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Tactics: Practical and Imagined

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AFTERWORD: TACTICS OF CARE (Practical, and Imagined)

By Diana Damian Martin, Sharon Green, Clara Nizard, Theron Schmidt, Max Schulman, and Kim Solga

In December 2017, a group of scholar/teachers including Kim Solga, Sylvan Baker, Diana Damian Martin, Rebecca Hayes Laughton, and Katherine Low began convening working sessions at various schools and conferences to address the questions and problems that would ultimately animate this volume. We met at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (London, December 2017), the Canadian Association for Theatre Research (Kingston, ON, May 2018), the Association for Theatre in Higher Education (Boston, July 2018), and the ad-hoc convening of the American Society for Theatre Research in San Diego (November 2018).

Right from the start, we were overwhelmed and honoured by the responses of colleagues and students to these convenings. These responses opened up a necessary space to help us all work through the feelings of anxiety, isolation, fiscal stress, and institutional abandonment that have accompanied our various personal experiences of the neoliberal university over the last few years. They also, however, opened up spaces of hope: places to celebrate achievements, reflect on opportunities, and consider survival strategies that might in turn be developed and more widely disseminated.

Fig. 1: insert "Tactics 1.jpg"

Caption: *Tracing resilience at the "Theatre and Performance vs the Crisis in the Humanities" symposium, Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, December 2017. Photo by Kim Solga.*

Below, a handful of respondents from our event at ASTR 2018 in San Diego ruminate upon, list, and re-member tactics they have used, or dreamed of using, to make it through the neoliberal academic day-to-day. They are accompanied here by a handful of photos that document the documentation we produced at our first symposium, in December 2017.

We offer them in the spirit of hope, resilience, struggle and joy – with gratitude to you all.

Clara, thinking about care... especially of students.

Step away from commitments to rest. Keep the pot as close as possible to the stove-top (become feminist cooks). Find your 'equity and diversity crew'. Babysit each other's kids when away for work. Become a mentor. Pay students in training or cash. Have a citation policy in your research. Recommend books and events. Circulate resources. Go to events together. Put care at the front of your practice. Co-create assignments with students. Design a feedback model when collaborating. Be wrong. Be Out. Drop-in 'queer' as often as possible. Have 1:1 meetings. Facilitate access to support. Be powered by joy. Talk about Weinstein. Discuss larger issues. Work with compassion. Make room for emotions. Be personal. Be reflexive. Experiment with forms. Craft alternative methodologies. Account for feelings. Allow people to enter discussion from a place of feeling. Have an open-door policy. Sit with people when they book mental health appointments. Walk people to their mental health appointments. Archive what you do. Share your archives. Make

resources open-access. Build alliances. Curate feminist networks. Pass around tools. Pass around power. Develop feminist ears. Listen for the silence (harassment work). Do not stay in a job that personally damages you. Self-care is warfare. Transform the organisation that employs you. Make banners. Put up posters. Make theory work for you. Theory is a tool. Take theory seriously. Make better tables. Hang laundry outside. Organise Long Tables. Porch-sit.

Fig. 2: insert "Tactics 2.jpg"

Caption: *Participants at the Central symposium were invited to write take-away moments on postcards, which we used to decorate the floor on our final afternoon. Photo by Rebecca Hayes Laughton.*

Sharon, thinking about interdisciplinary collaborations.

How to bring others to the table?

Invite them. Meet them on their turf. Invite them early.

Spend time learning about what matters to them. Gauge their interest first, then invite them to participate in whatever way is meaningful for them (be prepared that this may be different than you expect).

Take someone to coffee and learn about their work and interests; ask them to be involved in something small and low stakes/low prep then use this as an opportunity to gauge continued, more in-depth collaborative interest.

Find and meet staff stakeholder, show them how collaboration/participation with your project will help meet their own goals.

Expect to spend a lot of time learning, cultivating new relationships, and drinking coffee. Walk across campus and see what life is like from a new point of view.

Cultivate mutually beneficial relationships with both junior and senior colleagues; expect to be challenged, to change course, to learn new stuff.

Attend talks/lectures/events organized by other departments/colleagues, then stay after the talk to meet those colleagues and thank them for the event; do the same for student events.

Send an email note of thanks to a colleague for an event that you particularly enjoyed – tell them why it mattered to you.

Find out where the money is and how to get it to support your work. And when you get it, prioritize paying people for their labour.

Invite stakeholders or potential future collaborators to apply with you for funding a project; ask them how you and your work can also support their goals.

Pay attention to who is sitting at the table with you and who isn't. Ask yourself how you can shift structures to be more inclusive if you don't see and hear a diversity of ideas, points of view, and experiences.

Offer something concrete, if possible, to collaborators in return: guest talk in a class, give a backstage tour of an upcoming production, offer coaching a performance-based exercise in a non-performance class, or plan a joint field trip.

Fig. 3: insert "Tactics 3.jpg"

Caption: *More traces at Central, December 2017. Photo by Rebecca Hayes Laughton.*

KIM, THINKING ABOUT DECOLONIZING TEACHING.

BE OPEN AND TRANSPARENT WITH STUDENTS AT THE BEGINNING OF EACH SEMESTER ABOUT YOUR OWN GOALS, ABOUT THE AMOUNT OF WORK TEACHING IS, ABOUT HOW YOU NEGOTIATE ITS LABOUR – LET THEM SEE YOU AS A WORKER, NOT JUST A PROFESSOR.

RECONFIGURE YOUR CLASSROOM SPACE A FEW TIMES IN A FEW DIFFERENT WAYS SO THAT EVERYONE IN THE ROOM CAN EXPERIENCE IT PHYSICALLY FROM ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW (INCLUDING YOURS).

BE WILLING TO SAY YOU DON'T KNOW THE ANSWER; BE WILLING TO ASK EVERYONE TO HELP YOU TRY TO FIND THE ANSWER.

INVITE COLLEAGUES TO GO OUT FOR COFFEE AND TALK ABOUT TEACHING.

STOP COLLEAGUES IN THE HALL OR DROP INTO COLLEAGUES' OFFICE TO ASK HOW THEIR CLASSES ARE GOING.

VISIT THE TEACHING CENTRE ON YOUR CAMPUS TO GET CONNECTED TO OTHER COLLEAGUES IN OTHER DISCIPLINES WHO ARE INTERESTED IN THE QUESTIONS YOU HAVE ABOUT TEACHING.

OFFER TO SPEAK WITH YOUR GRADUATE STUDENTS ABOUT TEACHING ISSUES AND CHALLENGES, EVEN IF THEY ARE NOT YOUR ASSIGNED TA.

CHECK IN WITH YOUR GRADUATE STUDENTS ABOUT THEIR WELLBEING AT KEY POINTS IN THE SEMESTER.

SET LIMITS ON THE TIME YOU WILL SPEND ON TEACHING TASKS EACH WEEK (PREPPING, MARKING, RESPONDING TO EMAILS) AND TRY LOGGING THESE LIMITS IN YOUR CALENDAR.

IF YOU FEEL THE URGE TO BYPASS THESE LIMITS, REMIND YOURSELF THAT GOOD ENOUGH IS GOOD ENOUGH!

Diana, thinking about working across contexts (between academia the wider cultural sector).

share the resources where possible to the benefit of those outside of the institution whose labour is fundamental to its pedagogical and research cultures. place pressure on transparency of pay and be aware that the university upholds hierarchies of knowledge – do not participate in that. work in alliance to change structures that do not foster multiple routes, forms and ways of work of academic practice. invite those who are critical and do not be defensive. circulate resources. be open with students, and do not traffic in narratives that are harmful or reductive. be an ally to colleagues and to students. make space for other ways of working. strive for plurality. share toolkits and knowledge. talk about failures and be accountable. name and make space for collaborators, especially those whose work is outside academia and who often get left out. learn ways and modes of listening; pay attention to where you are. make a case for knowledge-production as a shared endeavour. keep your door open. build alliances. work collectively. unpack affects and how they shape you and others – think about how they might be in the space differently. organise spaces for conversation. share opportunities and share your knowledge about processes, institutional jargon and structures, which are often impenetrable for students, early career researchers, and cultural workers on the outside.

Fig. 4: insert "Tactics 4.jpg"

Caption: *More postcards decorate the space after our symposium, December 2017. Photo by Rebecca Hayes Laughton*

Max, asking: how can we use first-year "intro to uni" courses to help reposition or reorient theatre studies (discipline, department, mission) within the institution, and within the community, in a productive way?

There are inherent skills and capacities within theatre studies that make it an effective and nimble player on campus. It is especially in its practical and "applied" capacities that theatre can work toward larger campus-wide change by providing 1) opportunity and tools for dialogue, 2) general dissemination of information, 3) empathetic and embodied learning. How might we target moments of campus or community gathering as places where those skills (through Boalian exercises, ensemble creation, applied theatre exercises) can be of most use? Rather than focusing on specific courses or creating events in order to enact these practices, what curricular or administrative instances already exist that might benefit from our involvement?

An example. Many universities have a required course for incoming freshmen that act as an introduction to campus life as well as an introduction to some kind of critical thinking that they will use in their college careers. I wonder: how unified are these gateway courses across academia? At my university these courses are primarily team-taught pet projects with intriguing titles. But perhaps there is a way to strategically use these courses as a way of setting standards for discourse on campus.

"Intro-to-uni" classes are often focused on negotiating campus life, along with the development of skills necessary for success at the university more broadly. Imagine, then, a curriculum component or tool focused on embodiment and dialogue that was inserted into all freshman gateway courses? Imagine a group of thirty freshmen exploring concepts of diversity, independence, depression, STEAM vs STEM, and more through Boalian sculpting or curated improvisations.

The eventual (perhaps utopian) idea is that every student on campus will then have engaged in a version of an applied theatre studies curriculum, and developed basic tools of embodiment and observation, as core to their learning alongside standard Socratic dialogue or didactic practice. Perhaps, too, they will discover the power of the former early, and know that it is okay to jump in, make noise, stand up, step back, and breath.

Theron, imagining the classroom as social practice.

Imagine the classroom as social practice. Consider that this class is not separate from the power relations we study but is an instance of them. Ask everyone to read Jo Freeman's 'The Tyranny of Structurelessness'. De-invisibilize the structures we are working with and within. Model different ways of thinking, sharing, responding, making decisions. Work in silent collaboration. Take an unguided walk together. Allow five minutes of uninterrupted speech from everyone, not just those used to talking. Cultivate active listening from everyone, not just those used to being quiet. Let silence be equally valued as a form of expression. Take turns demonstrating non-directive leadership, so everyone gets a go. Try out preferential voting systems rather than binary ones. Borrow from histories of consensus-based processes. Remember that 'formal consensus works best in an atmosphere in which conflict is encouraged, supported, and resolved cooperatively with respect, nonviolence, and creativity' (www.ic.org/wiki/conflict-consensus/). Adopt principles from Open

Space, such as: whoever is here are the right people; or, if you're not getting or contributing something it is your responsibility to move to a conversation where you are – and if such a conversation doesn't yet exist then it is up to you to start it. Craft neutral questions, or even try avoiding questions at all. Value the richness of individual experience and non-verbal knowledge. Explore resiliency as an anti-individualist practice. Use terms like 'anti-racism', 'emotional labour', 'hidden curriculum', and 'intentional community' so they become part of ordinary conversation. Don't mistake any structure for an ideal one, but compare the affordances of each, its inclusions and exclusions, its dramaturgy and its politics.

And then do the same in the department meeting. And then at the university council. When it looks less like a boardroom, it will act less like one, too.

Fig. 5: insert "Tactics 5.jpg"

Caption: *Like the postcard said. Photo by Kim Solga.*