

## **Editorial: Training for Performance Art and Live Art**

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### **Radical remoteness?: training for performance art and live art in the age of social distancing**

It is early May, 2020. The eight weeks between finalising the editing of this special issue on “Training for performance art and live art” in mid-March and writing this introduction have been the most extraordinary period of my life, likely of anyone’s life. When I submitted the last batch of edits to the publishers, I had just completed another full week of teaching, having worked with my theatre students as usual face-to-face in seminar rooms, lecture theatres and studios. Three days later, we all found ourselves confined to our homes as the UK went into lockdown to join the near-global domestic sheltering, from which we have yet to emerge. I, alongside lecturers, teachers, instructors and trainers all over the world, have had to move my teaching online and am now connecting with my students via video conferencing platforms and virtual discussion boards, trying to reach across our physical remoteness with the kind of detached proximity that digital technology is so adept at simulating.

Among the many areas of life that have been thrown into crisis by the COVID-19 pandemic—health and public health provision, our economic system, the organisation of our social and political life—is also teaching and training; and possibly nowhere is this more evident than in performance. The issue is not that it is impossible to deliver training in and teaching of performance knowledges remotely. Difficult, yes, but not impossible. We can still foster conceptual imagination and critical thinking when we guide students through online tasks and prompts; we can still encourage collaboration facilitated by virtual meeting spaces; we can still be there to answer questions and clarify misunderstandings by way of emails or chatrooms; and we can still connect face-to-face, even if our faces are now neatly lined up in small windows on the screens in front of us. As Jonathan Pitches reminded us in a recent posting on the *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* blog (Pitches 2020), even aspects of embodied learning and training in performance can be delivered online—the success of Pitches’ own groundbreaking MOOC (Massive Open Online Course), ‘Exploring Physical Theatre’, for FutureLearn is confirmation of this (Pitches n.d.). Unequal access to technologies certainly is a major problem; but in-person teaching too is marked by access inequalities of various kinds.

The crisis of performance training and teaching may be less to do with actual pedagogical practices and the challenges of moving them into online spaces and, eventually, back into real spaces under social-distancing rules. Rather, it concerns the profound way in which it affects the discourses that have underwritten these practices. In another recent TDPT blog post that reflects on the impact of the current pandemic on our field, Felipe Cervera suggests as much: 'The actual crisis that we face' he proposes, '[...] is a crisis in the foundational arguments that dance, theatre, and performance made to academia in their fight to legitimize their knowledge(s) as distinct from, and not a subsection of, literature or history (for discipline and degree specialization). It is also a crisis that unsettles the argument that they made to the contemporary economy on their value and specificity concerning other media.' (Cervera 2020) The acute emergency of this pandemic will, hopefully, be temporary; but the impact it is having on our understanding of what performance is and what it does, and how it can be learned, transferred and shared, may prove lasting. It goes hand-in-hand with the immense impact the pandemic has on the future of performance to be practiced at all and on the personal futures of those who practise it, whose already often precarious existence as artists or non-institutional scholars has been thrown into turmoil.

Why begin the introduction to a collection of articles on the training and teaching practices in performance art and live art with this reflection? After all, the articles were written long before the pandemic hit, and none offer a direct response (if such a response were even possible at this point in time). I start from here because I cannot really think about anything else at present; and because the current crisis filters the ways in which I now think about the themes and practices that are discussed in these pages.

This special issue arose from the suspicion that the absence of a developed discourse about training in performance art and live art is not an indication of the absence of training itself. As someone who studies the experimental time-, body- and action-focused art practices that we have come to group under this catch-all term 'performance art', or its later variant, 'live art', I have been interested in how deeply the histories of these practices have been imbricated with those of education and its institutions. Many artists who have shaped performance art and live art have also been committed teachers and activist educators; pedagogical approaches to the teaching of performance practices emerged at the same time as the practices themselves; educational institutions have frequently offered material support for the making of performance works and provided a living for artists; and the integration of performance into their provision has led to changes to the organisational structures and procedures of both art schools and universities. At the same time, performance artists and live artists have devised radical artist-led models of anti-training, created non-institutional spaces of learning and adopted events and publications as

alternative forms of curricula.

And yet, the claim that (to paraphrase artist Esther Ferrer) performance art and live art cannot be taught, only practiced persists among many artists and scholars. As I have indicated, a renewed attention to the discourses that underwrite our practices and to our particular investments in them has made me look at this notion in another way. The important question may indeed not be whether one can be trained in performance art and live art; instead, the question should be what is at stake in asserting that one cannot. Historically, for radical artists of Esther Ferrer's generation, the stakes were unquestionably high. When artists in the 1960s and 1970s disavowed their own histories and practices of training, it was to disassociate themselves from the traditional associations of training with mastery or conformity to standards in which they themselves would have been educated, emphasising instead open-ended experimentation, a radical questioning of norms and rules of any kind, and an expansive (and still expanding) understanding of what might be considered as performance art and live art. Correspondingly, we should ask what has been at stake for us in recent years in asserting that training and teaching have played key parts in the development of performance art and live art? As many of the contributions in this issue show, uncovering the radical pedagogical roots of performance assists us, for example, in envisaging alternatives to our neoliberal, marketised education. And acknowledging training not just in the formation of a performance artist but as part of their continuing practice also means valuing experience, expertise and professional standing as an essential part of performance art and live art work.

And, we could ask, what might be at stake in the future in asserting the importance of training and teaching for performance art and live art (and conversely, perhaps, the importance of performance art and live art for training and teaching) in an age of social distancing? While for many performance art and live art practitioners, the close encounter of bodies in space remain an essential component of both performance and training for performance (which includes many of the contributions in this issue), the current situation has shed light on a parallel lineage in performance art and live art that has at its heart an examination of transfers and connections across remoteness. Performance artist and live artists have long circulated scores and instructions, artists' publications and documentations as didactic tools that work at a distance to shift the agency from artist to audience or teacher to student and with which to make teaching independent of hierarchical institutional frameworks. Furthermore, as documented in this issue, performance art and live art have been particularly effective in developing infrastructures for pedagogical exchanges, whether through festivals and platforms, workshop programmes or summer schools, to redress existing inequalities of access, or simply to share new approaches to art making among a geographically dispersed artistic network. Traditionally such infrastructures

have been designed to bring people together in shared spaces, but many have recently proven themselves to be surprisingly adaptable to being moved onto virtual platforms.

It is perhaps from performance as a creative approach to remoteness, rather than as an ontology of co-presence, that we may be able to build our future training for performance art and live art in the new age of social distancing.

### **Training for performance art and live art**

There is a small but growing body of literature that attends to questions of training and teaching in performance art and live art, to which this special issue is aiming to make a contribution. There is a lack of precision in my use of the terms ‘training’ and ‘teaching’, terms that this journal has done much important work to differentiate and hold discrete. I want to propose, however, that in reference to performance art and live art, training practices and teaching practices, and, indeed, performance practices cannot always be easily differentiated. ‘Training’ for performance artist may include the acquisition of techniques for rigorous physical and mental preparation, but also the development of the kinds of imaginative and conceptual knowledges and skills that have been the object of pedagogical instruction; and avant-garde art practices themselves often have a didactic dimension in their urge toward engagement and transformation. With the development of research into training and teaching practices in performance art and live art, differentiations may become more nuanced. More difficult than terminology in the development of this area of research is access to training and teaching practices in performance art and live art, as past classroom, workshop and studio activities tend to be even less well documented than past performance works.

Some attention has been paid to the pedagogical practices of key artists in the canon of performance art and live art, including John Cage, Allan Kaprow, Joseph Beuys, Alison Knowles and Marina Abramović (eg. Finkelpearl 2013; Moss 2016; Verwoert 2008). These artists have often considered their writings as platforms for their teaching practice, not just literal class work, and scholarship has tended to focus on the more accessible published works, statements and teaching manifestos. In addition, there are interviews with the artists-teachers (eg. Cage in Kirby and Schechner 1965; Cage in Fetterman 1996; Beuys, Cage, Kaprow et al in Filliou 1970) or accounts by the students they taught (eg. Al Hansen on Cage’s class at the New York New School, 1956–1960, Hansen 1965) that allow a glimpse into the actual instructions they carried out in studios and classrooms. The most substantive publication by any performance artist on the practice of teaching is Abramović’s *Student Body* (2004), which combines a reprint of her lectures with extensive documentation of performance work by her students. A further strand in the history of performance art and live art are those artists who approached performance art itself as an experimental pedagogical practice. Foremost among them is Robert Filliou, whose publication, *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts* (1970), approached the participatory practices of Fluxus and Happenings as a kind of interdisciplinary laboratory, from which techniques of engagement could be applied to wider fields of social and economic practice; and subsequent scholarship has focused on the history of Fluxus more widely as a form of

experientially charged, emancipatory pedagogy (Higgins 2002; Krstich 2006).

Filliou also worked on plans for an alternative educational institution, the 'Institute of Permanent Creation', which he envisaged to be jointly run by artists and students. The desire for alternative institutional frameworks and radical educational reform that would inform social and political as well as artistic change was shared by many of his fellow performance artists and informed as broad a range of projects as, for example, Kaprow's educational programme for the Berkeley public schools in 1969, *Project Other Ways*, and Beuys's *Free International University*. Research into the key role that educational institutions, whether alternative such as these projects or established, have played in the history of performance art and live art is again a growing area of scholarly attention.

Finally, there are a dozen or so publications that have focused on existing approaches to training and teaching performance art and live art, often written by performance artists themselves and deeply informed by their own experience as instructors. An early example is Anthony Howell's, *The Analysis of Performance Art - A Guide to its Theory and Practice* (1999), which juxtaposes workshop exercises on what he identifies as the three elements of a 'grammar' of action—stillness, repetition and inconsistency—with reflections on their psychoanalytical repercussions. Published in the same year, Charles S. Garoian's *Performing Pedagogy* (1999) starts from the belief that, in light of postmodern theories of self and society, performance art that emerges from an exploration of personal, cultural and historical matters has a unique role to play in contemporary education, to which it can contribute its radical qualities, emancipatory goals and interdisciplinary methods. Sharing a similar passion for performance as a driver of social change, Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Roberto Sifuentes, in *Exercises for Rebel Artists: Radical Performance Pedagogy* (2011), provide a manual to the activist performance methods and workshop practices of their group, La Pocha Nostra. Helen Paris and Leslie Hill (Curious) have published a number of books (eg. Paris and Hill 2004) that marry theoretical and analytical examinations of aspects of performance practice with workshop exercises and other creative tools. An example for an essay that attempts a similar critical reflection on pedagogical practices from the perspective of an artist-teacher is Marilyn Arsem's 'Some Thoughts on Teaching Performance Art' (2011). Valentin Torrens' edited compendium, *How we teach performance art* (2014), collects university course outlines and workshop syllabi from over forty performance artists worldwide alongside theoretical reflections; Pilvi Porkola's *Performance Artist's Workbook: On Teaching and Learning Performance Art* (2017) similarly combines essays and exercises, but focuses on shorter individual instructions, again donated by performance artists working internationally. The German language *Performativität erfahren. Aktionskunst lehren - Aktionskunst lernen*, edited by Marie-Louise Lange (2006) too asks artists and art educators to share examples of their teaching practice. Further collections of essays on the topic have appeared as part of *Performance Research's* special issue 'On Radical Education' (2016), edited by Ric Allsopp and Michael Hiltbrunner; and in the bilingual (English; German) volume, *Performatives Lehren Lernen Forschen - Performative Teaching Learning Research*, edited by Susanne Even and Manfred Schewe. (2016).

To add to the growing conversation on the topic, this special issue of *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* on training for performance art and live art encouraged potential

contributors to consider topics such as:

- distinct pedagogical approaches to the teaching of performance and live artists
- experimental and alternative modes of training in performance art and live art
- models of anti-training in performance
- the role of educational institutions in the emergence of performance art and live art
- the role of anti-institutional, counter-educational or deschooling initiatives in the emergence of performance art and live art (eg. anti-universities; artist-run schools; cooperatives; workshops; laboratories)
- approaches to learning and 'unlearning' in performance training
- models of the 'self-taught' performance artist
- training as continuing artistic practice
- translocal or transnational exchanges and collaborations (eg. festivals; residencies; magazines; mail art) and their impact on the pedagogies of performance art and live art
- the impact of key teachers on the development of performance art and live art
- publications on the pedagogy and training of performance art and live art and their impact
- artists books; charts; games or kits as alternative curriculum models for performance art and live art
- alternative spaces and models for intergenerational exchanges in the framework of teaching and learning performance art and live art
- the documentation of teaching practices in the field of performance art and live art
- research approaches to the histories of training in performance art and live art
- the impact of the 'pedagogization' of performance art and live art on artistic development
- institutional legacies of performance art training
- strategies for the re-activation of past pedagogies for the future of performance art and live art

## **Contributions**

The response to the call was very positive, and from a strong field of proposed contributions we selected six full-length articles, which address the theme of training for performance art and live art in reference to its different histories (covering the 1960s and 1970s as well as the recent present); diverse geographies (examining developments in the UK and in Portugal); range of institutions and anti-institutions (covering art schools, summer schools, festivals and workshop programmes); and varied approaches to teaching and training as a performative inter-generational transaction. The Training Grounds section (edited and introduced below by Bryan Brown) supplements this with a collection of shorter essays, postcards, and a book review (edited by Chris Hays).

Two articles explore performance art and live art's relationship to pedagogy from an historical perspective. They both emerge from substantive, long-term research enquiries; and they affirm that an attention to the pedagogies of performance can bring other histories into view, helping to decentralise established narratives about the emergence and development of performance art.

Gavin Butt's 'Without Walls: Performance Art and Pedagogy at the "Bauhaus of the North"'

traces the impact of libertarian teaching in the 1970s at arguably the most influential teaching institutions for the history of performance art in the UK, Leeds Polytechnic. Mingling influences from the Bauhaus with elements of sixties counterculture, Leeds encouraged students to traverse artistic limits, shaping a particular British approach to performance art that crossed from fine art practice into theatre, from avant-garde influences into those of popular culture, and from individual creation into collective work. Butt examines the reasons for the eventual unravelling of the 'horizontalized' educational model of the 'Leeds experiment', inviting us to consider more closely claims to educational progressiveness and their complex legacies.

In 'Lessons from Outside the Classroom: Performance Pedagogies in Portugal, 1970-1980', Cláudia Madeira and Fernando Matos Oliveira highlight another important narrative of performance and pedagogy at the edges of established histories. Drawing on a variety of primary sources, they recount approaches to performance training as they developed in Portugal in the wake of the 1974 revolution. Outside of formal institutions, communities of artists in urban and rural contexts, alongside the crucial input of two 'critic curators', Egídio Álvaro and Ernesto de Sousa, created the conditions for experiments in performance practice and pedagogy that were in close conversation with (but, crucially, never subsumed by) more canonical European performance scenes.

Performance historian Jennie Klein has argued that the growth of performance art and live art in the UK has largely been due to artists' ability to create 'institutional support that was anti-institutional in appearance and nature'. (2012) Two key initiatives in this anti-institutional institutional support system are being discussed in the articles by Heddon and Greer.

Deirdre Heddon's 'Professional Development for Live Artists: Doing it Yourself' explores the history of the DIY project, a 'professional development' scheme for live artists initiated by the Live Art Development Agency, in partnership with the Live Art Advisory Network, in 2002 and continuing to this day. Heddon explores how DIY manages to take seriously the need of artists working in performance art and live art to further their skills, whilst at the same time challenging the prescriptive templates for professional development that exist in the worlds of mainstream art and business. DIY does so, Heddon argues, by handing over the interpretation of what might count as professional training to the artists themselves, which has led to a reimagining of such training practices as live art practices in themselves.

Stephen Greer's article, 'Training for Live Art: Process Pedagogies and New Moves International's Winter Schools', focuses on New Moves International (NMI)'s winter school, an annual programme of courses that offered training and development for performance and live artists, and that ran in Glasgow between 2003 and 2011. Greer portrays the winter school as another key example for an artist-led scheme that made productive live art's resistant relationship to established forms of performer training. Greer argues that in drawing on live art's own practices of experimentation and foregrounding process as an end in itself, the winter schools developed a model that approached training in terms of a continual commitment to exploration rather than the acquisition of specific skills.

The close relationship between training and making in performance art and live art are explored by the final two essays included in this special issue.

In “‘I’ve been as intimate with him as I have been with anybody’”: Queer Approaches, Encounters and Exchanges as Live Art Performer Training’, Kieran Sellar engages with the complex dynamics of performer training that are present in the cross-generational performance collaboration between Sheree Rose and Martin O’Brien. Drawing on interviews with the two artists alongside key queer scholarship, Sellars approaches Roses’ and O’Brien’s performances themselves as a reframing of received patrilineal and heteronormative ideas about ‘training’. Sellars carefully lays out the various pedagogies of the body that occur in the dynamic intimacies between the two performers, recognising a form of queer embodied discipline that draws on BDSM as well as Live Art lineages.

In ‘Curious Methods—Pedagogy Through Performance’ Leslie Hill and Helen Paris document their extensive history with performer training, and the close ways in which their training methods have reflected on and contributed to their creation of live performance work. Hill and Paris offer detailed accounts of a range of workshops, and generously share their tools and exercises and the conceptual ideas that underpin them. Among the three teaching instances on which they reflect is their pioneering online MOOC for Stanford University, *Practice-Based Research in the Arts*, in which over 5,000 scholar-artists from 30 countries participated in 2013. Hill and Paris identify as the most rewarding long-term outcome of the course its creation of a practice-focused community of performance makers interested in critical dialogue—an instance where performance is addressed not as incompatible with but as a response to a situation defined by remoteness and distance.

[...]

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