

Editorial

Hope, in the bleak mid-winter

Misri Dey with Sara Reed and Thomas Wilson (Training Grounds)

I sit here in the howling Cornish winds, in December 2023, in the midst of a bleak mid-winter, both in the UK and abroad. The war in Ukraine continues. The war in Gaza also continues, with its rapidly rising death toll. On December the 12th, this numbers approximately 20,000 Palestinians - 70 % of them women and children and 1,200 Israeli people (2023). Global responsibility, and useful action, to help cease the fire is flaccid; too little, and woefully late. And since this war started, related antisemitic attacks in London in October alone rose from 15 to 218. Twenty years ago, materialist philosopher Richard Sennett's observation, that two edicts dominate 21st century late capitalist society: 'us against them' coupled with 'you are on your own' (218) continue to ring loud and clear, globally. Meanwhile the UK's 2012 strategy for managing immigration, the self-proclaimed 'hostile environment' policy, of then Home Secretary Theresa May spreads its reach and influence, focusing the blame for our economic troubles not on Brexit, pandemic management, or war in Ukraine but on immigrants and immigration. Binary thinking, fear and hate of the 'other' is being tactically stimulated, channelled, and unleashed.

Creative work, artistic training would seem to take place in a completely different world, be unconnected, marginal, and irrelevant. There is a temptation to be overwhelmed by despair, and feelings of impotence. Yet we also know that art is potent, performance can be performative and do things in the world. Artists disrupt, their power revealed through global histories of governments aiming to censor, and control them, repeatedly. Artists can be activists, engaged in a wide spectrum of actions; changing thinking; 'conscientization' (Freire, 1972:15), activating our political 'habits of being' (hooks. 1990:8), reminding us of hope as concrete action. And I have found that a small but steady resistant pulse is offered here in this journal, both in how it comes about and in its content. This is not 'Politics' but 'politics' – an insistence on changing how we train, who trains, and how we can spread the news to make it happen more. I unashamedly highlight here some examples of what Rebecca Solnit suggests is the way forward for an activist scholarly praxis: having 'broad perspectives with specific possibilities, ones that invite or demand we act' (2016:9).

You are not on your own.

We performance folk have a powerful, honed weapon in our arsenal. It is so obvious we often do not articulate it. We collaborate, work together, usually quite well. It is our core method, embodied in multiple ways. I offer three different examples.

One. Academia expects me to refer to my colleagues. When I think, write, teach, or make, I am happily accompanied by and speak the names of a prolific, published, noise choir: currently Avtar Brah, Royona Mitra, Amy Wong, Arundhati Roy, Patrice Cullors, Audrey Lourde, Angela Davis, Trin T Minh Ha, , bel hooks, Rebecca Solnit, Paulo Freire, Sara Ahmet, Donna Haraway – an infinite list whose collective energy, rage and writing refuels me time and time again.

Two. June 2020: we face another bleak time, amidst the new and isolating Covid pandemic and the bewilderment of lockdown. On Facebook, with a Labour party colleague, I organise a 9 minute 29 second silent, ritual kneel, 'We can't breathe' in Kimberley Park, Falmouth, Cornwall, inviting people to come and re-perform, as protest, the action that killed George Floyd. We thought a few dozen folk would come. 750 people knelt, in this small seaside town of Falmouth, Cornwall with other sister protests taking place in Mousehole, Penzance, Truro, Redruth. The police supported it, the media reported it, and this performed action rapidly linked to Black Lives Matter actions and protests across the world. As we know, this anti-racist work continues.

Three. Another June 2022. I was invited to become an Associate Editor (Positive Action) here, at the Theatre, Dance and Performance Training journal and encouraged to edit this issue, under the steady and supportive mentorship of co-editors, Libby Worth and Jonathan Pitches. Over the past six months, I have been inspired by the collective, kind, nature of this work, the consistent generosity offered by people who do not necessarily know each other well. To make this one issue involves the voluntary work of writers, reviewers, editors, publishers, students, all working to move creative training forward, to reach out to different people and help effect positive change within this small yet connected environment of contemporary arts training. Voluntary, collaborative, creative, detailed thinking, and doing. This work, with these people, at this time has created a steady, supportive background hum, sustained despite the war cacophony which continually threatens to overwhelm. What I also notice, and hear, in the content of these pages, is the implicit or explicit acknowledgement that in theatre, dance and performance training, dominance, rigid hierarchy, centralised power has had its time. Long overdue space is being made for multiple 'others' – across the board. Avtar Brah writes of this as decolonising thinking 'scholarly activism... political work of building new futures, whereby multiple worlds can co-exist and sustain life affirming praxes' (13). In these articles, the writers include for example, giving increased agency to the inanimate objects in rehearsal, and the rich materials we all work with ('props' no more), working with other performance languages (signing, AI, physical, sensory) understanding other sources of knowledge and intelligence: (physical, AI, cellular, play) involving other actors (avatars, community members, students) and using the possibilities offered by working in virtual as well as live, rehearsal spaces and times to challenge heterodominant ways of working and teaching.

It was not always so - 'us against them'...

I also wonder where theatre, dance and performance training would be, in the West, if migrants had not been allowed to cross borders to work, to create, to escape, as asylum seekers and refugees? I had the fortune to work at Dartington College of Arts, a small college on top of a hill in Devon, a vibrant hub for international creative arts practices. Had we the current immigrant laws in place, there would have been no Kurt Joos, designer, and company, who relocated to Dartington Hall Estate to escape Nazi persecution in Essen. Joos brought his teacher, Rudolf Laban, who affected not only the whole of UK contemporary dance training, but the industrial workforce in Manchester, with his work on kinesiology. There would have been no psychophysical work of Moscow Arts Theatre Michael Chekhov. This is now a standard part of core acting training in the UK, as reflected in Barone's article. Chekhov fled Russia in 1928, also under threat of persecution, due to his experimental work clashing with Soviet ideology. He was also offered refuge at Dartington and set up

there his Theatre studio. Under current policy, Laban and Chekhov would have been sent to Rwanda, their effect on UK performance training altered, if not lost.

Allow me to push this 'what if' slightly further, in this shadowy time between the old and new year. What if, in the latter half of the 20th century, Global South countries had been able to close their borders to Western artistic migrants, citing colonising histories as having taken aplenty and instigating the 'Enough environment'? Again, European theatrical avant garde practices would be very different. Rustom Barucha pointed this out, back in 1990, 'interculturalism' a misnomer for the North taking from the South via a herd of white, male theatre directors. Peter Brook, Bertolt Brecht, Eugenio Barba, Jerzy Grotowski all aimed to invigorate their tired, white, Western theatre traditions with 'new' practices from Kathakali, Chinese mask theatre, African street theatre, Indonesian shadow puppetry. In this imaginary 'Enough environment', they would have been turned away, 'coming over here, taking our artistic forms' and again subsequent UK performance training would have been entirely different. They were however privileged, and they took their enrichment. And this idea also reveals how those non Western practices are deeply entwined with thinking about 21st century performance training, for example Indian and African fluid boundaries between dance and drama echoed in the embracing of multiple psychophysical approaches, Japanese Noh mask evident in the neutral mask work of LeCoq, and equally creative approaches increasingly taking on teachings of mindfulness and qualities of attention present in Buddhist thinking, as evident here in the conference review. This is not a new point made but a reminder of what scholars in the West can take for granted, and perhaps a suggestion towards some kind of on-going practice of legacy acknowledgement, complete with its inherent tensions.

Articles

Agency is distributed beyond the human, in **Rob Kitsos and Meagan Woods'** Moving Matters, which details a research process, method and project exploring the physical choreographies and design possibilities of a collaborative interactive method between materials of all kinds, in which the human moving body is just one 'thing', alongside clingfilm, lino and cloth. The human as 'subject' gives up the assumed privilege of centrality and actively supports the voices of the inanimate, through the evocative practice of 'embodied echoing'. We are invited to know our place, lower our 'positionality in our world of stuff'. Although not framed as training pedagogy, it is relevant and useful for practitioners in developing their ways of creative working with the literal materials in performance. The authors also explicitly state that they are engaged in a long process, where publication of ideas is precisely for other practitioners to use in their work.

Samuel McKay's article explores this circulation of power through an applied theatre project, working with the practice of Theatre for Democracy. This is where the opinions and issues facing community groups in the Wirral including young people are creatively explored and facilitated by LIPA student actors and then represented to council decision makers, so they can do something about them. This is highly reminiscent of Augusto Boal's Legislative Theatre. As McKay points out, Higher Education creatives, teachers and students alike have long been engaging in community work, in a wide variety of everyday contexts, aiming to research, represent and facilitate social change. The UK University research environment has been playing catchup and this is now reframed as Knowledge Exchange. McKay offers a refreshing revision of the walls of the academy, not as elitist constructions designed to keep the great unwashed out but as a temporary retreat for young people. They

inhabit an increasingly harsh world, and this is a safe space, to be able to meet, talk, giggle, energise and return to these communities to work. This crossing opens 'a third space, a walking through walls, an 'agility in research' which refuses fixed borders.

Luciana Barone explores a psychophysical approach to acting training, exploring how the work of Body Mind Centring's deep physical systems approach can support the training involved in Michael Chekhov's acting techniques. Self-respect, for example 'Expanding consciousness of one's own body and the many minds inhabiting it' opens creative possibilities in terms of character development. Providing access to the different anatomical body systems at work, which we all have, increases existing knowledges, and widens experiential possibilities for an actor. This was always a puzzle for me, as a young actor – how to access and represent experiences beyond my knowledge, and this provides one practice-based answer. This is a useful de-stabilising of the dominance of 'memory' work in acting technique, opening access to deep character work obtainable from physical sources.

John Matthews offers a detailed examination of how Meisner actor training technique can be enhanced using virtual and immersive technology, another potential 'third space', like McCay's, in an immersive projection space in Plymouth, UK. A shake up of heteronormative teaching takes place, using JG Ballard's *Drowned World* as aesthetic reference to experiment with Meisner techniques, but queer timed and equality audited. The model of teacher as 'guru' is challenged - their virtual presence shared with avatars and automatons; their communications shared with virtual stimuli. This decentring of the physical teacher is not rationale for replacement but a development towards collaborative, dialogic training, and an opening up of how and where we train and what this training can consist of, in the 21st century and beyond. This is light years apart from my own actor training, in 1999, in a traditional theatre conservatoire where female actors were considered 'difficult' if they had opinions. Matthews offers 'interstitial space time' as 'under water' - which works as both ecological reality and metaphor for a new world where we can find new ways to breathe life into actor training.

Rodrigo Sculari's article explores the physical clowning and creative training principals of Copeau, and the later practices of LeCoq, Gaulier and Mnouchkine, and how these engage with and benefit from the turn of the century ideals of Rousseau and the Romantic era. Sculari acknowledges Rousseau's over idealisation of the notion of the innocent child, to freely access play, truth, and unconscious genius and how this underestimate the true technical, detailed work involved in clown training. However, he points to the usefulness of working with a 'discovery-based logic through improvisation', foregrounding astonishment and the rich work of the unconscious. In our current bleakness of this mid-winter, I find astonishment as innocent discovery to seem very far away, apart from its alignment to being stunned. However, this model of open discovery, applied to pedagogy is indeed one I read as articulated repeatedly in these articles, and I am glad and heartened by this. Perhaps not sourcing it from the 'innocent' child but from the teenager – to joke, offer lightness of touch, to literally fight against the dying of the light.

Rhonda Blair offers a multi levelled approach to using Stanislavskian actor training, specifically 'Active Analysis' - given circumstance, intention, task, action – and how it chimes with frameworks and thinking in physical training and cognitive science. This is a nuanced

and again, non-hierarchical approach to how to train actors. Simply put, a reminder that emotion, thinking, and the mind is not separate from actions, doing, and physical being. It offers a connected approach, the physical in the linguistic, the linguistic as physical, blurring boundaries and suggesting that holistic approaches are more alive, real, and useful. I like the fact that, again, revising and applying training techniques connects with the current thinking of us as physical bodies, working within contexts, worlds and interacting with people and environments, to become fuller people.

Move aside / give it up.

What I hear, and choose to highlight, in this writing, is an insistent beat, a steady rhythm towards divergent, collective thinking, teaching and creative practice. Small acts. The training grounds editorial team, below, rightly highlight the theme of a focus on increased 'access' in their review of *essai*, postcards and conference review. This word, 'access', much used in current aspirational Higher Education mission statements, suggests an important opening of pathways so more people can participate. Perhaps 'moving aside' or giving it up might also be added as concrete actions – where the privileged don't just open the door, or change the conditions, but actively give up territory, space, and occupation. I hear Rustom Barucha's call, for pragmatic activism – 'if theatre changes the world, nothing could be better, but let us also admit that this has not happened so far. It would be wiser (and less euphoric) if we accepted that it is possible to change our own lives through theatre.' (1990:10). What will I give up? What space or time can I make, for those who have less? Acts of hope are everywhere possible, on all kinds of scale. The writings here will not change the world, but they do propose, to we who encounter them, suggestions for changing our practice – artistic, pedagogic, personal, or political. Small suggestions of hope-in-action.

Training Grounds

The core of our Training Ground pieces is centred around access, with different contributors reflecting on this theme from several perspectives. American trainer Rob Roznowski offers, in his *Essai*, a first-hand account of negotiating student mental health needs and the impact a mental health first aid course had on his teaching. Alongside this we have four postcards and one speaking image, which span a variety of different contexts:

In her postcard Jane Streeton, singing tutor, discusses the inspiration of having a BSL interpreter when teaching singing to a student. She highlights the profound experience and insights that this situation offers and the importance of the positioning of three people, rather than two, in the practice room. Alongside the written component Jane includes a striking performance image.

In *Architectures of Access*, Lucy Curtis, discusses her approach to access with reference to a targeted inclusion programme at The National Youth Theatre and she gives two interesting examples to illustrate her approach, as well as an exuberant image of her students.

Rob Roznowski asks the question, 'Is there a better time to be an acting teacher?' He cites several 'social movements' which have instigated much needed radical change and, within these changes, reinvented the classroom in exciting and innovative ways.

Jeni Seo discusses access and imagination in her beautifully illustrated postcard focussing on the awakened attention and its story. In her speaking image, titled *An Actor and A Monk: Discovering and navigating impulses*, Jeni gives a brief explanation of the *Awakened Attention Acting Paradigm*, likening the practices of Buddhist monks and actors whilst 'drawing a comparison between their purposes'.

Within the theme of access, Tom Sanigar (Davis) offers a review of a collaborative project The S-Word's one-day London South Bank University symposium on Stanislavsky and Mindfulness. Sanigar (Davis) traces his review along the keynote theme of 'care' reflecting on different perspectives and interpretations of what we group under Stanislavskian approaches.

And we are delighted to include an interview with the renowned expert practitioner of Kalarippayattu, Padma Shri S. R. D. Prasad. Kalarippayattu has a long and deep influence on Indian performing arts. It has also had an important impact on Western theatre trainers/practitioners.

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Guest editor

Misri Dey is Senior Lecturer in Theatre and Acting at Falmouth University, and a theatre maker, performer and dramaturg. She specialises in solo and group performance making and dramaturgies and is author of the monograph *Making Solo Performance (2018)*. Decolonising activities pulse throughout her performance, research, pedagogical, editorial and political work, currently manifest in her new Arts Council funded solo - *Family Tree (2022)*, Research England funded podcast series '*They Just Don't Apply: interviews with people of colour in UK*

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Training grounds editors

Sara Reed is an independent academic, researcher, writer, project manager and a qualified Feldenkrais practitioner. With a career that has spanned a wide range of dance, performance, arts and education contexts, she has published widely in the area of embodied-movement, dance, somatic practices and pedagogy. Her experience includes interdisciplinary teaching across art forms. Sara is an Associate Editor for TDPT Training Grounds and on the Editorial Boards of the Journal of Dance & Somatic Practices and Dance, Movement & Spiritualities. She is Co-chair for Independent Dance.

Thomas Wilson is Programme Director for BA (Hons) European Theatre Arts at Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance, and an Associate Editor for Theatre, Dance and Performance Training Journal. He has a diverse performance background, initially competing internationally in voltage (Equestrian Gymnastics), before training in a range of physically-rooted practices (Contact Improvisation, Butoh, Theatrical Biomechanics) and making work at the intersection of theatre and dance. He served on Accademia Teatro Dimitri's Educational Advisory Commission from 2016–2020. His book *Juggling Trajectories: Gandini Juggling 1991–2015* was shortlisted for the Society of Theatre Research Book Prize in 2016.

Editors

Jonathan Pitches is Professor of Theatre and Performance at the University of Leeds and Head of School of Performance and Cultural Industries. He specialises in the study of performer training and has wider interests in environmental performance and blended learning. He is founding co-editor of the TDPT and has published several books in this area: *Vsevolod Meyerhold* (2003), *Science and the Stanislavsky Tradition of Acting* (2006/9), *Russians in Britain* (2012) and, *Stanislavsky in the World* (with Dr Stefan Aquilina 2017). Recent book publications include: *Great Stage Directors Vol 3: Komisarjevsky, Copeau Guthrie* (sole editor, 2018) and the monograph, *Performing Landscapes: Mountains* (2020). His most recent publication is the co-edited Routledge Companion to Vsevolod Meyerhold (2022) (again with Dr Aquilina).

Libby Worth is Reader in Contemporary Performance Practices, Royal Holloway, University of London. She is a movement practitioner with research interests in the Feldenkrais Method, physical theatres, site-based performance and in folk/traditional and amateur dance. Performances include co-devised duets; *Step Feather Stitch* (2012) and dance film *Passing Between Folds* (2017). She is co-editor of TDPT and has published on *Anna Halprin* (2018 2nd Ed., co-authored), *Ninette de Valois* (2012 co-edited), *Jasmin Vardimon's Dance Theatre* (2016) and *Time and Performer Training* (2019, co-edited). She currently leads an AHRC funded Project: *Dancing Dialogues: Networking research with traditional English and diasporic dance groups practicing in three regions in England*.

