

The Space to Move: Essentials of Movement Training. By **Christian Darley**. London: Nick Hern Books, 2009. Pp. xiii + 193. £12.99 Pb.

Reviewed by Kene Igweonu, Swansea Metropolitan University

The Space to Move by Christine Darley is a refreshing contribution to the field of performance and movement training. The book is unambiguous in its treatment of the pedagogic issues inherent in movement training. In it Darley introduces useful exercises and lessons drawn from her training, teaching and community workshops, as well as giving helpful tips on issues of classroom (workshop) management and working with student groups. *The Space to Move* goes straight to the root of the matter to address the fundamentals of movement training without, first, subjecting the reader to an intense theoretical discourse on the practice. As an alternative and particularly effective approach most suitable for a practical sourcebook of this nature, Darley successfully communicates key principles and theories through the exercises and lessons she describes in the book, as well as with her introductory comments. Equally, Darley presents brilliant practical (movement) solutions to the 'blocks' that performers often experience in training and in the rehearsal process.

Darley's profound experience and understanding of the demands and complexities of training performers shines through as a very useful feature of the book. Writing about her work with students at LAMDA, Darley describes how she would structure her workshop sessions so that activities undertaken are relative to students' experience on the course - depending on their term and year of study. This is a very thoughtful feature of the book which will be most useful to early career lecturers and students alike. The book is written in such a way that makes the reader feel that they are 'present' in a master class with Darley herself. This is because reading the book I got the distinct impression that Darley's life-work and experience is distilled in the exercises and lessons it describes.

The book is made up of thirteen chapters exploring topics ranging from ‘where to begin’ in your first session with a group of students and different ways of working, to working in community contexts. In Chapter One, ‘Starting the Work’, Darley guides the reader into a discussion and exploration of effective means of working with a new group of students to achieve ‘... a working group - i.e. a group that can work together to produce work that elevates the work of each individual’ (6). Chapter Two then extends this discussion by exploring what Darley refers to as ‘*Musicality: Being à l’Écoute*’, where each student/actor in the ‘working group’ maintains a certain level of concentration in which they can be said to be ‘in the moment’ and are ready to *play*. Darley argues that ‘...when the group is ready to play, each member is *à l’écoute* of the other, of the time and space and of the action (13). She then goes on to conclude that it is this ‘level of listening’ in which each group member is *à l’écoute* that the work flows (ibid.).

Even though Christian Darley does not claim to be a practitioner of the Feldenkrais Method, reading her book it is apparent that she is indebted to the work of Moshe Feldenkrais which she draws heavily on in her work and teaching. Feldenkrais’ influence on Darley’s work appear to derive from her training with Monika Pagneux who encountered Moshe Feldenkrais in the early 1970s when he was invited to the Centre International de Création Théâtrale by the theatre director, Peter Brook. Nowhere in the book is the influence of Feldenkrais more apparent than in Chapters Three and Four in which Darley writes about ‘The Business of Relaxation’ and ‘Getting the Best Out of Technique’ respectively.

Chapter Three is a necessary precursor to Chapter Four in which Darley discusses the role of Alexander Technique and Feldenkrais Method, as well as Lecoq’s seven states of tension ‘as a way of exploring character and as a springboard to improvisation’ (32). In the book Darley defines relaxation, in the context of performer training, as ‘an active process’ for which the term ‘relax-action’ is better suited. This active process of relaxation or relax-action, according to Darley, ‘creates space’ which ‘allows the body to regroup [...] allows the mind into the body, making for an efficient partnership’ (26). In this

state, ‘There is no imposition of technique, rather an invitation to discover how a body is held together efficiently so there can be an intelligent physical response to the subsequent learning of technique’ (ibid.).

Chapter Five deals with the importance of ‘play and suspense’ in the creative/training process. Chapter Six then moves on to ‘Animal Work’ which Darley describes as being appropriate to introduce students to after ‘The first term had been spent on the business of “playing” – reminding the students that acting and playing belong to the same business... (60). Chapter Seven, focuses on ‘Contact Work’ and returns to the notion of *à l’écoute* which requires that students be trained to ‘read’ one another’s body with ‘empathy, respect and circumspection’ in order to develop a form of ‘physical dialogue’ with each other (95). On its part, Chapter Eight undertakes a very interesting exploration of ‘The Actor’s Voice’ and its relationship to both body and movement. The lessons described in this chapter can, perhaps, be summed up in Darley’s advice to her students that ‘...whatever constraints the actor’s body is put under by the drama he is inhabiting, the voice is always free. [...] It is when the actor separates movement-play and voice in an acting situation [...] that the voice is usually in trouble (104).

Chapter Nine, ‘Musicality and Visual Spacing’, touches on the vital concept of ‘sensing’ or ‘listening’ to one’s self in training which is central to all the lessons and exercises in this book. Writing on this concept, which she refers to as the ‘musicality of movement’, in her work with students, Darley states; ‘I wanted to get them away from their thinking bodies, and into their listening bodies, so that their movement would both ‘feel right’ and look right in the most bizarre situations’ (135). To achieve this Darley presents a series of theatre games and exercises that are aimed at helping actors to fully understand their ‘contribution to a musical whole’ and spacing onstage.

Chapter Ten explores ‘The Mystery of Music and Props’. This chapter examines the actors’ relationship *with* music and props, in which they provide ‘a voice that needs listening to as much as you would a fellow actor’ but not one to be seduced by’ (145). I equally enjoyed reading Chapter Eleven on ‘Pastoral Care’ with its frank and very practical advice on managing the

learning process. This chapter span only three pages but is packed with useful insights that are, perhaps, easier to grasp due to its brevity and straightforwardness. While recognising that actor training can be a ‘dangerous journey’ in which students are challenged and brought to ‘an edge in order that they may fly in new and undiscovered directions’, Darley warns that consideration must be given to how this is done as every student will respond differently to this journey (157).

Chapters Twelve and Thirteen cover Darley’s work with children and the Army in very useful ways for those going into similar environments to do theatre work. These last two chapters are ostensibly written against the backdrop that theatre people increasingly find themselves working in non-traditional settings; with institutions and organisation such as schools, businesses, charities and the military where they are required to use the skills they have learnt to address issues that are specific to the organisation they are working with. Consequently, the exercises described in these last two chapters are useful in helping practitioners to engage effectively in their work with such institutions and organisations. To conclude, *The Space to Move* by Christian Darley is a remarkably good read. I recommend the book to all movement and acting tutors, as well as students of performance and theatre as a valuable sourcebook on movement training.

Actor Training the Laban Way: An Integrated Approach to Voice, Speech, and Movement. By Barbara Adrian. New York: Allworth Press, 2008. Pp. xiii + 193 + illus. £22.99 UK / \$24.95 US Pb.

Reviewed by Danielle Meunier, Swansea Metropolitan University

Actor Training the Laban Way by Barbara Adrian aims to present an integrated approach to voice, speech and movement training. Rather than prescribing a rigid training method, Adrian expresses a flexible holistic approach, allowing

for freedom of exploration in both functional skills and expressive capabilities in voice, speech and movement simultaneously' (3). Such a line of approach allows the actor to identify restrictive habitual patterns and subsequently discover and develop countless vocal and physical possibilities.

To date, surprisingly, few authors have brought together physical approaches and voice approaches in such an integrated way. Most published voice books include some physical work, however it is treated as a secondary and supportive influence to the voice work. Adrian treats voice and movement as equal partners. *Actor Training the Laban Way* integrates voice, speech and movement training, enabling student actors to synthesize the skills immediately and avoid the common training dilemma of building links between different specialized practitioners' approaches.

At the start of each chapter Adrian discusses the subject area and guides the reader through the concepts in a straight forward manner, giving advice and addressing common misconceptions along the way. Chapters progress from beginner to advanced level and gradually introduce material in digestible pieces, careful not to overwhelm the learner and to follow the notion of quality not quantity.

Actor Training the Laban Way spans fourteen chapters, divided into three sections identifying levels of practice. These chapters are prefaced by an important introduction discussing the evolution of voice and speech training and Laban Movement Analysis, giving a clear context for this book. In Level One (Chapters One to Six), basic vocal and movement concepts are explored, giving a solid base for detailed work in Levels Two and Three. Concepts in Level One include: breath support, movement awareness, dynamic alignment, resonance and shaping of sound. Adrian also includes Bartenieff's nine principals in Chapter Two and integrates voice with these fundamental physical exercises by adding unstructured sound, thus indirectly encouraging development of core support for the voice and encouraging vocal and physical integration from the start.

Level Two (Chapters Seven to Eleven), builds on core skills learnt in Level One and introduces specific technical elements developed by Laban.

The student is asked to explore these elements ‘singly and in random combinations’ (141). Elements include: modes of shape change, the vocal and physical kinesphere, and the Laban efforts from the point of view of voice, movement and articulation. This level of work helps the actor explore their use of personal space and interaction with the environment. Physical shape and effort is also applied to vocal expression, thus helping to develop change in the quality of sound, definition of the articulation, and discovery of expressive possibilities. Finally, Level Three aims to apply elements explored in Level Two in greater detail to focus on expressive possibilities through States of Mind and Drives. Adrian describes a Drive as a heightened moment in daily life when an individual moves and sounds (149). Developmental work at this level requires use of text.

Overall, this book is well structured, and thoroughly written. However there is one feature to consider. In the articulation sections it is understandable why the author has chosen to use phonological symbols to describe sound (rather than the IPA system) allowing for a more universal access by non-voice practitioners and students. Nevertheless, one could also argue that the use of IPA in the articulation chapters would encourage students to learn and work with the IPA symbols. For those who are unfamiliar with the IPA symbols, a small chart to identify the sound each symbol represents could be included, such as the consonant manner and placement chart already included in the book.

Actor Training the Laban Way emphasizes the importance of experimentation and ‘play’, not for the purpose of ‘getting it right’ (30), but to gain a sense of ease, physical awareness and flexibility. Exercises show a variety of approaches to developing and integrating vocal/physical technique and expression such as: individual work, partner work, and vocal and physical improvisation. This presents a dynamic learning approach and encourages the development of a flexible and critically aware actor.

Voice and speech practitioners have been using Laban Movement Analysis approaches in their voice teaching work for some years, however this seems to be the first book to *officially* integrate the LMA with voice and speech

training in great detail, thus creating a holistic movement and voice training method for the actor. Exercises are clearly laid out with succinct instructions, supported by helpful anatomical and demonstrative illustrations, and time frames for understanding and embodying content in each chapter. Adrian gives a clearly structured progression of work to follow. Both voice and movement practitioners will find this a useful sourcebook. Students will also benefit from reading this book to support their practical studies with practitioners drawing ideas from this area of work. In Adrian's words, 'this book is not meant to prescribe but rather to inspire readers to use what they know in a new way and, hopefully, to learn something perhaps unexpected in the process' (7).

Dead Cat Bounce. Dir. **John Hardwick.** Perf. **Paul Davies, Philip Ralph, and Peter Webb.** Swansea, Cardigan and Newport: Volcano Theatre Company, Oct. 2009.

Reviewed by Jason Benson, Swansea Metropolitan University

Creating truly original work requires an exploratory journey and if evidence were needed of this you need only examine the incongruity of the title of Volcano Theatre's latest work, *Dead Cat Bounce*. Originally intended as an examination of the world of financial markets (where the title refers to the term in financial circles of declining stock rising slightly in value), the work instead became a metaphysical examination of purpose and action through the lenses of philosophy and film making. The only obvious link to the original project title was the innocent stuffed toy cat that is onstage as the audience enter which is unceremoniously kicked off the stage by the company in the opening minutes of the play. Some might ask how you can start with the intention of performing *Macbeth* and end up with *King Lear*? But the answer is to understand the creative devising process and in some ways this is the link to understanding ourselves and why we go to watch live theatre performance.

A creative devising process demands that the performers invest a part of themselves, that they allow themselves to open up to the possibilities they are confronted with in order to question and challenge their own assumptions, and in due time ours as audience. This is where and how the work is allowed to develop and gain momentum. It becomes the product of the relationship between a group of people and their initial stimuli. So the collapse of financial markets on a global scale may lead us to question our priorities of social and political conscience. Some economic experts clearly argued at the time of the collapse that this was an opportunity for a new more radical paradigm, not just for the financial and economic structure of nations but of a social one as well; an opportunity to redefine capitalism.

So, *Dead Cat Bounce* explores the theme of threat and opportunity, of challenging the status quo and individual and collective conscience. This emerges through the dual narratives of the performance. Set in 1977, with a backdrop of political and financial turmoil and feverish debate. On one hand we have the battle of ideals and philosophical outlooks at the Cardiff Conference on Consciousness and Nihilism, and secondly the more private battle taking place on the other side of the world on the set of Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* where the struggle of art versus life takes on a personal perspective between the director and his lead actor.

Inextricably tying the two unfolding narratives together is the fact that Paul Davies and Phillip Ralph take on the roles of all four characters that we encounter in the performance. A pivotal moment during one of the early scenes between the two young conference delegates is the emerging realisation that one of them is playing the role of a female character. There is no attempt here to act with feminine qualities or to convince us as audience that he (Paul Davies) is a woman. There is in fact nothing transformative about the dramaturgy of the piece at all. Instead Volcano, under John Hardwick's considered direction seeks to convey another truth, something altogether more essential. We very quickly accept that this is a male actor playing a female character, and this allows for the actor to achieve a more truthful demonstration of character without the need for verisimilitude. Volcano consciously resist

character based naturalism. This production is a master class in a didactic style where what resonates with you are the implications of the questions raised, not the tragedy of the individuals within the narrative. Paul Davies and Phillip Ralph complement each other superbly. Both deftly controlled the balance of the 'I am a performer' and 'I am performing for you'. This isn't simply smug self awareness, but returns us to one of the simplest functions of performance. A member of our society generating debate and argument.

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is the narrative basis for both Coppola's filmic masterpiece and *Dead Cat Bounce*. The novella written at the dawn of the Twentieth Century is a journey through the Congo, delving deeper and deeper into the darkness of its psychological landscape, delving deeper into the mind and soul of the protagonist; giving rise to the duality of human nature. As this production clearly demonstrates, Coppola and his lead actor, Martin Sheen also experienced a reality of this in the shooting of the film; Sheen being driven to near madness and a massive heart attack. The young conference delegates are also on a journey which becomes darker and more revealed as they battle to place themselves and their philosophical outlook on the consumerist driven world.

Setting the piece in the late 1970s does not just provide us with a vehicle for a nostalgic look back at a slice of history. Many of the audience in the performance I attended were not even born then. Rather this allows us to examine the themes and questions of the piece through a double lens. We experience the narrative from a decade where questions were being asked and asked with some fervour about the cold war and western Imperial colonialism (which was to receive backlashes in Iran and other Muslim states turning to fundamentalism - the consequences of which we are still dealing with on a massive scale today). It was a period where the cold war still hung in the balance. Action was still a word that was not tempered by the media savvy need to ensure that a film crew is on hand for a press release. Actions can be meaningful or meaningless, and the decisive, if tragic, outcome of the female delegate in the Cardiff Conference narrative is not presented to us with any moral or emotional context. Rather we are left to consider and reconsider the

ramifications of action. To quote from the play, 'Drinking and thinking, two of the surest ways to do nothing'. By looking at ourselves through a lens of 1977 what can we learn? As a society have we become more inactive, immersing ourselves still further in the escapism of mass consumerism?

This returns me to the original thought of investment of the personal by the performer. This sense of the personal connections of the company to the original themes and working title, the personal in the making of Coppola's filmic masterpiece, the sense of the personal in the world of philosophy and the personal connection between the performers and the material and the performers and the audience. This is to me what is so successful about the piece. It is at once both an introspective journey of the deeply personal points of views that we experience and hold dear, based on assumptions of how life is which can be exposed as deeply flawed or at least fragile, whilst accepting the universality of this introspection through the shared event of live performance.

The scenography was typically Volcano, functional and considered, a white cyclorama on which was painted colours reflective of the action. Suspended from above, a number of large, light fittings which would be at home in many 1970s public buildings interspersed with suspended microphones. On the stage, a simple desk with a drawer, and a drum kit. As with the production itself there is nothing that is not needed. Except, perhaps, for the poor cat. Although without it, this wonderful journey would never have started.

Their programme notes admit that they moved away from the theme of the original working title yet I would suggest that in many ways they never left it at all. At a moment in history where we are as economically stretched as we have been for nearly a hundred years, the arts, and culture are becoming the usual victims of recession. Producers (and Arts Councils') can afford less risk and so take less risk. The resulting quality of such work reflects the fact that the status quo is maintained. Feel good cultural experiences that do not remind us of the difficulties that we are living through tend to be far more popular. But Volcano proves, with *Dead Cat Bounce*, that we can and should have

intelligent, thought-provoking theatre that challenges its audience not only in the event of performance, but beyond.

When I walked away from this performance, the cat in the title, intentionally or not was still bouncing in my head. The resonances of which are for me the profound nihilism. Yet the paradox of this work is that the meaninglessness of it all is communicated so meaningfully.