

The Reception Game

1.

Spend some time in your head thinking about what kind of response you'd most like your artistic practice to generate. What are the responses to your work that you find the most gratifying, the most productive, the most resonant, the most motivating?

Jot down a list of adjectives that you hope might be applied to your work when it meets a public. How would you most like to hear your work described? Trenchant? Poetic? Fiercely intelligent? Provocative? Rigorous? Engaged? Revelatory? Cathartic? Memorable? Relevant? Ambivalent? Disturbing? Critical? Poignant? Intensely personal? Theatrical?

Tuck your list of adjectives into a book and forget about it for a while. Nobody else ever has to see it, unless you choose to share it.

2.

Invite a small or large group of people to respond to your work in a context of your choice. Share your work with them and invite them to share their feedback in the form of a critical conversation that includes yourself and all who are present. When the conversation has run its course, give each individual a piece of paper. Ask each to write down the adjectives that s/he would use to describe your work (challenge each to write down three or more adjectives). Let each person decide whether they wish to respond anonymously to this challenge, or to include their name on the piece of paper. Collect the adjective lists from everybody in the group and take them home. Nobody else ever has to see them, unless you choose to share them.

3.

Retrieve the list of adjectives that you put together before you met the group. Compare your desired adjectives to the adjectives offered by the group.

Is there a significant overlap of your aspirational adjectives with the adjectives that others think are relevant to your practice? If so, does it matter?

Is there a complete disparity between the adjectives you listed and the adjectives that others projected onto your practice? If so, does it matter?

To what extent is your practice shaped by a desire to engage others in a particular way? To what extent does the feedback that your work receives influence your ongoing practice? Is it at all worth thinking about how your practice is received? If so, why? If not, why not?