



Murray, S., Worth, L., Brown, B. and McCaw, D. (2018) Editorial. Theatre, Dance and Performance Training, 9(3), pp. 299-306.

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Deposited on: 10 December 2018

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Theatre, Dance and Performance Training
Training Places: Dartington College of Arts - Special Issue
Volume 9, Issue 3, October 2018

Editorial

Bryan Brown, Dick McCaw, Simon Murray and Libby Worth

It was highly predictable from the off that a Special Issue of *TDPT* on Dartington College of Arts would be complex, intricate, provocative, possibly contentious and would burst through the usual formats and patterns followed by the journal. We expected to be pressed in terms of the sheer number of contributions and the variety of offers of writing styles, visual elements and ways of using a page. And we were not disappointed in this. So why set about such a project?

The 'why' question deserves a response, and there are doubtless many kinds of answer. Three possibilities seem particularly salient. Firstly, since the launch of *TDPT* in 2010, its editors always imagined an occasional, but recurring series of contributions which we ambiguously called 'Training Places'. In the first ever issue (Vol 1.1. 2010) we published an article by Marijke Hoogenboom on *DasArts* in Amsterdam and in 2016 (Vol 7.1.) a fascinating account by Ivam Paulo and Rodolfo Garcia of the *SP Escola de Teatro* in Sao Paulo. We still have aspirations to identify authors who might write on the likes of Black Mountain College, the Bauhaus, Judson Church and L'École Jacques Lecoq, amongst others. However, between Amsterdam and Sao Paulo we had already put down a marker for Totnes, in the form of an essay by John Hall and Simon Murray entitled 'Arts for what, for where, for whom? Fragmentary Reflections on Dartington College of Arts, 1961-2010' (Vol 2.1). Amongst many other matters, the essay acknowledged the inevitable incompleteness of this account, and pointed to the multiple narratives that could be told about Dartington College of Arts. There was a further sense of unfinishedness to the Hall/Murray essay in that Dartington's 'relocation' to Falmouth had only taken place the year before, and there was thus huge uncertainty as to how, and if, the complex legacy, ethos and spirit of the College could be sustained and reinvented in Cornwall. Staff and students had been assured that it would. In 2018, we know that almost all promises and hopes of this nature have been frustrated and unfulfilled. However, this is another story for another time, but one which most certainly deserves to be told. Whilst Hall and Murray's 'Fragmentary reflections' remains unfinished business, the issue you have in your virtual or fleshy hand offers, we believe, another significant piece in a jigsaw which, of course, can never be completed. A big step from a single 'Training Places' essay to a whole issue devoted to one institution which no longer exists. At this juncture we should also acknowledge Sam Richards' contribution to these narratives in the form of his monograph, *Dartington College of Arts: Learning by Doing. A Biography of a College* (Longmarsh Press 2015). Sam figures later in these pages too.

The second kind of answer concerns why we should remember any institution. We answer by posing more questions. What purpose does memory and memorialising serve? What 'job of work' is undertaken by acts of this sort? In whose interests do such projects serve? What stories, and which perspectives, might be privileged and which forgotten and ignored? What actions and practices should be validated? How to balance minute detail with wider narratives of framing and contextualisation? How to find a way of articulating the sheer materiality of a place through words and images. And, perhaps, most importantly, how can such projects avoid being only elegiac and melancholy accounts of loss and yearning, but somehow also offer signals and pointers for practices, beliefs and dispositions to be carried confidently, but reflectively by the Dartington diaspora into the future? When the editors, along with Ric Allsopp, met in Exeter in October 2016 to begin planning this issue of *TDPT*, these were the kind of debates and discourses we started to play with.

Officially, there was a college on the Dartington Estate from 1961, but the material, conceptual and ideological roots and routes into an educational institution launched in that year can be traced back to the Elmhursts' arrival in Totnes in the 1920's. So, although this is a special issue devoted to the College (1961-2010) it is impossible to understand its ethos, its moods, its triumphs, failures and catastrophes without some kind of backward glance to those decades up until – and then beyond – 1961, and the associated beliefs and aspirations of the Elmhursts and the Dartington Hall Trust into the present day. 'A Dartington Timeline', beautifully composed by Kevin and Kate Mount, covering three double pages later in the volume does this job of work with great economy and elegance, revealing, if one did not already know, the startling array of artists, pedagogues and public intellectuals who have illuminated the Dartington project since its inception. We would also like to express our thanks to Tina Henle on behalf of the Fritz Henle Estate and Yvonne Widger of the Dartington Hall Trust for giving us permission to use monochrome images, without cost, in the Mounts' 'Dartington Timeline'. In partnership with the Mounts, Graham Green (also sociology and cultural studies lecturer at Dartington) offers a photo essay, 'Dartington Stills: 1970's – 1990's', documenting student learning and performances in the two decades before Kate Mount became – official or unofficial? – visual chronicler of the College.

The closure of Dartington College of Arts at Dartington between 2008 and 2010 excited huge passions, emotions, furies and arguments. For many people connected to the College and living in Totnes and beyond, these complex sentiments lie buried close to the surface of consciousness, and emerge – often unexpectedly – at different times and in surprising conjunctures. Our task, as editors, was to try to curate and construct a publication which celebrated the pedagogical and artistic practices of Dartington without ever glossing over its difficulties, contradictions, duplicities, precariousness, and occasionally absurd pretensions and whimsical tempers. We are not convinced that we have completely succeeded in this aspiration, and perhaps it was naïve to think we could ever achieve this within the pages of a single issue. Many of our contributions – sometimes unduly - 'accentuate the positive', but maybe this was inevitable. In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams remarked 'Nostalgia, it can be said, is universal and persistent; only other men's nostalgias offend' (Williams 1993, Hogarth Press: p12) and if such 'nostalgia' offers a portal into generative but critical thinking about the cultural and pedagogical conditions in which contemporary university and arts education exists, then so be it. A little legitimisation from Raymond Williams is good enough for now.

Ultimately, if justification is needed for our labour, and that of all of our contributors, in assembling this creature, it is because, at their best, and indeed often at their messiest, most contradictory and crazy, the pedagogical and artistic practices of Dartington College of Arts have signalled approaches and conditions of making and thinking that we believe are worth holding on to as the 21st century unfolds. These were not simply recipes and methods for making art, but ways of being together for a material purpose, methodologies for communality, comradeship and disagreement. At its most interesting, perverse and vibrant, Dartington College of Arts was a 'creative commons' and we hope this special issue goes a little way towards telling these stories and offering testimony to such ridiculous ambitions and aspirations. And this serendipitously segues into the third reason, we believe, for the timeliness of this publication.

Dartington, of course, was never perfect, and indeed many who worked there would have been highly suspicious of 'perfection' as a goal to be pursued either pedagogically or artistically under any circumstances. Whilst this special issue is inflected by a feeling of loss, it is also 'utopian' and transgressive in the sense that it identifies many practices and dispositions which run counter to the ethos of contemporary university education in the UK and beyond. The corporatisation of the contemporary university – the prevalence of performance indicators, business plans, the overly rigid application of learning outcomes, market competition, commodification of research and knowledge,

students as customers, crude tick-box evaluations of teaching and all the attendant anxieties and stresses for staff and students which accompany these qualities – has often been testified over the last two decades. For much of its life Dartington College of Arts was able to bypass the damage and the very human costs entailed in this corporatisation, even if it generated ‘costs’ and injuries of its own. If this volume helps to sustain and broadcast pedagogical and creative practices and values which counter the ‘naturalness’ and the hegemony of the culture identified immediately above then it will have done a small, but reasonable job of work.

Ten years after the closure of DCA seemed a timely moment to think again about the many ways in which the ideas, forms, plans, provocations and performance-making developed within the college had streamed out and continue to flow into new places, countries and practices. However, such an extended period since the college closed combined with an increasingly international *TDPT* readership also meant that readers were less likely to have prior knowledge of Dartington. It was crucial therefore to find ways of documenting, recalling and discussing DCA experiences that emphasise an outward looking focus and that actively enter and extend current discourses on training. What became very interesting was the canny and diverse ways contributors found to locate significant, sometimes challenging aspects of their past practice and reconsider their significance within contemporary training ecologies. This set up an ebb and flow whereby delving into the past located multiple ways that staff and students at DCA significantly contribute(d) to radical change within the field of training, acting as sowers, collaborators and provocateurs. It is likely therefore, that those unfamiliar with DCA are nevertheless apt to find threads of practice-thinking and structures alluded to by contributors that are known, albeit by different terms, and that might be embedded already in their own practice.

The contents of this special issue trace and shadow not only many of the actual lived experiences of being at Dartington as staff or student – quite a few of our contributors have been both - but also point to some of the tensions which the College wrestled with over much of its 50 year history. Although some of these tensions were produced by unwelcome outside forces, many were creative and productive in the sense of being a consequence of the institution’s refusal (or inability) to stand still, its appetite for risk-taking and a perpetual restlessness around fixed and given solutions. Often these tensions were indeed stressful and difficult to deal with in the moment, but, at their most productive, they were problems or challenges to be enthusiastically engaged with, if ultimately impossible to resolve. Over the decades, these were played out in differing forms and contexts, but often reappeared in various guises. Such creative tensions simmered or effervesced around the following:

- The rural – urban divide. Sometimes expressed as the ‘Dartington bubble’ versus the (apparent and perceived) ‘grit’ of urban and cosmopolitan life.
- A model of creative practice which validated the idea of a closed, ‘sheltered’ and hermetic laboratory as the ideal creative space to make work, versus an approach which affirmed the importance of contextual messiness and discomfort as integral stimuli for generative practice.
- The relationship, and appropriate privileging of what one crudely might identify as formally ‘avant garde’ practices and those more directed towards community, socially engaged and ‘applied’ arts. At its most interesting, Dartington dissolved and exploded this binary.
- In and beyond the studio as loci for creative practice – an axis of spatial relationships between studio, the Dartington Estate, Totnes and South Dartmoor and in the Contextual Enquiry Projects (CEP), the rest of the world.
- Teaching and learning theory through practice: the ease and comfort of the rhetoric, versus the toughness of actually constructing effective pedagogies to achieve this praxis. How to practice theory. How to theorise practice.

- Defining 'excellence': finding the space between the conservatoire and the liberal arts and humanities.
- The role of skill acquisition whilst questioning its definition, purpose, habitual use and epistemologies, and – connectedly – the relationship between 'knowing about' and 'knowing how to'.

Special Issues are inevitably defined by the response to the Call for Proposals. For this special issue, we were looking for contributions to cover all the Dartington fields (Music, Theatre, Visual Arts, Performance Writing, Choreography/Dance, and Cultural Management). This was perhaps another of our utopian ideas and, despite best efforts, one that could never be realized in the scope we aimed for. We envisaged an issue capable of being fluid and experimental, embedding images, diagrams, etc., into a compendium of voices that captured the range, versatility and provocativeness of a 50 year anti-institution. While we may not have captured such a playful visual fluidity in every contribution, by freeing ourselves from the typical article format (6-7000 word count), we did gather the sought for compendium of voices - a rich collection that attempts to speak across the different 'eras' of the College and the political and social contexts those eras existed within. Alongside this question of 'eras' were others we posed to our contributors and ourselves, including how the college ascribed to and structured a form of 'un-training' or 'de-training'; how the environment of diverse buildings and countryside influenced the type(s) of training that happened at DCA; what was shared within the training processes but not articulated; what roles Dartington College took in nurturing innovative practices – New Dance for instance; what remains important in the mystiques, fantasies, hauntings and residues triggered over the life of the college; and what were the broader ramifications of the College's closure in Devon and the controversial merger with Falmouth College of Arts in Cornwall for other training ecologies?

With our **POSTCARDS** we sought two specific practical experiences: 1) A description of a startling/challenging/rewarding moment of teaching or learning; and 2) A contribution which succinctly describes a particular teaching exercise used or experienced. For our **ANSWER THE QUESTION (ATQ)** we suggested either of two (inter-related) questions:

- Question 1 (for ex-Dartington teachers and other staff): *What was Dartington training or educating for?*
- Question 2: (for ex-students of Dartington): *What in retrospect do you feel the Dartington experience trained you for and what did it leave out?*

The structure of the issue is worth a moment's reflection. Unsurprisingly there was no straightforward rationale for establishing an order, certainly a strict chronology would not work. However, we had agreed early on that dispersing the Training Grounds materials through the articles would be a more fluid and productive way of encouraging engagement across the different writing/visual registers. We have attempted to provide those readers less familiar with the history and context of the College with more detailed articles at the beginning of the issue. These articles we hope provide stimulating history while raising provocative discussion points that are then responded to by a collection of ATQs and postcards. The issue then moves into a focused discussion of the content of what was taught at DCA while keeping this movement back and forth between longer contributions and ATQs/postcards. The second photo essay by the Mounts becomes a pivot point from materials focused primarily on content to materials that emphasise how DCA's learning/ethos/principles already have or could have impact in current performance training. These conversations we hope raise new provocations for contemporary performance practice and training.

Peter Hulton sets the tone for the special issue as he wrestles with the very word 'training' itself and its relationship (or not) to DCA. His linking of training with 'discipline' further illuminates choices that the various departments of the College provocatively engaged with throughout its history. While

DCA is often perceived as a model of innovative interdisciplinarity, the departments consistently debated the merits of having a firm grasp of one's discipline from which to collaborate with others. At the other end of the issue, the structure of collaboration is investigated by Noyale Colin who offers one of the few contributions in this issue by a non-Dartington academic-practitioner. Combining her research into collaboration in performance practice with a detailed historical analysis of the College's many eras, Colin presents a series of windows onto the College that offer ways of thinking about contemporary pedagogy that might usefully challenge neoliberal paradigms. Coupled with Hulton's interview on the context of the College within the broader Dartington experiment, Misha Myers offers her insight as Head of the Theatre field just after the move to Falmouth. Her walking practice and current post at Monash University have brought her into contact with Rabindranath Tagore's Sriniketan, an educational project devoted to reconstruction that inspired and grew alongside the Dartington project. Myers elegantly captures the circumstances of DCA's merger with Falmouth and its ramifications for other ecologies, while further adding to the complex questions raised by Hulton and Colin.

Donna Shilling, in her textured and originally structured article, calls on a range of voices of former DCA students and staff to reveal the importance for each of them of aspects of the college. Shilling left Dartington in 2001 for London, but to mark the closure of DCA she organised a walk back there with others joining her on the way. Shilling selects conversation fragments from many fellow travellers who, aware of this historic moment, share their views on their time at Dartington, its relevance to themselves personally and beyond to the wider arts communities. Provocative, funny and surprising, more of these voices can be heard on the TDPT blog [\[link\]](#). Where Shilling allows the fragmentary and intimate to tell a wider historical story, Chris Crickmay takes a more sweeping overview. Reflecting on his 12 years as head of Art and Design at DCA, he takes John Berger's phrase a 'small pocket of resistance' as resonant of how it was for DCA to survive and thrive despite the hostile environment of 11 years of Margaret Thatcher's government. Crickmay traces how the 1960's and 70's ferment of new approaches to visual art and dance found a welcome in the college, extended in the case of dance to the Dance at Dartington annual festival. The subsequent openness within DCA to collaborations across multiple art forms (Crickmay has himself an extensive record of working with visual art and dance) was one of the aspects of this 'resistance' to a regressive cultural environment.

The name 'Dartington' for many performers became synonymous with the specialist festivals held there. With different layers of connection with the college, these festivals extended the already lively international interchanges hosted there. For instance, the 'Dartington International Summer School and Festival', now in its 70th year continues to flourish as a significant space for music teaching and performance. The 'Dance at Dartington' international festival had a much shorter existence (10 years) but, as detailed in articles by Linda Hartley and co-authors Fergus Earley and Jacky Lansley, had a powerful impact on New Dance developments of its era. Lorraine Nicholas examines this and the extensive history of dance at Dartington in great detail in her book, *Dancing in Utopia* (Dance Books, 2007).

Hartley provides an intimate picture of her experience as a student (1974 – 6) in Dance and Theatre, revealing her appreciation of the immersion in the Devon landscape and enjoyment of the easy flow that took place between the different arts practices. Rather than rely solely on her reminiscences, Hartley draws extensively on the writings of seminal dance tutor Mary Fulkerson (later O'Donnell Fulkerson) in *Theatre Papers* (1977) to elucidate the thinking behind the studio practices of Release dance and its presaging a change in attitude to dance that led directly to the, now familiar, somatic-based practices. Early and Lansley similarly credit the work of O'Donnell Fulkerson as an enduring influence on dance developments in the UK. They discuss her Release Work within the broader framework of the emergence of a wide range of new dance forms and approaches that loosely came

together under the heading 'New Dance'. They note the fertile relationship between dance at Dartington and parallel radical re-assessments and experiments in dance-making taking place at X6 Dance Space in Butler's Wharf, London. Such innovations were documented and debated within the pages of *New Dance*, the journal founded by the X6 collective.

Avia Moore and Sarah Hart provide a brief insight into the postgraduate and international experience of DCA in its later years. Together they grapple with articulating the Dartington ethos – a way of thinking/doing/perceiving/teaching that spans the eras of the College and was tacitly embedded in its pedagogy of daily 'training' of "these people, this time, this place". Similarly, Amanda Brennan provides a reflective essay on the value of detraining for the actor as an important step into developing one's creative voice. The richness of learning at a place that nurtured innovation allowed Brennan to experience Contact Improvisation well before it was introduced in most other interdisciplinary performer training institutions. In her current role as actor trainer at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, the push and pull between technique and cultivating individual expression is grounded through this early exposure and experience of a sensorial awareness that encourages progressive risk-taking.

Rootedness, somatic and sensorial awareness are at the heart of Adam Strickson's theatre and writing. Extrapolating his lived experience of *Theatre Papers* by Peter Hulton and Steve Paxton into a performance project created with a rural fishing community in Bangladesh, Strickson's contribution moves between image, poetry and scholarship in a way that illuminates Dartington's non-attachment to pre-set or fixed forms and active encouraging of individual responses through multiple media.

Former Performance Writing MA student at DCA, Andy Smith's article unfolds with gentle passion into forceful arguments for the processes of learning he undertook that successfully modelled combining research and practice. The ways in which he was enabled to 'make and reflect, consider and take action, think and do' became lifetime work practices with critical theory playing as much a part as task-based activities. He worked alongside tutors who introduced him to writers such as De Certeau, Rancière, Barthes and Phelan and who were honest in saying when they did not understand an idea. This opened up debate, kept it fluid, so supporting his development of 'a sense of self-drive, discipline, integrity, and rigour'. Another former Performance Writing (BA) student, Gregg Whelan, deploys the performance text from Lone Twin's production, *On Everest* (1997) as a scaffold to contain an elaborate and fast to and fro between memories of the performance (his final student piece at DCA) and current musings on how the piece came together. In this context, the notion of 'training' requires quite radical expansion to include the contingent, the absurdity of coincidence and the essential need for collaboration and interdisciplinarity. The writing exudes a quiet humour and sense of wonder at the intimacy of past and present, as exemplified by Whelan finding his book marker still in place in a volume of Charles Olsen's poems that moved from Dartington to Falmouth 21 years after he consulted it for *On Everest*.

The issue concludes with David Slater answering a question Peter Hulton posed him as a student in the early 1970s – "What if you grew up with a theatre at the end of your street?". Slater's *Entelechy Arts* grew directly out of the third-year Theatre Language course placements in Rotherhithe. In a recent project engaging artists, caretakers, relatives and older members of society living in care facilities, Slater provides snapshots onto the legacy and viability of a pedagogy devoted to holistic individual growth through rural and urban experience, formal and real world practice.

The diversity and range of postcards and responses to 'answer the question' illuminate many of the issues identified in our 'creative tensions' above. A commitment to using different sites as context and provocation for creative work is touched upon by many contributors (Balbirnie, Murray, Prior,

Persighetti) whilst for Denyer the world in 'world music' is his expanded site, as he laments the College's later departure from the Elmhursts' vision and (imposed) embrace of 'per capita' funding. Claid, Murray and the musicians (Wiggins, Laws, Sanderson, Prior, Denyer and Richards) all point to Dartington's aspiration to resist given models of practice and to refuse the apparently easy answers provided by established academic canons. Misha Myers in her poem (the Dartington estate as site of refuge and experimentation), Barbara Bridger in her short (comment-less) documentation (or is it a fiction?) and Jonathan Stone in his performance proposal, all reveal, in a very Dartington way, how art itself can embed, document and speak the questions of pedagogy and research. Simon Persighetti, invoking Benjamin, celebrates the power and ubiquity of 'context' in the Contextual Enquiry Projects and beyond, as do the music quintet in their own field. Loveday and Bush write about generosity and bravery, almost as a precondition for flourishing at Dartington, and note that the purpose of teaching at the College was to 'create conditions for ideas, rather than being able to create an idea itself'. In another context, David Williams, long associated with the Theatre field, in an elegant phrase, used to describe the job of the Dartington teacher as 'inventing the conditions of invention' for and with the students. Significantly, some of the ex-student contributions (Murray, Loveday and Bush, for example) quietly note a sense (often in retrospect) that Dartington did not prepare them for the realisation that the 'rest of the world was so completely out of step with its (Dartington's) aims and ethos', whilst Richards wryly, but lovingly testifies to the madness of creative practice as he describes building a wall of imaginary bricks with mime teacher, Julian Chagrin in 1966. He notes 'After we had left the studio, I had to return to retrieve my precious kaftan. I witnessed Julian collecting in the bricks'. Beautiful and preposterous.

Three students were at Dartington between 1973 and 1975: Sue Davidson, Brian Jennings and Melanie Thompson. Coming from Glasgow, Davidson remembers finding the 'rural setting, the beauty, the country-ness, the quietness, absolutely horrific.' Her most enduring memories were lessons in performance writing with Peter Kiddle who indirectly led her to working with the BBC Community Programme Unit. Jennings's key learning experience about writing was 'to have a place to start, to effectively stand like a sculptor with a chisel about to make the first mark on stone. To consider the stone. This would be followed by a second mark - which could be considered to again be the first mark now that the stone was different/new. I have taken this moment into all my work since.' Thompson was inspired by the multi-faceted teaching at Dartington which she characterises as follows: 'to question curiously, to take risks and most of all to fail, to fall, to have accidents, to find yourself in another place, another space, from the one you started in and then have the courage to make a new response'.

Tanya Myers remembers an all-day writing exercise with Peter Hulton. After a fruitless morning and afternoon he asks how she's doing. She tells him she has nothing. 'He suggests I 'calmly' recount my day's observations, putting judgement aside. As each 'non-event' unfolds, Peter invests value into each observation and dust of day settles, revealing treasures right under my nose!' Emma Gee offers an overview of the search for words: 'Jo Richards had us walking solo round the deer park and woods to find words. A search for words: Pete Kiddle had us yomping about Dartmoor to find more. Ric Allsopp took us to the seaside to see if we could dig up yet more – why were we always looking for words so hard?'

Maybe they weren't all looking for words. Diana Theodores argues that 'Every story begins in our body. The body is our first environment through which we experience the fullest palette of our life experiences. It makes sense therefore that writing is a physical act.' This surely was the experience of Fabio Cicala, an exchange student between 2007 and 2008, who remembers an exercise with the Norwegian *Baktruppen* who encouraged us to put on a show in which there were two football teams playing a match, while another team was reading one of Ibsen's plays over a microphone.'

Despite the changes over the years, Dartington remains a primary place in the South West for community building, craft thinking and artistic development. With its housing of Schumacher College, it continues a legacy of experiential pedagogical practice working at the edges of disciplines and challenging dominant paradigms. It seems appropriate to mark, honour, provoke and continue this legacy by launching this special issue at Dartington. We are grateful to Rhodri Samuel (Dartington CEO) and the Dartington team for hosting the afternoon event. But the launch, like this special issue, is not a memorial or a commemoration. It is a prompt towards a shared retelling and rethinking of how places and training can productively shape and inform individual and collective experience(s). The degree of intersection in the special issue prior to publication led to an unprecedented and much appreciated response from Routledge to agree to print a large number of extra hard copies that could be sold at the launch. The conversations this special issue has evoked have already gone beyond the pages of this journal and into the TDPT blogosphere. The Visual Performance field has generated a collaborative post that didn't easily fit between these pages, as with Emma Louvelle's visual response to how DCA's alternative pedagogies enabled her to engage with and thrive in an academic institution. Many audio recordings of Donna Shilling's walk, Sarah Hart and Avia Moore's conversations, and Peter Hulton's interview are also now housed on the blog and we hope this special issue goads you as well to add your own response to one of our initial questions: If Dartington College is seen as an ecology and not merely a place, how is this still growing?