

A Practice

A Practice is a hybrid form.

Fundamentally it is an experiencing practice. It is a carefully curated and performed series of relatively still and simple poses that permit for hyper acute attention...

Some moments call for the abandon of will while others call for the recruitment of will.

By attending, each participant becomes the host of the body experience and thus, the performer, teacher, pupil and audience all at once.

— Kelly Keenan & Adam Kinner

February 24-28, 2014, Studio 303, Montreal

March 3, 2014

Dear Kelly and Adam,

First of all, thank you both for having done what you did with A Practice. I wanted to offer you some of my thoughts, since I didn't get to say anything at the end on Friday.

(My job interview, by the way, was very long and kind of exhausting, but I think it went okay. I'll be finding out about it next week.)

The session on Friday morning ended up being pretty intense for me. I don't know why exactly, but the feeling was one of culmination—as if the week's doings had come to a head somehow. Between the Belgo building and my appointment on Saint-Laurent and Sainte-Catherine I had to stop and write a few things down just so I wouldn't forget them. I wish I could have shared it with you all at the studio, *mais bon*.

It's not that I think that this was the point of A Practice, to reach some sort of climax on the last day, but something I really appreciated about it was the way that it built on itself from one day to the next as the week progressed. My experience became quite layered in the course of the five sessions. (Look at Eric Cameron's "thick paintings" for a metaphor?) The regular repertoire of movements, I guess, provided a base for that. It felt like every day we were exploring a different aspect of...*something*. So that by the final day all these aspects started to make a form.

—But we weren't *just* exploring, either. We were also being led through the exercise, which made us part of someone else's (your?) exploration at the same time.

You were very good at *not* defining A Practice at the beginning. I loved how you said it was and wasn't a workshop, was and wasn't a performance. It put a really productive gap right in the middle of the experience. By the end of the week, each movement, however simple, had become layered with a memory. It felt like you and we had cultivated this memory together over the five sessions: day by day, *couche par couche*. Yeah, maybe that's it: A Practice took a set of guided postures and over time invested them with a memory.

I found the order of the days really effective. A different ordering would have resulted in a different form.

For me, it felt like on the first day, I became familiar with the movements.

On the second, I learned how to think of the movements as tied to lives and personal histories.

On the third, I learned about the unstable boundary between the individual and the collective.

On the fourth, I learned that movement, and the experience of movement, always occurred in virtue of a horizon. (Kelly “just” putting down a trampoline would be one horizon, doing it “with intention” would be another.)

I find that really, really interesting, to move in virtue of different horizons, not just the ones that I’m used to and take for granted. I’m most used to moving without thinking about it. I guess this everyday kind of moving has a horizon to it like any other, it’s just that I don’t pay attention to it: when I move like that, I’m moving in virtue of a consciousness (an “I”) that is simply given and omniscient. I’ve also done a fair bit of restorative yoga in the past couple of years. Restorative offers another way of moving, another horizon, with which I’ve become familiar. The way A Practice started every day reminded me of restorative yoga: we began lying down, and you invited us to breathe, and I had my eyes closed most if not all of the time and tried to let gravity take my body. I approached A Practice with a restorative attitude until the last couple of days.

On Friday though, I realized that there was something in A Practice that made it really different from restorative: this was the effort and focus it took to locate my movement in time (in arcs of five minutes, eight minutes, etc.). Restorative is not about keeping time with the body, but about losing track of time and becoming lost in it. The experience of A Practice became really rich for me when I learned what it was like to move from this “restorative” mode (based on letting go and relaxation) to another, much less familiar mode, based on the focus required to track time with my movement. That’s part of what I learned on Friday.

A Practice raised the question of performance in a way that really affected me. On the fifth day, it felt like I was learning to cross between horizons of experience: from the horizon of “just moving,” to the horizon of relaxation, to the horizon of an audience. Though I don’t think the idea of an audience is really at home in A Practice. The closest I can come to defining it, is to call it an audience without a gaze (can I say that?). When the question of performance was raised, I realized that the horizons of movement were infinite: I could move in virtue of an “I” that is simply given and omniscient; I could move in virtue of breath and gravity; I could move in virtue of an audience, or no audience; or of just me; or of my neighbour; or of a sound; or of the entire population of Caracas. What is this “moving in virtue of...,” anyway? It is not moving for people and things and non-things, but moving on the basis of, or with an eye to the strength of those people and things and non-things—moving with an eye to them as potential horizons. Is that what moving with intention means? Sharing movement with *that*—it kind of floored me!

It became a question of composure. Of oscillating between composure and non-composure: like what you were saying about the micro-adjustments (the dance) of standing still. And then there were the trampolines.

I think that the way that A Practice worked with slow movement in time put me on this track. To take five minutes to travel my arms from my head to my sides demands focus. If I lose focus, I lose track of time. For me, more than anything, it was this will to focus on keeping time as I moved that shook me out of my normal, taken-for-granted horizon. So long as I was focused, I could invoke this weird sense of an audience without a gaze; I could move in virtue of...(anything); I felt, in a sense, liberated (there was a tremendous feeling of sharpness and potential). But when I lost focus, and lost track of time, that sense of the...(anything), in virtue of which I was moving, dissipated and slipped away.

I guess I’m saying what mattered to me was the way that A Practice encouraged a focus on time and linked that focus to the idea (the “degree-zero”) of an audience.

Of course, there was so much more going on than that. The experience I’m talking about was fleeting. It came and went. It’s an experience that

I've given form and consistency to in the process of writing about it. It was a creeping thought that wasn't so much in my mind as it was in my body. Why did I find it so emotionally moving? Why did I want to hold on to this thinking as a lesson, to call it a lesson? My first impulse is to say that it was ethical—that this experience had an ethical dimension. There's a real difference between "just moving" (as if no one was paying attention to me, especially not me) and moving in virtue of something (anything and everything) beyond that. As a result of A Practice, I am thinking more and more about movement as something that is always shared, that always has a horizon; something that demands a particular kind of attention/focus, *especially* after it grows familiar. And that when movement becomes familiar (when it loses its horizon), it may be interesting to bring the experience of time into the picture, because that effort can help to put you back on the threshold between yourself and everything that is beyond you.

Maybe A Practice—any practice?—is about moving into and out of this kind of composure. (Is that why the trampolines?) Not "just moving," or even moving for someone, but moving in virtue of...something, someone, anything, everything. Eyes open, eyes closed. Maybe what I'm talking about is attitude, disposition. In virtue of what do we gather ourselves up for? It's a question that I'm left with, and for which I am very thankful.

I'm still grappling with the role that the music played in the experience. I think it definitely affected me constantly—mostly on a micro level that I would not be able to speak to. I think it established a very distinct atmosphere and helped to give time substance. It was very much of the moment. But it also helped to link up smaller moments into bigger moments. I also noticed that on Friday at one point Adam was playing longer, more drawn-out notes—more steady and droney than usual—which changed only slightly and infrequently. I remember that that was the sound playing when I found myself trying not to think, and at the same time grappling with the idea that part of what I was learning was about this sense of composure. Maybe it was the resonance between the steady tone and my attempt to keep time with my movement that clicked somehow.

I also really appreciated that both of you had different ways of approaching and engaging with the group.

Ha! It makes me smile to think what you will make of all of what I'm saying. Thank you for taking the time to read it. And thank you for your work. It strikes me as the result of many years of practice because it works on so many levels and goes in so many directions but never in a way that feels untrue or distracted. There is a unity in that somewhere.

If I could have asked a question on Friday, it would have been, "what is A Practice for you two?" Obviously, your position in it was very different from the rest of the group. As the leaders/facilitators, did you also feel that it was and wasn't a workshop and a performance? My guess is that you'd say yes and more than that. I got the sense that you were both outside of the experience that you had constructed for the group. But you were also obviously "in it." Whatever it is, I hope you continue to do it for as much and as long as it helps you to explore whatever you are exploring.

I'm probably smiling because I feel so out of my element writing this to you. And it's become much longer than I imagined it would be.

Many hugs and kisses to you both,

Pablo