You are listening to The Red Line Sessions - a new series of podcasts from South East Dance as part of their Dramaturg in Residence programme.

Over the next weeks you can join dramaturgs Lou Cope and Luke Pell for a number of reflections, discussions and exclusive interviews with artists shed light on how the work we see on and off stage gets made.

The podcasts will be uploaded every week to uploaded to The Red Line website. Or, you can sign up to the South East Dance mailing list and we’ll deliver them to your inbox.

Be sure also to join The Red Line facebook group where you can comment, ask questions and suggest future topics. You can also join in the conversation on twitter by tweeting @southeastdance #DiR

The Redline Sessions - Podcast 1- Luke Pell - Why wouldn’t we?

Why wouldn’t we?

Attend, to detail, to imagination, to possibility to questions. If making is an art, a craft, an invitation, to look, to look again and then to look away, so as to look a new, with fresh eyes, other eyes, our blinkers lifted, something else invited in. An invitation to feel, not to privilege, one sensory perception, one way of being but to be, with being...

An invitation to experience, resist, relate, express, to feel a thought, a new... to feel lost, to feel it out, to intuit. To hold, to grasp, to touch, not too tight, to let go of many possibilities, positions, perspectives, peoples, thoughts in our hearts and our heads and to offer something, that might make meaning when meeting, with their lived experience.

If, our work as makers, is to attend passionately, politically, imaginatively, and so, so carefully to the live. Then why wouldn’t we, want this for dance.

These are some words, I thought I’d come back to, I wrote two years ago or so, for The Red Line after my first encounter with the Dramaturg in Residence.
programme. I’m delighted now to have been invited to be a Guest Dramaturg as part of the programme by Lou Cope and South East Dance.

Over the next few months Lou and I will be offering a series of podcasts that explore our approaches to dramaturgy and some of the projects and artists we are working with... Each week that they are released we’d like to invite your thoughts, questions and responses via twitter... tweet us @southeastdance @lukespellmakes @loucopeSED #DiR we look forward to being in conversation.

What I want to begin by saying is that things I’ll share, discuss, describe in these online offerings are an approach. They are my approach, they come from thinking and feeling, from conversation and quietness, mapping and charting, lists and listening, from notes notes, notes, pages of notes and drawings and small spells of days, months and years, from ways of working, time spent doing, with other artists and organisations being in and with - not outside - having agency and autonomy, which comes from trust.

What I’ll talk about will span performance, participation and discourse. At the heart are key concerns of my practice - the choreography of people place and thought, where dance meets with other worlds, a fascination with detail, nuances of time, texture, memory, landscape. All the things that exist around an artist and their work, drawing threads, between seemingly unrelated constellations of bodies and thought. Not fixing, holding or pinning down, but relating, with care.

Care full.

Close to tenderness and precarity. How to invite openness, an atmosphere, a quality of attention, attending, deeply considered, with weight, and weightlessness, to allow driftings. Why. Wait

To consider choice, patterns, context, legibility, perception and perspectives.

To take the time to not know

My sessions will speak to: An approach, to lineage and heritage, to where dance meets with other worlds, intersectionality, a slight shift, a little bit of logistics and to this wider weave – all the other conversations, participatory work, the artistry of engagement, of embedded access, when other materials or modes of
encounter exist as part of a project or practice, documentation and communications, and ideas about archive, integrities to an artists work and way of working’

What’s good for you, what’s generative, troubling...

Since being invited to be guest dramaturg I’ve been thinking about exactly that, how I am always a guest, that my role is not a permanent one and that one of the things I am doing most often is... being 'in residence.' In someone's practice, with someone in their world, someone's raw live thinking which in dance might be doing, action and activity.
That my work is to be or become at home, in their world, their work, the practice, the process, the moment. I am not homeless. I am nomadic. The work is to move between artists, ideas, audiences, perspectives, spheres of thinking, to swim in the flux of an emergence, to be one who perhaps goes deeper down into the depths than is necessary, to know what might be down there and if we should haul it back up or leave it be, for now.

What it is to be concerned with, to be noticing, the widening weave - of a work, of a person, the disparate, unformed, intuitive inklings of artists. There is something about being with the murky, a different kind of approach to thinking, unlike or at least alongside the incisive, interrogation of the academic mind.

That whilst I’m in residence in someone’s work there’s something about a need to be soft, and open and responsive in order to be relating to the - as yet – unformed...(as well as ordered, careful, considered, detailed, rigorous, precise.) To be porous, permeable, a conduit, a vessel, a medium, for the un-thought, for unknowing and newly knowing, the unnamed, and not to call a thing too soon, but to offer language that might be for it or around it and help to bring it into being with greater clarity.

To be the witness, wet nurse, washer-maid-man to these energies and inklings
- to not kill the baby before it’s born
- to not pin the butterfly down
- to keep quiet
- to keep counsel
- to eventually become invisible

That what I’m doing is to do with reflection, attention, noticing, connecting, teasing out and being concerned with a wider weave more broadly, where dance and choreography meets or might meet with other worlds.

At the heart for me is intuition and responsiveness. To work with an artist’s process, to understand or come to understand the ‘logics’ of a project, process, practice.
Importantly, for me, and the way I have come to work is to understand an artist's performance heritage and lineage, where or why a work or moment in practice might sit as part of that – so that I can then really respond to what's emerging.

Some might say ‘well that’s a lot’, but I think if we are to work deeply, I’d say it’s not... it feeds and informs questions, propositions, challenges, possibilities for composition, potential orders, sequence, structures.

But really, more so, it asks what the work is doing, or might be doing in that moment to come, when it meets with others and their worlds, in the micro – and then in the macro ...of an artists practice and its relationality. What feeling thoughts might come from these coming togethers.

More and more regularly dramaturgs are worked with in order to consider and attend to the dramaturgies of a work. But what is it to consider the dramaturgies of a practice?

My approach to working with artists and organisations exploring the dramaturgies of a practice, involves discussing the ways in which we might consider the evolving arc of an artists work, the interplay between projects, the particularities and patterns of their processes and the significance of these relationships when considered across time and changing contexts.

I think, my role and responsibility as a dramaturg is: to work with artists to make the work they want to...and most often, to discover what that is with them.

I am not outside of it. I am in it, with it, questioning the it. And as such I need to find ways into and alongside their journey.

So there are questions I ask everyone I work with at the beginning of collaborating with them. They aren’t meant to be heavy or complicated, just useful for shaping our conversations, the way we work and our expectations of each other.

One of the first things I say is - that I think of all the work with artists as a as being ‘in conversation’ with them about their practice and if I’m working on a particular project with them, that we are in conversation about that project as part of their practice, within an arc, an unfurling of their practice.
As I’ve said earlier I feel that artists and organisations invite me to be ‘in residence’ with them and with what they are doing. So I like to ask things like this... to have in our heads to attend to as we work together...

Where have you come from, where are you now, where might you go?

Where are you at now? in this month, in this moment?

- that might be in relationship to a place, event, festival, programme, year or, they can be in relationship to a much longer, deeper arc, this wider weave

I ask:
What would you like this relationship - between you and I as a dramaturg - to be and to bring to your practice and this project?

- this could very be a quality or perspective or something else

I let people know from the outset that I will ask questions of them and of their practice as we begin to develop this conversation.

A core question is always:

What is this project, in this moment, in your practice, in your life?

What is it doing, what might it do, why has it or will it come to be?

And for me, it’s really important to trace this in relationship to the particularity of a performance lineage, culture or heritage. I find it helpful to hear about this, about other projects, people, places, pasts, ghosts, influences.

We’ll try to draw freely, fleetingly and in detail:

— Family trees constellations, maps that trace...
— Who is your performance family?
— Who are / were theirs?
— What was happening in the word locally, globally at those times, in those movements, moments?
— What was happening with your body, your relationship to and understanding of it and other?
— How do these things shape our routes in?
— How do these things feel, ring true, resound in this now?

We’ll play with giving potted histories, of: living, loving, training, dancing, doing, thinking - to find what are the lines of embodied thought that are coming into this ‘room’

Dates, births, lovers, leaders, bullies, deaths, accidents, peers, pals, happenstance, celebration, moments of meaning, of risk, fear, affirmation, inspiration, coincidence, connection, challenge, contemplation, shoals of thoughts, shoals of feeling, folks - all to talk about a something that stays with you.

It might be a task, an image, an approach, an argument, a colour, a smell.

Memory is a live act and it changes, what stays, what we love, what we let go, and these things help me to get my head into the worlds of a work as fully as possible and to offer tangible jumping off points for conversation.

I’m often trying to get under the skin of a trajectory, not to face a project, a choice or decision upfront, but to hear what is running underneath. What can we track back, across a body of work, how do things gestate, germinate, to emerge, relate

I’ll chart up long lists, to add to along the way...

Make a map of the people, places, projects of last year and then let’s find one word/or feeling for what that did/does for your practice

Tell me something you loved from the last year or before now - from your projects and practice

Continue these sentences:

— I would like to...
— I am...
— We are...
— Once I was...
— Someday sometime soon...

Tell me something in your words about this new project, this ensemble, these ideas

Tell me more about that...

And what is ... that... that word that continues to recur

These streams of thinking aren’t directed at ‘a production’ per se, but the stuff that’s running through this project, where the ideas are coming from, the ‘it’, the ‘why,’ for ‘who’ and ‘how come’, value systems.

With this, I begin to consider how I am being asked to or need to be in residence with an artists private thoughts, what doesn’t go into the world but bubbles beneath what does, what has a place, and what will haunt. And of course that requires trust, and confidentiality, and an understanding that something is not the thing but really only part of being on the way, to the thing it might become.

That I am in residence with all the murk, the messy bits, the unrefined, potent quiet, loud, unformed, instinctive stuff first - before even going into the studio - and that there’s a need to be someone who minds that stuff as much as the more formed thing that begins to face out into the world. One who’s aware of step changes, cultural shifts, context, life.

Connected to an understanding of what it is to be an artist...to be re-selfing, re-imagining as the world turns. What things take effect, what shuffles we haven’t anticipated in the climates that cultivate our work, in stewardship, in funding, in institutions and infrastructures, our interdependence, we feel these fissures. Things take the time they take energetically, emotionally, economically, these conditions effect our questions, our interrogations.

I can do this as a one-off, it doesn’t depend upon a lifelong friendship, but it helps to acknowledge a sense of responsibility, and to share, so that we can re-remember,

Recurrences
Patterns
Echoes
Elements
Aspects
Entanglements
Estrangements

So that we might revisit, resist, review, refuse, re-use, repurpose
And not know
Listen
Lean in or out
Follow

So that - as a dramaturg - I can offer:

I notice
It seems to me
I wonder
There's something about...
When...
Where...
What if...
What is...
Why?