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Contact: gala@gre.ac.uk

Preface

It is highly likely that the majority of you are reading these words on a screen rather than on paper in a hard copy of the journal. You are probably facing a desktop computer or a laptop, possibly even a tablet or mobile phone. Whatever device you are using, along with the various capabilities to see/hear other things and annotate, the screen involves you – your embodiment and capacity for cognition – in ways other than holding a book in your hands. The *activity* of reading may have remained the same (i.e. you are still ‘reading words’ and looking at photographs), but the *act* of reading has changed.

This special issue of *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* on ‘Digital Training’ explores some aspects of how performer training as an act – i.e. as a practice in its various forms – is affected and effected in a digital environment. What tools and platforms can be brought to bear on the experience of training? How do screens and devices influence the time and space of training? For example, what is the effect on the trainee’s attention or the student’s ability to be self-reflexive and their capacity for notation? Does the trainer’s role change in such an environment and, if so, how? Questions like these foreground our ‘being in the world’ in the twenty-first century as much as they reflect the changing landscape that is performer training today.

In sending out our initial special issue call, we were keen to embrace the broadest notion of training, including but also going well beyond the performance studio. We also wanted to know more not only about how we might **do** training digitally, but also how we show, articulate or reflect on it whilst doing? In performer training, where does the digital begin and end? We are of course all performing continually, something of which social media make us especially conscious, but how might these self-same media enhance or damage training practices? Who has not turned to youtube films or other digital resources to learn how to mend a bike puncture or some-such practical task, to do your makeup, cook a meal, learn some yoga? The ways are legion in which we interact or mould and present ourselves through digital means on a daily basis. Beyond such now quite normalised activities, there are increasing possibilities for more bizarre or challenging technology-human interactions, from robot hotel concierges or sex dolls through to personalised ‘yogabot’ teachers. How might any of these change understanding and practices of training?

Set against these technological advances, for this relationship has typically been positioned oppositionally, are the live interactive processes of performer training, person to person. This is the familiar stuff of this journal, from accounts of personal experiences in the studio, through analyses of and reflections on particular pedagogic processes past and present, to specific focuses on a technique (Feldenkrais), a place (Dartington), or a person (Michael Chekhov), to name the focus of three *TDPT* special issues. Liveness in training has often been considered the be all, but, we suggest, it is not the end all. In our special issue we want to broaden perspectives to consider how digital tools, processes or resources might enhance the act of training, avoiding the binary of live as being better than online. We wish to celebrate but also understand better their capacity to extend, challenge or simply alter training. How do such processes change notions of what a trainer is, what it is to be trained, what teaching and studying are, and where and how they can happen?

It sometimes seems that modes of transmission in training have been fixed rather narrowly for decades, however broad the types of practice conducted within this spectrum. Given current desires to break down or at least interrogate such hierarchies as that of the teacher-pupil or master-trainee, to empower students and young people (of course these are not one and the same thing), to provide greater access to materials and processes too often the prerogative of a Northern hemispheric and Western elite, can digital training offer powerful alternatives which might soon become future norms? What are the politics and social implications of digital training?

Each of our six articles and [Training Grounds pieces and related Blog entries](#) offers different responses to some of these questions, exploring digital training in a range of ways in relation to diverse media and modes of interaction. One unusual feature of our collection is that half of the articles are cowritten; even though Paul Allain is listed as sole author for his piece, close collaborator Stacie Lee Bennett-Worth prepared the photos and his essay is very much about a team project. This perhaps speaks to the complexity of working with technology, the fact that different skill sets are often needed to maximise technology's potential. It also suggests that multiple presences can help to offset the absorption that digital tools can entail or in fact might require: just think of how the camera person-editor relationship works in film. Interestingly, the majority of our article writers, 6 out of 10, are women, perhaps belying commonly held assumptions about the dominance of men in tech-related areas.

Three articles reflect on university educational and rehearsal practices with students that utilised digital technologies. In 'Training the *Homo Cellularis*: Attention and the Mobile Phone', Maria Kapsali considers a student project with mobile phones in order to address questions about the value which both attention and distraction might have in training processes. She examines how the creative use of mobile phones may invite us to reconsider 'the way attention is exercised and understood within performer training'. In her case study, student performers deployed mobile phones to send performance commands remotely across small distances. Kapsali deploys this example to think through how technologies can extend and challenge familiar understandings of the space for training and performance, how the mobile phone might act as *pharmakon*, both poison and cure.

Tom Gorman, Tiina Syrja, and Mikko Kanninen stretch this potential for spatial interaction quite a bit further than Kapsali's on-campus project. Their account of a remote rehearsal collaboration between British and Finnish colleagues and students shows the complexities of not just how to rehearse *King Lear* or *Coriolanus* across a 1,500-mile distance, but also how social media and digital platforms like Adobe Connect facilitated learning and training outside of the virtual and actual rehearsal spaces, helped to close this physical, geographical gap. Quite pragmatically, they explain some of the difficulties in using such telepresence but also celebrate the gains. As with all the pieces, we learn how working digitally can alter notions of space, time, the body and human contact and interaction. Technology can confound and bemuse us, but it also opens immense possibilities (although how quickly we take these for granted). As just one example, the use of scale intrigued the authors: in a world without actual physical contact between the two groups, when the student actors approached the camera, their presence became greatly magnified to the cast many miles away whilst also creating a strong sense of intimacy.

Paul Allain's 'Physical Actor Training 2.0. New digital horizons' also promotes the benefits of digital technologies, in this instance focusing on capturing and distilling but also presenting training processes through online publication. He traces the development of a

substantial online resource, an A-Z, created with this issue's co-editors, Camilleri and Bennett-Worth, which in turn led to this special issue. The project involved filming Camilleri's and his own training sessions which were then edited down into 66 films and published along with other companion materials such as an extensive reading/viewing list on Methuen Drama Bloomsbury's [Drama Online](#) platform and their own open access [digital performer webpage](#).

Allain's article is accompanied **in Training Grounds** by Franc Chamberlain's original take on what is normally conceived of in this and most other journals as a book review. Here, instead of focusing on literature, Chamberlain compares two major online resources for theatre, dance and performance scholars and students – Routledge Performance Archive (RPA) and Digital Theatre+. Both websites offer an abundance of workshop films, interviews, and textual materials about practitioners and practices, though the latter focuses more on filmed performances, whilst the RPA mostly explores process. Allain's article references these as both stimuli for the A-Z and as fellow companion resources that will inevitably change the way students learn and even train.

Sarah Crews and Christina Papagiannouli's 'InstaStan – FaceBrook – Brecht+: A Performer Training Methodology for the Age of the Internet' investigates how students can use digital tools to enhance their learning, in this case exploring how different social media platforms were used to better understand three key director figures of the modern age: Konstantin Stanislavski, Peter Brook and Bertolt Brecht. The authors invited the students to embrace new possibilities for rehearsing, researching, training, and reflecting, working mainly with Instagram, Facebook and Google. When they are fully integrated into the students' learning rather than being demonised, when the teachers 'work *with* rather than *for* the students', new performance techniques and practices can arise as digital doors open.

In a similar vein, Göze Saner and Scott Robinson write in 'Designing Performer Training: Digital Encounters with Things and People' about their practice research projects. Their partnership of Robinson as designer, documenter and video-artist and Saner as actor/practitioner-researcher and lecturer shows how playing with technology can unpick training processes, specifically with reference to the absence of a teacher-trainer and a shared space. They focus on what they call 'constructed enactive pedagogic spaces' that engage digital technology not only to improve the skills of participants but also to reappraise ('deconstruct' as they call it) existing exercises. In doing so, Saner and Robinson conjure an enticing correlation between *how to train* (the resources used) and *what it means to train* (the nature of training).

In 'Training the Analytical Eye: Video Annotation for Dance', Rebecca Stancliffe offers a welcome shift away from live studio and creative practices as she examines how dance tools might be used for annotating choreography. She offers a useful survey of some key practices, most notably William Forsythe's long-term research in how to document and open up choreographic process with a range of digital processes. For Stancliffe, video annotation becomes a form of *dialogical mnemotechnics*. It can encourage what she calls *annotational thinking*, 'an iterative and recursive process of grammatisation'. Such documents create dense multi-layered artificial memories that can even train the student as they deepen their understanding of dance. Training is enacted through the process of looking as much as dancing in a studio. What is being posited here, and to some extent in all the articles, is that we train ourselves and are trained in so many more ways than just the overly familiar and too-dominant live in-the-studio interaction between trainer and trainee.

Some themes recur across the articles **and other pieces**. We learn how digital tools and processes aid deeper analysis, can offer greater insights, may help us share work, and can lead to creative innovation. All well and good. Perhaps we don't need to be reminded of the possible negative effects they can also have on our physical and mental behaviour and wellbeing, something that figures rather in the background here, but clearly not to be overlooked. Rather our authors promote the need to face into such possibilities, challenges and risks, to bring what is so pervasive outside the 'studio' (which we take in its broadest sense as any place in which training occurs) into its practices. This goes far beyond the ubiquitous use of Moodle, Blackboard and MOOCs in current educational practices, and tries, in Allain's article and **Chamberlain's review** especially, to emphasise the need for trainers and educators to take control of and offer curated resources as antidotes to the mass of materials in which we all can and frequently do get lost online.

In collating these papers we were also very mindful, **as the opening to our preface highlights**, of **how technology so quickly changes**. Expensive software, systems and access become quickly outmoded, sometimes impossible to engage with, as much as fashions change. We have tried to capture a moment, only too aware of how passing this might be.

The Training Grounds materials in this issue demonstrate the innovative and diverse discourses opening up around digital training for theatre, dance and performance. ZU-UK's discussion of training for interactive performance offers a glimpse at artists who have transitioned between the purely body-based practices of Twentieth Century performance and the hybrid styles of technology-assisted, interactive performance. The text of this discussion represents the multi-modal modes of their working practices, having been reconstituted from written email and audio responses from different times and locations. Jo Scott's Postcard provides an invitation to break down the distinction between the natural environment and the use of digital technology in training, challenging the recipient to bring these two worlds together in an exploration of digital training in nature. Kris Darby's postcard, by contrast, initiates an exercise of coding as performance that allows participants to interact through programming and hacking practices. The essay from James McLaughlin documents an ongoing attempt to bring the TDPT Blog into his training practice as a resource for his students and a platform for their ongoing praxis.

Paul Allain, Stacie Lee Bennett-Worth, Frank Camilleri, with James McLaughlin, Thomas Wilson