We trained with Jeff Wirth (Artistic Director of Interactive PlayLab) to develop a technique for dance performance in which an audience member becomes the protagonist of the dance. This is a brand new kind of work drawing from a number of different sources. Therefore, we have compiled a glossary of terms and techniques related to interactive dance, as well as a video of the ideas in action.

-Live Action Set

Introduction to Interactive Dance Techniques

BASIC VOCABULARY:

*Interactive Performance:* A type of performance in which one or more trained performers invite an unrehearsed audience participant to play, using improvisation techniques to make that participant the protagonist and co-creator of the performance.

*Interactive Dance:* Interactive performance in which the majority of the work is done non-verbally and physically; it is often more abstract than interactive theatre.

*Inter-Actor/Inter-Dancer/Inter:* The trained performer who support the audience member.

*Spect-Actor/Spect-Dancer/Spect:* The unrehearsed audience-participant who plays with the inters.

*Portal:* The spect's introduction to the experience; includes standard verbal instructions (e.g. “You will be invited to play. Any impulse you have is correct. You control the experience. You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to do. The piece will begin when X. The piece will end when Y.”); may include an atmospheric entry point into the work.

WAYS OF ENGAGING:

*Collective Warm-Up:* The group of inter-dancers and spect-dancers do a short (3-4 minute) physical warm-up together. After a verbal introduction including instructions (e.g. “This is a warm-up. We’re all going to do it together. This is not a performance.”), the warm up becomes a full-bodied physical exploration. This collective warm-up allows the spect to practice 1) moving in a non-pedestrian way, 2) moving with the group, and 3) become comfortable on the stage. It allows the inters to 1) begin to understand the spect's unique physical language and 2) begin to build relationship with the spect.
Storytelling Portal: The spect is invited to tell a story from his/her life to an inter who listens and asks questions to deepen the anecdote while the other inters listen. The spect is then told that the inters will use this story as a point of inspiration for the piece. Note: We have found that if the inters abstract the themes and characters revealed in the storytelling, the piece created is strong for both the spect and the audience. If the story’s narrative is held on to too tightly, a spect can feel as if they must perform the story “correctly” and in doing so can lose his/her sense of play and emotional connection to the inters.

Dynamic Start Portal: The spect is placed on stage in a pose (either by the spect himself or by an inter), and is then given the direction that the dance begins when the music begins. Note: We have found that this gets spect “in their bodies” from the beginning, as they start from a “dynamic” (non-pedestrian) position.

Movement Sculpture Portal: The spect is invited to place one or more inter-dancers on stage in poses that relate to each other. Both the inters and the spect are invited to begin moving when the music begins. Note: This can be combined with the storytelling portal. Caution: Be mindful to avoid miming and instead exemplify the emotional essence through abstraction.

Open Choice Portal: The spect is not given any directions outside of the standard. The spect is simply invited to move when he/she feels an impulse to do so. Note: This is great for spect who have a strong/bold sense of play already (which can be determined in the warm-up). For spect who are hesitant, beginning this way can be intimidating.

Thin-Slicing: Silently “reading” the spect on the part of the inters to determine how he/she will likely want to play. To thin-slice, an inter may ask himself: How does the spect naturally move? Does the spect appear strong enough to support the weight of an inter? Does the spect seem hesitant to touch others? Is the spect stiff or is movement fluid? Does the spect appear to subscribe to standard gender roles? Does spect appear to share a culture with most of the inters? Note: A thin-slice is simply a jumping off point on the part of the inters to begin engagement with the spect. The inters will always and constantly be adjusting the way that they play with the spect as with each moment provides new information about and cues from the spect.

WAYS OF PLAYING:

Unison: The dancers all move in unison--either based on what the spect has offered or because the spect has mimicked the inters. Unison is an accessible way for the spect to begin playing, and can make them feel “part of the group.”

Flocking: In which unison is maintained through following the “leader” of the group. An excellent exercise to develop “group mind” in ensemble rehearsals, as well as a technique for playing with the spect.

Echo: In which unison is created through call-and-response. A “leader” proposes a movement, and the ensemble simultaneously repeats it. An excellent exercise to develop “group mind” in ensemble rehearsals, as well as a technique for playing with the spect.

Ripple: In which there is unison of movement, but not of timing. A “leader” proposes a movement, and the ensemble repeats the movement to a beat, but not simultaneously. In a seven-person group, a ripple sequence may look like:

ORIGINAL MOVEMENT
| A | B | C | D | E | F |

or

ORIGINAL MOVEMENT
| A | B&C | D | E&F |

or ORIGINAL MOVEMENT

ORIGINAL MOVEMENT
| A | B&C&D | E&F |

or

any other variant.

Often “echos” will naturally turn to ripples over time. An excellent exercise to develop “group mind” in ensemble rehearsals, as well as a technique for playing with the spect.

TOOLS FOR LEARNING:

PLAYTEST: We can train these principles in a closed rehearsal setting, but the real learning comes when we test them on unrehearsed audience-participants. These participants are told that this is a work-in-progress, and that they are helping us learn.

DECOMPRESSION PERIOD: After the interactive experience, our spect is invited to give their feedback. First: they are invited to simply speak. Next: the inters are invited to ask questions of the spect. Third: the spect is invited to ask questions of the inters. Finally, when the spect leaves, the inters share their own thoughts about what worked, what didn’t work, and what could have been improved upon.

Link to Playtests:
https://vimeo.com/184198754