choreographers, invite them to the classroom (or make the classroom the studio) and have them share their work and their ideas and insights about their work? Choreographer Liz Lerman's "civic dialogues," for instance, in which she engages community members as part of the creative process, may be a way to think about bringing writers closer to performers. In her *Critical Response Process*—subtitled "A Method for Getting Useful Feedback on Anything You Make, from Dance to Dessert" (2003)—Lerman employs a four-step system that involves a series of structured questions posed to both the performer and a respondent; the idea is to help audience members deepen their understanding of the work and help artists push their thinking further. Lerman's interest in writing about her dancing stemmed, in part, from her desire to "give myself a voice" in response to the varied critics writing about her work (1995, 1). More than a "feel-good" exercise for both parties, as Ann Daly has noted, her process, which she developed in 1990, has evolved into "a truly dialogic model characterized by moments of what she [Lerman] calls 'colliding truths'" (2002c, 10).

It's interesting to think about what type of critical exchanges might get ignited if, employing Lerman's model, the critic became the "respondent" in dialogue with the artist. It is true, of course, that artists and critics have different missions and preoccupations, but a closer coming together of the two might break down and demystify a process that too often pits the all-knowing and educated critic against the intuitive, nonthinking dancer/performer.

I realize that I have emphasized what young writer-critics seem *not* to be doing, but I am of course encouraged and delighted when they do begin to break through their own resistances and get underneath the surface of the work, as in one student's critique of Bill T. Jones's *Still Here,* which she refers to as a "brashly bold piece" that "stings the senses and hurls the hearts of its viewers into rapid palpitations of agony and ecstasy." Or another, on Elizabeth Streb's "aerial creatures": "Once airborne, their bodies take the forms of beautiful birds, backs arched, one leg tightly pressed against the other, arms longing to reach the corners of the ceiling and, as their faces stretch to confront the audience's, they happily scream their names."[2] It's these stirrings and glimmers that give me hope—when the writers begin to open their eyes, see with their senses, and behold what is there to be seen.

Extending Critical Voices Between the Lecture Room and the Dance Studio

Ann Nugent

The majority of students come to us at the University of Chichester in the United Kingdom, where I am a dance lecturer, because they want to develop careers as dancers, choreographers, or dance teachers.[3] They are usually attracted by the opportunity to improve their dance technique and/or *to be creative* rather than to align themselves with the more conventional avenues of academia, and for most writing will never be a career contender.[4]

I teach writing courses at M.A. and undergraduate levels and find that students are often uncomfortable about letting their

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visual awareness carry over into writerly incisiveness. They erect a perceptual barrier between studies in the dance studio and the lecture room.[5] They may understand something about the structuring of a dance, and they may be interested in exploring anything that gives them opportunity for "self-expression," but if they have to write about dance critically they fear their inadequacies will be exposed. Among those who feel passionately about the act of dancing, there are mixed feelings about seeing dance and translating what one sees into prose, for it might kill that passion.

Yet all writing relies on the power of an individual mind and the ability to engage with ideas, and writing about dance—even the most academic and objective—needs to be creative, especially where criticism is concerned. We have only to compare responses to a performance to see how differently people see things and make sense of them. The critic has a freedom to engage with concepts and ideas, but it is a freedom that must be related to *what happens* in the dance work. I stress the importance of seeing what happens because so often students respond negatively to what (in their view) has not happened, or what is absent, and in this way they miss the pleasure of discovering the many layers of a dance work. As the seminal writings of Edwin Denby and John Berger remind us, there is always more to see and always more to think about.[6]

During university study, as students perceive how to build up historical, aesthetic, and critical understanding, learning how to look will undoubtedly develop. They will be helped too because they themselves have danced and have an understanding of how it feels (somatic knowledge) and of how watching dance generates kinesthetic awareness in the watcher; this is a point to which I will return.[7]

Doing and seeing are activities using different kinds of energy, and those who want to release their energy in the studio and on the stage often feel crushed—even dulled—by what they think of as the "static" activity needed for seeing, thinking, and writing. Putting the word "static" in quotation marks lends an element of irony to something that requires a lot of activity, in the brain at least. Discovering what a dance means is never easy because there is so much to take into account, but sometimes our bodies know what we have seen before we are able to find ways to express it. Then the challenge is to find the words that properly represent what we think and feel; often the knowledge can be found lurking somewhere in a dancer's "beingness," and physical reenactment of the dance can trigger the desired articulation. The evidence of this becomes obvious when students are seen puzzling over words but can get up and *demonstrate* what they saw and reveal dancerly intelligence in replicating something of the choreography. The task then becomes one of translating different kinds of knowledge and experimenting with mutation between the physical and the literal.

If our students are excited by the activity of dancing, then why not turn this excitement to advantage? What goes on in people's heads when they are dancing, and how is this to be communicated? Can we relate critical studies to experiential dance, to open up other kinds of insight? I invited my students to write about themselves in an account entitled "A Life in the Day of . . . ."[8] Suddenly they found enthusiasm for articulating their hopes and fears, and that was revelatory, for they wrote with an honesty normally hidden from all but their

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most intimate peers—and certainly from their tutors. They felt able to confess such things as "I never feel I am up to the standard of the rest of the group" and "I know I'm not supposed to say it, but I hate ballet." One disclosed what until then had been a closely guarded secret: "My main ambition (one day!) is to tell my story of dance, the battles I've had because of body image and anorexia and the love/hate relationship I have always felt towards the art." The students found fervor in writing about issues that concerned them personally. They threw themselves into inquiries about careers as dancers or teachers, producing investigative articles and profiles for their assignment journals. They wrote news stories, and again it was surprising to discover how preoccupied they are with the problems of eating disorders. They produced features on how to fund a dance company and dispensed advice on how student dancers might get going with careers of their own.[9] They thrived on teamwork and in finding a policy for a publication of their own, which they then designed and wrote articles for and turned into an impressively coherent journal. Every journal was vivid and put together with an avidity proving that the way to avoid relegation to "the dry and dusty" is to make the tasks relevant to students as individuals.

It gave me an idea: Why not take the students out of the lecture theater and into the dance studio as part of Dance Criticism class and work on improvisatory tasks? Improvisation and its processing happen in the moment of delivery, whereas writing is mediated. Laban points out that within all movement, aspects of weight, space, time, and flow are to be found, and the way in which they reveal themselves during improvisation has to do with inner awareness (see Laban 1966). Inner awareness is of course what occupies the critic throughout the watching, processing, and writing about performance. Is there a problem weighted in the brain that the space of writing—given time and flow—can release? Can the flow of a written idea be equated with the flow of improvisation? Kinesthetic awareness is a proven phenomenon, and when we watch dance we both feel and know something in our bodies. Both improvisation and criticism emerge through the meeting point of mind and body, the psychical and the physical soma. In the studio the students stood in a circle and passed an office chair around, improvising wildly as each tried to make the chair's trajectory more imaginative. Then they struggled to try and remember the passage of movement, registering weight and precise volume and angling as they repeated the exercise but this time without the chair. It was serious and challenging work, but they (mostly) loved the freedom of improvising and exhilaration was written across their faces. Back in the lecture room the debate began. The point was to try and establish a relationship between embodied knowledge and how it could be communicated.

It was clear that work in the studio made an impact, and a quick roundup of student response to the improvisation session produced the following observations. It "helped me to really analyze and interpret movement, in a detailed and critical way" (Hannah Gill). "It was the hardest lesson I've done in a long time and brought back feelings I thought I had overcome, but it also made me produce a piece of very honest writing" (Hannah Brown). "I found that it was a fresh way of helping me look at dance in a different light" (unnamed). "It fueled my choreographic bank more than my ability to write about dance" (Brittany

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Duggan). "It made me become more aware of looking at the dancer, and thinking about the dancer as a person not a performer" (Nikki Henderson).

The students were given the option of absenting themselves from the improvisation class because, after all, they had signed up for a Dance Criticism module, and two students later admitted they were embarrassed at having to improvise. They joined in, however, fearing that to stay away would draw attention to their anxieties. Louise Hennessy wrote a little sadly, "I felt exposed in the improvisation and at times a little uncomfortable [and] this, in a way, stunted my learning." But she went on to acknowledge, "[It] was [also] intriguing and gave me new ways to look at dance, and specifically to analyse how dancers use space." Another student did not perceive the purpose of improvising, complaining: "I do not feel this session helped me understand new ways of looking at/writing about dance." However, she went on to realize that some learning had taken place, writing, "I did gain new knowledge that will be of use in a choreographic/movement-based approach to my work" (unnamed).

Turning to a different aspect of improvisation, Rhian Faulkner found that the effect of "metaphors and language ideas and the knowledge of writing style has made me excited about writing about dance," while Lanie Al-Ayoubi could recognize, "I have so many words waiting inside me to describe many works." Despite her doubts, Louise Hennessy found she learned a lot "from analyzing other people's work" and would like her "enjoyment of dance to be communicated to others." Contrary to what Nikki had said, Louise also sensed that "you can be your most honest in your writing and not feel obliged to please people." Another student saw dance criticism could become "a new way of life [bringing] opportunity to educate people on dance as an art form" (unnamed).

In what was to me the most rewarding response of all to the improvisation session, Katrina Walter saw that working in the studio in this way "helped me to understand the link between my body and how I write. It also helped me generate new words from the resonating movements in my body." Discovering this link between an external task and embodied knowledge enabled her to communicate something of the experience and increased her confidence in writing about a performance. By the end of the discussion, this was the consensus view.

Students today, with easy access to different realms of knowledge, need to be helped to take the texture, rhythm, and sound of words into their thinking awareness. They need to see and feel poetry and to use language consciously to interrogate what is going on in their heads. They need to experience color and dynamic in their everyday lives, recognizing that through seeing and communicating, the inner life becomes a life of ideas—bringing with it a flowering of the intellectual, sensual, and emotional. Put simply, I want more of our students to write about dance, to have the confidence to recognize that all understanding comes from personal experience and that a dance begins to mean something only because of the way an individual engages with it.

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