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Turning Back to Training

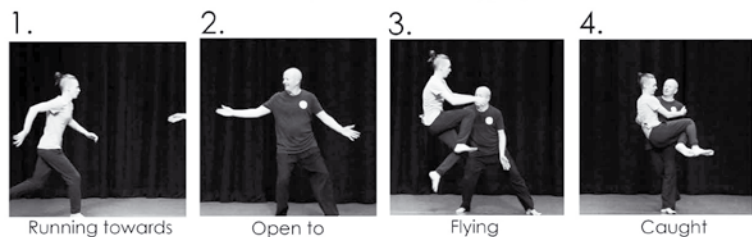
PAUL ALLAIN & STACIE LEE BENNETT

'On Training' was published nearly a decade ago in 2009. Since then, there seems to have been no waning in the public's interest in and enthusiasm for training in all its possible guises, arising in part from unceasing anxiety about our health. In fact, desire and engagement have probably grown. We keep on training. Who doesn't have or know someone who has a Fitbit activity tracker or similar, counting steps daily, at least until curiosity wanes or the body tires? The surge of interest within theatre and performance specifically, which the editors noted in 2009, has become so much more than that outside our fields, perhaps a tidal wave even. Training is now a thriving global concern with its constituent elements of well-being, mindfulness and other buzz terms, its practices of hot yoga, meditation on the go and countless diets – in short, it is big business.

Digital training, by which I mean using digital tools as instruments within training processes but also to document them, has also jumped forward in leaps, bounds and bytes. There is so much on YouTube alone that can instruct us how to live, live better, train. However much such developments progress digitally, in theatre and performance training at least, ghosts of the past are always present. Collectively, our theatre forebears inhabit us, as we move, think, listen to and speak with them. Personally, we are also inhabited by our former ghost selves, recalling memories of things we once did while pondering those we still want to do, and perhaps now can't. Many things we can train for, but some are beyond us. Only Photoshop can make some (training) dreams come true.

Ghosts also accompany those viewing training. We anticipate and already see what has not yet happened, imaginatively filling in the trajectory of

ON TRAINING to catch a partner in the 'baby jump'.



One grounded and ready, the other running at ease. Aiming above and beyond. Push off from one foot. Look to the skies. A moment suspended. Caught at the height of the arc, land lightly on the chest, weight balanced. Wrap arms around legs. Breathing together...



movement in advance. We hear sounds perhaps unspoken, unuttered. In the digital traces presented on these pages here, we see a sequence as one image, the then and now woven digitally together. Where is the end point, the beginning, the middle? Training dissolves in the blur of flow ...

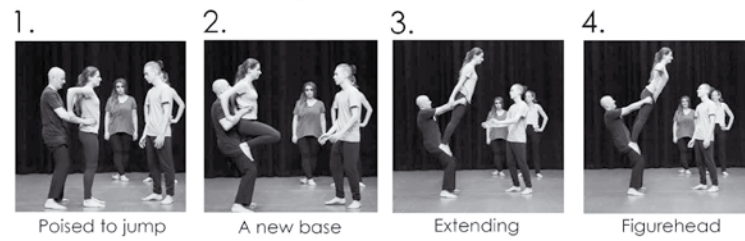
The 2009 preface to 'On Training' emphasized how its essays foregrounded 'the matter of language'. The sequences presented here are taken from our *Physical Actor Training – an online A-Z*, an alphabet of terms ranging from Acrobatics to Zoning Out.¹ Training may be bits and bobs, now and then, here and there, an F and a G perhaps, but it is also always such components together in flow, as they accrue in the body in correspondence with past letters, figures, practices and terms, while always looking forward to future possibilities being trained for. With the ability digitally to compose such trajectories, Eadweard Muybridge reconceived, we

assert again the dynamics of training as something never ending, ever evolving, necessarily situated within a long history of bodily practices and the exploration of human limits and technological capabilities.² Training always returns us to ourselves, past, present and future.

The artist's pages here show just two exercises, both involving moving upwards to defy gravity. One takes us back to babyhood (and don't forget that first vital act of training on the potty); the other recalls the masthead embrace between Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet from the blockbuster 1997 film *Titanic*, which epitomizes, in populist and normative terms at least, true mature love. Just two, but they could be any, for within them is everything that training comprises. Contact, rhythm, challenge, learning, failing, trust, balance, body, breath, risk, emotion ...

We are but shadows, rendered increasingly digitally, images on pages in a *Lost and Found Family Album*, as the editors playfully presented in 'On Training' almost a decade ago. There they constructed a fantastical photographic scrapbook as container for the past and present of training (just as we have now created our A-Z). Today, images are probably less likely to be unearthed leather-bound in a dusty Hay-on-Wye bookshop but will be pulled together digitally from the (often murky) depths of the Internet, the future norm ... if, that is, we can train ourselves to save our planet. Otherwise, like the RMS *Titanic*, the best that technology can offer will leave us once again heading fatefully towards lurking icebergs.

ON TRAINING to hold a partner in the 'Titanic lift'.



Standing close, hands on hips. The group look on: support. Outbreath down, inbreath jump, up onto thighs. Pause. Slowly stand. Unfold, feel weight shift, feet rooted but flexible. Leaning forward, leaning back. Let go. Don't look down. Counterbalance.

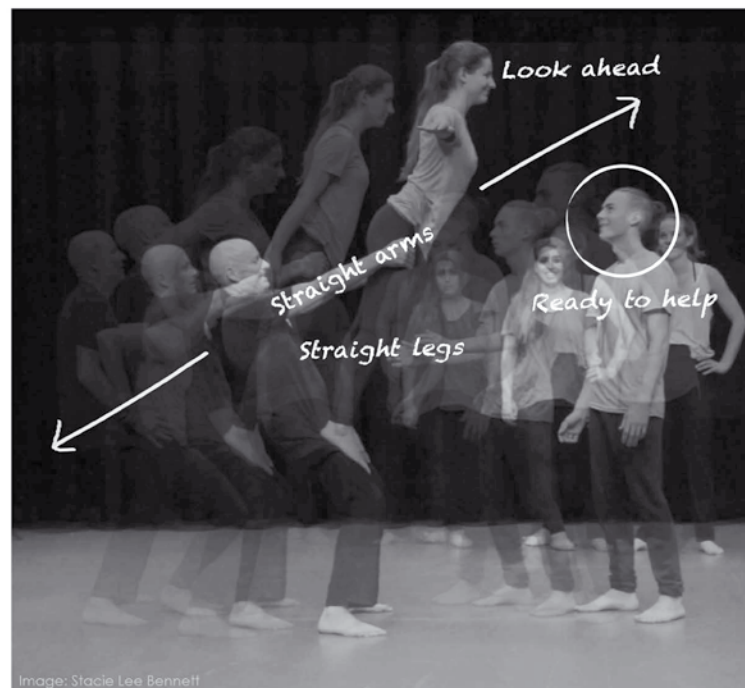


Image: Stacie Lee Bennett

¹ Published in July 2018 by Bloomsbury Methuen Drama as part of Drama Online. <http://www.dramaonlinelibrary.com>

² Eadweard Muybridge was an English nineteenth-century photographer, perhaps best known for his work on capturing animal motion in stills that he then collated and animated. Today's digital tools have allowed us to overlay and play with images in ways of which Muybridge could only have dreamed.