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Experiencing Connection

Bridging the Gap in Interpersonal Exchanges on Stage

Abstract

This article explores interdisciplinary practical research centered on co-performer connection, a term encapsulating the deeply gratifying sensation arising from profound interpersonal exchanges among performers, ultimately enhancing the overall performance. While several performing arts practitioners, such as Stanislavski (1937/2008), Nachmanovitch (1990) and Zarrilli (2009), have attempted to unravel what co-performer connection exactly is and how performers can achieve it, there are still an abundance of ideas regarding how to achieve it, with a myriad of names associated with the phenomenon. Drawing on interdisciplinary practical as well as theoretical research, this article contends that co-performer connection happens indirectly through active engagement with the evolving performance. Following this statement, it redefines the functioning of co-performer connection as a responding to the game of the third space. Furthermore, by drawing a parallel between my redefinition and the ideas of Leo Apostel, the article argues that dedicated interaction with the performance-in-progress is spiritual in nature and can therefore evoke a spiritually transformative experience.

Introduction

Undoubtedly, every performer has their own unique motivations for pursuing a career as a performer. As I delved into my own reasons, I discovered that there was one specific, captivating yet intricate experience that drew me towards this profession: the deeply gratifying feeling born from a profound interpersonal exchange among performers, which I term 'co-performer connection.' At first sight, this term may appear oversimplified or elusive, given that the word 'connection' encompasses a broad spectrum of concepts, ranging from WiFi to romantic attachments. Furthermore, human connection can be consciously or unconsciously perceived, experienced through direct or indirect relationships, and signify both mere causal relatedness and self-transcending experiences. I acknowledge the complexities inherent in this concept. However, from my interdisciplinary practical and theoretical research, co-performer connection emerges, both in practice and theory, as the most empirically fitting phrase to encapsulate this profound experience. Phrases I have used in practice —e.g. 'being present for my co-actor,' 'experiencing free play together with a co-performer,' or 'having peace of mind while performing'— resonate with other performers' embodied memories, but also tend to elicit additional questions. The words to describe this experience simply seem to vary from person to person.

The variability in describing this experience aligns with numerous established performing arts practitioners —actors, directors, musicians and dancers— who have felt compelled to write, define, reflect upon, and study co-performer connection (e.g. Stanislavski 1937/2008; Meisner 1987; Nachmanovitch 1990; Zarrilli 2009). Their writings reveal that the phenomenon is bestowed with many names, each accompanied by corresponding theories on how to attain the profound experience. While many practitioners eventually came to embrace the untamable nature of co-performer connection, my growing fascination with articulating this phenomenon has led me to believe that I can make it somewhat more accessible to fellow practitioners. Consequently, I set out on interdisciplinary practical research centered on co-performer connection. Through the presentation of select findings of this largely practical research, this article aims to (a) redefine co-performer connection's functioning and (b) clarify the spiritual aspect that can arise from a co-performer connection experience.

The first research question (a) will be answered through untangling the process of co-performer connection. I will present three major (auto-)ethnographic observations that I derived from fieldwork on the topic. Based on these three observations, I will redefine co-performer connection's functioning as a 'game of responding to the third space.' I will argue that co-performer cannot be pursued; it must be present as the unintended side-effect of one's personal dedication to the performance-in-progress. This idea of dedication to a greater cause than oneself (as well as the other-oriented consciousness needed for it) will be framed as a key component of the experience of co-performer connection that is spiritual in nature (b). In my discussion on the functioning of co-performer connection, I will also expand on the seemingly limited actions — i.e. responding — individual performers can undertake in the connection process. Finally, I will argue that since 'responding' happens when performers tune into the shared activity of performing together, the performer's other-oriented intentionality to serve the creative work should be performers' vital concern.

As mentioned before, the research methods that underpin my redefinition of co-performer connection as a game of responding to the third space are based on practice. I work

as an actor, dancer and devisor. I develop exercises for actor-actor connection and direct multidisciplinary performance events that center around connection. In addition to the practical gathering of knowledge, I drew inspiration from an extensive literature review of existing knowledge on performance connection in Western and non-Western performing, acting and dance training, music ensemble playing, and various additional discursive frameworks. In the last decades, a substantial body of research has been developed in adjacent fields that helped me understand co-performer connection. The construct of a model for co-performer empathy in music theory has had a considerable impact on my analysis of the functioning of co-performer connection. Furthermore, I have found the tension between acting theory and philosophy to be a fruitful source of insight. I will draw on Leo Apostel's writings on atheist spirituality (b) and build on the philosophies of Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas to clarify connection's functioning (a). Buber and Levinas centralized their thinking around the experience of the irreducible encounter with another and questioned which modes of consciousness and qualities of interaction are required for it (Buber, 1923; Levinas, 1991). In the following sections, their theories will weave into my redefinition of co-performer connection's functioning as a game of responding to the third space.

The third space: hybrid, together and between us

The first observation that led to my redefinition of the functioning of co-performer connection as a game of responding to the third space happened during a laboratory in which I was exploring touch as a tool for connection (The Hague, March 2019). In the lab, I found myself wondering whether I, while being touched, connected to the body or the hand of the person touching me. I realized that when someone touched me, I connected to the *action* of touch. It was through that person's touch that I subsequently connected to them. In a similar way, Jamaican reggae musicians report to find the 'groove' — the connection experience that exists between instrumentalists — by tuning into the music and the song itself (Oliver 2019, 194-209). The reggae musicians perceive the song as having its own feeling, and interacting with that feeling makes the performers empathically attuned (Ibid.). They do not take as its object a perceived other, such as the other musician, but rather the music's shape-shifting and developing body, the shared musical action. This empirical phenomenon where shared action leads to connection has also been reported outside of the performing arts.[1] The observations suggested to me that the performed artwork itself (the evolving song, scene or dance) is contributing to co-performer connection.

Following this line of thought, one could say that connection between performers happens indirectly: input comes from listening to the scene and responses are fed back into the scene. Director Anne Bogart summarizes this process quite simply with the words: "It does not matter what I want. What does the play want?" (2019). The play in Bogart's quote is not a third active, decisive entity. It should be considered the *meeting point* created by the performers together, their shared, intersubjective creative endeavor. In that sense, calling it a third *space* seems fitting.[2] Although it is not a tangible, physical space, it is a metaphorical one shaped by the performers' collaborative actions, a fundamentally hybrid area that exists because of the combination of their contributions. This metaphorical space belongs to all contributors and, most importantly, to the work itself. In the subsequent sections of this article, I employ the term 'third space' to denote the crucial juncture of shared action-in-

progress among performers. Acknowledging this juncture serves as the prerequisite for performers to establish co-performer connection.

Creating a third space is not a singular event but an immersive journey involving the actor in a continual process of performance creation. This ongoing engagement with the evolving dynamics of the third space demands a persistent commitment to the collective artistic endeavor. This also implies that, once established, the third space does not exist in isolation but rather thrives on an ongoing acknowledgment and adaptation to its ever-evolving nature. In other words, both the play and the co-performer connection expand and develop simultaneously through a constant recognition of all the changes that are being suggested. This follows Stanislavsky's observation that connection and adaptation are interdependent: "as long as we are on the stage, we are in unending contact with one another, therefore our adjustments to each other must be constant" (Stanislavski 2008, 234).

Before I delve into the continual dynamics of co-performer connection, I want to translate the above to more hands-on and practical knowledge for performers in a rehearsal room context. In the creative process of a devising project centered around mythic imagination and storytelling, I exposed drama students to a rehearsal process in which I emphasized the importance of the third space. After the project, a participant summarized their learning curve as follows: "I think a performer should know that during co-performer connection the focus is not on oneself, not on one's co-performer, not on the audience or director, but on the activity of *performing together in service of the piece*" (Interview Participant, September 2021). This participant's quote not only follows Enfield and Kockelman's statement about the central importance of intentionality in joint action (2017, xiv), a theme I will elaborate on later in this article, it also underscores the necessary personal development of actors.

An intention to serve the performance as a third space requires performers to have a balanced or self-reliant sense of self. They cannot 'serve' while being — or having to be — appropriated versions of themselves. Only when the existence of oneself and one's particularities are acknowledged and accepted, it becomes possible to open up to the contributions of the other (or others) and truly interact with their suggestions to the third space. Acknowledging the input of a co-performer in a way that produces a third space is fundamentally not predictable, manageable or scripted. It cannot be rehearsed and later reproduced with closed eyes. One needs to be willing to let their input change one's ecosystem. In return of what could be called an ego-sacrifice, the third space will display new ways of looking at the same scene, score or choreography time and time again.

The articulation of philosopher Martin Buber's I-You relationship might be useful here: in *The I and You*, Buber recognizes two types of relationships: the I-It and the I-You (2016). The relationship with 'it' is a relationship with the conceptualization of 'You'. 'It' is there for the taking, its world is reliable, manageable, it can be rehearsed (Buber 2016, 40). In comparison, the I-You is a relation through the I's whole being that goes beyond the I's control and recognises a new way of looking at the same old thing (Buber 2016, 61, 87). Buber continues that although the You may be different every time, one should look forward to entering the temple of 'You' again and again (Buber 2016, 63). Meeting the contributions to the third space of the other without heated curiosity to penetrate the unknown will prevent co-performer connection and hinder a continual adaptation process.

The game: balancing between freedom and restriction

The following section discusses the functioning of co-performer connection after the establishment of the third space—a shared creative endeavor in which the performer acknowledges the creative contributions of co-performers. As I suggested in the previous section, the creation of a third space is a major challenge in itself but not a fixed achievement. Instead, it requires an ongoing acknowledgment and adaptation to the performed artwork-in-progress. In other words, a performance based on co-performance connection needs to evolve through a renegotiation process between performers who acknowledge each other's input and thus constantly redefine the ongoing performance. In this section, I will argue that from the perspective of the performers, this process functions as a game: a renegotiation game.

I started to frame co-performer connection as a game due to the significance of rules I observed in its practice. After all, whether explicitly or implicitly agreed upon, games always involve limitations and rules that players adhere to (Caillois 1961, 5-10). Expanding on this idea, it could even be argued that rules, by providing structure and ensuring fairness, form the foundation of games. The importance of rules first dawned on me during a hands-on experience in the realm of contact improvisation, an improvised dance style where the dance unfolds guided by points of contact with the dance partner (Ghent, 2018). I noticed that the specificity of the task in a contact improvisation class made co-performer connection more accessible for me, a non-professional contact improvisation dancer, during structured and well-defined exercises than in a free contact improvisation social dancing event. Supported by informal survey outcomes and discussions with other practitioners, this initially led me to believe that staying connected to a co-performer is generally easier when the rules governing the alteration of the third space and the acknowledgment of its changes are clearly outlined (workshop discussion March 2021, online; informal survey participants July 2021, Ronse).

However, this belief was nuanced in a second series of practical experiments during a theatre project that made use of a voice choir (Brussels, 2019). In this project, the opposite of what I experienced in the contact improvisation class proved to be true as well. In the voice choir, twelve professional performers were asked to speak synchronically at certain moments during the performance. The text phrases were meticulously composed as a score. Speed, breathing pauses and intonation were fixed. Apart from a dozen of these composed interventions, the voice choir had no additional tasks. During the process, it became apparent that once performers mastered the score and could execute it proficiently, they expressed a lack of challenge, joy, and connection. Contradicting my first belief, it seemed to be attributed to the fact that, for seasoned and skilled performers, an excessively structured and rigid task limits opportunities to both challenge as well as playfully explore the redefinition of the third space.

These two seemingly conflicting observations converge on the understanding that the possibility to stay connected to a co-performer depends on the balance between the set of rules guiding the reshaping of the third space in accordance with the performers' level of skill and experience. In other words, the right balance between structure and flexibility is crucial for fostering meaningful ongoing co-performer connection. Depending on the skills and needs of the performers, rules might benefit from being implied or even unstated and alterable. As noted in the beginning of this section, the game of the third space is first and foremost a renegotiation game. Although rules might shape the game, there is more to the playing than

simply 'sticking to rules'. More than anything, the presence of rules has to do with enabling the exploration of the boundaries of the third space; discovering opportunities; and walking the path in perfect balance between creative restrictions and freedom. Finding this perfect balance needs to be a team effort in which project leaders are especially put to the challenge. Moreover, the working context, circumstances and process have a considerable impact.

If we look more closely at the rules guiding the reshaping of the third space applied in a performance context, it becomes clear that those may seem unequal or different among participants, as seen in scenarios like the leader-follower dynamic in tango dancing or the distinctions between a lead character and a supporting role. However, these rules are equal in the sense that they both serve the needs of the third space (the tango dance, the play). Some of those rules are fundamentally specific to the choice of repertory and the vocabulary of the third space (from improvised jazz to acting Shakespeare). Other rules can be considered rules for how a team player should act. The final set of rules mentioned underscores the responsibility of performers. Achieving a delicate equilibrium between freedom and restriction typically excludes actions like cheating or violating the rules, as these behaviors often lead to the disruption or destruction of the third space.

Restating the above in a more practical context for performers in a rehearsal setting, it's crucial to highlight that, in navigating the delicate balance between freedom and restriction, performers should appreciate the importance of rules in co-performer connection and embrace the specificity of their tasks. In addition to the rules they might discuss in the creative process, they also must be aware of a set of rules that shape the progression of their collaborative endeavors. In acting a dialogue, for example, the two actors have a set of implicit rights and duties. If one actor abruptly stops midway through a sentence and leaves the other hanging, that actor has violated the team player rules of the specific dialogue-game which includes progressing together through the scene. It depends on the individuals involved whether or not certain actions (e.g., paraphrasing, an unrehearsed physical action or an unexpected pause in acting a scene) are rule violations. Co-performer empathy skills — this is a term from Music Studies (Waddington 2017, 230) that can be understood as the skill of sensitive understanding and subsequent adequate response to another performer's input and feelings (Rabinowitch 2012, 80) — can aid the performer to become more sensitive to this process.

For the team-playing performer, playing the renegotiation game most importantly entails experimenting with involving both poles of restriction and freedom in a new way around each other in a generous manner (especially towards co-performers). This is a delicate business of harmonizing seeming dualities, an inherent quality of co-performer connection. In the earlier mentioned philosophy of Buber the balancing of duality is given a central place.[3] This makes the renegotiation game of the third space essentially a practice that embraces difference, viewing it as a potential for expanding and redefining the third space and co-performer connection. The question remains: how should a performer do that? After discussing the performer's intention to serve (third space); the performer's personal context of self-reliance (third space); the importance of a suitable framework (game); and the required team player attitude (game), the argument arrives at the word that sums up the performer's share in co-performer connection: responding.

Responding: active–passive balancing in constant change

The third observation that has led to redefining co-performer connection as a game of responding to the third space was preceded by a long auto-ethnographic process of investigating what the performer actually *does* when co-performer connection is experienced. An important insight in the mattered happened whilst doing balancing exercises for Argentine tango technique. In our (daily) balancing act with gravity, the body acts automatically when adjustment is needed; the brain sends messages to instruct muscles to move and make the adjustments to body position that will maintain balance and coordination (Studd & Cox 2019, 20). This process is not a conscious process, but a constant, cyclical, dynamic yet harmonizing relation of falling and compensating that we experience as a body reflex, happening on its own accord (Ibid.). Similarly, in the balancing act of the game of the third space, it is important to come back to the fact that it cannot be *done* by the performer. An actor is playing (with) a scene but only insofar as he is subjected to the information provided by the scene-in-progress. This specific type of continual interaction of the performer with the third space cannot be anything other than a continual *responding* to the third space.

When exploring how to respond, performers should first and foremost be aware that there is a key difference between responding and initiating a response. Proposing or initiating a response — i.e. having an idea — happens through a processed stimulus. When a performer responds, the trigger comes immediately and fundamentally from the outside. Here, the performer is not self-oriented. In auto-ethnographic writing about the connection experience in Argentine tango dancing, I described *both* performers as followers, continually responding to the third space and instantaneously answering to the 'call' of the other (Logbook January 2019, Brussels). The continual call-response sequences create what I earlier referred to as the balancing game of differences. Although the responding seems to happen to my partner directly, there will be a difference if one responds to the co-performer alone or to the third space of which the co-performer is one (very important) physical manifestation. Because the co-performer is (one of) the largest physical manifestations of the third space, practitioners in the past have wrongly simplified that when a performer considers the other performer as the source of all practical energy, it would lead to co-performer connection.

In order to let the continual responding to the third space happen, the performer needs to be open to all the resources of the third space and fire up when the scene or the dance demands it. I call this attitude 'other-orientation'. When a performer brings other-oriented consciousness into the performative moment, responding happens without effort through what Levinas —a second philosopher who puts the encounter with others central in his philosophy— calls the immediate absorption of the command issued by the other (Levinas, 1969).[4] Arguably, call and response might even coincide. In Argentine tango, for example, the follower (usually the woman) is already pushing the ground shortly before the call for a back step by the leader. However, she only takes the back step, she only fires up and gets activated the moment the partner calls. In theatre, people refer to the responsiveness I describe here as 'being on'. It is also reminiscent of Peter Brook's 'invisible network' that when fired up, causes performers to improvise seemingly simultaneously (Marshall et al. 2010).

Translating this theory, once again, to the rehearsal room, performers understandably want to find more clarity on *how* to respond. The response-call-response process has been expressed many times by composers, poets and other artists to feel more like following, or

taking dictation (Nachmanovitch 1990, 4). Rather than defining it with a specific action (following) or behavior (taking dictation), I argue that what is needed is an *attitude* that envelops both activeness and passiveness equally as well as a *consciousness* that is focused outside the self. The performer is after all simultaneously receptive and responsive, depending on what is asked for.

I find the required attitude is explained best in a fun fact used by improvisation teacher Keith Johnstone: "[Inuit] believed that each piece of bone only had one shape inside it and the artist's job was not to think up an idea, but to wait until he knew what was in there" (1981, 79). Following Johnstone's story, Nachmanovitch states that the painter Michelangelo had a similar theory of sculpture; The statue is already in the stone, has been in the stone since the beginning of time, and the sculptor's job is to wait until he sees it and only then release it by carefully scraping away the excess material (1990, 4). The attitude described by Johnstone and Nachmanovitch is a sort of active passiveness: non-doing that can easily fire up and become action. Active passiveness is not a method, but a dedication, an intentionality, a mindset and, an approach to the third space.

Performers are presented with two problems here. First, there is the fact that changing one's attitude or mindset is a notoriously hard thing to do. In essence, the outlined dedication (i.e., active passiveness) cannot be 'achieved'. It is only encountered in the doing, through the intense active-passive engagement with the third space. Second, active passiveness is fundamentally opposite to steering or controlling the performative moment. It is therefore both daunting and challenging for many performers. The challenge is inflicted, at least partly, by today's decisive and businesslike ways of thinking which are often unprepared for service, non-action, ambiguity, slowing down and trusting what is (Claxton 2000).

To address these problems, I briefly turn to philosopher Richard Tarnas (1996). Tarnas writes that the structural imbalance of yang (simplified: activity) over yin (simplified: passivity) is pervasive and affects every aspect of Western civilization. He claims it necessarily calls forth a longing for a rebalancing of the polarities (Tarnas 1996, 443). Translating Tarnas's conclusions to insights that might help performers to adopt the active passive attitude, I see the need for the active state to undergo a devaluation while the passive state should become an equally valuable quality. Even though activity is needed at times to move on, to strengthen dynamic, to unbalance in order to rebalance, an emphasis on passivity can be helpful and focus the performer more outside the self, on the senses and on the actual resources that are provided by the third space. In the wonderful metaphor from *Zen in the Art of Archery* (Herrigel 2020), by doing nothing, the performer might discover to 'let the shot shoot itself,' to let the dance be danced, to let the music play itself, to live the role.

While active passiveness reiterates once more the importance of the performer's intention and mindset, I do not want to imply that active passiveness is solely the responsibility of performers. Active passiveness should be nurtured in the rehearsal room. Keith Johnstone elaborates on his Inuit example by describing the need for an empathic rehearsal environment that releases performers from the idea that they need to be original, come up with a clever idea or do their best (1981, 79). Johnstone noticed that such an environment freed performers up and enabled them to dedicate themselves to the game they were involved in (1999, 62-69). It is therefore important to end my redefinition of the functioning of co-performer connection as a game of responding to the third space with an

acknowledgement of not only co-performer connection's indirect occurrence but also its circumstantial complexity.

Conclusion: the experience of responding to the game of the third space

In my redefinition of the functioning of co-performer connection as a game of responding to the third space, I have touched several times upon concepts hinting at spirituality, such as self-reliance and dedication. This is not a rare occurrence. Based on a comparative study on connection approaches in Western post-Stanislavskian acting theory, mentions of spirituality echo throughout discussions on co-performer connection (Hanselaer 2022a, 48-54). Moreover, looking at the mystery from a different angle, spiritual experiences in performance are often described with terms related to connection, such as attunement, synchrony, harmony, resonance and oneness (Hanselaer 2022b, 67-68). Although co-performance connection and performance spirituality thus seem to be associated, there is very little clarification about what the spiritual aspect of co-performer connection is, or vice versa. Even Konstantin Stanislavsky, the pioneer of modern acting theory, who had the intuition that the exchange of inner, invisible spiritual resources was most important for co-performer connection (Stanislavsky 2008, 201), was unable to pinpoint what these spiritual resources exactly entail. In this conclusion, I want to shed a light on this issue. After all, based on my auto-ethnographic research into co-performer connection, I believe there is a distinct spiritual dimension to co-performer connection experiences which is not very ambiguous. I will explain my stance by drawing a parallel between my auto-ethnographic observations, my redefinition of the functioning of co-performer connection and philosopher Leo Apostel's work on atheist spirituality.

In observing the more intense experiences of co-performer connection during multiple phases of my practical research, I noted that the more I aimed for connection and made it a target, the more I missed it. Instead, I felt intense connection was most likely to occur when it was not given conscious focus, but slowly evolved when focusing on the performance-in-progress. In that sense, the experience reminds of intense feelings like success or happiness. In *Man's Search for Meaning,* psychologist Viktor Frankl states: "[Success or happiness] cannot be pursued; it must ensue…as the unintended side-effect of one's personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself" (Frankl 1984, 17). Leo Apostel's writings clarify the spiritual turn to my experience and Frankl's quote. According to Apostel, the crux of spirituality lies in committing oneself to a purpose larger than one's own self or one's own pleasure. He explains that spirituality comprises (1) placing oneself as an integral part of a greater 'whole', and (2) centering one's efforts towards specific objectives that serve this bigger 'whole' (Apostel 2013, 24). In order to be able to do both (1) and (2), Apostel suggests that a certain attitude and mindset is needed. This attitude should be based on consciousness processes that are characterized by the transformation of self-centered impulses to other-orientation (Apostel 2013, 106).

The attitude Apostel describes reminds of the attitude of active passiveness that I suggested in the game of responding to the third space. In fact, both (1) and (2) are represented in my redefinition of the functioning of co-performer connection. Firstly, the redefinition is neither centered around the performer nor around connection itself. From the performer's perspective, the third space is put center stage. It is the greater 'whole' of which

the performer is an integral part. Through the service of the third space, as the relationship becomes more important than the *relata,* the connection experience can occur as a 'side effect'. Second, since 'responding' happens when performers tune into the shared activity of performing together, it seems only logical that active passiveness suggests a type of performing that is not led by ego-centered impulses. At this point, it also becomes possible to justify Stanislavsky's mention that sharing spiritual resources between actors is most important in co-actor connection. Building on the above, these resources can be understood as the impulses that arise through serving the play, i.e., when acting becomes a contribution to something 'bigger' than one's own performance of a role. The spiritual resources can be the implicit sensations that performers feel when they communally work towards the same goal: the sensation that the performers are 'in it together'. From experience, I can only agree that such a shared intention is most effective.

Finally, my attention is drawn to a sociocultural implication. Many contemporary actors are trained according to systems that tend to focus increasingly on individual action and behavior and the development of an individual skill set. Furthermore, the acting industry as it exists in 2023 emphasizes individuality and rewards individual success. In this conclusion, I have claimed that the attitude that underpins both co-performer connection experiences as well as spiritual performance experiences requires the opposite: other-orientation. I understand that it is hard to pass on this attitude to actor-students. It is also challenging to capture the topic in a meaningful way in a scholarly context. In another publication on the topic, I make suggestions for individual work as well as partner exercises that aim to develop this attitude (Hanselaer 2023). Nevertheless, in current performance practice in general, I find that both spirituality and connection remain too often uninvited guests that are left in the corner of the rehearsal room. The word 'spirituality' seems to bring a set of difficulties for many practitioners. It is true that spirituality is not easy to grasp without some ambiguity. Like connection, the term has multiple interpretations, occasionally in opposition to one another.[5] Be that as it may, I believe that the nurturing of an active-passive, other-oriented attitude and mindset in actors is not a weaker alternative theory to individual-skill-based performer training but a necessary extra layer that needs to be recognized and developed. Otherwise, I fear that when we progress further in time, we might come to a point where we need to conclude that we lost an immeasurable valuable dimension of performing along the way.

Notes

1. Team building activities foster interpersonal bonds by encouraging participants to engage with a shared activity or goal, making the collaborative process a central force. In ancient history, as populations grew too large for kinship to provide connection, narratives were installed to bind people together (Harari 2017; Voorhees, Burton & Read 2020). These collective fictions, where large groups choose to believe in a shared narrative or concept, similarly revolve around a common engagement.
2. This should not be confused with Homi K. Bhabha's Third Space theory, a postcolonial sociolinguistic theory of identity and community. In this theory, the Third Space is described as the space where oppressed and oppressor can come together. The space embodies both the oppressed and the oppressor's particularity and is theoretically free of oppression itself (Bhabha 2004). Reminiscent of the third space I describe, Bhabha considers the Third Space a

challenge to the limits of the self in the act of reaching out to what is liminal (Bhabha 2009, xiii). He also argues that the Third Space results from interaction (in his theory the interaction of two or more cultures) and describes it as both a collision and on-going process of adjusting to the other (2004, 111).

3. Buber states that the I-You happens in the encounter of two contradictions in the ultimate zero point of the now (2016, 75-87).

4. Levinas used the concept of 'the command issued by the other' to explain that in face-to-face encounter, people are ethically responsible to one-another because the human face calls the subject into giving and serving the other. Levinas considers the call to be perceived through the senses: 'The first consciousness, the beginning of consciousness, is the sensory sensation. With that the being opens itself, the darkness is dispelled, there is light' (Levinas 1969, 163).

5. The word 'spiritual' can relate to the religious concept of a true undividable, unchangeable and potentially eternal essence often referred to as the soul. Another more academic line of thought considers spirituality to be a socioculturally structured attempt to cope with existential human situations. As I will explain in the main text, I interpret spirituality as a specific experience of consciousness.

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About the Author

Elien Hanselaer is a researcher, theatre maker, and acting tutor in the United Kingdom and Belgium. Having completed her studies at KASK in Belgium and East 15 Acting Achool in the UK, Hanselaer performed with renowned international companies, including Dash Arts, Odin Teatret, and KVS. In 2018, she received the esteemed Northern Bridge award, providing funding for her practice-based research on co-performer empathy and connection. More specifically, Dr. Hanselaer's research delves into the intricate dynamics of performers' connections, exploring avenues for improved connectivity and investigating the transformative potential of a creative ideology that places co-performer connection at the core of the artistic process. Her research also translates to her work as an acting tutor at Conservatorium Antwerpen and the International Opera Academy where her pursuit of understanding and strengthening the bonds among co-performers is taught to future generations of artists. Currently, Dr. Hanselaer spearheads 'Korte Keten,' an ambitious four-year arts project in Belgium that centers on nurturing cultural connections, encouraging artistic collaboration and forging meaningful relationships between artists and communities.