not expecting or predicting any particular occurrence. I am wondering about Craig's suggestion that 'Art arrives only by design. Therefore in order to make a work of art it is clear we may only work in those materials with which we can calculate. Man [sic] is not one of those materials. The whole nature of man tends towards freedom; he carries the proof in his own person that as a material for the theatre he is useless' (1956). It seems that in Optik's work the performers are materials not differently hierarchised from the space, time and the audience. Does a performer interact with other performers, or react to them as objects they encounter or which pass by influencing their own relationship to space or creating obstacles reacted to in the same way as solid walls?

How much would you equate your performers to de Certeau's pedestrian who actualizes the spaces s\he moves through?

'If it is true that spatial order organizes an ensemble of possibilities e.g. by a place in which one can move and interdictions e.g. by a wall that prevents one from going further, then the walker actualises some of these possibilities. In that way, he [sic] makes them exist as well as emerge. But he also moves them about and he invents others, since the crossing, drifting away, or improvisation of walking privilege, transform or abandon spatial elements [...] And if on the one hand he actualizes only a few of the possibilities fixed by the constructed order (he goes only here and not there), on the other he increases the number of possibilities (for example by creating shortcuts and detours) and prohibitions (for example he forbids himself to take paths generally considered accessible or even obligatory). He thus makes a selection' (1984).

De Certeau seems particularly applicable since the paths traced by performers form a grid-work much like that of an American city. Why only straight lines?

In *Ritual of Discovery* you talk about working from the centre, is this, to return to Cage 'putting [each] person [performer and audience member] at the centre'? Cage also says 'The structure we should think about is that of each person in the audience. In other words, his consciousness is structuring the experience differently from anybody else's in the audience. If we have done nothing, he [sic] then will have everything to do' (Cage in Sandford, ed. 1995).

Perhaps in an *Optik* performance there are heterogeneous centres, the performance is composed and centred by the focus of each audience member and each performer as they search for regularities and differences and actively pattern and map the movements as though they were choreographed.

I would much appreciate any response to these musings and questionings. Thanks once again for the workshop, I look forward to hearing from you and working with you again. Hope all is well.

*Best wishes,  
Paul Clarke*

## **Dear Paul**

### Rules / Neutrality

As you expressed it, there are no 'rules' laid down in advance of actional possibilities. Workshop, rehearsal: the same. So we need to be clear that what *you* perceive in the performance situation is a performer behaving by a set of 'rules', by which you presumably mean that their behaviour potential is limited or constrained in some particular way. There is an immediate mis-match here. Are these 'rules' really there, or do you perceive/create them? Does the 'explanation' of the performers' behaviour resort to the rules system because of an *expectation* of a menu of action possibilities? Consider that in most performance that actional possibility only arises in the creation of the work, ie in the rehearsal process. In the moment of performance the work is not being discovered, but re-enacted. If you like there is one big rule governing the overall behaviour system of the performers (the rule of performance itself), mediated by lots of smaller ones (ie what has been learnt in the rehearsal process and has to be repeated). There is an illusion of variety since we are not looking at the performer's choices at that moment but at the selected repertoire developed in rehearsal. Selection becomes the key factor. Now in an Optik performance selection is not a factor since the performer is not being asked to present actional sequences to spectators. There is therefore nothing to select. The performer is however constrained in what they do by a constant barrage of impulse information which they have to fine tune both to receive and to respond to. They have a choice with regard to their responses but only in so far as they feel they are determined or not determined by the information they are being subject to.

In this way the performer is not therefore neutral in the traditional sense, but active. Again, neutrality is a particular selection for a performer, one of the places they can 'inhabit'. In an Optik performance the performer is not selecting, is not presenting a position to the spectator. They are in a ceaselessly changing stimulus environment, and have to concentrate very hard to explore it fully. So it would not be strictly accurate to say that rest and motion are 'unpremeditated'. The shift from one state to another is not planned in advance, and is not initiated to produce an external effect. But each performer can 'know' which state they are in at any one time (rather than losing themselves, they find themselves more acutely), and can use this knowledge, and the capability they have to change their state, in order to explore, fine tune, respond to impulse fields.

#### Game / Boundaries / Grammar

In that there is a game, it is the game of being human. Performance itself as a game is too limiting. So performing cannot limit itself to its own boundaries - as you rightly suggest. The useful thing about the notion of boundary is the way it creates inside and outside fields. If you then, as is attempted in Optik work, explore the notion of fractal boundary, you begin to understand the complexity of the whole affair. It is possible to feel oneself, as a performer, 'inside' the performance with every-thing/one 'outside', but this can shift to a position of being 'outside' while every-thing/one is 'inside'. I use the word 'feel' since I think that understanding of this sort cannot be disassociated from emotion. Therefore the analogy with language and grammar is not appropriate since language always stands 'outside' the phenomenon it is describing, and is linked to reflectivity and to expressivity. There is no Optik 'grammar' of movement, since none of the movement is pre-scribed. There is though a systematic attempt to work with the released weight of the body, and without uncontrolled tension. But this is precisely because those 'knots' of tension and habit are little 'grammars' of individual body movement, encrusted 'statements' of expressivity. It is when these are removed (as far as is possible) and the performer starts to work that the 'individual differences' that you describe start to glare out.

Barba / belief / form

*[I have spent quite some time working with Barba, and initially was particularly influenced by his frame by frame breakdown of rehearsal/training actional sequences in order to collage performance sequences. I sometimes think that what I am doing is taking Barba's frame (his notion of smallest actional sequence) and going beyond that to a 'quantum' field where frame ('particle') also exists as constant dynamic flow ('wave'). As a wave function of course, constantly emerging actional possibilities cannot be re-created since once fixed they 'revert' to non-dynamic actional moments, 'frozen' (Barba's term) in time.]*

The problem with Barba's term pre-expressive is that it creates the need to invent the expressive. I would not describe Optik's work as a search for the 'origin' of movement, which would suggest that movement starts somewhere and develops. Barba has an end point in view - his performance. His work on bio-mechanics is therefore teleological - its purpose is to produce performance. I have no such purpose, therefore there can be no 'pre' or 'post' state, indeed no 'expressive' state at all. So there is a question of course which is what do you do, or how do you start? Grotowski invokes the language articulation of the impulse: 'do it'.

The key here is the attempt to explore non-purpose driven movement/action. Notions of form and content are the casualties in this experiment, since one is ceaselessly flowing into the other. As far as I am concerned there is no content, no form, but they seem to emerge nevertheless, in performance. They are never discussed in rehearsal.

The audience can never believe in the performers. Generally audiences believe they are being conned in some way, which is why traditionally performers spend so much time in getting the audience to 'trust' them. This is also a con of course - we are back to the 'game' of performance. Outside of this limited game, the audience must think/feel for itself, or more accurately each individual must think/feel for themselves. Or do you think that this is always 'transferred' onto the performer? Your questions seem to imply this.

## Stillness/movement

I have done a lot of work on this in the rehearsal process. In practice the performers are encouraged to see no difference between the two. This can be dangerous, lethal even, as when a stillness of ten minutes or so can happen (as at Union Chapel). This has to be taken as just one of the hazards of the enterprise - if it is a hazard at all. I do not use intention-led movement. This has strange consequences which can be explored by the performer. For example, the performer can be walking toward a wall (observer's description) but engaging the feeling of stillness. This will produce the sensation of the wall moving toward the performer (performer's description). This becomes even more critical in respect of other performers/spectators, where it can be reversed. A performer is walking toward another performer (observer's description). The 'still' performer engages the feeling of movement (but remains 'still') thus producing the feeling that they are moving towards the other performer (who is actually moving). This shifting of perception parameters is constant, and becomes just one of the impulse generated elements of information that the performer has to deal with.

## Openness / possibilities / objects

Performers, spectators are not objects, they are humans. The range of potential each has can be restricted by others, both physically and somehow 'conceptually'. In the Union Chapel performance a spectator dropped her sheet of paper (the programme) and it floated aero-dynamically onto the floor in front of her, but far enough away from her seat to be 'out of bounds' in some way. She lowered herself in her seat so that her foot could reach out to get it but it was too far. So she moved the other way, curling up and extending her arm so that her hand could grab the paper and instantly recoil. This action

in itself, as this description implies, produced far more interest than a deliberate, relaxed standing up walking forward, picking up would have done.

So without question there are constraints and possibilities opened up during the performance, for everyone there. The spectator (like the performer) can spend a long time feeling/dealing with the impulse to enter a space (like the woman with her programme) or to leave the space completely (like those who left before the end). And many points in between. What seems to happen is that people feel the impulse information physically, and this means they must 'have' the impulse (no difference between performer and spectator here). It does not mean that they must 'action' the impulse, but they cannot just wish it away either. The performance as a whole is very much centred on the fact that people are not objects (and that objects are not people).

### Space / lines

Space is what lies in between (people / objects). According to Richard Gregory we do not look at the matter 'filling' the space, but at the 'gaps' in between. If this is the case it has many implications. It must be the case that at the very least we are matching occupied and unoccupied space in order to perceive. What happens when the performer is occupying both fields (potentially)? There is no certainty for a spectator that the performer is going to occupy that area and not that one. The boundary between (another boundary) filled space and unoccupied space become fluid. This is where de Certeau is inadequate. The uncertainty, or fluidity between filled and gap (linked to Freud's fort/da which Blau is fond of quoting?) is mediated by time, which is also relativised (and so linked to space). The de Certeau framework is linked to territory, to space, to image (?). There is no prohibition as far as going anywhere is concerned. In *Optik* there is not an obsession with 'pathways' or some such notion (though a spectator may develop such an obsession - even though it will be apparent it is a pathway to no-where/everywhere). The performer is not making a selection.

The question of straight lines is very puzzling. I do not talk about straight lines in rehearsal. I do talk about moving forward, facing forward, and about Jousse's notion of symmetrical body (in front/behind; right/left). The option seems to be very straightforward: circles or lines. Of course the line is a fiction. It is in fact a part of a (very large) circle (around the globe). This is why I don't talk of lines. But for the performer who impulses forward, and faces forward the direction will always be straight ahead. What we perceive as straight lines is actually an accident. [*Or is it? The visual cortex of the brain has specialist cells that deal with orientation in space, including straight lines. These cells respond to alignment and to orientation. Certain cells also respond specifically to lines of orientation in motion, while other cells specialise in movement away and movement towards.*] It also comes back to this question of selection. The performer is not making a selection: therefore to move off the line of forward movement deliberately would invoke an infinity of choice (one degree? 31 degrees? etc) - ie no choice. It is also linked in some way to the forward movement of time, and to the properties of light. But the feeling association of city grid lines is understandable, though accidental.

Centre / consciousness

Each performer is asked to work with themselves at the centre. I think it goes beyond the subjectivity of each individual (which Cage proposes and which is beyond dispute). Going back to the performer consciousness of inside and outside, the notion of centre allows these boundaries themselves to become fluid. We could be moving from a notion of collective outside (the traditional notion of audience and single meaning), through a transitional notion of individual outsides (your proposition) and towards a notion of collective inside. In this condition the performance is not 'composed and created' by individuals (the individual outside) but the whole notion of an outside performance disappears to be replaced by the currents and signals of impulse recognition and response

(and what does that 'look' like: can it be seen? or is what we see nothing to do with this at all? or is it related in some way? we don't know).

*Barry*

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