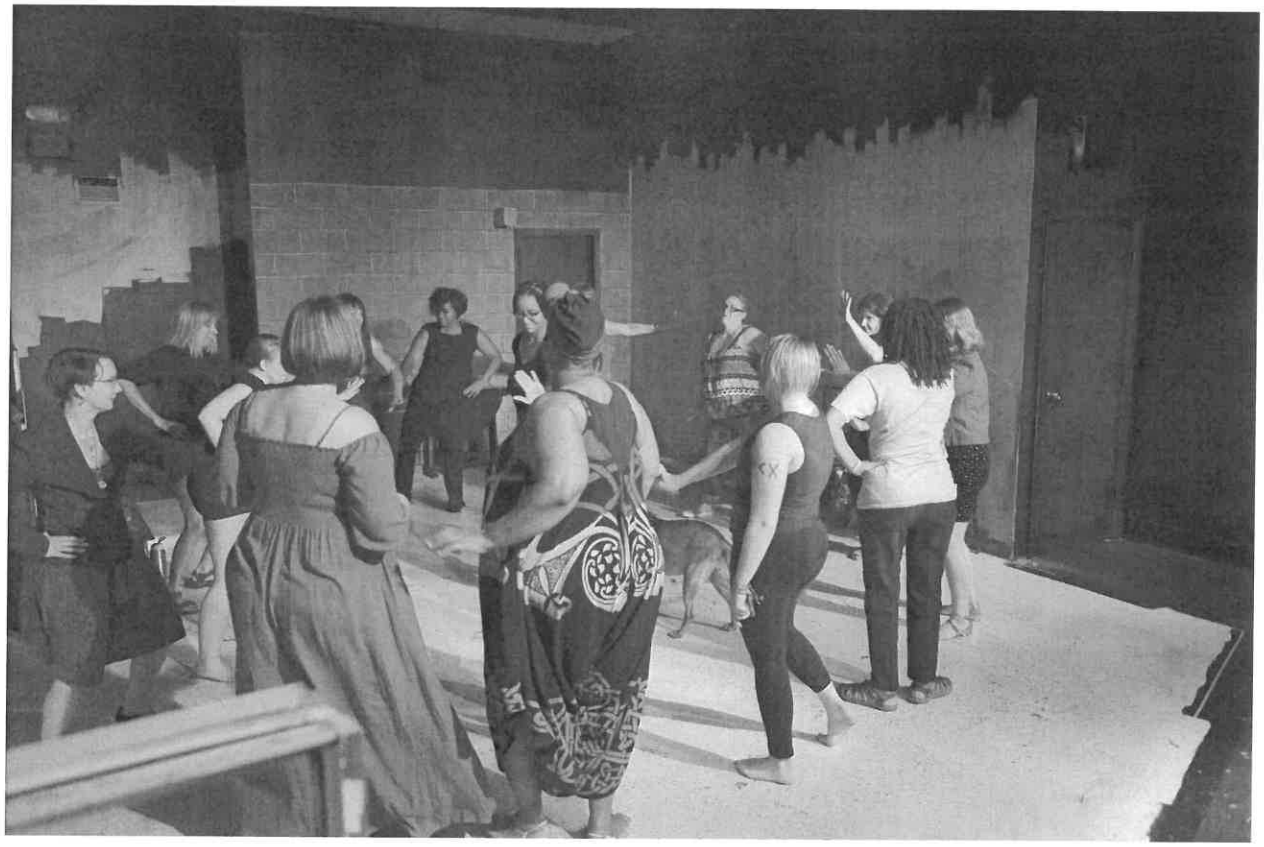
Women's Performance Workshop (WPW) Facilitator Manual



Created by Jayme Kilburn
jayme.kilburn@gmail.com
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This manual is intended for individuals who have participated in the Women's Performance Workshop and the WPW Facilitator Training.

HISTORY

The Women's Performance Workshop has been in development since September 2015 when Jayme Kilburn (me!) facilitated the first workshop at Cornell University for the '16 AGIT Lab (Association of Graduates in Theater). This first iteration was an experiment in recreating second-wave feminist models of theater-making. In order to increase the project's reach to the Ithaca community, Jayme partnered with Civic Ensemble for the second iteration that took place over the 2016-2017 school year. In January 2018, the first two-day version of the workshop was offered at the Strand Theater Company in Baltimore City. Since January 2018, two full cycles of the workshop have taken place at the Strand (intro and advanced).

BASIC PRINCIPLES

The WPW borrows from feminist and community-based performance methodologies including consciousness raising techniques, story-circles, and the basic principle that women deserve to take up space. The workshop is designed for the community and is heavily process based. *This is not an acting class.* Its main function is to build a community of women through the act of storytelling.

The final presentation/performance is not the ultimate goal of the workshop, although it is critical to the participant's experience that they are given the opportunity to have their stories witnessed.

In order to attract a diverse group of participants, it is important to do your best to break down barriers of inclusion which may include offering childcare, transportation, refreshments, attendance flexibility (coming late, leaving early, missing a session), etc.

The Women's Performance Workshop is open to all women-identified, trans, and non-binary individuals.

CREATING THE ROOM

One of the most important duties of the facilitator is creating the environment of the room. Most participants walk into the room not knowing what to expect. They may be hesitant, nervous, or even standoffish. I have found that anxieties can be easily relieved with a few easy tricks:

- Be welcoming and engage in conversation
- Make sure the space is clean

Before a workshop I make sure the workshop space is clean (trash taken out, toilet paper in bathroom, etc.). If you are working with a small organization or a rental space it is not guaranteed that the space will be clean. Although it may seem inconsequential, a clean space is much more comfortable than a dirty one.

- Offer refreshments

Ideally you will be able to offer participants refreshments. Even if it is bottled water and a bag of chips, these small offerings make participants feel taken care of.

- Have extra supplies

Participants should be able to show up as they are and be able to participate. When you start asking for them to bring their own supplies it tends to feel like work (although budget depending this may be necessary).

- Relax

It is easier said than done, I know. Certain things make me anxious; like starting late. I start to think no one is coming, begin worrying about how to adjust the exercises, and from there I will spiral. I have to remind myself that the whole point of the workshop is to create a space where women don't have to be anxious or apologetic. If I begin to get anxious that energy will be noticeable to the participants. I have learned to get all my preparations done early so that I can sit and talk with folks as they come in. I keep an eye on how many participants have entered the space and tell myself that starting 10 minutes late will not ruin anything. Try to acknowledge your anxiety triggers and adjust accordingly.

FACILITATION: TIPS

Facilitating can be hard. Sometimes it feels thankless. You will work with a lot of different personalities. In many ways this is a service position. It is important that you always approach the workshop from a position of generosity and remember that what you are doing is meaningful.

Important mainstays:

- After each exercise check-in with the group

Checking-in gives participants a chance to process what they have just experienced. If they felt awkward encourage them to say so. It is beneficial to explore why an exercise produces feelings of awkwardness. Perhaps they will discover something new about themselves or perhaps the exercise just wasn't effective. This small action allows participants to take up space, produces ownership and investment in the workshop, and allows individuals to bond over a common experience.

- Adjust exercises for individuals with limited mobility

At the beginning of the workshop announce that participants are welcome to adjust exercises based on their comfort. If you know that someone has difficulty with certain movements adjust the exercise accordingly (or sub in a different exercise). Every person is different, however, I have found that being overly cautious about mobility (i.e. checking in excessively, adjusting dramatically) can turn the individual into a spectacle. In general, individuals will take care of their own needs. Let them.

- Groups of 3-5 participants is ideal

Whether it is for the tableau exercises or the performance groups, 3-5 is the ideal number of participants per group for timing purposes. For breaking participants into groups, I like to use the count off method. It relieves the anxiety of having to find a partner.

- Acknowledge the silliness

Remember, whether someone has done theater before or not these exercises may make them feel silly. Some folks might be reticent, feeling as if they need to perform. Acknowledge that some of these games are goofy and it's okay if they feel silly. Always model an exercise when you can. Doing an exercise as BIG as possible (ex/ the name game) gives others permission to be BIG.

- Presentations/Performances should be around 1.5 hours (or 5 minutes per story)

The ideal length of a presentation/performance without an intermission is 1.5 hours. It may be necessary based on the number of participants to suggest a limit on the story length. In general, it is difficult in the intro workshop for participants to write lengthy stories over the course of an hour. However, giving an approximate time of 5 minutes each can be helpful. You may have a much smaller group and can give more time to the participants. Or, you may opt for a shorter presentation instead. Or, you may have more participants and need to limit stories to 3-minutes. If the presentation is free, you can get away with having a presentation as short as 30 minutes. If the presentation is going to be more than 2 hours I would acknowledge it and give the audience an intermission. This is where wine really helps...

Things I've Learned:

- Rules are not necessary

Often establishing rules or values amongst a group is an important part of creating a hospitable working environment. At the same time, as facilitators we must acknowledge that women, gender nonconforming, and trans individuals are much more subject to rules (aka, policing) in their everyday life. In my experience, rules are not necessary for promoting a respectful environment in the WPW.

- Be flexible, this is low stakes stuff

As the facilitator, being flexible is your main job (that and problem-solving). You may run out of time and need to skip exercises. You may have more or less participants than you had planned for. Someone might present a story that is much longer than the limit. All these things happen and they are all okay! No one will know you skipped an exercise, they are having too much fun! I would much rather someone present the story they want than feel bad for going over. Since the workshop is ultimately for the participants as long as they are enjoying themselves nothing else matters.

- You can't always tell how people are feeling

Some participants are very expressive and enthusiastic, some are more stoic and reserved. You may find yourself worried about the participants who do not look like they are having fun. Don't worry. You cannot always tell whether someone is enjoying themselves by their face. If they come back the next day you can assume they want to be there.

- Groups work differently

Similar to the above, you cannot always tell how a group is doing by how talkative they are. I have encountered groups that seem very quiet or break early and I worry that they are not getting along or have not staged their piece, etc. This has never been the case, put simply, groups work differently.

SUPPLIES

Depending on your budget, you can ask participants to bring a pen and paper. Name tags are nice but not necessary. I encourage you to at least have water available for participants. Groups do better if they have the Process handout.

- Pens or Pencils (for the entire group)
- Something to write on (writing pad, loose leaf paper)
- Name tags
- Refreshments
- Liz Lerman Critical Response Handout (see page ___)

2-DAY *AT-A-GLANCE*
WOMEN'S PERFORMANCE WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

First Day (ex/Friday 7-10pm):

*1-hour (ex/7-8pm): **Warm-Ups***

-Name Game
-Whoosh, Boing, Freak Out
-Walk the Space Blind
-The Blob
-Rhodessa Jones Music Warm-Up
-Viewpoints Bogart Counting Exercise

*1.5 hours (ex/8-9:30pm): **Storytelling and Tableaus***

Getting Comfortable:
-Mimic, Movement, Music
-Tableau with Four Changes
-Tableau in a Line, Heighten

More Intensive:
-Dream Tableaus
-Meld the Dreams
Additional (if time): Ritual Tableau

*30-45 minutes (ex/9:30-10:15pm): **Closing***

-Free Write (3 Minutes)
-Circle and Share
-Final Reflections + Next Day

Second Day: (ex/ Saturday 10:30am-5:30pm + Presentation)

*30min-1 hour: (ex/10:30-11:30am): **Warm-Ups***

-Name Game
-Imitation Dance
-Badada
-Story River

*1-1.5 hours (ex/11:30am-12:30pm: **Story-Circle***

*1 hour (ex/12:30-1:30pm): **Working Lunch***

-Write 3 Personal Stories
-Share Liz Lerman Process

*1.5 hours (ex/1:30-3pm): **Sharing Sessions***

*30 minutes (ex/3-3:30pm): **Self-Stage***

*1.5 hours (ex/3:30pm-5:30pm): **Staging Sessions***

*1-1.5 hours (ex/5:30-7pm): **Break***

*1.5-2 hours (ex/8-10pm): **Performance***

2-DAY DETAILED
WOMEN'S PERFORMANCE WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

These exercises are designed to move in a way that encourages more participant comfort as the workshop progresses.

For the most part, these exercises can go on for a varying degree of time. Some exercises you may want to continue longer while others you go through quickly. You may need to cut some or rearrange depending on the needs of the group. As you continue to facilitate you will be able to tell when an exercise has reached its conclusion.

Check-in after each exercise.

First Day (ex/Friday 7-10pm):

1-hour (ex/7-8pm): ***Warm-Ups***

Name Game

Participants stand in a circle. Participants are asked to say their name accompanied by an adjective and movement. For example, "Jigglin' Jayme" (movement: shaking tummy). Each participant mimics the movement and name. After everyone has shared their name, quickly go through the names again. Then, ask participants to call and respond names. Ex/ "Jigglin' Jayme, Happy Hannah."

Why? *This is an excellent ice breaker. It allows participants to quickly get familiar and comfortable with each other while using their bodies and getting out of their head.*

Whoosh, Boing, Freak Out

Participants stand in a circle. Begin by asking participants to pass the whoosh. Then, add the "boing." Continue to add other elements as the group gets comfortable: Zap, Dance Party, Om, Freak out, Shwing.

Why? *The 'game' element of this exercise revolves around following complicated rules. It allows for participants to be creative within the safety of a straightforward structure.*

Walk the Space Blind

Participants get into partners. The first partner is asked to close her eyes and put her hand on the second partners back. The second partner moves around the space, changing how fast she walks, levels, etc. After 2-3 minutes the partners switch.

Why? *This exercise quickly builds trust between participants. It asks participants to let go of control and be vulnerable.*

The Blob

Participants are asked to walk the space in neutral. After 30 seconds or so ask them to observe each other and heighten the movements they observe. If someone is swinging their arms everyone should begin to swing their arms as big as possible. Participants may add in movements and sound. The objective is that everyone observes each other, mimics each other, and continues to heighten as the blob changes shape.
Why? *The blob asks participants to be seen acting silly. It requires that participants move their bodies oddly and make big sounds. Within the safety of the group, participants are pushed out of their comfort zones.*

Rhodessa Jones Music Warm-Up

Participants stand in a circle. Go to a participant and ask them to give you a 'beat.' As the beat continues move down the circle asking each participant to add to the beat until everyone is contributing to the soundscape. In the middle, indicate that they get louder or softer.
Why? *This exercises shows participants that they can collectively and quickly create something beautiful. Each participant is necessary to create the unique soundscape. It is also a device that they can potentially use in the performance.*

Viewpoints Counting Exercise

Everyone stands is a circle. Put an object in the center and ask that participants stare at the object (and not each other). Without indicating to each other, ask them to collectively count to 20. If two people say a number at the same time they must start over.
Why? *This is a cool down exercise that tests the cohesion of the group.*

1.5 hours (ex/8-9:30pm): ***Storytelling and Tableaus***

Getting Comfortable

Mirror, Movement, Music

In partners, participants face each other. Each partner is given 1-2 minutes as the "leader" of the movement. As they move, their partner must mirror them. After each partner has gone, ask partners to contribute one move each to an overall movement. For example, the first partner adds a hand being raised (both must raise their hand). From that position, the second partner adds a turn. So on and so forth. Ask the groups to see how many movements they can add while still remembering the sequence. After 3-5 minutes ask each partner to share the movements they have created while playing music (optional). Or, ask a group of 3 partners to share while playing music. Observe how the movements become a dance.
Why? *Similar to Rhodessa Jones' Music warm up, this exercise gives participants a glimpse into what can be made through group work. It helps participants free up their bodies while introducing them to the concept of tableau and mimicry. By watching each other "perform" their movements, participants are covertly introduced to staging.*

Tableau with Four Changes

Participants get in two parallel lines facing each other. The facilitator asks partners facing each other to make note of the others' appearance. What are they wearing? How are they wearing it? Is their hair up or down, etc.? The facilitator asks both lines to turn away from each other and change four subtle things about their appearance (pull a sleeve up, unbutton one button from a blouse, etc.). When the groups turn back around each partner must guess the four changes that have been made.

Why? *This exercise is an introduction into observation. Observation is a large part of performance-making. Observation is a gateway into noticing behavior, both in order to be a better group member (being able to respond when you notice someone is uncomfortable) and to create a more compelling performance.*

Tableau in a Line, Heighten

Participants get in two parallel lines facing each other. Facilitator asks participants for an emotion (ex/ sad). Participants in the first line will all make a tableau/statue physicalizing "sad." The participants in the second row will then heighten their partner's tableau, moving the first participant's body (with their permission). The facilitator asks the participants in the second row to examine the tableaus. The facilitator will ask the participants in the second row to move down and the process continues. After "sad" has been exhausted the facilitator can ask for a new suggestion. The alternate row would now serve as the tableau/statues.

Why? *This exercise helps participants think about physicalizing emotions. By observing others' physicalization of emotions and how they can be interpreted and heightened, participants are given a better understanding of how they can use their bodies to accentuate their piece.*

More Intensive

Dream Tableaus

Participants are asked to get in groups (3-4 is a good number of participants in each group). The facilitator asks each participant to share a recent dream with their group (in as much detail as possible). If they cannot think of a dream it can be a childhood memory. After each participant shares a dream, groups will create a tableau to represent each individual dream (using each person in their group). Once the tableaus have been created each group will share the tableaus with the larger group. If there is time, the facilitator can ask the group to guess what the dream is about based on the tableau.

Why? *This exercise accomplishes three major goals: 1) It asks participants to begin sharing personal stories with each other (in a low stakes way); 2) It asks participants to think about how they would represent their story in terms of staging (tableau) that would be understandable to an audience; 3) It asks participants to collaborate with one another to accomplish a creative goal.*

Meld the Dreams

After the dream tableaus are shared, ask participants to reconvene in their groups. Each group will now create ONE dream/story using elements from each person's dream. After they decide on a story that uses an element from each dream, they will create a "moving" tableau for their story. Groups may use one tableau for each person in the group (which can move, but only slightly; i.e. someone rocks back and forth). Groups may also use up to five words and unlimited sounds. Once each group has created their moving tableaus they are shared with the group. After each group shares participants may guess what the story is or the facilitator may ask the group to explain the story (time depending).

Why? *This exercise asks participants to more deeply develop staging techniques. By limiting the number of words, groups are forced to think of alternative ways to communicate their story (outside of a narrative structure). It also asks that participants not be too precious with their stories (by only telling a segment of it) and think about how their story can contribute to a larger whole. You may communicate with the group that creating soundscapes and tableaus are great tools they can use to enhance their pieces.*

Additional (if time): Ritual Tableau

In groups, participants are asked to think of a daily ritual they all perform (i.e. taking off their bra, brushing their teeth, etc.). Each group is asked to create four tableaus to represent their ritual. Once the four tableaus are created they are shared with the group. Then, the groups reconvene and add sounds and transitional movements into the tableaus creating a continuous piece. Each group shares their rituals and discusses how the sounds and transitions changed/affected their ritual representation.

Why? *This exercise assists participants in thinking of how to create movement in a piece from the starting point of a single image and soundscape. It reinforces the idea that staging can be relatively simplistic yet still interesting.*

30-45 minutes (ex/9:30-10:15pm): ***Closing***

Free Write (3 Minutes)

Ask participants to free write any thoughts, reflections, or feelings they have about the workshop thus far. Let them know that their writing will not be shared.

Circle and Share

(From 'Theatrical Jazz' workshop facilitated by Omi Osun Joni L. Jones)

Ask participants to circle four words in their free write that are meaningful to them that will be shared. As each participant shares their words, ask participants to write down shared words that resonate or are significant to them. Once all the words have been shared ask participants to write a piece/poem/narrative that includes all of the words they have written down that will be shared. Give 3-4 minutes for this. After, ask each participant to share their narrative.

Why? *This exercise asks for a bit of vulnerability from each participant. At the same time, they can decide how much they want to share with the group and are given the safety of using other participant's words. It asks participants to stand alone in front of an audience, again, with the safety that they have built a comradery with their spectators. Finally, it shows the similarities in each participant's experience as they connect with certain words over and over again.*

Final Reflections + Next Day
Ask for reflections about the workshop thus far. You may decide to give a short breakdown of the next day's events.

Second Day: (ex/ Saturday 10:30am-5:30pm + Presentation)

30min-1 hour: (ex/10:30-11:30am): ***Warm-Ups***

Name Game
Participants stand in a circle. Participants are asked to say their name accompanied by an adjective and movement. For example, "Jigglin' Jayme" (movement: shaking tummy). Each participant mimics the movement and name. After everyone has shared their name, quickly go through the names again. Then, ask participants to call and respond names. Ex/ "Jigglin' Jayme, Happy Hannah."
Why? *Remind participants of each other's name. It also opens the second day with a game they are familiar with which increases comfort and confidence.*

Imitation Dance
Participants stand in a circle. The facilitator plays music (something upbeat). One participant goes in the middle of the circle and starts dancing. The rest of the participants mimic their dance. When the person in the middle is ready, she may choose someone else to enter the circle. The warm-up continues for 1-2 songs.
Why? *This exercise is plain fun! It allows for everyone to feel comfortably silly. It is also a great exercise to energize the group.*

Badada
Participants stand in a circle. The facilitator begins to clap (thighs, hands, partner hands). Once the beat has been established, the facilitators says a word (ex/ "apple) and asks the next person in the circle to say the first word that pops in their head (ex/ "orange"). Then the entire group repeats the words: "Apple, Orange, Badada." The next participant would then offer a word with the proceeding participant adding an associated word (ex/ "shirt", "shoes", "shirt shoes badada"). The facilitator may ask the group to increase the pace until it becomes unmanageable.
Why? *This exercise helps participants get out of their heads. The beat and speed of the chant demands that participants associate words quickly (aka, they can't overthink it). The exercise asks for a full physical engagement from each participant. If one person breaks the chain the chant will fall apart. It is a good lead in for the Story River.*

Story River

Participants stand in a line. The facilitator stands in front of the line and asks for a suggestion (ex/ "pizza", "dogs", "mothers", etc.). The facilitator explains that the object of the story river is to tell a true story about the given suggestion. However, the participants should interrupt the storyteller as soon as their story reminds them of their own story. For example, "In college I got in a fight with my boyfriends and threw pizza in his driveway…" (new participant runs in the circle and interrupts) "In college I didn't study for an exam and just marked all the questions blindly"...(new participant runs in the circle and interrupts) "I took an eye exam last week and the woman asked me to cover my eye…" The goal is for no participant to be able to tell more than 20 seconds of their story. Explain that by interrupting each storyteller the group is actually being supportive. The facilitator may tell participants that they can start their story with "college reminds me of…" which sometimes is helpful. This exercise can go on for several minutes.

Why? *This exercise begins the storytelling process. It allows participants to access a wealth of memories and connect with each other through shared experiences. The limited time provides a safety net for the sharer and also gives permission for participants (especially women) to take up space (via the interruption). This exercise sometimes requires the facilitator to participate a lot at the beginning to model interrupting. As the exercise progresses more and more participants will get involved. In my experience the longer the exercise goes on the more space is given to the person telling the story. The group begins to intuit when to step in without actually interrupting the story.*

1-1.5 hours (ex/11:30am-12:30pm: ***Story-Circle***

Story Circle

The group is asked to sit in a circle (on the ground or with chairs or both). The facilitator offers a prompt (ex, when is the first time you felt your gender or your gender was imposed on you?). Participants are not required to share. Participants may share a story that is unrelated to the topic. Silence is okay. Displays of emotion are okay. While the storyteller is talking no one else is talking (only listening). Ideally, the story is told without comments from the group.

Why? *Along with the Liz Lerman Critical Response Process, the story circle is a pillar of the WPW. The story circle demands a level of comfort in the group. The story circle allows women to take up space, uninterrupted. It is not unusual for participants to cry in a story circle. I have never had to discourage participants from comforting each other, however, often when we comfort each other it is to relieve our own discomfort with seeing such outward displays of emotions. I generally introduce the story circle by saying a version of this. I generally do not police the story circle if it devolves periodically into a conversation. The story circle more deeply connects the group, establishes the theater as a sacred space, and gives participants a starting point for their story by bringing to the fore important ideas and events.*

Suggested Prompts:

1 hour (ex/12:30-1:30pm): ***Working Lunch***

Write 3 Personal Stories

During lunch, ask participants to write up to three stories that they are interested in sharing for their performance. They may write them as a poem, monologue, dialogue, a set of movements, etc. (Explain terms such as "monologue" and "dialogue.").

Share Liz Lerman Critical Response Process

Step 1. Statements of Meaning

Responders state what was meaningful, evocative, interesting, exciting, and/or striking in the work they have just witnessed.

Step 2. Artist as Questioner

The artist asks questions about the work. In answering, responders stay on topic with the question and may express opinions in direct response to the artist's questions.

Step 3. Neutral Questions

Responders ask neutral questions about the work, and the artist responds. Questions are neutral when they do not have an opinion couched in them.

Step 4. Opinion Time

Responders state opinions, given permission from the artist; the artist has the option to say no.

1.5 hours (ex/1:30-3pm): ***Sharing Sessions***

In groups, each participant is given 20 minutes (time depending) to share their story and elicit feedback via the Liz Lerman Critical Response Process. If the participant has written more than one story encourage them to share all two or three before eliciting feedback (for time's sake). The groups are generally self-sufficient during this process. However, groups may have questions and may need time reminders. Let them know that once everyone is shared they should select one story they want to share during the presentation and take the remaining time to revise it.

FYI: *I have found that groups work at different paces for the sharing sessions. However, the first sharer generally takes up the most time as the group gets used to the Process. I like to go around to each group and say something like "FYI, 20 minutes has passed so if you haven't moved on to the second person in your group you should begin to think about it..." Not too imposing but also letting participants know that time is finite. Allow for 20-30 minutes at the end for participants to revise their stories.*

30 minutes (ex/3-3:30pm): ***Self-Stage***

Ask participants to take 20-30 minutes to think about how they will direct/stage their piece. Remind them that they should use their entire group in the staging and can use tableaus and soundscapes to enhance their story. They may want to solicit the input of their group if they do not have ideas ready. As director, they are in charge of how they want to lead the staging session and ultimately how the piece is staged.

1.5 hours (ex/3:30pm-5:30pm): ***Staging Sessions***

Each participant is given 20-30 minutes to stage their piece with the rest of the group.

Groups approach this differently. Some prefer to talk about staging before they put it into action. Some will stage participant by participant. As facilitator, it is important to remind the group of time, encourage them to run through the pieces as many times as it takes to feel comfortable, and establish a performance order.

FYI: *I have found that staging is where participants are most likely to impose their vision (taste, biases) on others' work. Remind participants that the author/director's vision is supreme. Collaboration is encouraged and can be extremely fruitful in generating ideas, however, it should be framed through the Process. I contend that when the author serves as the director of their piece it promotes a sense of agency, eliminates artistic disagreements, and saves time.*

1-1.5 hours (ex/5:30-7pm): ***Break***

Before the performance decide the group order.

If you are doing a long day this break is very necessary (although you may alter the time depending on whether you expect participants to leave for dinner or are providing food).

1.5-2 hours (ex/8-10pm): ***Presentation/Performance***

I make a point to call the intro workshop's performance a "presentation." Depending on the venue, it manages expectations for the performer and audience. Ideally the presentation is free and open to the public. I like to have wine available for the presentation (for performers and spectators). I also like to invite the audience into the warm-ups before the presentation. These small acts help invest the audience and indicate that they are not going to witness a traditional performance (and therefore do not have to act as a traditional audience). You may announce to the audience that this is a radical feminist act and in the tradition of radical feminist performance the spectators are invited to take care of their own comfort (refill their wine, go to the bathroom, take a break in the lobby, be vocally supportive, etc.). At the same time, it is important to impart to the participants that the presentation is ultimately for them alone, to have their stories heard and be witnessed.

ADDITIONAL GAMES

Physical Warm-Ups

Enemy and Friend

Participants walk the space. Participants are asked to identify one person as an enemy and one as a friend (without telling each other). Participants want to stay as close to their friend as possible while putting as much space as they can between themselves and their enemy.

Jana Cabana

In groups of three, 2 participants create the "cabana" and one participant serves as the "jana." The cabanas create the house and the jana stands under it. One person stands outside the group and tries to take the place of a jana or cabana . If she yells "jana" all of the jana's move. If she yells "cabana" all of the cabanas move. If she yells "jana cabana" everyone moves.

Don't Die!

Everyone stands in a circle facing the floor. When the facilitator counts to three, everyone looks at another participant. If two participants are looking at each other they both must die dramatically. The process continues until one person is left.

Cognitive Warm-Ups

One Word Story

Participants stand in a circle. Each participant contributes one word to the story. You may ask participants to begin with "once upon a time" if they are having trouble. When it feels like a story is over a participant may say "the end."

In the Manner of the Word

One participant is sent out of the room, the "guesser." While the guesser is out of the room, the other participants decide on an adjective (happily, sadistically, vaguely, etc.). When the guesser returns she asks participants to perform different tasks in the manner of the word until she guesses the adjective. Ex/ "Jayme, in the manner of the word brush your hair." "Kat, in the matter of the word, walk a dog." "Christen, in the manner of the word, walk up the stairs."

Name 5 Nouns

Participants sit or stand in a circle. One participant is in the middle of the circle. Another participant holds an object (usually a pen is easy). The participant holding the pen says a letter (ex/ "A") and begins to pass the pen. The participant in the middle must then name 5 nouns that start with "A" before the pen reaches the first participant. In some versions of the game the participant stays in the middle for another round if she cannot name 5 words. In other versions the participant picks the next person to be in the middle.

Movement-Based / Skill-Building Exercises

Move and Touch

In partners, one participant closes their eyes while the other serves as the leader. The leader then touches a part of the other partner's body (arm, hip, leg, etc). The leader can gently touch the body part or use a little more force (obviously never shoving/hurting someone). The person with their eyes closed responds to the touch by moving that part of their body either a little or a lot depending on the force the leader uses.

Spell Name w/ Body

In groups of four, each participant spells their name with their entire body and teaches it to the other participants. After each participant in the group has spelled everyone's name, they can link their names together to form a larger movement. These movements can be performed for the other participants (optional: to music).

Create a 2-Minute Play

In groups, participants will create a 2-minute play including all of the following:
Choose a dramatic theme (melodrama, comedy, horror).
Choose a dramatic title and a specific setting.
Include: something to do with someone named Lois, one true story, one big reveal, a planned accident, one moment of extreme levels (ex/voice high or low; one person standing on a chair, one person on the floor), extreme distance or proximity, a moment of stillness, a moment of unison movement, a meaningful silence, a dance, and a moment of playing opposite.
Give no more than 10 minutes for groups to create their 2-minute play.

ADJUSTMENTS

Originally, the WPW was designed as a 6-month workshop. Condensing it down to 2 days meant dramatically speeding up the process. You may find it valuable to spread the workshop out over more days. At the same time, as the workshop is extended the demand on the participants is increased. A 2-day workshop is a manageable commitment and may serve as a way to garner future buy-in from your community. A longer workshop gives each participant more time to connect, write and share their stories, and work on staging.

There are several ways to adjust the workshop schedule. I have included here the 3-day advanced workshop schedule and a short description of the 6-month workshop.

<u>6-Month Workshop</u>

This workshop takes the same techniques found in the 2-day workshop and extends them. If you are leading a longer workshop I recommend participating in the process (contributing a story). Because of the length of the workshop, it is conducive for a smaller group (6-12). Previous workshops have met once per week for 2-3 hours per session. During the staging period it increases to 2 days per week. Below is a month-to-month breakdown:

- Month One (meet once per week):
  Drop-in period for interested participants
  Theater exercises
- Month Two (meet once per week):
  Finalize participant list
  Create a sharing schedule for next month; ask participants to write 1-3 stories to share
  Focus on theater exercises and introducing the story circle
- Month Three (meet once per week):
  Two participants share per session (1-hour each)
- Month Four (meet once or twice per week)
  Continue sharing sessions
  Move onto staging sessions
- Month Five (meet twice per week)
  Continue sharing sessions
  Each participant receives 2 staging sessions of 1.5 hours each (rough blocking and detailed blocking)
- Month Six (meet 2-3 times per week)
  Work in props
  Create transitions
  Run the entire show
  Tech
  Performance

Advanced Workshop

Schedule Example:

Schedule		
Friday, January 11th 6:30-10pm		*Snacks*
6:30-7pm	Intro Games	Name Game, Name with Body, Mirror+ Music
7-8pm	Story Circle	
8-8:20pm	Free Write (Revise Draft)	
8:20-8:40pm	Make a 2-Minute Play	
8:45-10:30pm	Playwriting Workshop	
Overnight	Finish Writing	
Saturday, January 12th 11am-6pm		*Lunch + Snacks*
11:00am	Warm-Up	Dance Circle
11-12:30pm	Directing Workshop	
12:30-2:30pm	Share stories, feedback, final revisions	Lunch
2:30-3pm	Self-stage	
3-5pm	Rough Blocking with Group	
5-6pm	Lighting Decide Show Order How to Open and Close the Show	Email Scripts, Props, and Lighting Before Midnight
Sunday, January 13th 2-7pm		*Pizza*
12-2pm	Detail Blocking	Rotating space (30 minutes)
2-4pm	Cue-to-Cue	
4:30-5pm	House Open	
5:00 PM	Show!	

GRANT NARRATIVE

This program is fundable! You just have to do the research to find granting agencies and foundations interested in supporting community-building work. Below is an example of a grant I wrote for the Baltimore Office of Promotions and the Arts.

BOPA Grant Narrative

In America, we are in a historical moment where women refuse to be silenced. Social media has fostered movements like the #metoo campaign and Time's Up, sparking important discussions about sexual assault and inequity in the workplace. Right now, women's visibility and silence-breaking are shifting systemic cultural biases and giving other women permission to tell their stories. While theater can be a powerful tool in giving a public voice to the disenfranchised, much of the theatrical process takes place in private spaces with little pedagogical evaluation. My project opens up a space for women and trans community members in an effort to forge a supportive community while also creating personal narratives that can be publicly performed. My project incorporates techniques employed by community-engaged theaters such as Roadside Theater (story-circles, personal narratives) and feminist performance collectives such as Split Britches and Spiderwoman Theatre (devised playmaking, collaborative staging). By using participant-based performance applications, the Women's Performance Workshop provides the opportunity for women and trans individuals to write, stage, and perform their own narratives.

During the first portion of the workshop, the emphasis is on creating a discourse among participants. I lead participants in different forms of theater exercises and embodied pedagogy including dramaturgy, acting, improvisation, and story-circles. During the second half of the workshop participants write personal narratives that they will share with the group, eliciting feedback through Liz Lerman's critical response model. These stories are then formed into collaborative performances with each member serving as the director of their own piece. The WPW provides a flexible structure and sufficient support so that working women, mothers, students, and economically disadvantaged individuals are able to participate.

The goals of my project are to 1) produce a narrative testimonial questionnaire that provides ripple effect mapping; 2) create a self-sustaining model of facilitation using the "train the trainer" approach in which previous participants are trained to facilitate future workshops; 3) and, provide initial structural support to my community-partner so that the WPW may be continuously replicated after I leave.

The Women's Performance Workshop has been in development since September 2015 when I facilitated the first group of Cornell University undergraduate and graduate women in the spring '16 AGIT Lab (Association of Graduates in Theater). This first iteration was an experiment in recreating second-wave feminist models of theater-making. In order to increase the project's reach to the Ithaca community, I partnered with Civic Ensemble for the second iteration that took

place over the 2016-2017 school year. Adhering to a community-engaged framework, which serves to decrease barriers to participation, the workshop offers participants child-care, transportation, refreshments, and the option of flexible attendance.

The workshop is a place where women can take up space, are given time to connect with each other through story-circle discussions about gender roles, sexism, relationships, and so much more. The workshop takes place over 2 days. Day one participants engage with theater exercises, learn theatrical techniques, and begin writing personal narratives. On day two, participants engage in a group-wide story circle, spend time writing and workshopping their personal narrative, and finally, perform it for an audience. During the course of the workshop women are encouraged to serve as leaders, listeners, and collaborators.

After recently completing a short 2-day workshop at the Strand in January I am moved to continue working in the Baltimore community to develop and create a self-sustaining model of community-engaged theater that can be replicated in other communities. I will return to Baltimore this summer to lead a workshop for previous participants, expanding and deepening their engagement, as well as offering a workshop for new participants in the Baltimore community. Participants from the previous workshop, who opt to return, will be given the opportunity to be trained as facilitators for future workshops. I will return again in the winter to repeat the process and once again in the summer of '19. At the end of this process the Strand will have a self-sustaining program specifically for women-identified, trans, and gender fluid community members.

Describe the Community It Will Serve

The Women's Performance Workshop is open to all women-identified, trans, and non-binary individuals. The workshop is a place where women can take up space (something they don't often get to do). Women are given time to connect with each other through discussions about gender roles, sexuality, everyday sexism, racism, aging, body-image, stress, family, pets, friends, work, marriage, dating, illness, and so much more. The first workshop at the Strand garnered 25 participants from all over Baltimore City. The response from the community was overwhelming and spoke to a strong need for Baltimore to more deeply engage with its women and trans individuals. The workshop limits barriers to participation by offering transportation, childcare, and refreshments. The public presentation is free and open to the public. The workshop uses theater to empower women and trans participants to take ownership over their own narrative.

Partner Info

Mission:

The Strand Theater Company champions challenging and provocative theater that especially celebrates women's diverse voices and perspectives while bringing together the creative talents of both women and men as artists, technicians, and administrators.

History

The Strand Theater was founded in 2007 by Jayme Kilburn in the 1800 block of N. Charles Street. Since its inception, the Strand has specifically offered opportunities to women theater-makers, emerging playwrights, and young artists. In its first year, the Strand produced world-premieres of four full-length plays and initiated its community-engaged Open House series. By season five, the Strand had produced over fifty new plays through its Friends and Neighbors summer play festival and Second Saturday reading series. The Strand has given residencies to other local theater companies including the Charm City Kitties and Baltimore Improv Group. In 2012 Elena Kostakis (former Managing Director of the Baltimore Theatre Alliance) was hired as the Strand's Executive Director when Kilburn left her position to pursue a master's degree. In her first year, Kostakis secured a city grant allowing the Strand to create a permanent home on Harford Road. Since moving to Hamilton, the Strand has become a leader in staging performances that speak to the diversity of Baltimore's population and has expanded its programming to now offer educational theater classes.

The Women's Performance Workshop speaks directly to the Strand Theater's mission, offering opportunities to not only women theater-makers but women and trans individuals in the larger Baltimore community. The workshop allows for a greater and deeper perspective of women story-tellers by breaking down barriers to participation. Unlike other workshops currently offered at the Strand, the Women's Performance Workshop is free for both the participants and audience members. The workshop serves to empower Baltimore women to author their own narratives and trains interested members in facilitating future workshops. The WPW creates a community of women that is sustained long after the performance is over.

Although my primary partner is the Strand Theater, I will also continue my relationship with Ithaca's community-based theater group, Civic Ensemble, who will work with me to create a post-workshop questionnaire and train facilitators. Since its inception in 2012, Civic Ensemble has created work that critically engages with relevant and pressing issues in the Ithaca community and has been recognized nationally as an expert in community-based playmaking. Civic Ensemble's partnership on this project lends structural support and direction in forging ethical relationships with community-members. Civic Ensemble's Education Director, Sarah Chalmers, will accompany me to train previous workshop participants in ethical facilitation techniques.

LIZ LERMAN CRITICAL RESPONSE HANDOUT

THE ROLES

- The **artist** offers a work-in-progress for review and feels prepared to question that work in a dialogue with other people.
- One, a few, or many **responders** — committed to the artist's intent to make excellent work — engage in the dialogue with the artist.
- The **facilitator**, initiates each step, keeps the process on track, and works to help the artist and responders use the process to frame useful questions and responses.

THE PROCESS

The Critical Response Process takes place after a presentation of artistic work. Work can be short or long, large or small, and at any stage in its development.

THE CORE STEPS

1. **Statements of Meaning:** Responders state what was meaningful, evocative, interesting, exciting, striking in the work they have just witnessed.
2. **Artist as Questioner:** The artist asks questions about the work. After each question, the responders answer. Responders may express opinions if they are in direct response to the question asked and do not contain suggestions for changes.
3. **Neutral Questions:** Responders ask neutral questions about the work. The artist responds. Questions are *neutral* when they do *not* have an opinion couched in them. For example, if you are discussing the lighting of a scene, "Why was it so dark?" is not a neutral question. "What ideas guided your choices about lighting?" is.
4. **Opinion Time:** Responders state opinions, subject to permission from the artist. The usual form is "I have an opinion about _____, would you like to hear it?" The artist has the option to say no.

PLANNING A SESSION
W HAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?

PARTICIPANTS

- Size of group? (If YP - any other adults?)
- Mix of group? (Age, genders, Culture, Mix of boss-worker, older-younger?)
- Abilities, experience, preferences, interests? Skills? Desire to do theatre?
- Developmental & other needs? (Languages?) Values?
- Group culture I experience together?

LEADER/S

- Do you have the confidence and experience to fulfill the objectives?
- Do you need someone else to co-lead? To supervise? To support? What's the ratio of leaders to participants?
- Have you led the activities before? How much is riding on 'successful' performance versus flexibility in mid-stream?
- Are there other 'leaders' in the host organization? - What is their role? What are their and your expectations? How will you work together?

ACTIVITIES

- What are the objectives/expectations of outcomes? (Why are we doing this?) What are the assumptions? By group members and by the host organization? What is the con(act you can agree between all parties?
- Is this a one-off session or a sequence? (How much time do you have to achieve goals? Are they realistic?)
- What are the evaluation/documentation/compliance expectations?
- What is the exit strategy? ?
- What resources do you have access to?
- How will you HOOK in the group?
- Are activities high or low exposure? Do they require high or low energy?

SETTING

- Physical environment - never assume!
- How big is it? What shape? What restrictions are there (furniture, noise etc.)
- What is the surface (carpet, concrete, dance floor, grass)?
- Is it clean/safe? (sprinkler heads, musical equipment, glass, dog droppings, holes, nails etc) Are there potential distractions? (Chalk, balls, TVs, Loud speakers) Are there moveable chairs? Rugs/mats?
- Do you have full access to it? What other activities occur there? Will other groups have access during the session? (Noise? Windows?)
- Can the area be secured?

SITUATION

- What is the context? (Are participants choosing to come? Being paid?)
- What is the surrounding emotional and activity environment the participants are immersed in?
- What is happening before and after the session?
- How long are the sessions, at what time of day? Breaks?
- What are the expectations I rules I culture of the organization I host leaders?

Adapted by H.K.White from "The Game and Play Leader's Handbook" by Michaelis and O'Connell

TOOLS YOU CAN USE TO DEVELOP SKILLS

GAMES
(Can you make it into a game? Adapt an existing game? Make.it fun and challenging?)

OFFERING CHALLENGES (Can you be this still?)

USING 'SECRETS' & "GUESSING"...
'Secrets' can be used as a way of offering a challenge, and upping the stakes. Each group 'secretly' has a different topic ...

Guessing can be a useful way to 'check out' whether what we are attempting is being understood by an audience. This is what we intended - how successful were. we? Be aware of 'right answer syndrome' and making people wrong. Framing is important.

POSING PROBLEMS ("Problematizing")
Can you problematize - make it into a problem they need to solve...? Play devil's advocate?

OBJECTIVES
What are we trying to achieve with each activity? What is our focus? Have you let us in on what we are trying to develop? (Are we making an image for you to make your own interpreations, or are we trying to guess which fairy tale you have created?)

LEADER'S INTERVENTIONS

Eg: SIDE COACHING
Remind of objective - particularly useful if there is more than one objective....when we are successful with one, what about the other one?
Eg: MODEL
(You say I have to 'say yes'. I say 'yes' to everything... is that what you mean?)

ACKNOWLEDGING FEARS I FEELINGS/PERMISSION TO FAIL/ "WRECK" SOMETHING I REASSURANCE.
Using terms like 'experiment', acknowledge 'strangeness' of a particular skill (Movement) or'feeling phoney' (Mime). Theatre asks us to do some weird things!

REFLECTION I ASSESSMENT (in pairs, groups, all together)
What are you discovering about how to play this game?

LEADER REFLECTS BACK
"I noticed this". (Some people left space for the pen, some people pushed their fingers together. Interesting. Choice) Not necessarily judgi ng, but giving freedom to interpret tasks, affirming they can find ways to solve challenges.

HELEN K. WHITE
10/3/05

TAKE OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED BY GROUP
If a group member identifies something that has a term, introduce the term and/or concept. Make connections to the wider body of knowledge. (Watch over-using - can feel like school...)

OPPORTUNITIES TO OBSERVE AS WELL AS DO

DECONSTRUCTI ON
Break down what we have seen

OPPORTUNITIES TO GIVE FEEDBACK TO EACH OTHER
(in pairs, groups, all together)

CHANCE TO REAPPPLY
Construct a task that gives us a chance to reapply what we have learned... the task is a form of problematizing. It contains a creative problem we need to solve

PRACTICE
Just doing it. Useful as a stage, but what are we practicing? Remember 'practice makes permanent'. Need to look at how to develop the work further.

CHANCE TO REFINE, CLARIFY, REPEAT
Did we succeed? What changes would we need to make?

UP THE STAKES (Develop at another level)

RETURN TO ACTIVITIES TO PLAY AT A HIGHER LEVEL OF SKILL
Spiral - begin another sequence

HELEN K. WHITE
10/3/05

WHAT DOES A GROUP NEED TO LEARN TO CREATE STRONG THEATRE?

- Confidence

- How to work together

- What they want to communicate to an audience (content)
  Develop understanding that theatre has meaning - *what do we want to say?*

- How theatre communicates (form: styles/genre/ routines/rhythm/concrete mime/music/ non-naturalism etc. Particularly to support non-actors) How 10 dvise in theatrical form

How do we want to say it?

- What makes 'quality theatre'? A critical relationship to the work

- Performance skills - acting skills, improv, physical choices, character etc.
- If no director or self-sustaining: how to devise

How can you support a group to do the best quality work that they can do? Where can you push/challenge yourself and them?

LEADING ACTIVITIES

S TEP BY STEP INSTRUCTIONS

H OOK

R ULES

U SE OF SPACE

M ODELING

P LAYER'S OBJECTIVES

REMEMBERING...

SAFETY
FUN
STYLE & ENERGY OF LEADER

Asking Better Questions

A number of different classifications of questions have been defined to help people develop the skill of questioning. This one is drawn from Norah Morgan & Julianna Saxton in the book ASKING BETTER QUESTIONS. It is based upon an intention for each question by asking 'what do I want this question to do?'

The categories are flexible, and frequently overlap. What is most important is understanding what we are trying to achieve in asking the question...

1. SEEKING INFORMATION - Draw out what we know, what we have just seen

    - How many of you have played this before?
    - What does 'astounding' mean?
    - How can we get more information?
    - So what are the alternatives we have come up with?

2. SHAPING UNDERSTANDING - What lies between the facts? Infer, restate, clarify, share point of view

    - What do you mean by 'civilized'?
    - Why do you hate cops?
    - What effect did the silence have on the scene?
    - What does this game have to do with theatre?
    - How did that scene make you feel?

3. PRESSING FOR REFLECTION - Think critically & creatively, speculate on future action & consequence, implications of actions, uncover contradictions, reflect on self and others, make critical judgments

    - Why did that scene make you feel that way?
    - Do you think there is anything in the show that could offend an audience?
    - Which idea would make the strongest ending for an audience?
    - What kind of concerns do people have when they leave their homes to make a new
    - start somewhere else?
    - How can we make this subject relevant to our audience?
    - When might we choose to use pantomime in a scene?

HELEN K. WHITE
11/14/08

Asking Better Questions

BE AWARE OF

1. YES/NO QUESTIONS - These are also known as 'closed' questions. There is a finite answer. Questions can be answered with a simple yes or no.

   - Did any of the scenes contain meaning? (Y/N)
   - Was it challenging to try to pantomime? (Y N)

   Yes/No questions will usually require a follow up question.

2. QUESTIONS THAT CONTAIN ANSWERS - Check if your question contains an assumption, "an agenda" or a right answer.

   - How did pantomime make the scenes better? (Did it? Assumption that it did)
   - What about that theme was interesting? (Assumption: It was interesting.)
   - Why should we say no to drugs? (Agenda: we should all say no to drugs)

3. FIRST LEVEL QUESTIONS - These questions can serve a purpose at the beginning of a process if they are about gathering information. As the session progresses, you want to try to move onto questions that require a deeper analysis.

   - What do you see?

4. GENERAL VERSUS SPECIFIC QUESTIONS - General questions can serve a purpose, but check whether you are clear about why you are asking the question, and whether a more specific question will better serve your objective.

   - So how did we do?
   - Are there any observations on our work today?

   These questions leave it open for responses about content, form, dynamics or your leadership and structuring of the session.... Do you want to ask such a general question? Did the session focus on content or form? Do you want to ask specifically about the process of working together?

   Be careful - there can be a danger that the group will begin to process your session instead of you processing their learning ...!

HELEN K. WHITE
11/14/08

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS IN GROUP THEATRE SESSIONS

You need to have a clear objective to get the group to reflect critically. Reflection could go in one of three directions:

SKILL

- What would we have to do to play this game better?
- What did you discover about pantomime from this exercise?
- What helps to make pantomime believable?
- What were some of the challenges?
- How successful were we at using pantomime in the scenes?
- Did you make any discoveries about using pantomime when devising original theatre?
- Does anyone have any ideas for how we could make this moment more powerful?

CONTENT

- What did the scenes tell us or ask us about the theme?
- (Is that always true? So what could we do to make it less simplistic?)
- Do you think there was anything in our scenes today that an audience might find offensive?
- Do you think it is possible to live in the middle of a war zone and remain neutral?
- What would be your reaction if that happened to someone you know?

GROUP DYNAMICS/ISSUES

- How do you think we worked together today?
- Are there any observations on the way we divided into groups today?
- How are we affecting the work as an audience?
- So I said today we were going to look at working together ... what just happened here?
- What should we do if someone misses more than three sessions in row?
- What should we do about people being back late from break?

HELEN K. WHITE
10/2/08

I-Statements

Accepting responsibility for your feelings is one of the most important communication skills you can acquire. A good rule of thumb is: "If you have a problem, make an I-Statement. Instead, we tend to express feelings and opinions without assuming responsibility for them. We tend to hide behind blaming others for making us feel the way we do, claiming "it" is responsible, or claiming "we" all feel this way.

I-Statements consist of a description of how you feel, an indication of the conditions under which you feel that way, and why those conditions cause your emotions. i-Statements take this form: "I feel... (State your emotion) when you....(describe their behavior or under what conditions you feel this way) because... (explain why their behavior or the conditions cause you to feel this way).

I-Statements have Three Parts

1. **Emotion: "I feel**..." (state your emotion): It is a self-disclosure, referring to "I" and it expresses a feeling.
    a. The emotion or feeling must be expressed by saying, "I feel..."
        i. "I feel like..." is not a statement of emotion
        ii. "I feel like you...".is not a statement of emotion
        iii. "You make me feel..." blames the other for your emotion
        iv. "It makes me feel..." blames "it" for your emotion
2. **Behavior: "When you..."** (describe their behavior or under what conditions you feel this way)
    a. Describe the other person's observable behavior or describe the conditions that are related to your feelings
    b. State the facts objectively without opinions, assumptions, criticisms, commanding, threatening, moralizing, judging, ultimatums, mind-reading or other behaviors that create defensiveness
3. **Why: "Because..."** (explain why those conditions or their behavior cause you to feel this way).
    a. Explain why you feel this emotion when the other person does that behavior or when you are under these conditions.
    b. The reason why you feel the way you do is often due to one or more of the following:
        i. How you interpret their behavior (intent or meaning)
        ii. The tangible & concrete effect their behavior has on you, them, or others (do not repeat your feelings).

Benefits of I-Statements

1. Avoids blaming others for your emotions
2. Accurate and less hostile way to express a feeling or an emotion you're experiencing
3. Most appropriate way to inform someone that their behavior is causing a problem
4. Minimizes making the other person feel guilty, put-down, & resentful

I-Statements are not a guarantee that others or conditions will change to accommodate you.

Examples of I-Statements

1. I feel annoyed (feelings) when you leave your clothes on the floor instead of putting them in the hamper (behavior), because then I have to pick them up to keep the house neat (why).

2. I feel angry (feelings) when you leave your dishes in the sink instead of putting them in the dishwasher (behavior), because I get the impression you expect me to clean-up after you and that is not my expectation of our relationship (why).

3. I feel upset (feelings) when you raise your voice at me (behavior) because I don't want to be in a relationship where yelling is the norm.

When To Use I-Statements

We can use I-Statements almost all the time--whenever we want to connect with others, build intimacy, or let them get to know us better. They are the bricks and mortar that build solid relationships. Even though it's difficult to break our culturally-reinforced habit of using You-Statements, whatever work we put into learning to use I-Statements will be richly rewarded.

An occasional You-Statement is no problem if our partner agrees with our comment completely ("You're 32 years old.") And You-Statements can be very healing when our partner wants our feedback and we've already built a solid level of trust between us. However, when we're trying to build close, intimate relationships, we'll be far more successful by reversing our normal tendency to use around 95% You-Statements, and use 95% I-Statements instead.

FEELINGS	Suggestions for expressing more clearly:
What emotions are you feeling?	A. Use specific emotion describers such as "I feel..." glad, angry, delighted, sad, afraid, resentful, embarrassed, calm, enthusiastic, fearful, manic, depressed, happy, etc. B. Avoid feeling words that imply the action of another person: "I feel.., ignored, manipulated, mistreated, neglected, rejected, dominated, abandoned, used, cheated (etc.)" Notice how these words indirectly blame the listener for the speaker's emotions. Translate "implied blame" words into an explicitly named emotion. For example: **"I am feeling totally ignored by you" probably means** **"I am feeling really sad (or angry) because I want you to pay more attention to me, (spend more time with me, etc.)..."**

BEHAVIOR	Suggestions for expressing more clearly:
FACTS ONLY What are you seeing, hearing or otherwise sensing?	A. Begin by stating what you actually see or hear rather than how you feel about it or what you think of it. B. Describe specific actions observed, avoid generalizing such as "you always..." or "you never..." C. Be specific about place, time, color, texture, position and how often. D. Describe rather than diagnose. Avoid words that label or judge the actions you observe such as "slimy," "lousy," "neurotic," etc.. E. Avoid descriptions of a situation that imply emotions without actually stating them, such as "totally disgusting" and "horrible." State your feelings explicitly in Emotions (described next). For example: **"When I saw the big coffee stain on the rug..." is easier to hear and understand than** **"When you ruined my day, as always, with your slimy, stinking, totally disgusting, rotten antics..."**

WHY	Suggestions for expressing more clearly:
What interpretations, wants, needs, memories or anticipations of yours support those feelings?	A. Express the interpretations, hopes, understandings and associations that support your feelings: **... because I imagine that... ... because I see that as...** ... because I remember how... ... because I take that to mean ... instead of ... **because YOU ...(did, said, did not, etc.)**
Or what tangible, concrete effects or consequences were experienced?	B. There are often tangible, concrete consequences or effects that need to be explained: **... because I wanted ... ... because I would have liked ...** ... because I was hoping that... ... because I needed ... instead of ... **because YOU ...(did, said, did not, etc.)**

Sources:

http://www.humanpotentialcenter.org/Articles/IStatements.html

http://www.austincc.edu/colangelo/1318/istatements.htm

You are 17 years old and very involved with your debate team at school. You've been very successful in recent competitions, placing in the top three at several recent debates. This means a lot to you because high school has been very tough for you and you finally feel like you have found a place to belong. Your mother has not been able to come to your debates at all during this school year. You told her about your upcoming competition and have asked her to come. She said she would come but now is telling you that something has come up and she can't make it.

Using an I-Statement, what would you say to your mother?

You and a colleague at work have been working hard on a project for many months. The big presentation was yesterday and your colleague took direct credit for work that you did. It was clear to you that the people at the presentation viewed your colleague as the "leader" when up until that day, you had been working as equals.

Using an I-Statement, what would you say to your colleague?

You have been close friends with Amanda for several years. Recently, she has been distant and secretive. She has cancelled on you lately when you made plans to spend time together. You suspect that she has been using cocaine.

Using an I-Statement, what would you say to Amanda?

You work in a small office environment. You have only been in your job for a few months. The director of the organization has periodically called you out for mistakes in front of co-workers.

Using an I-Statement, what would you say to your boss?

You have been overextending yourself for several months. Your work, your extracurricular activities, and maintaining relationships have left you no time to take care of yourself. You've been at the end of your rope for about 4 weeks. A friend stops by one evening and insists on taking you out to an expensive dinner where you talked for hours about your lives and dreams. It turned out to be one of the best evenings you've had in a long time.

Using an I-Statement, what would you say to your friend?

You are in charge of a team of young people working on a community project. The project got a rocky start and the group has not been working well together with disagreements and negative behaviors being the norm. At the most recent work session, the team started working together in a way they had not previously. The change resulted in a leap forward for the project that was much needed.

Using an I-Statement, what would you say to the team?

STORY CIRCLES

A Story Circle is a group of people sitting in a circle, telling personal stories, led by a Story Circle facilitator. Each Story Circle is different according to its purpose.

What is and is not a story?

- A story is a narrative of events drawn from the teller's personal experience.
- A story can be fashioned from a memory, a dream, a reflection, a moment in time, and more.
- A story typically has a beginning, middle, and end, as well as characters and atmosphere.
- A story is not a lecture, an argument, a debate, or an intellectualization, although these elements may be part of a story.

Story Circles should:

- Be preceded by an informal time to socialize. (For example, a pot luck dinner.)
- Take place in a quiet space with good acoustics where interruptions are unlikely to occur.
- Consist of from 5 to 15 people sitting in a circle without notepads, pocketbooks, etc., and in such a manner that each participant has a good view of every other participant.
- Have one trained facilitator who begins, oversees, and ends the Circle.
- Have a stated time period in which the Story Circle will take place.
- Have a purpose articulated by the leader and agreed to by the participants.
- Allow for silences between stories.
- Be as much about listening as about telling.

Story Circles should not:

- Primarily serve the agenda of any one participant.
- Give importance to one story, or one type of story, over another.

The facilitator's role:

- Be clear about the purpose of the particular circle. (Examples: reinforcement of cultural identity; examination of issues of race and class; identification of community concerns; introduction of a community storytelling project; and so on.)
- Know, or determine with the group, the theme for the particular circle. The theme must complement the story circle's purpose. For example, if the purpose is to explore cultural identity, a circle theme could be family holiday traditions. If the purpose is to better understand race and class, the theme of the circle might be a story about a moment when one realized that one was different.
- Introduce him or herself, describe the circle's purpose and theme, and state the time the Story Circle will end.
- Tell the rules of the Story Circle and answer participants' questions about them.
- Emphasize the idea that listening to the stories of others is as important as telling your own, noting that deep listening can engender a meditative quality in the circle.

- Discourage participants from thinking too much about what they will say when it is their turn, asking them to trust that their story will come from their listening to the stories of the others.
- Tell the group how long the circle will last, and ask participants to pace the length of their stories to the time available, taking into consideration the number of participants. For example, if there are 12 people in the Circle and 60 minutes for storytelling, each story should be approximately 5 minutes in length.
- Announce the manner in which the facilitator will politely indicate to a teller that he or she has passed the time limit and needs to wrap-up the story.
- Ask the participants to quickly name the typical elements of a story – narrative, plot, characters, atmosphere, etc.
- Begin the circle with a story that sets the tone for the purpose and theme of the circle, or state the theme and ask who in the circle would like to tell the first story.
- After the first story, go around the circle clockwise or counterclockwise, with each person telling or passing when it is their turn. The rotation continues until everyone has told a story.
- Reserve time after the telling for participants to reflect on what has just transpired by asking everyone for their observations and comments.
- When possible, end with a group song or poem (perhaps taught and led by a participant) that brings closure to the spirit of the particular Story Circle.
- End the Story Circle on time.
- Participants often want to talk personally to each other after the Circle breaks up, so the facilitator should ensure space is available for this purpose.

Story Circle rules:

- There is only one Story Circle facilitator.
- There are no observers – only participants.
    - The Story Circle facilitator is also a participant, and must tell his or her story as well.
- Participants speak only when it is their turn.
    - The order of telling is either clockwise or counterclockwise from the first teller.
- When it comes to one's turn, the person decides the timing of when to speak, and may decide to pass, knowing their turn will come around again.
    - After everyone in the Circle has had the opportunity to speak or pass, the rotation begins again for those who have passed.
- Listening deeply is the most important part of the Story Circle experience.
    - Participants should not distract themselves by thinking ahead about what story they will tell.
    - Rather, participants should listen to the stories told, and, when it is their turn, tell a story brought to mind by the previous stories, or pass.
- Participants and the facilitator never argue with or debate another participant's story.
- Participants and the facilitator never comment upon another participant's story other than to say, when it is their turn, "That story reminds me of . . ."
- There is no cross-talk in a Story Circle and all responses to a particular story wait their turn and are in story form.

- Story Circles are never tape recorded or videotaped without the participants' expressed permission.
    - If the stories in a Circle might be used to inform the development of a new play, all participants must understand this and give their permission.

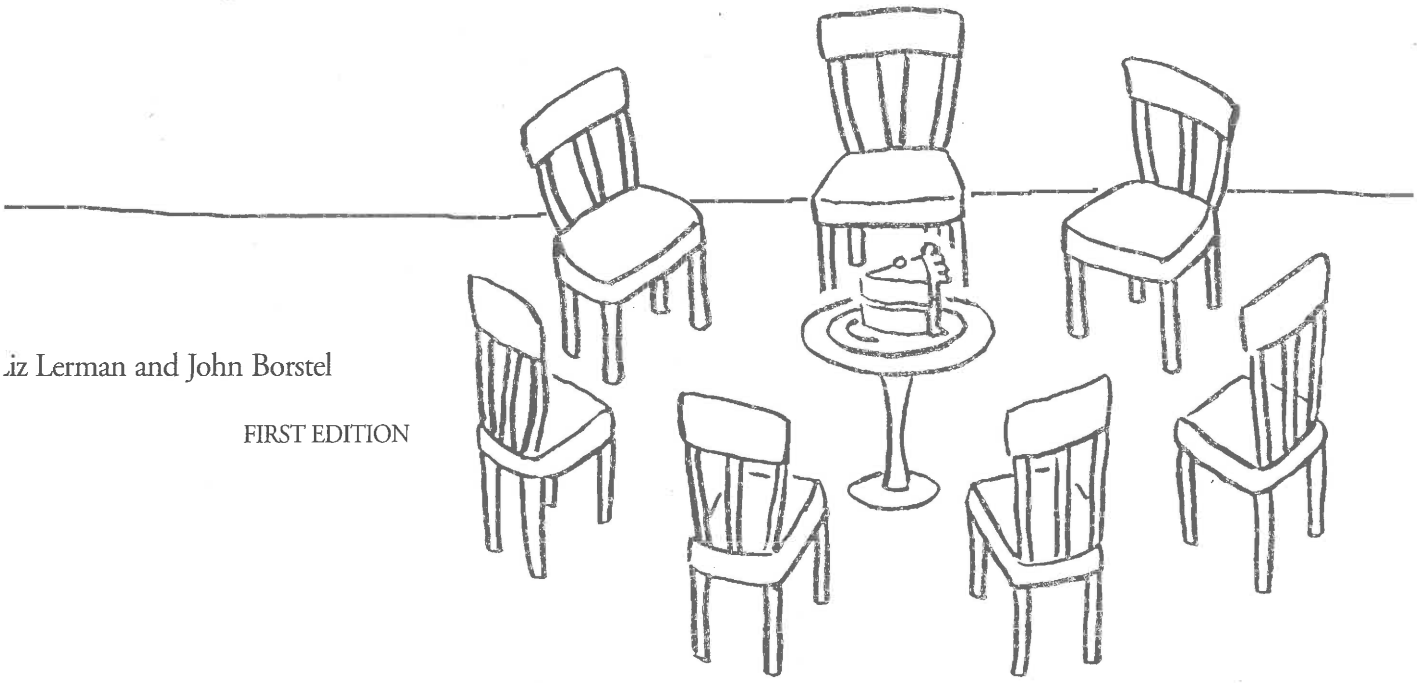
When a Story Circle should be stopped by the facilitator:
It is not unusual for painful stories to emerge in a Story Circle. The facilitator must exercise judgment about when to continue a Story Circle and when to stop it. Story Circle facilitators should not try to serve as therapists, social workers, or doctors (even if these are their professional occupations), because participants did not come to the circle to receive these services. The facilitator can:

- Call for a break and talk individually with the distressed person.
- Refer the distressed person to the proper professional.
- Resume or reschedule the Story Circle.

Liz Lerman's

CRITICAL RESPONSE PROCESS℠

A method for getting useful feedback on
anything you make, from dance to dessert



Liz Lerman and John Borstel

FIRST EDITION

Liz Lerman Dance Exchange was founded in 1976. Its unique brand of dance/theatre breaks boundaries between stage and audience, theater and community, movement and language, tradition and the unexplored. Through explosive dancing, personal stories, humor, and a company of performers whose ages span six decades, Liz Lerman Dance Exchange stretches the expressive range of contemporary dance. Its work consists of formal concerts, interactive performances, specialized community residencies, and professional training in the art of community-based dance. An artist-driven organization, Liz Lerman Dance Exchange employs a collaborative approach to dancemaking, administration, and implementation.

Liz Lerman Dance Exchange is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. To learn more about the company's diverse programming in performance, education, and community engagement, please contact:

Liz Lerman Dance Exchange
7117 Maple Avenue
Takoma Park, MD 20912
301-270-6700
www.danceexchange.org

SBN 0-9727385-0-9

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CHARTS

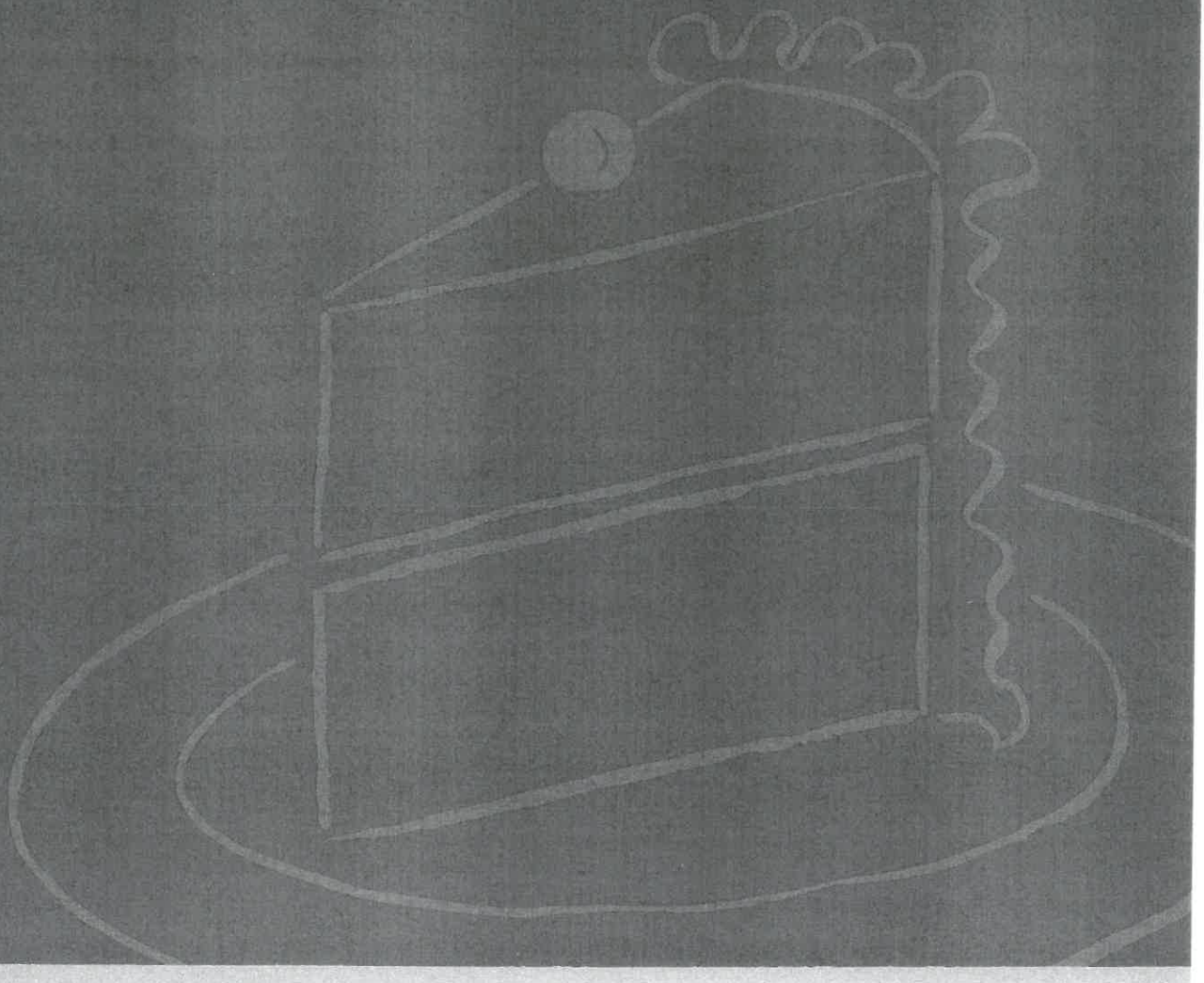
The purpose of art is to lay bare the questions which have been hidden by the answers.

—James Baldwin, writer

It is the function of art to renew our perception. What we are familiar with, we cease to see. The writer shakes up the familiar scene, and, as if by magic, we see a new meaning in it.

—Anias Nin, writer/diarist

THE PROCESS

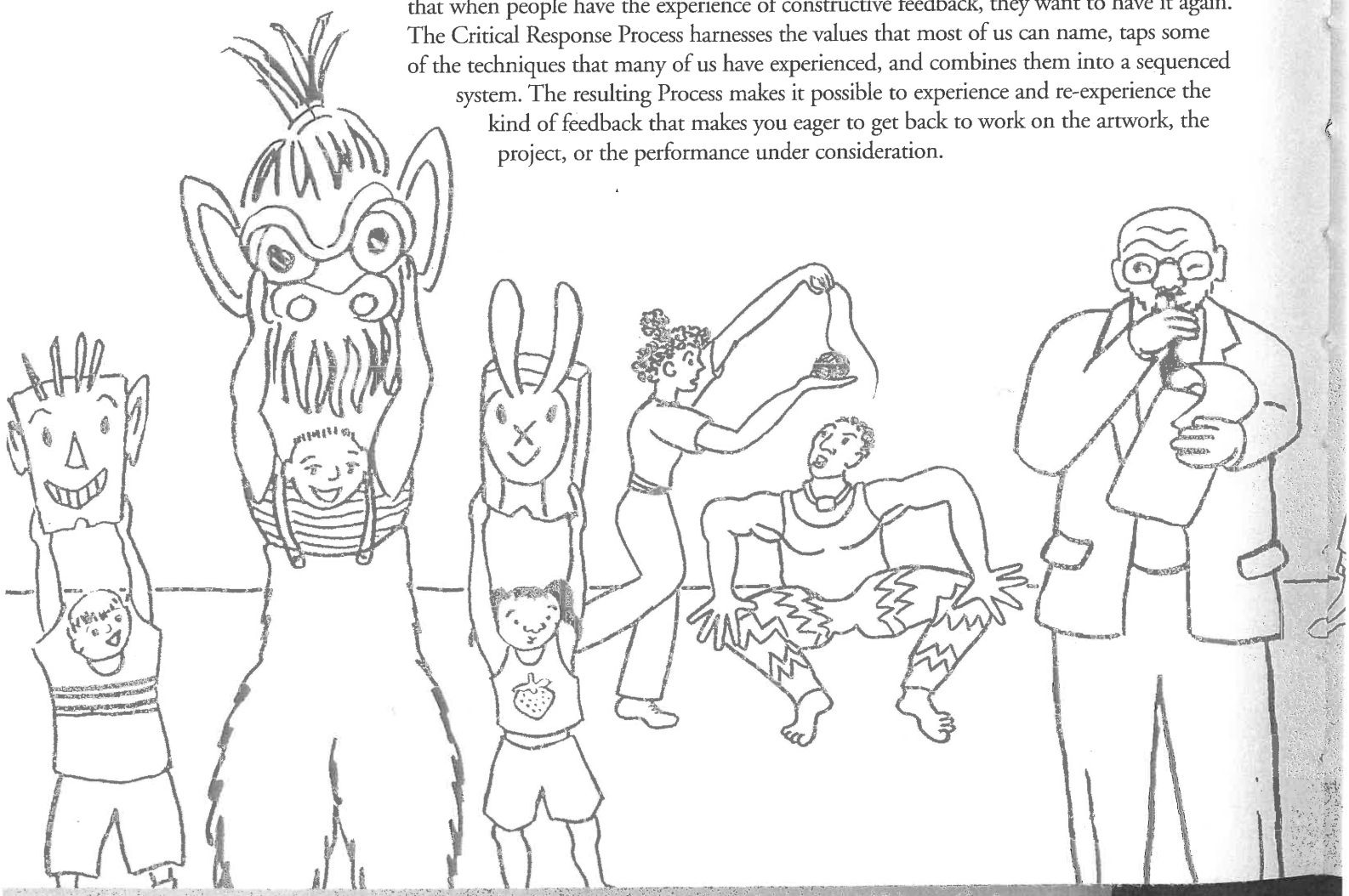


Think of a time in your life when you received really useful feedback. Where were you? Who was talking to you? Exactly what was it that made the encounter so constructive? When the conversation was over, what was your perspective?

These are questions we often ask when we introduce the Critical Response Process. In calling to mind a particular situation or individual, most people can readily name the aspects of the interaction that left them feeling motivated rather than deflated by the criticism. Some will answer the questions by naming specific qualities: respect, trust, specificity, clarity, insight, integrity. Others cite particular approaches that their effective partners-in-critique used in addressing the work under consideration: "He started by pointing out the things that were already working well" or "She asked me some great questions, which left me with a lot to think about."

Contemplating our encounters with people who have a capacity for giving useful critique, it is possible to draw out a set of frequently recurring values and techniques. It's also obvious that when people have the experience of constructive feedback, they want to have it again. The Critical Response Process harnesses the values that most of us can name, taps some of the techniques that many of us have experienced, and combines them into a sequenced system. The resulting Process makes it possible to experience and re-experience the kind of feedback that makes you eager to get back to work on the artwork, the project, or the performance under consideration.

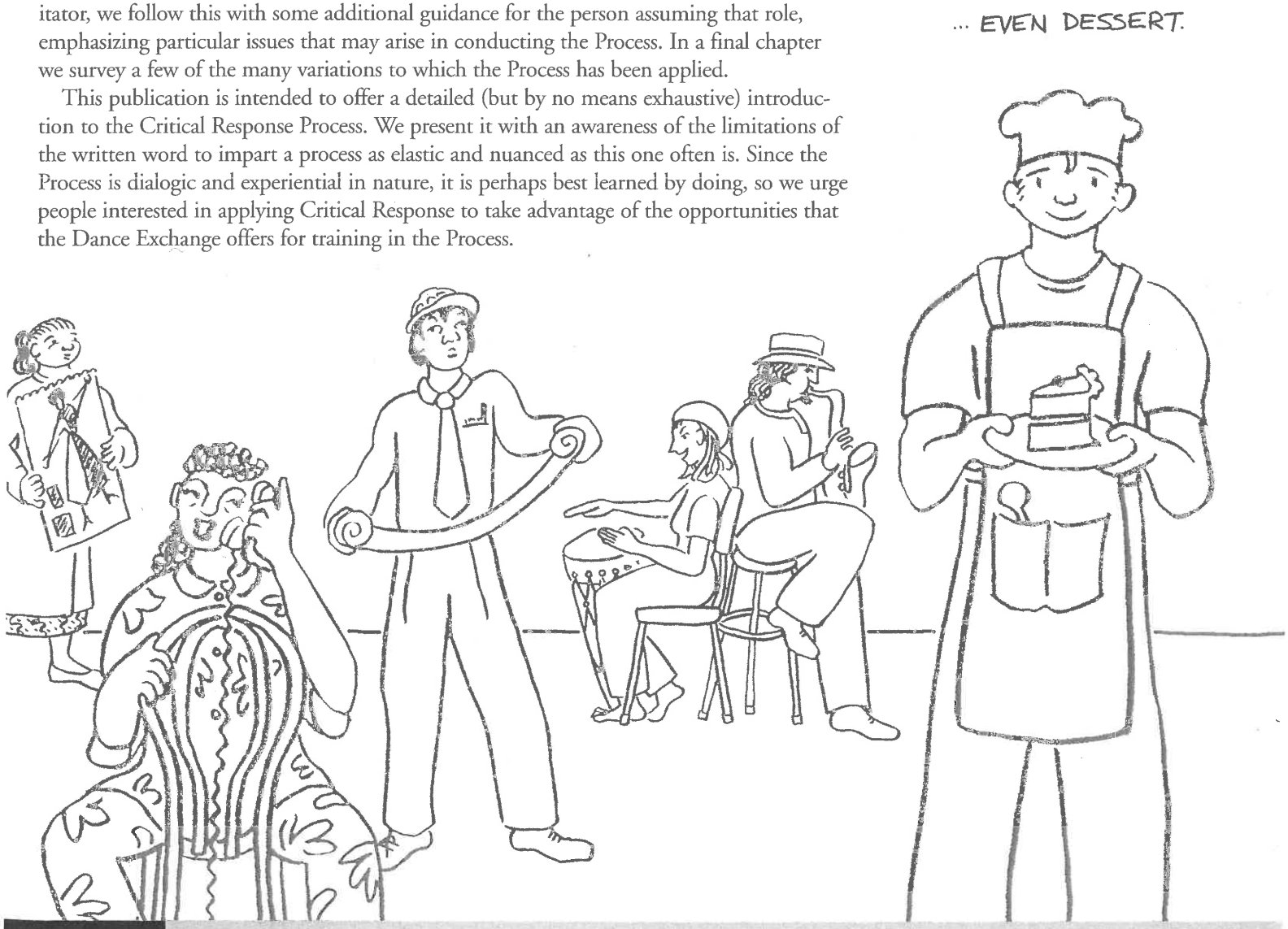
THE CRITICAL RESPONSE PROCESS CAN BE APPLIED TO ALMOST ANYTHING A PERSON MAKES...



The Critical Response Process enables a group of people to uncover their various aesthetic and performance values and, by being patient, apply them to a creative work-in-progress in a way that pushes the artist's thinking forward. The Critical Response Process can be applied to almost any kind of creative product: new works or interpretations of existing works in dance, theater, and other performing disciplines, not to mention writing, visual art, design, planning, public speaking, curriculum development, teaching processes, almost anything a person makes...even dessert.

The key elements of a Critical Response Process session are the four core steps of the Process and participants in three roles: an artist showing work, a facilitator, and a group of responders. These are detailed in the next two chapters, along with ideas about follow-up. Because much of the technique of effective Critical Response resides in the role of the facilitator, we follow this with some additional guidance for the person assuming that role, emphasizing particular issues that may arise in conducting the Process. In a final chapter we survey a few of the many variations to which the Process has been applied.

This publication is intended to offer a detailed (but by no means exhaustive) introduction to the Critical Response Process. We present it with an awareness of the limitations of the written word to impart a process as elastic and nuanced as this one often is. Since the Process is dialogic and experiential in nature, it is perhaps best learned by doing, so we urge people interested in applying Critical Response to take advantage of the opportunities that the Dance Exchange offers for training in the Process.



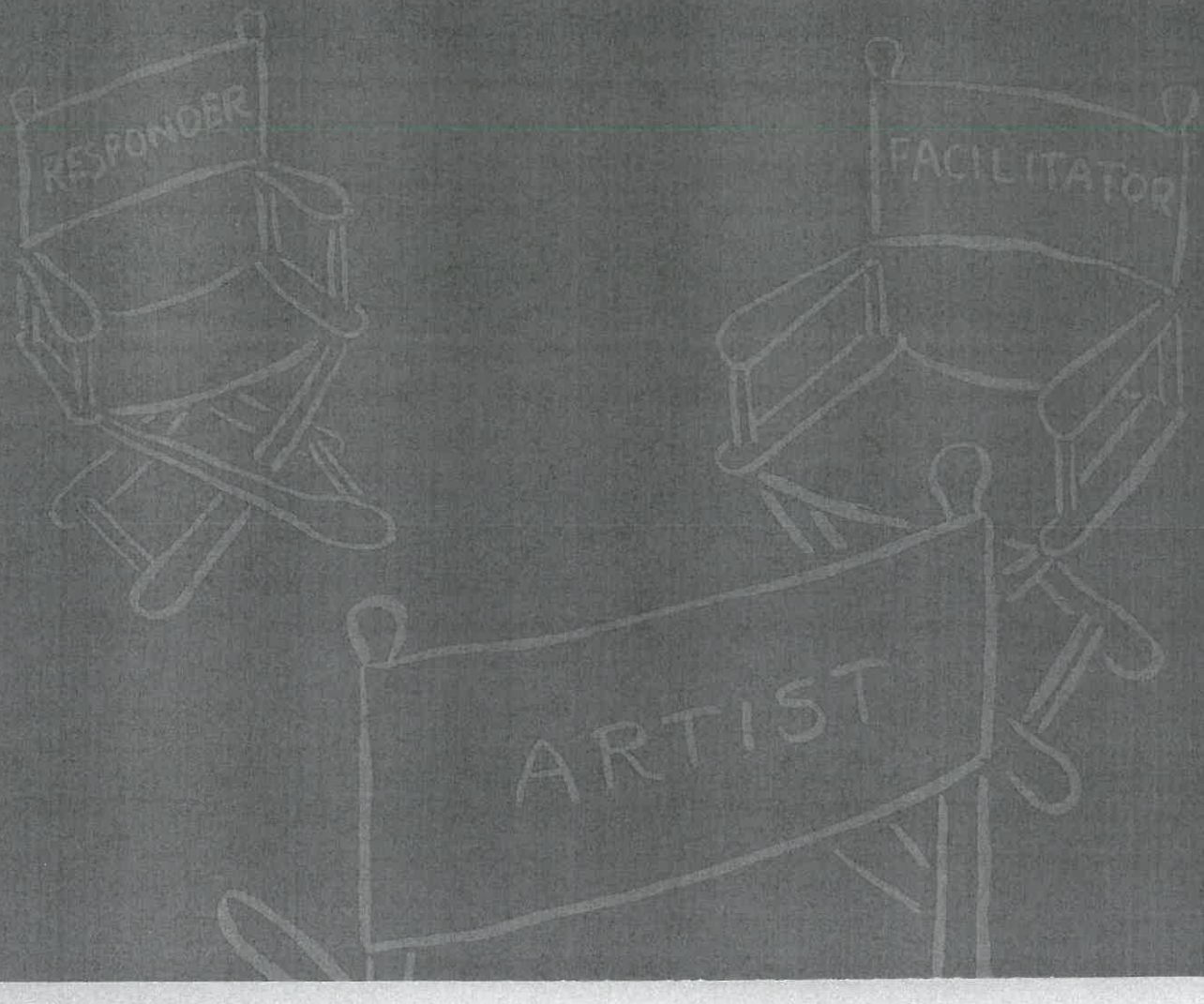
The creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act.

—Marcel Duchamp, artist

When critics disagree, the artist is in accord with himself.

—Oscar Wilde, writer

THE ROLES



The Artist

Since a work of art is typically the focus of a Critical Response session, the artist's contribution is essential to the unfolding of the Process. The artist's own attitude walking into the session, in combination with the control that the Process affords the creator of the work under discussion, will vitally influence the direction the ensuing dialogue takes. The artistic task under consideration may be either generative or interpretive in nature, and the product may be at any stage of its development. Artists need to be at a point where they can question their work in a somewhat public environment. They also need to be able to hear positive comments that are specific, not "this is the greatest thing I have ever seen." (Since we all wait for that comment, it can be difficult hearing anything else.) The Process is most fruitful when artists are invested in the future evolution of the art they are showing, or at least in the possibility that they can learn something of value to apply to future projects.

The Responders

A Critical Response session typically engages a group of people who watch, read, listen to, or otherwise experience the work to be discussed. This can be as few as one person or up to hundreds, as when Critical Response is used for post-show discussions (an application discussed further on pages 46-48). Sessions engaging five to twelve participants have some advantages: easier management for the facilitator and the opportunity for more of the responders to participate.

Responders can be friends or strangers, peers or public, experts or novices, all depending on choice and circumstance. Whoever they are, it is important that these observers sincerely want this artist to make excellent work. Occasionally, especially when competition is a factor, people looking at work may not want the artist to succeed, especially on her own terms. While the notion of actively harnessing our responses to the idea of

Their best, not your best

When artists meet peer-to-peer in the Critical Response Process, part of the success of the session lies in the perspective that participants bring to the circle. As a responder, you really want the artist to do *their* best work, not something only as good as *your* last work. The competitive impulse is a useful force in artistic creation, but I encourage people to enjoy the relief of setting it aside for a little while.

—*Liz Lerman*

another person's excellence may not be achievable in every case, it is always worth striving for.

Are fellow arts practitioners the best responders to an artist's work? The answer may vary according to what kind of feedback artists are seeking or where they are in the development of work. Certainly the tools of the Process have proven very useful for creators engaging people who may not think of themselves as artists: The artist can walk away with valuable information about how the work communicates to a general audience, and the responders will often gain considerable insight from the act of articulating their reactions. Groups that combine peer practitioners with less seasoned viewers may require extra sensitivity from the facilitator to assure that specialists' technical or conceptual jargon doesn't intimidate non-specialists into silence.

The Facilitator

Although these sessions are geared to the needs of the creator, much of the success of a good Critical Response session lies with the facilitator. This guidebook is intended in large part as a primer for people assuming that role. The facilitator's job description includes initiating each step and managing the transition to the next, keeping the Process on track, and assuring that the artist and responders all understand the guidelines and get the most out of them. In these capacities, the facilitator may need to play a variety of translating, coaching, and policing functions. Beyond these basics, the skilled facilitator can choose to play a very active role to deepen the dialogue further. We expand on these possibilities in Facilitation Fundamentals and Deepening the Dialogue sections of this book.

THE FACILITATOR ASSUMES A VARIETY OF FUNCTIONS: TRANSLATOR, TRAFFIC COP, AND COACH.

When I'm working on a problem, I never think about beauty. I think only how to solve the problem. But when I have finished, if the solution is not beautiful, I know it is wrong.

—R. Buckminster Fuller, architect/engineer

Good questions outrank easy answers.

—Paul A. Samuelson, economist

THE STEPS

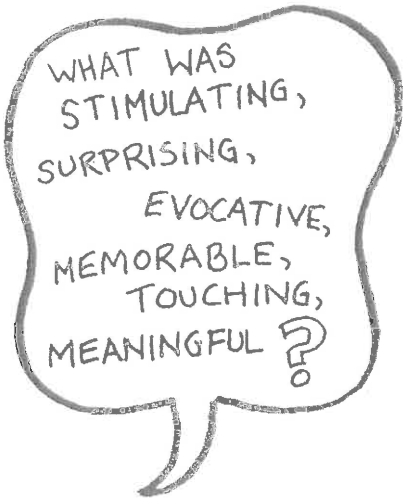
Critical Response sessions are initiated in a variety of ways: artists schedule dialogues among peers or informally gather a group of responders to see a work-in-progress, teachers adopt the practice for the benefit of their students, and institutions offer sessions as a dimension of their programming in artist support and audience development. The Process can be applied multiple times in the development of a particular work, or employed in combination with other modes of feedback. The focus of a Critical Response session can be a full work or an excerpt, presented in formal performance, informal presentation, or in-class showing. As Critical Response has evolved, we've come to spend more time explaining the steps and sequence before starting the Process, even before experiencing the work under consideration. Knowing what to expect and how each step supports the succeeding ones helps participants to make better use of the Process. Responders who know they will have a chance to express opinions by the end will experience the rigor of the earlier steps as stimulating rather than limiting. If participants follow the sequence of steps with a little patience, mutual respect naturally emerges. Over the course of the Process, even the most disparate points of view can be taken into account through dialogue and response.

When conducted in its formal structure, the Critical Response Process consists of four steps. We will describe each one, followed by ideas for optional activities that can happen after a session.

The meaning of meaning

When I first introduced the Process, I named step one "Affirmation," which encouraged facilitators to start the Process by saying something like "Let's start with affirmations. What did you like about what you just saw?" But now I discourage this approach, as it tends to put the emphasis on the artist's feelings rather than the art itself and how it is communicating. When we start by naming the fact that the work has meaning at all, and offer options for responding to that meaning, we broaden the lens by which responders can experience and comment. The new phrasing encourages responders to be more specific by enabling them to name their experience and affords artists a different way of accepting that information. The whole dialogue becomes less about individual psychology and more about the power of art.

—*Liz Lerman*



CORE STEPS

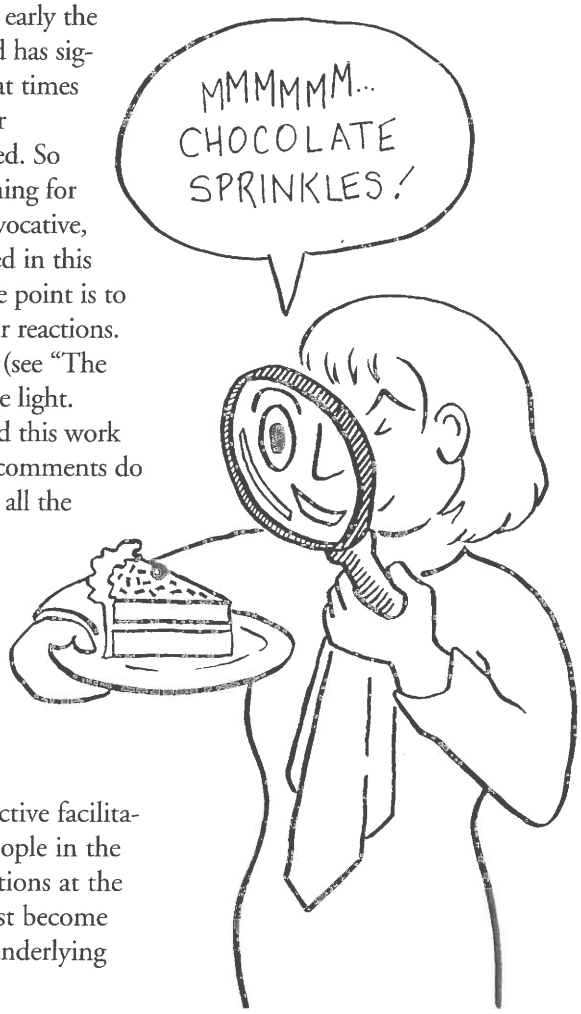
Step One: Statements of Meaning

No matter how short the presentation, how fragmentary the excerpt, or how early the stage of development, artists want to hear that what they have just completed has significance to another human being. This natural condition can be so intense at times as to appear desperate. It makes sense, then, that the first response artists hear should be one addressing the communicative power of the work just presented. So the facilitator starts step one by asking the responders either "What has meaning for you about what you have just seen?" or "What was stimulating, surprising, evocative, memorable, touching, meaningful for you?" Other adjectives can be employed in this question: "challenging," "compelling," "delightful," "different," "unique." The point is to offer responders a palette of choices through which to define and express their reactions.

Though we discourage facilitators from explicitly asking for "affirmations" (see "The meaning of meaning," opposite page), step one should be framed in a positive light. Contrary to this spirit a responder once said, "It is meaningful to me how bad this work is," a statement that definitely required facilitator intervention. But step one comments do not need to begin "I liked..." If artists only wait for "I liked...," they can miss all the other ways that people communicate.

Thus the Critical Response Process begins with the philosophy that meaning is at the heart of an artist's work, and to start with meaning is to begin with the essence of the artistic act. Meaning is a huge category that can hold a wide range of response, a fact often demonstrated by step one. Responders may feel called upon to make broad pronouncements about the work, but artists invariably value hearing about details as well. Nothing is too small to notice.

It is in step one that we can first notice people's different values. A very active facilitator might draw attention to the variety of aesthetic and social values that people in the circle bring to their role as audience by asking participants for their observations at the end of step one. It is in that moment of group reflection that responders first become aware of the numerous ways people see art, and the array of value systems underlying their differing visions.



REMEMBER:
NOTHING IS TOO
SMALL TO NOTICE.

Step Two: Artist as Questioner

This step is the first of two rounds of questions and answers. The creator asks the questions first. The more artists clarify their focus, the more intense and deep the dialogue becomes. The facilitator can actively assist artists in forming their questions. Some artists are quite able to analyze their work, and form their dissatisfactions or dilemmas into questions with ease. For others, it is a new experience.

In the act of clarifying, the artist has a wide range of choices from general to specific. Facilitators can make artists aware of their options along this spectrum, and how those choices will yield different kinds of answers. General questions often elicit more varied responses, which can be helpful if the artist is seeking a broad survey of reactions to a particular aspect of the work. But when an artist poses her inquiry broadly, she may find that the response is not addressing the issue that is really at the root of her question. Specific questions, naturally, bring forth a more focused and precise commentary. While no prescription dictates which kind of question will be most effective, artists can consider several factors in formulating their questions: Where am I in the process of developing the work? Working from the base of information I've heard in step one, where would I like to expand or focus the response? Do I want an overall gauge of the work's effectiveness, or focused guidance about particular challenges?

Artists should approach the furthest extremes on the general-to-specific spectrum with caution. The most general sort of question—"Well, what did you think?" can mire the Process in some of the usual pitfalls of an open discussion where any topic is fair game and those most insistent about expressing their opinions dominate. Far from opening up the discourse, the breadth of possibility can shut both artists and responders down. By the same token, the use of very specific questions, such as "Did it work when I shifted the mask to the back of my head?" or "Should I have my arms up or down in the final image?" amounts to an opinion poll. This can be useful if the artist is trying to resolve the choice between options and if responders justify their choices. But if these are the only kinds of questions that an artist has, the either/or brand of specificity limits the potential of the dialogue.

Playing a bit closer to the middle of the spectrum can be very fruitful: "How did you experience my transitions from one character to another?" or "I'm working right now on the way I express a strong feeling, so what did you think of the closing section?" Such questions offer responders the opportunity to say exactly what they think and to name some of the specifics themselves.

Artists can always broaden or narrow their exploration with a follow-up question if the original query doesn't yield the information they seek. Here the facilitator may need to probe with more questions—not answers—to help the artist find the heart of the matter. (See Sample Dialogue, page 56 for an example of this kind of facilitator guidance.) Often we observe that the artist has the same questions as those watching. When the artist starts the dialogue, the opportunity for honesty increases.

Step Three: Neutral Questions from Responders

The dialogue is now reversed, and responders can ask the artist informational or factual questions. Further, if they have opinions, responders can take this opportunity—in advance of stating the opinion in step four—to form the opinion into a neutral question. Thus, instead of saying, "It's too long," (an opinion) or "Why are your pieces always so long?" (a question that couches an opinion), a person might ask, "What were you trying to accomplish in the final section?" or "Tell me the most important ideas you want us to get and where is that happening in this piece?"

The neutral question presents another aspect of the Process in which the facilitator needs to be active. For many people, forming

A step toward critical thinking

Before adopting the Critical Response Process at Jump-Start, we would tip-toe around each other and never have substantive dialogue. The Process has enabled us, for the first time, to talk about our work in a profound way. In our educational programs and monthly work-in-progress series we often put particular emphasis on step two: it helps artists develop critical thinking skills by learning to ask astute questions, and that is where one can open the doors for critique.

—Steve Bailey
Jump-Start Performance Co.

RESPONDER QUESTIONS:

OPINIONATED...

...AND NEUTRAL

a neutral question is not only difficult, but a seemingly ridiculous task if criticism is the point. But the actual process of trying to form opinions into neutral questions enables the responder to recognize and acknowledge the personal values at play. Often these are the very questions that the artist needs to hear.

The neutral question is a common stumbling block for people. Therefore, it can help, when introducing the Process, to lead the group in practicing how to form neutral questions. To do this, the facilitator might suggest a non-neutral question based on a hypothetical work of art (not the piece under review), by posing something like the following: "Let's say that after a dance showing, a viewer questioned the lighting by saying 'Why was it so dark?' Can you suggest neutral way to phrase that question?" The group will soon arrive at a possibility like "What governed your choices in lighting the piece?" (See chart, page 23 for more examples of neutral alternatives to opinionated questions.)

For some people the neutral question may sound like a cover-up for the real action, and it can indeed function that way. But even the most hard-edged, "I-can-take-anything-you-dish-out" artists seem to become more receptive and involved in the critical session as a direct result of the neutral question. And the more open they are to the possibility of hearing what others are saying, the more they seem to learn from it.

When defensiveness starts, learning stops. The Critical Response Process emphasizes the benefits of getting artists to think about their work in a fresh way, as opposed to telling them how to improve their work or asking them to defend it. This aim is supported by the discipline of the neutral question. People who are used to giving feedback from a position of authority—teachers, directors, adjudicators—may feel at first that step three makes them sacrifice the right to tell the truth very directly. But many quickly discover that they can say whatever is important through this mechanism, and in the process, get the artist to think more reflectively than he might if the opinion or solution were directly stated. The opportunity for opinions is coming up soon in step four; step three allows the responder to determine the relevance of the opinion and lays the groundwork for the artist to hear the opinion from a non-defensive posture. (For more discussion of "fixing," see "The Challenge of Fixits," Page 42.)

tep Four: Permissioned Opinions

Now the facilitator invites opinions, but specifies that opinions nust be offered with a particular protocol: Responders first name ne topic of the opinion and ask the artist for permission to state :. For instance, "I have an opinion about the costumes. Do you vant to hear it?"

In response, the artist has the option to say "yes" or "no." The rtist may have several reasons for not wanting to hear the opinon: perhaps he has already heard enough opinions about the ostumes and wants to move to something else; perhaps he is ery interested in hearing about the costumes, but not from that esponder, or perhaps the opinion is irrelevant because of factors not yet established by a neutral question, i.e., the costumes used or the showing have nothing to do with those planned for the ultimate presentation. In every case artists have the option to say no," or "not right now."

Opinions like objects

I sometimes demonstrate one of the functions of the "I have an opinion..." permission requests in step four by doing this: While I'm in the middle of my explanation of the step, I'll wad up a piece of paper and toss it at an unsuspecting group member, who usually flinches and fumbles in response. Then I'll pick up the paper, make eye contact with the same person and say "catch!," then toss again, to a now-deft receiver. Opinions can feel very much like objects thrown at us. If we have no preparation we can often feel affronted rather than engaged. But with a little notice and a moment to adjust to what's coming at us, we can be in a much better position to "catch" the opinion.

— John Borstel

In most cases, however, the artist will say "yes," because the Process has laid the groundwork for this moment. Perhaps an observer has already transformed an opinion into a neutral question, eliciting a rich and informative response from the artist. Such an exchange may have had several different effects: 1) The responder may have discovered that her opinion was irrelevant to the artists' intent, so she no longer needs to advance the opinion. 2) She might discover that the artist is so clearly aware of the issue she has in mind that stating her opinion becomes unnecessary or redundant. 3) Or the artist's answer will leave the responder feeling that her opinion would indeed provide needed information or make the dialogue more specific and hence more useful for the artist. (See Sample Dialogue 3 on page 61 for examples of these scenarios.) This is when a responder will want to take advantage of step four.

Many of our reactions to work, which we may hold to be balanced, informed criticism, can also be viewed simply as subjective opinion. At times artists can use these opinions to help place the work in a larger context. Or artists can hear all of these opinions and use them to weave their own solutions. But artists may not want to hear from everyone, or everyone at that particular time. In step four, the artist can control this moment.

Often during this opinion time, people choose to return to the function of step one and make additional positive statements of meaning. These may reflect new ideas stimulated by the dialogue they have heard since step one.

Throughout step four, the repeated expressions of "I have an opinion about...would you like to hear it?" can strike some participants as stilted and unnatural. Both novice and seasoned Critical Response practitioners have asked, "Do we really have to go through this ritual every time?" But the practice serves several functions. For the responder, forming that initial statement offers a kind of warm-up and mental preparation for identifying and stating the opinion itself. For artists, it affords a chance to readjust their focus to become receptive to a new partner and new idea. Finally, it serves to maintain the Process's dynamic of dialogue through an exchange that keeps both speakers focused and listening. The step may seem formal, but often the formality, discipline and structure inherent in the Process make it safe for people to go into a more challenging dialogue.

FORMING NEUTRAL QUESTIONS

This chart is designed to suggest a process for forming and coaching neutral questions, a key concept in step three of the Critical Response Process. Keep in mind that not everyone will agree on whether or not a question is neutral or on the best neutral alternative to an opinionated question.

Opinionated Question	Embedded Opinion	Neutral Question
Why is the cake so dry?	The cake is so dry.	What kind of texture and consistency are you aiming for in this cake?
Why is the video so long?	The video is too long.	How are you thinking about time in relation to the viewer's experience?
How do you expect the reader to comprehend this passage?	The passage is incomprehensible.	How are you hoping the reader will experience this passage?
What made you put the entire cast in green costumes?	The green costumes don't work. OR There are too many green costumes.	What's the significance of the color green to your concept? OR Talk about your costuming choices.
Are the photos in the series intentionally banal?	The images are banal and therefore unsuccessful.	What kind of reaction are you hoping to elicit from a viewer?
Have you shown the text for the brochure to an editor yet?	The text needs editing.	Where are you in the process of developing the brochure?
Have you thought about getting an actor to read your poetry for you?	Your poems are good but your reading is bad.	What would you like to add to our experience of the poetry through your use of voice and gesture?
Why do you think you need to tell the moral of the story at the end?	The moral is obvious, you don't need to tell it.	Where do you want your listeners to be at the end of the story?
Why would you want to draw dead animals?	Dead animals are an unappealing subject.	What ideas do you want to convey through your choice of subject matter?
Do you really understand what this song is about?	Your interpretation of the song shows that you don't comprehend its meaning.	How did you prepare your interpretation of the song?
Why isn't your season programming offering more opportunities to emerging artists?	You aren't offering enough opportunities to emerging artists.	What is your curatorial vision and how does it inform your programming choices?
So, do you always chew gum when you dance?	Chewing gum is distracting or inappropriate while performing a dance.	What's the role of gum chewing in your performance? OR What attitude are you hoping to convey in your performance?

FOLLOW-UP & FOLLOW-THROUGH

Closure

The Process is now complete. If it has functioned well, the responders feel invested and engaged, and the artist has gained a fund of useful, even inspiring, information. At this point the facilitator has several options to bring the Process to closure. Thank yous to both artist and responder are usually in order, and appreciated. The facilitator may ask for observations or request that the artist or a responder offer a summary of the discussion. This can be done by posing a question to the artist like: "Based on what you've experienced in this conversation, what's your next step in working on this piece?" Though occasionally artists need more time to assimilate the dialogue, they usually respond readily and specifically, often with reference to key points they've heard in the session. This short exchange affords artists the final word in the discussion of their work as well as a moment to consolidate the information they've gathered through the Process, while responders get confirmation of the purpose their involvement has served.

New Business, Unfinished Business

At times in the course of a Critical Response session, responders want to get into a discussion about the subject matter of a work, particularly if it broaches an area of social or political controversy. On other occasions an issue of aesthetic perspective or artistic technique will seize attention. The resulting discussions may or may not relate to the specific evolution of the piece, and the emergence of such topics may require the facilitator to make a judgment: Is the emerging issue central to the discussion of the artist's work and can it be discussed within the protocol of the four steps? Can the varying opinions be addressed directly to the artist rather than exchanged responder to responder? Are strong feelings about the issue hindering the Process and will a time-out for a short, managed discussion enable the Process to resume on track? Or, on the other hand, does the group have a need for a conversation about the issue which can nonetheless be clearly separated from the content of the work? In such instances, a subject matter discussion can be added to the session following completion of the Process's four steps. This added discussion is often a viable option as it avoids breaking the momentum of the peer response but addresses the needs of the group. For example: During step three at a Critical Response reviewing a show of regional art at a Midwestern arts center, a responder questioned

SOMETIMES AN ARTIST MAY FEEL READY TO EXPERIMENT RIGHT AWAY.

the idea of "regional" in relation to New York as the supposed national center for visual art. This sparked a flurry of reactions. It was clear that the topic was vital to many of the participants and that the discussion, if pursued at that moment, would derail the response to the program itself. To meet both of these needs, the facilitator guided the Process through step four and then initiated a discussion of the group's vital topic.

A discussion that follows completion of the Process can be fruitful for both the artist and the group even when the content is not stirring controversy. An artist discovering that the circle contains people with personal experiences related to the subject of the work might benefit from an added discussion to hear about some of those experiences. When workshopping a piece among peers, an opportunity to discuss points of technique or aesthetics is a chance to draw from the collective wisdom of the group. Facilitators can pose such options to the artist.

Back to Work

By virtue of the fact that we are using Critical Response, we can usually assume that additional work remains to be done on the art under consideration. How the work advances to its next stage is up to the artist. But first steps can be taken during the gathering, and if the group is a class, support circle, or ensemble that regularly meets, a thread can be sustained from the formal Critical Response session into other activities.

Sometimes, depending on the scope of the work and the medium, an artist can feel ready to experiment with changes to the work right away. A dancer/choreographer wants to see what happens if he alters the facings in a section of his work. A poet decides to try reinstating a passage from an earlier draft. A photographer realizes she can re-edit a series by replacing two of her images with other prints she has brought to the session. These changes can be presented to the group on the spot, and the session can return for a few moments into step two to entertain the artist's questions about new approach.

In teaching settings, the Process can transfer into a coaching mode. Following the four steps, the teacher asks the student where she wants to take the work, or may give directive guidance for next steps, moving immediately to a coaching session where various options are tried and reviewed. The group may continue to be involved as responders, or simply serve as witnesses. Another variation is to engage the group in trying some of the approaches suggested by the session. (see "Sustaining the Critical Response spirit," below.)

At times work can be developed through a series of Critical Response sessions. When the same group is involved in multiple dialogues about a developing piece, it observes how the artist is using the response to evolve the work. This typically gets the responders highly invested in the outcome and leads them to a deeply informed response.

Sustaining the Critical Response spirit

After Critical Response sessions, I encourage student artists to re-enter the rehearsal/creation process in a similar spirit of inquiry and discovery. The activities I recommend fall into three inter-related, but not necessarily sequential categories : **1)** Labbing the work, usually driven by a dialogue between artist and teacher/facilitator and thus engaging skills from steps two and three of the Process. The entire class or ensemble can be involved in this experimentation, sometimes splitting into smaller groups, each seeking its own solution to the same problem. **2)** Subject matter discussion, often exploring artistic ideas or social context and drawing on different perspectives in the observer pool. **3)** Generating a research list for information that can't be gleaned from immediate lab or discussion. These activities are not about the teacher making decisions for artists or the group taking over; the goal is to give the artist more: more information, more choice, and a wider view.

—Peter DiMuro
Liz Lerman Dance Exchange

What we have to do is to be forever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions.

—Walter Pater, critic

Literature is strewn with the wreckage of men who have minded beyond reason the opinions of others.

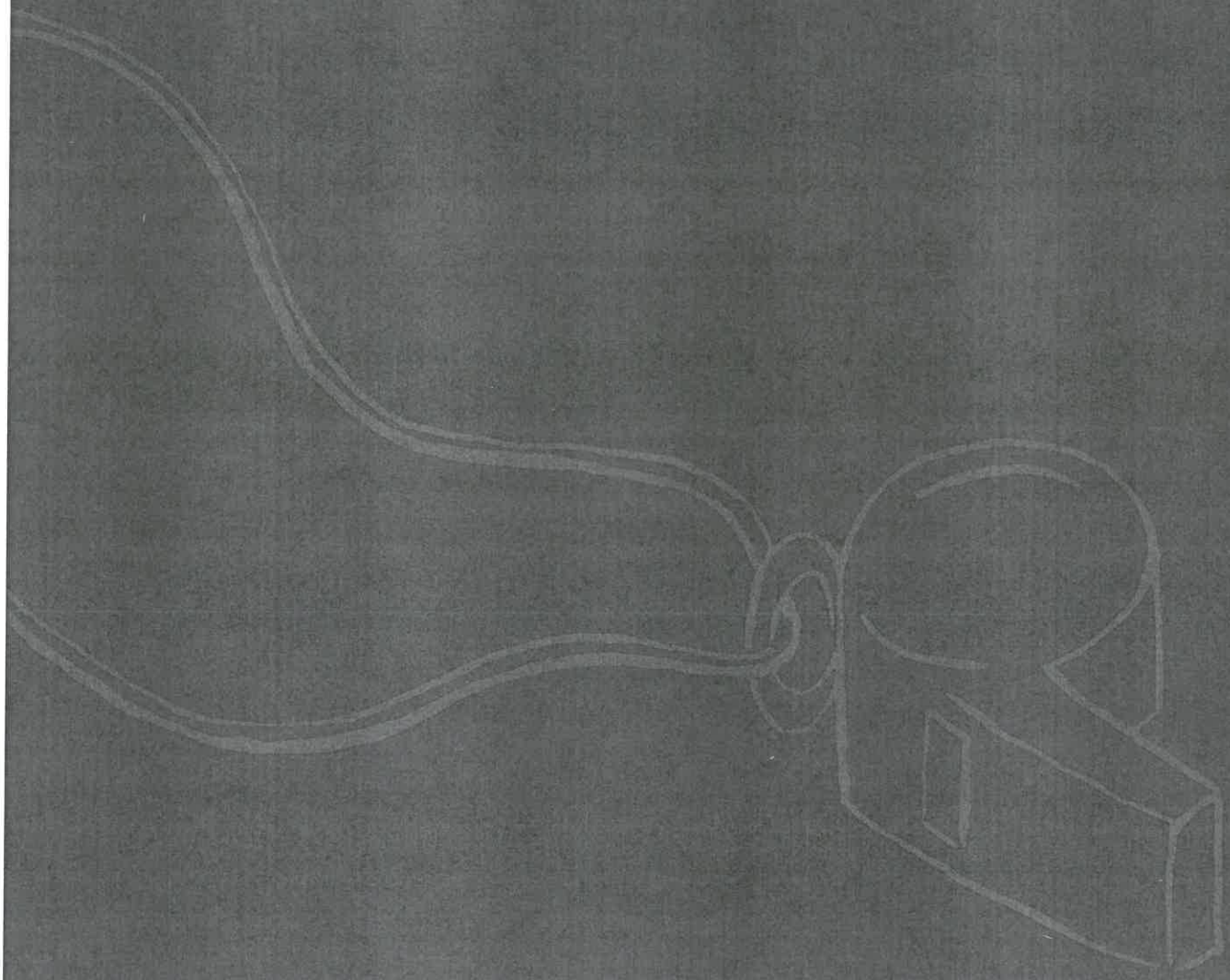
—Virginia Woolf, writer

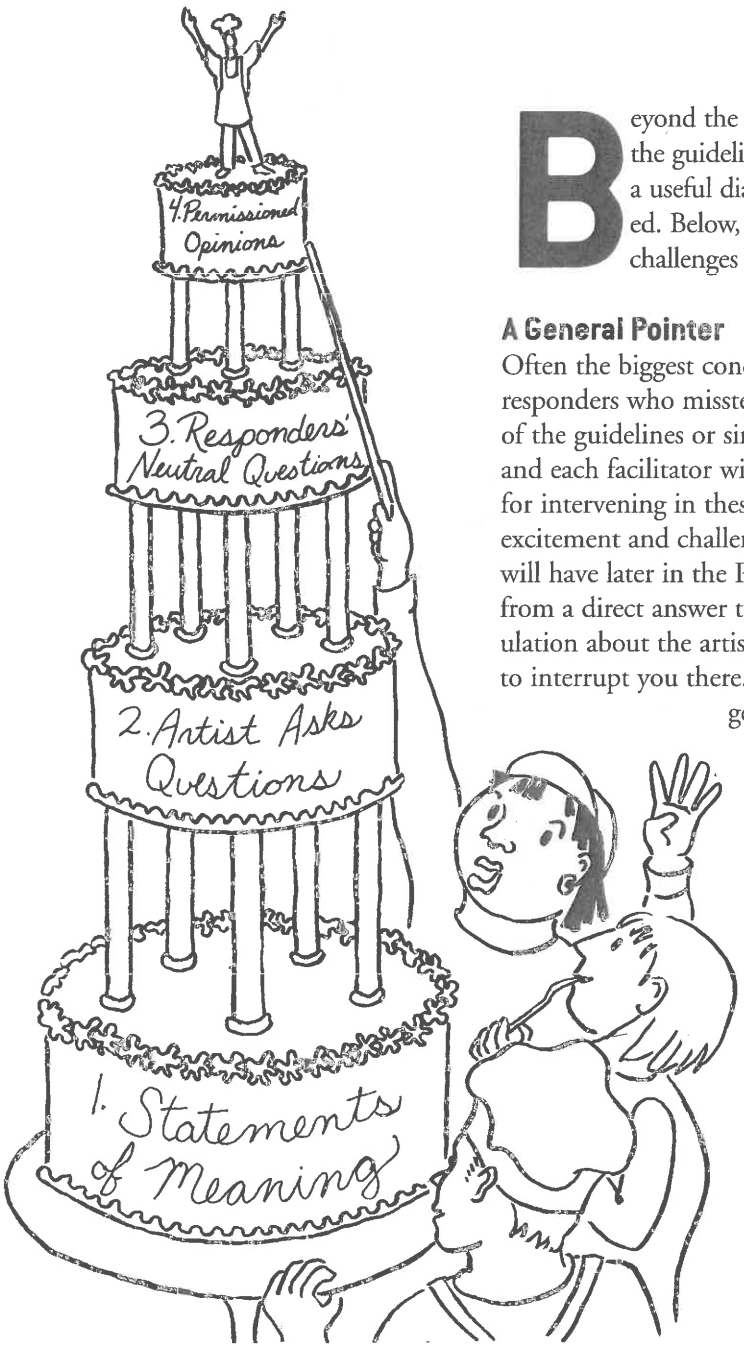
I think on-stage nudity is disgusting, shameful and damaging to all things American. But if I were 22 with a great body, it would be artistic, tasteful, patriotic and a progressive religious experience.

—Shelley Winters, actor

FACILITATION

FUNDAMENTALS





THE FACILITATOR SHOULD EXPLAIN HOW THE FOUR STEPS ARE SEQUENCED TO SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER.

Beyond the basics of setting each step in motion and watching for adherence to the guidelines of the Process, an engaged facilitator can do much to assure that a useful dialogue emerges from the Process and that common pitfalls are avoided. Below, presented step by step, are some key practices and advice on meeting challenges that regularly occur.

A General Pointer

Often the biggest concern for a novice facilitator is simply how to manage and assist responders who misstep in the Process, either because they are struggling with restraints of the guidelines or simply misunderstanding the steps. Practice helps with this dilemma, and each facilitator will find a personal style in dealing with these challenges. Our advice for intervening in these moments is to draw attention to the larger context by noting the excitement and challenge of having such discussions and the opportunities the responder will have later in the Process. If a responder in step two moves quickly and passionately from a direct answer to an artist's question to a pointed suggestion or even a hostile speculation about the artist's intentions, the facilitator might intervene by saying, "I'm going to interrupt you there. At a moment like this, I always like to note how engaged people get when they have a chance to talk about new work. At this point in the Process we are focused on responding to the question the artist is posing, so I'm going to ask you to hold on to some of your thoughts for now. As we move to the next step, you might want to think about a way to frame a neutral question about the issue you have in mind, or in step four you might ask if the artist would like to hear your suggestion."

Setting the Stage

Despite its clearly defined roles and steps, the Critical Response Process requires very few formal trappings. It began as a few collaborators and friends conversing in a circle on the floor after a rehearsal, and it can still be as simple and spontaneous as that, occurring with no special setup and little preparation. While it has thrived when incorporated into programming as a structured and planned event, it has also been pressed into service on very short notice. With this range of application in mind, facilitators and other organizers have a variety of factors to consider when preparing for a Critical Response session. As with the followup, setting the stage for Critical

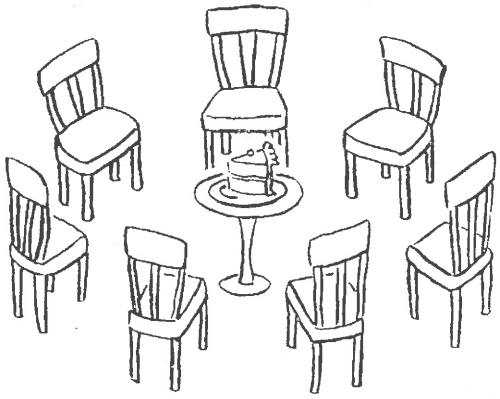
Response is less a matter of following a set method, and more about considering a range of options and finding an approach that fits the artist, the group, and the setting.

Preparatory Conversation: Though preferences range widely on this point, most facilitators find that a preliminary conversation between the artist and the facilitator is a useful measure. At a minimum the facilitator will want to be sure that the artist is familiar with the four steps and how they unfold, and is giving some thought to questions to pose in step two. Some facilitators like to deepen this preparation by giving artists a chance to talk about their concerns regarding work to be shown, and offering some preliminary coaching on framing the questions. Knowing the artist's key concerns can also help the facilitator to steer the Process more toward the artist's needs.

Whether the facilitator and artist choose an in-depth preparation or just a brief check-in prior to the session depends on several factors. The deeper preparation may be useful when either facilitator or artist is less experienced or assured, or when time is limited for the actual Critical Response session. More experienced facilitators and artists may feel comfortable opting for briefer preparation. Less preparation means that more of the facilitator's coaching of the artist happens during the Process, which can be enlightening for the group to witness, particularly if part of the session's intent is to teach the workings of the Process itself.

While the Critical Response Process is meant to offer artists control in the process by which their work is reviewed, it should also advance and challenge their thinking. Thus the preliminary session should not be employed as a way of coddling the artist. Likewise it should not relieve the facilitator of any responsibility for coaching and intervention during the Process.

Seating arrangement: The best shape for the Critical Response Process is usually a circle, and facilitators should make every effort to move participants into this configuration which promotes participation, exchange, and eye contact, and helps to balance perceptions of power. Within this circle, we suggest that the facilitator sit next to the artist, as this helps the facilitator to stay attuned to the artist's responses, particularly such non-verbal cues as restlessness or tensing that may signal the need to clarify, probe more deeply, or press forward. Collaborators who are sharing the role of artist should also sit together, allowing them to confer when needed and keeping the responders' focus in one place. In rehearsal or seminar settings, with open space and movable chairs, the circle is easy to achieve; in theaters, face-front classrooms or café/cabaret spaces the circle can be more difficult to achieve, but the effort is generally worthwhile.



THE PERFECT SHAPE FOR CRITICAL RESPONSE SEATING? A CIRCLE!

Warmups: As in any activity that involves physical or mental focus and exertion, Critical Response participants can benefit from a warmup, particularly if they are less familiar with one another or unaccustomed to giving critique and response. This can be as simple as going around the circle, prior to a showing, and having each participant briefly mention a recent artistic experience and describe why it was meaningful to them. A more elaborate approach can call on participants to form pairs and practice statements of meaning and neutral questions based on one another's clothing, objects in the environment, or other immediate subjects. The point of such activities is to give participants a chance to practice some of the skills they will be employing in the Process.

view: When a facilitator introduces Critical Response to a up unfamiliar with the Process, it is always helpful to review four core steps, emphasizing how they are sequenced to sup- t one another and to afford openness and receptivity. When sible, doing this preview before the showing or review of rk can inform how responders watch and think about the rk in question and prepare them for effective participation. metimes for newcomers, the Process seems to impose a daunt- number of rules to follow. Therefore, facilitators should courage participants to take risks in the Process rather than to l hamstrung by its protocols. So it's helpful to say something e "We will all make mistakes as we experience the Process lay. As a matter of fact, I hope we make mistakes, because 'll all gain useful insights. So, if you have doubts, I encourage u to forge ahead."

ote-taker: Most artists appreciate having a written record of e session. Because Critical Response engages them as active rticipants in the dialogue, some artists may prefer not to take eir own notes so they can give full attention to the exchange. thers find that writing helps them synthesize the ideas they e hearing. A note-taker can be arranged in advance, or, before unching step one, the facilitator can ask if the artist would like note-taker, and request a volunteer from the group to serve that role.

tep One: Statements of Meaning

alanced Participation: As noted, the facilitator starts step one ith a question like "What was stimulating, compelling, interest- ıg, surprising, memorable, evocative about the work you've just en?" This usually sets in motion a range of varied and specific atements. The facilitator has options for managing this round. he may take responses in no particular order, simply calling on ıose who indicate that they have something to say. Or she can e more directive, asking each person make just one brief state- ıent, taking turns in order as the opportunity to respond moves round the circle, then opening the response up to further com- ıents. This approach can be useful with medium-sized groups of 0 to 15 responders, because it exposes many ideas quickly and assures that everyone with something to say gets at least one chance. It can also be a helpful way to launch the entire Process in group dynamics where some participants may need more encouragement to speak.

Occasionally, when the floor is open to comments, a responder will take his role very seriously, and having taken notes during the showing, will use step one to list everything he found meaningful or positive about what he saw. Here a facilitator may have to judge the value of the responder's comments. If the artist appears receptive and the commentary is rich, the facilitator may choose to let the responder continue. But if the responder is at risk of monopolizing the time and energy, the facilitator can intervene

Articulate viewing is active viewing

We often encourage students, particularly children and teens, to use words other than "I liked" or "I loved," in making their step one statements of meaning. This helps them hone their vocabularies and sharpen their skills for watching and articulating. For younger children this may not be easy at first. I therefore demonstrate quite a bit and often translate their comments. If Kevin says, "I liked it when Kayla did the arch on her hands and feet," I might add, "Yes, that caught my eye too, because I could see Cindy on the ground behind her. The shape of her body made an interesting frame for Cindy." Watching for relationships, looking for small details, talking about meaning—step one encourages anyone to be an active viewer, questioner, and idea-maker.

—Margot Greenlee
Liz Lerman Dance Exchange

THE THREE ROLES

Here are some ideas for action and reflection in each of the three roles . In surveying all these options, try to remember that the Critical Response Process is not about getting it right or wrong. It's about making new discoveries in the artistic work, in your own statements and questions, and in what others have to say.

Artist	Responder	Facilitator
Preparing for the Process		
... invested in continuing to work on the piece you are showing and open to the possibility that you might change it. ... thinking about what you want to learn related to where you are in the process of developing the work you are showing. ... in an open frame of mind about what you will hear.	... invested in the potential for the artist to do his/her best work. ... thinking ahead to how you will participate in the steps of the Process as you observe the presentation of the artist's work.	... considering what kind of preparation will be appropriate for this artist, taking time, if needed, to meet with the artist in advance. ... assuring that all understand the sequence of the steps and the concepts of the neutral question and permissioned opinion. ... checking to see if the artist would like a note-taker.
Step One: Statements of Meaning		
... suspending the need to hear "this is the greatest thing I've ever seen." ... suspending the need to question the sincerity of positive comments. ... attending to your own internal reactions to the comments in terms of how they inform the steps to come: • Are they answering the questions I have about the work? • Are they suggesting that I need to probe deeper on any subject? • Are they raising my sense of curiosity about something new? • Are they reflecting a consensus reaction or a diverse response?	... making comments that add new perspectives to what has already been stated. ... limiting your response to one or two points when many responders are participating. ... if you have a strong opinion that you would eventually like to make, addressing a related aspect of the work in your step one statement. ... noting the meanings that others have found in the artwork, observing how those comments are expanding your own perception of the work. ... observing your own preferences and points of reference.	... encouraging a broad response with an opening that suggests many possible kinds of reactions (i.e. "What was stimulating, challenging, memorable, evocative, etc...") ... intervening when responders jump to negative opinions or suggestions, reminding them of the opportunities they will have later in the Process. ... drawing the group's attention to the variety of responses elicited.
Step Two: Artist Asks Questions		
... building on the information you have heard in step one. ... refraining from long explanatory preambles. ... considering possibilities for two-part questions or general questions. ... ready to narrow questions down when they spill out in groups. ... ready to hear opinions, including negative ones, when they are in direct response to the question you have posed.	... keeping your answers honest and specific to the artist's question. ... expressing opinions, even negative ones, IF they are in response to the artist's question. ... listening carefully to the areas of interest and concern that are directed by the artist. ... staying interested in the conversation, even when it is about an aspect of the work about which you may not have a strong opinion.	... encouraging artists to limit their preambles to questions. ... encouraging the artist to phrase in more general or specific terms if the question isn't leading to a useful response. ... helping the artist refine very general questions, or sort through multiple questions that s/he may want to pose all at once. ... encouraging responders to respond to the question by being honest and specific, but staying on-topic with the question. ... intervening when responses to questions contain fixits (suggestions for changes).

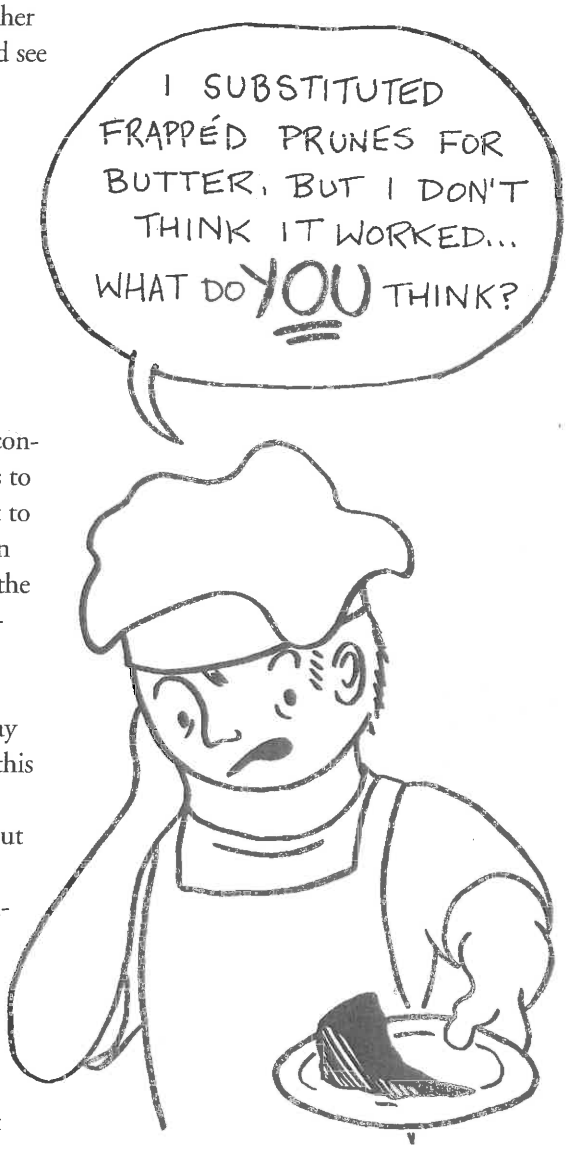
continued on next page

THE THREE ROLES (CONTINUED)

Artist	Responder	Facilitator
Step Three: Responders Ask Neutral Questions		
... attentive to possibilities and issues that may not be prominent in your current thinking. ... using the dialogue as an opportunity to advance your thinking about the work rather than to repeat what you already know. ... not working too hard to divine the opinion behind the question.	... framing a neutral question about the area of your opinion. ... considering options from general to specific and the possible merits of posing a more general question before a specific one. ... listening to the artist's response for indications that the opinion you have in mind may be either very valuable or irrelevant to the artist's concerns. ... curious about aspects of the work that aren't related to strong opinions (i.e., open to asking questions that are not opinion-driven.)	... reminding responders about the discipline of framing questions neutrally. ... discerning whether questions are neutral, and asking responders to rephrase neutrally when they are not. ... intervening to rephrase a question, or asking responder to refine question, when artist seems "stuck" in responding. ... intervening and refining the query if artist gives a long-winded "explanatory" response that sounds as though s/he is repeating information s/he has stated before.
Step Four: Permissioned Opinions		
... listening to the content of permission requests as well as opinions. ... exercising the options of saying "yes" or "no" to a proposed opinion. ... considering how content of this and previous steps is informing your thinking about how you want to continue with the piece you are working on.	... always prefacing opinions by saying "I have an opinion about _ would you like to hear it?" and waiting until artist consents. ... indicating, in your request to the artist, if your opinion contains a suggestion or fixit. ... not loading the content of your opinion into the permission request. ... engaging the artist directly rather than dialoguing with other responders.	... reminding responders about the protocol of asking for the artist's consent to state a particular opinion. ... checking to see if artist wants to hear suggestions as well as opinions. ... asking responders to restate when their permission statements have the content of an opinion loaded into them. ... directing opinions to be stated to the artist, not as seconds or rebuttals to other responders. ... intervening when responders engage in a dialogue that does not include the artist or when they become sidetracked discussing something other than the artwork under consideration.
Wrap-up		
... consolidating the most useful information you've heard.	...observing the quality of the contribution you and your fellow responders have made.	... asking the artist to say what his/her next steps are. ... checking to see if artist is open to hearing more from the responders outside the formal session. ... thanking all participants.

with a statement like "Because time is limited, I'd like us to move on so we can hear some other voices. It could be that some of the additional points you have will come up in other people's comments. If there's time we can come back to you at the end of the round and see if there's anything that wasn't touched on."

Signaling agreement: To keep the responses diverse, the facilitator can encourage each participant to say something that has not been voiced yet. Here it can be helpful to identify a common signal of assent like head-nodding, gentle "um-hms," or (popular with some practitioners) two-handed finger snapping. Using such a signal—ideally evident to everyone but unobtrusive to the flow of the Process—enables responders agreeing with a statement to reinforce it without feeling the need to repeat it.



DOUBT AND NEED CAN INFLUENCE HOW AN ARTIST ASKS QUESTIONS.

Step Two: Artist Asks Questions

Honing the Questions: In the course of step one, an artist can experience a shift in his concerns about his work and his expectations of the Process. When the opportunity arrives to pose his own questions in step two, he may find that the pressing issues he has brought to the session were actually addressed in the opening round. As a result he may flounder in moving his own inquiry forward. Here artists may benefit from gentle intervention by the facilitator. Sometimes this is a matter of moving to the next stage in the work's development; but sometimes an artist may need to probe more deeply and specifically into the question that he thinks has been answered.

In contrast to the tongue-tied creator is the artist who is brimming with things to say when step two begins, offering a long explanation as preamble to a question. Because this uses up precious time and may guide responders to the answer the artist wants to hear, the facilitator can remind the artist that the Process will offer more chances to talk about the work, and suggest jumping directly to the question. On other occasions an artist's questions spill out in groups of two and three, all posed in a single query to the responders. Here a facilitator can suggest that the artist choose from amongst the questions posed or ask, "Do you see those two questions as related, or would you like to ask them separately?"

The dialogue holds greater potential when the artist can pose questions that lead to more than an answer of yes or no. Artists striving for specificity may get stuck on yes/no questions, and the facilitator can sometimes help by suggesting a simple two-part question. "Did you find the piece confusing, and if you did, can you talk about why you had that reaction?"

The idea of the neutral question is central in step three of the Process, but it can also be useful here in step two. Needing reassurance about the work, an artist may angle a question to elicit the positive, or prodded by doubt, may pose a question that leads toward the negative:

I'm worried that readers are getting lost in the transition between ıe two sections of my story. What did you think?" But the most seful answers will emerge when the artist is able to frame the uery neutrally. Here the facilitator might suggest "How did you xperience..." as an opening, leading the artist to a rephrasing such s "How did you experience the transition between the two sec- ions of the story?" Even if the responders have heard the artist's ıegative bias, the revised question will help them to refocus and ›rovide more helpful responses.

Early Opinions: Facilitators may need to tell responders that ›pinions are fine, and expected, in step two, as long as they are n direct response to the artist's question and do not contain sug- ;estions for "fixing" the work. Suppose an artist has posed this ıuestion: "I wanted to capture the chaos of the city in these pho- ographs, but I'm trying to balance that content with composi- ions that have force and integrity. Have I succeeded?" We must ssume that the artist wants answers to this question, even if they nclude a response like: "Well, most of the photos are so artfully omposed that I'm really not perceiving the theme of chaos." ome responders will hesitate to be this direct, either because hey are still focused on the positive perspective of step one, or ›ecause they are anticipating the opportunity to express opinions n step four. But if the responder waits until step four, the artist nay be left feeling that her concerns about her own work have ıot been acknowledged, a circumstance that can lead her to ssume a defensive posture when the final step arrives.

At other times a responder may segue from a direct response mmediately into an opinion about something else or to a ques- ion of his own. For example, a responder asked about the circle ormation at the end of a dance might say, "I loved the circle, ut I hate the diagonal that came right before it." In cases like hese, the facilitator needs to direct the responder to hold the ıuestion or opinion until the appropriate step.

Step Three: Neutral Questions

Willful Explanations: Step three is the point in the Critical Response Process where the artist has the opportunity to speak at greatest length. Because the Process aims for a dialogue that pushes the work forward, one of the facilitator's challenges is to keep the artist in a non-repetitive mode. In responding to questions, an artist can begin to "explain" the work: Rather than speaking about his own explorations, intentions, or inquiry, the artist talks as a way of willing things to be true about his work. When this happens in the Process, the artist's response will appear to be rehearsed and unspontaneous, and his language will have a definitive quality that does not invite openness to outside comment. The artist treads water while responder waits through the explained response until the real answer comes. The pre-packaged, explanatory response may be of educational value for the group, but the facilitator should ask if the explaining is getting to the heart of the responder's question and if it will uncover something that truly advances the work. A facilitator who recognizes this can cut in to elicit from the artist "not what you did already but what you plan to do." This prompt can shift the speaker to a more productive mode of articulation in which he is imagining forward, actually using the act of talking to make discoveries.

Articulating Answers: On the other end of the spectrum from artists with pre-fabricated explanations are those who appear, in the moment, to have a limited ability to communicate. Such an artist, when asked, "Why did you sequence the stanzas of the poem the way you did?" might just say "Hmmm, I don't know" or "I haven't thought about it." At this point, because some prodding is in order, the facilitator might announce, "I'm going to be somewhat directive now," and phrase the question differently, or ask the questioner to phrase more specifically. By either approach, this deeper-level question might emerge as, "Can you talk about how you sequenced the poem in relation to the story you want to tell? (or the theme, or the relative proportions of the different sections?)" Now the artist must find new words to describe something she may never have addressed before. In the process, the artist who was earlier inarticulate may discover that there was a reason for her sequencing choices.

Funneling Up: Facilitators often want to know how to help responders ask better questions. As in step two, it helps to make questioners aware of their choices along the continuum from general to specific, and one particularly helpful approach for responders is to start with a more general question and follow up with something more specific: "Can you talk about the audience you are planning to target with this brochure?" followed up with "In targeting teenagers, how did you make your design choices for the brochure's cover?" For some responders this may require a mental process of "funneling up," finding the more general query that lays the groundwork for the real question they want to pose. This approach is particularly helpful when discussing an aspect of the work that has not been mentioned earlier in the Process.

Step Four: Permissioned Opinions

Managing Cross-talk: In step four, an opinion may lead to a short conversation consisting of several exchanges between the artist and the responder. This can be informative for everyone, but the facilitator may need to manage the exchange to maintain focus on the work at hand. On other occasions, a responder may impulsively rebut an opinion he has heard, addressing the person in the circle who originated that opinion rather than the artist. The facilitator needs to guide this responder back to the step four protocol and remind him to address his contrasting opinion to the artist, prefaced by the usual permission request. And even when a response builds on a point already expressed, the new speaker needs to initiate again with "I have an opinion..." restating the focus; in other words, stating "I also have an opinion about your use of irony in the first paragraph, would you like to hear it?" not "I have a thought about that too..." or "I have an opinion about the same thing she's talking about..."

Loaded Permissions: Once in a while a responder will enter step four by saying something like, "I have an opinion about how the title of your picture makes the piece seem didactic," effectively loading the content as well as the subject of the opinion into the opening statement. Here an alert facilitator would ask the responder to rephrase by stopping short of actually giving the opinion before the artist has granted permission. Sometimes Critical Response is about saying less rather than more.

Education is a kind of continuing dialogue, and a dialogue assumes, in the nature of the case, different points of view.

—Robert Hutchins, educator

When I woke up this morning my girlfriend asked me, 'Did you sleep good?' I said 'No, I made a few mistakes.'

—Steven Wright, comedian

DEEPENING THE DIALOGUE

DIFFERENT VALUES COME TOGETHER WHEN PEOPLE GATHER TO GIVE FEEDBACK.

Critical Response and Personal Dynamics

In spite of its broad and enthusiastic acceptance in many quarters, the Critical Response Process has also encountered some lively challenges and even outright resistance. The varied reactions to the Process probably reflect the broad range of attitudes, aptitudes, mindsets, and cultural conditioning that people bring to the experience of feedback and critique. While there are no strict predictors for how people will adapt to the Process, it sometimes appears that those who have a hard time being critical or who are especially sensitive about other people's feelings discover through the Process that they can say almost anything that they want. They find the structure liberating and feel comfortable in an atmosphere where the artist maintains some of the control. But for people who are used to being immediately and directly critical, the Process may feel indirect, Machiavellian, and ultimately untruthful.

Strait jacket

Passion and emotion definitely influence the reactions people have to the Process. Many people tie their measurement of honesty in direct proportion to how emotional they are in the moment. For them, to have to wait until step four to state their opinions — which by then have probably dissipated in emotional energy —seems completely dishonest. The problem goes something like this: A person equates his sense of honesty to the way he feels after seeing a piece. (He may keep the passion under wraps, and think that he is actually being very analytical. The emotion may kick in when he is denied the right to respond on his own terms.) He knows he needs to tell the artist the truth as he perceives it. This need far outweighs the premise of Critical Response Process, which is that the artist will not hear what he says because of the emotional nature of the message and because of the timing. The artist sends up a defense system and the dialogue is over. But this responder will feel like he is being told to lie if asked to withhold his opinion temporarily or to form it into a neutral question. For others there is a clear sense that the only way to measure truth is how much it hurts. These dynamics make it very hard for some people to view the Process as anything but a strait jacket.

—Liz Lerman

The Responding Facilitator

How active should a facilitator be? An effective facilitator may choose to be very engaged as a structural engineer, but not to take part in the discussion of the work itself. In that mode, she pays close attention to the flow, timing, and interplay, she offers guidance on framing questions and responses, but she never actually participates as a responder. On the other hand, if the facilitator does choose to take part in the dialogue, it's a good practice for her to ask someone else to serve as facilitator during the moment that she is playing the responder role. She may then reassume facilitation when the exchange with the artist is finished. Switching between roles like this can be especially useful in allowing the facilitator to model particular ways of responding. (If, for instance, a lull ensues shortly after commencing step one, the facilitator can offer a statement of her own to help convey some of the possibilities for statement of meaning responses.) But if the facilitator has a great deal to say to the artist, the assumption of multiple roles can have its limits. In using the Process with students, teachers often assume that facilitating is a natural extension of their mentoring role; but if they also hope to offer their own commentary and guidance inside the Process, they may find that at least one of the roles is undermined by the attempt to play both. Instructors should consider training students to facilitate and rotating this role among the group. This is a valuable experience for students and frees the teacher to be more a more engaged responder. The teacher can still keep an eye on the facilitation and intervene when any missteps occur.

Letting the Process lead

I use the Critical Response Process in my classes with youth. After they get used to the form, we rotate facilitatorship so that all the students have the opportunity to lead the Process. As a teacher, it's both scary and thrilling to watch Critical Response lead the learning. There are times when I do not even have to be involved—all my comments get expressed through the students using the Process.

—Steve Bailey
Jump-Start Performance Co.

Jumping Back, Leaping Forward

Suppose in the opinion round of step four, a responder's statement leads to a need for clarification, prompting another responder to say "May I ask the artist a question?" Should the facilitator approve moving back to step three? It is often a useful practice, at any point in the Process, to make a brief jump backwards to an earlier step. In response to the above example the facilitator only needs to say "There's a question for the artist, so I'm going to suggest that we move back to step three for a moment."

Sometimes a leap forward in the Process seems appropriate. Perhaps in step three a person asks a neutral question and the artist answers, but the facilitator senses that the dialogue is incomplete. The responder may not know how to ask a follow-up question neutrally, or may be afraid of asking the question incorrectly. In a moment like this, can the facilitator intervene and suggest a move forward into step four for an opinion? Forward leaps like this can be more challenging to manage than backward jumps, as it means moving participants into a step not yet formally introduced. But with familiarity, the facilitator may feel comfortable allowing the Process this kind of fluidity. If, in the scenario mentioned above, the conversation has ground to a halt, the facilitator might encourage the responder to go on to step four, to say that she has an opinion and ask permission to state it. The artist agrees, hears the opinion, and perhaps offers a response. When this conversation is complete, the facilitator brings the entire group back to step three.

Whether advancing forward or backing up in the Process, it is important for the facilitator to state explicitly each time there is a move to a new step. This avoids cross-talk and confusion about

where the group is in the Process. When successful, this kind of flexibility allows a more organic flow to the discussion and usually provides an example of how people use the principles of the Process in one-on-one situations where a facilitator might not be present and a looser structure prevails.

Managing Time

Once familiar with its basic principles, users often begin to experiment with the Critical Response Process. We encourage people to adapt the Process to their needs; this is a living, breathing thing, not a code of conduct to be practiced in an orthodox way. Indeed, in the short history of the Process, many practitioners have evolved their own notable variations and applications, some of which are mentioned in the final chapter of this book.

This principle of flexibility is particularly worth considering in regard to time management. A satisfactory Critical Response session can take anywhere from 30 to 90 minutes, so time does not always allow for a complete four-step Process at every point when an artist might find it useful. This is particularly true when employing it at several stages of a work's development or applying it inside a course of study, where many people will be offering work for response. Here are some practical shortcuts:

- Pose questions, but don't answer them all. In the "Q and A" format of steps two and three, there may not be time to fully address every question worth raising. To close each of those steps, facilitators can ask for artists or responders to state their remaining questions without taking time to answer them. One-on-one dialogue can continue afterwards, but the Process is not bogged down by the need for everyone to get a turn. It's useful for the facilitator to confirm to the group—always making sure that the artist agrees—that the artist will be available later for further responses or questions.
- Limit the number of people who can respond to each artist and spread the responsibility around. When several artists are showing work within a limited time, only a few people are asked to speak about any one artist's work. The rest listen, but take a turn later in the session. The implications of silencing some audience members for the sake of expediency may challenge facilitators to experiment with structures for choosing who talks and who listens, perhaps using a lottery, sign-up sheet, or system allowing artists to choose some or all of their responders.
- Limit which steps of the Process you do. For instance, an eight-week course in storytelling might usually employ

STEPS & SEQUENCE

Through its inner working, each step lays the groundwork for the one that follows.

STEP ONE Statements of meaning: Responders state what was exciting, compelling, meaningful, memorable, evocative.

* Provides a range of specific information about how responders are experiencing the art work.
* Draws attention to multiple ways of experiencing the work and diversity of aesthetic perspectives.
* Establishes positive baseline for discussion, grounding conversation in what is working, what is effective.
* Gets responders participating, artist listening.

PREPARING FOR STEP TWO...

Artists experience...

* Confirmation of meaningful aspects of the work.
* Deeper understanding of how and what the work is communicating.
* A context for the questions they will pose in step 2.

Responders experience...

* Range of context for their own reactions.
* Effect of their responses on artist.
* Practice talking and a warm-up for deeper dialogue.

STEP TWO Artist asks Questions: The artist poses questions. Responders answer.

* Initiates two-way dialogue with artist being first to establish the scope of the conversation.
* Allows artists to state where they are focusing energy or seeking solutions.
* Indicates to responders what artist may not be thinking about.

PREPARING FOR STEP THREE...

Artists experience...

* Investment of responders on the artists' terms.
* Multiple perspectives from which to view their artistic dilemmas.

Responders experience...

* Understanding of issues artist is addressing in refining work.
* Sense of value attached to what they have to contribute.

STEP THREE Neutral Questions from Responders: Responders ask questions, phrased neutrally. Artist responds.

* Broadens dialogue to aspects of the work about which responders are wondering or holding opinions, thus providing additional context.
* Engages artist in articulating intentions, motivations, background thinking.
* Engages responders in analyzing their opinions in order to phrase them as neutral questions.

PREPARING FOR STEP FOUR...

Artists experience...

* A way to advance work by talking about it.
* Chance to explore topic area of future opinions as a warm-up to hearing them.
* Opportunity to inform the content of opinions in step 4.

Responders experience...

* Opportunity to think through the content of their opinion and broach it in neutral terms.
* Chance to hear background which might inform the expression of opinions in step 4.

STEP FOUR Responders ask permission of artist to express opinions about their work. If artist accepts, responders state opinions.

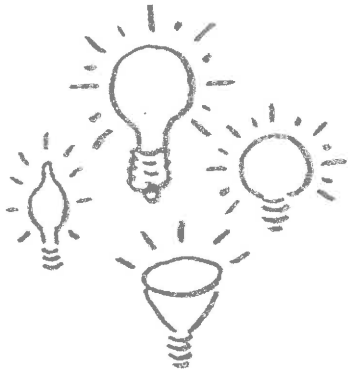
* Affords artists a degree of control in what opinions they choose to hear.
* Exposes full range of responders' experience.
* Completes a dialogue on terms that both artist and responders have helped to establish.

only the first three steps. Or if students are presenting stories at several stages of development, the course might use only step two on day one and step three the next time the work is shown. At some point in the course a full Critical Response session is done for each student.

he Challenge of Fixits

Vhen asked to respond to work in progress, it is remarkable how uickly we slide from observation, into opinion, and then to a fixit," that is, a directive suggestion for a change. The arrival at he fixit can be so unconscious that the responder may need to lo some mental backtracking to realize that an opinion underlies he fixit. In fact, suggestions for changes can emerge as early as tep one when a responder says, "One of the things I liked about he musical arrangement was hearing the bass played with the ›ow rather than just as a rhythm instrument. I wish that would ıave lasted longer." Already: a fixit. Often in step two, they occur in response to a question or dilemma posed by the artist: "Black isn't the right color for the costume. The costume should be red because your dance is about passion." And certainly fixits will come very naturally to some responders in step four: "Your film about farm workers would be more compelling if you incorporated some oral histories." As constructive problem-solving, and as an expression of creative impulse, fixits often channel a very positive intent on the part of the responder. But they can be problematic for the artist, and when they emerge in a Critical Response session, it raises the question of whether they have a place in the dialogue and how the facilitator and artist should handle them. The answer depends on the several factors:

- The relationship of the artist to the responders. Sometimes Critical Response can function inside a collaborative process where multiple hands and voices are involved in shaping a work. A playwright drawing some



Multiple opinions, multiple solutions

When facilitating, I used to be very strict about not allowing fixits as a possible variation to the permissioned opinion step, believing that it was vital for artists to find their own way to solve what was missing or needed changing in their work. As I began to facilitate more, I loosened my grip on step four, the opinion stage. I encouraged a range of opinions, as it allowed the artist to see the wide range of potential action—not only taking action on the one professed opinion. I began to see fixits as a close relative of opinion: I now allow fixits but I make sure that there is not only one fixit offered—there needs to be a range of fixits for the artist to hear. This has the same benefit as hearing a range of opinions: the artist realizes that there is an array of possibility as opposed to the predominant, first-articulated way to explore the work.

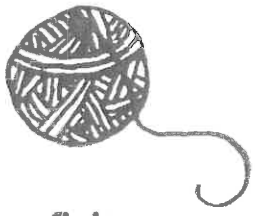
—Peter DiMuro
Liz Lerman Dance Exchange

of her content from improvisational exercises by a group of actors, for instance, might welcome solutions offered by this collaborating ensemble.

- The preference of the artist and the progress of the work. An artist in the final stages of developing work, still grappling with a problem that he can articulate but not solve, might actively solicit solutions within a group of peers. "I know the song is running on too long. Can you make suggestions about what could be cut?"
- The intent of the criticism. If Critical Response is used in an academic, curatorial, or mentoring setting, where "fixing" work is accepted as a part of a larger program of teaching and guidance, fixits can be useful (though sometimes a shortcut that may compromise opportunities for deeper learning; see "Unraveling a fixit," right).

To manage these variables, facilitators can take a couple of measures at the beginning of the Process:

- Allow artists to state whether they welcome fixits. This can be determined in a preliminary discussion with the facilitator or asked publicly at the start of the session. If an artist says no, the facilitator may need to intervene in step four, guiding responders who may still want to pose fixits to frame the opinion that underlies the suggestion. If an artist says yes, responders in step four who have fixits should say "I have an opinion that includes a suggestion about ..." or use other phrasing that indicates that their opinion contains a fixit.
- Acknowledge that the desire to get involved in the process of shaping work is natural and creative, but that the artist may gain more if she follows a path to her own solutions. Ask responders who immediately jump to ideas for changes to use steps of the Process to get at the issue that their fixit is intended to address. This may mean encouraging responders to mentally backtrack through the Process before taking part in it: first thinking through the opinion that may underlie their fixit, and then framing a neutral question that addresses the focus of the opinion.



Unraveling a fixit

Once during the early 1980s, I was selected by audition to be part of a group of Washington-based artists studying with a famous New York director. We would each bring a work-in-progress; she would help us develop it, and all of us would get produced at a local avant-garde venue.

I was thrilled by this opportunity. Struggling with a work about the defense budget, I was trying to apply new approaches to combining text and movement. Instead I was feeling quite constrained, especially with one section of the dance. The director watched me do it a few times and made a startling fixit, suggesting I use a ball of string to focus the theme. I complied. I performed the piece. People loved it. Critics loved it. And what they loved about it was the very thing she had fixed. I always felt that I should put an asterisk in the program and explain that the device that made it work was not my idea.

I might have solved the problem myself if she had asked me enough questions: Did I have other tools for making my ideas more concrete? Was there a visible metaphor that could focus the audience's attention? How could I use a prop to convey my meaning? I know I would have grown the creative muscles I needed to develop my own solution.

—Liz Lerman

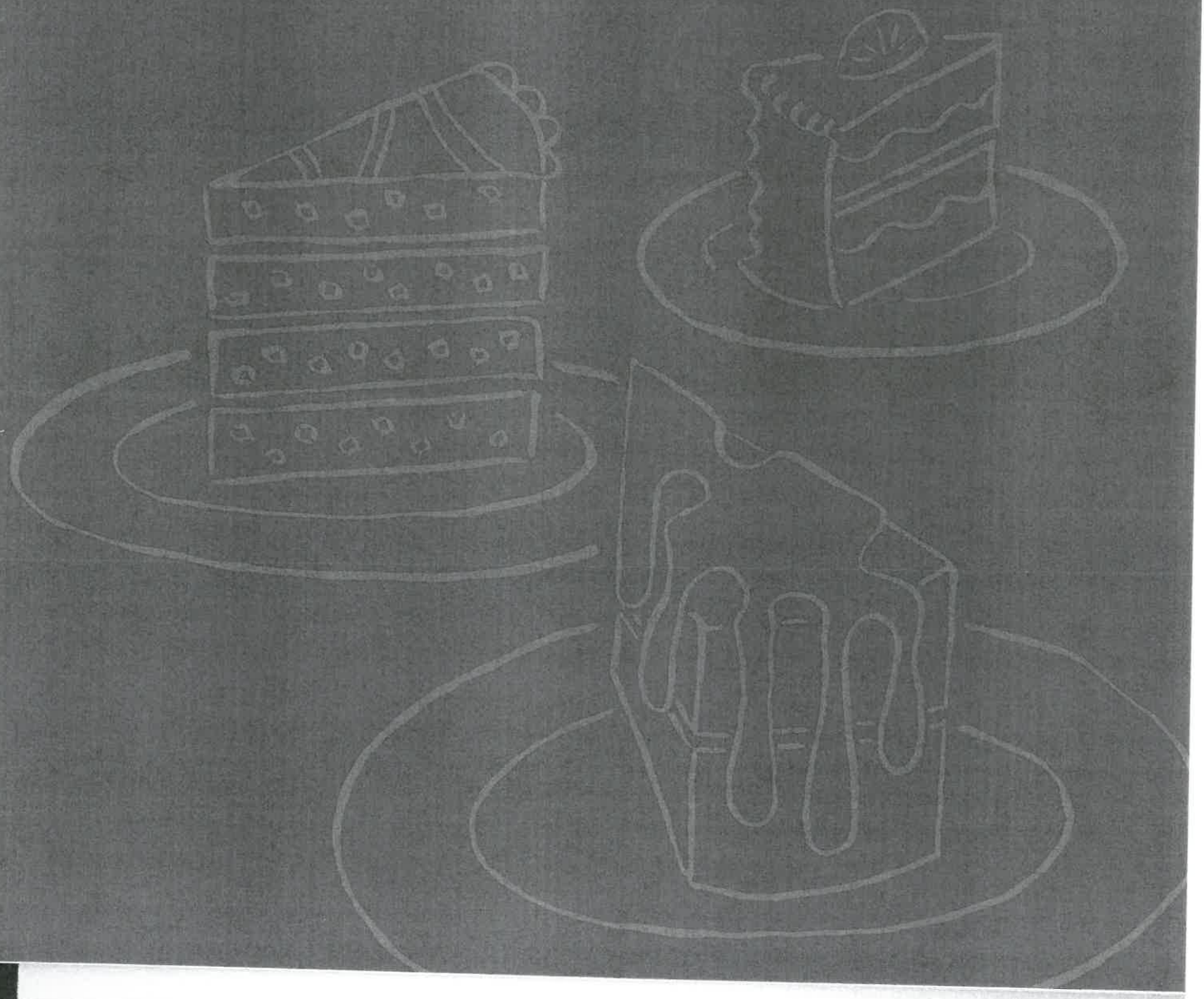
Nothing in the entire universe ever perishes, believe me, but things vary, and adopt a new form.

—Ovid, poet

When you come to a fork in the road, take it.

—Yogi Berra, athlete

VARIATIONS



Like a clear melody, strong dance phrase, or cogent image, the Critical Response Process is a theme conducive to many variations. Some of these variations leave the steps and outlines of the Process clearly intact, while others venture beyond the four-step ·ocess, emphasizing the principles of the Process rather than its rmal elements. While this publication is not intended to ·ovide detailed guidance on every possible application of the ·ocess, we offer a sampling of frequent or particularly thought-l variations, in hopes that users will gain inspiration from the .riety of applications to which Critical Response can be adapt-l. These variations are organized into three categories: audience ıgagement (including audience talk-backs and interpretive ·ogramming); education (including applications of the standard ·ocess and a variation focused on peer-to-peer coaching); and ›llaboration (including thoughts about using the Process on eative works engaging multiple artists and a variation to use for ·oup assessment of collaborative projects.)

Liberating a long-standing dialogue

In the small rural community where I work and live, we've developed a tradition of discussion after performance. We all know each other, and the audience wants a chance to say what they think and to ask questions. Over time I became increasingly uncomfortable about hosting these events: I felt as though I was improvising an encore, where I was expected to take in everything with good humor, process it immediately, and present an entertaining response to each comment. It was usually exhausting and demoralizing. The Critical Response Process shifted the weight. Rather than feeling obliged to serve what I imagined the audience's needs to be, I was able to organize the discussion around the needs of the work. Liberating moments were when I just sat still and listened; when I answered that I didn't what to hear an opinion about an issue I was tired of discussing; and when I left a question unanswered, to probe for future investigation.

—*Sally Nash*
Workspace for Choreographers

AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

Frequently Critical Response moves beyond the walls of the artist's studio to enter such arenas as an arts center's community dialogue efforts, a theater's audience engagement strategy, or a museum's interpretive programming.

Audience Talk-Backs

As part of their public programming, many contemporary theater companies offer staged readings of scripts under development. Usually followed by "talk-backs," these readings serve both to engage audiences and cultivate new work. Because they focus on a work-in-progress through conversation between artist and audience, the success of such talk-backs is often measured by how well they manage the dialogue. It is probably for this reason that the Critical Response Process has been enthusiastically embraced by numerous contemporary theater companies. Indeed, according to Nick Olcott, Artistic Associate with Round House Theatre in Maryland, without some structure for managing the audience's participation, "comments invariably turn to the negative and destructive, and the playwright becomes a vulnerable target."

Multi-disciplinary arts centers and dance venues have put the Process to similar uses. In these "talk-back" applications, the Process can be employed in its four-step form with a few minor variations:

- Organizers should recognize the demands made upon an audience asked to take part in a discussion after a full evening of focused concentration. The audience may need a break between the showing and the Critical Response session, and a time span for the session should be announced and observed.

MANY CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS USE TALK-BACKS TO BOTH ENGAGE AUDIENCES AND CULTIVATE NEW WORK.

Another option is to schedule a "morning after" Critical Response session, inviting members of the audience to re-engage in discussing the performance the following day.

- The size of the audience for such an event may make circular seating impractical, though if part of the audience leaves and the seating is flexible, it is worth asking people to move their chairs to approximate a circle.
- Not everyone may participate by speaking, but the facilitator can still work to keep everyone engaged by asking them to reflect on their responses and questions even if they don't voice them.
- Because time will be precious, artists should be encouraged to give advance thought to the questions they want to pose in step two.

Beyond these small allowances, institutions using Critical Response for talk-backs have made their own adjustments to particular steps in the process.

- New York Theatre Workshop likes to introduce the spirit of step four's permissioned opinion one step earlier, so that playwrights responding to neutral questions in step three are offered the option to say "I'd like to think about that question, but I don't want to answer it right now."
- On the responders' side, Jump-Start Performance Co. in San Antonio, Texas, likes to demystify the neutral question, emphasizing that the exercise of neutral questions is about a thought process rather than about getting neutral questions "right" by negating opinions or suppressing honest reactions. "We state this up front," says executive director Steve Bailey, "so that no one feels pressure to create the absolutely neutral question or feels so guilty about having an agenda that they don't ask their question at all."
- At the Round House Theatre's New Voices Playreading series, Nick Olcott stresses close adherence to the guidelines of the Process, suggesting that the facilitator "firmly but good-naturedly enforce the rules, even if the audience members protest." His variation on step four takes the form of an added stricture: "I have learned in step four never to call on anyone who has not participated in steps one through three. Those are the destructive opinion mongers who have not contributed helpfully to the Process."

In talk-back applications, one additional variation can be useful with large groups or controversial subject matter, or when responders seem hesitant to talk. After the performance or showing, the facilitator can direct observers to form pairs or small groups for conversations that don't engage the artist. These conversation groups may take two to five minutes to practice step one statements of meaning, or they may even allow for freewheeling opinion at the outset. After this warm-up, the Process can commence as usual, or if many responders are engaged, representatives can speak on behalf of their groups to offer step one comments.

Interpretive Programming

Typically the Critical Response Process addresses artwork that is still underway and artists who are engaged in the conversation about their own work. But aspects of the Process, particularly steps one and three, can be fruitful even in cases where the artwork is complete and the artist is not present (or even alive), such as literature discussion or interpretive programming in museums.

In the step one variation used in these cases, the group experiences the work of art and then responds to the usual "statement of meaning" question: "What was exciting, evocative, challenging, memorable, compelling, stimulating to you about this work?" In a case where a group has gathered to experience an environmental installation, tour a significant piece of architecture, read a poem, or listen to a musical work, this is a simple but potentially profound act, engaging people to search inside their own responses and listen to those of others.

At a later point, in a variation of step three, the group can simply pose questions about the content of the work, the artist's process, and the issue or theme the work addresses. This questioning may follow the usual discipline of neutral phrasing, functioning here not as a step in dialogue with the artist, but to engage the viewers or audience in separating out the aspect of their response that is opinion, personal aesthetic, or bias. This allows for an exploration of the work that is less colored by these factors. If work is controversial or issue-oriented in nature, the neutral questions can encompass the issue as well as the art.

We encourage artists, educators and programmers to think of these variations on steps one and three not as ends in themselves, but as tools to be applied in a bigger context. Their impact will depend largely on how they are combined with such approaches as group discussion, reflective writing, hands-on artmaking exercises or conversations with curators, docents, and scholars.

Collaborative dialogue

The underlying principles in the Critical Response Process can be useful, even when the steps are not done sequentially or with a facilitator. For example, in rehearsal, I may use certain aspects of it in order to get information from the dancers or other collaborators. It has proven especially helpful when I have been really stuck. I will sit everyone down and ask for a step one, particularly if they can articulate what they find meaningful at that stage as dancers. Then I will fire away with my questions. Usually all kinds of ideas emerge that can get me up on my feet and working again.
—Liz Lerman

EDUCATION

Critical Response in the Classroom

Applied in educational settings, the Critical Response Process emphasizes practical learning and the opportunity for students to take the lead in the cultivation of their own work. With its structured approach to group critique, it provides a methodology for a central aspect of the teaching process in the creative arts. As Cynthia J. Williams, professor of dance at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, has noted in her article for *Journal of Dance Education*[1], "Even though many good texts on the art of dance composition are available, there are few texts on the topic of one of the most central activities of the dance composition classroom:

1. Williams, Cynthia: "Beyond Criticism: Lerman's 'Critical Response Process' in the Dance Composition Classroom." *Journal of Dance Education*. Volume 2, Number 3, 2002.

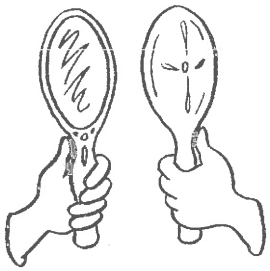
the giving and receiving of feedback." The point can probably be applied equally to other art forms. Williams describes how the Critical Response Process has enabled her to reverse the hierarchical model of teacher as sole authority, thus affording students more opportunities to learn from one another by exposing their own questions and struggles, and limiting "the nonproductive behaviors of defensiveness." It also allows both student and teacher to clarify their artistic perspectives. While training students to articulate vision and intention, it enables the instructor to differentiate her aesthetic values from those of the student.

In the hands of a skilled instructor the neutral questions of step three can offer a path for directive learning. In her article, Cynthia Williams discusses how she has often taken a step three question and assigned the student the task of finding multiple solutions to it, which are then shown at the next class gathering. She notes a difference in assignments generated by the Process as opposed to those merely suggested by the instructor, inherent in the "students' willingness to consider trying multiple solutions not because they were 'told' to, but because they were excited by the possibilities and saw the connections between their own intentions and the processes suggested."

Peer-to-Peer Coaching

Another variation harnesses some of the spirit and practicality of Critical Response toward a form of mutual coaching. This approach focuses on interpretation, technique and performance quality, rather than on the creative aspect of artistry. Originally developed to give students in large dance classes a chance for individualized attention, it evolved as a way of refining performance of dance repertory. This variation is easily transferred to other practices such as public speaking, character interpretation for actors, and instrumental performance:

1. Present work: With a plan to work on a short segment of particular material, participating artists pair into



A crucial role for everyone

I first encountered the mutual coaching variation on Critical Response several years ago when I attended a technique class Liz Lerman taught to senior adults. Since then I have had the opportunity to use this process in classes and in rehearsals with the young people in our Teen Exchange program. I find it incredibly effective in engaging quiet students. Everyone is involved and everyone has a crucial role. When the teens know their peers are watching them, it steps up their performance, with a healthy air of competition. The dialogue turns any icy edge of competition into encouragement. Teens cheer for their partners: "C'mon Emily! You're gonna get that turn." When the teens give feedback to their friends about the tough parts of the phrase (often the same parts they struggle with) they are on their feet and are demonstrating with a clarity that improves both peoples' dancing: it actually reduces the number of times we need to repeat and clean a phrase for performance.

—Elizabeth Johnson
Liz Lerman Dance Exchange

teams. One performs the material, while the other watches.

2. Responder comments: The watching partner offers a few comments in the form of Critical Response step one statements of meaning, citing aspects of the performance that worked well or were effective.
3. Performer states area of focus: The performing partner now cites an aspect of his performance about which he invites feedback. This is parallel to a step two question, so a dancer might say: "I'm working on my transitions," a speaker: "I want to vary my intonation without sounding whiney," or a pianist: "I want the right hand to play lyrically while I keep the left hand percussive." The performer then repeats the passage.
4. Responder responds: The partner attends to the repeat and responds to the performer's named area of focus, making the equivalent of a step two response.
5. Responder offers additional focus area: Then, combining the functions of steps three and four, the viewing partner also names another area for the performer to work on, "Think about keeping your movement more fluid across the shoulders;" "Try varying the loudness and softness of your speaking as well as the pitch;" "See what results you get if you use the pedal a little more sparingly."
6. Repeat and switch: After a final performance of the material, partners switch roles and repeat the process.

When used regularly, this strategy for mutual coaching affords students a chance to be the object of undivided focus while challenging them to assess their own abilities and set their own benchmarks. It can also counteract some of the passivity and self-absorption that certain conventions of artistic training may instill, where students are sometimes conditioned to wait for the teacher or leader to be the taskmaster. In situations like community-based performance projects that engage people with varied backgrounds and skill levels, this approach enables all participants to expand their range by interacting with colleagues who have different strengths and perspectives.

COLLABORATIONS

Multiple Artist Sessions

Artists work together all the time. Sometimes roles are clearly delineated (a composer and lyricist team); sometimes partnerships are highly fluid with two or more partners playing similar roles in relation to the outcome (multiple dancer/choreographers creating an ensemble together); and at times multiple artists can contribute to an effort with one person clearly defined as the leader (a director with an ensemble of actors). The Critical Response Process is flexible in accommodating these different configurations, but because roles and dynamics vary inside artistic relationships, these multi-artist sessions may call for minor adjustments and raise a few issues of which facilitators and organizers should be aware.

It is helpful to consider whether the feedback is being equally shared among the artists, or if the collaborators have distinct roles that may make particular responses more pertinent to a specific artist. This information about roles should be clearly conveyed to the responders, for instance: "As director of this scene, Jane was the primary interpreter, but since the actors are with us, they may jump in to respond at points in the Process." If it is agreed in advance, ensemble members even may switch between artist and responder roles in the course of the Process; in a case like this, the lead artist should be forewarned that information may emerge that hasn't yet come forth in the rehearsal process.

Artists sharing responsibility without a rigid delineation of roles (like the dancer/choreographers mentioned above) may want to consult with each other before the session about the kinds of questions they wish to pose in step three. Often such

ARTISTS WORK TOGETHER ALL THE TIME.

sessions involve moments of quiet consultation during the Process as well as moments when one artist refers a question or comment to the other.

In Critical Response sessions that address the work of collaborators with clearly delineated roles (like the composer/lyricist team) artists should make it clear to responders what their particular roles were. For some kinds of work it may be useful to segment the response. If artists agree ahead of time that the approach would be useful, facilitators in step one can solicit statements of meaning first about one artist's contribution, and then about another's, before assessing the impact of the work as a whole.

Adaptations for Collaborative Process

Contemporary performing ensembles, be they dancers, musicians, actors or slam poets, often develop work through such collaborative processes as generative exercises, structured improvisation, or free-form jamming. In such collaborations, the principles of Critical Response can help to prod the process and harvest material of performance quality.

Key practices from the Critical Response Process—stating the meaningful, phrasing neutral questions, and signaling opinions before stating them—can be applied on their own, without the formal four step sequence, to help advance the hundreds of conversations that take place in artistic collaborations. More structured adaptations can also be applied: everyone might take on an assignment to do some kind of artistic research on a theme, then gather to show what they have developed. After a round of showings, step one-style statements of meaning can be the first step to help to bring forth some agreement about what is useful. Step three-style neutral questions can then be used to prompt the next round of exploration. Or a lead artist can use steps one and two to engage the collaborating ensemble in a conversation that can clarify the juicy content worth advancing (see "Collaborative dialogue," page 48).

Internalizing the process

Sometimes I can use the Critical Response Process backwards. I am in a conversation, and I hear something about my work that I could perceive as negative. No permission asked, just opinion stated. In that moment, I have some choices, including to feel bad, angry, or vengeful, or just to sulk. But lately I have used the moment to ask myself "what if this person had asked me a neutral question in order to get me thinking about the problem they are perceiving? What would that neutral question have been?" Then I go about answering the criticism as though I had heard the neutral question. Usually I learn a lot this way.
—Liz Lerman

Project Debriefs

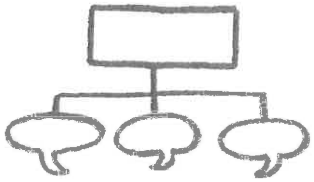
A group has collaborated to create an artwork, or to bring a performance or other event to fruition, and some form of self-assessment is clearly in order for the group. Elements of the Critical Response Process can be helpful here, though the usual structure can be problematic; some of the momentum and "dialogue energy" of Critical Response arises from the clear delineation of roles; when the roles break down because everyone can be considered both artist and responder, the Process can become murky. The following variation addresses this dilemma, adapting some of the principles of Critical Response to the task of group debrief and allowing for some planning of future actions.

One person is designated as facilitator to lead the process. It is also useful to have a recorder.

1. State the significant: The facilitator opens the floor inviting participants to offer statements of meaning. This can be done using the usual language for starting a Critical Response session, or it can be more particular: "What was a highlight for you? What was a particular moment of insight or learning? What moment was especially challenging?" People can respond moving in order around the circle, or speak as the spirit moves them.

Co-equal performance reviews

Members of Alternate ROOTS (Regional Organization of Theaters South) had been using the Critical Response Process for a couple of years when we decided to re-structure the staff, moving from a traditional hierarchy (executive director, with supervised staff) to a team of three co-equal directors (development, program and operations). With an excellent counselor and the help of our executive committee, we worked through the new staff structure and most of its implications. But one of the sticking points was annual performance reviews: who would do them, now that we no longer had a "superior" staff member? Finally, we realized the answer was right under our noses—we would use the Critical Response Process on ourselves! It worked great. We asked rigorous questions of our own work, and of each other. We also created a process for on-going feedback during our weekly staff meetings: state what we had accomplished in the previous week, what we planned to accomplish in the coming week, and what we needed help with. Because we had a note-taker, and because we said out loud what our goals were for each week and month, there was a high degree of accountability. We were able to question another person's follow-up in a non-threatening manner; as a result, goals were sometimes re-prioritized. We were also forced to have more realistic expectations for ourselves and for others, which made us a more effective staff in general.



—Kathie de Nobriga, Lisa Grady-Willis and Greg Carraway
former staff of Alternate ROOTS

2. Collect questions: Now the facilitator distributes note cards or self-adhesive notes and asks participants to think about the questions they have as they look back on the experience. Each person writes down one or two questions, one to a note card. While these questions may not need to be strictly neutral, they should be open-ended queries that imply action or responsibility that the group can assume. (So rather than "Why doesn't the University administration recognize our program and allocate us more money so we can do a better job?" a more apt phrasing might be "What can we do to advocate for more resources from the administration?") Participants take turns stating their questions, handing them to the facilitator who places them on a board or sheet of chart paper.
3. Organize questions: Now the facilitator, and/or one or two others assigned to the job, takes a few minutes to organize the questions into three or four larger categories. For instance, in viewing the questions, this organizer might sort questions into groups focused on artistic quality, partnerships, marketing activities, and followup.
4. Breakout: The person organizing the questions presents the categories to the group for its assent. If no reorganization is suggested, the group then breaks into subgroups for a discussion of each of the question categories. Each group should have its own facilitator and recorder. The breakouts are charged with reporting back to the larger group with findings, reflections, suggestions, and recommended action items. Each group goes to its own area and takes a designated amount of time (30 to 40 minutes is normal) for their discussion.
5. Regroup: Each subgroup takes a few minutes to report on the outcome of their discussion. If future action is recommended, the group should then apply whatever process it uses for decision-making (voting, consensus) and put plans in place for next steps.

CONCLU

The point when an artist is ready for feedback is as important as any event in the development of a work of art. For the artist, the moment of presenting work-in-progress for response is both one of distinct accomplishment, as hours or months of preparation culminate in a showing and an exchange, and of deep vulnerability, as everything the artist has invested comes under scrutiny. The rigor that applies throughout the artistic process should apply at this juncture: Whether we are printmaking or playwrighting, choreographing a solo or performing a sonata, late-night jamming or poetry slamming, we naturally expect standards for technique in artistic training, protocols for artistic processes and rehearsal, and rules of behavior for audience and artist in the settings where the art is presented. Likewise we should expect that a particular structure, sequence and code of conduct should apply in the crucial moment when an artist says "I am ready for you to experience what I have been making, and it matters to me what you think about it."

The Critical Response Process was designed with this crucial moment in mind. Whether we call upon the Process on short notice or plan it as a structured event weeks in advance, once it is under way we are in essence saying: Art matters, and this artist is worthy of our focus. We enter into consideration of this work with respect for its maker, a sense of curiosity, and a willingness to question both the work and our own responses to it. We are willing, for a little while, to suspend other considerations (our own artistic ambitions, our opinions about issues beyond the scope of the work at hand, even our own preferences for human interaction) in the interest of offering a response that can help to advance the artist's work.

Perhaps one of the core functions of art is to help us live with all the contradictions that life presents. True to its genesis in the realm of art, the Critical Response Process is rich with contradiction. Its basic tenets can fit on a single sheet of paper, but a full exploration of all its possible nuances, adaptations, and vari-

Remember: Nothing is too small to notice. When defensiveness starts, learning stops. Turn discomfort into inquiry.

SION

by John Borstel

ations in human encounter might fill a phone book. Adherence to its protocols for facilitation, sequence, neutral questions and permissioned opinions reliably produce a satisfying outcome for artist and responders, but varying and adapting the Process can lead to remarkable discoveries. Facilitator, artist, and responders can all enter into their roles with very little experience of the Process, and trusting in the steps and some very basic principles, derive a satisfying outcome. Yet with sustained experience and a willingness to reflect on the Process, everyone who participates can derive even greater rewards as mastery of its subtleties grows. You can feel reasonably confident in any role in the Process without much practice, but the more you use it the more you will discover.

I would urge anyone who wants to deepen their grasp of the Process to practice Critical Response in this spirit of paradox. If you are just learning the Process, remember you must crawl before you walk. But also remember that you'll never know if you will sink or swim until you dive into the deep end of the pool. Believe whatever you believe about art as fiercely as you can: that it matters deeply to society, that it is vital to sustaining a community, that it makes life worth living. But also realize that the process of critiquing art (any process of critiquing art) is very rarely a life-or-death situation.

This leads to my parting advice for people embarking on Critical Response. Jump in and do the Process. If you are in a situation where you think it would be useful, start using it. Grab any opportunity to assume the role of artist, facilitator, or responder (even if your ultimate goal is to be a good facilitator, for instance, what you learn in the artist's seat will be invaluable). Remember that, whichever of the three roles you play, you will have to hold several thoughts in your head at once. Don't be afraid of making mistakes, and especially, don't be afraid of exposing your own doubt or confusion, since the conversation that ensues invariably will lead to useful insight.

Those of us who've had a chance to learn the Critical Response Process directly from Liz Lerman have had the benefit of her remarkable insight into art and human nature. From all the coaching and reflection she has offered, I can think of no better final words for this primer than three simple but profound ideas that she often states and constantly puts into action. Remember: Nothing is too small to notice. When defensiveness starts, learning stops. Turn discomfort into inquiry.

John Borstel

SAMPLE DIALO

The following fictitious dialogues demonstrate the kinds of conversations that occur when the guidelines of the Critical Response Process are observed. The annotation in the margins notes the dynamic of the dialogue and indicates the facilitator's perceptions and choices in directing the Process.

SAMPLE DIALOGUE 1: Getting to the Heart of the Artist's Question

Scenario: The Artist, a playwright, has presented a scene representing a father confronting an alcoholic teenage son. We have arrived at step two in the Process, and the artist is posing her first question.

Artist starts with a concise question, phrased neutrally and intended to elicit an open-ended response.

Artist: How familiar or unfamiliar did the story seem?

Responder 1: I could relate to it out of my own experience since something like this happened in my family; the attitudes of the father character seemed very real to me.

Responder 2: It's not like anything I've experienced, since it's about alcoholism and I really don't have any first-hand experience of that.

Responses continue in a similar vein.

Facilitator perceives a generalized quality to the response and a lack of "spark" in the artist's reaction. Facilitator intervenes.

Facilitator: Is this helpful?

Artist: Well, it's interesting to hear.

Facilitator notes equivocal tone in artist's answer. He probes.

Facilitator: Is it getting at the issue you are trying to pursue in your question?

Artist: Not really.

Facilitator begins to coach the artist to form a more specific question. He starts by asking about the artist's opening query.

Facilitator: Maybe it would help to make the question more specific. Can you state why the categories of "familiar or unfamiliar" are important to you?

Artist exposes the issue underlying her question, supplying additional information for responders as she does so.

Artist: Well, I'm aware that the topic—alcoholism, teen alcoholism specifically—is one that gets touched on sometimes in the mass media, so I guess my hope is that this scene might convey something that an audience hasn't seen before on TV or in the movies.

Facilitator: Okay, do you think you could phrase a question that gets at that?

Artist: Let's see... Compared to other treatments you may have seen of teen alcoholism, did this scene seem like a fresh take on the topic?

Facilitator continues coaching.

Facilitator: Good... and maybe you can add something more specific to that so you get more than "yes" or "no."

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Artist: Okay... So if your answer is yes, what in particular seemed fresh, and if it's no where did it seem familiar?

Facilitator: Great, so now put that all together now into one question.

Artist: Okay... [takes deep breath] Compared to other treatments of teen alcoholism you may have seen, did this scene offer you a fresh take, or did it seem overly familiar? And tell where or what seemed particularly fresh or too familiar.

Facilitator: Great. Do you think that gets at your concern?

Facilitator confirms that rephrased question is on target for the artist's needs.

Artist: Yes.

Facilitator: Is everyone clear on the question?

Responders nod, signaling assent.

Facilitator: Does anyone have a response?

Responder one: Yes, it seemed fresh to me, and it goes back to what I mentioned before, the character of the father; it seems like you've conveyed his struggle in a compassionate and complex way. It's clear that while he's taking responsibility, he's not positioned as the perpetrator of the son's alcoholism. And you haven't portrayed him as simply the victim of it either.

Responder comments are now more specific and focus more on the content of the work under discussion.

Responder two: Well now that I understand what you're getting at, I'd actually say yes, it does seem familiar, at least in terms of the emotions: guilt, anger, reproaches, outbursts. That and the business about discovering the hidden liquor bottles; it does seem typical of how we tend to think about this problem. But there were other details—the story about the camping trip, the way the father talks about his divorced wife in that jokey way—those things made it seem to go to a deeper level than something on TV.

Now that she has heard the artist's more specific question, this responder offers a response that contrasts with her earlier one. She also offers an opinion that could be construed as a negative one, but does so in direct response to the question.

Facilitator: (to artist) Is this helpful?

Facilitator asks artist if new phrasing is eliciting a helpful response.

Artist: Definitely!

SAMPLE DIALOGUE 2: Refining the Neutral Question / Presenting the Opinion

Scenario: The director of a performing arts presenting organization (assuming the position of the Artist in this response session) is presenting plans for the next season's programming to an advisory board consisting of community members and local artists. We are at step three, when responders are asked to pose neutral questions.

Responder starts with a question expressing a strong opinion.

Responder: Yes, I have a question. Why isn't your programming offering more opportunities for emerging artists?

Artist reacts.

Artist: (stiffens) Well, I...

Facilitator begins coaching responder to move toward a neutral question...

Facilitator: Excuse me, I'm going to intervene here. Responder, I'm going to ask you to find a neutral question through which you can address the issue you have in mind.

...facilitator explains...

Responder: That wasn't neutral?

Facilitator: No, because operating in that question you have an assumption and an opinion about what the programming should be doing.

...responder attempts a neutral rephrasing...

Responder: Oh. Okay. Let's see... How have you considered opportunities for emerging artists when planning your season?

...facilitator continues to coach the responder's phrasing, suggesting a more general query...

Facilitator: You're moving in the right direction, but I think your opinion is still evident in that question. I'd suggest you try a somewhat broader question, then maybe we can follow up.

...responder arrives at a neutral question.

Responder: Hmm. (Pause) What is your curatorial vision for programming and how is that reflected in the plans for the coming season?

Artist responds.

Artist: I can talk about that. The mission of Western University Arts Center is first to serve the University community, and secondarily the city as its largest performing arts complex. As such, it's our mission to balance attractions that have broad appeal with the dominant demographics, and to program in three areas we've identified as supportive of the University's charter: Multi-cultural programming, classics, and innovation. You'll note that each of those categories will be offered as its own series, and we also have the dance, music, and family series that cut across those three categories. Our decisions are also influenced by our primary venue, which is a 1,800 seat auditorium: we have to consider the appropriateness of attractions to a venue of that size as well as our ability to sell that many tickets. Finally, while we are independent of the university's departments of theater, music, and dance, we attempt to complement the programs that each of those presents in the recital hall and black box venues at their end of the campus.

Responder: That's informative, thanks. Can I try a more specific question now, and I'll try to make it neutral?

Responder, having learned some background from the general query...

Facilitator: Go ahead.

Responder: What role do you envision for emerging artists in your programming?

... now poses a more specific question.

Artist: I think I'd be happy to answer that question, but can I ask for a clarification?

Artist and responder clarify terms.

Facilitator: Sure.

Artist: Can you tell me what you mean when you say "emerging?"

Responder: I guess there are lots of ways to define that, but I'm specifically thinking of young classical musicians playing solo and chamber repertoire.

Artist: Okay that's helpful. Thinking about classical artists, except for major-name soloists, it is very difficult to fill the house, and chamber music is a particularly hard-sell in an 1800 seat theater. There is a small but loyal audience here, and I think they're being well served by the music department's season in the recital hall, which at 300 seats is really a more appropriate venue.

Artist answers the more specific question that the responder has posed.

Responder: Yes. Okay, thanks.

Dialogue continues with other responders. After the facilitator introduces step four, the same responder re-enters the conversation.

Responder is ready to offer an opinion about the topic she has put forward in step three, but begins to reveal some of her opinion in her opining request.

Responder: Okay, so I have an opinion about what we were discussing, the lack of opportunities for emerging artists, would you like to hear it?

Artist reveals some resistance.

Artist: Well, alright...

Facilitator intervenes.

Facilitator: Just a moment... Responder, I think you've started to express your opinion even in the request.

continued on next page

SAMPLE DIALOGUE 2, continued

Responder acknowledges, rephrases.

Responder: Oh, right. Let me try again. I have an opinion about the role of emerging artists in your programming, would you like to hear it?

Artist assents.

Artist: Certainly.

Responder voices opinion, referencing information that the artist shared in step three.

Responder: I understand about the limitations of the theater and I agree that it's not good for chamber music. But the problem is that the Department of Music is presenting only graduate students and faculty, with the occasional guest artist. So there's a category of artist who never appears here, and no opportunities for local artists who don't have the University affiliation. I also wonder about whether the young artists could actually play a role in helping to build a bigger audience for chamber music, which might actually expand opportunities for both the artists and the Arts Center.

Artist: Can I respond to that briefly?

Facilitator: Yes.

Artist responds (this is allowable in step four, but not required).

Artist: You've expressed your concerns really clearly, and its definitely an issue I've heard from others. If there's an answer, it probably will lie in the Center's cooperative relationship with the University and some options we've started to examine for shared programming that would give us more access to the other venues on campus. I can't guarantee you that the situation will change over night, but we are beginning to look at it. And I'd love to hear your ideas for how young artists could help to build the audience, so maybe we can talk later.

Responder: That would be great.

SAMPLE DIALOGUE 3: The Informed Opinion

Scenario: A choreographer is showing a work-in-progress. The cast of eight dancers is outfitted in costumes of an identical shade of emerald green. The responder finds the color garish and distracting. In step three she poses a neutral question. (This dialogue posits three different responses from the artist, each with a different outcome on the part of the responder.)

Question

Responder: What's the significance of the color green to your concept?

Response 1

Artist: Well the piece was inspired by the process of photosynthesis, so green seemed like the natural choice. I don't think the concept is quite right yet, and I'm talking to the designer about painting and dyeing the costumes to get more of a range of shades, because I'm not really happy with this one unvaried shade.

Responder understands that the issue that her opinion would address is already on the mind of the artist, so she does not need to put forward her opinion.

Response 2

Artist: Green? Oh, because of the costumes? Actually I probably should have said that these aren't the costumes I have in mind; I just wanted a straightforward look for this showing, so I borrowed the costumes from a woodland piece we do as part of our in-schools program.

Responder discovers that her opinion is irrelevant to the artist's plan, so she does not need to put forward her opinion.

Response 3

Artist: Well the piece is pretty abstract, and I wanted the dancers to have a unified look. Green actually isn't a color you see used for costumes very much… there's even an old tradition that it's bad luck to wear green on stage… so I thought it would make a bold statement.

Artist's response suggests to responder that her opinion might be useful to the artist. In step four she does so.

Dialogue advances into step four, where the same responder re-enters the conversation.

Responder: I have an opinion about your use of green, would you like to hear it?

Artist: Yes.

Responder: I appreciate what you're saying about wanting to have a unified look and make a bold statement. But I experienced this shade of green as a little overpowering, and actually distracting from the movement. Green has strong connotations on stage—you know, Robin Hood, Peter Pan—so unless you really want to bring those connotations into the mind of the audience, you might want to consider another way to achieve the unity and boldness you want.

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The Critical Response Process has evolved over the course of innumerable encounters during hundreds of workshops and Critical Response sessions. We learn something new about the Process at practically every encounter, and many of those insights have been incorporated into this book. While those who have furthered the understanding and practice of Critical Response are too numerous to name, we want to thank all the institutions that have sponsored the advancement of the Process by hosting workshops, and each person who has offered an insight or taken a risk in the context of a session.

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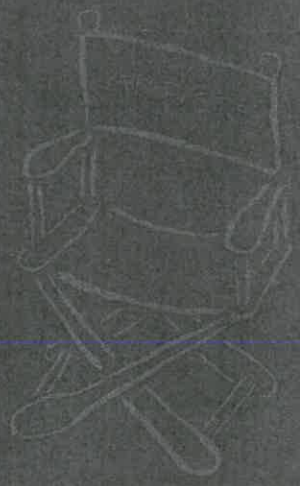

LIZ LERMAN, co-author and originator of the Critical Response Process, is a performer, writer, educator, choreographer and Founding Artistic Director of Liz Lerman Dance Exchange, based in Takoma Park, Maryland, near Washington, DC. Her innovative work has been seen throughout the United States and abroad. Recognized in 2002 with a MacArthur "Genius Grant" award, she has also received an American Choreographer Award, the American Jewish Congress "Golda" award, the first annual Pola Nirenska Award, the D.C. Mayor's Art Award and Washingtonian Magazine's Washingtonian of the Year. Ms. Lerman's work has been commissioned by Lincoln Center, American Dance Festival, Dancing in the Streets, BalletMet, and The Kennedy Center. From 1994 through 1996, Ms. Lerman directed and collaborated with The Music Hall in creating The Shipyard Project in Portsmouth, NH. She conceived and directed the *Hallelujah* project, a national initiative in which the Dance Exchange created a series of celebratory dances through collaborations in 15 communities from Maine to California between 1999 and 2002. Ms. Lerman is a frequent keynote speaker and panelist for arts, community, religious, and educational organizations both nationally and internationally, and has consulted with such diverse organizations as Synagogue 2000, Harvard University's Saguaro Seminar, and the Juilliard School of Music. She is the author of *Teaching Dance to Senior Adults*, published in 1983. She is married to storyteller Jon Spelman; they are parents of Anna Clare, born in May 1988.

JOHN BORSTEL, co-author and illustrator, is Humanities Director for Liz Lerman Dance Exchange, a position he assumed in 2000 after seven years as the company's Director of Development. Working closely with Liz Lerman, he has conducted training in the Critical Response Process during the Dance Exchange's summer institute series and for organizations including the Association for Fundraising Professionals, New York Theatre Workshop, Washington's Arena Stage, Philadelphia's Asian Arts Initiative, and Seattle's Cornish College. Before joining the Dance Exchange, he worked as a puppet-maker and a graphic designer and developed educational materials for Central City Opera in Colorado and Pennsylvania Opera Theater. As a visual artist, John's work in collage and photography has been commissioned, exhibited, and published. He graduated from Georgetown University where he majored in English.

JULIAN B. KABENGE, designer, is award-winning Principal and Creative Director of Kabenge Design, a graphic design and communications firm that specializes in creative problem solving. Julian received her BA in Graphic Design from Marymount University and has designed annual reports, brochures, exhibits, corporate identity packages and other collateral materials for a variety of organizations. Her firm's client roster includes: The Nature Conservancy, AARP, the University of the District of Columbia, the American Marketing Association–DC Chapter and Liz Lerman Dance Exchange, among others. Samples of her firm's work can be found at www.KabengeDesign.com. Julian is also a professional dancer, singer and instrumentalist and has performed East African dance and drama at the Kennedy Center, the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts and the Bluebird Blues Festival, to name a few.

Liz Lerman's

CRITICAL RESPONSE PROCESS

A method for getting useful feedback on anything you make, from dance to dessert

Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process is a multi-step, group system for giving and receiving useful feedback on creative processes and artistic works-in-progress. Originated in the early 1990's by choreographer and MacArthur "Genius Grant" Fellow Liz Lerman, the Process has been widely embraced by artists, educators, and administrators. It has been applied in such diverse contexts as choreography classes, post-performance discussions, actor/playwright collaborations, curatorial decision-making, and university level curriculum assessment. In addition to reflecting on the work at hand, the Critical Response Process affords artists a voice and a degree of control within the critique of their work while promoting dialogue with audiences, fellow artists, students, mentors, and other colleagues.

This book, *Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process,* offers a detailed introduction to the Process, beginning with its three roles and four core steps. With particular emphasis on the role of the facilitator, this illustrated publication offers guidance on how artists and participants can get the most out of the Process and the opportunities it offers to ask questions, give answers, and voice opinions. A final chapter discusses adaptations and variations. Charts and annotated sample dialogues demonstrate the inner workings of the Process.

> In supporting the creation of new work, we have found Liz's Lerman's Critical Response Process to be the best tool we've ever encountered in assisting individual artists at the most vulnerable stages of creation. The Process empowers artists and invests responders with real responsibility as audience members.
> *—James C. Nicola, Artistic Director*
> *New York Theatre Workshop*
> *New York, New York*

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