



## Editorial

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To cite this article: Mark Evans , Cass Fleming & Sara Reed (2020) Editorial, Theatre, Dance and Performance Training, 11:3, 245-252, DOI: [10.1080/19443927.2020.1791477](https://doi.org/10.1080/19443927.2020.1791477)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19443927.2020.1791477>



Published online: 10 Sep 2020.



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## Editorial

Mark Evans, Cass Fleming and Sara Reed

This special issue of *Theatre, Dance and Performer Training* addresses the forgotten and marginalised contributions made by various collaborative artists and practitioners to the development of performer training during the twentieth and twenty first centuries.

Many previous publications on training have tended to focus on canonical figures and the dominant historical performer-training narratives. Less attention has been paid to collaboration as an important characteristic of avant-garde performance training, and to the complex exchanges through which pedagogy and work has been developed and disseminated. This journal issue intentionally centralises these acts of cross-fertilisation and collaborative exchanges, thereby shifting the focus away from canonical individual figures and towards frequently overlooked or under-recognised practitioners and pedagogues. In doing so, we are aware that this special issue is not alone in advocating for such a shift of focus. In many respects we see this issue as one particular marking point in a turn away from a linear, white and patriarchal history of theatre, dance and performance training.

Our contributing authors challenge the manner in which traditional performer training histories often still seek to capture the ‘purity’ of established methods and to identify individual owners of successful techniques. This issue will seek to challenge the ways in which practitioners such as Stanislavsky, Craig, Copeau, Laban, Chekhov, Leqoc and Meisner are often uncritically revered as ‘Master Teachers’ and the ways in which this obscures or negates

the existence of wider networks of artists who contributed to the development of these training practices, many of whom were women. To this extent our authors are not looking simply to critique existing canonical figures, but to bring forward the work of those who are usually ignored.

In addition, this edition explores strands of performer training that emerged for artists whose needs, and/or identities, have been poorly catered for, marginalised or damaged by the dominant trainings and institutions in the twentieth century. Thus some of the Training Grounds contributions cover the emergence of performer training and talent development by companies such as Graeae and Tamasha or organisations such as WAC Arts in the UK and The Black Acting Studio and The Black Theatre Association in the USA. These are initiatives that have sought to challenge and disrupt conventional and canonical processes of training and to offer creative and inclusive alternatives. Other contributions re/present individual artists, both historical and contemporary, whose work offers a different perspective on well-known canonical practice (for example, Falke-Heller, Pagneux and Reeve).

The intention of this special edition to re-position some of those practitioners marginalized by gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, socio-economics or disability follows larger, and older, feminist, post-colonial, Afrocentric, materialist and queer projects in relation to historical research. For example, the reconsideration of women within the

wider discourse of history, and as an intellectual field in its own right, has continued and expanded into different fields since the 1970s. However, as Joan Wallach Scott has argued 'women's history does not have a long-standing and definable historiographic tradition within which interpretations can be debated and revised. Instead, the subject of women has been either grafted on to other traditions, or studied in isolation from them' (1999, 16). In the context of performance and theatre studies there is a body of work, which continues this feminist project (see Case 1988; Hart 1989, 1996; Martin 1996; Aston 1999). However, for the most part this field tends either to address a twentieth and twenty-first century canon of (often previously hidden) female, feminist or queer theatre artists, or to consider the material conditions of women working in the theatre industry, or to apply feminist and queer theory to analytic considerations of performance and representation, rather than specifically addressing the history and practice of actor training developed by women and its relation to new forms of theatre making. In contrast, this special issue has sought to move away from a focus on seminal texts or productions, and instead of focusing on these 'products' and their ownership to look at other indicators of worth and value. Alison Hodge's seminal *Twentieth Century Actor Training* (2000) featured Joan Littlewood and in its second edition (2010) included the important work of Ariane Mnouchkine, Monika Pagneux and Anne Bogart. Historical studies of dance training in the past two centuries have represented the contributions made by women to a greater extent, no doubt in large part because so many of the seminal dancers and choreographers in Europe and the USA in the twentieth century were women (for example, Duncan, Wigman, St Denis, Graham, Dunham, Bausch, Brown, Rainer, Butcher and Davies). However, many of the other women involved in this network of training and those who worked with the canonical male practitioners have remained obscured by the larger narratives. Similarly dance training outside the Eurocentric and

North American canon in the twentieth and twenty first centuries has also frequently been omitted from larger historical studies or inadequately addressed.

Gender is, of course, only one of the ways in which canons exclude artists and intersects with race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, socio-economics and disability. The publication of *The Politics of American Actor Training* (Margolis and Renaud 2010) started the important process of addressing these political dimensions of American actor training. The editors ask: 'How are gender, class, and race expressed and perpetuated in acting studios and training programs? What physical and/or vocal gestures of race, class, gender and sexuality do teachers reinforce or even require their students to perform?' (p. 7). This publication also provides important studies on the cultural colonialism of American forms of actor training and the appropriation of South Asian dance forms by American theatre in the 1960s. However, the focus of their publication is the exploration of the politics of actor training that is already known and acknowledged in the Stanislavsky tradition (Stanislavsky, Knebel, Adler), the work of Mnouchkine, Bogart and Suzuki and the voice work of Linklater. Post-colonial studies have placed focus on overlooked forms of ritual, carnival, performance making, dance, dance-theatre and playwriting that developed over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Amkpa 2003; Fischer-Lichte, Jost, and Jain 2014; Gilbert and Tompkins 1996). The conception of, and processes for, training performers both formally and informally are always culturally specific and vary considerably around the world. Sharrell Luckett and Tia Shaffer's key publication *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches* (2016) notes how most training for actors in the USA operates 'within a Eurocentric theoretical framework of performance' (p. 1) and offers a vital intervention by 'paying homage to Black pedagogy while highlighting the need for more culturally and racially diverse perspectives in classrooms' (p. 2). This publication explores Henricks Method, Cristal Chanelle Truscott's

SoulWork, Rebecca Rice's improvisational training methods and Hip Hop pedagogy, amongst other important methodologies. In the British context, the work of companies such as Theatre of Black Women, Tara Arts, Talawa, Tamasha and Yellow Earth has supported the development of important processes of training for actors from black, asian and minority ethnic communities that have not yet been fully explored within the wider context of UK actor training. Similarly in the context of dance practice, the work of Phoenix Dance Theatre, Irie!, Akademi, Shobhana Jeyasingh Dance in the UK and Katherine, Dunham, Honi Coles, Chollyu Atkins, Alvin Alley and others in the USA, have made key contributions to dance training. However the history and significance of these practices, and the development of cultural diversity in dance training is a history that is still being written. Christy Adair's book on Phoenix Dance (2007), Royona Mitra's book on Akram Khan Mitra (2015), Adair and Burt (2016) work on Katherine Dunham and Elroy Josephs (2019) all represent important and valuable contributions to a field that merits much further attention.

Critical analysis of training has, in addition, paid little attention to the experiences, needs and interests of the LGBTQI+ communities. Where it has been tackled, it is often driven by the needs of specific plays or productions, the interests of particular directors and challenges from the field of performance art and dance. It is important to note that censorship and homophobic legislation have also suppressed discussion of these identities and strands of practice until relatively recently in some parts of the world, and continue to do so in many countries. Whilst there have been studies of the performance work of seminal LGBTQI+ practitioners and companies this often ignores or marginalises the training methodologies. While the literature on disabled theatre, dance, circus and performance art is also growing rapidly there is as yet no publication specifically addressing in depth the history of actor and dance training for disabled artists or the development of inclusive training

practices. Adam Benjamin's book (2002) is a practical guide to teaching dance to disabled and non-disabled students. Though historical now, it is still a highly valued and important introduction to this work; however it is not an historical account of training methods in dance. This lineage is therefore still frequently overlooked despite the ground-breaking work of Graeae and Candoco in the UK, Phamaly in the USA and Back to Back in Australia, all of whom have developed methods of performer training. The lack of any academic histories of training for disabled performers sustains the impression within the industry and the academy that either such history does not exist, or it only matters to those directly involved.

In order to move these many marginalized artists, companies and methodologies of performer training to centre stage and to respect their positions of difference or resistance, we have encouraged the contributing authors to use alternative forms of historiography and documentation, diverse critical approaches, and different styles of writing, that they feel might be better suited to explore non-linear cross-fertilisation and the emergence of both historical and new forms of training. Thus the ways of thinking, the styles of writing, as well as the content of each contribution, participates in challenges to the conventional politics of performer training – and – notions of history. Below is a brief outline of the different strategies and points of focus offered by the authors in this issue.

### **Feminist forms of historiography – her-stories, collage, conjecture and gaps**

Scott describes a 'her-story', 'As the play on the word "history" implied, the point was to give value to an experience that had been ignored (hence devalued) and to insist on female agency in the making of history' (1999, 18). She argues that the advantage of this form of historiography is that it 'departs from the framework of conventional history and offers a new narrative, different periodization, and different causes' (1999, 19) and asserts 'that "personal, subjective experience" matters

as much as “public and political activities,” indeed that the former influence the latter’ (1999, 20). However, she highlights a number of problems related to this approach including the way in which it can assume that considering women’s experiences as being valid for historical study attributes automatic worth to everything that women have contributed and that this approach ‘tends to isolate women as a special and separate topic of history’ (1999, 21). Whilst this project does not seek to create a ‘Her-story’ which either automatically assumes that whatever female contributors did was positive and successful, or which isolates them from what has already been defined as a highly collaborative and hybrid exchange with many other practitioners, it will be useful in terms of the way in which it provides the opportunity to create new genealogical narratives, and to consider influential practice from different perspectives. Scott also argues that the feminist historical project could draw on Foucault’s position outlined in his text *The History of Sexuality* and suggests that this would:

end such seeming dichotomies as state and family, public and private, work and sexuality. And it would pose questions about the interconnections among realms of life and social organization now treated quite separate from one another. With this notion of politics, one could offer a critique of history that characterized it not simply as an incomplete record of the past but as a participant in the production of knowledge that legitimized the exclusion or subordination of women. (1999, 26)

In this context, various authors’ contributions demonstrate selective borrowing from the strategies utilised in ‘Her-stories’, along with interconnected approaches. A non-linear, genealogical or rhizomatic form of her-story enables Evans, Fleming, Huxley and Burt, Loukes and Mitchell to reveal the hidden contributions of female practitioners obscured, and on occasion claimed by, their male collaborators. Fleming provides a visual mapping of these different approaches to history and

reveals what changes in this epistemological approach can reveal about the work of Bing and other female practitioners working in France. Huxley and Burt demonstrate how the work of women developed a receptivity for the work of Laban in the UK. Mitchell argues that we need to recognize the ‘atmosphere’ and the intangible in the emergence of Chekhov’s performer training and re-appraise the work of Deirdre Hurst du Prey in this context. Loukes offers a postcard on the work of Gertrud Falke-Heller and Elsa Gindler and Evans explores the contribution made by Monika Pagneux. All these authors also note the significance of embodied history and the transmission of methods through inter-personal exchange. This dismantling of linear models of history also brings forward the training that has evolved completely outside the ‘mainstream’ to cater for artists that have not been adequately provided for due to their race, ethnicity, social class, or disability. This issue also features a postcard from Cornford on the work of Theatre Workshop, and WAC and Graeae offer postcards from their former students. Crow draws on a form of embodied ethnography to better explore the contributions of women working on the margins of ballet practice and Murphy develops an ecological model of history to explore the contribution of a group of female artists working with Edward Gordon Craig at the Arena Goldoni School. Many of these her-stories inevitably intersect with other aspects of identity such as race, ethnicity, religio-ethnicity, sexuality, poverty, pregnancy, motherhood and the related experiences of marginalization experienced.

### **Post Colonial, Afrocentric and Intercultural strategies to decolonise the curriculum and the approach to actor training**

Kristine Landon-Smith discusses her approach to intra-cultural training as a method designed to help the students base their work in a practical understanding of their own cultural heritage. Her work offers support for students who experience the pressure to ‘fit in’ to

ways of being in the world that are implicit in western actor training but may be inimical to the students lived experience. She also notes the damage that is done to student actors from the black and minority ethnic community when they are forced to train in methods that erase, dismiss or marginalize their own cultural identity. Kaja Dunn, Sharrell Luckett and Daphne Sicre, who all work in actor training in the USA, discuss the experience of teaching black and minority ethnic students and of seeking to challenge and change the mainstream institutions and literary canons. They also discuss the place of Afrocentrism as part of these interventions. As Luckett and Tia Shaffer explain 'Afrocentricity argues for the centering of Blackness and Blacks in their education. This centering is critical to identity building and for the express purposes of Blacks to exact agency in their own history. Yet this has not been the case for Blacks in acting' (2016, 3). These interventions offer a serious challenge to current pedagogy and demonstrate the need for urgent changes in the conservatoire and university systems in relation to de-colonizing the curriculum, improving representation, and tackling institutional racism.

The literature on intercultural performance has grown and diversified in recent years (Schechner 1985; Pavis 1996; Fisher-Lichte 1997; Bharucha 2000; Holledge and Tompkins 2002; and others), and the special issue of *Theatre, Dance and Performer Training* on Intercultural Acting and Actor/Performer Training (2016) guest edited by Zarrilli, Sasitharan and Kapur made an important contribution to this field, as did the subsequent book that evolved from the journal issue, *Intercultural Acting and Performer Training* (2019) edited by the same team. However, Barbara Sellers-Young notes that the global discourse on intercultural performance still frequently centres on materialist readings of colonialism, race, gender, authenticity, cultural ownership and the political empowerment of post-colonial subjects. She argues that at the margins of these discussions have been the subjective knowledge of phenomenological experience of

ethnic communities, that are in some cases migrant communities, whose expertise, directly or indirectly, contributes to the style and development of performance. She therefore examines the role of Japanese Americans in the evolution of cultural life and performance training through the lens of Nihon Buyô in the USA. Significantly, she explores case studies of first, second and third generations of immigrant artists and how some of these younger artists are blending Nihon Buyô with contemporary dance in innovative ways. Moreover, she explores what she terms a 'body bilingualism' in their practice. This exciting negotiation and fusion represents a type of intertwining of cultures and has fed into contemporary training.

### **Queer theory and Disability Arts – training disabled, trans and queer actors**

If we consider William Haver's analysis of Deborah Britzman's 'queer pedagogy' as, 'a technique [...] which does not make the world familiar or comfortable [...] but which defamiliarizes, or makes strange, queer or even cruel what we had thought to be a world' (Haver 1997, 291), we can see that several assumptions remain stubbornly embedded in normative discourse. Pearlman and McLaughlin's article, for instance, asks the heterosexual 'we' to rethink whose world is familiar and comfortable and the ways in which differences are projected in teaching and training practices within the canon. Likewise the Training Grounds Postcard from a Graeae participant encourages us to see training for performance from a different perspective and challenge the starting points that are too often assumed to be consistent with social norms of embodiment.

### **Dialogues and provocations**

Several authors have sought to explore how we can start to develop better ways to talk about, document and understand historical practices, and how to avoid replicating the

same forms of exclusionary historical documentation in the future. Such forms of writing have included the use of dynamic dialogue between practitioners that Russell and Dunn employ in their edited contributions. Russell and her colleagues celebrate the difference and diversity of their perspectives and consider ways to further develop Lecoq's pedagogy in the twenty-first century. Dunn and her colleagues open out the complexities, all too painfully significant at this point in 2020, of teaching acting in ways that empower black and minority ethnic students and teachers. Huxley and Burt's article reminds us of the importance of collaborative research, and reflects the rich history of collaborative training and performance practice. Oram offers a dialogue with himself, inspired by the work of Cree/Salteaux/Dakota scholar Shauneen Pete, which enables him to re-think his own form of pedagogy as a voice teacher and scholar. He reminds us of the importance of self-questioning, humour and of the fact that no form of performer training can be free of politics, echoing the influential work of Rancière (1991), Hooks (1994) and Freire (1996). Clarke considers the evolution of Reeve's movement work into a feminist and ecological practice, and Cryer-Lennon and Crews offer a brave, bold manifesto for performer training as a provocation for the future.

The inclusion of these various exchanges and the presentation of collective voices, rather than individual narratives, further challenges the linear and singular models of historiography around performer training. The images presented in the postcards, some of which are from archives, remind us that many lineages are passed through embodied, inter-personal and social exchanges and not written texts or techniques presented as 'products' to be owned.

We write this editorial in the midst of a global pandemic, which we know will have as yet unforeseen consequences for the future of performer training. In the UK and the USA the pandemic has foregrounded the socio-economic, health and racial inequalities that remain embedded in our societies and we recognize the need to ensure that training faces

its responsibility to tackle these challenges. We also write only months after the conviction of Harvey Weinstein, a significant moment for the #MeToo movement and a turning point in terms of how intimacy, touch and consent are factored in to training, teaching and performing. The traditions of face-to-face teaching within which many of us trained have been and will continue to be profoundly challenged by both of these events.

As we finish the work on this special issue, we are also confronting the brutal realities of George Floyd's murder, symbolic of the systemic racism in the US, UK and elsewhere, and the urgent necessity for the performing arts academy and the relevant industries to both acknowledge and challenge the racism that exists in all aspects of life, and to listen out for, reflect on and call out white privilege and its effects.

What is heartening is to see the move that has happened over this period towards collaboration, awareness and empowerment; to see those whose contribution and role has previously been marginalized being acknowledged and accepted; and to see not only history and profile being challenged but also processes and practices. We hope that this special issue will invite further interventions, revelations and provocations. 'Training: Against the Canon' does not mark the beginning or the end of intervention into the canon by *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* and the hope is that future editions of the journal and submissions to the journal blog (<http://theatredanceperformancetraining.org>) will reveal, explore and celebrate other hidden performance trainers and processes. Readers are encouraged to submit their own reflections on other marginalized trainers, and provocations that continue this dismantling of the canon and recognition of difference and diversity.

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### Guest editors, special issue

**Mark Evans** has, since 2012, held a personal chair as Professor of Theatre Training and Education, and until August 2019 was Associate Dean (Student Experience) in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. He trained originally at the *École Jacques Lecoq*, and with Philippe Gaulier and Monika Pagneux, in Paris. As well as teaching and researching theatre practice he has over fifteen years' experience of directing and performing new plays, site-specific performances, and community projects. He is an Associate Editor of the Theatre, Dance and Performance Training journal and has published widely on performer training and the history and development of physical theatre.

**Cass Fleming** is a Lecturer in Theatre and Performance at Goldsmiths, a theatre director, and trainer of actors and directors. Her practice and research centres on the use of play in actor training and theatre making processes, particularly those developed by Suzanne Bing and Michael Chekhov (2013). She is the Founder and Co-Director of The Chekhov Collective UK (<https://chekhovcollectiveuk.co.uk/>) and co-edited Michael Chekhov Technique in the Twenty-First Century: New Pathways with Tom Cornford (Bloomsbury, 2020). She and Evans wrote about

Jacques Copeau, and Bing's work, in *The Great European Stage Directors, Vol. 3* (Bloomsbury, 2018).

**Sara Reed** is Principal Lecturer and Associate Professor of Dance and a member of the School of Media and Performing Arts and the Centre for Dance Research (C-DaRE). She is an associated editor for the Theatre, Dance and Performance Training –Training Grounds; on the Editorial Board for the Journal of Dance, Movement and Spiritualities (*Intellect Journals*) and a reviewer for the Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices. Sara is a trustee for Independent Dance and a trustee for Wriggle Dance Theatre – for children and families. Sara is a qualified Feldenkrais Practitioner and she trained with Scott Clark and Elizabeth Beringer in London.

### The editors

**Jonathan Pitches** is Professor of Theatre and Performance at the University of Leeds in the School of Performance and Cultural Industries. He specialises in the study of performer training and has wider interests in intercultural performance, 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). His most recent publications are: Great Stage Directors Vol 3: Komisarjevsky, Copeau, Guthrie (Sole editor, 2018) and the monograph, Performing Mountains (2020).

**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 published texts include Anna Halprin (2004, co-authored), Ninette de Valois: Adventurous Traditionalist (2012, co-edited), Jasmin Vardimon's Dance Theatre: Movement, Memory and Metaphor (2016). Chapter contributions include on clog and sword dancing for Time and Performer Training (2019, she co-edited) and 'Improvisation in Dance and the Movement of Everyday Life' for the Oxford Handbook of Dance Improvisation (2019).