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Training the *Homo Cellularis*: Attention and the Mobile Phone [1]

Dr Maria Kapsali, University of Leeds

Abstract

Drawing on literature from philosophy of technology, mobile media studies, performer training as well as practice-based research, this article examines the use of mobile phones in performer training, through the notion of *pharmakon* and in relation to questions of attention. It reviews the work of other performer training practitioners who use mobile phones and examines underlying assumptions with regard to the nature of attention and the use of space. Although the aim of this article is neither to advocate nor apologise for mobile phone use, it argues that the mobile phone may invite a re-thinking of the way attention is exercised and understood within performer training. By discussing an exercise developed by the author within a university-based theatre training context, this article argues that an 'attention–distraction' dichotomy in terms of the trainee's attending capacity is no longer an adequate explanatory framework. It therefore suggests that attention should be approached as a multi-modal and synthesizing process.

Keywords

Attention, distraction, mobile phones, *pharmakon,* technology

Introduction

This article is concerned with the presence and use of mobile phones in performer training. It examines how a ubiquitous digital device may become a tool for training as well as how performer training practice may offer grounds to re-think the mobile phone's function and the

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relationship of both trainees and trainers to it.[2] The article is situated in relation to two important trends in scholarship on technology. The first one openly expresses an admission of and concern for the insidious presence of technology in contemporary life (for example Wendland et al 2018; Crary 2013; Stiegler 2010a; Stiegler 2010b). It is pointed out that the encroachment of technology in daily life needs to be considered not only as a form of mediation between humans and the lifeworld, but also as a consolidation of a way of being in the world that increasingly makes environmental processes, human actions, biological cycles and internal landscapes legible only in terms of use and optimisation. Jonathan Crary, for example, contends that, 'since no moment, place or situation now exists in which one can *not* shop, consume, or exploit networked resources', the lifeworld is increasingly experienced as a 'switched-on universe for which no switch off exists' (2013, p. 30, emphasis original).

The second key point that emerges from current analyses is a call for the need to develop alternative relations to technology. Some scholars explicitly identify such need as a task for education (Wrathall 2018; Thompson 2018). Others (for example Lemmens 2017; Dreyfus 2002) emphasise the importance of developing forms of practice that transcend the kinds of use stipulated by external agendas, often serving hegemonic, yet invisible, corporate interests. Despite the different emphases, these two positions are intertwined, since there is an appreciation that the development of new practices has an educational dimension. Conversely, it is recognised that the development of a form of education that can enable alternative relations to technology presupposes a radical change in the way subjects think of and act in the world. In other words, such education needs to have a lived and embodied dimension. Mark Wrathall, in fact, speaks of a kind of 'training' that 'could be accomplished through an

[2] Data suggest that in many countries the number of mobile phone subscriptions exceeds the total population (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_number_of_mobile_phones_in_use, accessed 29 June 2018). Goggin and Hjorth similarly predicted that by 2014 'mobile phone subscriptions will have exceeded seven billion' (2014 p. 1).

apprenticeship in skilful behaviour, rather than the teaching of general and decontextualized theories' (2018, p. 34).

It is against this wider background that the discussion on the use of mobile phones in performer training is situated. The intention is not to make a virtue out of their ubiquity, a 'they-are-here-let's-use-them' kind of attitude. Nor is this article concerned with the host of possibilities for making performance that mobile phones can offer and which would dictate their inclusion in training curricula. Although there might be merit in both of these positions – if anything they could pave the way for creative experimentation – the aim is to respond to questions that are arguably more pressing: how might we develop alternative relations to technology that move beyond habits and understandings inscribed in consumerism and (self)optimisation? And what role can performer training, as a multi-layered form of cultivation including artistic, somatic, and social dimensions, have in such an endeavour? In order to consider these broader questions, this article is grounded in the following analytical positions.

One is an understanding of performer training as an 'expanded field'. As Andy Lavender suggests (2016), contemporary performance includes participatory, intermedial, digital, verbatim and site-specific practices amongst a range of other cultural activities that have a strong performative or theatrical element. Similarly, training, whether undertaken in institutions, companies or workshops, can be seen as an equally expanded practice expected to serve not only a variety of performance genres, but also to engender artists who straddle conceptual, professional and disciplinary boundaries. In this larger sense, training is not only understood as a preparatory activity towards making performance. It also becomes a means of gaining awareness of the dispositions and habits that result from the repetitive, and often disciplinary, performances of class, gender and race, as we shall see also from the series of

gestures involved in use of technological devices – and which make up the trainees' embodied selves.

The second analytical position proposed here is to understand the mobile phone as a *pharmakon*, a term denoting both poison and cure and often encountered in discussions on technology. Drawing on Plato's *Phaedrus*, which debates the social and political effects of writing for Athenian democracy, Bernard Stiegler expresses a similar concern in relation to the digital and networked technologies that mark contemporary life: 'what Socrates describes in *Phaedrus*, namely that the *exteriorization of memory* [through writing] *is a loss of memory and knowledge*, has today become the stuff of everyday experience in *all* aspects of our existence' (2010a, p. 29, all emphases original). Stiegler traces in the ongoing and pervasive technologisation of aspects of daily life, work, and leisure an impoverishment of knowledge, both practical and theoretical, as well as the occlusion of users from participating in the systems through which technological processes are produced. Stiegler bemoans a situation whereby human subjects have been fashioned into '*consumers who are henceforth deprived of memory and knowledge by the service industries and their apparatuses*' (2010a: 35, all emphases original) whilst 'memory has passed into the machine that produces the gestures' (2010a: 35).

Stiegler also argues that precisely because technology is foundational to the way humans evolve and become subjects, digital technologies form 'a network of *pharmaka*' (2010b, p. 85). The *pharmakon*, according to Stiegler, 'is at once what *enables* care to be taken and that *of which* care must be taken – in the sense that it is necessary *to pay attention*: its power is curative to the immeasurable extent […] that it is also *destructive* (2013: 4, all emphases original). An alternative relation to technology, and the world, therefore is not premised on shunning technology but rather needs to emerge from a (different) engagement with it. Within this formulation, the distinction between practice and use is paramount. As Lemmens

explains in relation to Stiegler's pharmacological approach, '"use" represents sheer *adaptation* to the marketized media commodities', whereas practice suggests a process of '*adoption*', foregrounding the remedial potential of a specific digital technology-as-*pharmakon* and bringing forward 'new ways of living' (2017, pp. 200-2, all emphases original).

When looking at the mobile phone as a *pharmakon*, it becomes clear that it is fundamental in naturalising the 'switch on' mode, with which its function is inextricably connected, as well as universalising such mode as a way of life. According to Maurizio Ferraris, the use of the device has become so pervasive that being in the world is experienced as 'being-on-the-mobile-phone', a kind of being that is both individual and ubiquitous: 'they can find you, only you (individuality) everywhere (ubiquity)' (Ferraris, 2014, p. 19). Following Stiegler, it is also evident that the mobile phone serves as a repository not only of individual memory – who remembers phone numbers by heart anymore? – but also of collective and spatial memory through the storage and circulation of the data generated out of the phone's multiple functions.

Moreover, such functions rely upon and 'produce' a series of gestures which have become deeply acculturated and sedimented. Ingrid Richardson argues that 'mobile device usage' needs to be understood as a 'mode of embodiment, a way of having a body' (2005, np). She considers the body as a 'mobile-specific *mediatrope* – inclined metaphorically, corporeally, communicatively and gesturally towards the mobile media device' (2005, np, emphasis original). As a result, the mobile phone 'modifies what we pay attention to, what we "turn to" and face (and turn away from) in the everyday lifeworld, and the modalities and *durée* of that attentiveness' (Richardson 2005, np). Put simply: the phone both produces a series of deeply habituated kinetic and spatial arrangements, which shape what the user might pay attention to *and* becomes the end point of the user's attention.

Attention, therefore, emerges as a key point where critiques of technology and analyses of mobile phone use intersect. Notably, the use of digital devices in education is often problematized in relation to a distinction between 'deep' and 'hyper' attention. As Katherine Hayles explains:

> Deep attention, […] is characterised by concentrating on a single object for long periods […] ignoring outside stimuli while so engaged, preferring a single information stream, and having high tolerance for long focus times. Hyper attention […] is characterised by switching focus rapidly between different tasks, preferring multiple information streams, seeking a high level of stimulation, and having a low tolerance for boredom'. (2007, p. 187)

Hayles (2007; 2012) notes that these two kinds of attention mark a generational divide, with young people having a strong preference for the hyper mode. Stiegler concurs with this evaluation, but also notes that such preference is highly alarming since, in his view, the processes of capturing and shaping attention effected by digital technologies are a means of exercising power and corrupting democracy. He thus argues that our relationship to these technologies is 'badly in need of therapeutic care' (2010b, p. 91) and education is tasked precisely with such a project (2010b, p. 73). On the other hand, Hayles, reviewing the work of Stiegler and others, points out that deep attention is the normative cognitive quality expected in humanities, whilst 'hyper attention [is] regarded as defective behaviour that scarcely qualifies as a cognitive mode at all' (2007, p. 188). She contends that different modes of attention may enable different modes of engagement and these may be productive, depending on the context. Against Stiegler, she argues, for example, that hyper attention

might be more suitable for information-laden environments and useful for approaching certain literary texts.[3]

As I will discuss in more detail, a tension between attention and distraction, as well as a preference for 'deep' attention, also pervades performer training pedagogies, since attention is not only deemed essential for training to take place but often marks the very capacity that is trained. The ubiquity of mobile phone use in daily life, therefore, raises for performer training similar questions to those encountered in the humanities: are trainees acculturated in modes of attention that are fundamentally different from the ones expected in and for performer training practice? May other kind of attentive modalities be productive within performer training? Or is the search for deep attention so embedded that other modes are undesirable by default? Similarly, the use of mobile phones *within* training contexts, whether intended or not, raises questions about the nature of attention as well as its management: how should attention be directed vis-à-vis a device, which, within educational contexts, is often positioned 'as disrupter' (Lepp et al 2015, p. 1)? If the mobile phone shapes regimes of attention, which may be inappropriate or undesirable (poison) for performer training purposes, may its use in performer training also make possible different ways of paying attention (cure)? What might such attention look like and what kind of relationship to the world might it enable? Treading a fine line between Stiegler's apprehension for an 'attention deficit disorder' (2010b, p. 72) and Hayles's endorsement of hyper attention as a valid mode for knowledge production, this article argues that approaching the mobile phone as a *pharmakon* allow us to keep in mind those aspects of the device 'of which' care should be taken: the gestures, and possibly risks, associated with its daily use, and not least the ethics of its production and the politics of its operation. At the same time, it may enable us to consider ways in which the

[3] For details on the debate see Stiegler 2010b, pp. 72-93 and Hayles 2012, pp. 250 -1.

phone can become a medium through which the *homo cellularis* (Eco, 2014, p. viii) may become 'care'-fully attentive towards the world and others.

This will be exemplified with reference to a specific exercise that deals exclusively with text messaging. Although the mobile phone is a multifaceted device – Goggin and Hjorth call it the digital version of the 'Swiss Army Knife' (2014 p. 2) – texting became established as the most dominant form of mobile communication, whilst writing emerged as the principal mode of accessing other functions of the cell phone (Wellner 2015, pp. 35-43). The focus of the exercise on texting has been determined therefore both by its popularity as the preferred mode of communication, especially amongst young people, often called the 'Thumb Tribe' or 'Mute Generation', as well as by the particular kinetic repertoire it requires.[4] As I will discuss in more detail, when texting, the body obtains a closed shape, exemplified in the narrowing of the focus and the proximal relationship between face and hand, which can disrupt the flow of face-to-face communication. The act of texting is thus antithetical to the open-body characteristics (peripheral vision, three-dimensional awareness, eye contact) expected by many training regimes. Texting, as an embedded and embodied cultural activity – which due to the phone's ubiquity can also take place during a training session – presents training with a problem. How can a prescribed and sedimented functionality, which in social situations that require face-to-face communication can be perceived as a cause of in-attentiveness, become appropriated within a creative/learning context and harnessed towards developing a form of attention?

The discussion of the exercise will be preceded by reviewing other examples of using mobile phones in performer training, as well as by an examination of the way performer training is

[4] See for example https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/nov/07/generation-mute-phone-call-instant-messaging (accessed 12 March 2019).

expected to cultivate attention. The exercise is offered as a step towards a larger project that seeks to explore whether, and if so how, performer training may enable the development of 'interpretative flexibility' (Feenberg, 2005, p.104), i.e. the ability to tinker with, loosen and re-configure the social, political, and cultural determinations of any particular technology. The analysis of the exercise aims to exemplify an approach whereby performer training *practice* seeks to open up a sedimented form of mobile phone *use*, within a process that re-configures both.

Mobile Phones in Performer Training Practice

Within formal training contexts, such as Higher Education Institutions and conservatoires, the mobile phone is often employed as a form of learning assistive technology, for example through applications for accessing virtual learning environments and Bluetooth Attendance Management.[5] In addition to institution-related use, the phone may also be used directly in training for a range of activities, serving, for example, as an *aide memoire* for scripts, a recording device to document work-in-progress or verbal feedback, a writing pad to take notes and a gateway for accessing online spaces set up by the trainees.

In addition to the way established use may serve learning purposes, there is also the emergence of innovative practice in terms of content creation and/or pedagogical appropriation. In 2012, Marisa Zanotti at the University of Chichester launched an application for choreography co-created with dance company bgroup. Based on a piece for screen-dance, *Passing Strange and Wonderful*, which Zanotti and bgroup developed together, the phone was employed as a one-stop terminus where course material could be gathered, including footage of the piece, exercises for developing choreographic scores, and links to further research. Zanotti emphasised that the project was developed specifically for mobile

[5] Bluetooth attendance management systems enable students to register for class through the signal emitting from their phone.

media, not only because of their ubiquity in training studios, but also because she wanted to draw links between the kinetic repertoire of the choreography and the actions of the user. For example, progression through the content of the app was achieved through a sweeping motion of the hand, which resonated with the lateral movement that was explored in the choreography (Zanotti 2018, interview with author).

Another instance is the work of Christina Papagiannouli at the University of South Wales, who developed a series of exercises that utilise the phone camera as an 'eye' through which trainees see and move in the space. In a workshop offered at the University of Leeds, trainees were asked to walk in the space with phone in hand and in front of their eyes, record their pathways, and eventually swap phones with one another. At the end of the exercise, all phones were placed on the floor, playing back the recorded footage and creating a multi-perspectival mosaic of the activity. The exercise opened up several possibilities. By mediating one of the simplest activities, i.e. walking in the room, it complicated ways of moving and seeing. By asking trainees to re-arrange the phones on the floor as these played back the recorded footage, it offered an opportunity for practising composition skills. Finally, the presence of footage in one's device recorded by someone else encouraged a consideration of one's relationship to the device, in terms of intimacy and privacy. These examples demonstrate the emergence of diverse experimentation within which the phone is used to support established pedagogical aims but also layer the training activity with additional possibilities. Papagiannouli's exercise enables the concomitant development of spatial awareness, visual literacy and critical enquiry. Zanotti's app serves both as a pedagogical compendium and a catalyst for bringing awareness to the artistic and operational dimensions of a specific gesture.

Nonetheless, even well-thought and deliberate practices that adopt and appropriate existing use are not immune to the 'toxic' dimension of the *pharmakon*. Proving Stiegler's point about

the simultaneous presence of poison and cure, the phone also offers access to activities that are not relevant to the training/learning situation. It is instructive for example, that Zanotti not only developed a bespoke application that necessitates the presence of the phone in the studio; she also introduced a code of practice explicitly stipulating that phone use should be limited to class-related activities only (Zanotti 2018, interview with author). Even when it is harnessed for artistic-pedagogical ends, 'mobile phone use' therefore remains fluid, since it can involve a range of functions; some might be pertinent to a training context, others might not. As such, the practice of using mobile phones in novel ways raises the need, at least within a training context, for circumscribing the kinds of use that are possible. This can take the form of an etiquette, and similarly to other social contexts, if such etiquette fails, phone use can be experienced as a source of distraction, especially when it takes place in situations in which 'paying attention' is the normative and expected behaviour. It is imperative then that the use of mobile phones in training is considered in tandem with notions of attention. The next section discusses how the problem of attention has been configured historically, and particularly in relation to performer training.

Attention and Pedagogy

As Jonathan Crary (2001) convincingly argued, attention is a historical construct, coming to prominence alongside and in response to the emergence of 'modern distraction' at the end of the nineteenth century. Western modernity and industrialisation spells

> an ongoing crisis of attentiveness, in which changing configurations of capitalism continually push attention and distraction to new limits and thresholds, with an endless sequence of new products, sources of stimulation, and streams of information, and then respond with new methods of managing and regulating perception. (Crary 2001, p. 14)

As a result, attention is configured as a mechanism of selection premised on 'the relative capacity of a subject to selectively isolate certain contents of a sensory field at the expense of others in the interests of maintaining an orderly and productive world' (Crary 2001, p. 17).[6]

Of particular interest here is that an understanding of attention as deliberate selection also forms an important trope of twentieth and twenty-first century performer training practice. In fact, as Soto-Morettini observes, 'in nearly every acting book you will ever pick up, you will generally find great emphasis on the importance of the actor's ability to concentrate' (2010, p. 66). Two examples merit reference: Stanislavski's system and the more recent, post-Stanislavskian psychophysical paradigm. Stanislavski's work on concentration and attention is well known and forms a significant part of the System's contemporary iterations. Stanislavski's own writings not only demonstrate an extensive preoccupation with the actor's ability to concentrate, but also offer a pedagogical framework on how the desired mode of attention can be achieved. In the 'Circles of Attention' series of exercises (Stanislavski 2008, pp. 90-109), the trainees are asked to modulate the range of their focus in response to the area of illumination provided by different spotlights. Light, it can be argued, provides the group of young trainees, as well as the contemporary reader, with a clear physical proposition of how attention works (it rests on and engulfs the object it is focused upon) and a metaphor (attention is a sort of illumination that the actor can 'train' in the same way that a light technician can 'train' a beam of light).[7]

[6] Crary's book was written before the popularisation of mobile phones, but his argument remains valid and foreshadows more recent discussions in relation to the attention economy (see for example Terranova, 2012). It has also informed current analyses of attention and contemporary performance (for example, Bishop 2018) as well as attention and education (Hayles 2012).

[7] Jonathan Pitches kindly brought my attention to this meaning of the verb 'train'.

Although Stanislavski's understanding of attention has been traced to contemporaneous yoga exercises, it also resonates strongly with the work of William James.[8] James has been central in configuring attention as a force for organizing consciousness which would otherwise remain chaotic (Crary 2001, p. 61). In the chapter 'Attention' in his celebrated *Principles of Psychology*, James, wishing to stress the constituting nature of experience, contends that '*my experience is what I agree to attend to*' (1950 [1918], p. 402, emphasis original). He further argues that 'without selective interest, experience is an utter chaos' (1950 [1918], p. 402). James defines attention as a selective, focalised and concentrated activity which 'implies withdrawal from some things' and is further contrasted with 'the confused, dazed, scatter-brained state […] called distraction' (1950 [1918], p. 403). And although James acknowledges a continuum between attention and distraction, attention is ultimately defined as 'concentration upon one single object with exclusion of aught besides' (James, 1950 [1918], p. 405). Correspondingly, a state of mind that darts from one interest to another is, according to James, a characteristic of children and should be tamed through education (James 1950 [1918], p. 417). James's work significantly contributed to the establishment of two important tropes, which still have valence today: an understanding of attention as the opposite of distraction and as a voluntary act that can be trained.

Stanislavski's chapter, accordingly, can be seen as an instance of such training, specific to concerns of acting. The actor is taught that attention is selective, and exclusionary and she is thus trained in an ability to both select one area of the theatre (the stage) as well as exclude another (the auditorium). His account, moreover, extends beyond an exposition of how attention operates. It presents the performance event as a potentially overwhelming experience that the actor can navigate only by learning to focalise one's attention

[8] As I have argued elsewhere (Kapsali 2015), during the late nineteenth century there was significant cross-fertilisation between yoga and psychology. Both were emerging in public discourse as part of a wider cultural and scientific milieu concerned with the development of human faculties.

(Stanislavski, 2008, pp. 100-2). In this manner, Stanislavski's description of performing, as well as the student-actors' struggle to discipline their attentive capacity, resonates with contemporaneous anxieties about the adverse effects of industrialisation upon the subject's environment and cognitive abilities and can be seen as an example of a preference towards 'deep attention'. If we add to this picture the unabated popularity that the System still enjoys, it can be concluded that, within contemporary actor training contexts, an understanding of attention as a monofocal activity continues to be appealing.

Moreover, in approaches to psychophysical training post-Stanislavski, attention remains a key aspect of the performer's preparation. Phillip Zarrilli argues that 'actor training might be productively viewed as a specific form of "perceptual apprenticeship"' (2015, p. 83). Accordingly, he has developed a form of training that combines somatic and meditative practices within a theoretical framework of 'enactive cognition'. Performers are trained in 'increasingly subtle and complex modes of directing one's attention and opening one's sensory awareness' in relation to a specific 'performance score' and 'theatrical environment' (Zarrilli 2015, p. 83). In comparison to Stanislavski's formulation, Zarrilli's work on the cultivation of attention is emphatically premised on a holistic, psychophysical engagement that enables the actor to attend to different aspects of the performance activity all at once. Arguably, Zarrilli's model is a lot more encompassing of the performer's environment than Stanislavski's circles, and grounded in a heightened form of somatic awareness.

Zarrilli, however, has a clear preference for what he calls a 'heightened mode of attending' (2015, p. 88) which is pitted against the 'squirrel-like "busy" mind of the actor' (2015, p. 84).[9] This strongly resonates with the kind of fragmentation and distraction adumbrated in Stanislavski's writing and currently associated with the use of digital devices and the phenomenon of 'hyper attention'. Furthermore, 'heightened attention' is positioned as a

[9] Zarrilli borrows the metaphor from Zeami, a 14th-century Japanese Noh Master.

remedy for the 'darting' kind. For example, Zarrilli notes that breathing exercises can serve as 'a way of "deconditioning" our busy, analytical, squirrel-like minds' (2015, p. 86). Similarly to James, Zarrilli proposes the remedy of education, this time through breathing. As the squirrel-like mind is presented to be in need of modification, an idealised version of attention is set up and other kinds are left unexplored.

It can be assumed, therefore, that within a psychophysical approach, a mediatropic body-mind that unreflectively turns towards the mobile phone would be expected to be disciplined through training. On the one hand, this raises questions of achievement. If – or as Zarrilli admits (2015, p. 87) *when* – trainees find it difficult to develop 'heightened' attention, where shall we look for the cause? Is it the inadequacy of the trainer? Is it a cognitive inability or character weakness of the trainee? Or is there a dissonance between the cultural practices the trainees might bring with them and the expectations psychophysical training sets out to achieve? On the other hand, it raises questions of relevance. If, as Katherine Hayles suggests, young people have a preference for hyper attention, is there a danger that the kind of psychophysical training outlined by Zarrilli may no longer be an adequate response? Or, to put it otherwise, may an exclusive focus on 'heightened attention' obscure the creative potential that may be latent in other cognitive states? Unlike Stanislavski's circles that circumscribe the objects of attention, this is not a question of *what* the trainee is expected to pay attention to; rather it is a question of *modality*, i.e. which mode of perception of and engagement with the environment counts as attention.[10] Accordingly, I would argue that once 'heightened attention' is understood as one possibility amongst others, we can begin to explore whether mediatropic embodiment has pedagogic or creative value. Before we do so, it is important to look further into how the mobile phone may affect a training situation.

[10] It is possible to conceive, for example, that within psychophysical training, students could be asked to focus on the phone in the same 'heightened' manner in which they are expected to engage with other aspects of their environment.

Attention in the Studio

The previous section offered a historical and contextual analysis of attention and distraction and pointed out that performer training is underpinned by assumptions about the nature of attention. Shifting the focus away from individual experience, the aim of this section is to engage with the social and interpersonal dimension of training by considering how spatial characteristics structure attention and how mobile phone use relates to the social and spatial configuration of a training situation. I will draw on studies that examine the way mobile phone use manifests in and shapes behaviour, in particular Takashi Nakamura's work (2015) and Jesper Aagaard's notion of 'absent presence' (2016).

Nakamura argues that mobile phone use needs to be examined as a form of physical communication in and of itself, independent of the exchange of verbal or textual content. He observes that even though the mobile phone is associated with 'distant communication', 'individuals have begun using mobile phones to regulate face-to-face communications' (Nakamura 2015, p. 73). Nakamura is concerned with the physical gestures and actions needed to accomplish phone use and points out that these gestures have a communicative potential in and of themselves. For example, he argues that users employ 'the act of gazing at their phones to control their face-to-face interactions […] even if there is actually no data on their phone' (Nakamura 2015, p. 74). Mobile phone use, in other words, is not only aimed at engaging with distant others and virtual spheres; it consists of minutiae – movement of fingers, orientation of the gaze, a relation between body parts – which have semantic valence and can thus affect social situations in the physical here and now. This can be disruptive, not only in terms of the trainee's individual attention – on the condition that we accept that the trainee is still working towards achieving a heightened state. More troublingly, mobile phone use affects the communication between the trainee and the activity of training.

As Mark Evans observes (2009), performer training has been traditionally underpinned by a tacit, yet formational, politics of gaze. Training positions the student under the intense 'scrutiny' of the teacher and 'places them in an economy of looks' (Evans 2009, p. 129), eventually preparing the student for a series of scopic regimes: of agents and casting directors, fellow performers, theatre directors and, last but not least, the audience. Although within a training context the gaze has a disciplinary function, it is also sophisticated and caring. Depending on their own training and expertise, performer trainers are likely to look for and respond to a series of signs on a moment-to-moment basis: levels of engagement and energy; aspects of embodiment, such as posture, breath, use of space; elements of attunement and understanding. The act of looking, therefore, however disciplinary, also serves a pedagogical function, as it is a key way in which the trainer gathers and responds to the information emanating from the students: the student is there to be looked at *and* looked after.

For this reason, I would argue that the use of mobile phones in performer training, whether triggered by the phone or initiated by the trainee, needs to be explored not (only) in terms of the trainee's attention, and the possible distraction thereof, but also in terms of the communication that constitutes the training activity in the first place. As Aagaard (2016) explains with reference to interpersonal relations, when using a mobile phone a person assumes a closed physical position, acquires a different rhythm and ceases to emit signs that inform the moment-to-moment shaping of the communication. As a result, an '*unintentional misattunement*' sets between interlocutors (Aagaard 2016, p. 229 emphasis original). In a training context, such a state of 'absent presence' becomes detrimental, as it disrupts the non-verbal, ongoing, and visually-based communication among trainees and between trainees and trainer.

An important qualification, however, needs to be taken into account: the presence and effect of the phone on the training situation has been so far discussed in relation to studio spaces.

We could, however, ask in what ways the studio space, in and of itself a form of technology, may also affect the training situation. Arguably, an experience of a performance, as well as the perception of the phone as a source of distraction is significantly determined by the space in which an event takes place, and the expectations it sets (Gardner 2012; Home-Cook 2015). Claire Bishop, for example, argues that the emergence of the 'black box' in the 1960s as a paradigmatic performance space was not only a result of theatre aesthetics; it 'steer[s] and hierarchise[s] attention and thus construct[s] viewing subjects' (2018, p. 30). It can be assumed that the use of such spaces in training has a similar effect. An understanding of how this is achieved can be gained by applying Robert Rosenberger's notion of 'field of awareness'.

For Rosenberger, the field of awareness encompasses 'the totality of what a user is aware of in any given moment' (2017, p. 152). It includes

> What stands forward within one's awareness, what stands back, how these things are arranged among one another, how deeply set these things may be within our habits of perception, and then also how these things can change, or become 'reorganised', as one's technology usage changes. (2017, p. 152)

An examination of the trainee's field of awareness within a training studio would reveal that 'what stands forward' is the training situation, and 'what stands back' is the everyday; in the form of belongings, such as bags, shoes and, indeed, phones; surrounding objects, such as chairs and walls; and behaviours, such as giggling, gossiping, swearing. The studio, in other words, renders certain aspects of daily life irrelevant to the training by a literal and metaphorical positioning of the everyday to the margins of the room and the periphery of one's awareness. Accordingly, it establishes what the trainee should pay attention to, by offering, again, both spatially and cognitively, a 'centre'. In this manner, though, the use of

the space reinforces established understandings of attention as a monofocal, selective mechanism. I would further argue that such an attention regime can be normative and operational, even when training takes place in spaces other than a black box studio. At the same time, though, it is precisely because of this spatial, shared configuration that the disruptive potential of the phone needs to be understood beyond individual cognitive states: by transcending established, yet rarely acknowledged boundaries, the phone may not only distract the individual student. It can also unsettle the established hierarchies between a fore- and a background, centre and periphery, the daily and the extra-daily. The phone disrupts the value system that underlines the operation of 'perceptual apprenticeship'.[11]

In light of the above, the presence of the phone and the possible effects of its use can be understood in relation to a number of factors: the historical and contextual understandings of attention that may underpin a performer training regime; the way phone use manifests in behaviour and the ways in which such behaviour may affect the communication of training; the relationship between phone use and the spatial, as well as value-laden arrangements, of a training activity. Bearing all this in mind, the next section discusses an exercise that explores the use of mobile phones in outdoor space. In addition to sharing an instance of practice, the aim is to explore what happens when key features of performer training, such as the use of indoor space and visual communication, are suspended.

Feel/Hear/See/Do: Attention outside

Feel/Hear/See/Do was initially conceived as an exercise for a second-year module of the Theatre and Performance BA at the University of Leeds. It has since been used in several training situations, including preparation for the development of material for an interactive

[11] In this respect, individual instances of mobile phone use may also be understood actively as a form of intervention rather than passively as a result of distraction. For example, in his project with college students, Aagaard found that a tendency to use the mobile phone may be a response to material that the student finds difficult and wishes to avoid (2015, p. 94).

peripatetic performance.[12] The exercise was inspired by *IntuiTweet*, a project developed by choreographer Susan Kozel with Mia Keinanen and Leena Rouhiainen. Kozel and her partners, located in different geographical places, exchanged messages on Twitter describing movements or kinaesthetic sensations they experienced throughout the day. In response to a message from one member of the group, the other two would improvise and send a message back (Kozel 2014).

Feel/Hear/See/Do utilised text messaging and was done in pairs. Each partner was positioned at a different place on the university campus and, following a kinaesthetic sensation or event in the space in which they found themselves, had to compose a text and send it to their partner. The partners had then to undertake the task suggested in the text message and, out of this experience, compose a new text to send back. For example, Partner A invited Partner B to look at the trail of airplane fumes in the sky. As Partner B engaged with the task, their movement changed: B looked upwards and began walking backwards following the line the airplane left behind. The new movement formed the basis of the next instruction B sent to A: 'Walk backwards until you find an obstacle'. The exercise thus aimed to establish a feedback loop between sensation-experience-action which involved the two partners and the surrounding space, mediated by the messaging service.

After initial free play, the exercise was structured around the senses, following a progression from sensing to doing, reflected in the title. This served two aims. The first aim was to ensure that any action the trainees might invite or engage with in the 'doing' part of the exercise would be a result of and/or in tune with an enhanced sensory perception that included the person doing the exercise, the absent partner, other people that happened to be physically present, and the surrounding environment. This progression also marked a trajectory from

[12] Feel/Hear/See/Do is part of a cluster of exercises that seek to explore the creative potential of basic functionalities of mobile phones. For more, see https://signalspace.leeds.ac.uk

instructions that could be considered 'safer' – since engagement with the initial invitations to 'Feel' and 'Hear' would not draw attention to the doer – towards instructions that could entail visible movement. The intention was that by the time the trainees were invited to perform an action, they had already been involved in a sensory trajectory that progressed from sensing, which remained fairly internal and invisible to an external observer, towards doing that was visible and could attract attention.

The exercise therefore relies on the following three premises: it takes place outside; the communication between the partners is effected by text messages; and the trainees need to have a working phone with them. As such, the requirements of the exercise begin to upset established assumptions: where trainees, at least in formal university and conservatoire settings, are usually confronted with the monochrome walls of studio spaces, now they are asked to work in the midst of a plethora of events[13]: colours, shapes, sounds, textures, changes in temperature and light; where trainer and trainees are usually the only ones present in the studio, they are now surrounded by other people who have nothing to do with the training; where trainees are potentially visible at all times to the trainer and the trainer can be visible at all times to the trainees, they are not able to see each other; where trainees are encouraged to make eye contact with their partners, no such contact is possible.

Accordingly, the body through which the exercise takes place is not positioned within an extra-daily framework of movement; rather, the exercise is situated within the mundane kinetic registers of 'mediatropic' embodiment (Richardson 2005). Yet at the same time it upsets this repertoire by asking the trainees to engage with the environment, turn this experience into language and share it with another. The exercise is based on the trainees' existing competencies as mobile phone users but also seeks to extend such competencies into

[13] Notable exceptions include developments in training for site specific performance, see Quigley 2018, as well as approaches that take place outside by default, for example Body Weather.

a form of ecological-somatic discovery. As such, the exercise has the potential to produce what Kozel calls with regard to her own project, 'gift[s] of motion' (2014, p. 91), invitations for sensing, interacting or acting upon the environment that move beyond familiar and often narrow kinetic repertoires associated with mobile phone use and behaviour in public spaces. Significantly, the exercise substitutes an instrumental relationship to space with an attitude of playfulness and discovery. As the trainees who took part in the exercise observed, campus pathways are treated routinely: as routes from one space to another and as an insignificant aspect of one's daily routine. By contrast, in this exercise trainees were encouraged to take notice, find out details, and embody kinetic relations beyond the usual ones, experiencing, along the way, their surroundings in a personal and fairly intimate manner.

In this respect, the function of the gaze was paramount, since the exercise required the trainees to switch between very different focal qualities: staring at one's phone was alternated with a sense of 'open' viewing and sensing one's environment, which again could be interrupted at any point by an incoming message. None of these modes was prioritised; rather what was exercised was an ability to move between them. As a result of these shifts, the exercise put forward a different relation between training and texting: instead of text messaging being considered an event external to the training, as would happen for example in a normative training environment, the training activity 'in-corporated' the function of the mobile phone. Sending and receiving text messages became a means of enhancing awareness and kinaesthetic experience, whilst somatic exploration became communicated in a text message, extending, in this way, the content, language and behaviour that is often associated with this medium. As a result, a set of gestures that comprise mediatropic embodiment acquired a novel experiential potential and made up the very activity of the training.

The way the exercise appropriated a specific, and deeply acculturated, function of the mobile phone encouraged a range of attention modalities: a 'heightened' mode, by inviting the

trainees to open up to their environment; disruption, by asking them to switch between an open focus and the introvert shape of texting; and distraction, which could be caused at any moment by the incoming text messages or, indeed, any other event in the space. Of course, each trainee's engagement with and commitment to the exercise might be radically different. Crucially, however, the exercise does not valorise one mode of attention over another. Nor does it rest on a pre-conceived assumption with regard to what needs to be selected and what needs to be excluded from the trainee's field of awareness; rather this includes both the training situation as well as non-training ones. In fact, it would be more accurate to say that instead of separating the training from the daily, as can happen when training takes place indoors, the daily can be at any point folded into the training.[14] As such, the trainees are tasked with the responsibility to synthesise their own field of awareness and share aspects of it with their partner. Within a process of negotiating, responding to, as well as ignoring a range of stimuli that are not, and cannot, be controlled, the 'circle of attention' becomes the world.

Conclusion

In response to recent arguments that the development of alternative relations to technology is a task for education, and specifically for training, this article sought to explore whether performer training can serve such a purpose. It focused on the use of mobile phones as an instance of a ubiquitous technology with a strong cultural and social identity. By positioning the mobile phone as a *pharmakon* and by reviewing the work of other practitioners, it argued that the multiple functions of the phone render its use inherently ambiguous. This foregrounds a tension between attention and distraction, which is central not only to

[14] In some cases, onlookers began to watch or even film the exercise on their own phones. This blurred the boundary between training and performance and raised questions about the politics of public space as well as the ethics of the exercise. Students are pre-warned that their work may – pun intended – attract attention and are given permission to abandon the exercise if they feel uncomfortable.

performer training practice but also to current debates about the cognitive capacities of young people.

In response to the problematics of attention, the article presented an exercise that utilises texting and takes place outside. Drawing on the trainees' experience, it put forward an alternative way of engaging with questions of attention and distraction, one that does not pit one against the other, but rather positions the trainee's engagement as multi-modal, processual, synthesising, and mediated. Specifically, by focusing on aspects of embodied experience, in terms of mobile phone use, modes of attention, and behaviour in public space, the exercise sought to engage the 'mediatropic', peripatetic body. Through utilising a series of deeply sedimented gestures, there emerges the potential to sensitise the trainees to the tacit, yet powerful, constituent elements of quotidian activity and enable them to gently push these boundaries in their training and possibly through their future work as performers and performance-makers.

Alongside exercises developed by other performer trainers, Feel/Hear/See/Do may be seen as a first step towards a performer training practice that works with, through and against a mobile-being-in-the-world in an attempt to appropriate established cultures of use and invite a reconsideration of modes of attention. Accordingly, it can be argued that the constituent elements of the exercise, common with other approaches, demonstrate that training practice can serve as a site where alternative relations to technology and digital culture can be rehearsed. Training, in other words, may not only support the development of performance but it may also serve as 'an apprenticeship in skilful behaviour', offering an opportunity for thinking, and crucially embodying different ways of using digital devices. Training can thus be understood as an active space where relations to digital culture and artefacts are contested and reconfigured. Within such a process, though, performer training is also bound to change: in the configuration proposed here both shoes and mobile phones are kept on.

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