

Maintaining the consent-bubble: an intimacy coordinator's perspective on touch in performance training

Èmil Haarhoff & Kate Lush

Abstract

This article sets out to argue that purposefully consenting to touch constructs a metaphorical 'consent-bubble' in which only those invited into its parameters (often not including the IC, facilitator or teacher) may engage in touch, considering they comply with its uniquely constructed rules and boundaries. To do so, emphasis is laid on the intricacies, processes and importance of communication and consent within the scope of touch and performing arts training. In addition, it is argued that the lack of such consent results in embodied self-preservation and tension activation strategies that halter effective learning. Finally, practical strategies (from an IC perspective) are devised to construct and maintain the consent-bubble, ensuring that touch can be utilised safely, efficiently and consensually in training.

Keywords: intimacy coordination; consent; touch; embodiment; performing arts

Introduction

Intimacy directors (ID) for the theatre arts and live performance, and intimacy coordinators (IC)¹ for television and film, are movement designers and consent advocates who focus on optimising artistry, elevating efficiency and maintaining consent. IC stems from fight direction and stunt coordination, forming a close relationship between the staging of violence and intimacy. IC's employ defined protocols and codified systems for choreographing intimate content, advocating for the performer and liaising between departments through an IC lens. The IC emphasises the concepts of consent, safety, efficiency and confidence when designing intimacy scenes and elevating storytelling, while respecting the performer's agency and subjective boundaries and perimeters, ensuring the repeatability thereof while sustaining the well-being and longevity of the actor. IC's are trained in various concepts, including sexual harassment, mental health first aid, power dynamics, LGBTQIA + representation and sexuality, as well as the complexities of consent.

Intimacy, from the IC perspective, stretches further than scenes containing nudity (the character Alan Strang showing full frontal nudity in the play *Equus*, 1973), sexual inter- and intrapersonal contact (an orgy scene called 'Contact' in the musical *Rent*, 2008), simulated sex (various partnered and masturbatory scenes in *Sex Education*, 2019) and other sexual acts (the depiction of male-on-male anal rape, fellatio, urination and torture in the play *Blasted*, 1995). Intimacy includes content pertaining to the actor's subjective vulnerability, such as non-sexual abuse (the character O'Brien tortures Winston and forces his head into a cage of rats, ready to rip his face to shreds in the play *1984*, 2013), high and/or explicit emotional content (the investigation of the motive and methods of a serial killer as seen in the series *Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story*, 2022) and non-sexual touch (various medical procedures in the series *The Good Doctor*, 2017). Examples of well-known characters that might trigger safeguards in some actors include Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1623), the cannibalistic Hannibal Lecter in the film *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) and the controversial Aileen Wuornos in the film *Monster* (2003).

The term ‘vulnerable’ stems from the Latin noun *vulnus*, meaning ‘wound’, or the Latin verb *vulnerare*, meaning ‘to wound’ (Vulnerable 2022). Intimacy, in the IC context, thus relates to physical and figurative actions that can have the power to wound the performer. Touch, whether charged with sexual intent or employed in a platonic training milieu, encapsulates these qualities. IC protocols include defining and maintaining, for example, touch-and-consent between two or more performers, a process that grants them the opportunity to investigate and indicate their subjective boundaries regarding touch. This article leans towards practical and embodied strategies to facilitate touch in the training environment, within the scope of consent-based practices.

The IC community has been going to great lengths to introduce the concepts of safety, consent and protocol regarding intimacy in universities and training institutions. Hunt (2022) has developed a protocol guide produced specifically for theatre in Cambridge and the Cambridge University Amateur Dramatic Club (ADC Theatre). The purpose of this protocol document is to empower students to feel braver, bolder and more considered in the staging of intimacy through instilling knowledge surrounding best-practice, professional language and tools, and the processes of consent. One of the leading IC training bodies, Intimacy Coordinators and Directors (IDC), has been introducing a series of online courses, globally targeting consent in the performing arts classroom and theatre-based pedagogies, as well as the ethics surrounding intimacy in tertiary education. Theatrical Intimacy Education (TIE) specialises in intimacy education and has launched their Educator Advocate Program that trains educators to amplify consent-based, trauma-informed teaching and guide their colleagues and students towards best-practice. In South Africa, Safe Sets has been designing intimacy workshops and instilling practical tools in various universities, colleges and training institutions around the country.

Yet, merely introducing IC concepts and consent-based practice is not sufficient. There needs to be a leadership-led approach to the way an institution practices and models consent in the learning space. For institutional change to be effective, education of consent-based practices cannot begin and end with the performer, it has to be accepted as a cultural shift, a new way of working, for the whole institution and the more general creative environment. This practice would also need to additionally extend to anyone brought in from the outside of the institution to work with the performers, such as guest directors, choreographers and lecturers. The concept of modelling consent in the creative sphere might meet resistance, the argument being that the moment of seeking consent might be a disruptive force to the creative process.

This article argues that consent in action can be a tiny verbal or non-verbal gesture, formulated at the nucleus of the intention, a cue prior to the moment of touch which indicates to the intended receiver the giver’s intention, and gives the receiver the option to accept, decline or negotiate. Observations indicate that the purposeful implementation of consent-forward protocols and efforts have made a noticeable difference in the understanding, safety and implementation of intimacy in student productions and theatre-based pedagogies.

Embodied pedagogies

As IC’s and performing arts teachers (specifically movement, acting and musical theatre) the authors subscribe to the notion that theatre, dance, acting and related performing arts genres are bodyminded practices. We subscribe to the notion that the performing arts is ‘an art of body and an art grounded in body’ (Sheppard 2006, 7), and that in the context of the performing arts, the body(mind) is the nucleus of any process of inquiry. A shift occurs from the dualistic notion

of *body-in-performance*, to the embodiment focused notion of the *bodymind-as-performance* (Coetzee and Munro 2010, 10).

Embodiment necessarily impacts the way in which pedagogy, consent and intimacy are viewed in this article. Embodiment theories emphasise the perspective of a lived body, with kinaesthetic-motor intelligence, as the locus of bodymindedness, intrinsic body wisdom and the body as subject, as opposed to object. Embodiment theories celebrate a holistic organism and a non-hierarchical synthesis of the body, mind and environment, and seeks to integrate functions such as action, gesture, cognition, thought, emotion, experience, perception, physicality and expression (Haarhoff, Munro, and Coetzee 2022, 234).

Bodymindedness, as a concept of being, is an understanding and performance of self. It can be defined as a coalescence and integration of the multi-layered and multimodal systems of the body, the cognition, psychological, socio-political, cultural and lived experiences, as well as the external and internal environments (Allegranti 2015, 2; Reeve 2013, 140). The bodymind is the primary connection to, meaning maker and agent of, an embodied being-in-the-world (Dawson 2013, 220). Therefore, the self and bodymind are intimately mutual.

This article argues that the language of the bodymind is the sole source of communication through which performance operates. The performer, through this perspective, becomes an embodied vessel of the content of the performance. A bodymind-oriented pedagogical approach in the training of the performance arts might thus align itself towards the optimisation of the bodymind's expressive dimensions and practical functions. Consequently, this approach might call for training methodologies that include bodies and the interpersonal connection of these bodies: touch.

Touch and intimacy

Touch is a complex, personal and multimodal action and is under no circumstances unilateral. Touch necessarily contains a myriad of possibilities as two, or more, lived bodyminds collide in the external environment. Skrzypulec (2021, 301) argues that touch has a dual nature, (1) an interoceptive² modality, presenting states of the bodymind and the locale where tactile bodily sensations are experienced, and (2) an exteroceptive modality, presenting external entities. Resultantly, an inner-outer interplay ensues as the internal environment (thoughts, feelings and so forth) responds to the action in the external environment.

Touch plays a noteworthy role in the reception and processing of sensory information. Through touch, a number of bodymind awareness factors arise, such as the sensations of heat and weight, awareness of the skin, tracing of the boundary of the skin, and the bodyminded response to connecting with another subject body, changes in heartbeat, pulse, sensations, breath, the internal environment, the rise of energy, and the shifting of tension and motor responses (Reeve 2013, 39; 126). Physical touch, in the context of this description, metaphorically resembles the act of seeing and listening through the skin (Bloom and Shreeves 2004, 64).

Touch, as an interpersonal connection, occurs on the skin. The skin is the body's largest sense organ and the first physical and tactile site to distinguish the self from the external environment and others (Reeve 2013, 32). Furthermore, the skin is a primary mode of communication and experience with the external environment. Simha-Alpern (2019, 72–74) argues that the skin bears three related qualitative dimensions: (1) sensitivity, a perceptive organ where sensory and tactile input is registered; (2) permeability, as a protective layer that permits flexible

exchange between the internal and external environments, allowing influence without fragmentation; and (3) elasticity, the ability to connect with those in the external environment and surrender to the intersubjective exchange, yet simultaneously maintaining differentiation, distance and protective autonomy.

Owing to the embodied nature of bodymind-space harmony, this article infers the notion that touch might ensue prior to skin-to-skin contact. Blakeslee and Blakeslee (2007, 13) introduce the notion of the peripersonal space as an invisible volume of space surrounding each individual bodymind. They dismiss the notion that the peripersonal space is metaphorical, emphasising that it is annexed to the limbs and body, 'clothing you in it like an extended, ghostly skin'. The peripersonal space is an elastic, amoeba-like and embodied annexure that morphs as the individual interacts with the external environment and has the ability to contract and expand according to the individual's subjective needs and goals. The peripersonal space extends the self, as a multimodal bodyminded being, beyond the flesh and blends the self with the external environment. Graziano (2018, 1) humorously defines the peripersonal space as the 'margin of safety, bad breath zone, duck-and-flinch buffer'. The peripersonal space maps the meeting of the self and other, enabling the dual functions of the working space, a privileged space to connect, intervene or ensue goal-directed action with an other, and the protective space, a privileged space for the protection and defence against perceived threats (De Vignemont and Ianetti 2015, 6).

The bodymind is thus directly, personally and intimately connected to the enveloped spatial expansion, mapping the potential for action and meaning: a space-skin. If space is personal, yet public, the question then arises: when is consent at play? From an IC perspective, consent should be granted at the nucleus of the intention. Reaching into the embodied peripersonal space with the purpose to touch, or touching another's body with skin-to-skin contact, thus warrants consent from all the parties involved in the action. The coexisting need to connect (or the pedagogical inclusion of touch), yet the simultaneous need to remain autonomous and protect the bodyminded self from external impingements, hinges on the fulfilment of consent and agency. The ability to connect, yet maintain differentiation (the elasticity of the skin) is playfully described by Simha-Alpern (2019, 74) as 'Touch me, but don't get under my skin'.

The IC and consent

Consent is not a new or groundbreaking concept. In the analysis of the moment two people come together and mutually agree to hug, there are socio-cultural variants to mutually understood bodyminded gestures that communicate their intention to hug each other. For example: Person A spreads their arms, while looking at Person B, who mirrors the gesture and then steps in, towards Person A, for a hug. In that seemingly ordinary, day-to-day exchange, both the offer of touch and the acceptance, denial or negotiation to receive touch, are demonstrated. This informal exchange is consent in practice.

IC's are consent advocates who promote consent-based practices. Consent is essential for the safety, respect and protection of the performers, facilitators and training institution. Consent grants those involved in the action or behaviour, in this context touch, agency. Such agency is typified by an ongoing, interactive and dynamic process which pre-establishes precautionary measures, negotiations, the open communication of boundaries, mutually defined terms, transparency, responsibility and the ensured protection from harm. It is these factors, including the negotiation and renegotiation of the potential activity, which redistribute power and grant

all involved agency. Subsequently, the participants can voluntarily consent to participate, or not participate, based on an informed and mutual understanding of the imminent action.

The performing arts industry has a precarious relationship with consent and power. It is this unsettling history that gave impetus to the development and integration of the IC into the performing arts industry. Steinrock (2020, 18) argues that malicious structures of power dynamics in the industry have severely infringed the performer's agency to grant consent. She outlines five social bases of power, as coined by John French and Bertram Raven (1959, 105–167), and how they relate to the performing industry, consent and IC:

- Legitimate power: power granted through a title or position, or someone's perception that a person (irrespective of their title) holds such power, such as a teacher, lecturer, director, producer or choreographer. For example: 'I cannot say no to touch, because your hierarchical status grants you automatic permission³ to touch me without consent'.
- Expert power: power granted through the belief that a person is an expert on a specific topic, due to, amongst others, their certification, experience and referrals. For example: 'I cannot say no to touch, because your expertise in how to use touch in training, overshadows my understanding'.
- Reward power: power found in those individuals who are able to reward others when certain expectations, or the assumptions of such expectations, are met. For example: 'I cannot say no to touch, because allowing you to touch me might result in a role, extra marks or good rapport'.
- Coercive power: this form of power is the opposite of reward power, and relates to the negative consequences for certain actions, such as the ability to fail a student or not give them a role in a performance. For example: 'I cannot say no to touch, because it will lead to negative consequences, punishment or losing marks'.
- Referent power: power developed through charisma, likeability and the ability to network or give career-changing referrals. For example: 'I cannot say no to touch, because I might fracture the shared rapport which might benefit me in future'.
- Information power: power granted when an individual has key information about a situation, process or person. For example: 'I cannot say no to touch, because I might lose out on key information or you might spread negative information about me'.

These bases of power have been observed to be an immense presence in training environments, especially those which specialise in the performing arts. Placing prominence on consent necessarily disrupts systems of power and distributes agency to every individual. IC's define consent as the permission, granted solely by the performer – not the script, production/creative team, teacher, trainer, facilitator, parent or agent – to engage in the communicated actions, choreography, staging or touch.

The acronym FRIES (Planned Parenthood 2022) has formed an integral part of the IC's toolkit and is often referred to as a fundamental resource in the understanding, implementation and teaching of consent. FRIES introduce consent as:

- *Freely given*: The performer chooses to be touched or to touch another freely. No coercion, power imbalance, force or harassment occurs for the performer to say 'yes'. Coercion and consent are contrasting concepts; coercion is a pervasive infringement that re-enforces invasive and malicious power dynamics.
- *Retractable*: The performer can revoke consent and change their consent at any time. The performer, their fellow performers and facilitator understand that a 'yes' may

become a ‘no’ at any time. Consent exists on a continuum, and it is this fluid nature that grants all involved the freedom to revoke or renegotiate their consent.

- *Informed*: Consent implies the notion that the performer is completely informed and has a clear understanding of the facts, implications and consequences of these actions. The performer understands the context of the touch and is duly informed; there are no hidden or secretive aspects to the touch being performed.
- *Enthusiastic*: The performer agrees wholeheartedly to be touched or to touch another. The performer is not uncertain about their consent. In their IC practice, the authors have made an addition to the ‘E’ in FRIES: **Enthusiastic/Engaged**. Enthusiasm can manifest in the engagement of an embodied comfortability.

In this article, the authors advocate for the addition of another ‘E’: **Embodied**. Verbal consent does not equate to a ‘yes’ if the bodymind is not consciously communicating consent in harmony. This discussion is continued in the following section.

- *Specific*: The performer grants consent to a detailed and specific touch. Consent to be touched is not a blanket statement, but related to the detailed context of the pedagogical approach.

Various versions and expressions of FRIE(E)S exist within scholarship, confirming the major themes found in this acronym. Ólafsdóttir and Kjaran (2019: 42) concur that consent is not a fixed entity, but a fluid notion. They introduce three additional themes: **negotiation**, **temporality** and **relationality**. Owing to the notion that consent is temporarily granted, contingent on context and specificities, it should be continuously negotiated and sought after. Furthermore, owing to its relationality, consent is necessarily dependent on the act of giving consent and accepting the act – until consent is withdrawn, the boundaries shift, the context changes or time has passed.

IDC have recently critiqued the implementability of FRIES in the entertainment industry, and have migrated to the acronym CRISP (Consent Studio 2022). The latter substitutes ‘freely given’ with ‘**considered**’ and ‘enthusiastic’ with ‘**participatory**’. The argument claims that ‘freely given’ consent is tainted by the power dynamics ingrained in the industry. This might also translate to the inherent power dynamics found in training institutions. The considered nature of consent allows the individual to consider all the relevant information, factors and consequences of the action and ultimately make a decision regarding granting or withholding consent. The term ‘participatory’ emphasises the agency to decide what happens with and to one’s own body. Although we would not replace the importance of enthusiastic and engaged consent, the addition of considered and participatory action is important.

Bodyminded consent: ‘E’ for embodied

In addition to the FRIES and CRISP acronyms, we introduce the concept of bodyminded consent. This new term finds its foundation in embodiment theories and the phenomenological perspective of, amongst others, Merleau-Ponty (2002, 277): ‘we merge into this body which is better informed than we are about the world, and about the motives we have and the means at our disposal for synthesizing it’. Through this lens, it is argued that a performer might grant verbal consent (cognitively), but that the performer’s body might object to touch, and a variety of other behaviours, characters and actions often performed in the performing arts milieu. Bodyminded objections introduce a multidimensionality to the concept of consent, might occur subconsciously or periodically, and do not devalue the performer’s honest verbal consent.

In the training environment, the facilitator needs to understand the embodied and multidimensional nature of consent, to underpin the choice to initiate touch between themselves and the performer, or to suggest touch between two or more performers. A verbal 'yes' does not necessarily equate to consent, when the bodymind non-verbally indicates a 'no'. Internal activity, such as consent, manifests in the bodymind through behaviour, thus verbal consent forms but a layer in the pursuit of consent.

The observable bodymind manifests impulses in the internal environment. Non-consent and discomfort, for example, may be presented through movements, body attitudes, gestures, physiological changes and physical actions. Human beings are in a constant state of impulse and response (Marshall 2008, 33), and allowing this state of flux to manifest freely, reinstates bodyminded consent as an ever-changing and fluid interpersonal concept.

Embodied responses are often completely subconscious and automatic, and a performer's inability to code or verbalise these embodied impulses, might lead to contrasting verbal and non-verbal communications of consent. The performer's inability to translate or acknowledge the apprehensiveness encapsulated in the bodyminded non-consent experienced, does not diminish its performance- and learning-restricting presence and manifestation through bodyminded behaviour.

Embodied non-consent

Bodyminded consent is derived from the intrinsic human need to sustain bodyminded homeostasis. Scholars of psychology, neuropsychology and trauma research define homeostasis a delicate internal balance that is continuously striving towards consistency within the environments and context of the performer's personal uniqueness, to maintain the optimisation of health, growth, well-being and restoration (Dana 2018, 60, 169; Passer et al. 2009, 135; Porges 2017, 20). Bodyminded homeostasis has a magnetism towards poise (the ease experienced during homeostasis), wholeness, wholesomeness, sustainability, balance, satisfaction, equilibrium, and the alleviation of tension. Furthermore, neuropsychologist Suchy (2011, 162) defines homeostasis as an emotional state, characterised by the balance between positive affect and negative affect, and a preference toward the former.

In circumstances where bodyminded consent is undermined and bodyminded homeostasis is not sustained, the performer's bodymind might be placed in a state of flight-flight-or-freeze/flop, this being a state of action readiness to manage the subjectively stressful situation or perceived threat. Autonomic nervous system (ANS) activation, through the sympathetic nervous system (SNS), allows the individual to experience a 'stirring of unease', or respond through various protective embodied patterns (Dana 2018, 35). The polyvagal theory (Porges 2017, 92) outlines three responses, following each other as a strategy toward bodyminded homeostasis, related to the parasympathetic nervous system (PSNS):

- Safety in social engagement: attempting to re-establish poise through interpersonal bodyminded negotiations. This might include facial expressions, gestures and vocalisations.
- SNS activation: the social engagement system is withdrawn and defence is achieved through fight-or-flight behaviours and danger mobilisation. This might manifest through abruptly leaving the space or aggressive verbal and/or bodyminded behaviours.
- Behavioural shutdown: if SNS activation falters, freeze-and-flop systems are activated through the PSNS dorsal vagus, the bodymind is immobilised and a behavioural

shutdown ensues. This state manifests through dissociation, numbness, apathy, despair and disinterest, or the loss of consciousness and bodily control. In this state, consent might be granted to accelerate the perceived harmful process and ‘just get it over with’.

Fawning is often misinterpreted as a positive response, but is potentially dangerous to consent-based practices. Harris (2021, 24) includes the fawn response as separate to the flight-fight-or-freeze/flop system (FFFS), and clarifies that it is not an ANS function. Fawning manifests when the performer is working overly hard to please and appease others, as a self-preservation and protective strategy. Fawning is seen in extreme ‘people pleasing’, to the detriment and neglect of the performer’s own needs, boundaries and values, with the purpose of gaining the approval of others. When a performer is fawning, agency might falter, and consent might be granted to please the power dynamics and hierarchical structure in the faculty, rather than honouring subjective individual boundaries.

Not adhering to the boundaries drawn during non-consent, or not granting the opportunity for honest consent, may disrupt bodyminded homeostasis, subsequently activating self-protective strategies and resulting in performance restricting habits. These habits might include habitual tension, fear, anxiety, stress, emotional responses, mood shifts and related survival techniques. When the bodymind is in any form of self-preservation, this results in the depletion and re-allocation of energy towards the perceived ‘unpleasure’ and the avoidance of interactions that promote disorder, disintegration and imbalance (Schneide 2013, 219; Shotter 2011, 7).

This depletion and re-allocation of energy results in the restriction of performance and learning, placing the performer in a state of action-readiness and self-preservation, rather than a state conducive to optimal learning, bodyminded integration, homeostasis and poise. Granting the facilitator the knowledge to understand bodyminded consent, encode self-protective strategies, and facilitate self-to-self bodymind awareness and somatic reflection with their performers, might be key in the process of negotiating and renegotiating bodyminded consent and embodied interactions within the constructs of the consent-bubble, such as touch.

The consent-bubble in praxis

The consent-bubble is a metaphorical structure that includes and excludes certain parties from a negotiated action. The terms of the consent-bubble have to be constructed by all the parties involved in the action/s. It is important to note that the consent given to one person does not automatically apply to another. Each party entering the consent agreement, or constructing a consent-bubble, has to establish their subjective and personal boundaries with the parties involved. Within training environments, it might be imperative to define the concept of the consent-bubble and ensure that the entire faculty understands the complexities of consent and the boundaries of the consent-bubble.

A practical understanding of consent, through resources such as FRIE(E)S and CRISP, distributes power, forms agency and dismantles the perceived negative consequences of non-consent. Consent-based training ensures the faculty that a decline of consent to touch, the negotiation of consent, and even non-consent does not equate to negative consequences, such as losing marks, opportunities or favour. Every person entertaining the consent-bubble is allowed to change their mind, renegotiate the terms or shift their boundaries.

Intimacy Directors International (IDI) defines five sequential pillars in the process of IC (IDI 2020; Steinrock 2020, 6): Context, Communication, Consent, Choreography and Closure. An

alternative framework for bondage, discipline/domination, sadism/submission and masochism (BDSM) negotiation and education introduces four C's: Caring, Communication, Consent and Caution (Williams et al. 2014, 1). Although the impetus within these two environments might be vastly different, the concept of consent corresponds and is highly valued. In the training environment, defining touch as a pedagogical tool in embodied practices and bodymind-focused training paints the context: the purpose and the given circumstances, parameters and boundaries where touch may, or may not, be introduced. Communication and establishing the need for touch ensures that the participants are duly informed and maintain an openness to negotiation and renegotiation. Caring about the autonomy and agency, as well as the subjective boundaries and idiosyncrasies of the performer, a thorough understanding of the pedagogical and methodological context and open communication devoid of negative consequence, enables consent to manifest. Only when consent has been given full authority, can touch be introduced through caution. With this in mind, the following strategies emanate from the IC's perspective and might assist in constructing and maintaining the consent-bubble.

Tap-out strategies

Establishing a safe-word or a safe-action (such as time-out signal or a verbal phrase), allows the performer to revoke consent within predefined parameters and a safely designed action plan. Without a tap-out strategy, an overwhelm in emotion or bodyminded non-consent might lead to destructive, unintentional and subjectively shameful behaviour. Introducing strategies that honour non-consent, and are accessible to all involved, allow the performers to communicate non-consent or step out of the consent-bubble without negative consequences or personal shame.

Verbally ask for consent before touching

Asking for consent to enter or construct a consent-bubble is key in granting the performer the opportunity to accept, decline or negotiate. Steinrock (2020, 116) argues for a differentiation between the terms 'permission' and 'consent', claiming that any authority can grant permission (the teacher, script, pedagogy, lesson plan). She states that permission is 'the understanding that the action is allowed to take place in this space', whereas consent is dynamic, embodied and collaborative.

Be mouldable

Non-consent might sometimes feel like a personal attack, especially in environments where emotions are harnessed frequently, the bodymind becomes the locus of pedagogy, and rapport is built around embodied spaces. IC's often use the catch-phrase "'yes" has no power if "no" is not an option'. It is on this basis that non-consent should be respected, honoured and celebrated. As facilitators, this does mean that an intended touch, for training purposes, might have to be moulded into other methodologies.

Ask with specificity

Consent to touch does not automatically equate to the consent to touch every part of the performer's body, nor to touch them with any intention. It might be preferential to avoid referring to general body areas, such as the upper body or lower body, but to refer to specific body areas. An example might be: 'May I touch your calf muscle with my palm?' or 'May I

touch your hip flexor with my index finger?’ or ‘May I touch your clavicle bone with my thumb?’

Avoid any jargon, slurs or sexually charged language

When referring to another’s body, or parts thereof, the use of anatomical terms are preferential. For example: utilise the terms ‘buttocks’ or ‘gluteus muscle’, rather than ‘bum’, ‘booty’ or ‘ass’; ‘stomach’ or ‘rectus abdominal muscles’, rather than ‘tummy’ or ‘belly’ and; ‘breasts’, ‘chest’ or ‘upper torso’, rather than ‘tits’ or ‘boobs’.

Listen, look and feel

Being conscious and showing care for the performer’s embodied responses enables consent, as a multi-layered and deeply embodied concept, to thrive.

- *Listen* for a verbal, audible and enthusiastic ‘yes’. A half-hearted verbalisation of the word ‘yes’ might not be sufficient to establish consent. Listening to the tone, pitch and inflection behind the verbal confirmation enables the listener to encode the intention and meaning behind the granted consent.
- *Look* for bodyminded consent. Understanding the concept of bodyminded consent enables the facilitator to recognise the bodymind’s observable and embodied apprehensions or protection strategy activations. Verbal consent (saying a phrase that means ‘yes’), but a bodyminded expression of non-consent (the bodymind saying ‘no’) does not equate to consent. These layers of consent need to coincide.
- *Feel* for tension activation. Once consent has been established, feel for any body tensions or protection activation strategies that might occur once the touch is engaged. In the presence of the performer’s honest consent, the bodymind might respond in a way the performer did not anticipate. If a performer flinches, tenses up, looks away, or manifests any related aversive responses, touch should be disengaged.

Re-establish consent continuously

As has been established through the notion of temporality of consent, previous consent does not automatically equate to current consent. Touch from one person, in one context and in one day, is not transferable to a new context. Owing to the notion that the bodymind is a dynamic and multimodal expression of self, it is important to note that, as environments, contexts, moods and lived experiences change, consent changes.

Closure

Deconstructing the consent-bubble implies a de-rolling ritual, which enables the performers to find closure and sustain personal and mental health. This closure ritual might be as short as verbally thanking those involved for allowing touch within the boundaries of their consent-bubble, or tapping-out through a high-five or fist bump. Establishing that the consent-bubble has been deconstructed, allows those involved in its construction and maintenance to adjust their subjective self-protection strategies, pre-empt further actions within the current context and negotiate their subjective behavioural framework and expectations.

It is of utmost importance that, once the process for the construction, negotiation, maintenance and deconstruction of the consent-bubble has been established, that the process is followed

consistently. The performers might find safety in the routinised methodology and the conscious upholding of expectations. When the consent-bubble is not established, expectations are not maintained and bodyminded consent is undermined, the performer might enter survival strategies to maintain bodyminded homeostasis and, in the process, impede the learning process and optimal performance quality. Furthermore, consistency and repetition of working within the consent-bubble in the training environment may empower performers to model this behaviour in the professional outflow of the work. Integrating IC protocols and advocating for safe and consensual training environments is thus key to the development of best-practice in the performance industry at large.

Conclusion

The metaphorical consent-bubble is a fragile, yet malleable, construct. It is an embodied and verbally negotiated contract that welcomes and/or excludes certain individuals, actions and levels of touch. Through moulding its barriers with the practical measures discussed in this article, and consistently maintaining embodied specificity, negotiation and renegotiation, its walls and legitimacy are strengthened. Those who find themselves in its centre are protected, enabled and granted the freedom to learn within their subjective and fluctuating boundaries. Autonomy is celebrated and optimised when consent is freely given, retractable, informed, enthusiastic/engaged, participatory, considered, embodied and specific. The complexity of consent might feel overwhelming, but this article argues that it can be simplified and practically implementable in the training environment when, much like an indicator on an automobile signals an action, the consent-bubble is negotiated prior to touch.

In the perspective of the IC, touch is an intimate act, regardless of the intention of the instigator. This is due to the multimodal qualities contained in the interpersonal, and by no means unilateral, act of touching. Touch is an embodied action, initialising bodyminded impulses and reactions from those involved. Owing to the notion of the peripersonal space, the intimate nature of touch might already be present before skin-to-skin contact, when touch, or the intention to touch, enters the performer's privileged protective peripersonal space. Introducing touch without consent might burst the consent-bubble, or weaken and scar the concept thereof, leading to embodied survival responses and self-preservation strategies in the performer, halting optimal learning and restricting performance quality, comfort, believability, trust and safety.

The consent-bubble does not aim to discourage touch as a pedagogical tool, but rather offer a framework that allows those included in the consent-bubble, to practice touch safely, consensually and effectively, ultimately optimising the training environment. Introducing the notion of the consent-bubble to the faculty is a step toward dismantling infringing power dynamics, instilling the freedom to learn safely and underlining the consequence-free implementation of consent. Touch, if practised within the consent-bubble, is a powerful and influential embodied pedagogical tool in the training of the performing arts. However, touch, when practised outside of the boundaries of consent, can be destructive, impeding and wounding – *vulnerare*.

Notes on contributors

Èmil Haarhoff is an actor, director, choreographer and intimacy coordinator (IC). He obtained his Ph.D. in Drama from the University of Pretoria and his M.Tech in Musical Theatre from the Tshwane University of Technology. He is certified with Intimacy Directors

and Coordinators in the USA and has trained, and co-designed training, for IC's throughout Europe, India, Brazil and Africa for Safe Sets and Netflix EMEA. He is currently completing his Laban Certification in Movement Analysis through LIMS New York. He specialises in actor discomforts, practical embodied strategies toward actor well-being and the development of protocols for minors and intimacy through play.

Kate Lush is an award nominated actor and movement teacher, has a 1st Class Degree in Performing Arts from the University of Hertfordshire and an MA in Acting from Manchester Metropolitan University, having trained in Poland with Teatr Pieśń Kozła. She works as an intimacy coordinator for film and TV. She co-founded IPSA and was instrumental in the creation of the Protocols for Working with Intimate Content in Film, TV and Associated Media – South Africa. Most recently Kate, with the Safe Sets team, designed and facilitated an education program for Netflix EMEA region - training a cohort of Intimacy Coordinators in Europe, India, Brazil and Africa.

Notes

¹ While the difference between ID and IC is acknowledged, this article will refer to the term IC as a bracket term for all intimacy practitioners (IP's). The authors are both trained IP's and actively working across the spectrum of intimacy and vulnerability in entertainment

² Interoception is the ability to analyse and interpret sensations and stimuli originating from the viscera and internal tissues of the body; Exteroception is the ability to perceive the external environment and to, through the five senses, relate to the outer world and information or stimuli originating externally from the body. (Blakeslee and Blakeslee 2007, 404)

³ See a discussion on the difference between 'permission' and 'consent' in section 7, *The consent-bubble in praxis*.

References

Allegranti, B. 2015. *Embodied Performance: Sexuality, Gender, Bodies*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Blakeslee, S., and M. Blakeslee. 2007. *The Body Has a Mind of Its Own: How Body Maps in Your Brain Help You Do (Almost) Everything Better*. New York: Random House.

Bloom, K., and R. Shreeves. 2004. *Moves: A Sourcebook of Ideas for Body Awareness and Creative Movement*. London: Routledge.

Coetzee, M. H., and M. Munro. 2010. "Embodied Knowledges: Physical Theatre and the Physicality of Theatre." *South African Theatre Journal* 24 (1): 10–15. 10.1080/10137548.2010.9687918

Consent Studio 2022. Defining Consent: From FRIES to CRISP! [Online]. Accessed 13 October 2022. https://community.consentstudio.com/posts/27397111?utm_source=manual

Dana, D. 2018. *The Polyvagal Theory in Therapy: Engaging the Rhythm of Regulation*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

- Dawson, M. R. 2013. *Mind, Body, World: Foundations of Cognitive Science*. Edmonton: AU Press.
- de Vignemont, F., and G. D. Iannetti. 2015. "How Many Peripersonal Spaces?" *Neuropsychologia* 70: 327–334. 10.1016/j.neuropsychologia.2014.11.018
- French, J. R. P, and B. H. Raven. 1959. "The Bases of Social Power." In D. Cartwright (Ed.), *Studies in Social Power*, 105–167. Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research.
- Graziano, M. 2018. *The Spaces between Us: A Story of Neuroscience, Evolution, and Human Nature*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Haarhoff, È., M. Munro, and M.-H. Coetzee. 2022. "Navigating Dissonance: Bodymind and Character Congruency in Acting." In *Embodiment and the Arts: Views from South Africa*, edited by J. Lauwrence, 233–254. Pretoria: Pretoria University Law Press.
- Harris, R. 2021. *Trauma-Focused ACT: A Practitioner's Guide to Working with Mind, Body & Emotion Using Acceptance & Commitment Therapy*. Oakland: New Harbinger Publications.
- Hunt, R. T. 2022. Intimacy Direction Guidelines: A guide produced specifically for theatre in Cambridge [ONLINE]. Accessed 29 June 2022. <https://www.adctheatre.com/media/4545/intimacy-direction-guidelines.pdf>
- IDI, Intimacy Directors International. 2020. Intimacy Directors International. [Online]. Accessed 28 April 2020. <https://www.teamidi.org/>.
- Marshall, L. 2008. *The Body Speaks: Performance and Physical Expression*. 2nd ed. London: Methuen Drama.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. 2002. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by C. Smith. London: Routledge.
- Ólafsdóttir, K., and J. I. Kjaran. 2019. "Boys in Power": Consent and Gendered Power Dynamics in Sex." *Boyhood Studies* 12 (1): 38–56. 10.3167/bhs.2019.120104
- Passer, M., R. Smith, N. Holt, A. Bremmer, E. Sutherland, and M. L. Vliek. 2009. *Psychology: The Science of Mind and Behaviour*. European ed. Berkshire: McGraw-Hill Higher Education.
- Planned Parenthood 2022. What Is Sexual Consent? | Facts About Rape & Sexual Assault. [ONLINE]. Accessed 22 June 2022. <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/relationships/sexual-consent>
- Porges, S. W. 2017. *The Pocket Guide to the Polyvagal Theory: The Transformative Power of Feeling Safe*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Reeve, S. 2013. *Body and Performance: Ways of Being a Body*. Axminster, UK: Triarchy Press.

Schneide, J. 2013. "The Death of an Adult Child: contemporary Psychoanalytic Models of Mourning." In *On Freud's 'Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, edited by S. Arbisher and J. Schneide, 219–230. London: Karnac Books.

Sheppard, S. 2006. *Theatre, Body and Pleasure*. London: Routledge.

Shotter, J. 2011. "Embodiment, Abduction, and Expressive Movement: A New Realm of Inquiry?" *Theory & Psychology* 21 (4): 439–456.

Simha-Alpern, A. 2019. "Touch Me, but Don't Get under My Skin: The Skin-Ego and the Conflicting Needs for Connection and Protection." *Psychoanalytic Perspectives* 16 (1): 70–87.

Skrzypulec, B. 2021. "Is There a Tactile Field?" *Philosophical Psychology* 35 (3): 301–326.

Steinrock, J. R. 2020. "Intimacy Direction: A New Role in Contemporary Theatre Making." Masters diss. Urbana: University of Illinois.

Suchy, Y. 2011. *Clinical Neuropsychology of Emotion*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Vulnerable. 2022. Merriam-Webster Dictionary [Online]. Accessed 24 July 2022. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vulnerable#note-1>

Williams, D. J., J. N. Thomas, E. E. Prior, and M. C. Christensen. 2014. "From "SSC" and "RACK" to the "4Cs": Introducing a New Framework for Negotiating BDSM Participation." *Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality* 17: 1–10.