



Practical Resources

Notes on RSVP Cycles for devising and theatre-making

A. Creating movement through task

In pairs make a sequence of movements, using simple instructions and tasks. Add a movement each which moves your partner. Repeat and then add two more and so on. This way you can build a sequence, clarifying, rehearsing and add to it as you go. The aim should be to not 'dance' it but to be practical and smooth over the transitions between each move and each of you leading and following. Some starting points you might try include:

- Look / Shift / Cover
- Wrap / Through / Around
- Leave / Retrieve
- Wash / Gather / Travel

This should create a sequence of natural and unexpected moves whilst the performer avoids any thought about meaning or context. Once the sequences are practiced and flowing you can *then* apply additional focuses to explore and observe the meaning by adding and changing music, pace, tension, a context, eye contact or focus, a piece of text to precede it, an action that you play; e.g. 'I educate you', 'I repel you', 'I warm you' etc.

B. Applying Text to Movement Material

Sometimes we will add some written material to a piece of movement. The choice of text or movement might be due to a range of factors - a correlative association someone has made through observation, perhaps a specific aim to explore a theme or moment of narrative. In workshop it could simply be enough that both elements share a common link: e.g.. water or drowning.

First read the text together as a group, draw out images and take time to imagine and connect with the feelings, locations, timeframe, images, atmospheres etc that the text conjures ...

Next, with another pair have one group read the text the other whilst they run their movement material alongside it.

- look for 'happy accidents', moments that offer interesting meaning and then tighten / justify / adjust them accordingly - finding a way to draw the two performance languages together to create a piece that reads as we want it to. This approach offers lines of flight, and heightens the importance of the physical narrative (how one might read dance).
- How does the choreography restrict you and what does it offer up to inform how you serve the text?
- Go back to the text and interrogate what moments / intentions / subtext needs to be championed and honoured.

C. Scores

Another process we use in rehearsal for both devising visual / movement material or even rehearsing a more text-based scene is creating 'scores' for performance.

Try a warm up / movement score:

A group of 5-20 people start by walking in the space, balancing themselves across the room. Then with a piece of music playing each person can do any of the following at anytime from the following 'score' or list of guidelines:

People in the group can at any point: Walk, Run, Sit, Stand, Follow

It is interesting to note this is a reasonably 'closed' score as your actions are limited to five instructions but it can non-the-less create an huge variety of patterns. To make the score even more 'closed' one might say the whole group have to all do the same action at the same time. and the score might change to:

As a group you can: Walk | Run | Sit | Stand |

Notes and pointers:

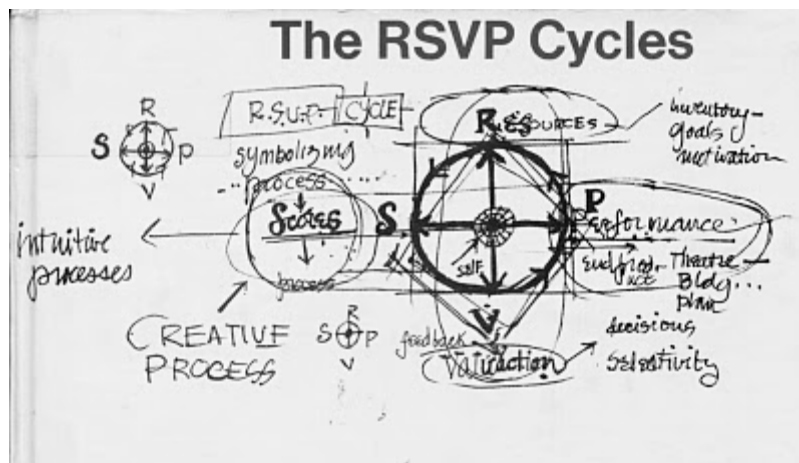
- Focus on listening and responding to *everyone* working in the score.
- Rather than lead, respond boldly to impulses of observations
- look for patterns that emerge as a group
- Say yes to offer by either working with or against the offer (building upon what is offered)
- let events that happen follow their course and then look to respond to the next trigger or moment.

D. Using RSVP Cycles

This is a mode of working we use for process was inspired by Anna Halprin's practice in creating dance pieces and community events. Why not look her up on the internet to learn more?

Combining it all using RSVP:

Next try creating a score for performance that might include a wider range of resources of be more specific to an area of investigation. For example you can include movement material you created previously. We often refer to the material we have already made as a 'movement bank' that can be drawn upon at anytime in more 'open' or improvised scores. We also run performance scores with people reading in text from outside that the performers respond to (avoiding literal illustration or mime). If memorised by performers the text can be included by performers in the performance. Eg. an instruction within the score might be "Tessa and Will will include their text at any point and speak it to any target" (See notes below on this).



Here's an explanation of RSVP Cycles and an example of how you might try using them in your process:

R - RESOURCES: What we have available to us E.g.: we have this room, these objects, three chairs, the text, this piece of music, 7 people.

S - SCORE: A set of guideline or instructions the group follow (can be very open to very closed) Our score was: There is a beginning and an end | A couple run their movement sequence and interact with someone reading the text | 4 people up-stage can walk in straight lines across space, pause and face the back, look over their shoulder towards the couple | Everyone should act in response to the text | The walkers should listen respond also to each other | everything else is up for grabs so listen, respond and make good offers.

V - VALUE-ACTION: Feeding back and developing the piece: At any point in process, usually after a performance stage, we can stop and take value - specifically what worked? What should we keep? - and then action accordingly (changing the score, opening or closing it down, and perhaps removing or adding resources each time.

P - PERFORMANCE: Using the Score and Resources we perform (either in rehearsals or as a performance to an audience) and no one interrupts our commitment to this act.

When using the RSVP cycle in rehearsal a group may decide to perform several times in a row before value-action depending on what is useful. Each time, depending on the results of the value-action stage the group may choose to open or close the score, or edit the resources.

Ultimately we think of this process as a spiral. It spirals up to a tightened and rehearsed version for a production - ideally closed enough that we feel safe, but still open enough that the performers still have freedom and the space to play and respond in the moment keeping the work fresh and exciting.

E. An extract from an interview with Simon and Phil about rehearsal processes

An open and collaborative approach to creating work: “we utilise a methodology based on upward spirals of work creation that grounds resources, analyses performance through value-action, tightens scores and re-performs”. This working practice is essential to the formulation of the company’s work that seeks to analytically and creatively explore potential within the pieces. The methodology has close links to Anna Halprin’s RSVP cycles and indeed Robert Lapage’s and Jacques Lessard’s appropriated process of Repère Cycles. Repère means a point of reference or starting point. The letters in Lessard’s version stand for REsource, Partition (score), Evaluation and REpresentation. “We have discovered it is very important to keep these kinds of ‘rules’ very flexible. Many people follow a similar structure when they rehearse. We have simply allowed it to be more embodied and out-in-the-open where appropriate. Working in this way also allows us to tighten and structure things as we go, whilst leaving room to truly play and explore. Things are up for grabs. Alongside this we try to develop an independent visual and physical vocabulary in separate sessions. We might explore a specific relationship physically and collect a bank of interesting ideas to return to later when they are useful”. Much of the work above is about play and responding to intuition. “I’m interested in getting actors working together and taking ego out of the equation. Play allows us to remove these barriers”. David Glass talks about the same thing when he says “*Play is a necessary process that humans go through in order to be able to deal with an incomprehensible and contradictory world. Play is risk and pain. At the same time play is pleasurable, it is fun, [for a child] it enables socialisation and a move into adulthood. In the body of the child joy and pain are intertwined, and it is this state that the actor has to be able to reach*”.

(Noises Off Magazine, NSDF 2006)