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Not *not* doing therapy: Performer training and the 'third' space

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Not *not* doing therapy: Performer training and the 'third' space

This article addresses staff- and student wellbeing in performer training by acknowledging and engaging with the role of the pedagogue in the complex grey area of training where we are not doing therapy, but also not *not* doing therapy. In doing so it seeks to open up for scrutiny and productive exchange an aspect of training that is often present but rarely discussed in pedagogical terms. The article highlights ways in which the transdisciplinary 'third space' between training and therapy draws attention to itself in training moments, and conceptualises this 'third space' by drawing on notions of 'being with' and 'thirdness' in radical pedagogy and relational therapeutic approaches. Drawing on autoethnographic examples of teaching practice, the article then looks at this 'third space' of complexity more closely as a reality that many teachers live in; begins to outline some of its possibilities in relation to the notions of resourcing, rhythm, and radical believing; and through that, proposes implications for future practice.

Keywords: actor training; therapy; thirdness; third space; actor wellbeing; mental health; performance pedagogy; Jessica Benjamin; being with

‘We’re not doing therapy’

2009:

- *Question: “Have you thought about the impact of Neutral Mask work on the students’ body image?”*
- Answer: That’s interesting, but remember, the Neutral Mask is not a tool for therapy.

2017:

- *Question: “What can I do if working with Chekhov’s psychological gesture gets too much for a student and they become overwhelmed?”*
- Answer: Really they need to be able to leave their personal stuff at the door; this is training, not therapy.

2021:

- *Question: “Is there a possibility for the institution to provide supervision support for staff whose subject means they are confronted with students’ emotional distress?”*
- Answer: Resources for that are not available; and in any case, staff should not need supervision because they should not be doing therapy with students in the first place.

In over a decade of pedagogical practice and related research I have continuously asked questions about student- and staff wellbeing in UK performer training, and about the therapeutic potential of training itself. We know that creative work and therapeutic approaches intersect in that they both touch the self and hear the self speak in unexpected ways, have the potential to facilitate growth and transformation, and ask us to engage deeply with feelings, sensations, beliefs and ways of being-in-the-world. We also know that both certain training practices and the culture surrounding training may contribute negatively to students’ wellbeing — as is covered in areas relating to anxiety, stress, depression, vicarious trauma and alcohol abuse (Robb and

Due, 2017; Maxwell, Seton and Szabo, 2015; Seton, Maxwell and Szabo, 2019); white supremacy and colonization in curriculum and training culture (Dunn, Luckett and Sicre, 2020; Landon-Smith, 2020); vulnerability, 'post-dramatic stress' and 'occupational health' in training and industry (Seton, 2006, 2010; Prior *et al*, 2015); trauma responses to character work (Thomson and Jacque, 2012); and body image distress (Mitchell, 2014; 2015) — and that these areas require (re)consideration of training practices. Despite these facts, my questions around wellbeing in training have often received a familiar response: We are not doing therapy here.

This response implies a boundary to delineate something that, in practice, is far from clear; designating as a 'no go' zone a space that most teachers and students regularly enter. It perhaps reflects a past reluctance in performer training — and in the institutions that house it — to acknowledge and engage with the role of the pedagogue in the complex grey area of training where, it is true, we are not doing therapy; but where I suggest that we are also not *not* doing therapy; and how this impacts on our own and the students' wellbeing. The aim of this article is to look at this space of complexity more closely as a reality that many of us work in, and begin to outline some of its possibilities, and through that, implications for future practice.[1]

In doing so, I draw on radical pedagogy and relational psychoanalytic approaches to develop perspectives on the concepts of 'being with' and 'thirdness' and how they may operate in the context of performer training. I use the term performer training to refer to teaching in the field of acting and performance that involves practical elements, including but not limited to training in a conservatoire context. While I draw on workshop discussions and exchanges with teaching

[1] In the UK this complexity has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, with the blurring of private and training spaces and with studies reporting 70% of UK students concerned about their mental health and wellbeing (Montacute & Holt-White, 2021).

colleagues, aspects of my discussion are necessarily autoethnographic and thereby specific to my own teaching practice particularly in the area of physical acting and performance in a UK context.

Journeying between disciplines: Training and not *not* doing therapy

> I was getting feedback from the school that I was at, about how much mental health was becoming an issue on campus, […] and we were like 'we're not equipped'! And then I'd think, I *am* somewhat equipped, as a theatre person: To attend to our ability to perceive, to sense, to have emotions pass through us like weather, to shape them, to create containers for those things. (US Performance Pedagogue, personal communication, 2021)

By positing that we are not doing therapy, but also not *not* doing therapy; the use of the double negative marks the liminal, subjunctive nature of negotiating the teacher's role in students' wellbeing in performance training, indicated in the quote above.[2] To examine this liminal space of negotiation, I firstly draw on Dodge *et al*'s definition of wellbeing, as a state that is experienced in 'the balance point between an individual's resource pool and the challenges faced' (2012:230). In this definition, 'stable wellbeing' is described as:

> […] when individuals have the psychological, social and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge. When individuals have more challenges than resources, the see-saw dips, along with their wellbeing, and vice-versa. (2012: 230)

[2] It also points toward Schechner's description of the performer's work, who through the process of workshop-rehearsal becomes both 'not my everyday self' and 'not not my everyday self', reminding us that the student's and teacher's broader context is inevitably part of the alchemy of the pedagogic process, and thus is part of what needs attending to (1985: 110-113).

I then look to critical and transgressive conceptions of pedagogy, defining it as a process of 'dialectical interchange, and growth' (hooks, 1994: 165), of which the interplay of challenges and resources is a part. This perspective views pedagogy as an engagement with the student as a Whole person, where the 'engaged' pedagogue responds to and evolves with their students; in other words, pedagogy as a process of '*being with people'* (hooks, 1994: 158-165).[3] This principle of 'being with' is deepened — or perhaps complicated — in performer training, by the fact that many of our current training practices were developed by practitioners for whom training for artistic work entails not just learning a craft, but also living and relating to the world differently. Actor-trainers such as Konstantin Stanislavski, Suzanne Bing, Jacques Copeau or Michael Chekhov all considered performer training as developing a way of living that enriches the individual themselves, the creative work, and the world around them, and entails social responsibility (Britton, 2013); while Crystal Truscott's contemporary SoulWork, based on African American performance traditions, constantly expands and renews through 'the ongoing Call and Response between the individual, the community and the society' (Truscott, 2017: 40). As Fleming notes, the principles of relational exchange and 'making contact' with the whole person — being with — 'offer important tools for actors not only in the production of theatre […] but also in relation to the practitioners' own wellbeing in the world' (2021, 30).

Already we begin to see the transition into a space that is also occupied by therapeutic practice. Therapy in the Western tradition, from the Greek *therapeia,* meaning 'healing' or 'medical treatment', can be very broadly defined as a structured encounter, between an individual or group and a therapist, 'invested in promoting

[3] Vagle (2008) also observes this principle to 'live pedagogically with […] students' (64) as part of 'the larger project' of being 'inclusive to dimensions of teaching that are not easily codified' (50).

mental and emotional wellbeing' (Walsh, 2013: 2). The pedagogic encounter has a range of other intentions, and does not usually involve a therapist. However, especially relational psychotherapeutic, psychoanalytic or body-based psychotherapeutic practice and arts therapy centre around 'being with' as a key aspect of the therapeutic relationship in a way that resonates with pedagogic 'being with', as will be discussed below. Further entry into this shared space is formed by the fact that many of our training practices were influenced by therapeutic approaches — such as Freud's influence on Stanislavski (Walsh, 2013: 33) or Bing's collaboration with Naumberg (Fleming, 2013) — and that those who participate in artistic training often believe in the transformational and healing power of art. In other words, we are training for work that we hope may in some way help to 'heal', relieve or repair, on an individual and social level, be that through entertainment, catharsis, or engagement with what has been silenced; to 'caress a wound in that part within [us] which lived in exile' (Barba 2010: 185). This follows in the tradition as old as performance itself, of viewing it as a crucial part of the social fabric — through rituals and traditions including and far preceeding the Ancient Greek notions of catharsis, all the way up to more recent efforts to re-integrate the healing powers of theatre and performance in our practice and consciousness in the Global North. The latter is perhaps most explicit in the field of 'Applied' theatre, or participatory arts, as well as of course being reflected in art- and drama therapy (McAvinchey, 2020).

I propose that acknowledging the space that a pedagogy of 'being with people' shares with therapy can be a valuable step in helping us navigate the complexity of the teacher's role in student wellbeing as a challenge-resource negotiation. As discussed further below, teachers may feel they lack the necessary skills to do this navigating (Robb and Due, 2017: 308), and as hooks observes, the notion of 'engaged

pedagogy' can seem frightening and exhausting, leading teachers to pull away 'because they fear "burn-out" (1994: 165). However, I suggest that by looking to therapeutic practice on topics such as 'being with' and resourcing, and by realising how approaches in performer training intersect with these — in fact at times offer practical solutions to what can feel like abstract therapeutic principles — we may be able to develop more conscious techniques for those moments where we are inevitably entering the transdisciplinary 'third space' between training and therapy. Before I examine the potential of attending to this particular 'third space', it is useful to first examine how it draws attention to itself in my experience of the performance training context.

Creative Individuality and Trauma: Teaching staff at the coal face of student wellbeing

Students' wellbeing in performer training is affected by a combination of factors that Robb and Due (2017, 301-309) broadly define as:

- The process of the training itself;
- The 'training environment and/or culture', including institutional racism, ableism, transphobia, sexism, homophobia, ageism, classism, intensive working hours and assessment patterns, availability of student support mechanisms;
- 'Student characteristics' and what students bring with them, including existing mental health conditions, trauma, poverty, family circumstances and relationships.

I would add to this the effect of events outside the institution on student wellbeing, such as major world events (for example Covid-19, events linked to the Black Lives

Matter movement, war in students' home countries, climate catastrophes), and pressures from the industry that students are looking towards.

While only some of these are things that teachers have direct influence over, the effects of any of them may manifest in the teaching space, because any dis-ease, anxiety or distress that students are experiencing lives in their psychophysicality, and becomes part of the training dynamics, even when not explicitly voiced. Instances of the training inadvertently touching pre-existing (or ongoing) individual or collective trauma —activated by delivery, form, or content — are perhaps the most immediate example of 'not not doing therapy' that will come to fellow-teachers' minds. Even with great care, these are almost inevitable given the statistics,[4] and require an in-the-moment response and longer-term thinking about adaptation strategies from the teacher. As Bedera notes in relation to the example of sexual assault survivors, 'it is virtually impossible to predict and prevent survivors' triggers', but lack of response or resources to manage when these occur potentially 'exacerbates the impact of traumatic experiences' (Bedera 2021: 268). Such resources can in part be (co)developed by the teacher and students, as discussed below, but are also an institutional responsibility, and problematised by the limited access to counselling services or trauma therapy where such support alongside the training might be needed.

More broadly, the space of 'not not doing therapy' is journeyed into quite regularly by virtue of the fact that most artistic training focuses on the development of students' 'creative individuality', which in itself affects student wellbeing. The term

[4] Regarding trauma from sexual assault alone, reports of rape in the UK rose by 8% in 2021 to the highest annual figure ever recorded (Syal, 2021), while a 2018 study of 4,500 students from 153 UK institutions showed that 62% of them have experienced sexual violence at UK universities (Revolt Sexual Assault, 2018).

'creative individuality' is a key element in Michael Chekhov's discussion of what it means to become an artist (2002: 87), and in simple terms refers to discovering or making use of, through creative work, dimensions of the self that extend beyond what is needed for everyday survival. It thus refers to an 'expanded consciousness' (Chekhov, 2002: 87) that is intrinsically connected to play in that it is autotelic, emerging from the joy of creative activity for its own sake, and through this activity revealing what is particular about a person's way of seeing the world and expressing themselves.

It is implied, then, that students will bring personal aspects of themselves to a training that explicitly invites them to develop their own 'distinctive style and creativity' (Drama and Theatre, University of Kent, 2021); engage in 'self-discovery, artistry, empowerment' (Acting, RCSSD, 2021); develop 'individuality and imagination' (Acting, RADA, 2021) and 'artistic identity' (Performance Arts, RCSSD, 2021).[5] This, in turn, alongside joy and expanding possibilities, activates particular challenges to be navigated in a pedagogy of 'being with'. As creative individuality grows and more dimensions of the self take space or are discovered, students may come into contact with desires, fears and pockets of emotion that they have been keeping at bay or masking in the everyday. Further, as the training progresses, students may feel that their everyday context and/or social connections and personal relationships are in conflict with their expanding creative individuality. Robb and Due discuss the impact of this on student wellbeing in actor-training in relation to 'growth', 'being exposed', and 'identity destabilisation' (2017: 301-306), highlighting that alongside important, exciting and liberating transformational moments this growth can also cause temporary instability.

[5] According to 2021-2022 online course information.

My suggestion is not that such instability should be avoided, but rather that it is an inevitable part of training, and that it deserves thorough pedagogic attention. Drawing on the experience of my own teaching practice in the area of psychophysical training and physical theatres, this can come to the fore in any aspect of this work, including fundamental and experiential movement work that explores the body in movement and movement within the body (checking in with the self), work that expands the capacity for expression through movement (articulating something to the world), transformations in and for performance (embodying something other / inhabiting character), and improvisation and play. I provide below just a selection of examples:

- When certain muscle groups are relaxed or activated; often in the hips, belly and shoulders and in the feet. Tensions, or feelings of numbness or not-there-ness, are connected with the body's historical dealings with life events as 'the human muscle system participates in psychological defences related to stress and trauma' (Brantjberg, 2020: 53); thus, relaxing a bodypart that has learnt to 'hold', or bringing energy through breath into bodyparts that are normally held in 'static tension' for the purpose of avoidance and protection (2020: 58), can lead to a release of emotions and an acute moment of vulnerability or overwhelm.
- Dealing with one's own weight and giving/taking weight with another person. This is an area very closely interwoven with sociocultural narratives around weight and associated shame, and can be an area of discomfort for students regardless of body size.
- Working with touch of any kind. This may be correctional touch, self-touching (as in the instruction 'put your hands on your belly'), or touch in partner work.

- Becoming aware of the power of one's own energy — for instance through Chekhov's technique of radiating (2002, 19) — and dealing with taking and sharing space, i.e. a concrete practice of 'being with' others and simultaneously separate, discussed further in relation to 'thirdness' below.
- Committing to a movement quality that feels like it reveals an aspect of self that in everyday contexts is considered forbidden, inappropriate, or has been chosen to be rejected. Examples include finding flowing movement in the pelvis, or the counter-stereotypes of 'punching' for women, 'floating' for men (see Alexandrowicz, 2012); however, both in general and particularly in relation to nonbinary or transgender students, this area is complex and individual, linked to upbringing, current sense of identity, and background.
- Early work with Chekhov's archetypal gesture (2002, 70), 'large, full-bodied gestures that we execute in order to stimulate the inner life…an indirect means of appealing to our psychology and awakening our feelings' (Rushe, 2019: 159). For example, engaging — for some students for the first time since childhood — in a full-body gesture of expansion can be experienced as a great risk. Beginning to consciously explore these gestures, and the sensations they awaken, may elicit feelings of liberation, but also give rise to personal (embodied) memories and associations, even where these are not invited or intended by the exercise.

Many teachers are aware of such and similar moments as areas that require particular attention, sensitivity and dialogue with students, even while not making a pretence of

situating the teacher as therapist.[6] A pedagogy of 'being with', of 'not not doing therapy', will need to provide space, rhythms, and frameworks that support students as they look at, work through, and dialogue with the way their sense of self is supported, challenged, or transformed by the training (Evans, 2009; Mitchell, 2014; Robb and Due 2017), and also for the training to be transformed — and, where needed, challenged — in turn. To complicate matters, this process is further influenced by the factors of what is occurring in the students' personal life, in world events, and the expectations of the industry students hope to enter.

Developing appropriate practical strategies to address the above in a teaching context is something that affects and preoccupies teaching staff (Robb and Due, 2017, 308). In a recent workshop I conducted on 'Gestures of Repair' in training (2021), the question of 'What brings you here today' received responses such as these:

> [I have] questions and concerns around artistic training and trauma, and how we heal our communities when there are traumatic experiences that happen because of the work […] the ability for educators to challenge young artists and it not feel like trauma for them […] how we can heal when we have these issues of trauma that come up. (US participant, 2021)

> […] as we go into re-entry in the fall, I think we're left in a challenging place, so I'm trying to understand how to support my students the best I can and also be working from a place of scar tissue that we're all working from. (US participant, 2021)

[6] See for instance Ewan and Green's discussion of 'Personal Safety in Movement' (2015: 245-255).

> I really often find myself in this third space, and I don't think the training that I did gave me the tools to navigate this space […] I just think this is really something that should be basic when we train as people who train others, so I'm here to fill the gaps. (UK participant, 2021)

Returning to Dodge *et al*'s (2012) definition of 'stable wellbeing' as a balance between challenges and resources, it is clear that many teachers are looking for both ways of resourcing themselves, and of resourcing their students, in relation to challenges arising from or within the training, and life- and world events.

Navigating the 'third space' of not *not* doing therapy: Resourcing

The therapeutic understanding of 'resourcing' is one way of activating, in practical ways, the space that therapy shares with a pedagogy of 'being with people', and can open doors to re-assessing and developing pedagogic encounters both for the extent to which they are resourcing or depleting, and for the role that time plays in this third space. I encountered the term as relevant to this context during a consultation with Charlie Blowers of the arts-in-health theatre collective Moving Pieces, after describing my concern about having unexpectedly 'touched' trauma for a workshop participant.[7] Blowers advised to respond to such moments by slowing down or stopping, in order to 'resource, resource, resource'. Linked most commonly to trauma therapy (Rothchild, 2003), and relational psychotherapy, 'resourcing' here refers to the things that help us (re)find a feeling of 'OK-ness', or to feel 'safe, at ease, empowered or even joyful' (Finlay, 2021). Resourcing practices we can draw on or

[7] Blowers is a psychotherapist, yoga therapist and Feldenkrais practitioner with a background in physical theatre and arts/somatic psychotherapy (Moving Pieces, 2010).

develop might for example be exercises that settle the nervous system; an awareness and activation of our own capacity for the action that is right for us; or 'getting nourishment from other people, situations and happenings' (Finlay, 2021). In the simplest terms, resourcing refers to the ways in which we can support ourselves or collectively support our community in response to the challenge at hand.

Resourcing is also closely connected to the principle of 'dosing' in the psychotherapeutic process, where 'cognitive, emotional, bodily and relational methodologies can be dosed differently' (Brantjberg, 2020: 57). We may consider the same in our training practices: As Brantjberg notes, when engaging in an activity or exchange, it 'supports curiosity and exploration' — in other words, creativity — 'to look for a dosage that makes [this activity or exchange] resourcing rather than taxing. The right dose can also be to not do the exercise or to do it in a tiny way' (Brantjberg, 2020: 57).

The idea of resourcing might easily be hijacked into a neoliberal tactic used to 'manage subjectivity' (Walsh, 2013:5) and deflect from institutional problems and structural oppression. However, I propose that 'resourcing' can sustain itself as a tool for resistance, and towards change, if it maintains awareness of power dynamics and collective responsibility for others, and is consciously harnessed as one ingredient to support the 'dialectical interchange, and growth' (hooks, 1994: 158) within a pedagogy of being-with. By placing the focus on resourcing our being-with, neoliberal individualism reveals itself as the weaker choice, as the process of responding to each other and evolving together necessarily involves the triad of — yes, the self — and just as importantly, the other and the third space of interaction between. Body psychotherapist Resmaa Menakem (2021) illustrates this in the

context of anti-racism work, emphasising that our individual body needs attending to if we want to avoid re-playing habitual reactions to threat and discomfort — such as those played out in the project of up-ending the status quo of white-body supremacy — but equally emphasising the importance of resourcing the collective body, by tending to culture (as in 'Cultural healing for African Americans') and finding new expressions of culture (for instance 'Whiteness without supremacy') as 'culture creates a sense of belonging — and belonging makes our bodies feel safe' (2021: 246-261).[8]

In the context of training, resourcing our 'being with' is thus necessarily dialogic, with each constellation of individuals and groups working out the particular strategies of resourcing and dosing that is right for them — both in relation to specific projects and subject matter, and also in general, as the teacher cannot be omniscient as to students' background, context, and related responses.[9] Collaborating with students over the process of resourcing acknowledges the fact that they are experts of their own experience, respects their agency, and invites reflection on the role of responsibility towards both self and group.

As the above definition of resourcing makes clear, the term embraces a living, shifting, situation-specific landscape of possible strategies and responses. Because of this, rather than providing examples of specific resourcing 'exercises', in the following I will discuss one set of concepts and principles that help me to understand

[8] The forming of literal 'third spaces', gatherings where individuals of underrepresented groups can meet to imagine their liberation (Bhabha, 1994), is one example of collective resourcing as/in resistance. Here, 'through conversation with others who share similar experiences and value, members of third spaces can decide which logics they might reject, seek to change or transgress' (O'Meara, 2019).

[9] In industry we now see cases of dramatherapists listed as part of creative teams or as Associates, such as Wabriya King at London's Bush Theatre.

the dynamics of being-with and to approach the co-discovery of resourcing practices. In discussing them, I activate some of the intersections between what we do in training and what is done in therapy that inform how I think about consciously working in the 'third space' between them.

Resourcing concepts: The 'Third Space of enunciation' and relational 'thirdness'

I understand Homi K. Bhabha's (1994) notion of the third space, and Jessica Benjamin's (2004) discussion of 'thirdness', as useful lenses through which to approach pedgagogy in the 'third space' of not *not* doing therapy, and thus as resourcing concepts that inform my approach in practice. Bhabha introduces the notion of the third space within postcolonial sociolinguistics, where he argues that the production of meaning requires that the communication between You and I 'is mobilized in the passage through a Third Space' (1994: 36). Bhabha designates this 'Third Space of enunciation' as 'the precondition for the articulation of cultural difference […] the *in-between* space — that carries the burden of the meaning of culture', and suggests that exploring it may be a way to 'elude the politics of polarity' (1994: 38-39). This has implications for how we think about 'being with' others, and has a useful parallel in performance training through Chekhov's conception of 'atmosphere' (1991: 26). For Chekhov, atmosphere, as 'the feeling dimension which links everything together' (Chamberlain, 2004, 53), is the crucial in-between, and indeed around, through which meaning emerges: it 'reveals the content of the performance' (Chekhov, 1991: 28). While it is crucial in the making of meaning, like Bhabha's Third Space, atmosphere is intangible and not owned by anyone, and simultaneously would not exist without the specific ingredients of the people and environments — including technologies (Camilleri, 2020) — that give rise to it. Both Bhabha's and Chekhov's ideas thus remind us that our pedagogic encounters involve

a co-created ‘third space’ and what Jessica Benjamin terms processes of ‘thirdness’ (2004: 7).

Benjamin articulates her perspective on ‘being with’ through processes of ‘thirdness’ in the context of relational psychoanalysis (2004:7). She points out that although, theoretically, interactions with others are indeed a reciprocal, mutually influencing process, our psychic experience can often actually be that of a one-way street, an impasse of doer and done to where ‘Each person feels *done to*, and not like an agent helping to shape a co-created reality […] Each feels unable to gain the others’ recognition, and each feels in the others’ power’ (2004: 9-10). Benjamin then suggests that the only way to really grasp two-way directionality is from the place of the ‘third’, and by understanding the process of creating ‘thirdness’. This thirdness involves surrender — a certain ‘letting go of the self’ in order to ‘take in the others’ point of view on reality’ — and recognition, ‘being able to sustain connectedness to the other’s mind while accepting [their] separateness and difference’ (2004: 8). In this way both I and You are understood to see each other, make an impact on each other, and have agency and the capacity to change each other:

> Thirdness is then made both of responsible action and freely given recognition […] We have to deeply accept our own contribution, and surrender to the responsibility that that brings, and accept the inevitability that we may hurt the other, [and] we have to bear the guilt of wanting to be separate, just as the other must bear theirs.
>
> (Benjamin, 2004: 11-16)

In highlighting the inevitability that we may hurt each other, Benjamin integrates what might be perceived as a ‘failure’ as, instead, an aspect of ‘being with’; albeit one that — if we are seeking relational repair — entails accepting responsibility. This is a useful perspective for the pedagogue who will inevitably ‘fail’ at times, as well as raising the question of how performer training’s attitude to failure — which often is to

see it as part of a generative process — might be drawn into how we navigate moments of 'failure' in our being-with students, or students' being-with each other.

The recognition of thirdness in Benjamin's view begins before speech, where an energetic third is already present in the earliest exchange of gestures between primary caregiver and child, which as a co-created 'dance' is deeply linked to rhythm. Within this the position of the caregiver — or later the therapist, teacher, or improvisation partner — is one of 'going first' in the process of surrender, a position that is made tenable by holding the tension between identifying with and observing:

> When the significant other is a recognising one who surrenders to the rhythm of the baby, a co-created rhythm can begin to evolve. As the caregiver accommodates, so does the baby… in effect, the baby matches the mothers' matching, much as one person's letting go releases the other. (2004: 17)[10]

In a performance context, though the power dynamics are different, we can nevertheless recognize this process re-articulated in improvisation, where the co-created third has the transitional quality of being both invented and discovered: 'To the question of "who created this pattern, you or I?" the paradoxical answer is "both and neither"'(Benjamin, 2004: 18).

I recognise, then, that this understanding of 'being with' — as a co-created process of thirdness that involves surrender, recognition, and responsible action — is already present in certain aspects of performer training, such as atmosphere and improvisation (see also Wangh, 2013). Doing so helps me grasp it in an embodied manner as well as intellectually, reminds me that performer training in fact contains techniques through which we can practise being-with, and is resourcing in the way it

[10] Vagle (2008) observes a similar process in teaching moments when 'the pedagogue allows himself or herself to let go and turn to the [student's] need' (59).

informs principles and approaches such as those concerning rhythm and radical believing, outlined below.

Resourcing Principles: Rhythm and Radical Believing

The resourcing principle of 'radical believing' in my teaching practice is inspired by feminist approaches to 'trauma treatment strategies for empowerment' (Brown, 2004: 469), and by survivors in the mental health community who highlight the importance of being believed (Olive, 2021). It also builds on Peter Elbow's (2009) 'believing game', which proposes that we explore what can be gained by practicing systematic believing, rather than seeing the only way to advance knowledge to be through systematic scepticism, doubt, and critical thinking. As Elbow observes, while neither doubt nor believing can demonstrate that anything is actually true, systematically choosing believing can help us enter into different ways of thinking or points of view. We take the risk of 'dwelling' in the other's position, and can thus use the believing game to see from 'a position that the doubting game seems to disqualify' (2009: 9). In performance training, this principle of believing is perhaps already present in the improvisational principle of 'yes, and', where students can play the believing game with themselves as well as with others.[11] Its use in this realm allows students to trust their own creative impulses and reactions by in the first instance believing them ('yes'), and then being curious about them ('and').[12]

Strengthening students' capacity to believe themselves through the creative work can also improve their ability to listen for what they need, and calibrate

[11] Hodgson and Richards observe that the understanding of self and others that follows through this process leads to growth, and involves an 'active participation […] through "being"' (1966: 25).

[12] When working with others, it is also entirely possible that the 'yes' of recognising the offer is followed by an 'and' that eventually rejects that offer, which is an important part of navigating boundary-setting.

accordingly, beyond it. To support the latter, the principle of radical believing can be used by the teacher, both in the training as an important part of co-discovering resourcing approaches, and in interactions with students more broadly, such as in responses in office hours, pastoral meetings, or emails. Within this, discovering and believing a student's need to calibrate or dose, for example by slowing down or pausing aspects of their training, can be accompanied by concerns that they will fall behind. And it is indeed possible that the student will fall out of the institutional rhythm for a while — which, when we consider the benefits of dosing, may be exactly what is needed, as they attend to re-finding their own rhythm with themselves.

Considering this temporal aspect of rhythm, and the fact that resourcing is closely associated with slowing down, suggests that the idea of a third space of 'not *not* doing therapy' is closely knit with something we might call 'transgressive time': inhabiting time in ways that resource rather than deplete our capacity for being-with, and holding our nerve and resisting capitalist pressures when this occurs. When students express their need for a different rhythm, I might respond as a teacher by linking the believing game — I see and hear you — with Benjamin's notion of 'thirdness': making space and time for that occurrence to be okay; to find a 'yes, and' response. In Benjamin's terms, this could be understood as a gesture of 'going first', providing a rhythm of calm and belief, which the student can eventually join in with again.

In my own teaching practice, this process in itself is resourcing to me, perhaps especially when I am run down, noticing inner reactions of impatience or frustration. The conscious choice to, first of all, believe the student, anchors me into this as a clear task. It creates a boundary by reminding me that my inner reactions and opinions are something to be separately curious about, and invites me to trust that holding a

calm space of belief will in turn create space for the student to feel, and act out of, their own agency. A student whose mental health had taken them away from a number of classes, for instance, observed how this particular module as a whole had taught them to take better care of themselves because 'you knew when time away was needed' (Student Evaluation, 2020). I would argue that I did not know, but that they told me, and I believed them.

Conclusion: Third Space, Transgressive Time

In this discussion I have suggested that navigating the complex space of 'not *not* doing therapy' in performer training is closely connected to pedagogic principles of 'being with', and that performer training may be able to clarify and extend some of its inherent potential to support 'being with' by looking to similar principles in therapeutic practice.

Drawing on Dodge *et al*'s (2012) definition of wellbeing as something that is experienced in the balance of challenges and resources, I have discussed some examples of ways in which the therapeutic notion of 'resourcing' — coupled with the understanding of relational thirdness and radical believing — can be a useful lens through which to examine our training practices in relation to wellbeing and working in the third space. By assessing what makes our 'being with' resourcing rather than depleting, we are able to make discoveries and choices about what we teach, how we teach, how we relate our individual teaching to wider structures and issues, and when and how we can employ resourcing as a tool for resistance.

In practice, this may involve teachers resourcing themselves, individually and collectively, by engaging with the third space between training and therapy as a legitimate topic for discussion. It might include instigating peer support networks that

can function as a kind of supervision or de-briefing space, or establishing the need for institutions to support skills development such as training in trauma-informed practice. Simultaneously, it might entail teachers co-developing resourcing strategies with their students, introducing them to the idea of resourcing and 'dosing', and engaging in an ongoing process of co-discovering what is needed to create a feeling variously of okay-ness, safety, ease, empowerment or enjoyment in the context of various pedagogical moments. I would suggest that these not only address the challenge-resource balance, but are also preconditions for curiosity and creative risk-taking. The projects of access, inclusive practice, trauma-informed pedagogy and decolonising training, are all activated as part of this dialogue around resourcing and 'being with'. Benjamin's notion of thirdness, and practising radical believing, are two examples of principles that can guide the process of co-creation among students and teachers.

Finally, the discussion has highlighted that engaging with the third space of 'not not doing therapy' also has a temporal aspect, and this might be where our efforts to support student wellbeing most obviously hit the frontier of neoliberal ideas of individual responsibility and productivity. On the one hand, giving ourselves permission to slow down and do radical things with time is both a precondition for resourcing our work in third space moments, and is in itself a vital resource and tool for resistance. As a course on 'resilience' for HE staff recommends, after taking a 'knock', 'we may just need to slow down, take some time off, whatever it is that allows you to recover… there should be absolutely no rush to do that bounce-back' (Fraser Wood, 2021). On the other hand, this advice is a good example of the tension between recommended strategies for wellbeing and the reality of

organisational/institutional pressures and deadlines.[13] As disability studies have long reminded us, taking time to recover and dedicating time to the practice of being-with is a radical act in a system that suggests that 'care for the self should occur only in the…slivers of time granted to nonwork' (Kim and Schalk, 2021: 335); it affects our relationship with the institution and bears real risk, reminiscent of Audre Lorde's statement in 1988 that 'Caring for myself is […] is an act of political warfare' (Lorde, 2017: 130). When thinking about sustainable wellbeing, being transgressive in our use of time, being creative in reimagining our systemic and institutional rhythms, and doing so collectively, may well be an essential priority in future developments.[14]

Inevitably, the discussion I provide here is limited, in scope, and by being lensed through one pedagogue's practice in a particular context. However, I have sought to use it to position the transdisciplinary space of 'not *not* doing therapy' in performance training as a key theme for discussion. By acknowledging the discourse around pedagogy and wellbeing as a core ingredient and indeed a potential strength of our field, and by collectively discovering techniques, principles and approaches for working in this 'third space', we may be able to generate training practices — and advocate for systemic shifts — that are more sustainable and responsive to the very real challenges of 'being with' each other, in training and in the world.

References

[13] At the time of writing, my institution's Union is balloting for strike action that asks the university to address unsustainable workloads for staff.

[14] We see movement towards this in the industry, as in Theatre Bristol's announcement in February 2022 to reduce public-facing activity for three months in order to 'Rest and Remodel', as well as re-purposing funds to create bursaries for artists to have a week's rest.

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