Liz Lerman and Martha Minow

Turning Controversy into Connection

Edited Transcript from February 21, 2024 Conversation

Next, we have a transcript of the actual conversation that took place orally. It has been lightly edited for coherence and clarification. As a conversation, it had three participants, the two experts and me.

As mentioned in an earlier section of the book, I did not know Liz Lerman's work before Martha Minow suggested her to me as a conversation partner for Minow. When I did explore it, I was truly embarrassed that I had not known of her before because of the breadth and profundity of topics she's engaged, and I was even more embarrassed when two of my closest friends in the dance world immediately responded very enthusiastically to my sharing that Lerman would be speaking in the "Humanities for Humans" series. Once contact was actually made for our preparation discussion, I was struck most by two things: Liz Lerman's affection and respect for Martha Minow, and Liz's simply stated but clearly profound wisdom about human nature. This sense of her wisdom was reinforced when I worked closely with the transcript of the original conversation for the purpose of its publication here.

Here's what Liz Lerman wants to tell us about herself.

From a piece about my days as a go-go dancer in 1974 to an investigation of origins that included putting dancers in the tunnels of the Large Hadron Collider at CERN[1], I have spent the past four decades trying to make my artistic research personal, funny, intellectually vivid, and up to the minute. A key aspect of this work is opening my process to various publics, from shipbuilders to physicists, construction workers to ballerinas, resulting in both research and outcomes that are participatory, relevant, urgent, and usable by others.

Born in Los Angeles and raised in Milwaukee, I attended Bennington College and Brandeis University, received my B.A. in dance from the University of Maryland,

1 Editor's note: CERN is the acronym for Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire [European Council for Nuclear Research], a research center located near Geneva, partly in Switzerland and partly in France.

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and an M.A. in dance from George Washington University. In 1976, I founded Liz Lerman Dance Exchange and cultivated the company's unique multi-generational ensemble into a leading force in contemporary dance until 2011, when I handed artistic leadership of the company over to the next generation of Dance Exchange artists.

New projects and partnerships have since emerged. I have conducted residencies on creative research, the intersection of art and science, narrative in dance performance, and the Critical Response Process, a facilitated method that I developed in 1990 for guiding feedback on creative works in progress. Hosts of me and my projects have included Harvard University, Yale School of Drama, Wesleyan University, Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and the National Theatre Studio among many others.

My performance piece, *Healing Wars*, toured across the United States until 2015, and my most recent piece, *Wicked Bodies*, premiered in April 2022. I have published several books including *Teaching Dance to Senior Adults*, *Hiking the Horizontal, Critical Response Process,* and *Critique is Creative* (the last two titles were co-authored with John Borstel). I have conducted Critical Response Process (CRP) workshops internationally, and 2024 marks the sixth year of the Critical Response Process Certification Program, a 10-month mentoring and peer-to-peer study and practice intensive.

With gratitude, I have been the recipient of several honors, including the 2023 Guggenheim Fellowship, 2002 MacArthur "Genius Grant" Fellowship, 2011 United States Artists Ford Fellowship in Dance, and the 2017 Jacob's Pillow Dance Award. My work has been commissioned by the Harvard Law School, the Lincoln Center, the American Dance Festival, the Kennedy Center, and others. During my senior fellowship with Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, Brett Cook and I showcased a retrospective, *Brett Cook & Liz Lerman: Reflection & Action*, from October 2022 until June 2023.

Current projects include building the *Atlas of Creative Tools,* an online resource, and *Legacy Unboxed*, a series of research performance events called *My Body is a Library*. A new collection of essays will also be published by Wesleyan University Press in 2024. I am an Institute Professor at ASU's Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts and a fellow at the Center for the Study of Race and Democracy. Married to storyteller Jon Spelman, we have a daughter, documentary filmmaker Anna Spelman.

Martha Minow has been a hero of mine since I first read her work in spring of 1995. I remember the circumstances and the article very clearly: I was participating

in an interdisciplinary seminar on "Cultural Memory" at Dartmouth College organized by my colleagues historian Leo Spitzer and Shakespeare scholar Jonathan Crewe, and as a group we read and discussed Minow's 1993 article "Surviving Victim Talk" (UCLA Law Review). I felt like Minow's diagnosis of U.S. America's love affair with victimhood was very accurate then, and alas, it still is today. When I put together the very first proposal for a talk series and when I was given the green light to start organizing it, Martha Minow was in the front of my mind. I was absolutely thrilled when she agreed to speak, and the only challenge for me was figuring out which of the many topics she had thought and written about so trenchantly would be the best for a "Humanities for Humans" conversation. Martha herself immediately suggested Liz Lerman as a profound and brilliant artist, commentator, and interlocutor, and though, as I mentioned above, I was at the time unaware of Liz's prodigious talents, I was quickly convinced that this was the right pair and the right topic. In the long process that organizing such conversations and now this volume inevitably is, Martha was immediately responsive to all my emails – for which I was and remain enormously grateful, since it is not always the case among academics in general and especially not among those who are in high demand as she is. As just one small example, when I asked the group of contributors to this volume to produce a biographical sketch in the first person, Martha sent hers that same day.

And here it is.

I pursued graduate work in education and in law with hopes of participating in civil rights and human rights advocacy in the face of exclusions and injustices in the world. I have had the good fortune to find in the legal academy the ability to reflect on deeper and broader questions underlying problems such as unequal schools, conflicts between ethnic and religious groups, racialized economic and social opportunities. Drawing on history, psychology, philosophy, and empirical research, my own research addresses human rights issues affecting members of racial and religious minorities, children, persons with disabilities, and gender-linked discrimination. With the freedom to "own my own mind," and not be bound to the interests of a particular client, I have been fortunate to pursue questions about the predicates of a constitutional democracy, the risks to public accountability arising when governments rely on private contractors, the scope of acceptable force within military action, and what contributes to and what could mitigate ethnic and religious conflicts. Group-based unfairness and restrictions on individual liberty are notably at risk with the rise of digital communication and the rise of "artificial intelligence," so my recent work has turned to social media regulation and AI governance.

My books include *Saving the News: Why the Constitution Calls for Government Action to Preserve the Freedom of Speech* (2021); *When Should Law Forgive?* (2019); *In Brown's Wake: Legacies of America's Constitutional Landmark* (2010); *Partners, Not Rivals: Privatization and the Public Good* (2002); and *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History After Genocide and Mass Violence* (1998). Recent publications include "The Unraveling: What *Dobbs* May Mean for Contraception, Liberty, and Constitutionalism," in Lee C. Bollinger and Geoffrey Stone, eds., *Roe* v. *Dobbs: The Past, Present, and Future of a Constitutional Right to Abortion* (2024); "Equality, Equity, and Algorithms: Learning from Justice Abella," 73 U. Toronto L.J. 163 (2023); "Distrust of Artificial Intelligence: Sources and Responses from Computer Science and Law," with Cynthia Dwork, *Daedalus* (2022), https://www.amacad.org/sites/default/files/publication/downloads/Daedalus_Sp22_22_Dwork-%26-Minow.pdf, and "Social Media, Distrust, and Regulation," with Newton Minow, Nell Minow, and Mary Minow, in Lee. C. Bolling and Geoffrey R. Stone, eds., *Social Media, Freedom of Speech, and the Future of Our Democracy* (2022).

Litigation, legislation, social programs, and political advocacy efforts have afforded chances to test ideas and learn: about access to justice through service on the Legal Services Corporation (a federally-created nonprofit funding civil legal services centers across the country) and work as co-chair of the Access to Justice project of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; about international human rights, on the Countering Violent Extremism through the Center for Strategic and International Studies Commission, the board of the Iranian Human Rights Documentation Center, and advisor to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees; about disability rights through the Center for Applied Special Technology partnership with the federal Department of Education; with Public Counsel, about seeking judicial remedies for unequal education. I also have learned much from board service in public media (WGBH) and private media (CBS), and in philanthropic support of social change efforts. As a professor of law for more than 40 years, I have also had the opportunity to serve as dean of Harvard Law School and to teach across Harvard University and collaborate with people from other disciplines and with generations of students.

Here's the promised extract from our conversation. I point out that it begins in medias res because the opening of the conversation is already available as part of the De Gruyter blog series. With regard to edits here, I removed some distracting signs of oral delivery like "fillers" and "back-channeling" remarks, as well as a touch of repetition and some restarts. Liz Lerman added to this version more about her eight miracles for Hannukah, as that was a bit too truncated in the original oral

conversation to follow easily. Otherwise, this is what we said to each other and the audience that day, which I remind readers of these lines was February 21, 2024.

Liz Lerman

Critical Response Process (CRP) is a formal process for giving and receiving feedback. As you come to understand the process, its values become clearer, and in time, you can move around in it and not just follow the sequence. In fact, you can use it in a multiplicity of ways, although most people come upon it as a four-step process and use it in that format. In dance, you practice the steps, but dancing is not just about the steps; it's about much more than that. It's the same with the Critical Response Process. We practice these steps because it's a way to learn the steps and help you practice values that are hard to keep in the urgency of our lives. There are many variations and many applications.

Here's how it works. Someone presents something, a work in progress. It can be artwork of some kind but also a plan, a brochure, or a curriculum. Anything that you want to get feedback on. As listener, the first step is to let people know that what they just did was meaningful. This could be something interesting, provocative, surprising, delightful. It can be a small detail such as, "I noticed the way this sentence sets up the rest of the paragraph." This is not to be confused with giving compliments. In our culture, we dismiss a compliment as not being genuine. We ask in this first step that people offer something in a spirit of good will. And we, in that first step, are not to bring up the things that are problematic. I'm not saying that you have to forget that something was problematic. It's just that you don't lead with it. And truthfully, if you have a really good conversation about things, it's possible that your own opinion might change as the process proceeds.

In the second step, the person who's made the work asks questions about their own work of those who have seen it. This can be hard for makers because often our issues in our work don't appear as questions, but rather as doubts or even insomnia. I like to say: dignify your apologies and worries by turning them into inquiry. The people responding to these questions have a different filter than in the first step. Now they can answer positively or negatively, but they cannot change the subject. I believe that when a person asks a question, they are saying something like "I am open to hearing whatever you have to say about this topic." It doesn't mean that they are open to hearing anything you have to say. Sometimes we say, answer what was asked, not what you wish they had asked. The responder can respond with a negative thought, but they can't change the subject.

For example, if I say to you, "How do you like the ending of my dance?" you can tell me that you don't like it, but you can't say the ending of my dance is fine, but I don't like your hair. I didn't give you permission to talk about my hair. This is where things so often go off the rails. For instance, if my daughter invites me into her room to give her help with her homework, fine. But she hasn't given me permission to tell her to clean up her room. That wasn't the contract. That wasn't the invitation. We all know what happens next: they slam the door, and, by the way, the result is no homework and no clean room! So, you have to be listening. You said that right away, Martha, when we first started talking today. The first thing you brought up in this conversation was listening.

In the third step, responders get to ask their question. Here, the challenge is to try to make the questions neutral, to stay curious, to gather information. By neutral, we mean try not to embed your opinion or assumption in the question. There are a lot of reasons to attempt this. One is, it allows the responders to consider their own reactions and to see if they are correct for this exact moment in time. Another reason to avoid embedding your opinion in the question is that non-neutral questions will usually make the person getting the feedback go on the defensive. Once defensiveness starts, it is difficult for discovery and learning to continue.

In the final step, there is a little ritual. The Responder can say something like, "I have an opinion about. . ." and they name the category, and then also add, ". . . would you like to hear it?" And the person receiving the feedback can say yes or no. This is consent driven.

In summary:

1) There are statements of meaning from the responders to the artist or the maker;
2) The artist asks their questions;
3) The responders ask their questions; and
4) Opinions are given with permission only. That's the process!

Irene

I think some of us are familiar with some of this, but having it put together for us in a sequence is very helpful. So, I'm going to up the ante, so to speak, and comment that I can see how that sequence works well with the child and the homework and even with creative work and getting feedback. But what happens with a situation like Israel-Palestine – to take this to one of the most extreme cases of controversy or disagreement in today's world? Martha, you've done so much work in international relations. Can I ask you: how do we take these principles

that make so much sense when we think about them in our everyday lives and try to apply them to these situations that seem insoluble or are being "resolved" by terrible physical violence and destruction?

Martha

Let me say first that, I don't have answers, but I have questions. One question is: who's the "we" in that question and in that relationship? Ultimately, one hopes there will be some kind of a diplomatic solution. We hope that someday – we don't know when, not whether it's this year or 10 years from now – there will be an end to violent conflicts, to killing each other.

Here's another question: who's going to pursue responses to intractable conflicts? Who's going to be willing to do that?

I don't know the exact identity, but at some point, it's going to be human beings!

We'll have to sit down together and figure out a modus vivendi. How do we live together? I do know some people who are starting to talk about that. However, most of the political leaders who are relevant are not talking.

I think there's another way, and it concerns the rest of us who are not in those roles.

On college campuses in North America, we are more divided than any time that I can remember. Perhaps not on exactly these issues at the moment, but on other issues, we could do something that would involve listening to each other, trying to ask and to hear: what does this mean for you? We could be curious, locating the judgment parts of the conversation not at the beginning – at least, not leading with that.

I think this is true for people who live in Israel and live in Gaza, many of whom have long known each other as neighbors. And yet they haven't found a way to actually interact. This is true in Europe, too. There are people I know in France who are having exactly this problem with neighbors. They can't even talk to each other. So, I return to my question from before: who is the "we" in these questions? Once we locate, we identify, that the "we" includes some people who are neighbors and have had things in common in the past, I think that these steps are very, very relevant.

I've had fascinating opportunities to watch up close as people emerging from terrible conflicts take those small steps, whether it's through a formal process like a Truth and Reconciliation Commission or it's by cooperating around some shared goal, like building a community center. And those are steps that people can take and actually do take if they see a common ground, if they see some reason to have common ground.

One of the terrible features of the tragic Israel-Gaza story is that we have a not just recent but longstanding history of leaders who don't want a solution, leaders for whom the investment in the conflict is part of their own personal power. As long as that's the case, we can't have these steps, and it will take other people who say "no more!" and change who the leaders are.

Irene

That's a very sobering thought because as Katja Donovan mentioned at the beginning of this conversation [February 2024], several major parts of the world are facing elections soon, and the choices seem to be between candidates, as you put it just now, Martha, who don't seem to want resolution and those who maybe do want resolution and do want to work together.

Liz, you travel and work with so many different types of people. How do you see this "scaling up" happening? Is there something that the little folk – which is definitely what I'm feeling like right now: very little! – is there something that I need to be doing to create the path towards the scaling up of these wonderful practices that you've shared with us?

Liz

I share with Martha the sense that it's just so big! What I might propose is small. Martha has guided me in the past at difficult moments, and your book, Martha, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness* (1999) to me is one of the most powerful books I have ever read. You specifically helped me through a couple of projects by showing me some ways – I don't want to just say of hope, it's more of practice. It's a way to practice the thing, including what you did during our project, *Small Dances about Big Ideas*, in relationship to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Arizona State University, where I've been teaching, is an amazing place, but it scales up constantly the whole idea: scale up, scale up, scale up, scale up, scale big, scale big! There are fruits from that in terms of access. We have so many more people at my university who wouldn't be there or at other schools either. Inclusion is key to our school. And these people are doing amazing things. There are so many students from around the world and you can see through them ways of opening it up. But there is also the other scale, that is, the microscopic, and that also is really important to figure out.

Martha, you've talked about a couple who is distraught [in an opening example]. That could seem microscopic and yet it, too, is important. This situation in Gaza right now is so horrible for somebody like myself, an American Jew, and for you, Martha, an American Jew. I think this is in part why my new project, *My Body is a Library*, feels so true to me. When the patriarch Abraham died, his two sons are in that cave with him, and the questions I keep asking are: Were they already on distinct paths? Were they already separating their burial practices from each other? How early did this separation start? I feel like I'm living with that question in my body. Not at the political level, but in a visceral way. I believe that the body, the way we feel and express, if we give it an opportunity, along with our imaginations, it can help us hold ambiguity in a way that words often cannot. I know that those hearing or reading me might think they don't understand this, but actually we do it all the time: we allow ourselves to feel joy, grief, confusion, anger, and to consider how we might live with these emotions while having ideas at the same time. So often, we have to separate them, but in truth, if we let our bodies, minds, and dare I say, souls, speak to us, we can have a sensibility about something without always starting or ending with words. I call this "dwelling on something," and it is both a verb and a noun and also a place. On another level, I think that we can be making connections, working through things.

I agree with you, Martha, that strategy with our students is helping them de-escalate the controversy at this moment. I am concerned by the speed with which we are talking to each other about our differences and our opinions. And I am concerned with the positions that we assume and hold. I might think of this as we allow the anger and the opinion to form a shape, and then we are stuck in it. My suggestion is to allow some space for moving into other shapes. It's scary because while we are in momentum of change, we might not be so sure of everything. That is partly its beauty. But you can always assume your old shape (of an idea or a position), or perhaps find a nuance that changes it a lot or a little.

Critical Response Process can help with this through its practice of turning discomfort to inquiry as we discussed and trying to get to a neutral question. Both of these things help de-escalate the situation. Another concerns the speed with which the anger comes up. That's another thing Critical Response Process can help with, a de-escalation.

What a horrible place for us to be in, as Martha has just described, with our leadership. Personally, speaking out every day, I don't see how killing innocent people gets us anywhere. I just don't. It is terrible to see the state of Israel, born as it was, coming out of what it did, and it not being able to treat others differently. I know I'm not living there, and I didn't lose my family on October 7. But I am willing to work on it here.

Martha

I'm thinking right now about the words that make up the name of this conversation series: "Humanities for Humans." They make me reflect that I am drawn constantly to that basic question. If we're dealing with humans, isn't that something that we have in common, that we are human? Can't being human be a starting point for connection? I'd like to add one thing about that extraordinary group "Doctors Without Borders" that was in Rwanda on the ground as the genocide was unfurling. The local head, Dr. James Orbinski, anticipated that all of the children who were being housed in a hospital were at risk of violence. So, he went to the head of the hospital, and he said to him, "you know, I fear that the machetes are coming. It's terrible! We have to get these children to safety." And the doctor said to Orbinski, "No, we can't do that." So, Orbinski said to the doctor, "Are you a parent?" And immediately, the man opened up his wallet where he had pictures of his children. He was obviously very proud of them. And then Dr. Orbinski said, "Well, these are children, too! They're somebody's child." The head of the hospital responded to that, "No, they're cockroaches." It was in fact that word and similar words in Rwanda, similar words during the Holocaust, similar words in Vietnam, similar words in Gaza. It's this demeaning subordination of human beings to being not human that allows people to do horrific things. So, yes! I do think it's absolutely critical to resist that, to insist on recognizing people as humans. Talking about scale, at least I can start with my own communications, with how I talk.

Liz

I would like to thank you for that, too, Martha. If people see the film "Origin" about Isabel Wilkerson or read her book *Caste* (2020), they will see and feel even more of what you were just speaking about. In this context, I want to mention my own inability to celebrate Hanukkah this past year [2023]. I couldn't even light the candles. I just couldn't do it. But I did write eight "Miracles." And I'd like to mention them here. I have been told that they feel like Afro-Futurism. Maybe. I was aided in writing by Martha and by my daughter Anna and her husband Peter, who is German. They live in Turkey, and he works for UNESCO in Afghanistan, so they also see things from differing world situations. Some of what is written there has been on my mind for a very long time. Some of it arose after October 7. Hanukkah's arrival, with its ritual candle lighting, gift giving, and storytelling of resistance, became the torment and the structure for me to imagine these hopes. And yes, even miracles.

Here it is:
This year, instead of candles, I am observing a miracle a day.

Day One: The people awaken to a world without soldiers in their midst. They look for fuel as they rebuild their homes, their hospitals, their streets. And behold! Although there is only enough fuel for one day, what they have lasts 8 days, long enough to get what they need from the rest of the world.

Day Two: The families awake and find all prisoners and all hostages are walking towards home. Everyone has been fed and is safe.

Day Three: The miraculous return of those raped to death, their pelvises now intact, their heads are back on their bodies, which bear no bruises from having been dragged through the streets. The bodies torn apart by bomb after bomb are back in place, where they were put by God, Allah, Buddha, the Divine Sacred.

Day Four: Leaders of States and Governments realize they can't fight a proxy war with their enemy by killing thousands of innocents. They agree to meet with all sides.

Day Five: The people realize they have been misled by their government, a government led by a man who must prosecute this war or lose his power and possibly be imprisoned; a government that ignored the warnings because the military was too arrogant to believe resistance could be organized and too macho to listen to a woman who forecast these devastating events. And, so, the people elect a government devoted to a two-state solution and living side by side.

Day Six: In the United States, the American people decide to de-escalate their opinions and try listening. In Congress, in academia, in families, in religious institutions, and within ourselves. Each one of us realizing that we are in relation and in community.

Day Seven: We understand that we have to share the land, nurture its beauty, and find a way to identify our heritage, our cultures, and our beings beyond what we own.

Day Eight: All the candles are lit. A song of permanent cease fire is heard everywhere; there is prayer, dancing, gatherings, of political or religious nature. And all the children feel safe for the first time in years. The children can sleep now. They can rest in the arms of their mothers and fathers. The children can go to school and to the movies without fear, holding the hands of their siblings or their friends. The war machines that pretended to be in their interests have been

halted. A new psalm is written in which the music itself, and the way it beats in our hearts and our muscles, tells us that we can live with our differences.

The thing about the "Miracles" in the way I intended them involves not denying the horror of the present, but also posing what it could be. I suppose there's a bit of naivete there, though it isn't like I say, "Here is how you do it." It did help that I could at least imagine it.

Martha

Imagination is so important. It's absolutely critical to think that it's possible, that it could be otherwise. I always communicate to my law students how critical it is to study history, to study comparatively what other countries do and have done. Science fiction is important for the same reason. To imagine other worlds is the strength of human beings. That's what we can do even in the darkest times!

Irene

To repeat some of your important thoughts, Liz and Martha: one thing we can do is treat those around us as human beings. That seems truly fundamental. Another is to imagine. Perhaps I can share that we focused on the importance of the imagination in an earlier conversation of "Humanities for Humans." The general topic was climate change. But in talking together before the public conversation where we had to narrow it down, the experts shared how central to them the idea of imagining a new future for the earth is, a future that could be liveable for humans and animals and plants. So that's exactly what we called it: "Imagining Anew the Future of the Earth." Rebecca Tsosie, a philosopher and legal scholar from Arizona, who also does Native American studies, and Harriet Hawkins, a British cultural geographer who often works with artists, insisted, each from their own experience and disciplines, on how critical it is to imagine that things could be different. Because if you can't imagine that it could be different, then we don't really have a chance of getting there. I think that's what both of you are saying about controversy, disagreement, outright aggression. To add one more thought, there was a very controversial piece in *The New Yorker* a few years back by the author Jonathan Safran Foer, who was arguing that it's definitely too late to save the planet, but that doesn't mean we should give up and not do anything. He urged individuals to find a project that means something to you, a project that

you can do something about. So, if there's a park you love and they're threatening to turn it into a parking lot, then you can fight for that spot of green in your neighborhood. To connect this with what we've been talking about here today, I wonder if that's also a hope that we can offer listeners. Can you practice these steps? Can you practice non-judgment? Can you practice respect? Can you speak from experience rather than from authority? Can we be practicing all of that in situations over which we might have a modicum of control? That might just be a good idea no matter what, but perhaps I also want to have the hope that if a lot of us try to follow the steps we've been talking about, our efforts will add up to some different, some more peaceful spirit in the world. Am I being an unrealistic optimist at this point?

Martha

I totally agree that hope is critical. Taking steps, action often seems more feasible, more imaginable, more doable when it's local, when it's small. Your comments make me recall that when Al Gore created the film about why environmental challenges overwhelm people[2], he noticed that – and he is so powerful on this point – people move very quickly either to denial or to feeling overwhelmed. It's too big and therefore there's nothing I can do, and pessimism takes over. It seems to me that the challenge is to manage our feelings so that we *can* imagine, so that we *can* act. I want to return to your comments about fear, Liz. We can turn it into a resource as opposed to shutting down.

Liz

I want us not to skip over something: I think we even have to *practice* imagination. The topics and steps we've been discussing are so powerful, so effective, and yet, it's fascinating to me how little we train in them. I have a short essay proposing that Einstein was a choreographer because he was so good at thought experiments. Through his thought experiments, he was living in his imagination. When I studied that a bit, it felt similar to the way I live in my imagination when I'm in the midst of making something. I can sit there and spend enormous amounts

2 Editor's note: *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006).

of time in my imagination. It's like a giant computer because I can delete, add, subtract.

Let me try restating that: imagination is a practice. And like any other type of practice, there are warm-ups. There are things you know. You keep at it so that in times of need, you don't have to wait for it to come unbidden. You actually have it. Here we go once more. Let me try this formulation: it is a tool; it is part of who you are. With regard to not having the garden be turned into a parking lot, there are many things you need to have practiced. I have to get out of bed and actually do something. I can't let myself be a pessimist today. I've got to talk to my neighbor. I've got to pick up the person who doesn't have a car. Or maybe you're riding a bike instead of being in a car. To my sense of it, just saying all of those things counts towards building the kind of world that we want to be in. And yet so often we dismiss them as too insignificant, or we just completely overlook them.

There's one other point floating out there about judgment. It's not so much about being non-judgmental. Rather, I'm interested in how we turn judgment into inquiry. When do we engage with our judgment because our judgment is telling us something is wrong? We could think of it and emotion like a signal: I'm sad. I'm happy. I'm this. I'm that. That's a signal where the next step can be to quickly move to inquiry – something you can practice! You can use those questions to get us somewhere. After teaching critical response all these years, I count judgments like neutrinos. They're coming at us every second, and we're having them every second. So, the issue really is how we manage them. Manage is a good term you use, Martha. It's such a good point related to practice.

Martha

Elaine Scarry is a professor of English at Harvard who wrote a book called *Thinking in an Emergency* (2011). It could have been a short book with two words: you can't. But instead, it's a beautiful book that talks about the fact that since you can't think in an emergency, you have to practice ahead of time – which is exactly right. And then you have it available.

It is striking to me that young people today actually need more practice in having conversations, more practice in knowing how to separate out the question from the statement, and in how to read the emotions of the other person. To put it yet another way: how to be in the presence of another person who has emotions. I don't know whether that was always true for the young, but it seems to me like there's more need for actual practice of those kinds of activities. A study coming out of MIT indicated that undergraduates would prefer on the whole to

have asynchronous communications, because then they don't have to manage the feelings that somebody else has.

Irene

I can certainly say as a teacher myself for many decades that things have changed in terms of students' ability to talk to adults. The pandemic didn't help any, because students were able to – often told to do many things asynchronously, and in general, face to face conversations have become more and more rare for the younger generation. They'd much rather text about arranging even what they're going to do that evening with their friends, for instance. This is not a criticism of the younger generation. Martha already brought it up. It's the very structure of digital communications.

Communication itself has changed so much and instead of just bemoaning that, we could use it as a call to all of us who are in teaching positions about how important it is to help our students learn those skills you've both talked about. To make them aware of and help them acquire the tools they'll need in life and to urge them to practice using those tools.

Liz

I'm working on something right now called, "The Atlas of Creative Tools." It's not public yet, but I'm hoping to make it a place where people can access all kinds of things. What I really want to say is that people already have their own tools, but they just don't realize that. Sometimes they'll call it intuition. I think your intuition is your knowledge arriving super-fast. If you do a kind of deep reflection when you're inspired, you can go one more step and ask what it was that inspired you about this thing or situation, and then you'll hear yourself say the thing that you want to practice. In any case, I do believe that most people have a lot of tools. So, I'd like to urge people: Go back over a situation when you were saving yourself, a moment that happened and then you got out of it. You saved yourself! Fabulous! Well, what did you do exactly? Those are the tools that will be of use. It's a mentality around that that I call a toolbox mentality, or maybe better would be an Atlas mentality.

Irene

This is intriguing. Could you continue explaining what you mean?

Liz

It goes like this: Each person can develop what I might call a toolbox mentality, and by that, I mean that whether you're working intuitively, or with recipes, or with processes that someone has taught you, you can be paying attention to the things that work, to the way you interchange them, and you will come to find that it's actually interesting to make your own toolbox, your own set of ways of working. Sometimes I think of it like this: I can teach you how to swim. We can walk slowly into the pool, and we can start practicing our breathing, and then we can practice our movements and our kicking. We do all the things to become good swimmers, working from the shallow end to a point where suddenly you're in the deep end and you're swimming. That's one way to think about a toolbox.

But what I'm calling a toolbox mentality would be something like this: I'd throw you in the deep end and let's pretend that you don't know how to swim. You would start thrashing around and you might notice that if you cup your hands, you can keep your head up longer. You might notice the speed of how much you're working your arms. You might notice that if you add your legs, you can keep your head above water. You might even notice that keeping your head above water is a good idea. This is really how the toolbox mentality works. It's you noticing that you're in the deep end. Things are happening. You're surviving.

Irene

Maybe this is my idealism again, but is there anything we need to say before we close about love?

Martha

I suppose that's a part of recognizing other humans' rights. But love is a tall order. I don't think it could be commanded. Maybe this is the context to reflect on the experience I had after having a child and suddenly realizing that for every-

body alive who is a human being, some mother went through this process of pregnancy and birth for them. That certainly is something I hold on to, even when I'm having a difficult conversation with someone. Somebody went through a lot for you to be around!

I relate this to the idea of a mediator, the conviction that sometimes you can't do it alone. Sometimes you need somebody else to help orchestrate the conversation, to set the ground rules, to make sure that everyone is treated fairly and has an equal opportunity, and sometimes even an adjudicator, someone who will resolve a conflict.

I do think that there are practices that everyone can engage in related to playing those kinds of roles in their own lives and being willing to have in essence a social contract that says: we have a conflict and we're going to have to solve it, and we're going to agree to solve it this way.

Liz

That's a helpful train of thought, Martha. I used to think that everybody understood that you see this over here and apply it over there. Over time, I've come to realize that's not the case. Rather, again, it's a matter of practice: How do I make this make sense to me over here? Make sense of another context? For another purpose?

Trying to put our conversation together with love makes me think of the work we did with veterans over a number of months during the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War. We built a piece around what was happening in Iran and Iraq, that is, with veterans returning from that war. One of the things I learned by talking to so many of them, and by being in circles with them, is that there seemed to be three things that had happened to them. Why they would sign up to serve again was not because of our political policies. They reenlisted because there's a certain amount of risk, and risk is a wonderful thing. What I mean is that risk can keep you on the edge. I happen to love risk, too. But they also had purpose. The third thing was love. They didn't always use the word love, but it was so clear that they loved their comrades, as did my father. The only time he would talk about World War II was in relationship to this kind of love of comrades. I don't think we do such a good job of expanding the notion of what we mean by love to encompass the kind of love these veterans felt.

Even in my classrooms, I want my students to sit there and love each other in a manner in which they can support each other's ups and downs, growth experiences, changes, and all that. You can create that kind of world; truly you can. It's

helped by watching them. They have taught me so much when I listen to or witness the ways in which supporting each other played out for them. Critical Response helps in giving folks the skills for this. But, also, I have noticed how important it is for me to help them understand competition and inspiration. If you insist on living in a vertical world, where you are constantly climbing upwards, then, when someone else shows something that you admire, your only choice is to feel bad because yours is worse, or you push harder to out-compete them. If you live in the horizontal, you have another set of choices. Instead of saying, "Wow, I could never do that," you ask yourself, "Wow, what was it about that which inspired me?" And here is where a toolbox mentality can help, because you can discern the process, the tool, or a way of thinking and borrow that. It's a way of turning inspiration into a workroom, a rehearsal, or something to try out. It's very exciting.

Irene

We have a question from the audience, from someone who's listening to us from Tel Aviv. They write: "I thought it" – I assume they mean this conversation – "would be neutral, but the only condemnation was uttered about Israel. Why doesn't anyone condemn the atrocities of Hamas?" This person continues on about academia and that they've been reading about Jewish students, even those who are not espousing Zionism, being attacked by anti-Israel mobs and asks: "can't you influence the authorities to prevent demonstrations and sponsor only discussions at which academics of various persuasions will encourage information?"

I don't know which universities this listener is referring to, but at Dartmouth College where I teach, I am very fortunate to have colleagues who immediately – literally on October 7 – got in touch with each other, professors of Middle Eastern and Arabic studies and Jewish studies. They realized right away how important it would be to have discussions with students, to "encourage and give information" in the context of our community as a university, a place where we are located to learn. They also understood emotions would be running very high. So, two big public forums occurred at Dartmouth within days of the Hamas attacks. I was so impressed not only with the amount of information, of teaching my colleagues did during these forums, but also with their own modeling of calm discussion, and their own reflexes to de-escalate whenever a student got up and starting yelling. I am confused about our listener's perception that only the atrocities of Israel are talked about here and also the perception that only Jewish students are having problems feeling safe right now. That's not what I'm reading and hearing.

Martha

I should have been more explicit when I said recognizing the humanity of others. I certainly mean the hostages, too. And I certainly mean the Israelis who were killed, whether they were at a concert or they were at home in a kibbutz. I am appalled when I look at groups that claim to be feminists who deny that rapes happened. So, when I say it's important to recognize the humanity of others, I mean that too. I am absolutely outraged that there are people on my campus tearing down posters with photos of the hostages. That's a perfect example of what I was trying to describe about not recognizing the humanity of other human beings, of treating them as cockroaches. The fact of someone taking down the poster is an acknowledgement that "oh my goodness, someone might actually recognize that these hostages are human beings, and I don't want that." I am sympathetic to the listener's question about why we can't have discussions about the issues rather than protests.

To be sure, we have a very strong commitment to free speech in this country, and that includes on college campuses. I myself have been a big advocate of what we call "time, place, and manner" restrictions. I do not believe that there should be protests where people are eating or sleeping or studying. That's consistent in my view with the rules that apply to public spaces. I believe they should apply to even private campuses. It is tough; it is tough. There are so many strong, strong feelings right now. Some people just don't seem to be ready to have conversations. I would also comment that whatever is being said and done seems to be going in all directions, not just one. There's been a lot of anti-Islamism as well as antisemitism.

Liz

I feel for the person who wrote in that question. I don't know that this is adequate, but I mentioned earlier, the eight days of Miracles that I wrote during Hanukkah. It may not meet the desires of the listener, but on day three, I wrote of the miraculous return of those raped to death. In my miracle, their pelvises are now intact; their heads are back on their bodies, which bear no bruises from having been dragged through the streets; the bodies torn apart by bomb after bomb are back in place where they were put by God, by Allah, by Buddha or by the Divine Sacred.

In this example, you see me again framing bigger and yet still trying to include the specifics and the horrors of what happened.

Irene

This is obviously a very sober place to be winding down this conversation, but I think in coming together today, we all were aware that this is a very difficult time we're living through – on campuses, but of course all over the world (and we haven't mentioned most of the armed conflicts that are currently occurring). It's a main reason I wanted to have you in conversation with the public. We're in a very, very sobering moment in human history, it seems to me, where people are grasping at violence rather than seeing someone else's humanity. Many countries, unfortunately, have leaders who do not want resolutions, as you pointed out earlier, Martha. That is something perhaps each of us in societies like ours that still make claims for marginal freedom of speech and elections should think about. What does it mean to be supporting leaders who don't want resolution? And what are the different kinds of resolutions that are available to us that no one is talking about? We have to work in whatever ways possible for conversations that might lead to resolutions being put in place.

Martha

I was very helped by Liz's suggestion, both in talking about critical response steps, but also steps in general for helping each of us to separate out things that we just immediately combine. As an example, I've worked on and written quite a lot about the issue of forgiveness. I think that it's absolutely critical to separate out the acts of forgiveness from honoring and recognizing people's justified sense of outrage and resentment being violated.

Forgiveness, whatever it is, is an aspiration that's embraced by every religion, by every philosophic tradition. It means letting go of a justified resentment. But, first, let's recognize the justified resentment.

Liz

I love that, Martha. You've shared that with me before, and I'm really glad for you to raise that again. It's really, really good, as are the four definitions of truth that you brought to my attention that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission used in order to do that excruciatingly difficult work in South Africa.

Martha

I can mention them here. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission very powerfully articulated that there are different kinds of truth. It's not relativism to acknowledge that there are forensic truths, the truths of personal narrative, social truth that emerges from dialogue, and there's truth that is constructed in healing processes. They are not the same, and they are all important.

Irene

That is an inspiring place to suspend this conversation.