

THE SPACE BETWEEN:
UNCOVERING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE
OF ACTOR COMMUNICATION

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Doctor of Philosophy

by

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The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School have examined the dissertation entitled

THE SPACE BETWEEN:
UNCOVERING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE
OF ACTOR COMMUNICATION

Presented by Shawna Mefferd Kelty

A candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

And hereby certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

Professor Cheryl Black

Professor David Crespy

Professor Clyde Ruffin

Professor Ellie Ragland

Professor Michael Kramer

To the shoemaker and his wife.

and

To you...each and every one of you.

Yes, even you.

Strange how I knew you'd open this book, isn't it?

Life's uncanny like that.

What *is* canny?

Lollipops are canny. ☺

You can't pull the wool over their eyes.

...they don't have eyes, silly.

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THE SPACE BETWEEN:
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ABSTRACT

Using the qualitative methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology, this dissertation documents student actors' lived experience of actor communication in performance. The author locates this study in relation to actor training, rehearsal methods, director training, and psychoanalytic theory.

This hermeneutic phenomenological study examines the lived experience of eight undergraduate student actors who had performed at the University of Missouri and had experienced actor communication in performance and/or rehearsal. Participants were interviewed in two semi-structured focus group interviews with follow up individual interviews. The data collected from the participants was transcribed, coded, and managed with HyperResearch software. Max van Manen's thematic analysis was employed and participants verified the final analysis of the lived experience of actor communication. A brief secondary analysis using the critical lens of Lacan's psychoanalytic theory was used to explore the unconscious structures of transference in actor communication.

The actors' lived experience of actor communication was found to be a complex multi-dimensional phenomenon described as: a connection between actors which is only

understood through feeling or sense, having certain necessary conditions, obstacles and variable conditions which may impact the connection; a blurring of reality, identity, relationships, and emotions; and having a specific location with defined limits – a space between actors. The absence or presence of actor communication has significant impact on an actor's process and perception of her acting partner. The strong emotional responses towards acting partners suggest that the structure of transference is also a part of the process of actor communication.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Haven't you experienced it in similar circumstances, when something streamed out of you, some current from your eyes, from the ends of your fingers or out through your pores? What name can we give to these invisible currents, which we use to communicate with one another? Some day this phenomenon will be the subject of scientific research . . . Scientists may have some explanation of the nature of this unseen process. All I can do is to describe what I myself feel and how I use these sensations in my art.¹

The “unseen process” described above by noted acting theorist Constantin Stanislavski (1863-1938) is a mysterious, ephemeral, and intangible phenomenon that has fascinated and frustrated acting theorists and practitioners alike.² Stanislavski, who developed and articulated the most influential system of psycho-physical actor-training in the twentieth century, most succinctly expressed as “the creation of [the] inner life of a human spirit, and its expression in artistic form,”³ recognized the phenomenon as something he could “feel but did not know”⁴ and that in order for his students to understand the phenomenon they must experience and feel it for themselves. Stanislavski

¹ Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (New York: Routledge, 1989), 212-13. Since I began this dissertation project, Jean Benedetti has written a new translation of Stanislavski's seminal work on acting: Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work: A Student's Diary*, trans. Jean Benedetti (London; New York: Routledge, 2008). Benedetti's new translation is far more complete and eliminates the distortions and embedded terminology of Hapgood's work. As however the study of Stanislavski currently is still rooted in Hapgood's terminology, this dissertation will still explore terms such as “communion,” but I happily allow space for Benedetti's work as well in my research.

² In qualitative research, the phenomenon is the main concept that is experienced by multiple research participants. It may be a feeling, a culture, or a relationship – virtually anything that is possible for humans to experience. See John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among the Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 1998), 51.

³ Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 19.

⁴ Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, 211.

expanded upon the phenomenon as “mutual intercourse,”⁵ a type of communication between actors essential to bringing the “life of the human spirit” to the stage,⁶ and also speculated on the nature of communication between actors and audiences as a condition for believability in performance. For him, this kind of communication occurs when the audience “becomes involved in [the characters’] words and actions involuntarily.... it participates silently in these exchanges, sees them, understands them, and is caught up in other peoples’ experiences.”⁷

Stanislavski described the phenomenon of onstage communication, a core element of his systematic psychophysical Technique⁸ as “communion” – a specific type of uninterrupted stage communication, verbal and nonverbal, between an actor and a “living object.”⁹ He noted three distinct types of communion: self-communion, actor-to-actor communion, and actor-to-audience communion. Self-communion is the communication between an actor’s conscious thoughts and her emotions. Stanislavski asserted that actor-to-actor communion was a feat easily achieved in that it is a “direct

⁵ Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, 199.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁷ Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work*, 232.

⁸ Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, 15. Stanislavski described his acting approach as a psychological technique, psycho-technique, and psychophysical technique. The idea being that an actor is “under the obligation to live his part inwardly, and then to give to his experience external embodiment.”

⁹ Stanislavsky, *On the Art of the Stage*, trans. David Magarshack (London; Boston: Faber and Faber, 1950), 193. Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, 202. Living object refers to a non-imagined, real, and existing object or person. Stanislavski notes that use of imaginary objects pulls attention away from objectives, makes actors unaccustomed to real or living objects, and creates interference between an actor and her partner – “They set an inanimate make-believe one up between themselves and their partners.” On page 222, Stanislavski further qualifies communing with a living object: “Always use a living object, actually with you, and wishing to exchange feelings with you. Communion must be mutual.”

and conscious process.”¹⁰ An actor interacts directly with her scene partner and is aware of exchanging (sending and receiving) specific thoughts and emotions with her partner. Actor communion brings the unconscious (emotions) to the conscious realm (brain). Integral to the conscious process of communion was Stanislavski’s belief that structurally, communion was not only the sending and receiving of information, but also the sending and receiving of invisible energy rays. He believed that he could teach actors to recognize and manipulate mutual and reciprocal “rays of energy that carry communication.”¹¹ While he described actor-to-actor communion as *direct and conscious* mutual intercourse between actors, Stanislavski described actor to audience communion as an *indirect and unconscious* mutual communion with a collective object, meaning the audience as object.¹² While the actor communes with her partner, the audience communes with the actors: “The audience creates, so to speak, a psychological acoustic. It registers what we do and bounces its own, living, human feelings back to us.”¹³ Actors commune with the audience indirectly through the communion between actors. Stanislavski theorized that there are three facets of communion, but it was actor-to-actor communication that he asserted was of vital importance in performance: “Yet if communication between persons is important in real life, it is ten times more so on the stage.”¹⁴

¹⁰ Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, 60.

¹¹ Sharon M. Carnicke, “Stanislavsky’s System: Pathways for the Actor,” in *Twentieth Century Actor Training*, ed. Alison Hodge (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 23.

¹² Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, 202.

¹³ Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work*, 238.

¹⁴ Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, 196.

Since Stanislavski's work comes to us in translation, it should be noted that there are discrepancies or distortions in translation. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood translated Stanislavski's term "obshchenie" as *communion*; however, Jean Benedetti translates the term as *communication*. Since *communion* is such an embedded term, filled with spiritual and mystical overtones, and since *communication* is a more general term with multiple meanings, for the purposes of this study, the phenomenon will be hereinafter referred to as *actor communication*, which specifically refers to the process of communion/communication between actors, specifically: the interaction among scene partners, the experience of sharing, interacting, relating and being in contact with another actor in each moment of a scene or play, including both verbal and nonverbal communication.

Followers of Stanislavski have continued to explore and expand upon his work, each focusing on different aspects of his system. One of the most influential of those following this tradition, especially in contemporary American actor training is Sanford Meisner, whose Technique focuses specifically on actor communication.¹⁵ Meisner did not speak of actors sending or receiving Stanislavski's "energy rays;" rather he explored actor communication through what he called the "reality of doing." For Meisner, the reality of doing is the foundation of emotional truthfulness in acting, regardless of the style or genre of play. The reality of doing is a simple concept grounded in the given circumstances: "When you do something you really *do* it rather than pretend that you're

¹⁵ David Krasner, "Strasberg, Adler and Meisner: Method Acting," in *Twentieth Century Actor Training*, ed. Alison Hodge (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 129.

doing it”¹⁶ – that is, if an actor is going to do something, she actually does it (walks upstairs, listens to partner, counts money, etc.).

Meisner understood that the behavior and relationships between scene partners were the primary means of building the foundation of the reality of doing. He placed the locus of the actor’s work in her scene partner: “Don’t do anything unless something happens to make you do it and what you do doesn’t depend on you; it depends on the other.”¹⁷ The reality of doing, truthfulness in performance, depends completely on an actor’s ability to respond truthfully to her scene partner, to engage actively in actor communication.

Meisner created an experiential technique for actors to learn to recognize and respond instinctively to changes in the behavior of their scene partner. Unlike Stanislavski, Meisner did not describe his approach as a *direct and conscious process*; rather he asserted that his Technique got actors out of their heads and responding at an *instinctual* level:

My approach is based on bringing the actor back to his emotional impulses and to acting that is firmly rooted in the instinctive. It is based on the fact that all good acting comes from the heart, as it were and that there’s no mentality in it.¹⁸

While Meisner’s technique necessitates actor communication at an instinctual level, it does not uncover the nature or essence of the phenomenon that is experienced. Meisner’s focus was to teach actors to respond at an instinctual level through a series of exercises,

¹⁶ Meisner and Longwell, *Sanford Meisner on Acting*, 24.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

not to understand the nature of actor communication through a systematic and practical investigation.¹⁹ Both Meisner and Stanislavski emphasized the importance of actor communication, but neither attempted to systematically uncover the nature of the phenomenon.

Purpose of the Study

My interest in actor communication arises from my work both as an actor and as an acting teacher. It stems from a strong desire to put into perspective my own experiences and to develop a workable process for teaching actor communication to my future students. From my perspective, actor communication is essential not only for the believability of the performance for an audience, but also for the actor's creative process, her craft, in rehearsal and performance. What is important to me and what I want to investigate is the actor's experience of actor communication, or *lived experience*²⁰ – her experience as she lived through it, what makes up that experience for her, and how it is meaningful to her. Actor communication seems to be an intangible, ephemeral thing, something that is expected in an actor's process, but not understood fully. Actor communication needs to be studied in a practical and systematic way in order to understand the nature of the phenomenon itself. I believe there is a body of knowledge

¹⁹ I do not wish to imply that Meisner's work is focused solely on repetition exercises, but the exercises are the foundation for his "reality of doing." The Meisner Technique developed out of his work with The Group Theatre; in particular with Stella Adler, the Russian actor Michael Chekhov and the Russian theorist-directors, Ilya Sudakov and I.M. Rappoport whose work stressed the importance of the reality of doing. Ibid., 10; Paul Gray's article "Stanislavski: A Critical Chronology," in *Tulane Drama Review*, 9:2 Winter 1964 (21-60) also gives insight into Stanislavski's influence in American actor training and the divides within the American Method.

²⁰ Max van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science of an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*, SUNY Series in the Philosophy of Education, ed. Philip L. Smith (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), 10.

waiting to be uncovered within the actor's experience of actor communication. The purpose of this study is to seek a fuller understanding of the phenomenon of actor communication.

Justification for the Study

Actor communication has been discussed and commented upon in the relevant literature, but it has not been researched as a uniquely singular phenomenon.²¹ No single book exists which focuses specifically on the phenomenon of actor communication. Consequently, theatre practitioners may be hindered in their ability to teach actor communication because of a lack of research. Literature on acting is abundant, but literature that includes the aspect of actor communication is sparse and requires that one attempt to untangle it from a generic conversation, interview or text on acting. Acting textbooks make references to communion – i.e., *Acting is Believing* devotes a chapter to circles of attention²² and explores both Stanislavski's and Meisner's perspectives and exercises. However, few texts, if any, explore the *lived experience* of actor communication, that is: what the experience is like as an actor lives through it, what needs to be in place for it to occur, and how it is meaningful to an actor's process.

There is a clear need for the investigation of how actors experience actor communication in order to uncover the nature of the phenomenon. Richard Hornby, John

²¹ Acting texts that explore communion or “relating” are Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares*, Cohen's *Acting One*, and McGaw, Stilson and Clark's *Acting is Believing*. The latter two texts have a solid foundation in the Stanislavski System and discuss communion based on Stanislavski's writings.

²² McGaw, Stilson, and Clark, *Acting is Believing*, 119-24.

Harrop, Bruce Wilshire, and Bert O. States all note the importance of looking at the *lived experience* of actors in order to understand acting and theatre.²³ In *The End of Acting*,

Hornby states:

In all of the vast acting literature – the textbooks, the memoirs, the anecdotes, the biographies and autobiographies, the interviews, the historical studies, the theoretical speculations, the manifestos – it is rare to find any mention of what acting feels like. What could be more important than to know what it is like to be there on stage or before a camera?²⁴

Current literature that does mention actor communication is generally comprised of interviews of professional actors relating anecdotal information about their technique, not about the lived experience of actor communication.²⁵ The actor, while viewed as an expert in her field, is not seen as an expert of the phenomenon. The portions of interviews that mention actor communication are small and anecdotal in nature, not part of a larger systematic study by the authors as to the nature of those experiences.

The findings from this study have the potential to play a significant role in furthering our understanding of the “unseen process” of actor communication and may contribute to the field of acting as well as pedagogy in the following ways:

²³ Richard Hornby, *The End of Acting: A Radical View* (New York: Applause Books, 1992), 22; John Harrop, *Acting* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), 3; Bruce Wilshire, *Role Playing and Identity: The Limits of Theatre as Metaphor* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982), 13; Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms; On the Phenomenology of Theater* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), 119.

²⁴ Hornby, *The End of Acting: A Radical View*, 65.

²⁵ Roy Harris, ed., *Conversations in the Wings: Talking About Acting* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994) and *Eight Women of the American Stage Talking About Acting* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997); Joan Jeffri, *The Actor Speaks: Actors Discuss Their Experiences and Careers* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press) 1994; Joanmarie Kalter, *Actors on Acting: Performing in Theatre & Film Today* (New York: Sterling, 1979); Janet Sonenberg, *The Actor Speaks: Twenty-four Actors Talk About Process*; and Carole Zucker, *Conversations with Actors on Film, Television, and Performance* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002).

- 1) Uncover how actors perceive and understand their own experiences of actor communication
- 2) Uncover what conditions, skills, or techniques must be present for actor communication to occur
- 3) Uncover the impact of actor communication/absence of actor communication on an actor's process
- 4) Potentially lead to new teaching or directing methods
- 5) Potentially lead to further research concerning training, rehearsal, and performance practices.

Methodology and Procedures

In order to uncover the nature of actor communication through the *lived experience* of actors, a qualitative approach to the investigation is most useful.

Qualitative research explores a social or human problem and seeks to find an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. Hermeneutic phenomenology specifically explores a single experience, such as actor communication, through the perspectives of several people who have lived through a particular phenomenon.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a methodology for examining the conscious *lived experience*. It examines the question: "What is this or that kind of experience like?"²⁶

Max van Manen is very explicit in stating that a *lived experience* is a *conscious* experience for the participants:

Consciousness is the only access human beings have to the world. Or rather, it is by virtue of being conscious that we are already related to the world. Thus all we can ever know must present itself to consciousness. Whatever falls outside of consciousness therefore falls outside the bounds of our possible lived experience.²⁷

²⁶ van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 9.

Through thematic analysis, I attempt to provide a satisfying and reasonable description of the actors' conscious *lived experience*, making sure to place the narratives within their own contexts. Moreover, I attempt to uncover themes, or metaphors, of the lived experience through thematic analysis.

Using the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology, I construct semi-structured, audiotaped focus group session interviews with actors on actor communication. After transcribing the taped focus group sessions and follow-up individual interviews, I conduct a thematic analysis of each participant's narrative within the focus group.²⁸ Thematic analysis refers to the process of “recovering the theme or themes that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work.”²⁹ There are several theoretical and pedagogical benefits of using hermeneutic phenomenology to investigate the phenomenon of actor communication, not only in its findings but also in its methods. The research design of hermeneutic phenomenology allows the research participants to think critically about their process as actors and to create their own body of knowledge regarding their experiences. Hermeneutic phenomenology endows or rather reveals the actors' “expertise,” in that participants will impart the expertise of their *lived experiences* of actor communication – relating what it is like to experience it, what conditions must be present and how it is meaningful to their process as actors – as an expert participant in a systematic study. Researching the *lived*

²⁷ van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 10.

²⁸ Thematic analysis is discussed in-depth in Chapter 3.

²⁹ van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 78.

experience through hermeneutic phenomenology gives validity to the anecdotal experiences of actors and may reify or further explicate the theoretical works of Stanislavski and the practitioners who followed in his footsteps.

In order to uncover the actors' *lived experience* of actor communication, I employ both a descriptive and interpretive phenomenological framework. Specifically, I a) bracket out the relevant literature in my dimensional analysis as well as my own experiences and assumptions of actor communication; b) conduct open-ended semi-structured focus-group interviews and individual follow-up interviews designed for the participants to share their experiences; c) construct and confirm textural-structural descriptions³⁰ of the participants' experiences based on each of their own first person accounts [thematic analysis]; d) apply psychoanalytic theory (specifically Jacques Lacan's theories on transference) as a critical lens to further illuminate the *lived experience* focusing particularly on emotional responses, or *affect*, and interrelational data from their first person accounts [critical analysis]; e) and then I integrate the bracketed literature in order to discuss implications and future studies of the phenomenon. The application of psychoanalytic theory as a means to further illuminate the findings is desirable to clarify actors' conscious responses to the unconscious processes at work in actor communication.

Hornby emphasizes not only the necessity of looking at acting through phenomenology, but also through a psychoanalytic lens:

³⁰ A textural-structural description is an account of *what* is experienced and *how* each participant experiences the phenomenon. See Clark Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 1994); 95-98.

The time is long overdue for applying some of these new theories to acting. Two approaches are potentially very profitable: psychoanalytic criticism, which explores the unconscious processes that energize art, and phenomenological criticism, which rigorously examines art as a subjective experience, i.e., what creating a work of art, or responding to one, actually feels like.³¹

Much of the current literature makes connections between psychoanalytic theory and theatre. Stanislavski's approach is rooted in psychoanalytic theory, as are the many texts since Stanislavski.³² In *Psychoanalysis and Performance*, the authors of the essays attempt to articulate the dialectic between performance and psychoanalysis, but no author explores the phenomenon of actor communication within the framework of psychoanalytic theory. Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, specifically his work on transference, will be useful to further explore actor communication by looking at existing structures within the process of communication. Lacan's theory of transference grounds emotional responses into a structure that gives logic or rationale to actors' responses about the process or about their scene partner, which may help provide a fuller understanding of actor communication.

Qualitative research requires that I, as a researcher, study only the context of a specific and unique phenomenon, not offer generalized data about actor communication. The findings are the individual perspectives of specific actors from a specific focus group. My research findings provide a point of departure for the development of actor communication techniques in rehearsal and are not intended to be applied to all approaches or levels of actor communication. Therefore, it is not my job as a researcher

³¹ Hornby, *The End of Acting*, 9.

³² Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, 13. It is arguable that most of Stanislavski's followers or American method practitioners are also rooted in a psychoanalytic approach.

to test a given hypothesis about actor communication. Instead, by conducting focus group interviews with actor participants and carefully interpreting their perspectives on actor communication, I attempt to offer meanings generated by the respondents' own words as to the experience of actor communication. While my dissertation study concentrates specifically on the context of actor communication in performance, rehearsal and coursework, the study may generate new theories or approaches, allowing for future academic and artistic study using the *lived experience* of the respondents and the interplay with Lacanian psychoanalysis.

Scope

Since I am exploring the lived experience of actor communication, the number of participants is limited to eight, as a small group of interviewees allows me to investigate actor communication with careful attention to detail, context, and nuance. A larger pool of respondents would provide breadth and more generalizability, but the rich description and details of personal experiences would be lost, and consequently, the meaning of actor communication.

After the thematic analysis is complete, I conduct a critical analysis, applying Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, specifically his theories on transference, to my themes and data to examine unconscious structures of actor communication. The use of psychoanalytic theory is limited to data analysis; the theory will not be used to “analyze” the participants. The aim in using a critical lens is to further elucidate the phenomenon of actor communication. This study does not explore the entire process of acting. Rather it focuses on the specific experience of actor communication, which is an integral part of

the acting experience. This study will include experiences of actor communication, which may include both rewarding and/or non-rewarding experiences of actor communication and the meanings of those experiences.

Organization

Introduction

The first chapter introduces the phenomenon of actor communication, giving background and definition to the phenomenon. I provide the purpose of my study of actor communication. I also provide justification for the study and describe the methods and procedures to be used to study the *lived experience* of actor communication, including a basic outline of procedures, scope of the study and organization of the dissertation.

Bracketing: Dimensional Analysis of Literature, Personal Experiences and Assumptions

While a traditional literature review gives justification to a study, qualitative research requires a dimensional analysis of literature, which takes a different and more in-depth approach to the current literature. I am placing the dimensional analysis of literature in its own chapter, my second chapter, giving importance to the findings of the analysis. The dimensional analysis will further justify the significance of the actors' perspectives and experiences of actor communication and their contribution to current actor training as well as situate my study within the context of current acting scholarship and other relevant fields. However, some background on the literature is necessary in order to justify the study and my methodological approach to the phenomenon of actor

communication. The dimensional analysis situates the study within the literature and also provides further justification for the study. I also address my own experiences and assumptions by providing written accounts of my own experiences of actor communication as well as assumptions I have about actor communication and the study.

Methods and Methodology

The third chapter addresses the dissertation project of the actor focus group, in particular the methodology that informs the study and the methods used to collect the data. I justify the uses of hermeneutic phenomenology and Lacanian theory as methodologies and explain how hermeneutic phenomenology and Lacan's theories of transference relate to this study. I provide an in-depth description of qualitative methodology and hermeneutic phenomenology, including the role of the researcher; how data is collected and analyzed; interviewing procedures and techniques; and how defined terms and concepts relate to the study. I also provide an in-depth understanding of Lacan's theories of transference, including transference effects, and other terminology and how these terms and concepts relate to the study.

Findings

The fourth chapter presents and reviews the findings of the primary analysis of how actor communication is described and is meaningful to actors on a conscious level. I include generated themes and synthesized structural and textural descriptions of my participants' experiences. I provide salient verbatim examples from the narratives of my

participants, which include experiences from both traditional and experimental productions, as well as examples from my data analysis to support my findings.

Lacanian Critical Analysis – The Structure of Transference

The fifth chapter examines how actor communication is meaningful on an unconscious level, by exploring identifiable, conscious effects of transference. I will analyze the themes and include salient verbatim examples from the participants' narratives, as well as supporting data analysis examples. I relate my findings to the current Lacanian literature on the subject of transference as well as the current literature on actor communication.

Discussion and Implications of the Study

The final chapter examines the research implications, offering other questions and themes that emerged but were not selected to be addressed in the final study. I will summarize the entire study, both primary and secondary analyses. I will compare my findings to the findings in my dimensional analysis of literature. I will also relate my own experiences and assumptions to my findings. I will relate any personal or professional outcomes experienced by my participants or myself. Finally, I will conclude with further research options in the field of actor communication, particularly how a director or educator might go about using knowledge of the lived experience of actor communication in approaching rehearsals. I also will offer my own closing comments and future direction and goals concerning this type of research.

Appendices

In this section, I provide a copy of my Research Informed Consent Form for the dissertation project of the actor focus groups. I offer a copy of my participant selection letter, my focus group interview guide, a horizontalization sample, the list of invariant horizons and themes, and sample of coded interview data.

Chapter 2

Bracketing: Dimensional Analysis of Literature, Personal Experiences and Assumptions

Bracketing is the first step of data analysis in a phenomenological study. The researcher must bracket prior conceptions of the phenomenon in order to understand the phenomenon experienced by the research participants. However, in hermeneutic phenomenology, prior experience or understanding cannot be suspended completely in that a person must already have an anticipated viewpoint and contextualization towards a phenomenon. Through the act of bracketing, the researcher becomes aware of conceptualizations and biases of the phenomenon and keeps them in the forefront of her research, but the researcher's prior experiences are what give the research its focus in hermeneutic phenomenology. The research is a fusion of the researcher's perspective with the research findings; it is the fusion of "our ability to be aware of our own past and incorporate that awareness within our own present."³³ Prior researcher experience, which includes a dimensional analysis of literature, personal experience, and researcher assumptions, becomes incorporated and combined with new knowledge in order to gain a fuller understanding of the phenomenon.

Introduction to the Dimensional Analysis

A dimensional analysis of literature is designed to look at the multiple *dimensions*, that is, the primary and background variables, through which an examined

³³ Frances Maggs-Rapport, 'Best Research Practice': in pursuit of methodological rigour," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 35, no. 3 (Aug 2001): 378.

phenomenon is described and discussed in the relevant literature. The process of dimensionalizing a phenomenon separates out the different properties to find both commonalities and discrepancies about the phenomenon. A dimensional analysis of literature looks at the ways in which a phenomenon has been conceptualized not only through descriptions, but also through the conditions, problems, debates, assumptions, and represented perspectives associated with the phenomenon in the available literature. Conditions are aspects of the context or background variables that are considered important and are perceived to influence the phenomenon. Problems, debates and assumptions are those that are associated with or surround the phenomenon and are intrinsic to its conceptualization. Assumptions about the phenomenon may be both methodological and substantive. The relevant literature may describe actor communication from particular points of view, such as from the perspective of the professional actor or from that of acting instructors or theorists. However, the literature may omit other salient perspectives, such as that of the student actor. In the dimensional analysis, I will discuss perspectives of actor communication in terms of those that are included and those that are missing in the literature. Exploring the possible relationship of these perspectives to each other is also important in understanding the phenomenon.

By dimensionalizing the relevant literature, I will construct a conceptual or theoretical framework for my study of actor communication. Miles and Huberman note that a conceptual framework describes “the main things to be studied – the key factors, concepts, or variables – and the presumed relationships among them.”³⁴ The dimensional

³⁴ Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 1994), 18.

analysis is not an exhaustive approach towards all the relevant literature, but rather a sufficient approach to familiarize the reader with salient themes about the phenomenon that is being studied. Rather than explore every possible text that exists on actor communication, I will explore relevant literature until I reach a point of saturation³⁵, not only seeking out new descriptions, but also making connections between contradictory descriptions of the phenomenon. No single book exists which focuses specifically on the phenomenon of actor communication. With that in mind, I hope to conceptualize actor communication based on descriptions found in sources that focus on communication and on acting in terms of specific acting approaches, performance, theory, history, and actors' personal experiences.

Dimensional Analysis

While the phenomenon of actor communication is an experience of acting, actor communication at its most basic level is also an experience of communication. In order to situate my study, I begin my dimensional analysis by placing actor communication into the broader framework of communication and branch into interpersonal communication and then focus on actor communication as part of the field of acting.

Communication

Primary Dimensions

An exploration of a few sources on communication may help to clarify the phenomenon of actor communication. As the name "actor communication" implies, the phenomenon falls within the category of experiences of communication. Central to an

³⁵ Saturation is achieved when no new information or themes are uncovered in the literature.

understanding of the phenomenon of communication are the primary dimensions of “process” and “meaning-making.”

As Process: Several authors conceptualize communication as process.³⁶ Julia T. Wood describes a process as an “ongoing, continuous, dynamic flow that has no clear-cut beginnings or endings and that is always evolving and changing.”³⁷ Actor communication may be conceptualized as a *process* as well in that it is ongoing between actors during rehearsal and performance. Whereas communication may have no clear-cut beginning or ending, actor communication has clear time limits of rehearsal and the span of time of each performance and the end of the run of a production. However, actor communication does not have a clear beginning such as the first rehearsal or the first day off-book and has the capacity to evolve over time much like other kinds of communication.

As Meaning Making: The primary dimension of “creating meaning” goes to what the process of communication accomplishes. Burton and Dimbleby describe communication as “the creation and exchange of meanings.”³⁸ Samovar, Henman and King conceptualize communication as the creation of meaning and note that “the

³⁶ Graeme Burton and Richard Dimbleby, *Between Ourselves: An Introduction to Interpersonal Communication*, 2nd ed. (London: Arnold, 1995); Robert S. Cathcart, Larry A. Samovar, and Linda D. Henman, eds., *Small Group Communication: Theory & Practice* (Dubuque, IA: Brown & Benchmark, 1996); Nancy L. Harper, *Human Communication Theory: The History of a Paradigm* (Rochelle Park, NJ: Hayden Books, 1979); Raymond G. Smith, *Speech-Communication: Theory and Models* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970); Sarah Trenholm and Arthur Jensen, *Interpersonal Communication* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1988); Julia T. Wood, *Communication Theories in Action: An Introduction* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1997).

³⁷ Julia T. Wood, *Interpersonal Communication: Everyday Encounters* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1999) 26-28, 388.

³⁸ Burton and Dimbleby, *Between Ourselves*, 251.

decoding is the most significant part”³⁹ of the process. Trenholm and Jensen describe communication as a process whereby individuals “collectively create and regulate social reality.”⁴⁰ The creation of meaning transcends importance to the individual and begins shaping a mutual understanding of the world. Julia T. Wood further describes the meaning-making dimension of communication in *Relational Communication: Continuity and Change in Personal Relationships* as the primary way in which we create meaning:

The pivotal role of communication in shaping and continuously reshaping human connections reminds us that communication is a generative process that creates understandings between people, defines relationships and partners’ identities, composes rules for interaction, and establishes the overall climate of intimacy.⁴¹

The meaning-making dimension of communication transfers over to actor communication as well. Not only are the actors creating and defining relationships between characters within the specific context of the play, but also the actors are creating and defining relationships between each other as actors. Ideally, in the process of communication, actors will also create rules for interaction and a climate for their working relationship with other actors.

Interpersonal Communication

Primary Dimensions

³⁹ Larry A. Samovar, Linda D. Henman, and Stephen W. King, “Small Group Process,” in *Small Group Communication: Theory & Practice*, ed. Robert S. Cathcart, Larry A. Samovar, and Linda D. Henman (Dubuque, IA: Brown & Benchmark, 1996), 8.

⁴⁰ Trenholm and Jensen, *Interpersonal Communication*, 5.

⁴¹ Wood, *Relational Communication: Continuity and Change in Personal Relationships*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1999), xxi.

As Interactive, as Transactional: Interpersonal communication is characterized as a meaning-making process, but is further dimensionalized within the literature as an interactive and transactional process. In *Interpersonal Communication*, Julia T. Wood conceptualizes the meaning-making dimension of communication particular to the field of *interpersonal* communication as “a selective, systemic, ongoing process in which unique individuals interact to reflect and build personal knowledge and to create meanings.”⁴² Interpersonal communication is described as a process that grows and builds over time as people continue to communicate with each other on an interpersonal level. In Phillips and Wood’s *Communication and Human Relationships*, the authors further dimensionalize “meaning-making” as interactive and transactional. The latter of these two, transactional communication, creates meaning out of shared goals, mutual support and confirmation of personal identities.⁴³ Traditionally, transactional communication is considered a private exchange within deep personal relationships such as friends, spouses, or family members. Actor communication appears to share similar qualities to transactional communication in that an actor’s job may require that she create deep personal relationships at the level of *character* and create trusting relationships at the level of *actor*, all in the shared goal of the production of a play, with mutual support in scene work, in order to confirm the created identities and relationships of characters.

⁴² Wood, *Interpersonal Communication: Everyday Encounters*, 24, 386.

⁴³ Gerald M. Phillips and Julia T. Wood, *Communication and Human Relationships: The Study of Interpersonal Communication* (New York: Macmillan, 1983), 16-17.

Conditions: Communication also has conditions or salient factors that must be present in order for the phenomenon to occur. As in actor communication, the most prevalent condition necessary for communication discussed in the literature is that at least two people must be engaged in the process. Nancy Harper, in *Human Communication Theory: The History of a Paradigm*, specifically describes the process of communication as a process “between two or more persons.”⁴⁴ Whereas Harper is explicit in her description of the condition of at least two people, most of the salient literature reviewed implies the aforementioned condition through the use of the word “individuals” or “people” in their descriptions of communication.⁴⁵ Another salient condition of communication is that of interaction,⁴⁶ which is also considered primary to how actor communication is conceptualized. Samovar, Henman and King, in “Small Group Process,” describe interaction as a series of simultaneous exchanges of receiving and responding.⁴⁷ Another condition necessary for the interactive process of communication is the presence of both verbal and nonverbal language,⁴⁸ symbols that represent our

⁴⁴ Harper, *Human Communication Theory*, 262.

⁴⁵ The plural “individuals” and “people” imply at least two individuals. Cathcart, Samovar, and Henman, *Small Group Communication*; Trenholm and Jensen, *Interpersonal Communication*; Wood, *Communication Theories in Action*.

⁴⁶ Cathcart, Samovar, and Henman, *Small Group Communication*; Harper, *Human Communication Theory*; Phillips and Wood, *Communication and Human Relationships: The Study of Interpersonal Communication*; Wood, *Communication Theories in Action*; Wood, *Interpersonal Communication: Everyday Encounters*; Wood, *Relational Communication: Continuity and Change in Personal Relationships*.

⁴⁷ Samovar, Henman, and King, “Small Group Process,” 8.

⁴⁸ Ernest G. Bormann, *Small Group Communication: Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1990); Burton and Dimbleby, *Between Ourselves*; Cathcart, Samovar, and Henman. *Small Group Communication*; Harper, *Human Communication Theory*; Phillips and Wood, *Communication and Human Relationships*; Smith, *Speech-Communication*; Trenholm and Jensen, *Interpersonal Communication*; Wood, *Communication Theories in Action*.

feelings, ideas, events, situations, relationships and people.⁴⁹ All communication is formulated upon the presence of verbal and nonverbal language and consequently, actor communication is also based upon verbal and nonverbal language.

Perspectives: Predominantly, the perspectives represented in the available literature are those of communications scholars and theorists.

Actor Communication

I now shift the focus from general communication theory to the field of acting/theatre theory. Jean Benedetti translates Stanislavski's concept of this phenomenon as "communication".⁵⁰ In order to prevent any misunderstanding or blurring of lines between general communication theory and the phenomenon that I am researching, I use the term "actor communication" to describe the "unseen process" or phenomenon of the interaction among scene partners, the experience of sharing, interacting, relating and being in contact with another actor, which includes both verbal and nonverbal communication. I hope to uncover the experience of what it is like and what it means for actors to interact, to relate, to be in contact with each other.

Actor communication seems to be a phenomenon that is often omitted or, overlooked in much of the current theatrical literature. Many acting and directing texts

⁴⁹ Wood, *Interpersonal Communication*, 389.

⁵⁰ Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 229.

do not mention actor communication in any conceptualization.⁵¹ Although many contemporary acting and directing texts are Stanislavski-based, several texts do not mention actor communication as an important dimension of acting, rehearsal or play production. Several historical texts on acting theory also do not discuss actor communication; rather these texts look at the environmental or sociological conditions in the history of acting. James McTeague's *Before Stanislavsky: American Professional Acting Schools and Acting Theory 1875 – 1925* discusses the actor's relation to audience, to character, and to the text, but not actor-to-actor communication.⁵² Jane Milling and Graham Ley's *Modern Theories of Performance* devotes an entire chapter to discussing Stanislavski as a theoretical practitioner, yet omits any inclusion of his concept of communion.⁵³ Peter Thomson's *On Actors and Acting* describes the historical conditions

⁵¹ William Ball, *On Directing* (New York: Fireside, 1972); Brian Bates, *The Way of the Actor: A Path to Knowledge and Power* (Boston, MA: Shambhala, 1988); Robert Benedetti, *Seeming, Being, and Becoming: Acting in our Century* (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1976); Richard Boleslavski, *The First Six Lessons* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1949); Michael Chekhov, *To the Actor: On the Technique of Acting* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991); Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy, *Actors on Acting: The Theories, Techniques, and Practices of the Great Actors of All Times as Told in Their Own Words* (New York: Crown, 1970); Ramon Delgado, *Acting with Both Sides of Your Brain* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1986); James Roose-Evans, *Directing a Play: James Roose-Evans on the Art of Directing and Acting* (New York: Theatre Arts, 1968); David Downs, *The Actor's Eye: Seeing and Being Seen: A Fundamental Text* (New York: Applause, 1995); Michael Kearns, *Acting = Life: Actor's Life Lessons* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996); David Mamet, *True and False: Heresy and Common Sense for the Actor* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997); Joseph R. Roach, *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 1985); Richard Schechner, Robert L. Benedetti, William Jaeger and Kurt Cerf. *Actor Training I*, ed. Richard P. Brown (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1972); Tadashi Suzuki, *The Way of Acting: The Theatre Writings of Tadashi Suzuki*, tr. J. Thomas Rimer (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1986).

⁵² James H. McTeague, *Before Stanislavsky: American Professional Acting Schools and Acting Theory 1875 – 1925* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1993).

⁵³ Jane Milling and Graham Ley, *Modern Theories of Performance* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 1-54.

of British performances from the Elizabethan stage to the present, but does not discuss actor communication.⁵⁴

Primary Dimensions

Since Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares*, actor communication has been considered an integral dimension of an actor's process. However, it has rarely been the specific focus of acting literature. Current texts that address actor communication do so by describing its importance as it relates to an actor's technique. Actor communication appears to be an assumed "given" of an actor's process in rehearsal and performance. While the following texts do offer multiple theories of actor communication, there is very little detailed writing on the actor's lived experience. Theoretical and practical texts do provide some detailed understanding of how actor communication has been conceptualized. The texts that do begin to describe the actors' lived experiences of actor communication are limited to collections of interviews with professional "expert" actors. The primary dimensions of actor communication found in the relevant literature are communion, connection, chemistry, exchange, impulse/instinct and action.

As Communion: Several acting texts explicitly discuss the phenomenon of actor communication. Most authors' perspectives on actor communication appear, in their similarities, to connect back to Hapgood's translation of Stanislavski's conceptualization. Alison Hodge's *Twentieth Century Actor Training* is an excellent source for tracing the development and influence of Stanislavski's concept of acting and specifically, actor

⁵⁴ Peter Thomson, *On Actors and Acting* (Devon, UK: University of Exeter Press) 2000.

communication. Practitioners who worked closely with Stanislavski upheld his idea of communion. Michael Chekhov's "Stanislavski's Method of Acting," Eugene Vakhtangov's "Preparing for the Role," and B.E. Zakhava's "Principles of Directing," in *Acting: A Handbook of the Stanislavski Method*, describe actor communication in Stanislavski's terms: as a subconscious discharge and absorption of energy between two actors.⁵⁵

The influence of Stanislavski's conceptualization can be seen in American acting approaches as well. Richard Hornby's attack on the American Method, *The End of Acting*, conceptualizes actor communication in terms of "relating,"⁵⁶ which is an alternate translation to Stanislavski's communion. Richard Brestoff conceptualizes actor communication for his student actors as being much like Stanislavski's invisible currents of communion: the actor conveys "the living spirit that like a subterranean river flows under the external facts."⁵⁷ Steve Vineberg, in *Method Actors: Three Generations of an American Acting Style*, explores actor communication in terms of a spiritual communion.⁵⁸ Sonia Moore's *Stanislavski Revealed: The Actor's Guide to Spontaneity On Stage* discusses actor communication more in terms of physical communion: "when the expression of one person's face changes the expression of another."⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Chekhov, "Stanislavski's Method of Acting," 105-15; Vakhtangov, "Preparing for the Role," 116-124; and Zakhava, "Principles of Directing," 182-217.

⁵⁶ Hornby, *The End of Acting*, 160.

⁵⁷ Brestoff, *The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods*, 116.

⁵⁸ Vineberg, *Method Actors: Three Generations of an American Acting Style*, 186.

⁵⁹ Moore, *Stanislavski Revealed*, 120.

As Connection: Stanislavski's conceptualization of actor communication can still be seen in current actor teaching programs from both instructors and professional actors. Warren Robertson, in *A New Generation of Acting Teachers*, envisions actor communication as communion, yet more specifically as: "an invisible connection . . . transmitting to and receiving from each other without using words."⁶⁰ Professional actors Stockard Channing, Cynthia Nixon, Madeleine Kahn, and Alan Alda also view actor communication as a connection.⁶¹ In *Acting from the Ultimate Consciousness*, Eric Morris sees actor communication as a connection with consciousness, not necessarily a connection with other actors.⁶² Steve Vineberg discusses actor communication as "moments of intimate connection"⁶³ that promote ensemble performance. Joseph Chaikin describes actor communication as "the most intimate contacts"⁶⁴ that an actor can make outside of herself. Professional actor Terry Kinney describes the connection as forming characters and relationships "in the space between us, not just in our own spaces."⁶⁵ Stockard Channing further dimensionalizes connection as a "tension"⁶⁶ between actors.

⁶⁰ Robertson, "Warren Robertson," 121.

⁶¹ Channing, "Where Contradictions Meet," 120; Nixon, "A Good Intimacy of Feeling," 157; Kahn, "Like a Piece of Music," 193; Alda, "A Conversation with Alan Alda," 6. Alda worked under the guidance of Paul Sills in learning Spolin's improvisation. Channing, Nixon, Kahn, and Alda use the term "connection" or "connected" in their interviews.

⁶² Morris, *Acting from the Ultimate Consciousness*, 41.

⁶³ Vineberg, *Method Actors: Three Generations of an American Acting Style*, 17.

⁶⁴ Chaikin, *The Presence of the Actor*, 5.

⁶⁵ Kinney, "A Skin I Can Crawl Into," 68.

⁶⁶ Channing, "Where Contradictions Meet," 121.

As Chemistry: Richard Brestoff, in *The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods*, traces the most widely appreciated concepts of acting from where they began to how they are used in present actor training programs. Through his book, one can follow Stanislavski's concept of communion and visualize its influence on the American Method instructors as well as Spolin, Brecht, Grotowski, and Suzuki. Brestoff describes actor communication as a "living exchange"⁶⁷ or a "living chemistry"⁶⁸ between two actors. Professional actor Cynthia Nixon, in *Conversation in the Wings*, also describes actor communication as a "chemical thing."⁶⁹

As Exchange: Hardie Albright, Richard Brestoff, Marla Carlson, and Aristide D'Angelo conceptualize actor communication as an exchange of giving and then receiving.⁷⁰ Kurt Daw's *Acting: Thought into Action* and Robert Benedetti's *The Actor at Work* follow in the same vein. However, they describe actor communication as interaction.⁷¹ None of these authors describes what is being exchanged between actors. Gordon Phillips conceptualizes actor communication as a "listening-responding"⁷² interaction. Brestoff describes it as a "precious"⁷³ exchange in the theatre, and according to Madeleine Kahn, it is an exchange of feelings.⁷⁴ Hollis Huston, Charles McGaw, and Larry Clark describe actor communication as a transaction.⁷⁵ For Viola Spolin, in *Improvisation for the Theatre*, actor communication is described not so much as an exchange, but a yielding to one another.⁷⁶ Improvisation places actor communication at

⁶⁷ Brestoff, *The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods*, 53.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁶⁹ Nixon, "A Good Intimacy of Feeling," 157.

the forefront of Spolin's work; without actor communication, actors cannot connect with each other. Spolin's closest collaborator, Paul Sills, continued her work with improvisation and actor communication.

As Impulse/Instinct: Sanford Meisner described actor communication as responding to impulses, based in his Repetition exercises. In *On Acting*, he describes his entire organic approach to truthful acting as "The Reality of Doing," which is an actor responding on impulse to another actor: "Don't do anything until something happens to make you do it. And what you do doesn't depend on you; it depends on the other fellow!"⁷⁷ Larry Silverberg's *The Sanford Meisner Approach: an Actor's Workbook* follows Meisner's approach of impulse as the foundation of actor communication.⁷⁸ Joseph Chaikin's *The Presence of the Actor* also looks to free the actor's impulse.⁷⁹ Jerzy

⁷⁰ Albright and Albright, *Acting, the Creative Process*, 88; Brestoff, *The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods*, 53, 55, 130; Carlson, "Acting and Answerability," 25; and D'Angelo, *The Actor Creates*, 15-16, 52.

⁷¹ Daw, *Acting: Thought Into Action*, 17; Benedetti, *The Actor at Work*, 69.

⁷² Phillips, *Take It Personally*, 74.

⁷³ Brestoff, *The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods*, 55.

⁷⁴ Kahn, "Like a Piece of Music," 193.

⁷⁵ Huston, *The Actor's Instrument: Body, Theory, Stage*, 125; McGaw, Stilson, and Clark, *Acting Is Believing*, 119-20.

⁷⁶ Brestoff, *The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods*, 142.

⁷⁷ Meisner and Longwell, *Sanford Meisner on Acting*, 34.

⁷⁸ Silverberg, *The Sanford Meisner Approach*, 149.

⁷⁹ Chaikin, *The Presence of the Actor*.

Grotowski's *Towards a Poor Theatre* discusses actor work based in pure spiritual impulse.⁸⁰ Professional actors Mary Steenburgen and Julie Harris also view actor communication as instinctive or impulse-based.⁸¹

As Action: Stephen Wangh, in *An Acrobat of the Heart: A Physical Approach to Acting Inspired by the Work of Jerzy Grotowski*, combines Stanislavski with Grotowski to create a physical training approach that includes character technique. He conceptualizes actor communication as a concrete literal act of the verbalization of needs when actors are not in the act of acting, i.e., "I need x from you when we're working."

Francis Hodge's *Play Directing: Analysis, Communication and Style* argues that organic blocking is actor communication: "a living, breathing process of mutual discovery and communication between actor and director and between actor and actor."⁸² Organic blocking resembles the idea of actor communication, as an act or instance of transmission.

Conditions: Actor communication, in its myriad of conceptualizations, also has multiple, notable conditions or salient factors which must be present in order for the phenomenon to occur. Although most authors do not explore actor communication at length, some do describe its necessary conditions. The primary conditions necessary for actor communication discussed in the literature are the other actor and listening.

⁸⁰ Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, 16.

⁸¹ Steenburgen, "Mary Steenburgen," 76; Harris, "That Wonderful Strange Alchemy," 24.

⁸² Francis Hodge, *Play Directing: Analysis, Communication and Style* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994), 76.

The most prevalent condition of actor communication discussed is another actor in that actor communication requires at least two actors.⁸³ Stella Adler, in *The Technique of Acting*, views the other actor as one of the immediate circumstances⁸⁴ that an actor must encounter in rehearsal. Joanna Rotté, a former student of Adler's, reiterates her perspective of the importance of the other actor in actor communication: "The immediate circumstances, including . . . the partner, exist to impel the actor to do something."⁸⁵

Listening has also been described as an important condition for actor communication.⁸⁶ Larry Silverberg discusses listening between actors as "true listening" and further dimensionalizes the condition of listening as "your openness and availability to your partners and to yourself."⁸⁷ Alexander Dean's *Fundamentals of Play Directing*

⁸³ The condition of "two actors" can be inferred from most books on acting, but it is a primary condition for actor communication that cannot be omitted for its obviousness. Two people is a primary condition of interpersonal communication theory as well. Specific sources include Albright and Albright, *Acting, the Creative Process*, 88; Brestoff, *The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods*, 142; Daw, *Acting: Thought into Action*, 97; Zakhava, "Principles of Directing" 212; Jerzy Grotowski, "An Interview With Grotowski," in *TDR* 13 (Fall 1968): 32; Roy Harris, ed., *Conversations in the Wings: Talking About Acting* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994), 121, 139; Hornby, *The End of Acting*, 160; Meisner and Longwell, *On Acting*, 17; Robert Lewis, "Dialogue with Robert Lewis" interview by Charles Marowitz in *Prospero's Staff: Acting and Directing in the Contemporary Theatre* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 82; David Krasner, ed., *Method Acting Reconsidered: Theory, Practice, Future* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 232, 234-36.

⁸⁴ Stella Adler, *The Technique of Acting* (Toronto; New York: Bantam Books) 1988.

⁸⁵ Joanna Rotté, *Acting with Adler* (New York: Limelight Editions, 2000), 94.

⁸⁶ Albright and Albright, *Acting, the Creative Process*, 88; Brestoff, *The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods*, 142; Adrian Cairns, "Zen and the Art of Acting," *New Theatre Quarterly* 2, no. 5 (February 1986): 28; Daw, *Acting: Thought into Action*, 97; Harris, ed., *Conversations in the Wings: Talking About Acting*, 121, 139; Hornby, *The End of Acting*, 160; Meisner and Longwell, *On Acting*, 17; Robert Lewis, "Dialogue with Robert Lewis," 82; Krasner, ed., *Method Acting Reconsidered: Theory, Practice, Future*; McGaw, Stilson, and Clark, *Acting Is Believing*, 119-20; Don Richardson, *Acting Without Agony: An Alternative to the Method* (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1988), 150; Judith Weston, *Directing Actors: Creating Memorable Performances for Film and Television* (Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese, 1996), 297; Zakhava, "Principles of Directing," 212.

⁸⁷ Silverberg, *The Sanford Meisner Approach*, 149.

briefly discusses listening as an invaluable art of the stage.⁸⁸ Mack Owen's *The Stages of Acting: A Practical Approach for Beginning Actors* discusses listening, not as part of actor communication, but rather as part of representation in that it "has to be as close as possible to the real thing."⁸⁹

Other salient conditions for actor communication suggested by the literature are concentration,⁹⁰ mutuality,⁹¹ reacting,⁹² vulnerability,⁹³ and responsiveness.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Alexander Dean, *The Fundamentals of Play Directing* (New York: Rinehart & Company, 1941), 68.

⁸⁹ Mack Owen, *The Stages of Acting: A Practical Approach for Beginning Actors* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 107.

⁹⁰ Sources use the terms "concentrate" or "concentration." McGaw, Stilson, and Clark, *Acting Is Believing*, 119; Zakhava, "Principles of Directing," 212-13; Robert Cohen, *Acting One* (Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield, 1984), 14; Lindsay Crouse, "Lindsay Crouse," interview by Carole Zucker, ed. in *Conversations with Actors on Film, Television, and Performance* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002), 3-4; Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 236.

⁹¹ Sources use the term "mutual." Charles Marowitz, *Prospero's Staff: Acting and Directing in the Contemporary Theatre* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 69; Jerome Rockwood, *The Craftsmen of Dionysus: An Approach to Acting* (New York: Applause Books, 1992), 216-17; Hodge, *Play Directing*, 76.

⁹² Sources use the terms "react" or "reacting." Albright and Albright, *Acting, the Creative Process*, 88; Brestoff, *The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods*, 55; Carlson, "Acting and Answerability," 132; Mark Olsen, *The Golden Buddha Changing Masks: Essays on the Spiritual Dimension of Acting* (Nevada City, CA: Gateways, 1989), 45; Constantin Stanislavski, "Directing and Acting," in *A Handbook of the Stanislavski Method*, ed. Toby Cole (New York: Crown Trade Paperbacks, 1995), 25; Dianne Wiest, "A Conversation with Dianne Wiest," in *The Actor Speaks: Twenty-four Actors Talk About Process*, 261.

⁹³ Sources use the terms "vulnerable" or "vulnerability." Abunuwara, "Emmanuel Levinas and Sanford Meisner on Exposedness in Acting," 1-4; Cohen, *Acting One*, 20; Joe Seneca, "A Conversation with Joe Seneca," interview by Janet Sonenberg, ed. in *The Actor Speaks: Twenty-four Actors Talk About Process* (New York: Crown Trade Paperbacks, 1996), 189-190.

⁹⁴ Rosary O'Neill, *The Actor's Checklist: Creating the Complete Character*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Thomson Learning, 2002), 33; Downs, *The Actor's Eye: Seeing and Being Seen*, 64; Joan Herrington, "Directing with Viewpoints," *Theatre Topics* 10:2 (2000): 158; Donna Murphy, "Donna Murphy: The Serious Songstress," interview by Roy Harris, ed. in *Eight Women of the American Stage Talking About Acting* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997), 43; Carole Zucker, *Conversations with Actors on Film, Television, and Performance* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002), xi.

Vulnerability has been further dimensionalized as revealing or giving of one's self⁹⁵ and giving up control to the other actor. Responsiveness has been further dimensionalized as "being present,"⁹⁶ "being in the moment,"⁹⁷ and "a desire to share."⁹⁸ Rosary O'Neill also dimensionalizes responsiveness as "the electricity between characters" when a scene between actors is "cooking."⁹⁹

Problems of Actor Communication

Actor Communication Breakdown: The problems of actor communication have been described in the literature in relation to the exclusion or omission of one of the previously discussed conditions. Some authors view the breakdown as a result of a specific acting technique, in particular Strasberg's Method. In "Balancing," a debate with Kristin Linklater, Anne Bogart criticizes the American Method, specifically affective memory at the Actor's Studio, for its capacity to remove or negate mutual interaction between two actors. She describes Strasberg's approach as "deadly in the way it separates actors from each other. That's because the emphasis is, to a large extent, on trying to generate feeling, instead of on being present in the room."¹⁰⁰ B.E. Zakhava and

⁹⁵ Cairns, "Zen and the Art of Acting," 27.

⁹⁶ Kristin Linklater, "Balancing: Anne Bogart and Kristin Linklater Debate the Current Trends in American Actor-training," moderated by David Diamond, *American Theatre* (January 2001): 105.

⁹⁷ Anne Bogart, "Balancing: Anne Bogart and Kristin Linklater Debate the Current Trends in American Actor-training," moderated by David Diamond, *American Theatre* (January 2001): 104; Cairns, "Zen and the Art of Acting," 28; Carlson, "Acting and Answerability," 25; Meisner and Longwell, *On Acting*, 32; Eva Mekler, *A New Generation of Acting Teachers* (New York: Penguin, 1987).

⁹⁸ D'Angelo, *The Actor Creates*, 51.

⁹⁹ O'Neill, *The Actor's Checklist*, 33.

¹⁰⁰ Bogart, "Balancing," 33.

Brestoff suggest that affective memory is a detrimental approach to acting because it creates a loss of attention on the other actor¹⁰¹ and as a result the connection between actors is lost.¹⁰²

Other authors place the locus of actor communication breakdown within the actor herself, in personality or approach. Charles Marowitz describes the omission or exclusion of necessary conditions of actor communication as a result of certain types of non-actors. In *The Act of Being*, he discusses seven types of *non-actors* that may contribute to the breakdown of the process of actor communication: The Skater, The Simulator, The Therapy-Freak, The Prisoner, The Ego-Tripper, The Showman, and The Talker.¹⁰³ For example, Marowitz's Ego-Trippers acknowledge the audience, but fail to acknowledge other actors, which omits the experience of "palpable contact with their fellow-players."¹⁰⁴ Whereas Marowitz explores actor communication and its breakdown in terms of actors, Michael Chekhov discusses actor communication in terms of three approaches an actor may take towards a scene: for the audience, towards herself, or for her partner.¹⁰⁵ Yet of the three, only the last approach, "playing for one's partner" is sufficient in that: "If the actor, like a human being, makes himself clear and understood by his stage partner . . . the performance will become real."¹⁰⁶ Kurt Daw and Rosary

¹⁰¹ Zakhava, "Principles of Directing," 212-13.

¹⁰² Brestoff, *The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods*, 129.

¹⁰³ Charles Marowitz, *The Act of Being* (London: Secker & Warbur) 1978.

¹⁰⁴ Marowitz, *The Act of Being*, 44.

¹⁰⁵ Chekhov, "Stanislavski's Method of Acting," 108.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 109.

O'Neill both discuss actor communication failure in terms of an actor's unwillingness to relinquish control or an actor's unwillingness to accept another actor's full potential.¹⁰⁷

Professional actors describe the most salient examples of actor communication problems and also place the source of its breakdown within the actor as well. Roy Rifkin describes actor communication as one of the most difficult experiences between actors.¹⁰⁸

Stanislavski describes the difficulty of actor communication and the cause of its breakdown:

Most actors, if they use it at all, only communicate while they are saying their own lines. As soon as they have nothing to say and someone else is speaking, they don't listen, don't receive their partner's thoughts. They stop acting until it's their next line...It is more difficult to make communication with your fellow actor than to play at being in communication. That's the line of least resistance. Actors love it and so are all too willing to swap genuine communication for mere theatrics.¹⁰⁹

Stanislavski places the source of breakdown within the actor who chooses not to put forth effort to engage in communication with her partner. In an interview with Roy Harris, Joanne Woodward describes her own experience of communication breakdown in terms of loss of eye contact: "At least if the actors are looking at you. It drives me crazy if they're not . . . there was no way that we could communicate, and so it was a tough experience for me."¹¹⁰ John Lithgow describes actor communication breakdown in terms of actor insecurity, which causes exclusion: "you can't enter their world, they close you

¹⁰⁷ Daw, *Acting: Thought into Action*, 104; O'Neill, *The Actor's Checklist*, 33.

¹⁰⁸ Ron Rifkin, "Between Two People," interview by Roy Harris, ed. in *Conversations in the Wings: Talking About Acting* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994), 44.

¹⁰⁹ Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 236-240.

¹¹⁰ Joanne Woodward, "Joanne Woodward: An Instinctive Rapport," interview by Roy Harris, ed., in *Eight Women of the American Stage Talking About Acting* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997), 125.

out, they exclude you.”¹¹¹ Mary Steenburgen also discusses communication breakdown caused by actor insecurity, self-consciousness, and judgmental attitudes.¹¹² Tom Conti describes communication as a fundamental element to acting, so when a breakdown occurs “you have to make it up if the other actor is not delivering.”¹¹³ Alternatively, Frances McDormand describes her own experiences of giving too much to an acting partner: “Because your energy is being put into shaping someone else’s performance, you fail to find out as much as you could about your own.”¹¹⁴

Beyond the breakdown of actor communication, another salient problem appears to be the emotions that arise out of actor communication. Joe Seneca describes the difficulty of actor communication in terms of having boundary blurring consequences for the actors:

When two characters confront each other, two good actors open themselves up to the possibility of strong feelings arising between them. In those instances, feelings such as hatred or sexual attraction are possible consequences for the actors, not just the characters. It takes courage to seize these feelings and use them in the moment.¹¹⁵

Debates of Actor Communication

The multiple perspectives of primary dimensions, conditions, and problems of actor communication do not appear to be under debate in the relevant literature. The

¹¹¹ John Lithgow, “John Lithgow,” interview by Carole Zucker, ed., in *Conversations with Actors on Film, Television, and Performance* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002), 63.

¹¹² Steenburgen, “Mary Steenburgen,” 76.

¹¹³ Tom Conti, “Tom Conti,” interview by Carole Zucker, ed., in *Conversations with Actors on Film, Television, and Performance* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002), 93.

¹¹⁴ Frances McDormand, “A Conversation with Frances McDormand” in *The Actor Speaks: Twenty-four Actors Talk About Process*, 249.

¹¹⁵ Seneca, “A Conversation with Joe Seneca,” 189-90.

authors do not appear to question other practitioners as to conceptualizations of actor communication until they begin discussing the source of the phenomenon. A salient debate that arises from the conceptualization of its source is whether actor communication is primarily a conscious or unconscious process.

The following authors describe actor communication as a largely conscious process. In *Acting from the Ultimate Consciousness*, Eric Morris describes actor communication as an element of acting that takes place on what he calls the 11th level of consciousness, where the actor is totally involved moment to moment: “In this state there is some communication with the unconscious.”¹¹⁶ Don Richardson’s *Acting Without Agony: An Alternative to the Method* discusses the conscious as the actor’s only resource.¹¹⁷ Mark Olsen, in his Taoist approach to acting, encourages a “mindful”¹¹⁸ or self-aware approach to communication.

Whereas Morris, Richardson, and Olsen attribute the source of actor communication to the conscious mind of the actor, the following authors discuss an unconscious source of the experience. Stanislavski describes the subconscious¹¹⁹ as the “motivating source”¹²⁰ of actor communication. Michael Chekhov discusses actor communication as something that is created unconsciously and is “accompanied by a

¹¹⁶ Morris, *Acting from the Ultimate Consciousness*, 41.

¹¹⁷ Richardson, *Acting Without Agony*, 49-50.

¹¹⁸ Olsen, *The Golden Buddha Changing Masks*, 85-94.

¹¹⁹ I use subconscious and unconscious interchangeably. “Subconscious” is a term coined by Freud, which was later integrated into the term “unconscious” by Lacan.

¹²⁰ William B. Worthen, “Stanislavsky and the Ethos of Acting,” *Theatre Journal* 35, no. 1 (March 1983): 39.

discharge of energy which has an infecting quality.”¹²¹ Richard Hornby describes actor communication as an unconscious process as well in that it is: “giving yourself up to the situation rather than consciously trying to manipulate it.”¹²² Hornby describes an actor’s conscious control of actor communication in a negative light; a conscious source of actor communication is equal to an overt orchestration of the experience.

Philip Auslander in “‘Just Be Yourself’: Logocentrism and Difference in Performance Theory,” criticizes Stanislavski’s approach to acting and consequently actor communication, in that it privileges the self and the unconscious over the conscious mind in terms of “retrieving data.”¹²³ Kurt Daw, on the other hand, praises Stanislavski in that his theories are aligned with a “more complex and layered view of thought.”¹²⁴ However, Daw argues in his own approach that actors “start their performance process in a consciously self-created . . . environment.”¹²⁵ Hollis Huston’s *The Actor’s Instrument: Body, Theory, Stage* discusses actor communication in terms of affect, or an emotional response, as a result of the interaction between the conscious and unconscious.¹²⁶

Although Hornby favors the unconscious as the primary source of actor communication, he describes the actor’s pleasure that arises from acting as both

¹²¹ Chekhov, “Stanislavski’s Method of Acting,” in *A Handbook of the Stanislavski Method*, ed. Toby Cole, 117.

¹²² Hornby, *The End of Acting*, 160.

¹²³ Philip Auslander, “Just Be Yourself: Logocentrism and Difference in Performance Theory,” in *Acting (Re)considered*, ed. Phillip B. Zarilli (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 61; and also in Philip Auslander, *From Acting to Performance: Essays in Modernism and Postmodernism* (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), 29.

¹²⁴ Daw, *Acting: Thought into Action*, 33.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 32. Daw uses a “pyramid of thought” that has four layers: sensory, social, verbal, and logical.

¹²⁶ Huston, *The Actor’s Instrument*, 125.

conscious and unconscious.¹²⁷ Hornby raises another salient debate within actor communication, which is whether an actor's sense of self is fluid or fixed. He argues that American acting methods reinforce a fixed idea of ego:

It is in American actor training that we also find an emphasis on the conscious self, the ego, which is to be exhibited on stage in role after role. . . . The American actor seems condemned always to act the same 'self,' even though it is only a small part of his total persona; the fear hovers that should he stray from his accepted 'self,' not only will the public be confused, but his acting will become hollow and artificial.¹²⁸

However, Hornby suggests that actors have a firm understanding that the self is fluid, which is what allows an actor to "easily put aside his everyday identity"¹²⁹ and act a wide range of roles. Hornby's debate intertwines with Jonas Barish's *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, which traces cultural biases against actors from the Greeks to present day. Barish suggests that the prejudice against theatre, specifically actors portraying other people, is rooted in the problematic idea that the self appears fluid rather than fixed.¹³⁰ Centuries ago in *The Republic*, Plato warned his readers against the dangers of the fluidity of the self: "the mask which the actor wears is apt to become his face," believing that it was not in man's nature to play many roles and that only a man lacking self-respect would take on a role that was not good in nature.¹³¹ The appearance of the anti-theatrical

¹²⁷ Hornby, *The End of Acting*, 21.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹³⁰ Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1981), 22-23.

¹³¹ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, 3rd ed, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), 48.

prejudice within acting discussions, both present and past, suggests that a salient debate about actor communication is that of a fluid vs. a fixed sense of self.

Several authors describe the actor's sense of self as fluid, as having the ability to become a character, to be both character and actor at the same time, or as a total transformation of self. Philip Weissman discusses the actor's self in terms of ego-psychology, which suggests that actors have a fluid sense of self because they "have failed to develop a normal sense of identity and body image during the early maturational phases of infancy."¹³² John Harrop reiterates Weissman's theory on the actor's poorly developed ego: "These forces pulling in opposite directions could easily suggest that the actor has indeed not matured, lacks a defined core of self, a personal ego."¹³³ Harrop goes on to dimensionalize the actor's undefined sense of self as fluid and because of that fluidity uncovering the experience of acting is difficult: "the phenomenological problem of acting will always be with us; the actor is both himself and the character at the same time."¹³⁴ The difficulty of investigating the experience of acting intersects with the anti-theatrical prejudice, and consequently, relates back to the debate about a fixed or fluid sense of self. Hornby conceptualizes the actor's self as fluid and argues that the experience of acting goes beyond an actor representing a character and her self, but rather acting is a transformation of the fluid self.¹³⁵ Stanislavski also conceptualizes acting as a transformation, but argues that an actor must maintain a separation between the character

¹³² Philip Weissman, *Creativity in the Theater: A Psychoanalytic Study* (New York: Basic Books, 1965), 11.

¹³³ Weissman, *Creativity in the Theater*, 27.

¹³⁴ John Harrop, *Acting* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), 7.

¹³⁵ Hornby, *The End of Acting*, 21.

and the self.¹³⁶ Julian Olf continues to explore the acting/being paradox through the work of Stanislavski and others in “Acting and Being: Some Thoughts about Metaphysics and Modern Performance Theory.” While Stanislavski maintained the idea of separation between character and actor’s self, Olf argues that Stanislavski’s ideas on actor communication obliterated the actor’s self, “rendering himself a pretext, a medium, a transparency.”¹³⁷

While some authors argue the fluidity of self and explore the problems inherent in that fluidity, other authors imply that the self is fixed and that challenges and successes within actor communication arise out of the fixedness of self. William B. Worthen argues that the self is fixed, and the actor is caught in a double bind of being herself and portraying another, which can lead to actor communication breakdown in that the actor “fails to realize his personal authenticity on the stage.”¹³⁸ Kim Abunuwara suggests in her work that the self is fixed and that actor communication is “the transcendence of the self through dependence on the partner.”¹³⁹ In “Acting and Answerability,” Marla Carlson supports Abunuwara’s position, and she describes actor communication in terms of creating or fleshing out the self through Meisner’s repetition exercise, in that the exercises “developed a sense of self through communication.”¹⁴⁰

Within the debate of fixed vs. fluid sense of self are several overlapping ideas. Authors

¹³⁶ See Chapter 10, Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, 199-206.

¹³⁷ Julian Olf, “Acting and Being: Some Thoughts about Metaphysics and Modern Performance Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 33, no. 1 (March 1981): 41.

¹³⁸ Worthen, “Stanislavsky and the Ethos of Acting,” 37.

¹³⁹ Abunuwara, “Emmanuel Levinas and Sanford Meisner on Exposedness in Acting,” 4.

¹⁴⁰ Carlson, “Acting and Answerability,” 24.

on both sides of the debate suggest that the actor's sense of self is undeveloped, that a double bind exists between the actor's self and the character, and that acting may be a transformational process for the actor. The debate of the self also brings light to the potential difficulty of investigating actor communication because of the duality of actor and character.

Assumptions of Actor Communication

The assumptions about actor communication are both explicit and implied within the relevant literature. Several assumptions arise about actor communication. An assumption, as previously stated, is that actor communication is a given of the acting experience. Another assumption about actor communication is that it is essential to believable acting.¹⁴¹ Rather than discuss actor communication as an individual phenomenon, some authors imply that actor communication is inherent within the experience of acting.¹⁴² Since Stanislavski described actor communication as an important part of acting, several Stanislavski-based authors include actor communication as an integral part of their approach to acting as well.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ This is also an assumption of my own that I hold towards actor communication.

¹⁴² Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, 193-222; Daw, *Acting: Thought into Action*; 17; Brestoff, *Acting Under the Circumstances* (Lyme, NH: Smith and Kraus, 1999), 107-19; Moore, *Stanislavski Revealed*, 1-26, 108-23.

¹⁴³ It should be noted that not all practitioners hold this assumption. Adler, *The Technique of Acting*; Albright and Albright, *Acting, the Creative Process*; Benedetti, *The Actor At Work*; Brestoff, *Acting Under the Circumstances*; Edward D. Easty, *On Method Acting* (New York: Ivy Books, 1981); Kerry Fox, "Kerry Fox," interview by Carole Zucker, ed. in *Conversations with Actors on Film, Television, and Performance* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002); Uta Hagen, *A Challenge for the Actor* (New York: Scribners; Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan Canada; New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1991); Robert Lewis, *Method – Or Madness?* (New York: Samuel French, 1958); Meisner and Longwell, *On Acting*; Lee Strasberg, *A Dream of Passion: The Development of the Method* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown) 1987); Vineberg, *Method Actors: Three Generations of an American Acting Style*.

Another salient assumption regarding actor communication is that an actor's willingness to make contact with another actor is a necessary condition for actor communication to take place. This assumption arises out of texts that refer to a breakdown of actor communication as well as those texts that view acting as interaction, connection, communion, exchange, transaction, chemistry, or contact. All of the aforementioned texts imply that actors are willing to participate in each conceptualization of actor communication.

Several authors describe exercises to elicit actor communication.¹⁴⁴ However, there is an inherent assumption within the exercises that the experience of the exercises will transfer over into rehearsal and performance practices. Richard Brestoff's *Acting under the Circumstances* recommends to student actors that, as an exercise, they should speak their inner emotions or circumstances to their partner, which will begin building the path for communication between actors.¹⁴⁵ Brestoff, as well as other practitioners, assumes that student actors will do the same in rehearsal, regardless of their own insecurities, rehearsal environment, or acting partner's attitude towards the exercise.

An assumption that also is linked to actor communication exercises is that an actor cannot experience actor communication without first being led to it by an acting instructor or director. This assumption begins with Stanislavski and can be seen in his admonition: "do not attempt these exercises except under the supervision of my

¹⁴⁴ Brestoff, *Acting Under the Circumstances*, 107-119; Cohen, *Acting One*, 18-24; Daw, *Acting: Thought into Action*, 97-126; McGaw, Stilson, and Clark, *Acting Is Believing*, 109-32; Meisner and Longwell, *On Acting*; Silverberg, *The Sanford Meisner Approach*; David Krasner, *Method Acting Reconsidered: Theory, Practice, Future*; Viola Spolin, *Improvisation for the Theater*, 3rd ed. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999).

¹⁴⁵ Whereas Brestoff explores actor communication in *The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods*, in his own acting textbook, *Acting Under the Circumstances*, he only briefly notes actor communication in reference to the process of building a character.

assistant”¹⁴⁶ and continues through to Silverberg in that his Meisner exercises require an outside observer.¹⁴⁷ Another assumption that Meisner and his followers make is that actor communication is a means of building character, rather than simply a means of communication.¹⁴⁸

At the level of descriptive conceptualization of actor communication, as discussed under the debate section, there are two noticeable assumptions made about actor communication. First, actor communication involves the mind at a conscious and/or unconscious level. Second, actor communication is a process that reaffirms, reifies, or recreates the actor’s self. The available literature does not look specifically at the actor’s experience of actor communication. Regarding this omission, perhaps the most salient assumption about actor communication from the relevant literature is that actors can experience communication or know what the experience is without a meaningful description of the lived experience of actor communication.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, 222.

¹⁴⁷ Silverberg, *The Sanford Meisner Approach*, xviii.

¹⁴⁸ Abunuwara, “Emmanuel Levinas and Sanford Meisner on Exposedness in Acting”; Carlson “Acting and Answerability,” Brant L. Pope, “Redefining Acting: The Implications of the Meisner Method,” and Louise M. Stinespring, “Just Be Yourself: Derrida, Difference, and the Meisner Technique,” in *Method Acting Reconsidered: Theory, Practice, Future*, ed. David Krasner (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000): 81-95; 97-109; 147-157; Meisner and Longwell, *On Acting*; Silverberg, *The Sanford Meisner Approach*; Steenburgen, “Mary Steenburgen,” 76.

¹⁴⁹ Except for collections of actor interviews on technique, the relevant literature does not include the actor’s lived experience of actor communication. Collections examined include: Roy Harris, ed., *Conversations in the Wings: Talking About Acting* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994) and *Eight Women of the American Stage Talking About Acting* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997); Joan Jeffri, *The Actor Speaks: Actors Discuss Their Experiences and Careers* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press) 1994; Joanmarie Kalter, *Actors on Acting: Performing in Theatre & Film Today* (New York: Sterling, 1979); Janet Sonenberg, *The Actor Speaks: Twenty-four Actors Talk About Process*; and Carole Zucker, *Conversations with Actors on Film, Television, and Performance* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002).

Perspectives

Predominantly, the perspectives represented in the available literature are those of acting teachers, directors, theorists, and professional actors. However, the interviews of professional actors suggest that somehow “professional” translates to “expert” in that the professional actor has been authorized so that she is now imbued with more authentic knowledge than the student actor. Actor interviews begin to uncover the lived experience of actor communication. The snippets of the lived experience arise out of interviews on actor technique, rather than being the focus of the interview. The interviews suggest that there is relevancy in exploring actor communication through phenomenology. Richard Hornby, as previously discussed in the introduction, suggests that acting studies need to look at phenomenology as a way of understanding what it means to act.

The relevant literature demonstrates that there may be merit to Hornby’s suggestion of phenomenology as a viable approach to acting and theatre research. Most studies are largely theoretical in nature, but some practical phenomenological investigations exist. The theoretical applications give support to the implementation of phenomenology in theatrical research. Bruce Wilshire’s *Role Playing and Identity: The Limits of Theatre As Metaphor* explores the sociological function of acting, rather than the experience of acting itself. However, he suggests that the imaginative use of phenomenological methods may help to uncover the “essence” of the experience of theatre.¹⁵⁰ Whereas Wilshire uses phenomenology to look at the function of acting in a sociological context, John Harrop’s *Acting* uses phenomenology and semiotics to understand the experience of acting within the context of theatre. Harrop’s theoretical

¹⁵⁰ Wilshire, *Role Playing and Identity*, 13.

work does not focus exclusively on the phenomenon of actor communication, but he does suggest that phenomenology is a worthy approach to understanding acting. He suggests that phenomenology can be used to investigate acting in order to:

identify the problems, to examine them in the various areas of acting experience, to discover how far it is possible to speak of salient or common features, and to provide fuel and a structure for thought and discussion.¹⁵¹

Bert O. States continues the theoretical exploration of theatre in *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of the Theatre*, a phenomenological study on performance and performance space. States uses Heideggerian phenomenology to understand the *lived experience* of performance, where the actor is inseparable from the performance, where the actor is at once both “character and performer.”¹⁵²

A few dissertations also use phenomenology as a lens for understanding the experiential processes of acting and theatre, suggesting that the actor’s perspective not only a credible source, but also a vital means to understanding the experiences of acting. In her dissertation, Judith Lauren Herr explores how the aesthetic structures of theatre have been described.¹⁵³ Her approach, much like Harrop’s, is theoretical rather than based on *lived experience*. Shelley McKnight Russell-Parks also uses phenomenology to look at acting.¹⁵⁴ In her dissertation, Russell-Parks looks at the *lived experience* of the creative act. She includes actor communication within the parameters of her study, by

¹⁵¹ Harrop, *Acting*, 3.

¹⁵² States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms*, 119.

¹⁵³ Judith Lauren Herr, “A Philosophy of Theatricality: A Phenomenological Description of the Aesthetic Structures in the Arts of Performance,” (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 1971), 5.

¹⁵⁴ Shelley McKnight Russell-Parks, “A Phenomenological Analysis of the Actor’s Perceptions During the Creative Act,” (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 1989), 3.

the inclusion of respondent transcripts, but it is not the central focus of her writing.

While questionnaires are a viable means of data collection, the language and structure of Russell-Parks' questions do not allow the participants to describe the experience in their own words. The limiting and leading nature of the questions forces the participants to conform to only one of the listed perspectives in each question, for example:

In performance:

- ___ I often feel that I shift back and forth between actor and character, between working as an artist and living a certain situation.
- ___ I do not shift back and forth, but am always a kind of melded personality of myself and the character.
- ___ I am not really aware of my relationship to the character. I do my job. I act the role.¹⁵⁵

While Russell-Parks' study focuses in part on surveys of both student and professional actors, the understanding of the actor's lived experience is gained primarily through interviews with professional actors. She interviews student actors and acting instructors, but the interviews seem much shorter and do not contain the same line of questioning as do those with the professional actors. Russell-Parks describes actor communication much as Adler does: an immediate circumstance that an actor needs to be aware of onstage. One interviewee in her study focused specifically on actor communication as connection in reference to the creative act: "When you're really connected to your character and to the other actors on stage, it's the best feeling in the world."¹⁵⁶ Russell-Parks neither includes the response of her interviewee in her findings nor mentions actor communication as a salient part of the creative act. The appearance of actor

¹⁵⁵ Russell-Parks, "A Phenomenological Analysis of the Actor's Perceptions During the Creative Act," 191.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 200.

communication is limited to the transcripts of her respondents located in the appendix of her study and the salient dimension was not included as part of the creative act.¹⁵⁷ The scope of Russell-Parks' study appears too narrow to include actor communication in her findings. Since actor communication is a dimension that reoccurs in Russell-Parks' study, its reappearance may suggest relevancy in exploring the actor's *lived experience* of actor communication.

More recent literature also suggests the relevancy of researching the *lived experience* as a means of understanding the phenomena of the experiential field of theatre. In "Towards a Phenomenological Model of the Actor's Embodied Modes of Experience" and "An Enactive Approach to Understanding Acting," Phillip B. Zarilli uses phenomenology to understand the notion of the *lived body* and how one's acting process is influenced by unarticulated notions of history and culture – creating character, role, actions and relating to the audience.¹⁵⁸ While Zarilli's work is theoretical in nature, what he calls "a meta-theoretical understanding of acting as a phenomenon,"¹⁵⁹ his exploration of acting through phenomenology has led to a new acting text and approach to teaching acting, which incorporates the concept of "mind and body as whole" as part of the process.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Russell-Parks, "A Phenomenological Analysis of the Actor's Perceptions During the Creative Act," 78, 188-9, 242-4, 247.

¹⁵⁸ Phillip B. Zarilli, "Towards a Phenomenological Model of the Actor's Embodied Modes of Experience," *Theatre Journal* 56 (2004): 653-666 and "An Enactive Approach to Understanding Acting," *Theatre Journal* 59 (2007): 635-647.

¹⁵⁹ Zarilli, "An Enactive Approach to Understanding Acting," 638.

¹⁶⁰ See Phillip B. Zarilli, *The Psycho-physical Actor at Work: An Intercultural Approach after Stanislavski* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

In her dissertation, Kamella D. Tate uses hermeneutic phenomenology to explore the *lived experience* of the creative act of a production team at a major regional theatre: directors, designers, and actors. The scope of Tate's study encompasses designers, directors, and actors in the stages of preproduction, rehearsals and performance. An overarching theme she uses to describe the people of her study is "the world of the play" and each division plays a part: directors conceive and organize the world, the designers build the world, and the actors enact and inhabit the world. Out of thirteen participants, six were actors. Although actors were not the sole focus of her dissertation, she does give space to the actors' experiences separate from the directors and designers. She explores their experience of creativity in terms of a) actors are creators and the creation, b) theatre as a coping mechanism for life, c) acting as enacting a story or storytelling, d) actors in rehearsal vs. performance, e) evaluation and judgment, f) the actor-director relationship g) the actors perception of the institution or organization, h) trustworthy collaboration.¹⁶¹

Tate's study suggests communication is a vital part of the creative experience for the actor:

On the face of it, certainly, the actor creates and personifies a character in a play. The character, however, is viewed as merely the container, the vehicle for the *real* product: Communication of experience. The role, the part, the character, the personification are tools the actor uses to communicate "seeming reality. Believable reality. Because what we have to do is find what's real and then constantly re-create it" (Jane).¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Kamella D. Tate, "Artward Bound: The Lived Experience of Creativity," (Doctor of Education. diss., University of Southern California, 2007), 131-142, 171-182. It should be noted that this dissertation was submitted for completion of a degree in Education not in Theatre. While the findings are still relevant for the field of theatre, the focus was far more educational in nature with a foundation of psychological phenomenology. Her bibliography is a valuable resource on how creativity is conceptualized in "non-creative" fields.

¹⁶² Ibid., 141.

However, the focus of communication for actors is with an audience, not with other actors. A possible reason for the inclusion of the audience in responses is that she specifically asked her participants if they consider the audience when they are working.¹⁶³ Tate also creates a composite portrait (or composite textural-structural description) of the actor's experience of creativity: when it is not happening, when it is happening, the movement to and from creativity, the space where creativity occurs and the arguments surrounding its features, necessary or present conditions, and connection to the creation, to one's collaborators and to one's creative self. She briefly discusses interaction with actors or characters when describing the process of creating/becoming a character, but does not discuss actor communication or actor interaction as part of the creative experience:

This self-altering/self-making process can be profoundly disturbing, and requires her to have a trusting and open attitude toward her director and scene partners. Interestingly, she can adopt this attitude whether or not there is any bona fide basis for her vulnerability: It is a "trust that's really beyond the individuals involved, a trust that recognizes the 'human being' more than the person. I trust the artist, not the person." Thus, The Actor's capacity to behave as if fiction were real creates a blurring between life and art. (For example, as Juliet she may have little more than a friendly relationship with her Romeo – a man whom she must kiss, caress, and sleep with every night in front of hundreds of people. Even so, because she willingly and eagerly lends herself so completely to her rehearsed persona, she is able to *behave as if* theirs is an intimately passionate relationship).¹⁶⁴

Tate's description of the actor in the self-altering/self-making process seems to make several assumptions about how the actor perceives the experience: a) trust exists in the relationship between actors, b) the actor is willing and eager to blur between life and art,

¹⁶³ Tate, "Artward Bound: The Lived Experience of Creativity," 242.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 175-176.

c) the blurring occurs only onstage. Also, the quotes used in the section above are not given authorship. It is assumed that the words are from one of her actor-participants, however it is not clear. Tate's study does not include interview transcripts either; rather, she supplies the reader with her interview guide and a sample of marked and coded interview data. Tate's questions to her participants seemed to be self-focused, however she does ask her participants what they felt about their creative experience within "the collaborative structure of theatre...to shift from... private thoughts to the group process, from working alone to together."¹⁶⁵ Tate discusses the importance of the collaborative work environment for the actors, but it is more generalized to the company than to the specific working relationships of actors. Tate includes data about the collaborative structure of theatre, stating that there are two features that are necessary for creativity for the actor: the "intimacy and generosity" of a director and "the trust, resources, and support" of the collaborative work environment in order to "facilitate risk-taking."¹⁶⁶ The collaborative aspect of her study indicates there may be other salient statements concerning actor relationships and perhaps communication within the interview transcripts, however, since they were omitted, this is purely conjectured.

I began my dimensional analysis by placing actor communication into the broader framework of general communication and branched into the more specific field of interpersonal communication and then focus on actor communication as part of the field of acting. In doing so, I assumed that there is such a thing as actor communication. What I have found is that interpersonal communication has been described as a

¹⁶⁵ Tate, "Artward Bound: The Lived Experience of Creativity," 240.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 139.

transactional, interactive, meaning-making process that requires at least two people engaged in an interaction that includes both verbal and nonverbal language. I have found that actor communication has been conceptualized or experienced in several different ways: communication, communion, connection, chemistry, exchange, impulse/instinct, action that may require at least two actors, listening, concentration, vulnerability, mutuality, reacting, and responsiveness. For the purposes of this study, however I propose the following précis: actor communication is the interaction among scene partners, the experience of sharing, interacting, relating and being in contact with another actor, which includes both verbal and nonverbal communication.

Bracketing My Personal Experience of Actor Communication

Hermeneutic phenomenology not only requires that I, as the researcher, bracket the relevant literature, but also my experiences of actor communication. By listing my experiences of the phenomenon, I am able to safeguard against creating bias in the study. The following section includes my acting/theatre background and a few of my experiences of actor communication, both rewarding and unrewarding.

I have been acting all of my life, the house in which I was raised taught me much about acting. However, for the sake of this dissertation, I have been acting for over twenty years now. I appeared in my first play when I was 11 years old, an awful pantomime of *The Magician's Apprentice*, as part of an extracurricular series of mini-courses offered at my grade school. It was a nice escape, but it was a solo act. I began my "official" acting career in high school in a small town, more as a way of connecting to other people than as a means of artistic expression. I studied Dramatic Arts at Kearney

State College and then at the University of Nebraska-Omaha and obtained a degree in 1996. I obtained my Master's in Theatre from the University of Missouri-Columbia in 2000 and have been working on my Ph.D. since then. I am the cofounder of a theatre company, Independent Actors Theatre (founded August 2007), which focuses on actor-centric work, with a goal of advancing the art and craft of acting. I have taught acting to elementary, junior high, high school and college students. I have worked as an actor in both academic and professional settings over the last twenty years. I have played predominantly lead or ensemble roles in my career upon the stage.

I have had multiple experiences of actor communication throughout my acting career – the phenomenon of sharing, interacting, relating and being in contact with another actor in each moment of a scene or play. I have not experienced actor communication in every single moment of every single performance or rehearsal, but I have experienced it nonetheless. I am not sure that I could recall my first experience of actor communication. There are some significant experiences, both positive and negative, that influence how I approach my craft. I ask myself the same question I ask my participants: *What is it like for me to experience actor communication?* For me, actor communication is a connection between partners; it is something I can recognize in the eyes of my partner. Something almost, but not quite tangible that I can read, something that says, “I’m here. I’m present. I’m listening. I am here for you. I’ll catch you. I understand.” I know, for myself, I try to send out that sort of energy as well. I do this through trying to be receptive to whatever my acting partner is trying to do and to let them know through my presence and mindfulness that I trust them and that they can trust me. I try to begin my rehearsal process at the level of being because we usually don’t

begin with having developed characters right out of the gate. It is a sense of letting my partner know that I see her, that I really see her for all that she is as an actor and as another person in the vulnerable act of rehearsal, where we are expected to risk and to give up something of ourselves in the creative act. I begin by seeing the actor and then I start to see and respond to the character within the context of the production. I try to always be present for my partner, to respond in the present, to respond to what they are giving me, as the character would, given the situation. I think I try to send out what I want to get back – acknowledgment. Actor communication is not something that I can say that I comprehend in the moment that it is happening, but the awareness of the phenomenon is there. Much like a ping on a radar screen, there is a ping, but I don't know if it is a submarine or a whale while it is happening.

Rewarding experiences

I have been blessed with great opportunities where I have been allowed to work with people with whom I would give anything to keep on performing a particular play. I loved working with these actors onstage and I loved their characters. I have not known many of my scene partners well, if at all, in my everyday life and I did not necessarily want to either. An example: working on *Show S*, I adored working with James* (character of Flint*) – I think that there was a definite sense of chemistry between our characters, but that came from a strong working relationship between us as actors to risk, trust, listen, be open to anything, to acknowledge, to recognize, to know what was and what could transpire. We also both shared a strong, rigorous work ethic when it comes to rehearsal so we were also diligent in making sure that everything was as spot-on as

possible, from the broad brush strokes of the stage picture to the nuances of a glance or a touch. I did not really know James in everyday life – he was a former student of mine and fairly quiet in my class. However, I think we trusted each other in the show to do whatever we needed to in order to create these characters and their relationship.

For me, there is also a clear distinction between my character and myself, between her life and my own, a clear delineation or boundary, even if it is only clarified by the boundaries of the stage. Onstage anything can happen, but whatever happens there, stays onstage. And in *Show S*, Agnes* really fell for Flint. I adored Flint, just like a teenage girl adoring some heartthrob in a movie, but I always knew that it was *Flint* that really got to me onstage, not James. As an actor, it was James that I looked forward to working with night after night, but it was Flint that I couldn't wait to interact with and watch from the wings. I never saw James onstage (meaning, he never dropped character onstage), he was always 100% Flint within the framework of the proscenium. Several audience members that I talked with after the show mentioned the chemistry between James and me and often asked if we were “seeing each other” offstage. That was certainly not the case, but there are commonalities between an onstage relationship between actors and an offstage personal relationship between two people. I think that audience members sense the connection between two actors, which also brings an element of the unknown because you know you trust each other to do anything onstage, so anything could happen.

Scooter* is another example of an acting partner who is so present and engaged in actor communication that I would do just about anything to keep working with him onstage. Whether it was *Show J* or *Show M*, I loved our time onstage together. My

character, Joy*, loved Asher*, she loved bantering with him, the witty repartee, she loved being looked at by him, she loved him. And I loved enacting that night after night, living in the reality of the onstage fiction.

There are two layers of enjoyment in the act of acting: the pleasure of working with an actor who is present and giving as well as the pleasure of interacting as characters in a very real conflict of objectives and desires within the confines of the stage. Scooter and I are very close friends, but our onstage character relationships are a far cry from our offstage friendship. However, both relationships include one important thing – trust. I know how Scooter works as an actor. I have seen his work as an audience member. I have directed him; he has directed me. I have acted with him. He is an actor who trusts, risks, tries, acknowledges, responds to his partner, not to his own whims. I trust Scooter always to listen, to see and to respond honestly. When I say honestly – I mean that there are actors who act like they are listening, who act like they are seeing, and act like they are responding, but they are not; it is a shadow, a half-hearted attempt to give the illusion that they are present in the moment. There is never a case of going through the motions with Scooter. It was always an exciting adventure to work with him – even on our little scene in *Show L* – it may have been one of the few scenes where I knew that my partner was really present in the show. I feel that my working relationship with my acting partners probably has the largest impact on my experience of actor communication.

Unrewarding experiences

In *Show O*, I worked with Cheryl*, who knew her lines, but was deathly afraid of making eye contact, which I felt drastically hindered our interaction as actors. However,

I also knew that she was rather closed as a person and tried to make mental accommodations for that. It was difficult working with her, but she always knew her lines, what she was saying, and what she was doing. However, the next year, I spent the entire summer working with Derwood*¹⁶⁷ who never knew his lines or their intentions and did not respect the direction he was given – I say this because he resisted virtually all direction regardless of the damage to the production or working relationships among the cast – wasting rehearsal time to repeat the same failed attempt, ignoring direct and specific direction from Professor X. I felt that beyond his creepy demeanor towards all the women in the cast, which was inappropriate to say the least, he was a very self-absorbed and selfish actor who was wrapped up in himself, pulling focus, but awkwardly noncommittal to his character’s actions and words. I also felt that I had to “push,” and I mean really exert a lot of energy, for a good performance when interacting with him. I knew that I could not trust him to remember his lines, the blocking, the direction, his own fight choreography, let alone his ability to connect to another actor onstage. I was enraged with him most of the time, so I stopped talking to him when not onstage in character. There were many times in the first scene where he would go up on a line and leave me high and dry with no hopes of recovery. Usually, he went up on lines that were important to the plot, but that my character would not know. Typically, I would just try to leave, which was my character’s initial intention anyhow. I have never, ever in all my years of acting, ever felt so frightened of being onstage with an actor as I was with him. I eventually let go of my anger, but anger turned to apathy and the off chance that I might

¹⁶⁷ The experience that I describe with Derwood occurred after I began my dissertation project, but I felt that it was an important experience to include in my bracketing, as it shapes my experience of actor communication. And yes, Derwood, is a reference to *Bewitched* – Esmerelda’s name for her son-in-law.

be remotely amused by his ineptitude. I knew that I could not count on him for anything and consequently, I returned the favor. I even came up with metatheatrical exit lines if he ever really loused things up dialogue-wise – “Really, Ralph*, if you’re going to argue with me, you should know your lines a little better.” That never happened, but one particular performance, he cut out nearly a page and a half of important plot exposition, without hopes of retrieval. I always knew that he had no clue what his lines were at particular points – his eyes would get large and start shifting from side to side, his shoulders would get tense and his voice would become quieter and then he would pause as if to say, “you finish it.” Well that was impossible, considering those particular lines were something that my character knew nothing about. I had interruption lines such as “Ralph” and “Oh, Ralph, please.” I felt exhausted at the end of the show, not just because it was a high energy farce and I gave my all to Francesca*, but because I felt like I had to work 200% harder when onstage trying to interact with Derwood. Beyond his incompetence as an actor, he is also incredibly unprofessional. There were several times in rehearsal when I had to tell him and/or the stage manager that he needed to control his wandering hands. He used rehearsal as an excuse to touch me and other women in the cast in an inappropriate manner. He also tried some lame line about getting together outside of rehearsal to practice a kissing scene. I informed him that is why we have rehearsal. Clearly, his offstage demeanor had an impact on our onstage interactions and our onstage interactions had an impact on our offstage relationship or lack thereof. In some strange way, that may have helped fuel my character’s desire to punish his character throughout the play. The lines between self and character were never so blurred that I was unaware of my personal feelings for him as a person and my

character's feelings for his character. The breakdown in communication created a breakdown in any sort of workable relationship as actors and I found myself frustrated and often repulsed during rehearsals and performance.

I am a relationship-oriented person, which I think is why I am an actor, a teacher, and a theatre artist. The experience of actor communication is primarily a relational experience for me. What I observe of myself is that when I relate my experiences of actor communication is I speak in terms of my partner, not myself. My acting partners shape my experiences. I tend to have a more rewarding experience of actor communication if I sense a connection with my partner – that she is trying just as hard to connect with me as I am with her.

Bracketing My Assumptions of Actor Communication

This study seeks a comprehensive understanding of student actors' lived experience of actor communication.¹⁶⁸ Therefore, certain assumptions or *preunderstandings* will influence the study. Hermeneutic phenomenology requires that I, as the researcher, bracket or list my assumptions about the study in order for me to keep my assumptions before me and to remain unbiased. I have already bracketed out my experiences of actor communication. By listing my assumptions about the study, both in content and outcome, I am able to safeguard against my own assumptions becoming the basis for the themes that arise out of my study. The following is a list of assumptions that I have about my study.

¹⁶⁸ The participants of the study are student actors at the University of Missouri-Columbia. They are neither enrolled in a pre-professional program such as a BFA nor are they considered amateurs as they are enrolled in a BA liberal arts theatre program.

I assume that:

1. The focus group may create a learning, healing, or empowering process for the actors involved in that they are discussing, determining, creating the knowledge of the experience for themselves. There is no expert except for the actors themselves.
2. Participants will mention trust and vulnerability in their experiences.
3. Participants will mention love or aggressivity towards other actors in their experiences.
4. Participants will mention personal relationships occurring outside rehearsal for the duration of a production in their experiences.
5. The element of trust is necessary for actor communication to occur.
6. A willingness to make human contact may be a condition to actor communication, on the part of the actor as a person in order for actor communication to occur.
7. Relations between people exist.
8. Participants have emotional reactions/responses to relations in the experience of actor communication.
9. If actors do not experience communication in rehearsal, whether it is for scene work or a full-scale production, the phenomenon will not occur in performance between actors.
10. Experiences of actor communication in rehearsal will lessen the impact of actor-to-audience communication on the lived experience of actor-to-actor communication.

11. The size of acting space is not a determining factor in actor communication.
12. Actor communication experiences do not happen as much in classroom situations compared to rehearsal or performance.
13. The world of the play is crucial to creating connections between characters and consequently actors.
14. An actor expends more energy to sustain a good performance without actor communication/connection from scene partner.
15. The transference that occurs within the focus groups will be “positive” transference.
16. Positive experiences of transference occur when there is trust of the acting partner or director or both.
17. Some participants may confuse actor communication (interaction) with emoting or mugging.
18. Actor communication is more than an exchange of dialogue and acting cues.
19. Actor communication most closely resembles interpersonal communication in its structure.

The dimensional analysis of the salient literature, my personal experiences, and my assumptions discussed in this chapter will be discussed in the later stages of data analysis in Chapter Six. Bracketing allows me as a researcher to make explicit my biases, beliefs, assumptions, presuppositions and maintain conscious awareness of them, “to hold them deliberately at bay and even to turn this knowledge against itself, as it were, thereby exposing its shallow or concealing character.”¹⁶⁹ In the next chapters, I

¹⁶⁹ van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 47.

will frame my investigation of actor communication within the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology, giving focus to the *lived experience* of actor communication in order to comprehend structures and interpret meanings particular to the first-hand experiences of actors engaged in actor communication.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Methods

Conceptual Framework

I framed my study within the constructivist worldview, which maintains that realities are multiple and are socially constructed through an individual's experience of them. Constructivism argues that "reality is created by the participants" and places emphasis not necessarily on the *event* that is experienced, but on the "meaning attributed to that event."¹⁷⁰ Hermeneutic phenomenology arises out of a constructivist worldview, and the focus of the methodology is the meaning that participants ascribe to their experiences. The first-person stories of my research participants provide a means to examine actor communication experiences as well as individual meaning making about such experiences.

I also frame my study within a narrative tradition. Narratives are how we make sense of our experiences and our world. Donald Polkinghorne proposes that our understanding of experience is retroactive: the process of narratives clarifies the significance of our past events.¹⁷¹ I collected narratives, as the primary means of data, through group interviews from my research participants as they recollected past experiences of actor communication.

¹⁷⁰ P. Paul Heppner, Dennis M. Kivlighan, Jr., and Bruce E. Wampold, *Research Design in Counseling*, 2nd ed. (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1999), 238.

¹⁷¹ Donald Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), 11.

Donald Polkinghorne provides sound advice on developing a research strategy that fits the phenomenon under investigation rather than a strict procedural format:

1. Gather a number of naïve descriptions from people who are having or have had the experience under investigation.
2. Engage in a process of analyzing these descriptions so that the researcher comes to a grasp of the constituents or common elements that make the experience what it is.
3. Produce a research report that gives an accurate, clear, and articulate description of an experience. The reader of the report should come away with the feeling that ‘I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that.’¹⁷²

Since this study is looking at a fuller understanding of *actor communication*, I used van Manen’s reflective and pedagogical approach to support the examination of the *lived experience* of actor communication in order to uncover how it occurs, how it is structured, and how it is meaningful. This study focused on a particular group of acting students at the University of Missouri-Columbia and specifically, their experiences of actor communication. I implemented a semi-structured interview instrument based on van Manen’s and Brentano’s universals to elicit descriptions of specific experiences of actor communication as well as attitudes, expectations, and reactions to those experiences.

Research Design

Narrative tradition influences my study at every step, from my means of data collection and analysis to the interpretation of meaning for my participants. Narrative meaning develops within a cultural context and knowledge of meanings is required of

¹⁷² Donald E. Polkinghorne, “Phenomenological Research Methods” in *Existential-phenomenological Perspectives in Psychology*, edited by Ronald S. Valle & Steen Halling (New York: Plenum), 46. Polkinghorne’s use of the term “naïve description” is the verbatim first-hand account made by participants.

members in order to participate within a specific culture, such as the culture of actors. Cultural context played a role within my analysis and interpretation, since there is a language specific to the culture of theatre and to the actors within theatre. The research participants also created language specific to the focus group and the phenomenon of actor communication, making the research focus group an even more specific culture within the acting culture.

My study is also framed within a pedagogical tradition. As I am an educator at heart and feel that every opportunity is an opportunity for learning and self-discovery, and as the roots of my research project are pedagogical in nature, I wanted to create an interview process that would serve not only as a means for data collection, but also a means to share and “interpret stories of their lived experiences”¹⁷³ in order for both myself and my participants to understand the concerns and meanings of common experiences within an acting education community.

In order to make this learning opportunity a reality, I developed an approach to the interview process based on Max van Manen’s pedagogical hermeneutic approach and Nancy Diekelmann’s approach of Narrative Pedagogy. Van Manen’s pedagogical approach highlights the interview as serving a dual purpose in a hermeneutic phenomenology project: the interviewees are not just sources of data, but rather become collaborators in uncovering the meanings of their experiences. Diekelmann’s approach is similar to van Manen’s in that it is rooted in reflection, interpretation, and dialogue *between* and *among* its participants. Although Diekelmann’s approach is specifically

¹⁷³ Pamela Ironside, “Creating a Research Base for Nursing Education: An Interpretive Review of Conventional, Critical, Feminist, Postmodern, and Phenomenologic Pedagogies,” *Advances in Nursing Science* 23, no. 3 (March 2001): 72-87; online journal, accessed through Cinahl and Ovid, March 17, 2003.

oriented to nursing education, her approach influenced my choice of conducting focus group interviews instead of individual interviews. Narrative pedagogy explores the experiences of common practices in a community, such as how actors experience actor communication. By creating a focus group on actor communication, undergraduate actors as research participants had an opportunity to explore their experiences of actor communication as part of an artistic and educational community. Focus group methodology utilizes group interaction as a means of generating data, and the group process “can help people to explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less easily accessible in a one to one interview.”¹⁷⁴ Focus groups allow participants to take an active part in the analysis as well and “may develop particular perspectives as a consequence of talking to other people who have similar experiences.”¹⁷⁵ By using an “actor communication focus group” for my research project, I attempted to create a safe, non-judgmental, relaxed space where the participants felt comfortable in sharing their own thoughts and experiences of actor communication and building their own knowledge through the meanings of their experiences. I tried to accomplish this by: a) openly recognizing each participant as an expert in his/her experiences of actor communication, regardless of degree, status, or “professional” experience, b) offering participants the opportunity to collaborate in the interview process and data analysis, and c) recognizing

¹⁷⁴ Jenny Kitzinger, “Introducing Focus Groups,” *BMJ* 311 (July 1995): 299.

¹⁷⁵ Kitzinger, “Introducing Focus Groups,” 300.

participants as belonging to a particular community whose input was both credible and valuable.¹⁷⁶

Based on the approaches of van Manen and Diekelmann, as often as possible, I allowed the participants to guide the interview, including the use of probative questions with each other – the research participants, in effect, became the researchers. All participants had a list of potential probative questions to guide them, if they were interested in asking questions of their peers or were allowed to construct their own questions.¹⁷⁷ Beyond the initial framework of actor communication: “the interaction among scene partners, the experience of sharing, interacting, relating and being in contact with another actor, which includes both verbal and nonverbal communication,”¹⁷⁸ I actively and consciously refrained from shaping how actor communication was defined and left the development of definitions and meanings of the experience to my participants. I believe that I was successful in implementing van Manen’s and Diekelmann’s pedagogical interview approaches by creating an interview environment where the participants took ownership of their own scholarship. In the second group interview, one participant commented:

¹⁷⁶ I wanted the research participants to take ownership of the uncovering of their experiences and the truths of their experiences as they unfolded in the interviews – to take ownership of their own learning community. A simple step, which I did not anticipate as having any impact on the empowerment of my participants, was asking each of them to come up with his/her own code name. To my surprise, “code names” became their own personal stamp on the project and was an element that bonded the participants with each other in the process.

¹⁷⁷ The probative questions were based on van Manen’s existentials of lived time, lived space, lived body, and lived relation as well as Brentano’s representations, judgments or feelings. However, some of the most interesting sections of my group interviews arose from participant questions and probing. I must admit, there is some initial terror in allowing open dialogue when conducting group interviews.

¹⁷⁸ See Appendix 1.

And I think it's interesting that your question to all of us back before this started, you didn't really lead a definition of actor communication and never have really that all of us, 'cause we're describing similar but very different things that it's interesting that it all falls under the one category...it's clear that we're talking about our personal definitions of this one, this one concept.¹⁷⁹

By creating and maintaining broad, open-ended questions asked in a relatively unstructured interview and allowing my participants to collaborate in the interview process, I believe that I developed a pedagogical space where my research participants were allowed to create their own understanding of their actor communication experiences.

Process of Data Collection and Analysis

Sampling

I used snowball,¹⁸⁰ purposeful, and criterion sampling in this study, which is well-suited to phenomenological studies and in particular my study of actor communication. Snowball sampling allows for selection of participants from among acquaintances, including those of potential participants, which increases the size of the sample group; thus I selected eight participants from a group of students from the University of Missouri-Columbia Theatre Department. I used purposeful sampling to ensure that all participants “represent people who have experienced the phenomenon”¹⁸¹ and can articulate their experiences of actor communication. I also used criterion sampling

¹⁷⁹ Greg, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

¹⁸⁰ My sampling is similar to snowball sampling in that the participants were selected from acquaintances. However it differs from snowball sampling in that existing subjects did not recruit future subjects, but the sampling group did expand due to acquaintances of potential participants, with approval from my advisor.

¹⁸¹ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 118.

techniques for this study. For a phenomenological study, it is important that all participants share certain characteristics. I identified certain key characteristics that the participants must have in common for the actor communication study. Criteria for participation included: 1) participant has prior acting experience in dramatic productions or courses, 2) participant is a skilled performer,¹⁸² 3) participant is able to relate experiences in articulate manner,¹⁸³ 4) participant has participated in at least one Theatre Department production at the University of Missouri-Columbia, 5) participant is a undergraduate or graduate student at the University of Missouri-Columbia,¹⁸⁴ and 6) participant must be available for member checks either in person or through email.

Recruitment

I began my recruitment by sending out an email to the list of twenty potential participants that I had developed through my initial criterion sampling.¹⁸⁵ I also posted a flyer on the MU Theatre Department callboards located in the Fine Arts Building and the Fine Arts Annex, in case I had overlooked other potential participants. The recruitment email and flyer included the purpose of the study, definition of actor communication, inclusion criteria, expectations of the participants, rewards of participation, my schedule

¹⁸² The criterion of talent is determined subjectively by how I perceive their performance work in University of Missouri-Columbia Theatre productions.

¹⁸³ I conducted 30-minute sampling interviews to check for communication skills in potential participants.

¹⁸⁴ In the recruiting process, I selected all undergraduate participants, as there were no graduate students who were available, interested or suitable for the study.

¹⁸⁵ Three potential participants were eliminated from my list due to over-rapport – I have worked with the three actors in multiple shows and have a close relationship with them offstage as well.

and contact information to set up an initial sampling interview (See Appendix 1).¹⁸⁶ As part of the recruiting process, I held criterion/purposive sampling interviews in order to determine if the participants had experienced the phenomenon of actor communication, if they could relate their experiences in an articulate manner, and if they were available for the length of the study. I conducted ten sampling interviews and out of those ten, I selected eight participants for the study. Of the ten, two were not selected for the following reasons: 1) one interviewee was unavailable for the group interview sessions and 2) one participant was very closed in her interview, not appearing willing to share or communicate her experiences. I made personal email contact with all interviewees to explain their eligibility in the study and to request their confirmation of participation.

Selection

Eight participants were recruited and consisted of undergraduate students from the University of Missouri-Columbia. All participants were pursuing an undergraduate degree: four Theatre majors, two Theatre/Communications double majors, one Journalism major, and one Marketing major.¹⁸⁷ Among the eight participants, three were male and five were female.¹⁸⁸ All participants had experienced the phenomenon of actor communication and all participants met the six points of the criterion sampling of the study.

¹⁸⁶ I initially was looking to recruit five participants and after sampling interviews, due to student interest and snowball sampling (suggests between 6-10 participants), I elected to increase my participants to eight.

¹⁸⁷ To date, seven of the eight participants are currently working in theatre, television or film.

¹⁸⁸ And to satisfy the University's IRB: None of the female participants were pregnant at the time of the data collection. No participants were married or had children at the time of data collection.

Data Collection – The Interview

Data in phenomenological studies is usually collected through long interviews of participants. In my study, participants were interviewed in two large focus group interviews in May 2004 and individual follow-up interviews in the Fall semester 2004. The first focus group interview took approximately 3 hours; the second focus group interview took approximately 2 hours. Both were recorded using audiocassettes and sound equipment including microphones. The five individual interviews were 20-45 minutes in length and were recorded on audiocassettes using a hand cassette recorder. All interviews were recorded to make sure that the participants' perspectives were accurately recorded.¹⁸⁹ The two focus group interviews were conducted in Room 116 in the Fine Arts Annex on May 7 and 11, 2004. Individual interviews were recorded in the Fall semester 2004, either in my office, Room 113 in the Fine Arts Annex, or in my second office, the Electric Room of the Rhynsburger Theatre at the University of Missouri-Columbia. The interviews were conducted in a retrospective fashion, asking the participants to recall a past experience. The interviews involved an interactive and informal procedure with open-ended questions and probative questions concerning the experience of actor communication (Appendix 2). While these questions served as guidelines, they were varied, altered, adjusted to each participant's particular story of his or her experience of the phenomenon. I conducted all the interviews myself, allowing the research participants to ask questions as well during the interviews, and spent the Summer semester 2004 transcribing the group interviews and the Fall semester 2004 transcribing the individual interviews.

¹⁸⁹ I utilized the skills of a sound engineer for the large focus group interviews to ensure the recording quality.

Consent. When I began my research project on actor communication, I submitted a research proposal to the Institutional Review Board of the University of Missouri-Columbia. All of my data collection and data analysis was carried out with adherence to the guidelines established by the IRB concerning human subject research. When I met with the eight participants for the first interview, I reviewed the details of the study, my expectations, and their ability to withdraw from the study at any time. I gave each participant two copies of the written informed consent form (Appendix 3). Prior to the first interview, I emailed a copy of the consent form so each participant could ask any questions about consent before the first interview. All participants of the first interview agreed to and signed the informed consent form. I kept signed consent forms for my dissertation file and each participant was given a copy for his or her own records. Data analysis began at the same time as data collection and further analysis continued after the data collection was complete. I analyzed each interview, both group and individual interviews, using the constant comparison method and the basic steps of inductive analysis. The narratives of the participants were the units of data analysis.

Interview Approach. Interviewing plays an important role in the recovering of participants' stories or narratives, in recovering how participants have made sense of an experience. The hermeneutic phenomenological method aims for interviews that resemble conversations. The approach is interactive between the researcher and the participants and allows information to be "exchanged between interviewer and informant

in both directions.”¹⁹⁰ Interaction requires the researcher to probe for deeper understanding until the experience of actor communication is fully described by the participant. It is essential, in order to prevent researcher bias, that probing does not lead the interview in a predetermined way. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the researcher to keep the format of the interviews relatively unstructured. The interviewer is to listen “to whatever the informant says as opposed to guiding and controlling the conversation.”¹⁹¹

Since my research participants were acquaintances of mine from the University of Missouri-Columbia Theatre Department, it was important to maintain some distance while building a “good-enough” rapport with my participants. While I used the participants’ first names when addressing them in the interviews, I do not feel that this created an air of over-familiarity with the participants. I consciously and actively withheld my experiences of actor communication so as not to lead or influence the research participants in sharing experience similar to my own and thus distorting the represented perspectives. I also consciously and actively withheld any shared experiences that I may have had with my research participants to prevent any potential enmeshing of the interview process, where my experiences become intertwined with those of my research participants.

The first focus group interview was designed to get an overview of the participants’ experiences and to create an environment where participants felt

¹⁹⁰ David L. Kahn, “How to Conduct Research,” in *Hermeneutic Phenomenological Research: A Practical Guide for Nurse Researchers*, edited by Marlene Zichi Cohen, David L. Kahn, and Richard H. Steeves, *Methods in Nursing Research*, edited by Pamela Brink (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2000), 61.

¹⁹¹ Kahn, “How to Conduct Research,” 61.

comfortable in relating their own experiences of actor communication with the group. As my study was investigating past experiences of actor communication, I implemented a *retrospective* approach to the interview structure.¹⁹² I began my first focus group interview with a very broad question to all of my research participants: “What is it like for you to experience actor communication?” Probative questions were asked, either by me or by the other research participants, given the context or salient statements made by participants.

The second group session was designed to reduce researcher bias, to further conversational relationships between researcher and participants, and to allow the participants to reflect upon their experiences, offering more narratives and more descriptions of the experience of actor communication. The broad question that began the second interview was: “Can you tell me about a time when you experienced actor communication?”

The individual interviews were designed to reduce researcher bias, to further conversational relationships between researcher and participants, to clarify prior experiences from the group interviews, to offer more narratives and descriptions of actor communication. The individual interviews began with the same question for all participants: “Can you tell me a story about the last time you experienced actor communication?” The question put the participant into a particular context of his/her most recent experience of actor communication. Greg’s interview was set up to expand on his experiences and to answer questions I had from the first two group interviews. Abigail was anxious to share experiences and thoughts, but not necessarily with the

¹⁹² I am not excluding any recent experiences of actor communication, but I did not observe or conduct exercises that elicit actor communication and then conduct immediate interviews.

group, which lead to her relating new experiences and a follow-up interview on those experiences. Leon had an opportunity to study at the Stella Adler Studio over the summer and wanted to share her experiences. Lucille was individually interviewed, as her role in the group interview quickly shifted from participant to interviewer and listener. As a result, she never fully shared her own experiences of actor communication in the group. The individual interview was set up to make sure that I captured her experiences for the study. My goal in conducting the individual interviews was not only data collection for my study, but also to ensure that each participant's experiences were adequately represented, which added to the participants' ownership of the actor communication focus group.

Data Analysis

Hermeneutic phenomenology is an ongoing interaction between the researcher and her participants from participant selection and data collection to data analysis and presentation of findings. The participants' knowledge has continually informed and transformed my understanding of actor communication over the course of the study (and continues to do so).

I began my data analysis with memoing in my reflexive journal after my first two group interviews. Memoing continued through transcription of the group interviews and guided me for the subsequent individual interviews. Documenting my memos was the first step towards analyzing the data from the narratives of the focus group interviews. I recorded my responses, assumptions, and questions to the data during transcription and the inductive analysis process. Responding to the data as it was recorded allowed for an

evolving dialogue to develop between the developing narratives and my thoughts – allowing for follow-up questions guided by data from the group interviews. I read and re-read the interviews in the memoing process. After the interviews were transcribed, I sent copies to each participant, and while awaiting responses from the participants, returned again to the transcripts and the memoing of my impressions to identify relationships and possible categories for coding as well as new impressions that arose out of the inductive analysis.

When I began collecting data, I had arranged for two group interviews. I assumed that the necessity for individual interviews might arise due to either participants needing to expand on narratives shared during the group interviews or participants wanting to share an experience of actor communication outside of the presence of other participants. Thus, I began analysis of the group interviews after the second interview was completed. While transcribing the group interviews, questions or gaps in participants' narratives arose in my memoing, which led to individual interviews with certain participants. Not wanting to create bias, I offered the opportunity for individual interviews to all eight participants. Out of the eight, four participants agreed to participate in a follow-up interview. I began transcribing and memoing each individual interview as soon as they were completed.

The recorded interviews were transcribed and saved as both Microsoft Word (.doc) files and as text files (.txt). I emailed transcripts to each participant for member checks.¹⁹³ I used the text files as the source material for HyperRESEARCH 2.7 software

¹⁹³ Complete transcripts of the interviews are available from the author.

to code the transcripts. All identifying information was changed or deleted to ensure confidentiality.¹⁹⁴ I followed the basic data analysis steps of Moustakas and van Manen.

After all interview narratives were collected, read several times, and analyzed through memoing, I started a comparison analysis across the collection of group and individual interview transcripts. I first began open coding with the group interviews in chronological order to get an overall feeling of the whole, to see the overarching categories or codes that arose from the group interviews, noting overlap and interaction between participants. Then I separated out each participant's narratives from the group interviews and re-examined the narratives and codes with focus on each individual. Finally, I coded the individual follow-up interviews using codes that had arisen out of the analysis of the group interviews. I continued to memo during the coding of the entire collection of interviews. The codes and categories that arose from open coding began to take shape into the organizing ideas for themes.

After coding was completed, I began testing, or confirming, the uncovered themes of my study. Using constant comparison, I checked each participant's themes with the themes of the other participants, noting overlap or uniqueness to each theme. I also used *imaginative variation* and *intentional analysis* as a means of "testing" the uncovered themes of the study.¹⁹⁵ Imaginative variation asks, "If I alter or delete this theme, does the phenomenon remain the same?" Imaginative variation helps uncover what shared features are intrinsic to the experience of actor communication. To illustrate, I found that

¹⁹⁴ Code names were used for participants, scene partners, directors, colleagues, and professors. Code names were also implemented for any MU Theatre production, other theatrical productions or MU acting classes.

¹⁹⁵ Themes were also confirmed through participant member checks.

a feature of actor communication is that it requires two actors being present. In free imaginative variation, the *particular aspects* of each actor are not important, but rather what is important is the *presence* of another actor. Whereas imaginative variation looks at shared features of lived experience, *intentional analysis* looks at structures particular to individual experiences. Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty viewed these structures as universal categories of “being-in-the-world,”¹⁹⁶ which help create a context of a particular experience. The structures are referred to as the four existentials or universals and include *lived time*, *lived space*, *lived body*, and *lived relation*.

The four existential structures are not the only way that a researcher may approach intentional analysis. Franz Brentano suggests that a researcher may also classify the structures of experience as 1) representations, 2) judgments, and 3) love and hate or desires and feelings.¹⁹⁷ Since several of the salient statements from my participants deal specifically with emotional responses to the experience and participants’ acting partners, I also implemented the use of Brentano’s structures in my intentional analysis.

Free imaginative variation and intentional analysis are processes of thematic analysis, which explore both the particulars of each individual experience and the apparent common threads that participants use to describe the essence of an experience. Thematic analysis fulfills the human desire to make sense of the world and of being and

¹⁹⁶ Polkinghorne, *Methodology for the Human Sciences*, 205.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 206.

“forces us to come to terms with the *particular* . . . under the guidance of our understanding of the *universal*.”¹⁹⁸

In my data analysis, I followed Max van Manen’s suggestion that the researcher explore several important constructs of theme and their relation to uncovering meaning within the context of the research, asking myself, “What is a theme of the experience of actor communication? How do themes come about in this study of the actor’s lived experience of actor communication? What does the theme have to do with the phenomenon of actor communication?” Both imaginative variation and intentional analysis served as a means exploring multiple constructs of the experience and as a way to “check my work,” comparing my memos and arising themes against the data itself – to test the “theory” of the lived experience of actor communication, as it were.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Trustworthiness is defined as “the quality of an investigation (and its findings) that make it noteworthy to audiences.”¹⁹⁹ Conventional criteria for establishing trustworthiness are internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity. Qualitative researchers do not view reality with the same lens as empirical-analytic researchers. Whereas empirical research views reality as a single, external, physical, stable reality, interpretive researchers view reality as multiple, subjective, socially constructed and in constant flux. Empiric research also assumes that a researcher may

¹⁹⁸ Cohen, Kahn, and Steeves, “How to Analyze the Data,” 79.

¹⁹⁹ Thomas A. Schwandt, *Qualitative Inquiry: A Dictionary of Terms* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 1997), 164.

study a part of a phenomenon out of context. Interpretive research does not make this assumption. Rather interpretive research argues that parts cannot be separated from the whole phenomenon for study. When a part is isolated from the phenomenon, that part becomes its own individual phenomenon. Lincoln and Guba developed criteria for establishing “validity” or trustworthiness that are more appropriate for qualitative research, and which parallel conventional criteria: credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability), and confirmability (objectivity). Lincoln and Guba also specify specific procedures that a researcher may use in order to achieve the criteria.

Credibility addresses the issue of confidence that the researcher has taken precautions to assure that the participants’ perspectives and the researcher’s interpretation fit. A researcher may adequately represent the perspectives of the participants through prolonged engagement,²⁰⁰ persistent observation,²⁰¹ triangulation,²⁰² peer debriefing,²⁰³ negative case analysis,²⁰⁴ referential adequacy,²⁰⁵ and member checks.²⁰⁶ For my research project, I implemented clarifying researcher bias, prolonged engagement, triangulation, and member checks. Prolonged *engagement* requires that the researcher invest a sufficient amount of time in contact with the participants. As a researcher, I

²⁰⁰ Lincoln and Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, 304-5.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 305-7.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 308-9.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 313-14.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 309-13.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 313-14.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 314-16.

invested sufficient time with my participants in order to become aware of my personal assumptions, to build trust with my participants, and to avoid over-rapport. I have been in contact with my participants throughout my research project from initial data collection to data analysis and the writing process of my findings. *Triangulation* is the use of multiple sources, methods, and/or investigators in data collection so that the research project may be approached from multiple perspectives. I implemented the use of multiple sources of data collection with eight research participants. The group interview process also allowed my participants to become investigators in the interviewing process. *Member checking* is the continual and consistent return to my participants to ensure that I am representing their perspectives of the experience of actor communication. Member checks are crucial for establishing credibility of a qualitative study. By conducting member checks, the researcher offers the participants an opportunity to review their interpretations of the participants' words and to correct mistakes in the researcher's interpretation. I implemented member checks during transcription, coding, and data analysis with each of the participants and reached mutual agreement with my participants.

Transferability addresses the issue of generalization or applicability of my research and findings to other contexts. As a researcher, I must provide adequate information that allows the reader to determine the degree of match between "sending and receiving contexts" by providing thick description of my participants' perspectives and findings. Thick description is a detailed account of the salient and peripheral dimensions, the complex relationships among them, and the context in which these dimensions are situated. Thick description not only allows for the first person accounts

of the participants, but also an in-depth unpacking of their perspectives. Thick description provides a good enough description so that readers can make an informed decision when considering the comparisons or similarities of my research findings to another context.

Dependability addresses the issue of repeatability of the study and is concerned with the process of the research project. As a researcher, I must establish the methodological adequacy of the inquiry process through dependability audits and trails. Confirmability is concerned with the research product and addresses the degree to which the research findings represent the participants' perspectives. Lincoln and Guba propose that hermeneutic phenomenology requires an establishment of the reasonableness or confirmability of the interpretive product. I must establish that I have reasonably represented the perspectives of my participants. To address both issues, I will use detailed dependability and confirmability audits and audit trails. An audit is an examination of records of the research in terms of *process* and *product* by an outside researcher/auditor. Edward Halpern describes six classes of data to be examined in an audit: "raw data, data reduction and analysis products, data reconstruction and synthesis products, process notes, materials relating to intentions and dispositions, and instrument development information."²⁰⁷ Aside from the raw data, all other audit material should be recorded in the researcher's audit trail.

Audit trails, also known as reflexive journaling,²⁰⁸ include field notes, data collection methods, transcripts, and data analysis. Reflexive journaling is a method that

²⁰⁷ Lincoln and Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, 319-20.

applies to all areas of trustworthiness. The technique of reflexive journaling is a diary or journal where the researcher records her assumptions, biases, changes in methods, re-evaluations of process and any other variety of personal perspectives on a daily basis throughout the research project. It is a record of information about the self (investigator) and the method of her study. Lincoln and Guba suggest that a reflexive journal consist of:

(1) the daily schedule and logistics of the study; (2) a personal diary that provides the opportunity for catharsis, for reflection upon what is happening in terms of one's own values and interests, and for speculation about growing insights; and (3) a methodological log in which methodological decisions and accompanying rationales are recorded.²⁰⁹

Reflexive journaling is a way for the researcher to understand and maintain a record of her own assumptions about the research process. Reflexive journaling is also a technique, which attempts to insure all four criteria of trustworthiness in interpretive research. In addition to the basic assumptions of the hermeneutic phenomenology paradigm, it is important that the methods and techniques of the study safeguard against the basic assumptions of the researcher. In order to safeguard against my own assumptions, I used open-ended questions, bracketing through reflexive journaling, thematic analysis, and member checks.

Limitations/Delimitations

This study is a hermeneutic and phenomenological investigation of the lived experience of actor communication as perceived by a particular group of student actors at

²⁰⁸ Lincoln and Guba, as well as Karen Poulin, define an *audit trail* as a memo base or *reflexive journal*.

²⁰⁹ Lincoln and Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, 327.

the University of Missouri – Columbia. My study relies on autobiographical data related in group interviews as the basis of my research data. As a qualitative project, which allows for multiple and shifting truths, my study allows for participant assumptions, bias, contradictory perspectives, and shifting attitudes for each of my participants. Reflecting lived experience is not about “the facts,” but rather how the experience was meaningful to the individual. We create our realities in reflection and truth is more than a little subjective.

In my study, I gathered data from eight participants in two group interviews and five follow-up individual interviews for a total of seven transcripts.²¹⁰ Limiting this study to eight undergraduate participants at the University of Missouri leaves room for further studies to expand on the phenomenon of actor communication. Each interview, whether group or individual, represented each participant’s reflected knowledge about actor communication. The transcripts provided a wealth of information and themes as well as themes that deserve more attention than this study can adequately explore.

As a phenomenological study, it is qualitative, and therefore gives value to the concept of transferability over that of generalizability. The experiences of a particular group may be transferable to or recognizable in other situations and/or groups, but the experiences are not generalizable; i.e., “73% of actors find that...”

The group that participated in the actor communication study is a very particular subset of actors. They were undergraduate student actors at the University of Missouri – Columbia campus. All eight participants had experiences of taking MU Theatre Department acting classes with Theatre Faculty; performing on both stages at MU, the

²¹⁰ The follow up interviews were conducted with four of the participants, with two interviews with one participant.

Rhynsburger and the Corner Playhouse; and all were seeking an undergraduate degree at the University of Missouri. All participants were born in the 1980s. All participants are native US residents. At the time of the interviews, all participants were specifically stage actors and all of the experiences that they shared within the interviews pertained exclusively to stage performance, not film or television. One should note that the experiences of these undergraduate student actors are, for the most part, particular to classes or productions at the University of Missouri, and are not generalizable to all academic theatrical productions or acting classes.

This study does not include the perspectives of professional actors, amateur actors, or pre-professional student actors. While undergraduate student actors may or may not have the years of “experience” performing or training that professional, amateur, or pre-professional student actors might, the students did have two things on their side as far as optimal candidates for the study: 1) time for reflection and 2) academic actor training/opportunities for educational theatre experiences. Whereas pre-professional acting students, amateur actors, or professional actors have little time for reflection upon their work, dealing with the next audition, their full-time job or the next master class and teaching, undergraduate student actors are in the midst of their training – learning what works, what does not, discovering their own way of navigating the process of performance and rehearsal. In essence, undergraduate student actors are at a specific point in their “experience” where, through trial and error and faculty guidance, they are building their own knowledge about acting. When I contacted professional theatre companies, local amateur actors, and pre-professional acting programs, I received a nearly identical response – “who’s got the time for that?” In the participant selection

process, I found that the most articulate candidates were undergraduates. My graduate school colleagues appeared terse in relating their experiences, almost as if their experiences could be related in shorthand, a language we already understood and did not need translation or expansion.

The perspectives of the participants may differ from the perspectives of the aforementioned actor subsets as well as theatre educators/acting teachers or other theatre practitioners – directors, designers, stage managers, etc. Each of these groups may have a differing perspective on the lived experience of actor communication.

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this study was to uncover a deeper understanding of the lived experience of actor communication. Eight undergraduate student actors participated in the study and were interviewed and asked to describe their experiences of actor communication. All interviews were conducted, transcribed, and coded by the researcher. The interview transcripts were analyzed using the phenomenological method that is consistent with the models of Moustakas and van Manen. Through the use of constant comparison and thick descriptions, themes emerged about the *lived experience* of actor communication. Given that the group interviews provide multi-dimensional and comprehensive perspectives, I made a conscious effort to select direct quotes that best illuminate the emergent themes.

While each participant had a unique experience of actor communication, seven common themes emerged from the group. These themes weave together the individual experiences into a broader understanding of the experience of actor communication. The seven interrelated themes are: 1) Connection, 2) Requirements, 3) Awareness, 4) Blurring/boundaries, 5) Location, 6) The Impact of Presence, and 7) The Impact of Absence.

In Chapter Four, I utilize participant quotes to flesh out themes and sub-themes that were uncovered in the interviews. Quotes are represented as the participants spoke

during the recorded interviews, including grammatical errors.²¹¹ Each participant selected a code name and quotes are attributed to code names. All identifying characteristics of the participants were removed to ensure confidentiality.

When I began the interviews with my participants, I reiterated the phenomenon under discussion, *actor communication* – the experience of interaction among scene partners, the experience of sharing, interacting, relating and being in contact with another actor, which includes both verbal and nonverbal communication. Then I asked, “What’s it like?” The immense amount of complex data that followed such a simple question still leaves me in awe of my participants.

Notes/General Observations

Developing a Discourse of Actor Communication

According to the structuralist Michel Foucault, discourse is “a group of statements that provide a language for talking about - a way of representing the knowledge about - a particular topic at a particular historical moment.”²¹² Discourse constructs a subject matter, both in its definition and in its production, and determines how one can talk about it, as well as who can talk about it. Considering that my dissertation project was looking at a specific type of communication [actor communication] within a specific context [eight undergraduate MU theatre students], it comes as no surprise that specific language

²¹¹ Due to the nature of the group interviews, some quotes eliminate group responses or dialogue in order to represent a single participant’s narrative or perspective. Some quotes, due to their lengthiness or tangents, were edited to maintain as clear a focus on a single idea or perspective as possible.

²¹² Stuart Hall, “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power,” in *Formations of Modernity* ed. Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 291.

was developed by the focus group participants in order to differentiate between specific variations of actor communication.

The initial seed of creating a discourse may have been planted unintentionally by my specific use of the term *actor communication*. My use of such a specific term was not intended to create a specific discourse, but rather to avoid another. Although all of the participants and I were familiar with Hapgood's translation of Stanislavski's term for *communication*, I avoided using the term *communion* to avoid embedded religious references, baggage, misconceptions and the "mystery" surrounding *communion*. Although Jean Benedetti has translated the phenomenon recently as communication, I also chose not to refer to the phenomenon as *communication* in that the term is too broad and covers far too many types of communication. I selected *actor communication* to refer to a specific type of communication experienced by actors engaged in performing a scene in rehearsal or performance. Using such a specific term may have contributed to the creation of other specific terminology to define further the experience for the participants.

The research participants seemed to be looking for ways to personalize further their participation in the focus group. For example, before the interviews began, I asked each participant to decide upon a code name for transcription; however, the participants took the code names one step further. Not only did they come up with their own code names with specific and personal meaning for each of them, but participants also referred

to each other *only* by their code names during the interviews: Abigail, Ashlyn, Eva, Greg, Jake, Leon, Lucille, and Thadeus.²¹³ The use of code names was a simple, yet inadvertent, means to create inclusion among the participants, much in the same way secret societies such as Skull and Bones Society assign and use secret names for their members. Since the code names were known only to the participants and the researcher, the use of code names created a sense of exclusion and exclusivity and consequently contributed to constructing a discourse of actor communication.

My participants created further specificity by reducing *actor communication* to the initials of *AC* after the first group interview. By abbreviating actor communication, the participants created a term that only a select group of people would recognize. While *AC* to the average American may be understood to be “air conditioning,” *AC* became its own code word for the participants and their experiences and consequently, another step towards developing a discourse of actor communication.

AC referred to the experience of relating, interacting, reacting, and responding to one’s partner in the performance of a scene and refers to when people are “really communicating,” as well as when they are not. Participants also developed other terms, *non-communication* and *dis-communication*, to given further specificity to their

²¹³ The exclusive use of code names also suggested that the participants were “in character.” The idea of being “in character” is reiterated with the participants’ use of giving themselves lines when they were speaking. For example, an excerpt from Abigail: There’s a show that I absolutely enjoyed and loved and because of this speech people were like, “Ah, I don’t get all this happening.” And it’s like, “How could you not get what was happening?” Abigail, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004. Most actors with whom I have worked or know, myself included, have a habit of writing dialogue when offstage. Lines just seem to say so much more than a full and consequently dull and non-dramatic explanation ever could. We are a strange little makeshift band of people, aren’t we? When the participants decided to include the sound technician, who is also an actor, in the group interview, he was also given a code name – Scooter.

experiences and understandings of actor communication, which will be discussed in more depth within the first theme of the phenomenon, *Connection*.

Humor

Another observation that I made during the interviews and was reminded of again during the transcription and data analysis phases of my research is my participants' use of humor to discuss actor communication. I think humor was key to approaching the topic of actor communication. Laughter is noted over 300 times in the interview transcripts. The participants recognized their foibles and insecurities, but humor allowed them to deflect some of the discomfort that goes along with self-awareness. For example, at one point the participants were discussing their fears of not being able to achieve actor communication again:

Lucille: What if I can't do that? Oh my God, what if I'm terrible? What if I never get that again?

(laughter)

Lucille: Forever!

(laughter)

Greg: That was my one perfect moment!

(laughter)

Lucille: Oh my God! It'll never happen again!

Lucille and Greg act out what goes through their minds after the praise and the amazement wear off and actors are left with their insecurities. They laugh and create laughter in all the other participants, in part because it is all together too true of the inner workings of an actor's mind, and in part because it is relieving to know that others share their experiences. I admire my participants' candor about their feelings about their work, their sense of self-worth, their scene partners, and their talent. If it were not for my

participants' ability to laugh and make others laugh about their experiences, the interviews would not have the depth and richness that they do.

Participants become the Researchers

One of my goals of the research project was for my participants to take ownership of the research, in particular in the interviews, since it was the only forum where they would have a chance to interact and engage with each other. I gave each participant a list of contextual questions to give them an idea of the sort of questions that I might ask. Most questions did not spawn from the contextual questions on the handout, but rather from a need for clarification or a need for a sense of normalcy, that a participant's own experiences were similar to other participants' experiences. While the others did question each other, Lucille became the prominent questioner. I believe that it may have been due, in part, to minor conversation interruptions between she and Ashlyn, where Lucille deferred to Ashlyn when both had a response to a question. She may also have taken on the role of interviewer out of her natural curiosity about other people's experiences of actor communication.

Analogies and metaphors

Another observation that I made about the participant group that I feel is worthy of some discussion is the participants' use of analogies to describe their experiences. There were several analogies ranging from falling asleep, forcing sleep, *The Passion of the Christ*, dead body and soul, film, the counting game, hole/whole, music, and speaking a foreign language. Considering that the participants were discussing their experiences of

an intangible experience, it makes sense that they attempt to put their experiences in terms of something else. The use of metaphor will be discussed in more depth in the fourth theme.

Audience

My final general observation of the participants' experiences is how much the audience may or may not play a part in an actor's experience of actor communication. Some participants felt that the audience was essential to the experience, that the audience "witnesses"²¹⁴ the actor communication between actors. However, the audience is not always a factor in some experiences of actor communication, such as those that occur in rehearsal. Since the audience was not in all participants' experiences or within the scope of this study, I will not discuss it; however, the depth of discussion about the audience merited some exploration. For one of Leon's experiences, the audience became another character with whom the actors interacted. Other actors remark that they are not aware of the audience at all during actor communication. Greg suggests that the audience is quite essential to the experience: "I need them. Otherwise, I'm not an actor. I'm a person doing an accent walking around like a goofball in my bedroom...."²¹⁵

²¹⁴ Several participants in both group interviews either explicitly use the term "witness" or make allusions to it "if they saw it." For some actors, their experiences of actor communication were confirmed via the audience (Eva in particular).

²¹⁵ Greg, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

Themes

The first theme, *Connection*, reflects how the participants perceived actor communication as a connection between two people whether those two entities are an actor and a character, an actor and another actor, or an actor and the audience.²¹⁶ The second theme, *Requirements* reflects what the participants perceived as necessary conditions that must be present in order for actor communication to occur, obstructions that can prevent the necessary conditions, as well as external variables that impact actor communication. The third theme, *Awareness*, reflects how actors become aware of actor communication, how they know it is occurring, and whether or not actor communication is a teachable skill. The fourth theme, *Blurring/boundaries*, reflects the participants' understanding of boundaries and how the blurring of those boundaries impacted their experience of actor communication. The fifth theme, *Location*, reflects how the participants construct actor communication as a location to be reached. The sixth theme *Impact of Presence* reflects how actor communication is meaningful to an actor's process – how actors perceive their work, skills, talents, and acting partners and working relationships. The seventh theme *Impact of Absence* reflects how the absence of actor communication in scene work is meaningful to an actor's process – how actors perceive their work, skills, talents and acting partners when actor communication is absent from performance.

²¹⁶ The connection between an actor and a character refers to both an actor and her own character and an actor and another character.

Theme One: Connection

The first theme, *Connection*, is one of the most prevalent and overarching themes of the study. I cannot claim that *Connection* arose exclusively from the research interviews. Since the term is so prevalent in the relevant literature, I used *connection* to describe the phenomenon during the participant selection process. Since *connect* is one of the definitions of the word *communicate*, I did not feel that the use of the term would skew the findings of the study.²¹⁷ While I did use the term in my selection email and initial selection interviews, I did not re-introduce the term in the group interviews; rather, the participants did. Thadeus was the first to use *connection* in the group interview. Participants had brought up the question of sustaining actor communication during an entire performance, to which Thadeus responded,

I think you can and I think that's the goal and what we should strive for, but it's hard to connect, like, you know, like with uh... It also depends on the script you're doing, too, you know? It has to be kind of meaty... You know, sometimes it's harder to connect with like Restoration or things like...²¹⁸

Thadeus describes his belief that actors can sustain actor communication, or the *connection* between actors, for an entire performance. For Thadeus, the connection between actors is the goal of acting and several external variables impact an actor's ability to make a connection with his partner. Later in the interview Greg expands on the theme of *connection* as his reason or goal for acting, "I do this for the connection with

²¹⁷ See Appendix 1 – Participant selection email. "Communicate," Merriam Webster Online Dictionary, <http://www.m-w.com>, [accessed 26 May 2006].

²¹⁸ Thadeus, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004. The above-mentioned external variables will be expanded upon in the theme "Requirements."

other people, with the other actors and the audience...”²¹⁹ Greg gives primacy to *connection* over the other dimensions of the experience of performance. Participants continued to describe actor communication as a *connection* or provided an in-depth description of what *connection* is in their personal experiences of actor communication.

The theme of *Connection* is comprised of seven subthemes, or *invariant horizons*, relating to what makes up the connection, how the connection is made, with whom, and with what results. These horizons relate directly to the idea of actor communication as *connection*. The subthemes of *Connection* are: Interrelational, Nonverbal, Emotional Connection, Actor to Actor Connection, Actor to Character Connection, Character to Character Connection, and Connection as Exchange/Gift. The themes and subthemes of actor communication have several dimensions and will be explored to provide as full a description of the lived experience of *actor communication* as possible.

Interrelational

The first subtheme of *Connection* is Interrelational, which is a state of having a relationship wherein each person is dependent upon or is affected by others. Max van Manen describes the universal structure of interrelationality, or “communality,” as the connection we uphold with others “in the interpersonal space that we share with them.”²²⁰ Although interrelationality may seem to be a foregone conclusion in communication between actors, in that they interact with each other on stage, no assumptions about the phenomenon can be made at any level. Participants not only refer to working with scene

²¹⁹ Greg, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

²²⁰ van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 104.

partners in their experiences of connection, but also explore the relationship or expectations of the other actor(s). Participants suggest that the interrelational quality of the connection arises out of time spent working together in rehearsal as well as from giving focus to one's partner(s).

Greg describes the interrelational aspect of connecting with another actor at the level of their working relationship in rehearsal:

If you're trying to maintain a relationship with the other performer that they feel that they're free, then they need to also understand that there are times when you're going to come back to them and go...." No. (laughter) I see where you're going and...No. That, that's not...that. You see, the thing is, it has to be, 'cause it's not, these aren't monologues. They happen to be on the same stage."²²¹

Greg suggests that in order for actors to have a functioning working interrelational connection, actors need to be honest, stating their needs or opinions to their scene partners in a direct and supportive manner. Greg also points out that working with a scene partner is different from solo work, in that there is another person who is impacted by the choices his acting partner makes and actors need to be aware of the choices they make and how those choices impact their scene partners. Greg jokes about the interrelational quality of the connection:

With most other things, you hope it's happening for your partner when it's happening for you. When you, if you're actually paying attention to what the other actor is doing, you can see it in their eyes.²²²

As Freud once said, there is often an element of truth hidden within jokes. Humorous allusions to sex aside, Greg suggests that the connection is dependent on each actor

²²¹ Greg, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

²²² Ibid.

giving attention to the other and because of that attention each is affected by the other.

Leon also describes the interrelational dimension of the connection through her experience of an extraordinary physically-based performance:

Because we had all of these lines and all of these movement things that were just completely dependent on five other people also knowing their shit and not getting in the way of your shit. So you totally, um...(laughter) like, once we got into the show, um, yeah, like, if someone dropped their line, you know, I'm sure stuff like that happened, but somebody else was already right there to pick it up or to get where the other person was supposed to be or whatever. We just covered each other so well without really knowing we were doing it was just because we had all such a connection for so long and had gotten to know each other as a unit so well that we were really functioning as one character. It was super cool.²²³

Leon's experience, while experimental, illustrates the interdependent relationship among scene partners where each is supported and affected by the other performers' work. Leon and her five other cast mates performed a single character, six actors working experimentally to create a single unified character, which required each actor to continually, physically interact with the other actors. Leon suggests that the long rehearsal period aided in creating the interrelational connection between the actors.

All the participants refer to their acting partners in their experiences of actor communication or connection: "the two of you"; "with your partner"; "your partner"; "the other performer," "I had to work with this person"; "Trust in your partner"; and "spending three hours a night with that person." "just two people", "just you and the other person".²²⁴ However, Leon is the only participant to describe the experience using the term "we" consistently: "We rock"; "we just kept finding these new things"; "we had

²²³ Leon, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

²²⁴ Abigail, Lucille, Ashlyn, Greg, Lucille, Eva, and Thadeus, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004; Jake, Scooter, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

our moments of real communication”; “we were all in it together”; “it was really amazing how well we communicated in the scene.”²²⁵ Her repeated use of “we” implies that, for Leon, the connection is dependent on each person, affects those involved in the connection, and is an experience that is shared by both actors.

Nonverbal

The second subtheme of connection is a *nonverbal connection*. While it is understood that *actor communication* relies on both verbal and nonverbal communication, participants emphasize actor communication as primarily a nonverbal experience. Participants do not negate the verbal aspect of actor communication. Jake stresses the importance of the verbal aspect of actor communication, but in terms of the audience rather than one’s scene partner:

And you've still got to be able to communicate the words. Sometimes you get so into it...that you quit articulating and things like that and that's always got to be in your mind 'cause if the audience doesn't receive the message, I mean, that's not really the goal.²²⁶

Jake points out that verbal communication is necessary for communication to occur between actor and audience in that the audience needs to “receive” or hear the dialogue between actors. The emphasis on verbal communication in this form of communication suggests that perhaps it is not as necessary between actors. Jake suggests that actors can “quit articulating,” that is quit focusing on verbal communication techniques such as proper vocal work, and instead give focus to communication with other actors. Audience

²²⁵ Leon, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004; Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004; Individual Interview, University of Missouri, October 3, 2004.

²²⁶ Jake, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

members, unlike actors who have been in rehearsal for weeks, do not know the dialogue of the play and consequently the words of the play are crucial to the audience and the actor communicating. Outside of references to the audience, participants do not mention verbal communication specifically with regards to the lived experience of actor communication. Abigail describes her experience of *actor communication* as something more than just dialogue or verbal communication: actor communication happens “...when people are really communicating instead of spouting lines and waiting for their turn to say a line or something like that.”²²⁷ Abigail suggests that the exchange of lines and responses to cues for verbal communication are just a part of *actor communication*. For Abigail, *actor communication* is more than dialogue and instead starts to resemble “real” communication of everyday life. She implies that one does not know what words or actions are coming next when actor communication happens.

Participants describe this part of the connection as primarily a nonverbal experience. Jake recognizes connection as that point where he “knew exactly what the other person was thinking without lines,”²²⁸ suggesting that he understood what his partner was thinking without dialogue or verbal communication. The connection appears to be created through two recognizable ways, physical contact/proximity and eye contact.

Participants suggest that physical contact plays a part in creating connection between actors. Jake describes two actor communication experiences shared with his scene partner and research participant, Ashlyn, where physical touch was part of creating a nonverbal connection:

²²⁷ Abigail, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

²²⁸ Jake, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

Both times when we were together, the times that seemed most connected are when there's actually physical touch going on between actors. Like sometimes you'll be watching a scene and you're just like, "Neither of them are really connecting at all" and Professor Sum, although, he will say he doesn't know anything about acting, sometimes will say, "Why don't... Why don't you just... Why don't you just touch her, see what she feels like? Just touch her right now, just touch her." And there is some kind of a communication in touch that I think sometimes carries through emotionally.²²⁹

Jake emphasizes the importance of physical contact to develop a connection between him and his scene partner. Jake suggests that physical connection is nonverbal communication and provides a context for actors to respond to each other. Jake and Ashlyn go on to describe the type of physical contact from their scenes as:

Ashlyn: So physical.
Jake:...and my head was in her crotch, I was feeling her boobs, I was licking her face...
Ashlyn: Licked my face...
Jake: I was rubbing her...
Ashlyn: It was vulgar...
Jake: I was pulling her hair. Like it was very intense and sexual...
Ashlyn: He picked me up off the floor, threw me around...
Jake: And this one also, there were moments when we just like forced each other to connect and I think those were the, the most intense AC experiences.²³⁰

Ashlyn and Jake describe intensely physical scene work, which required intimate and sometimes intense, perhaps violent, physical contact between them. Jake suggests that the physical connection forced each of them to connect and respond to each other's nonverbal communication cues, which in turn, created a strong actor communication experience. Greg agrees with Ashlyn and Jake's description and shares his own experience of physical contact as connection,

²²⁹ Jake, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

²³⁰ Ashlyn and Jake, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

I would agree, um, and this, this is going to be the most pitiful statement of your, your entire grouping. (laughter) I don't play characters that get touched. (laughter) So, (laughter) I wouldn't know. (laughter) Greg has a very sad life, but Greg's happy. Um, back when Greg played characters (laughter) that did come in physical contact, um, that, that's an important aspect. A recent experience as a performer where there was contact was a student production of Show E which is purely contact and it's one of the most involved to a process that I've felt in quite some time.²³¹

Greg discusses, with quite a bit of humor, his experiences as primarily non-physical connections with actors in performance. However, a recent production relied completely on physical connection between actors and because of that he felt involved and connected to his cast mates. Leon brings a similar, yet differing perspective to the conversation on physical contact, “I think physical touch helps a lot, but I don't think it's absolutely necessary for actor communication. I think sometimes the absolute reverse can be very effective, like building up a tension of...completely not touching and not being able to.”²³² Leon sees physical contact as an important means of creating connection, but also suggests that the denial of physical contact can be equally effective. However, Leon’s idea of not being able to touch implies that physical contact is a viable element of nonverbal communication and to consciously deny actors from developing a connection through a physical means can create other nonverbal responses in the actors. Abigail supports the idea of physical contact as connection:

The protagonist was a relative of mine [of her character] and I just couldn't get into it until I touched her and I felt like somebody she knew and somebody I should know. And then I began to care for the things that happened to her many selves.... Yeah, like little things. It's crazy how like tickling someone can make you connect and then you feel like "Oh, we're

²³¹ Greg, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

²³² Leon, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

familiar because we're doing things that familiar people do." That helps a lot communication-wise.²³³

For Abigail, physical touch is a way in to a role or a performance and without it, it seems that she was disconnected to the role, the play and to her partner. Abigail's experience suggests not only does physical contact help create connections between actors, but it also helps develop connections between characters. Physical touch may occur when the actors are not in character. Physical touch is part of rehearsal and is only used when working towards developing character relationships. In general, actors respect each other's physical boundaries in rehearsal. However, physical touch between actors at the level of actor-to-actor connection may help strengthen a bond or a sense of trust between actors. Ashlyn describes an emotionally challenging production where physical touch between her and her acting partner was essential to maintaining their working relationship and carrying out the interactions onstage:

That's not fun, but it's, you, I feel like you have to know people so that you can finally just like after you've, like, looked at each other so you can be like, "Okay, come give me a hug. It'll be okay." You know? And you just have to like, I mean, we would seriously, like, we would just hug when we got done and just be like, "Okay, will you just love me for a minute? I just need to be loved."²³⁴

For Ashlyn, the physical touch of a hug was an absolute requirement to being able to continue the onstage work. The physical reassurance between actors counterbalanced the difficult nature of the relationship between their characters. Leon adds to Ashlyn's perspective on physical touch between actors, "I'm sorry for what my character did to

²³³ Abigail, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

²³⁴ Ashlyn, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

your character.”²³⁵ For Leon, the physical touch of a hug between actors can speak volumes to developing a connection between actors.

While eye contact is not explicitly physical contact, it is the contact of the gaze of one actor meeting or connecting with the gaze of another and is an important means of creating connection between actors. Just as eye contact is important in stage combat, eye contact is important for actor communication as well.²³⁶ Abigail qualifies her prior statement concerning actor communication as “really communicating” when she elaborates on her experience of connection through eye contact:

There's just been these moments in these big productions where I would look into another actor's eyes and completely forget that they were that person. Like they just became someone else completely and I think that's communicating even when there's no talking going on, maybe if they weren't even talking to me, but if they look at me and I see no sign of who that person was before the costume and that's pretty cool.²³⁷

Abigail describes the connection between actors when she makes eye contact with another actor without verbal communication and she sees the character not the actor, through nonverbal cues or signals that the actor is sending out. While eye contact is important to Abigail, she is an actor who has issues with eye contact, and from her perspective, she has good reason, “I feel like it tells people much more than I want to reveal.”²³⁸ Abigail suggests that more is communicated about one’s self through eye

²³⁵ Leon, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

²³⁶ Adrienne Adderley, “Wicked Meaning in Lawful Deed: The Essence of Performing Stage Violence” (PhD dissertation, University of Missouri – Columbia, 2008), 70.

²³⁷ Abigail, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004. This particular quote is incredibly dense in data and will be unpacked further in descriptions of other themes.

²³⁸ Abigail, Individual Interview #1, University of Missouri, October 7, 2004.

contact than through other verbal or nonverbal means. In the first group interview, Jake discusses the primacy of eye contact as connection between actors, “I think a lot of times it's spawned by the connection on the eyes more than anything.”²³⁹ Jake proposes that actor communication comes from eye contact between actors. He qualifies his perspective of eye contact as connection in the second group interview:

And it doesn't always have to be physical touch. I think that's the easiest way to do it, but sometimes like just locking eyes...is so intense that...something is definitely conveyed. Like we [Ashlyn and Jake] had a lot of moments today where we just looked at each other and it always made me really uneasy.²⁴⁰

Jake discussed physical contact as important to creating connection between actors. Here he clarifies his perspective to say that physical connection is the easiest means of establishing contact between actors. However, he goes on to say that while physical contact is the easiest, eye contact is a more intense connection between actors where nonverbal communication occurs.

The participants' perspectives of eye contact as a means of connecting or communicating are reinforced by experiences of nonverbal exercises that focus on eye contact. Jake and Leon describe a particular exercise that nearly all the participants experienced in an acting class:

Jake: There...there are some really odd moments, like in Class X...When we would have to walk and connect with our eyes and circle and connect with the eyes again and then leave. And we, and you know, we did that and it was just like a very honest sort of, like...“I'm very uncomfortable looking at this person right now....Those are definitely the type of communication....”²⁴¹

²³⁹ Jake, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

²⁴⁰ Jake, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

²⁴¹ Jake, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

Leon: Well, and that particular exercise, we weren't given a line or a character or anything else to take on, so you really got the opportunity to focus on just connecting with your...and it wasn't like, "Here's your line where you say this."²⁴²

Jake and Leon describe an exercise that focuses on eye contact with another actor, without dialogue, character, or context. The exercise requires actors to walk around in a circle, find another actor, stop and engage in eye contact with that other actor for a specific period of time, and then return to walking in a circle to repeat the engagement with other actors. The exercise allows actors to just focus on the other actor and to have eye contact with another person. Referring to Abigail's prior statement about eye contact revealing more than she would like, the exercise may feel "odd" or "uncomfortable" because the actor must reveal something of herself, must be vulnerable to another actor without or outside the context of a play, which may cause an actor to be uncomfortable, insecure, or out of sorts.²⁴³

Emotional connection

Emotional connection is the third subtheme of *Connection*, which describes what the connection is made up of for the participants. The participants describe the experience of connecting at the level of the character's emotions. Jake's earlier description of physical touch as connection – "And there is some kind of a

²⁴² Leon, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

²⁴³ The exercise the participants describe is a Michael Chekhov exercise used to help actors understand communion at a nonverbal level. I have done this exercise as an actor for years when I worked as a member of a touring Shakespeare theatre company. It was part of our Saturday morning acting work. I also use the exercise in my classes as well to help student actors understand that onstage communication (as well as in everyday life) is more than "I say my line and now you say your line."

communication in touch that I think sometimes carries through emotionally”²⁴⁴ - suggests that the connection conveys emotion between actors, emotion is what is carried in the connection. Greg also suggests that the connection is emotional: “Because if...if AC is really feeling all these emotions, when you’re dealing with someone who’s just like this, this negative hateful void of dis-communication...It’s impossible.”²⁴⁵ For Greg, the connection is made up of real emotions between actors and when interacting with a partner who is not willing to acknowledge the emotional connection, the experience becomes unbearable. Whereas Greg’s concerns are for the acknowledgement of the emotional connection in performance, Lucille voices her concerns about the intensity of the emotional connection getting in the way of a performance:

But sometimes I think during performance you have to watch that those moments almost don’t get too intense like they do in rehearsals ‘cause sometimes you have so much emotion and you’re so there that it hardly even, like if an audience saw that it wouldn’t even be transcribed as anything. They’d be like, “Whoa, okay, something happened. I don’t know what it was and I don’t know where they’re going, but something definitely happened just then.”²⁴⁶

For Lucille, the emotional connection between actors during actor communication may become too intense and not allow the audience to understand what is happening. She also suggests that the emotional connection is quite strong in rehearsals and may be lessened for performances. Abigail ties the emotional connection to eye contact:

But we also have these lovely tender moments of "My character understands what you're trying to tell me. I get it. Thank you" - that kind of thing and there are these constant looks that we give each other, even

²⁴⁴ Jake, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

²⁴⁵ Greg, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004. Greg’s quote has been truncated and will be explored more fully in later themes dealing with dis-communication and the absence of actor communication.

²⁴⁶ Lucille, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

when the audience is being really rude or attempting to distract us, we look into each other and that's where we keep our focus because we each know how serious and meaningful the whole story is. I look at the lead actress and her eyes are so filled with emotion and, and, I don't want to say agenda, I want to say just emotion and thought and understanding of what it is that that character is going through right now and it makes it easier for me to respond in my role because she is so focused then I can be focused and we share that back and forth a lot.²⁴⁷

Abigail describes an experience with her acting partner where the actors are connecting at the level of character, but also at the level of actor. She describes moments of understanding and gratitude as characters, but also as actors. Abigail talks about looking at “the lead actress” and being able to “respond in her role” which implies that she is responding as another actor and not simply responding character to character. Abigail suggests that her gratitude arises from her scene partner’s acknowledgement of what her character is going through and her recognition of the importance of the story, and out of her scene partner’s ability to stay focused on their connection despite distractions. Abigail describes what she is receiving through eye contact as emotion or empathy rather than agenda, suggesting that the connection is based in emotions not in character objectives or motivations. Jake agrees with Abigail’s idea of emotional connection through eye contact, but he talks about using an emotional connection from one actor to connect to another actor:

Okay, one actor made another actor really upset then he would say something that was really pathetic and I knew that one of the actresses onstage was always affected by his line because she always said, “I just always feel for you.” So she would get affected by what he said and I would always turn to that actress so that I could get what I needed from her rather than him.... Well, no because it wasn’t all connected, but... So it was bouncing off each person.... I knew what those words said to him and

²⁴⁷ Abigail, Individual Interview #2, University of Missouri, November 18, 2004.

I knew how bad it affected her and that affected me, which led to what I ended up doing.²⁴⁸

Jake describes an experience where he used the emotional connection with one actor in order to create his emotional response towards another actor. During the interview, other participants responded to his story, suggesting that he created an “AC triangle”²⁴⁹ or a “threesome.”²⁵⁰ However, the emotional connection was not connected to all three actors, but rather the emotional connection reflected off of one actor and on to another. Jake notes that it was his knowledge of the emotional connection and subsequent response he received from one actor that influenced his approach of creating a connection with the other actor.

Actors are asked to communicate on multiple levels with other actors in multiple roles: as an actor to another actor, as an actor to a character (her own or others), and as a character to another character. Each connection is complex and interwoven with the other levels of connection. For example, Jake describes the connection between actors:

...I really think the core of theatre is just two people doing things to each other and how they connect and what they.... I mean it's all about communication, just how two people affect each other and all the sets and props and lights and stuff, that's just so it looks pretty so people like watching it.... And you don't have to rely on any of those fluffy details of theatre that they put in because that's not important, which is why some of the times, like some of the most honest communication I've seen has taken place in the class without a set and without costumes and stuff because they didn't have to worry about anything so they really got to work just the core of it, which is two people who are doing something to one other.²⁵¹

²⁴⁸ Jake, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

²⁴⁹ Ashlyn, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

²⁵⁰ Abigail, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

²⁵¹ Jake, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

Jake sees the connection between actors as the central part of theatre and acting. He perceives the rest of the stage scenery as unnecessary to the connection between actors and suggests that actors have better connection with each other when the production details are stripped away and all they have to work with is each other. Jake's description, however, blurs the levels of connection: it is not clear if the connection is at the level of actors or at the level of characters or both. Is it the actors or the characters that are "doing something to one another" or is it both? The following sections attempt to extract each form of connection into separate subthemes of connection and also to explore the participants' experiences of engaging in the different levels of connection.

Actor-to-Actor Connection

The fourth subtheme of *Connection* is Actor-to-Actor Connection, meaning that actor communication is a connection between an actor and at least one other actor. The actor-to-actor connection exists at the level of the working relationship between actors in rehearsal or performance. Greg reflects on his experiences of past actor-to-actor connections:

That, but that, it's really important for me to know that my partner is the sort of person who is not on a personal deal, who's trying to screw me over, or, you know, that it's important to me that I know that I can take a risk because they'll back me up. That if, if I'm going to do something ridiculous, I'm not doing it to screw them over and they know that. And they know that they can do what they feel that they need to do...so that you can, so that you can keep working.... The difference is...by being with a performer that you feel that with. That you can say, "I can do anything I want and they're going to come with me" as opposed to the mindset of, "I'm going to do anything I want. It's going to be fantastic and it's their problem if they don't keep up." That what you're talking about is the sort of experience where...you've got somebody who's coming with you...²⁵²

²⁵² Greg, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

Greg makes clear comparisons between actor-to-actor connections and the disconnection between actors when the connection does not exist. Actor working relationships that do not have a connection at the level of actors do not appear to be conducive to actor communication in that one actor is self-focused or has a personal agenda with regards to the performance. Greg describes the actor-to-actor connection as inclusive and supportive of both actors in the experience, that neither actor is working in a selfish or self-serving manner and that both actors are aware and support the choices made by his partner. Earlier in the interview Greg describes the ease of actor communication in relation to one's partner: "I think there are some people that it actually becomes easier to do that with, depending on the thing you've got with them."²⁵³ Greg suggests the connection is dependent upon one's partner or one's working relationship with one's acting partner.

Abigail echoes Greg's description of working relationships that include actor-to-actor connection and suggests the actor-to-actor connection impacts character relationships:

And if you're supposed to be working with someone and there's supposed to be a romantic relationship you're playing...you can't be intimidated by that person and that person can't be completely cold to you in real life because what are you going to want to give them?²⁵⁴

Abigail suggests that if the actors are portraying characters in a close relationship, the working relationship between actors needs to be supportive and inclusive as well. She

²⁵³ Greg, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

²⁵⁴ Abigail, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

further indicates that an actor may be unwilling to interact or to give something of herself if the actor-to-actor connection is missing.

Jake describes how he works actively to develop close actor relationships offstage in order to develop close relationships onstage:

I try to develop close relationships with all the people that I act with and maybe that's just odd. But for instance, in Show B, I was the brother of...which just by knowing us and looking at us, you probably wouldn't assume...that we have qualities that would be brotherly, but just getting to know that person outside of the world of the play, you found things that you had in common and you found things that you could learn from each other and experience and I think a lot of those were put into some parts not that I think that it was brilliant or something, but just you, you find those moments and you have some...(laughter) yeah. And so I think that sometimes the relationship is appropriate. Now for instance, you wanted to slit my throat, it might be hard to look at a person who you're buddy-buddy with and you had lunch that morning and then went to slit their throat in an Elizabethan scene in class X. So...²⁵⁵

For Jake, a rapport built out of common ground or shared experiences between actors offstage helps to develop a closer connection with an acting partner onstage. The actor-to-actor connection provides a foundation for the behaviors and interactions that come out of a close relationship between characters. He elaborates upon the offstage actor-to-actor connection and expresses his belief that it should be appropriate to the character relationship. Jake advises that actors may not want to develop close offstage relationships with acting partners whose characters are the focus of violent or negative actions, suggesting that a close relationship may make it difficult for an actor to separate the actor-to-actor connection from what occurs between characters onstage.

Participants describe the actor-to-actor connection not only as a means of developing close character relationships, but also as a means of developing camaraderie

²⁵⁵ Jake, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

or a bond between cast members. Camaraderie, or as participants describe it: “the bond”, is an essential part of a broad working relationship not just as acting partners, but also for the cast as a whole. Greg describes an experience of actor-to-actor connection creating a bond between cast mates:

Yes, our cast was really close. We kind of bonded because of the nature of the rehearsals. The production was not inviting (laughter) so we created a support system for each other from within the cast. So we all got really close. We went out every night. We talked about the show, the characters, what happened that night in rehearsal and because we'd come back a week early before class started [beginning of Fall 2003], the only people we worked with that first week were each other and so we ended up being really tight and the only person that I think was kind of outside that was somebody who missed the first couple of days of that first week, where we really kind of gelled into a group. And I think whether or not any of us would think that was the case now, I think at the time, all of us really trusted that if we jumped, we'd be caught. And we knew each other, not so much in the "She's got four sisters and where he's going after school," but in a real sense of, I think I said this before, who the person is rather than what they are, that it made the process really easy among us. And I don't think that would have been the case had it not been for how negative some of the process had been because of people outside of the cast, that we kind of bonded in spite of our conditions.²⁵⁶

Greg suggests that the cast bonded, or developed a strong actor-to-actor connection and working relationship due to the unpleasant nature of the rehearsal process. He implies that cast members did not work in a positive or safe rehearsal environment, which was the impetus for creating a support system for cast members: if they could not trust the rehearsal process or their director, they could trust each other. For Greg, the bond between cast mates creates connections of inclusion and support as actors, which allows he and his cast mates to take risks in their performance work. Greg mentions that one actor was not involved for the same length of time, missing a few initial rehearsals, which may suggest that the length of time actors work with each other may have an impact on

²⁵⁶ Greg, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, September 30, 2004.

the actor-to-actor connection. Jake, who was a cast member of the production that Greg describes, echoes Greg's description of actor-to-actor connection as a support system, "A lot of time your cast becomes your therapy group..."²⁵⁷ suggesting that the connection between actors is supportive not just on a working level, but on a psychological level as well.

Whereas Greg describes actor-to-actor connection as a support system in a negative environment, Leon describes how important actor-to-actor connection is for her when the large size of a cast is a factor:

There's some merit to "Hey guys, we should bond" because I think sometimes it is apparent, the cast that don't have any connection with each other. When you have to be onstage, as a large group, I mean, it, it's helpful, for me, at least, sometimes, to go out and have beer with those people and find out what they're like in real life.²⁵⁸

Leon suggests that when a lack of actor-to-actor connection is apparent, especially in a larger cast, it is important for her to get to know her cast mates outside of rehearsal. Leon implies that the size of a cast impacts the level of actor-to-actor connection in the rehearsal process and therefore it may be necessary to develop the connection beyond the working relationship in rehearsal. Lucille expands on her experiences of building the actor-to-actor connection during a production:

It's interesting. I've always been one of those people who I hang out with the cast members that I'm around and once the show is done, I switch to a new group of people, but there's always a few individuals that are consistent all the way through that I'm like, "Yeah, we connect on a certain level" but I'm a fairly independent person so I don't cling to anyone in particular really. But I just thought, I know a lot of people who work that way and are in theatre, you just kind of "We hang out because we're in the

²⁵⁷ Jake, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

²⁵⁸ Leon, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

show. We hang out now because we're in this show." But I just thought it was interesting, you don't ever really, really get to know them, but you know them well enough that you trust them and that's really all that matters...and then you're onto the next thing again.²⁵⁹

Lucille describes the actor-to-actor connection outside of rehearsal as a connection that only exists the length of the production, from rehearsal to the end of the run of performances. For her, it is a necessity to developing a connection with an acting partner or cast mates and once there is no longer a necessity, the connection is finished. The actor-to-actor connection helps to develop trust between actors in the everyday, which helps build trust in rehearsal, and hopefully, a connection where actor communication can occur.

Group discussions about actor-to-actor connections in a cast led to a particular exchange about *Show D*, a production that had a long production process from initial rehearsals to final performance and was performed in three different spaces on the MU campus as well as at the York Theatre in New York City. The cast connection was easily recognizable by cast mates as well as by their classmates:

Ashlyn: Um...right. So in a show where, okay, let's say, the first show that I did here, which was incredibly heavy material. [*Show D*] Um, which, um, actually changed me a lot as a person, so I feel you on that. Um, and it was a really weird learning experience because it was very much, um, "figure it out on your own." It wasn't, there was a lot of experimenting going on. Um, we were taking part in the script. We were changing the script. It was very, very hands on. And it wasn't anything I'd ever done before. And it was heavy, heavy material. And in a situation like that, I would have gone crazy. Like, the people – and I didn't know anybody – and the people in the cast basically forced me to come out with them. And if they wouldn't have done that, I would have been a basket case at the end of that show. Like, I didn't know any of them and it was, I mean...

Lucille: You needed their camaraderie in order to get through it.

²⁵⁹ Lucille, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

Ashlyn: I needed to know that they were okay with me and that I was okay with them as people to let some of those things happen.

Lucille: Mmm.

Ashlyn: And not just, not just the, the person who was hitting me, like everyone. You can't, that's, subject matter like that, you can't...

Leon: Which is why that particular director was smart; even though we got frustrated with her about it later, for setting up the debriefing sessions from the get go. We needed that.

Lucille: You guys are so bonded even now.

Leon: Well, right. Like, we are, we're (lost word)...

Abigail: Right.

Lucille: It's almost obnoxiously so.

(laughter)

Lucille: I was like, "Good God! Will they ever quit that?"

Leon: Yeah. (lost words)²⁶⁰

Ashlyn describes the forced actor-to-actor connection as the thread that held her together during a very arduous production, both in terms of script development and issues addressed in the script. Lucille supports Ashlyn's perspective that camaraderie, the actor-to-actor connection is what helped her get through the production in a sane manner. For Ashlyn, the actor-to-actor connection was developed in rehearsal through physical contact, i.e., hugging, as well as the cast connection developed outside of rehearsal. The actor-to-actor connection gives rise to actors having concern or care for their cast mates' emotional or psychological well-being, which may contribute to creating an atmosphere where actors are willing to connect with their fellow actors as characters.

Leon, who was also a cast member of *Show D*, suggests that the debriefing sessions, sessions where actors can discuss their successes, concerns and frustrations about rehearsal, contributed to developing a strong actor-to-actor connection among the cast. Lucille notes that the bond between cast mates is still apparent after the show. From this conversation, one may infer that the actor-to-actor connection with this

²⁶⁰ Ashlyn, Leon, Lucille, Abigail, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

particular cast developed out of a longer production time, actor interactions both in and out of rehearsal, and debriefing sessions.

Character to Character Connection

The fifth subtheme of connection is a character-to-character connection, meaning that actors connect with each other at a level of identifying as characters.²⁶¹ A major shift in experience occurs in character-to-character connection: the actor experiences what the character is going through psychologically, emotionally and physically and responds as the character would in the circumstances. Abigail's experience of the emotional connection through eye contact takes place at the level of character: "My character understands what you're trying to tell me. I get it. Thank you."²⁶² For Abigail, the acknowledgement of the connection is from one character to another. Jake describes the character-to-character connection in terms of responding in character to his partner:

Like my stomach would actually tighten up when she would say really, really awful things and there's this.... but last night it was, like, even, even the stuff that was going on inside your body was connected to what was going on with the lines and that was just freeing and nice to experience.... I felt like a pathetic loser, like I really did. Like the confidence and the normal like "give it right back." Like take what she was giving to me and just turn it around to her and attack her didn't happen because emotionally I felt inadequate to be able to do that, which normally in real life, when I'm being Jake, I never have those sort of feelings, um...But it was much more of a self-conscious, unconfident, introverted feeling of that of the character I was playing...²⁶³

²⁶¹ The subtheme of character-to-character connection plays into a later theme of blurring and will be discussed in more depth in Theme 3: Blurring/boundaries.

²⁶² Abigail, Individual Interview #2, University of Missouri, November 18, 2004.

²⁶³ Jake, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

For Jake, his responses are in tune with what his character is experiencing and for him the character-to-character connection is recognizable in how it changes him as a person. The connection helps him identify with his character in relation to the other character. From Jake's perspective, the character-to-character connection is emotional and physiological: he no longer reacts as Jake, but rather he reacts as the character in the scene.

Greg describes his experience with character-to-character connection in terms of the actor not being in charge anymore:

In that case, I guess my character was because he was in charge. Everything that happened was up to him, which is not to say that something entered my body and I lost consciousness. No, I'm not channeling anything, but you know, it's one of those things where, at those moments, if somebody in the audience called you by name, you wouldn't look up because that's not you. And looking at the other person onstage, you don't think, "That's Jake, he's playing this character." You think, "That's the character." You only think of it in terms of your relationship with the character. So, for me, I don't necessarily notice when I slip into it because my character doesn't care about the University of Missouri. He wasn't worried about putting on a good show. He was worried about getting his point across to the other character, who was a person for him. So I only know that it's happened when I come out of it, when the audience does something or when something reminds me that I'm performing and I go, "Huh. I haven't been calling the shots for about 45 seconds," and then I realize it didn't even occur to me to think of it in terms of performance and technique.²⁶⁴

Greg describes character-to-character connection in terms of how he perceives himself and his partner. The character-to-character connection involves seeing himself and his scene partner as characters and those characters are real people. Greg suggests that in the character-to-character connection that the actor is no longer in charge and that all actor thoughts, from the every day to technique, dissolve and the connection is only thought of in terms of one's relationship to the other character. Lucille also perceives character-to-

²⁶⁴ Greg, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, September 30, 2004.

character connection in terms of how she sees herself and her acting partner in the context of a scene, although she creates the connection by projecting her experiences from her real life onto the onstage relationship:

Once I finally figured out how to put all of that emotion into who I am as a...in my relationship with my significant other and put that into my partner, then I was finally able to fully commit to what the scene required of me as opposed to being, "Yes, I'm your wife" - "I'm your husband." So once I finally gave into the fact that I could do something like that, then I actually saw him as an individual who I was very connected to because there's lots of...well, like, we talk about having sex in there, there's a lot of talk about children and what you wanted and what I wanted and it's close enough to me as an individual that I could play it decently. So anyway because it was close enough to me, just as me being myself, then and I think it was for my partner, too, maybe enough that we had good chemistry and I actually felt that I was talking to him as who my partner is, as if we were in an actual relationship.²⁶⁵

Lucille describes how her perceptions of her acting partner shifted from actor to character when she connected her feelings for her significant other onto her partner. She suggests that once she could do that then she could perceive her partner as someone with whom she had an intimate relationship. She also suggests that the wants and needs of both characters were close enough to her and her partner's real life desires to create the character-to-character connection.

Actor to Character Connection

The sixth subtheme of connection is actor-to-character connection, meaning the actor connecting with her/his character. Lucille suggests that her ability to connect at the level of characters stemmed, in part, from her ability to identify with her character. Greg echoes Lucille's perspective:

²⁶⁵ Lucille, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, September 30, 2004.

Well, and I think it has a lot to do with how close the character is to yourself and how close the character is to the other person because the more you're having to fake, the less real it's going to be to you.... Well, because the moments for me have always been, where, and, like I said, it's not that the character is close to my age or anything like that, but how close I feel to the character. Whether or not the character is completely opposite from what I am, how close I perceive that connection, it makes it more likely or not. 'Cause I, I generally don't play characters that are anything like myself, uh...²⁶⁶

Greg describes his experience of actor-to-character connection. For him, the connection is dependent on how close he feels to the character, not necessarily that Greg and the character share demographic similarities or life experiences. Greg suggests that identification with the character on a particular level is essential for the actor to develop an actor-to-character connection. Leon, Lucille and Abigail asked him to elaborate on his idea of being close to his character and he elaborated:

This is more of a, a philosophy of acting sort of question, but, for me, it's always finding what the character is of myself, if the character, if I'm playing a character who is.... My personal manifestation of my desire to succeed or if this character is, you know, the rage part of my personality or the benevolent part of my personality. The closer that I feel to that character's motivation is to a part of myself that I can identify, the more likely I am to slip into that character.²⁶⁷

Greg describes the connection with his character as connecting the character's desires with a facet of his own personality. He suggests that if an actor can connect the character's motivations to a part of himself, the easier it is for the actor to connect to the character he is portraying. For Greg, the actor-to-character connection seems to be foundational to character-to-character connection as well as actor-to-actor connection. In

²⁶⁶ Greg, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

a later interview, Greg describes his response to actors who are not willing to commit to connecting to their characters:

When a character says something it's because they know what they mean and if you can tell that the actor has no idea what the words his character has just uttered have meant, then you have the first step of realizing that this person doesn't care enough about crawling inside his character's head to find out.... That if you're not willing to take what your character does seriously, how can you take anyone else's work seriously? You're never going to find that place where it's real to you, if you have no idea what you're saying. And that's a, I think that's an important thing that there are some actors who clearly won't go into their character enough to give that back to you.²⁶⁸

Greg perceives an actor who is not willing to make a connection with his character as careless, uncommitted and self-focused. Greg implies that a lack of character-to-character connection in an acting partner may negate actor-to-actor connection or character-to-character connection as well, leading to a lack of actor communication in a performance.

Connection as Exchange

The seventh and final subtheme of connection is connection as a means of exchange between actors. In describing their experiences of actor communication, several participants describe a connection in which something is given or exchanged between actors. Leon describes the exchange as an energy flow between actors:

But yeah, we definitely weren't communicating that day and I left class really really really frustrated. And me and another girl who had the same feelings were just like (deep inhale) really upset because up until that point several of us had had good energy going and communication with the body and that sort of thing and then it just stopped so we were really, we were trying really hard not to be upset at those people who made it stop. Yeah, it was very frustrating. Yeah, it was. I wanted to be mad at them

²⁶⁸ Greg, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

and so I made myself go, "It's okay. They've never done this before. They don't know that when the energy starts happening, you're supposed to let it flow."²⁶⁹

Leon describes an experience where a few actors in her class interrupted the connection between actors. She notes her frustration at the interruption of the “good energy” between her and her acting partner pointing out that the connection is a flow of energy between actors. Leon’s forgiveness of her classmates suggests that understanding what is exchanged in the connection between actors is something that one must experience or learn.

Earlier when Abigail discusses actor-to-actor connection through eye contact, she describes the connection as an exchange between actors:

And I was getting what I needed emotionally for that moment from her and I was giving her something back and then we grabbed hands and then like the show went on, but there was like just this pause where everything....²⁷⁰

She describes an experience where her acting partner is giving emotionally to her and Abigail gives it back to her partner. She suggests that the exchange between actors is an emotional exchange that connects the actors with each other. Later Abigail describes the exchange between actors in an account of an actor who lacks an actor-to-character connection because he does not connect to the writing:

Well, um, if you've seen them perform before and they can't make words seem like they're their own or they completely don't make an effort to understand what's coming out of their mouth then like it's, it becomes painfully obvious and it's kind of sad that they shouldn't be there. And that's an awful thing to say, but if a person can't give into the, the stuff that's there in the writing. Sometimes a writer gives you so much that you can't help but go with it, if you just give into it and some people are

²⁶⁹ Leon, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, October 3, 2004.

²⁷⁰ Abigail, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

incapable of doing that. And if you see them, time after time, do the same thing and make the same mistake and stop at the same wall then they aren't going to be a person who's willing to take that journey with you and communicate with you and give you something meaningful in return.²⁷¹

Abigail suggests that an actor who does not put forth an effort to connect to the writing will not be an actor who is willing to participate in the exchange of the connection. She suggests that an actor can recognize tell-tale signs of an actor who is disconnected to his character, the script, and his fellow actors: demonstrates an inability to own their words, makes repeated errors, and repeatedly stops at the same level or place. Abigail's description of the exchange is "giving you something meaningful in return," which implies that she is giving something meaningful to her partner and has an expectation of her partner returning the gift.

A dimension of exchange concerns specific language the participants created to describe their experiences of actor communication. Two terms were developed in the interviews, guided in part by Greg, a great lover of language, to help clarify the experiences of when the exchange of actor communication is not occurring. The two terms that developed to further clarify the experience are *non-communication*²⁷² and *dis-communication*.²⁷³

The first term, *non-communication*, refers to an actor communication experience in which due to external variables the connection between scene partners does not exist.

Participants suggest that while actor communication is something that actors strive

²⁷¹ Abigail, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004. It is interesting to note that participants primarily describe exchange in terms of absence, meaning the connection is described as an exchange or giving/returning in experiences where the connection is noticeably absent.

²⁷² Greg, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, September 30, 2004.

²⁷³ Greg, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004 and Individual Interview, University of Missouri, September 30, 2004.

toward, it is not required for a good performance. Abigail describes a performance that she witnessed of other participants in which she noted a lack of actor communication:

In *Show B*...It was very polished and it was very entertaining, but I didn't feel like it was completely necessary for you guys to be like, "Oh, I'm communicating with you. Oh." You know? And I didn't get that and I was thoroughly entertained by the show, but I don't know if it mattered if...It was so polished and so, like, choreographed, and like, I never really felt like there was room even for you guys to be like, "We're having a moment" and I don't think it mattered either.²⁷⁴

Abigail notes that due to the style of the show and "polished" performances, she did not perceive that a connection between actors was feasible. However, as an audience member she did not feel that the lack of connection between actors detracted from the production. In the second group interview, Leon expands on the experience of non-communication from the actor's perspective:

But like, I, I've been in a nice handful of shows where there's a little, but like, yeah, we never quite reach that point of communication, but they still weren't horrible shows and weren't horrible performances by anyone and it's just...²⁷⁵

For Leon, performances that lack connection between actors appear fairly common in her production experience, but are not necessarily negative for her as an actor or for the audience. She goes on to say, "you've just got to do it and sometimes it's not going to happen and that's okay,"²⁷⁶ suggesting that the connection is not always present between actors and that as an actor one can accept its absence in some performances due to the style of the performance. Greg expands upon the lack of connection in non-communication:

²⁷⁴ Abigail, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

²⁷⁵ Leon, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

I mean, it's also possible in a non-communicative thing that the scene can be going really well, you're just not feeling it in a real place. That you know you're faking it and you know that other people care about it and because that is so much of my performance experience, those situations that were neither truly wonderful or "Dear God, kill me before I finish this act" that I wish more that was in the splendid actor communication sense. That's really kind of the ideal world, where I'm content if a performance goes well enough for me to be pleased and that I can still afterwards go, "By the way, let's, you know, let's look at this. This part went really well." It's just 'cause it's not one of the extremes that it doesn't get a lot of publicity. I'm not even sure if those will make a full sentence.... And in between that, there are just moments where you might be talking and the other person might be answering, but it's just happening, it's just the sort of, it's what a lot of shows end up being, between those flashes of brilliance and those moments of utter despair. So the majority of my experience would just be not communication and luckily, I've had relatively few dis-communicative experiences. So there's got to be a middle ground between the perfect performance and psychic vampires hopefully there's somewhere in the middle where you can hang out and recover.²⁷⁷

Greg affirms Leon's perspective that non-communicative experiences are common in productions. He suggests that the lack of connection seem to be one-sided or mutual due to lack of commitment on the part of one or both actors to the performance or part of the performance. Greg describes non-communication as quite prevalent to his experiences, but not a negative experience. He suggests that non-communication is a space for actor to recover from either connection or disconnection with his scene partner.

The second created term of the actor communication discourse is *dis-communication*, which refers to an actor communication experience where due to active disengagement by one or more acting partners, the connection between scene partners does not exist. In the previous paragraph, Greg mentions dis-communicative experiences as "moments of utter despair" as an actor. In a discussion about negative communication experiences, Greg goes into depth about what it is like to experience dis-communication:

²⁷⁷ Greg, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, September 30, 2004.

Because if...if AC is really feeling all these emotions, when you're dealing with someone who's just like this, this negative hateful void of dis-communication... Good word, go ahead and use it. When, when you're dealing with somebody who is just the prince of darkness incarnate onstage and you just try shouting at them and railing at them and they just stare at you, you know, the way a cow does at an oncoming train.... It's impossible.²⁷⁸

Dis-communication is described as an experience where all actions or attempts to connect are ignored or unacknowledged by one's acting partner. He describes the experience as a void where his scene partner has no response to him. Greg's explicit use of a negative tone towards his partner and the experience suggest that dis-communication resonates strongly for Greg. He describes the experience as impossible, implying that dis-communication is unbearably difficult and without solution. Greg expands again upon dis-communication:

Dis-communication, if actor communication is freely trading ideas and building into a real whole, then dis-communication is sort of a one-ended situation where you're just throwing all of your ideas into a hole, where one person just utterly refuses to help out, where you know that if knowing that you jump you can be caught, this is the sort of person that if you jump, you know they're going to enjoy watching you fall down, which has a tendency to limit your progress in the performance.²⁷⁹

For Greg, there is a shift between his first description of the differences between actor communication and dis-communication. At first for Greg, actor communication is really feeling emotions with his acting partner, but in his latter description he amends actor communication to include a free trade of ideas or thoughts which help actors to create a

²⁷⁸ Greg, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004. Greg's description continues in describing his responses to his partner, which will be explored in more depth in Theme 7: Impact of Absence.

²⁷⁹ Greg, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, September 30, 2004. While Greg's description of dis-communication was in an individual interview, through member-checking participants were given the opportunity to confirm, dispute, or amend the definitions of both non-communication and dis-communication. To date, none have asked to alter or amend the two terms.

fully developed reality, or real whole, perhaps suggesting creating the world of the play for the characters. He also expands upon dis-communication to include an actor who actively rejects his scene partner who also may potentially enjoy witnessing the failure of the other actor. Greg's linguistic play between whole and hole reinforces his description of dis-communication as a void; however, he implies that the void or hole is not merely a context or situation lacking connection, but rather the void is his scene partner.

Summary of Theme One: Connection

Actor communication is experienced as a connection between performers on multiple levels. The connection described by participants is interrelational where partners are dependent upon each other and have impact upon one another. The connection is primarily nonverbal made up of physical connections or cues as well as eye contact between actors. The nonverbal connection is made up of emotions, which are shared by actors in a working relationship as actor-to-actor or as character-to-character. In order to have the connection at the level of actors or of characters, an actor must connect and have an understanding of her character. The connection at the level of actor and character allows for the exchange between actors, a giving and receiving of emotions, thoughts, and ideas.

Theme Two: Requirements

The second theme of actor communication is *Requirements*. While it may seem obvious that there are specific conditions for *any* lived experience, actor communication is an abstract, intangible, and fabricated experience that exists only in a specific context

and under certain conditions. The context of actor communication is simple: actors talking (dialogue), interacting, relating, and responding to another actor both verbally and nonverbally while portraying a character in rehearsal or performance. Actor communication is a specific type of communication between actors in that the dialogue is already known and actors already have a general idea of what will happen or what is expected to happen within the play.²⁸⁰ It is in this context that actor communication exists. However, the context of already knowing what is going to occur is not the equivalent of the requirements of actor communication. The four subthemes of *Requirements* are: Necessary Conditions, Major Obstacles, Variable Conditions, and Frequency & Sustainability. Necessary Conditions describe the particular contributing factors that impact rehearsal or performance and allow for actor communication to occur. Major obstacles explore factors that may prevent actor communication from occurring. Variable conditions examine the inconsistent external factors that may or may not play a part in helping or hindering actor communication. Frequency and sustainability look at actors' abilities, considering all the conditions, obstacles, and variable conditions, to maintain actor communication.

Necessary Conditions

Participants suggest that there are several conditions that must be in place in order for actor communication to occur. Necessary Conditions are both internal and external factors that contribute to actor communication. The eight necessary conditions are: at

²⁸⁰ I do not wish to imply that there is no sense of spontaneity in the rehearsal or performance process, but the actors have a general idea of what is going to happen in the play and between their characters from the script.

least two people, trust (safety), confidence in performance, knowing a person, commitment, concentrating on partner, pressure, and lack of restraint: willing to letting go.

At Least Two People. While the condition of two people may seem to be an obvious condition, nothing about the experience can be assumed. Participants generally stated conditions explicitly, but the first condition was extracted from participant statements and that is the necessary condition of at least two people. The inference was made due to references of a “partner” or “other performer” - sometimes referred to by name or pronoun. Abigail begins to describe an experience of actor communication as: “And the two of you or whoever you're performing with, you get into this groove sort of where it doesn't even feel like you're acting really.”²⁸¹ Abigail suggests that actor communication requires at least two actors, but also suggests that it can occur with more than two people. The reference to one’s acting partner or partners suggests a strong implication that in order for actor communication to occur there must be at least two actors present so that each actor has someone with whom she can communicate.

Trust (Safety). Trust between people is implicit for actor communication to occur. Participants overwhelmingly describe the importance of placing their confidence in another person with the expectation that the other person will behave responsibly and respectfully. Eva describes the importance of trust to the phenomenon quite succinctly:

²⁸¹ Abigail, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

“I think you have to trust to be able to communicate.”²⁸² For Eva, she needs to trust the other person in order to engage in actor communication.

Some participants describe trust in terms of safety. Lucille describes an experience where actor communication was absent due to a lack of safety:

No, now hear me out, I couldn't tell [if he] was crazy, if he was being malicious, if he was trying to intimidate me, if he was just looking down his nose, if he thought I was an idiot or if he was up in his own little world. So I was totally just afraid to even try anything, but then I really wanted to at the same time, and so, it was incredibly difficult because I couldn't, not even during the scene, I couldn't, I couldn't get to him at all. And I tried to open up, but then he wouldn't either. So then when we tried to do the scene, it was practically impossible to ever relate or ever find a moment like that because we were on two totally different tracks.... I was frustrated. We also had two very different working methods, um, in the last minute sort of "Yeah, I'll get this eventually" kind of thing.... Whereas I am the "No, I plan out, I've got to feel comfortable in order for this to go..."... Well, it was frustrating because I felt unsafe.²⁸³

Lucille describes an experience that is riddled with her own insecurity towards her acting partner. She notes that she was unsure of his mental state, whether it was malicious or unstable, and on top of which, she and her partner had very different working styles, which left her feeling unstable and afraid as well. Lucille also suggests that she had no choice but to adapt to his working style, which was either out of fear or necessity, perhaps both. She suggests that due to her fear or mistrust of her partner, she was not able to connect with her acting partner. She also notes that he did not connect with her. Lucille suggests that the lack of trust was frustrating; she was not able to connect with her partner because she felt unsafe. Ashlyn and Jake also describe trust in terms of safety

²⁸² Eva, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

²⁸³ Lucille, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

with regards to their first experience of working with each other, which was in a physically intimate scene. Jake describes the process of establishing trust:

...in that scene didn't you feel so much better about your character because we had every moment of physical contact choreographed. We didn't have emotionally it so structured, like "You're going to explode on this line and do this," but we were both so confident in where the scene was going and how we felt about it and what we were doing in it that I think that's why we were...²⁸⁴

Jake describes a working relationship where physical contact between actors was choreographed, which helped them feel confident in the scene and in each other. For Ashlyn, creating a safe environment was key to actor communication:

I do like things choreographed, but I, we discovered them ourselves. We sat down with the script and we said..."Okay, this line really means this to me and I feel like something really disgusting needs to happen right there. I feel like this word really needs to be emphasized so what can you? You can grab my boobs." Like that's going to emphasize that word. Like, we sat down and together we looked at the script and... choreographed it based on...²⁸⁵

Ashlyn suggests that by mapping out their physical choices prior to rehearsal, she and Jake established trust in their working relationship. She describes a process where physical choices were discussed and permission was given to the other actor to enact specific physical choices. Jake compares his working relationship with Ashlyn to the unsafe relationship that Lucille previously described:

Jake: But the difference there was trust and planning. Before we ever got it on its feet, it calls for really disgusting things to happen in it and so we sat down and I was like, "I think, at this moment, I'm going to lick your face." ... "Then I'm going to go stick my face down in your crotch, slide it up to where I'm into your boobs and then go up into your eyes" and...
Ashlyn: Uh-huh.

²⁸⁴ Jake, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

²⁸⁵ Ashlyn, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

Jake: she's just like, "Okay."²⁸⁶

Jake suggests that the difference between the working relationships is trust, which they established through clear planning of the physical contact that occurred between him and Ashlyn. He provides specific and somewhat graphic examples of how they planned their actions and her acceptance of those specific choices. Even during Jake's description of how they established trust, Ashlyn confirms his account of their experience with an "uh-huh."

Participants suggest that trust is important in the working relationships of rehearsal and performance, which include not only actor-to-actor working relationships, but also actor-director relationships. Several participants describe the necessity for trust between an actor and her director. When Greg describes the ease of actor communication in rehearsal, he connects it to his trust of his director, who is:

“...this person that hopefully you trust, sitting in the director's chair, watching you... that, I mean, hopefully you trust them and there's nobody else sitting there judging you so you're just allowed to...Do what you're doing. Whereas, at times, it's harder to do during a performance because of the whole audience, tech thing, a crew waiting for you to finish.”²⁸⁷

For Greg, trusting his director is a necessary condition to actor communication occurring in rehearsal. Greg trusts his director in that the director observes his work in rehearsal, but is not disinterested or judgmental of his work. He implies that perhaps the other facet of the actor-director relationship is that the director trusts the actor as well. Lucille adds that the actor-director relationship includes mutual trust from both involved parties, “And whether they trust [the director trusts] you also that you will come through...with your

²⁸⁶ Jake and Ashlyn, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

²⁸⁷ Greg, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

part.”²⁸⁸ Lucille suggests that in order for actor communication to occur, not only should an actor trust her director, but also an actor needs to know that her director trusts her to make strong and effective choices in rehearsal.

Participants also suggest that trust must be mutual in both types of relationships. For actor working relationships, mutual trust allows each of them to risk and support each other. In actor-director relationships, the actors must trust their director to make sound decisions and to create a safe working environment, but the director must also demonstrate her trust in her actors’ abilities and creativity in order for the actor to feel comfortable in their working relationship.²⁸⁹

Several participants note that their inability to trust their partner impacts their ability to engage in actor communication.²⁹⁰ For some participants, they do not trust their acting partner’s ability, preparedness, or commitment to the performance. For others, they do not trust their acting partners as people. Jake describes his experience of distrust interfering with actor communication:

...a lot of times you don't have that trust. If you're working with someone you totally trust that's fine, but there have been actors who didn't have their lines memorized when we were doing dress rehearsals and scenes weren't blocked until the day before the dress rehearsal...And, yeah, I

²⁸⁸ Lucille, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004. Several other participants agree with this perspective. A dynamic of group interviews is that one or two participants may share perspectives or stories of their experiences and other participants will make short agreement statements, such as “yes,” or “true” or “mm-hmm” or “uh-huh.” The flip side of this dynamic is if there is disagreement, participants speak up and let you know that one person’s experience is not representative of their own.

²⁸⁹ Jake also describes the importance of trusting his audience. He is the only participant to discuss trust at the level of the audience. He suggests that he is more trusting of his acting class audiences than production audiences.

²⁹⁰ It should be noted that my use of the term distrust is not merely when trust has not been established in an acting relationship, but rather the instance when trust is lost due to actions of one’s acting partner.

didn't find that thrilling and spontaneous....I found that terrifying and "Oops, I crapped my pants."²⁹¹

Jake describes an experience where he distrusted the process and his acting partner. He notes his lack of trust stemmed from his acting partner's lack of preparedness in basic skills such as line memorization. Jake suggests that the alarm he felt did not contribute to a positive working relationship or connection with his partner. His experience may also suggest that the experience of fear caused him to become guarded, which may also have contributed to a breakdown in actor communication. In a discussion on trust and safety, Lucille describes an experience of distrusting her partner:

So I had to work with this, this individual and first of all, he freaked me out because he would go to some odd place when he would act and I couldn't tell if he was psychotic or if he was... I was worrying about it constantly. I didn't know what this person would do because I knew he would pull something out of his ass on a whim. It was, it was really, really, really uncomfortable.... And yet, I knew inside all of that...mess of an individual, there was something that could be tapped into because you'd have like three seconds and it'd be there and then it's gone.²⁹²

Lucille suggests that there was a breakdown in actor communication because she could not trust or depend on her partner. She notes that she was unsure of his mental stability, his spontaneous or odd acting choices, and his inability to sustain a clear character or connection with her. She notes that the experience left her uncomfortable and worried, which may suggest that her negative response had an impact on her ability or willingness to connect with her acting partner.

²⁹¹ Jake, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

²⁹² Lucille, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

Confidence in Performance. Another necessary condition that helps establish actor communication is an actor's confidence in her own abilities as well as in her partner's and even in the production as a whole. Participants suggest that if there is a lack of confidence in any of these areas, actor communication may not occur. Leon describes her experience of confidence in performance:

I describe it as, you know when you've done the counting game before a show and... I love that game. And you're up to like 153 and you think you're the coolest people in the world. It was totally like being in the counting game for the entire show. Because we had all of these lines and all of these movement things that were just completely dependent on five other people also knowing their shit and not getting in the way of your shit. So you totally, um...(laughter) like, once we got into the show, um, yeah, like, if someone dropped their line, you know, I'm sure stuff like that happened, but somebody else was already right there to pick it up or to get where the other person was supposed to be or whatever. We just covered each other so well without really knowing we were doing it was just because we had all such a connection for so long and had gotten to know each other as a unit so well that we were really functioning as one character. It was super cool.²⁹³

Leon compares her experience of confidence in performance to a very successful round of an acting exercise known as the counting game.²⁹⁴ For Leon, confidence in performance includes her work as well as that of her partners, which expands to confidence in the overall performance of the show. She suggests that when all actors feel confident in their capabilities from dialogue, movements, and interactions, actor communication feels effortless. Leon notes that her confidence in performance comes from developing a strong working relationship over time. Eva, Jake and Ashlyn also note

²⁹³ Leon, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

²⁹⁴ The counting game is a basic improvisation exercise. Actors stand in a circle and the group must count as high as they possibly can (usually to around 20). However, there are a few rules: only one number at a time, one actor at a time, and in random order. If two actors say a number at the same time, the group starts over. The goal of the exercise is to get actors to listen and look at the other actors in the exercise with the hopes that they will give each other the same focus onstage.

that a trusting working relationship with one's director also elicits confidence in performance.²⁹⁵ Jake describes his experience of confidence in performance as the point where he trusts himself as an actor:

There's a freedom in being uninhibited and then a trust not only with the other actor, but with yourself. Like it's also when you finally trust yourself as an actor and you're not like, "I wonder if this gesture looks inappropriate" or "I wonder if they're going to say 'oh, Jake always uses that" or... You know, you just l...this is going to sound cliché, you just live it without worries of portraying something, that you're just living something....I think it has to be nurtured out of character development and like analysis, too. And no actor communication is going to be achieved because there's a beautiful stage picture created and "Wow, that cross left was just really, you know..."²⁹⁶

For Jake, having confidence in lines, gesture, movement, and character allows him to trust both his acting partner and himself so that he can then connect with his partner. Jake suggests that confidence in performance may arise from a director who helps an actor understand who they are portraying and the choices they are making as that character rather than from a director who is more concerned with production value externals, such as stage picture. Jake notes how important having adequate rehearsal time plays in building a level of confidence:

It sucks in educational settings because a lot of times things are crammed in and it's like, "Okay, well, we were supposed to spend 3 weeks on this scene, but we only have a week. So, you know, I know it's not going to be the best, but let's go with our scripts in hand." And like, to do something that's noteworthy, you have to have your lines so ingrained that you're not thinking about lines, you're worrying about cues, you're not worrying about anything else and you're just focused on the person and I rarely have the time in a rehearsal process to get to that level of line memorization and line familiarity that you can listen to what the other person's saying rather than think what's your next line. So it's disappointing. Yeah, but listening, it's key.

²⁹⁵ Eva, Jake, and Ashlyn, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

²⁹⁶ Jake, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

Jake suggests that lack of time and preparation lead him to feeling unfocused, worrying about lines and cues instead of his partner. Jake notes that in order for actor communication to occur, he has to be able to give his focus to his partner and when he could not give his focus to his partner, the experience let him down as an actor. Jake notes that when he is prepared and confident he can listen, which he feels is key to actor communication.

Knowing a Person. Acting requires that actors function on multiple levels: as a person, as an actor, and as a character. In order for trust to exist in working relationships among actors (and their directors), participants suggest that an actor must know an acting partner outside of rehearsal or out of character in order to develop a trusting working relationship. In Ashlyn's experience of actor connection in *Show D*, she describes the need to know a person as a condition of actor communication:

Like, the people - and I didn't know anybody - and the people in the cast basically forced me to come out with them. And if they wouldn't have done that, I would have been a basket case at the end of that show. Like, I didn't know any of them and it was, I mean...I needed to know that they were okay with me and that I was okay with them as people to let some of those things happen.... And not just, not just the, the person who was hitting me, like everyone. You can't, that's, subject matter like that, you can't...²⁹⁷

Ashlyn suggests that getting to know her cast mates was an essential condition to the connection between actors onstage. She notes that, due to the heavy nature of the performance, knowing the other actors she worked with helped her understand that the characters' actions or attitudes toward her onstage were not the same as her cast mates

²⁹⁷ Ashlyn, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

perception of her offstage. Thadeus echoes the importance of knowing a person and notes the lack of getting to know cast mates in his experience:

As actors we don't communicate enough, I believe, offstage. You know, like...It's sad that, you know, like, you can be here for four years and no one really knows anything about you, you know? They know that oh, you know? They know your race or you know, like you, your jokes or that you fought a lot or whatever...But they don't really know you, right?²⁹⁸

Thadeus describes the importance of knowing a person offstage and also his disappointment at the lack of the condition in his experiences. He suggests that his cast mates may know his demographic information and perhaps a biographical item or two about him, but they do not know him as a person or a performer. Participants explore the condition of knowing a person, fleshing out what it is to know a person:

Greg: ...but I think it's really important that...and it's not even in a, I, you know, "I don't even know where this person's from. I don't know if they have siblings. You know, I don't know where they're going to be in ten years," but I know them in a performance way. That there are some experiences like a class that some of us have participated in or a show that came out of that that, you know, I, factually, I can't answer questions about them. But when I'm onstage I trust them within a couple inches of my wellbeing. I know if I dove off the back of a platform that someone would be there, whether we planned it or not because that's how I know them. I know them in a...

Lucille: You know who they are not what they are.

Greg: They do this.... what they are not who they are.

Lucille: Yeah, okay.

Thadeus: That's...

Greg: That I think knowing "what a person is" is more important than knowing "who they are." I could read your biography, but it's not going to help me perform with you.²⁹⁹

Greg describes the necessary condition of knowing a person is not learning who a person

²⁹⁸ Thadeus, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

²⁹⁹ Greg, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004. From this point on in the interviews, "knowing a person in a performance way" becomes a commonly agreed upon phrase in their experiences of actor communication.

is, but rather learning who a person is in a particular context, that of performance. He echoes Thadeus' perspective of the unimportance of biographical information in knowing a person. Greg suggests that knowing a person in a performance way is more important than knowing who they are. He goes on to suggest that if an actor knows her partner in a performance way, then the condition of trust has been established between actors.

While knowing a person is a necessary condition to actor communication, participants suggest that there is a limit to how well an actor can know her partner in order for actor communication to occur. Lucille describes her experience and perspectives of the limits of knowing a person:

I know him, but I don't at the same time. I mean, there's a point where if I know somebody too well, it's hard to act with them and if you don't know them at all, it's hard to act with them. Sometimes, it's a good combination and I almost don't want to get to know my partner any more than I do. I know enough about his background and I know enough about what he's comfortable with, just as an actor and a human being, to feel comfortable around him and know how far to push things and how far not to push things. Where I trust him enough to know that he won't laugh at me if I try this or if we both go, "That was really crappy" or "Hey, can I try this?"³⁰⁰

For Lucille, in order for actor communication to occur, she needs to know her acting partner, but only to a point. Lucille notes that it is important for her to know enough about her acting partner's limits so that she understands the limits of the emotional, physical, or psychological space she can work in with her partner. She also notes that she prefers not knowing her partner too well. She suggests that the lack of shared personal knowledge of each other allows Lucille to take risks with her scene partner in rehearsal without judgment of who she is as a person.

Abigail describes how knowing a person too well interferes with actor

³⁰⁰ Lucille, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, September 30, 2004.

communication:

Well, I just think it might make it difficult even though you're playing characters who are familiar with each other. If you're doing that with someone who knows the darkest parts of your existence and...all this stuff about you... It's just for some reason, it works the opposite way that it should and I'm not exactly sure why....Because one thing is real and one thing is completely not and...³⁰¹

Abigail describes actor communication failure that was due to having too close of a relationship with her acting partner offstage. She suggests that working with someone who knows an actor too well may interfere with the close onstage relationship. She notes that the offstage relationship is real and the onstage relationship is not, but due to the offstage personal history between actors, an actor may block actor communication. Abigail suggests that her rationale for blocking actor communication is that her acting partner knew too many intimate details about her, which may suggest that the offstage relationship may have created a feeling of vulnerability in Abigail. Participants' experiences may suggest that while knowing a person is a necessary condition for actor communication, there is also a need to limit knowing a person offstage and perhaps a need to balance that with "knowing a person in a performance way."

Commitment. Participants suggest that an actor's commitment to the role, performance or production is a necessary condition that helps to elicit actor communication. Greg suggests "it's a level of commitment with who you're working with as to whether or not you're going to get there."³⁰² Ashlyn concurs with Greg: "You

³⁰¹ Abigail, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

³⁰² Greg, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

just got to commit.”³⁰³ Greg expands upon commitment, “And it's just how much you commit to your character's communication. That if you're not willing to take what your character does seriously, how can you take anyone else's work seriously?”³⁰⁴ For Greg, an actor’s commitment is a necessary condition that must be in place in order for actor communication to occur. He notes that an actor must commit to his own words and intentions in order to engage with his partner in a serious manner. Jake suggests that commitment from all cast members is necessary to eliciting actor communication:

One person in a cast can ruin an entire show...with their negativity. Like if they make a comment about our scene, like, "Oh God, that scene takes so long," just because they're in a bad mood or in a bad place, I'm self-conscious in that scene every time I do it there on out because I'm like, "Why do they think it's too long? I thought it was fine. I thought we were doing a good job," and so...Right. So it's like...a community effort and if everybody pulls together - I've seen bad scripts turn into good shows and it's because everyone's committed and wants it to succeed. And I've seen bad scripts be bad shows because there were a few people who everyday came and were like, "This is the worst director. This is the worst script. This is the worst experience.”³⁰⁵

Jake describes how the lack of commitment on the part of one cast member may sabotage an entire production. He notes that a negative comment made by an actor will create a sense of insecurity within him while he’s performing, which does not allow him to commit fully to his work. Jake suggests that every cast member needs to commit to the production regardless of style, characters, script, or directorial interpretation in order to create an environment where actor communication or connections between actors can occur. One may infer that the negative comments serve as a means of an “out” for an

³⁰³ Ashlyn, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

³⁰⁴ Greg, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

³⁰⁵ Jake, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

insecure actor – i.e., if an actor voices his distaste for the script, the style, etc., then if the production fails, if he fails, then it is through no fault of the negative cast member as he already stated how awful the production was. However, the negative comments seem to exacerbate disconnection between actors and create an environment not conducive to actor communication.

Greg also considers actor communication to be vital to a good show and an actor's commitment helps create the climate for actor communication to exist:

I think it's [actor communication is] necessary.... I think to have a truly moving show - you can have a show that you're emotionally involved in, you care about intellectually, but I think the performers who just really shake you and make you believe that they're someone else and that, it's putting themselves aside. That they learned, like you said, how being an actor is not about yourself.... That their commitment to the shared reality of the performance was so much greater...³⁰⁶

Greg notes that an actor's commitment to the shared reality of a play (who they are portraying, what they are fighting for, and the world the characters live in) helps to create a production in which actors and audience become emotionally involved. Greg suggests that an element of commitment is the actor putting his own sense of self or ego aside during the rehearsal or performance.³⁰⁷

Concentrating on Partner. Participants suggest that an actor's ability to give her focus to her scene partner is vital to establishing actor communication. Lucille suggests that an actor needs to be in the right frame of mind in order to elicit actor communication:

³⁰⁶ Greg, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004. The "you" that Greg is referring to in this narrative is Ashlyn.

³⁰⁷ Greg makes reference to something that was stated earlier by Ashlyn – that acting is not about the actor, but about the bigger picture of the story.

And you're really concentrating and you're in the right mind frame. So often, we've got so much other crap that we're thinking about that we're trying to pay attention, but it's not always that easy. But I think if you're really paying attention to the other person and you really want to get to that spot that you'll find it and go with whatever there is...³⁰⁸

Lucille describes the necessity of an actor's ability to concentrate, specifically to pay attention to her scene partner, in creating actor communication. She notes that actors are subjected to several distractions that may interrupt or obstruct their ability to concentrate. Lucille suggests that if an actor is willing to concentrate and is willing to engage in actor communication, then the phenomenon is more likely to occur. Greg, Abigail, and Lucille note that the most common cause for an actor breaking concentration is giving focus to the audience. For Lucille, if she can see the audience then she is more likely to break her concentration. She notes that "sometimes it's almost easier to communicate and just forget that they're even there"³⁰⁹ in a larger performance space. She suggests that a larger performance space allows her to give her attention to her scene partner. Abigail notes that her concentration is not broken by seeing the audience, but by hearing the audience:

But, I'm, I actually more so hate hearing an audience when you're in the groove of something and they're like, "Oh girl, no you didn't!"... "You need to leave him."...I don't know sometimes it helps. Most of the time, it just annoys the fuck out of me. I don't know.³¹⁰

Abigail describes her experience of hearing the audience during actor communication as disruptive to her performance. She notes that while an audience member may feel they are helping or connecting with the character, as an actor the interruption in her concentration leaves her feeling annoyed. Greg's experience of audience breaking his

³⁰⁸ Lucille, Group Interview #1 University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Abigail, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

concentration is more an internal response than any external action carried out by the audience members. Greg describes his response:

...it's just this overwhelming negativity that was projected onto...That was projected onto us from them and you almost wanted just to stop and go, "I'm sorry!" and just leave and just go onto the next show because...you could tell that they hated you so much and it completely ruins the ability to work (laughter) with another performer 'cause you look at them and instead of seeing "I'm my character. You're your character we're talking"....³¹¹

Greg suggests that a perception of a negative response from the audience contributes to the breakdown of an actor's concentration on his partner. He describes sensing a hatred coming from the audience towards the actors so palpable that it draws his attention away from his scene partner. His internal response to the audience pulls him out of the shared reality of the play, to the point where he no longer sees his acting partner as a character.

Pressure. Another necessary condition in order for actor communication to occur is pressure. However, the condition of pressure is not identical for all participants. For participants such as Greg, it is the lack of pressure that creates a climate conducive to actor communication. Greg suggests that the lack of pressure in rehearsal helps actor communication:

...there's no pressure in a rehearsal to really...to really deliver...So, that and I think that lack of expectation makes it easier because you're just, you're doing what you know to do, in the most comfortable way you can do it...³¹²

³¹¹ Greg, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

³¹² Ibid.

Greg describes rehearsal as a climate where there is a lack of expectation, in fact, the atmosphere is one of competence and comfort and he suggests that the lack of pressure contributes to actor communication. Other participants, however, suggest that the exact opposite is required for actor communication. Abigail describes her need for pressure in order to experience actor communication:

I know that it makes a difference when you're in a rehearsal and you're there 'cause you have to practice it and then when you're put on the spot and there's that pressure to perform in front of a class then it happens. That's more so the case for me than "We had this moment in rehearsal, now we're going to have it in class." It seems to always be when it's under pressure to get it.³¹³

For Abigail, the pressure of an audience and of achievement in performance is what helps facilitate the occurrence of actor communication.

Lack of Restraint: Willing to Let Go. Participants suggest that an actor's willingness to try is essential to establishing actor communication. Unrestrained may be described in several ways: letting go of self, letting go of self-consciousness, willing to let go, or willing to try. Abigail describes giving in as a necessary condition:

Well, um, if you've seen them perform before and they can't make words seem like they're their own or they completely don't make an effort to understand what's coming out of their mouth then like it's, it becomes painfully obvious and it's kind of sad that they shouldn't be there. And that's an awful thing to say, but if a person can't give into the, the stuff that's there in the writing. Sometimes a writer gives you so much that you can't help but go with it, if you just give into it and some people are incapable of doing that. And if you see them, time after time, do the same thing and make the same mistake and stop at the same wall then they

³¹³ Abigail, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

aren't going to be a person who's willing to take that journey with you and communicate with you and give you something meaningful in return.³¹⁴

Abigail describes the importance of giving in to the writing or the process. She suggests that “giving in” is more about giving in to one’s partner or giving focus to one’s partner. She implies that an actor gives something up to her acting partner in order to receive something meaningful in return from her partner.

Leon also describes letting go of the material as a means to actor communication:

Yeah, (laughter) that was really cool. Well...I stopped concentrating on the lines and blocking and that sort of stuff and I was just sort of going and then it was especially evident in the improv as well and then once we went from improv back to the scene, it was that same sort of, you're just going and you're very natural and everything is just sort of coming out of you the way you would like as opposed to, "This is my line and I'm supposed to say it to you now."³¹⁵

Leon notes that once she stopped focusing on her own work, remembering the lines or the blocking, actor communication occurred. She notes that rehearsal techniques such as improv helped her to let go and she found herself “just going” with natural responses to her acting partners. She suggests that an actor must let go of self-consciousness, worrying about executing the technical aspects of acting, in order for actor communication to happen.

Greg describes his experience of letting go something he becomes aware of during actor communication:

I mean, there's a lot of work to be comfortable with the material to the point where you can allow that to happen. And I think that you have to allow that to happen. If you are constantly aware of yourself onstage,

³¹⁴ Abigail, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

³¹⁵ Leon, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, October 3, 2004.

you're probably going to prevent being able to sneak into moments like that. That it's a combination of being prepared and willing to let go.³¹⁶

Greg describes letting go as a combination of being comfortable with the lines, blocking, and material and of making the choice to allow actor communication to happen. He notes that an actor must be willing to let go of his sense of self-importance or self-consciousness. Twice Greg stresses the importance of allowing actor communication to happen, which may suggest that for Greg, allowing actor communication to occur is a choice rather than mere circumstance. He implies that once an actor is comfortable with the material and consequently, with his character choices, an actor may be willing or able to give his focus to his partner. Greg also implies that an actor makes a conscious choice as to where he places his focus, and perhaps out of this conscious choice to focus on one's partner, actor communication arises. Greg suggests that other necessary conditions play a part in an actor's willingness to let go: "Um, okay, I think, I don't know, because my personal relationship with some performers - and not my personal relationship - but that the fact that I trust them and I'm willing."³¹⁷ He suggests that trusting his partner is separate from his willingness to let go and take risks in rehearsal and performance, but that trust and willingness work in tandem in actor communication.

Ashlyn describes having an open attitude as a contributing factor to actor communication:

Like we met three weeks before, um, it was even due and just worked through the script a lot and we were really, really uninhibited. We were like, "we're going...", we knew how this certain professor wanted it done

³¹⁶ Greg, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, September 30, 2004.

³¹⁷ Greg, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

and so we were just going to be totally, you know...Balls to the wall. It's what we were going to do.³¹⁸

Ashlyn describes the shared lack of restraint between her and Jake during their shared experience of actor communication. Since they knew the expectations of their acting professor, she suggests that holding back would not have been conducive to meeting his expectations. Considering the expectations, Ashlyn suggests that she and Jake decided prior to working rehearsals that they needed to be uninhibited towards each other and their acting choices. She suggests that the conscious choice of adopting a willing, “balls to the wall” attitude contributed to their experience of actor communication. Jake also suggests that their willing attitude contributed to their experience of actor communication: “...but we didn't have our guard up and we had just a total willingness to throw ourselves into it and not to feel stupid.”³¹⁹ Jake notes that having a willingness to risk, making bold choices, lessens one’s self-consciousness. Jake describes the experience in terms of “we,” that it was a choice and an experience shared by both him and Ashlyn, which may also suggest that because of their mutual willing attitude, his focus turned away from himself and turned towards his partner. Abigail echoes the contribution that a willing attitude can play towards making actor communication happen: “And so I feel like I'm definitely one of those people who's open to exposing emotion and connections and letting my self slip away and letting something else inhabit me.”³²⁰ Abigail suggests that the connections that she makes with other actors are dependent on her willingness to be open, to connect, and to let go of her sense of self.

³¹⁸ Ashlyn, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

³¹⁹ Jake, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

³²⁰ Abigail, Individual Interview #1, University of Missouri, October 7, 2004.

All of which have a strong impact on her experiences and the frequency of her experiences of actor communication. Greg expands on the condition of letting go of one's sense of self: "You need to get rid of you before I'm going to see anybody else onstage."³²¹ Greg notes that an actor must let go of his sense of self in order to engage in actor communication with his scene partner. Greg goes further to suggest that until an actor lets go of ego, her scene partners cannot engage in actor communication with her since they only see the actor not the character. Greg's description raises the idea of a blurring of reality as another possible condition of actor communication: seeing an acting partner as the character.³²²

The eight necessary conditions described by the participants help to elicit actor communication. Participants suggest that in order for actor communication to occur there must be at least two people, trust, confidence in performance, knowledge of one's partner as both person and performer, commitment, concentration on partner, a presence or absence of pressure, and a willingness to let go of one's self or inhibitions. While participants describe eight necessary conditions that help to elicit actor communication, they also describe obstacles that interfere with actor communication.

Major Obstacles

Actors block actor communication. Participants suggest that significant obstacles, elements that interfered with or obstructed actor communication, arose from the absence

³²¹ Greg, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004. Greg's description also may imply that the negative response to a self-focused actor may contribute to the obstruction or breakdown of actor communication – it may be difficult to overcome in order to have a constructive working relationship.

³²² While Greg raises the potential for blurring as a necessary condition, there was not enough support in the narratives of the participants to support blurring as a necessary condition that must be present for actor communication.

of certain necessary conditions. When conditions are absent, participants note that actors put up walls or block out connecting with their acting partner. Actors may put up walls in two contexts: self-focused partners and offstage relationships with partners.

Participants also suggest that there are actors who, due to their own personal wall or block, are simply not capable of engaging in actor communication at all.

Greg explores the self-focused partner in reference to Lucille's experience of working with a "crazy" acting partner. He describes a self-focused partner as an actor who has "the mindset of, "I'm going to do anything I want. It's going to be fantastic and it's their problem if they don't keep up."³²³ Greg suggests that Lucille's partner's behavior was more selfish than psychotic, but nonetheless, it was not an attempt to connect with Lucille. Greg continues: "...if you're dealing with somebody who will do that...even if they do something slightly weird, it's going to be super weird."³²⁴ Greg suggests that since Lucille's acting partner's selfish behavior already inhibited an inclusive and safe working relationship, any choices he made after losing her trust may have been exacerbated by the context of the situation.

Jake describes his experience of working with a self-focused actor and how it contributed to the breakdown of actor communication:

...there 's those people who are just going to go off and leave you....That person would leave me...and I was always like, "What is happening?" because I never knew and they weren't dictated by the script...I think the choices, they made logical choices...that fit with it and sometimes they're not safe choices and sometimes they're not the easy choices, but they still need to be choices that have some kind of a bearing and the actors who just do things because they're like "I'm going to do something big to get

³²³ Greg, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

³²⁴ Ibid.

noticed here!" It's hard to stay in the moment with them...unless, because anyone in real life would just be like, "What are you doing?"³²⁵

Jake describes an acting partner who made choices not in relation to the text or to Jake's character, but rather out of a drive to glean personal attention from the audience. He describes feeling abandoned by his acting partner. Jake suggests that the exclusion he felt from his acting partner made him hesitant to connect with his partner. His experience also suggests that the self-focused actor is not attempting to connect with his scene partner either. Greg describes self-focused actors as "[they] no longer care about my process.... people who don't, who actively dis-communicate have no desire...to communicate with another performer."³²⁶ He goes on to describe his own response to a self-focused actor:

I have a personally reserved armchair past the orbit of Jupiter that I go during shows when I'm obviously not communicating with anyone....when I've gotten to that point I care so little that I completely disengage and unfortunate for them [scene partner], but they're the reason that I'm out there [in the armchair past Jupiter].

Greg notes that when he works with a self-focused actor he disengages with his partner and the performance. Greg suggests that he stops caring when he realizes that his acting partner will not connect with him. Disengagement may be interpreted as a form of a defense mechanism that an actor may employ to prevent anxiety arising from a negative or traumatic situation.³²⁷ Rather than engage in a negative situation, Greg notes that he

³²⁵ Jake, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

³²⁶ Greg, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

³²⁷ Defense mechanisms are generally helpful and healthy means of protecting one's self from perceived threats or trauma. They function by either distorting or blocking out the threat and thereby decreasing the mental tension or anxiety felt by a person in a situation. While defense mechanisms can function on an unconscious level, Greg's use appears to be a conscious choice. See Anna Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence*, trans. Cecil Baines (New York: International Universities Press, 1946).

dissociates from the situation and his partner by going to his “armchair past Jupiter,” suggesting that he goes mentally as far away from the situation as possible in order to continue with the performance.

Abigail describes how the offstage relationship between partners may cause a breakdown in actor communication:

I've done scenes with really close friends when we're supposed to be having these intense moments, like, "Oh, I'm going to slit your throat" or "Oh, I'm breaking up with you and we're going to get divorced" and it just, I never felt like it worked...and it wasn't because of my friend. It was because of me...and because of all this stuff that had been in our friendship past. It just got in the way for me and I wasn't willing to take that journey. I put up a block and I'm sorry. I'm sorry.³²⁸

Abigail describes her inability to connect with her acting partner due to their close offstage relationship and shared personal history. She notes that the offstage relationship and her feelings toward that relationship interfered with her ability to commit to the onstage connection or emotional intensity required of that connection. Abigail suggests that her thoughts or feelings about their offstage relationship caused her to block any sort of actor communication. Abigail's choice to block actor communication may suggest that there is a lack of trust in her offstage relationship with her acting partner. Abigail's unwillingness to engage in actor communication may also suggest that she became self-conscious due to their prior relationship: the status of their offstage relationship, shared experiences or feelings, etc. In this particular instance, Abigail takes full responsibility for the breakdown in actor communication, which may suggest that actors can choose to engage in actor communication and consequently, they are aware when it happens and

³²⁸ Abigail, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

when it does not.³²⁹ In a later interview, Abigail explores her understanding of blocking actor communication with a close friend:

...it's the part of me that shuts down when I know someone too well and we've been through too much together and so being onstage and pretending that we're something else doesn't make sense to me, to my heart or my mind.³³⁰

Abigail suggests that there is a part of her that cannot reconcile the history and shared experiences of her real offstage relationship with her acting partner and the fictional history of the onstage relationship and consequently, she shuts down and shuts out her acting partner.

Thadeus suggests that some actors, regardless of context, are unable to connect:

I think that, um, some people, like, I've discovered are, I don't [think] they're, um, capable of connecting. I don't know if it's, um... Yeah. Yeah, I don't know if it's...like a personality flaw or whatever, but like...it needs to, I, I...but I, I just don't think some people can, and, and, like, they're, you know, they're the type of people, like, like, that'll leave you hanging, like throw up onstage or stage, you know, a fall or something like that. That's like...And you just... Yes, and I mean, not, not anybody in particular either, but it's just like... You wonder sometimes if an actor, like, this, for someone who wants to do this for the rest of their life, you know, you're going to have to connect at some time.³³¹

Thadeus suggests that an actor's inability to connect may come from a flaw in their personality. He notes that actors who are incapable of connecting may not respond or acknowledge their acting partner, may not be capable of controlling their stage fright, or may engage in acting choices that do not fit the context of the play. Thadeus suggests

³²⁹ Abigail apologized directly to one of the participants in the group interview, which I feel took a lot of personal courage not only to apologize to her friend and acting partner, but also to accept responsibility for the breakdown in front of her peers.

³³⁰ Abigail, Individual Interview #1, University of Missouri, October 7, 2004.

³³¹ Thadeus, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

that an actor will have to connect with another actor if they want to sustain an acting career.

Greg describes acting partners who consistently block actor communication:

...people who've got the walls up, who won't let you in will also not let themselves out....That, you know, that not, not to be trite, but walls work both ways. Um, if, if they're not willing to give anything back... and I think you can tell that in, in meeting someone. You know, people who are always hyper self-aware. They know how funny they are, they know how cool they look or they know how awesome it must be to meet them...³³²

Greg describes the function of walls in that they keep an acting partner out and they keep the actor in, which creates a breakdown in actor communication. He describes an actor's walls as unwillingness to receive or to give anything back to his partner. He also suggests that the breakdown in communication exists from the beginning of the working relationship, due to the personality of an acting partner. Greg suggests that, in his experience, a self-focused actor will not engage in actor communication.³³³

Audience as Obstacle. Participants also suggest that the audience may interfere with the process of actor communication, which may cause actors to lose focus or to block out the audience or their acting partners. Some actors describe audience actions such as talking or eating during a performance that interrupt actor communication. Other participants describe their perception of the audience as a barrier to actor communication.

³³² Greg, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

³³³ Lacan, Freud and many others in the psychoanalytic and psychological fields would call this sort of personality a "narcissist". We, in the theatre, might call this sort of personality an "actor". Jokes aside, a narcissist may be quite social, but does not form social bonds with other people. A narcissist may also have a hyper-awareness or belief in the superiority of himself over others, i.e., how funny they are, how cool they look, how awesome it must be to meet them.

Greg describes his response to audience interrupting actor communication: “Then you hear somebody talking through the 4th wall and you're like, ‘Can they turn down the ...oh wait, audience!’”³³⁴ What Greg describes is being pulled out of actor communication because an audience member started talking loud enough for the actors to hear. Greg suggests that at first, he is still focused in the world of the play and his acting partner and then realizes that the sound was coming from the audience. He suggests that once the audience has drawn his attention, actor communication stops. Abigail and Greg describe audience actions in terms of a demand for attention:

...the audience will not be ignored. Like you can go in that bubble, but they're not going to let you stay there because they're going to shuffle, they're going to cough. They're just going to breathe and all of a sudden, you will snap back to where you are. That's why I believe it's impossible for a whole show, even if you really really want to. They won't let you because they're there! They are a force with which to be reckoned. They paid money.

Greg: They don't take being ignored lightly.

Abigail: No, they will talk to you. They will, you know. If it sucks, they'll tell you. They'll...

Greg: Or they'll walk out during your many intermissions.³³⁵

Abigail suggests that audiences demand that the actors pay attention to them through actions such as coughing, shuffling, even breathing. She suggests that actors cannot remain engaged in actor communication for any great length of time because the audience will not allow actors to keep all of their focus away from the audience for an entire performance. Abigail describes the audience as a force with which to be reckoned and that their power arises from their status as consumers: they have paid and they have expectations. Abigail and Greg describe different ways in which an audience will let

³³⁴ Greg, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

³³⁵ Abigail and Greg, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

actors know they are being ignored: audience may talk to the actors, audience may begin to heckle the actors, or the audience may leave the theatre. What Abigail and Greg suggest is that from the actor's perspective, the audience is aware of the power they hold over actors. While it is not clear that the audience understands their power, Abigail and Greg suggest that the audience is quite powerful within the minds of the actors and has the ability to pull an actor's focus away from his partner and consequently, disrupt actor communication. Jake describes audience actions in terms of size of theatre and audience accountability:

...because they are so close that people aren't going to open candy wrappers on the front row....And people aren't going to be like, "What did he just say?" and...They don't know you, they know you can hear them if you're on the front row of the Corner Playhouse [studio theatre]. They don't understand that you can hear them in the Rhynsburger [proscenium theatre]...and the audience can constantly prevent that actor communication and take you out of the moment.³³⁶

Jake suggests that an audience is more accountable in a smaller space, in that they understand that the actors can hear them, so the audience does not speak or open candy during the performance, which allows for an actor to engage with his partner. Jake notes that audiences in larger spaces, however, do engage in disruptive behaviors, because they do not understand that the actors can hear them. He suggests that to some extent audience behavior and their ability to disrupt actor communication is determined by the space. Jake also suggests that the audience is a force that can inhibit actor communication and can pull an actor's focus away from both his partner and the play.

³³⁶ Jake, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

Participants also suggest that the actor's perception of an audience has the capacity to disrupt or prevent actor communication. Greg describes his perception of an audience in a particular production that lacked actor communication:

I have had completely dead nights in the Corner Playhouse where you can clearly, it's almost like it glows out of their eyes, "I hate you. Finish this show." ... Where I have come out to a silent audience... You know, very farcey sort of comedy thing that there's nothing about it that can be taken seriously and it's just this overwhelming negativity that was projected onto... That was projected onto us from them and you almost wanted just to stop and go, "I'm sorry!" and just leave and just go onto the next show because... you could tell that they hated you so much and it completely ruins the ability to work with another performer..."³³⁷

Greg describes "dead night" performances where he felt a palpable negative energy coming from the audience, which emanated from their eyes. His perception of the audience's energy is distinctly hateful towards the actors. For Greg, the overwhelming sense of negativity made him feel like apologizing to the audience and giving up on the performance. Greg suggests that such perceived negative energy from the audience ruins an actor's ability to engage in actor communication with his partner.

Variable Conditions

Participants describe several variable conditions that may or may not have an impact on actor communication on any given day of rehearsal or performance. Variable conditions are not necessarily prevalent amongst all the participants, but are noted to have had an impact on their experiences of actor communication. Leon describes some of the variable factors that may or may not impact actor communication:

³³⁷ Greg, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004. The term "dead night" usually refers to either an unresponsive audience or to a lackluster performance.

I think like we were talking last time with a whole bunch of different factors coming in. Sometimes it does have a lot to do with the script and the director and these other things, the rehearsal period, and you just can't quite get to that point and that's okay.³³⁸

Leon suggests there are a variety of factors that may play a part in establishing or preventing actor communication. Some of the most prevalent variable conditions among the participants for actor communication are: actor's professional development, daily life, directorial style, length of rehearsal, script/style of the show, and audience proximity/size of the theatre.

Actor's professional development. Leon suggests that where an actor is in her professional development impacts actor communication:

They've never done this before. They don't know that when the energy starts happening, you're supposed to let it flow." Yeah, I was really unhappy with some of them. And some of them I grew to like as the class went on...(lost words) and some of them kind of stayed that way the rest of the semester and didn't want to open themselves up to things happening naturally. They're interesting people. (laughter) I think they'll be better off in modeling perhaps than in theatre. (laughter)...No, it was just very frustrating, but I made myself realize that we weren't all in the same place as actors and then it made a lot more sense.³³⁹

Leon describes an experience where actor communication did not occur due to the differences in development of each actor. Leon suggests that her classmates were new to the experience and did not understand how to react to actor communication. She notes that she found herself unhappy and frustrated with some of her classmates; however, once she put things in a perspective of actor experience, their reactions were more understandable.

³³⁸ Leon, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

³³⁹ Leon, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, October 3, 2004.

Daily life. The daily life of an actor impacts the work that she carries out onstage and in particular her ability to connect with her acting partner. As Lucille notes, “There are things that happen in daily life that affect what your mindset would be trying to do that.”³⁴⁰ Jake describes how elements of daily life can impact an actor’s work:

You get worn down. Like this semester, and I took it on myself because I wanted an intensive experience, but there's was a day when I was working on four characters in one day and I did all of them okay and I didn't do any of them great and it's because I was pulled in a bunch of different directions and you can't really focus on four different things at one time.³⁴¹

Jake describes his experience of how everyday rehearsal work of an actor can wear away at an actor’s ability to focus. He notes that taking on too many projects inhibited his ability to do work beyond an acceptable level, which may suggest that Jake was focused on basic character work and could not engage with his acting partners.

Directorial Style. The style of a director, how he/she interacts with actors, may have an impact on actor communication. For some participants, an experimental style that allows for an actor’s creative freedom is conducive to actor communication. Whereas for other participants, an autocratic style may ensure the confidence needed to engage in actor communication. For Leon, an experimental approach is more conducive to her and her acting partner to connect with each other:

I think a lot of it, whether or not it comes up in rehearsal, depends on director style, for me. Because I've worked with some of those directors who say, "You will move here on this line," and you spend all of your rehearsal fixing things and being choppy. Whereas I have had other

³⁴⁰ Lucille, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

³⁴¹ Jake, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

directors who are like, "Play with this. Try it that way." I, one example that I absolutely love, I had a director during show X, while I was playing a character that happens to be a fairy...And someone else was playing a character that happens to be a king and said, "Read it as Beavis and Butthead" and we went and it was hilarious and we found all of these new things to play with. Then it was "Read it as lovers" and we find, we just kept finding these new things that we never would have found in doing it as a show if we hadn't had a director nurture that in rehearsal.³⁴²

Leon suggests that an experimental style allows actors to discover new ways of connecting with their scene partners. She notes that when an autocratic director dictates acting choices, the actors' work is comprised of correcting those choices and feels choppy. Leon describes improv-oriented approaches that the director used to help the actors make their own discoveries about their characters. She notes that when a director allows for experimentation, the actors' work is nurtured. Thadeus echoes Leon's perspective of the autocratic director: "I don't feel free, I don't feel free when I'm given everything because...I feel like, I feel like that's taking away me. What's the point? You could get anybody and tell them exactly what to do."³⁴³ Thadeus describes an autocratic directing style as one that removes him, what is uniquely him, from the process. For Thadeus, when a director negates actors' artistic choices then he feels that he has no creative freedom, which may suggest that an actor who feels stifled may disengage from the process and his acting partner.

Greg, on the other hand, notes that an autocratic style allows him to connect with his partner: "actually the show that most clearly for me was full of those true

³⁴² Leon, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

³⁴³ Thadeus, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

performance moments was with a director who was very much an autocrat.”³⁴⁴ Eva describes her experience of working with an autocratic director:

I think it goes back into being comfortable in the role. If you have a director that is like a dictator and who wants to choreograph every little movement, wants to help you with your character...And your lines...Well, it might not be a fun process, but it, it might, it will get you to a level where you're so sure of what you need to do and what you're not supposed to do, but you know, that and it's freeing almost.³⁴⁵

Eva suggests that, for her, an autocratic style builds her confidence and is in its own way freeing. She notes that a director who dictates every move or line may not make an enjoyable process, but the result is a high level of confidence in her performance, which, as discussed in *Confidence in Performance*, frees an actor up to connect with her scene partner.

Length of Rehearsal. Participants suggest that the length of rehearsal has an impact on actor communication. Leon suggests that a longer rehearsal period is conducive to actor communication:

I've worked on some shows of the ritual theatre type nature that are very organic and had a much longer rehearsal period than other shows. And so by the time you get into it, everybody's so in the zone all the time...³⁴⁶

Leon describes the importance of a longer rehearsal period for some styles of theatre. She notes that the longer rehearsal period allowed for actor communication to occur for a

³⁴⁴ Greg, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

³⁴⁵ Eva, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004. During the portion of the interview concerning director styles, it became clear that participants were split in their perspectives. Leon noted during the interview: “It sounds to me like maybe the group is splitting in half with those of us that are product oriented and those of us who are process oriented,” to which the participants agreed to disagree in their approaches.

³⁴⁶ Leon, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

longer amount of time and prior to performances. Eva also suggests that a longer rehearsal period is conducive to actor communication: “Well, and, once you rehearse for a longer period of time and you become comfortable with the lines, it's easier to let yourself go.”³⁴⁷ For Eva, a longer rehearsal period allows an actor to let go of self-consciousness, which may inhibit actor communication.

Script/Style of the show. Some participants suggest that the script or the style of a production may impact actor communication. In the previous section, Leon describes an experience of ritual theatre, a style that, from her perspective, requires a longer rehearsal period, which may be more conducive to actor communication. Thadeus suggests that a variable condition of actor communication is the script: “It also depends on the script you're doing, too, you know? It has to be kind of meaty.”³⁴⁸ For Thadeus, the script impacts actor communication. He suggests that the script should be interesting and thought-provoking to the actor. Ashlyn describes the script of one of her actor communication experiences as “heavy, heavy material.”³⁴⁹ Both Ashlyn and Thadeus suggest that in order for actor communication to occur, the script must have substance.

Audience Proximity/Size of Theatre. For some participants, where the audience is in proximity to the actors impacts actor communication. Lucille describes an experience of performing in close proximity of the audience:

³⁴⁷ Eva, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

³⁴⁸ Thadeus, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004. Thadeus discusses script in the context of creating the connection of actor communication.

³⁴⁹ Ashlyn, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

Well, this year is the first time I got to work in the Corner and it was really difficult because...Stop it! (laughter)...because the audience is right up on top of you and I was trying so hard not to break character and concentrate on not watching them because they are in light and you can see them and their expressions and they're cracking up at you and you can tell who's cracking up and what they're cracking up at and what they're wearing that day and if they have on cologne or not. Whereas it's difficult to get into a spot with your individual when all of that is happening.³⁵⁰

Lucille describes the feeling of close proximity as the audience being right on top of the actors. She notes that she had difficulty maintaining her focus because not only could she see the audience but their reactions as well. She suggests that the close proximity of the audience makes it difficult to connect with her partner. Leon describes how the physical distance between the audience and the actors can help establish emotional distance:

Um, but on the other hand, like, Show D, um, I felt we actually formed it both places. I felt it was better on the Rhynsburger stage...I did because, well, I think my reasoning was, like, when my mom came and saw the show [Show D] at the Rhynsburger, I told her she was not allowed to sit in the first three rows because she would have started bawling, and like, there was too much emotional connection. Like I felt like to be comfortable in that show, I needed a separation from the audience....And so when we did it at the Rhynsburger, I was more comfortable.³⁵¹

Leon describes a production that moved from a studio space to a larger proscenium space, which created more distance between the audience and the actors. She suggests that actor communication occurred in both spaces, but she felt more comfortable in the larger theatre. She notes that due to the emotional nature of the play and her connection with her mother, Leon's mother was not allowed to sit too close to the stage. Leon notes that as an actor she needed a separation between the audience and the performers. Leon's experience suggests that increasing distance between actors and audience may help actors

³⁵⁰ Lucille, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

³⁵¹ Leon, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

to establish a connection with their acting partners more readily in that they are not as connected to the audience.

Frequency & Sustainability: A Debate

Participants describe actor communication as an infrequent phenomenon, something that occurs in moments or sections, but not for an entire performance.³⁵² Greg describes moments of actor communication that occur “every now and again” or “just a handful” of moments that occur as “flashes of brilliance” or “glimpses.”³⁵³ The frequency of actor communication brought about participant discussions of sustainability of actor communication. Ashlyn describes why she thinks that actor communication only occurs in moments or sections of a show:

Well, I think that one of the reasons that, um, it can't happen. Maybe it can't happen in, like, a huge show because it takes so much energy out of you. Like I don't know if it is physically possible to have that, like, going on in your head for, like, two hours. You know what I mean?... I mean, after you get done, you're just like, "Uhhhh." like you're completely exhausted.³⁵⁴

Ashlyn suggests that actor communication requires a lot of stamina on the part of the actor and that those moments of connecting drain the actor of energy to the point of exhaustion. She questions whether or not it is physically possible for actors to sustain actor communication throughout an entire performance, but she does note that she thinks

³⁵² Each participant describes actor communication in terms of moments or in terms of section vs. whole so footnoting each person and each interview seems redundant. During the interviews, as the researcher, I attempted to keep word choices as neutral as possible with phrases such as “times of actor communication” or “those times.” However, participants used the word “moment” so frequently that I found myself using without being aware of my usage until after the fact.

³⁵³ Greg, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, September 30, 2004.

³⁵⁴ Ashlyn, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

it is possible for “definite chunks.”³⁵⁵ Lucille echoes Ashlyn and describes the physical demand of actor communication as “debilitating.”³⁵⁶ Greg questions the safety of long spans of actor communication: “I’m not even sure that it would be healthy if you could do that....You start thinking of yourself in terms of another human being. I think you would start to drive yourself crazy.” Greg suggests that sustaining actor communication may not be mentally healthy for an actor in that it requires an actor to think as another person for an extended period of time, which may cause mental instability in an actor. Although several participants felt that actor communication is not something that can or perhaps should occur for the entire span of a performance, other participants felt that it is possible, not only possible, but a goal actors should strive towards. Eva and Jake suggest that sustained actor communication is possible. Jake responds to Ashlyn with a simple: “I think it is [possible].”³⁵⁷ Eva notes in response to Greg: “I think you definitely can, depending on the show, depending on the role.”³⁵⁸ Eva suggests that sustained actor communication is possible under specific conditions, not necessarily in every production. As mentioned earlier in *Connection*, Thadeus describes his belief about sustained actor communication: “I think you can and I think that’s the goal and what we should strive for,” suggesting that sustained actor communication is not only possible, but the goal actors should work towards in performance.

³⁵⁵ Ashlyn, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

³⁵⁶ Lucille, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

³⁵⁷ Jake, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

³⁵⁸ Eva, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

Summary of Theme Two: Requirements

The requirements that impact actor communication are experienced by participants as a) conditions that need to be present, b) major obstacles that interfere or prevent actor communication, c) variable conditions that may or may not play a part in actor communication, and d) the frequency with which actor communication is experienced and the potential for sustained actor communication. The particular conditions experienced by participants that impact rehearsal or performance and allow for actor communication to occur are that actor communication requires at least two actors who have a trusting working relationship with each other and their director. A trusting relationship is developed out of how the actors know each other both offstage and in a performance way. Each actor must be committed to her performance and be willing to give her focus to her acting partner in performance or rehearsal, in the freedom of rehearsal or in the high expectations of performance. When actors have confidence in their performance, they can give their focus to their acting partner and let go of personal restraints that may hinder their connection with their partner. Despite participants' discussion of what may seem like obvious elements for establishing a trusting interpersonal relationship, participants neither perceive these elements as predictable nor suggest that actors take them for granted as we so often do in the every day world. Participants describe the major obstacles of actor communication, beyond the absence of necessary conditions, as actors blocking actor communication, or putting up walls, and when the audience acts as an obstacle. Actors may block communication with their acting partners due to a self-focused acting partner, an offstage or prior relationship with a partner, or actors who are incapable of actor communication. The audience may act as

an obstacle to actor communication either through their own actions or because of an actor's perception of the audience. The variable conditions experienced by participants that may influence actor communication are described by participants as actor's professional development, the daily life of an actor, directorial style, length of rehearsal, script or style of a production, and the audience proximity to the actors or the theatre size. Participants describe and debate the frequency and sustainability of actor communication. They describe the ability to experience actor communication as fleeting, occurring in moments or sections of a performance, but debate the feasibility of sustained actor communication throughout an entire performance.

Theme Three: Knowing

The third theme of actor communication is *Knowing*. In the theme of *Knowing*, participants explore different facets of knowledge or knowing actor communication, ranging from when and how participants become aware of actor communication to how they know actor communication is occurring, *Knowing* also examines whether or not participants believe actor communication is a teachable skill. The three sub-themes of *Knowing* are: Awareness of Experience, Feeling as Knowing, and Learnable.

Awareness of Experience

Participants describe their knowledge of actor communication in terms of awareness or unawareness of the experience, of surroundings and of other people. Awareness suggests having knowledge of an experience, realizing an experience is happening, or mindful that it exists because one notices it. Awareness also suggests a

framework of time: either while the experience is occurring or after the experience has passed. Most participants note they are unaware of engaging in actor communication until after the experience has occurred. Greg notes that during actor communication that he is “not really aware of it.”³⁵⁹ Lucille echoes Greg’s perspective: “Yeah, onstage, I don't know what happens.”³⁶⁰ Lucille’s distinction in time suggests that “onstage” is the equivalent of “during actor communication.” She also notes that while the experience is happening, she is largely unaware of what is occurring. Leon describes her experience of actor communication:

Well, when it was actually happening, I'm not sure I was aware of it. It felt very natural, it felt like I actually was the character, not Leon playing the character thinking about what the character is doing. Afterwards is when I actually thought, "Wow! That was super-neato!" which is my response to a lot of things in life, but (laughter). So yeah, while I was actually in the moment, there wasn't much consciousness of "I am communicating as an actor to another actor."³⁶¹

Leon makes a distinction about awareness suggesting that it is conscious knowledge of an experience and notes that during actor communication, she is not consciously aware of the phenomenon. She describes that during actor communication portraying the character and her actions feels natural, as if she is the character. Although Leon suggests that while she is aware of feeling like her character, she is unaware that actor communication is occurring until afterwards. Lucille describes her level of awareness during actor communication: “they are kind of a blur, you don't know. Well, what did I do? I have no

³⁵⁹ Greg, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, September 30, 2004.

³⁶⁰ Lucille, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

³⁶¹ Leon, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, October 3, 2004.

idea what I did that was so good.”³⁶² Lucille notes that she is unaware of her own actions during actor communication. She describes the experience as a blur and notes that she cannot recall acting choices that she made during the phenomenon. Ashlyn echoes Lucille’s experience:

What happens for me and how I know that it's like full actor communication, like you're totally immersed in it is I, like, like, everything, like, it's a blur. It's like I forget what everything, everything that just happened.³⁶³

Ashlyn describes actor communication as a blur and that she also suggests that she cannot recall her actions or what occurred during actor communication. She suggests that her recognition of the blur is how she knows that she experienced actor communication.

Greg relates a similar response to actor communication:

That the director would say, "Good job! And those great things that you did, try to do those again" and we had no idea what she meant because we couldn't actually remember the performance.³⁶⁴

Greg describes his experience of actor communication as unawareness while it occurs. He suggests that although a director may praise his work or acting choices during actor communication, he is not aware of the choices that he made because he cannot recall his performance.

Although participants describe experiencing unawareness during actor communication, Ashlyn notes that she is aware of actor communication when it begins:

³⁶² Lucille, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004. “They” refers to her experiences of actor communication.

³⁶³ Ashlyn, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

³⁶⁴ Greg, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

I always think something to myself like, "Look, it's starting to happen. Oh my gosh, I'm really angry." Like I always do that...and then I just stop and then I just put it all away.³⁶⁵

Ashlyn describes her recognition of the start of actor communication as having a thought to herself acknowledging her emotional response to her partner. She suggests that her recognition occurs each time she experiences actor communication. She notes that once she has the thought, she is able to stop thinking about the experience so that she can experience actor communication. Ashlyn's experience suggests that if actors think too much about what they are experiencing, then they may no longer be able to experience actor communication.

Although participants describe an unawareness of their actions or what happened during actor communication, they describe an awareness afterwards of feelings or responses they had during the experience. Several participants suggest that they become aware of actor communication only after it has occurred. Greg describes his recognition of actor communication: "you won't even be paying attention to it and you'll suddenly realize, 'I haven't been aware of what I've been doing for the past five minutes.'"³⁶⁶ Greg suggests that not until he is "out" of actor communication does he realize that it occurred. He describes his level of awareness during actor communication as "not paying attention," which may suggest that an actor is not *thinking* about what is happening rather he is *experiencing* what is happening. He notes that his recognition of actor communication is a realization of unawareness of his actions, and perhaps, a lack of self-consciousness. Leon describes her recognition of actor communication:

³⁶⁵ Ashlyn, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

³⁶⁶ Greg, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

I don't, I don't know it 'til I leave it. Like, you know, so and then afterwards I'm like, "That was bad-ass" but while I'm in it... Like I think subconsciously I know, but I know if I let myself think about it I'm going to lose it... if I think about it, it's gone. So I just don't try to think about it.³⁶⁷

Leon describes her awareness of actor communication as something that occurs after the phenomenon, suggesting that it can only occur after the fact when an actor has an opportunity to be reflective about her experience. She suggests that she does not know that actor communication occurs until it is over. Leon also suggests that her awareness of actor communication comes from her partner's response: "I know she was always very happy afterwards...she'd always be like, 'Wow, that was really great! We actually did really good!'"³⁶⁸ She suggests that she knew actor communication had occurred through her partner's positive response to their performance not through conscious thought during the performance. Leon suggests that there may be a subconscious awareness of actor communication, but if she were to consciously think about the phenomenon it would stop occurring. She notes that she attempts not to consciously acknowledge or think about actor communication during the experience. Leon's, Ashlyn's and Greg's experiences may suggest that self-consciousness or thinking has a significant impact on actor communication in that thinking about acting choices or actor communication may prevent or stop actor communication.

One concern about the experience of actor communication is how do we know that the phenomenon really happened? How does an actor really know that it occurred? Did it occur for both partners or was it just one actor's perspective on the experience?

³⁶⁷ Leon, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

³⁶⁸ Leon, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, October 3, 2004.

Was it all just in their heads? All participants describe experiences of actor communication; some participants describe shared experiences of actor communication: Jake and Greg, Ashlyn and Jake, Abigail and Ashlyn, Abigail and Scooter, Jake and Scooter. The aforementioned participants described shared experiences of actor communication, and some had discussed their shared experiences prior to the interview; however, Thadeus and Lucille shared an experience of actor communication that went unconfirmed until the first group interview. Thadeus asks Lucille to confirm an actor communication experience; he believes that they shared in rehearsal and performance of a scene:

Thadeus: I wanted to ask a question also....‘Cause, you know, I was just thinking about “Was it as good for you as it was...,” you know....And, um...I’m not going to ask anything weird or anything...

Lucille: That’s fine.

Thadeus: I was, I was, uh, I was wondering, um, in uh, in Class X and we were doing Scene B...

Lucille: Oh...uh-huh.

Thadeus: Did you feel like there was communication?

Lucille: Yeah.

Thadeus: Like, okay, yes!

Lucille: Oh my God, that’s so awesome!

Thadeus: Okay, yes, so here I was thinking that there was...

Lucille: Yes.

Thadeus: And I wonder if she thought that there was...

Lucille: We did it in the lobby and there were people walking by and walking by and walking by and it was ridiculous...

Thadeus: We did it in the lobby one time...

Lucille: Because there were parts where we’d go out and then someone would walk through and I would, didn’t even notice and then we did it in class and yeah, it was really awesome.

Thadeus: Okay, cool.

Lucille: I was excited.

Thadeus: Now that that's in the open.³⁶⁹

Lucille and Thadeus both experienced what they each thought was an interrelational connection, an experience of actor communication, but it was not confirmed for the both of them until they discussed it in the interview. Although their exchange is brief and overlapping, their exchange suggests a confirmation of actor communication. Thadeus suggests relief in knowing that the experience “actually” occurred and was not a misperception on his part. Lucille suggests that their focus was on the two of them and therefore she was not aware of other people or their surroundings.

Participants note that awareness or conscious knowledge of actor communication arises outside of the experience itself, either in a brief thought before it begins or more prevalent, after the phenomenon has occurred. Participants' experiences suggest that conscious thought of actor communication may prevent actor communication from occurring. While awareness of actor communication does not occur during the phenomenon, participants recall experiences or feelings that occurred as confirmable indications of the experience including feeling like the character, feeling like a blur, and not feeling self-conscious. Participants also note outside confirmation from directors or acting partners after the experience as confirmation of the experience.

³⁶⁹ Lucille, Thadeus, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004. Both participants described the same occurrence of actor communication in their initial suitability interviews. I interviewed Lucille first and a few days later I interviewed Thadeus. When he began talking about the same experience during his suitability interview, all the hairs on my arms and the back of my neck stood up. When they brought it up in the interview, the same thing happened.

Feeling as Knowing

Participants describe how they “knew” actor communication primarily through “feeling” the experience either at an emotional/abstract level or a physical level. Several participants’ descriptions include the word “feel” to connote knowledge. Greg describes actor communication as: “There’s no other way it could work. And that feeling of rightness is what comes along with that.”³⁷⁰ He suggests that when actor communication occurs, actors have the sensation of perfection (or near perfection) in their work. Eva describes an experience of actor communication in *Show T*: “I could feel the actor and response from the audience.”³⁷¹ Eva describes actor communication as something she could feel as something emanating from her acting partner and from the audience. Lucille notes: “You can feel it in your gut,” suggesting that actor communication may create either a physical response or a “gut feeling.”³⁷² Greg describes actor communication as producing a physical feeling: “When you step out of it, you kind of know that you’ve been there because physically you have been, the heart racing and all that.”³⁷³ Greg notes that actor communication causes his heart to beat faster and it is through a literal physical feeling that he knows he has experienced actor communication. Abigail describes actor communication as a disconnected feeling:

I know it's happening because I feel like I have stepped out of myself and I'm watching me communicate with someone that isn't the actor that I know, it's just someone else there. So we're both outside of ourselves,

³⁷⁰ Greg, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

³⁷¹ Eva, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

³⁷² Lucille, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, September 30, 2004.

³⁷³ Greg, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, September 30, 2004.

looking at this interaction happening. It's kind what it feels like. It sounds cheesy, but that's what it feels like.³⁷⁴

Abigail suggests that she knows actor communication is occurring when she disconnects from herself and is watching herself as a character interact with another character. She notes that she does not see either person as actors any longer during actor communication. She suggests that the “stepping outside” feeling occurs for both actors. Abigail suggests that the distinctive dissociated feeling is how she knows she is experiencing actor communication. Participants note that there is a feeling they experience with actor communication, and while some descriptions are more explicit than others, their experiences suggest that actors may have an instinctive or emotional response rather than a thought response to actor communication.

Learnable: A Debate

Participants describe actor communication as an experience or skill that may or may not be learnable. Several participants describe actor communication as an innate ability. Abigail describes her perspective on actor communication:

I can never be sure if you can really learn something like actor communication, like learn to communicate or not communicate. It's just kind of, I think it's a natural ability really and that sounds I don't know. That sounds crappy of me to say, but it's just...I just think it's not something that can be taught to somebody because it's not a "learn it" kind of thing. It's just like a "either you feel it or you don't. Either you get it or you don't" and, yeah, that's all.³⁷⁵

At first, Abigail suggests that she is not sure whether or not an actor can learn actor communication. She describes actor communication as a natural ability. While she notes

³⁷⁴ Abigail, Individual Interview #1, University of Missouri, October 7, 2004.

³⁷⁵ Abigail, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

that her perspective may be “crappy,” she does not believe that actor communication is a learnable skill. She suggests that actor communication is something that actors either feel or understand innately. Ashlyn supports Abigail’s perspective:

Abby, I completely agree with what you said that it can't be taught because I feel the same way about acting in general. . . . I don't think that you can teach someone to act. I think that you can, I think that you can learn methods. I think that you can learn ways to improve upon what you already have. I think that you can be coaxed into different directions, but I don't think that you can take someone who doesn't have an innate ability to act in them and teach them to be a brilliant actor. I don't think it's possible. So I completely agree with what you said.³⁷⁶

Ashlyn notes that she agrees with Abigail’s belief and suggests that actor communication is not a teachable skill. She suggests that she does not believe that acting is teachable either. She notes that an actor may learn methods to improve one’s innate abilities, but without the innate ability an acting teacher cannot teach one how to become a capable actor.

In contrast to Ashlyn and Abigail, Greg and Jake describe actor communication as a learnable skill. Greg describes his perspective: “I think that learning actor communication is possible. It's a matter of knowing how it happens and why it occurs and how you do it.”³⁷⁷ He suggests that if an actor understands how and why actor communication happens and also how one engages in actor communication, then it is a learnable skill. Jake expands on actor communication as a learnable skill:

Maybe it can't be taught so much, but it can be gotten out of someone . . . we're all making breakthroughs all the time like, it's not like you just have one day where you communicate and then every performance you do after that is brilliant. . . . You're always making small breakthroughs and each time you just learn to have it more consistently. Like, you might

³⁷⁶ Ashlyn, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

³⁷⁷ Greg, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

have it one out of every five and then it's, you know, it goes up to 50% and then your hoping most of your performances are honest and communicating and so, consistency can be increased in the classroom not necessarily giving someone to be a good human being and communicate with other people.³⁷⁸

Jake describes actor communication in terms of a skill or experience that can be coaxed out of an actor rather than a specific learnable skill. He suggests that actors can achieve actor communication and they can learn how to have it more consistently. He notes that learning how to coax the experience out in the classroom may increase the occurrences in an actor's performance. He also notes that teaching an actor how to achieve actor communication more consistently is teachable, but how to be a decent person and how to communicate with other people is not teachable.

Some participants suggest that actor communication is innate, while others suggest that it can be learned. Participant perspectives are not so different as a first glance might suggest. Regardless of whether or not participants feel actor communication is an innate ability, their perspectives on the teachability of actor communication have similarities. On one side of the debate, Jake describes actor communication as teachable, but also suggests that it is an innate ability that can be coaxed out of an actor. On the other side of the debate, Ashlyn describes actor communication as an unteachable skill, she notes that one may make improvements and learn new ways of manipulating one's ability, which suggests that actor communication skills are teachable. Both Ashlyn and Jake describe actors' abilities to make improvements or to have actor communication more consistently, which suggests that there are teachable dimensions of actor communication.

³⁷⁸ Jake, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

Summary of Theme Three: Awareness

Participants describe how they knew they were experiencing actor communication as a conscious unawareness during the phenomenon, as a conscious awareness of the phenomenon afterwards, as a sense of knowing through feeling whether emotional or physical, and as an innate or teachable skill or experience. The descriptions of participants' experiences suggest that the experience is an impulse-based experience rather than an intellectual-based experience. Participants suggest that thinking interferes with actor communication and that an actor knows the phenomenon is occurring through feeling or at a non-intellectual level. Since participants describe actor communication as a non-thinking experience, they also debate whether or not an actor can learn actor communication. Participants describe actor communication as an innate ability. Some suggest that it cannot be learned whereas other participants suggest that if actors can learn how it happens and how it works, then actors can learn to engage consistently in actor communication.

Theme Four: Blurring/boundaries

The fourth theme of actor communication is *Blurring/boundaries*, which may be one of the most psychologically intricate themes uncovered in the investigation. *Blurring/boundaries* examines the blurring of perception between the actors' and their characters' sense of self, reality, thoughts and feelings, how actors perceive their acting partners as well as the limits of blurring and transgression of those limits.³⁷⁹ In the theme

³⁷⁹ My use of the word transgression is in Lacan's sense of crossing boundaries, or stepping outside, of explicit or implicit rules.

of *Blurring/boundaries*, participants explore their experiences of blurring, uncover an implicit taboo of actor communication: transferring onstage relationships offstage, and explore means of creating healthy boundaries.

Blurring

Blurred Reality. Participants note that blurring of reality occurs in experiences of actor communication. They frequently use terms and phrases such as “real,” “natural,” “actually happening,” “real genuine care,” and “from a real place,” to describe their experiences of actor communication. They also use terms and phrases such as “fake,” “faking it,” “fakest human being alive,” “fake it up to par,” “contrived,” and “mechanical” to describe their experiences when actor communication does not occur. Participants set up the two terms in opposition with one another suggesting there is an authenticity to their experiences of actor communication.

Participants describe experiences of actor communication where the line of reality is blurred. Greg describes his experiences of blurring reality as: “I momentarily forget who I am and completely believe that the other person is who they're claiming to be right then.”³⁸⁰ For Greg, blurring reality means giving up his sense of self and seeing his acting partner as the character they are portraying. He suggests that all sense of the “real world” is suspended during the blurring of actor communication. Leon describes an experience of blurring reality:

One rehearsal we were just on, we were just so awesome....And she says her line to me in Yiddish and (laughter) I broke character and stopped and

³⁸⁰ Greg, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

said, "Aren't you supposed to say it in Yiddish?" Well, I had heard it in English (laughter), which was really cool because I was like, "I don't actually know what you're saying, but I heard it in English. That's so awesome."³⁸¹

For Leon, the blurring of reality impacted her perception of hearing her partner's dialogue in a particular scene that includes another language. She notes that during the experience of actor communication, she understood or perceived her partner's lines in English although they were spoken in Yiddish. She notes that because of her blurred perception of the lines, she stopped rehearsal to question her acting partner about the language. Leon suggests that she confirmed that hearing the lines in English was her blurred perception of reality, not what actually occurred. Leon notes that this experience of blurring was remarkable.

Blurred Identity. Participants note a blurring of identity that occurs when they are engaged in actor communication. The blurring actors experience ranges from thinking or feeling like their character to losing or forgetting one's sense of self. Greg notes that during actor communication his thoughts and feelings are synonymous with that of his character: "[I feel] Exactly the way my character does."³⁸² Leon describes her experience of blurring identity as: "very natural, it felt like I actually was the character, not Leon

³⁸¹ Leon, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, October 3, 2004.

³⁸² Greg, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

playing the character thinking about what the character is doing."³⁸³ For Leon, during actor communication she does not feel a difference between herself and the character. She suggests that during actor communication the duality between character and actor disappears and she is no longer aware of herself as an actor portraying a role. Ashlyn notes that during actor communication she identifies with her character and what the character is experiencing:

I think it's like when you start to forget that you're you. Like you really do start to get... Like if you're supposed to be angry, you really do feel angry and you're like, "Holy shit, I'm really feeling angry right now. Okay, okay good." And, (coughing), whoa. And you can tell when the person is responding to that you're pissing them off. You know what I mean? Like, I don't think it's something you can put in words. It's something that you feel.³⁸⁴

Ashlyn describes the blurring of identity as forgetting who she is and taking on the experience of her character. She notes that if the character is angry, then she is not merely showing that emotion, but rather feels the same anger as her character. She also notes that she can intuit if she is creating a real emotional response in her partner as well. She describes ability to recognize a real response in her partner as something she senses. Ashlyn's experience suggests that there is a blurring between the actor and the character's feelings in actor communication, that the actor takes on the character's emotional state and experiences those emotions.

The blurring of actor communication raises questions of identity for actors. For Jake, his experiences of character-to-character connections are both emotional and

³⁸³ Leon, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, October 3, 2004.

³⁸⁴ Ashlyn, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

physiological. During the first group interview, he proposed an interesting question to the group:

I want to know if actors, if they are doing an intense scene, if men get erections because...I'm not, I'm not kidding because there's something that like, if you let yourself.... Yeah, do you let yourself go there, like to that extent or are you always aware that there's an audience and it's fake...I'm being completely serious right now. I am not trying...to make a joke of her dissertation.... I want to know.³⁸⁵

While Jake's question may seem inappropriate or out of left field, he does raise the question: at what point is a response the actor and at what point is it the character? In his query, Jake suggests that the physiological response or connection is a choice made by the actor at the level of actor not of character. However, the question remains. Perhaps the physiological response is a combination of physical stimuli as well as the emotional/physical/psychological context of actor communication.

Participants note a blurring that occurs in actor communication between onstage emotions between the characters and offstage emotions between the actors. Participants describe experiences where they feel they start to develop feelings for the other character.

Greg describes difficulty of separating between actor and character emotions:

Playing a character where I would rather see them die...The character. It, there are times where it's hard to separate, you know, 'cause if, if you three hours a day you hate them...three hours a day you hate them...The other twenty-one, you kind of take it on yourself.

Greg suggests that how an actor feels towards a character may be difficult to separate from how he feels about his acting partner in everyday life. He notes that spending a significant amount of time where an actor sees his partner as a particular character and feels particular emotions towards that person for that length of rehearsal makes it difficult

³⁸⁵ Jake, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

for an actor to distinguish between onstage and offstage emotions. Jake describes his experience of blurring emotions onstage and their offstage impact:

And a lot of times you, it's not necessarily a good thing. I will project the feelings I have as a character for that character onto that person after you have those honest moments because you really feel like you're living that moment. And if you're being attacked, you really do feel attacked. And some of those have lingering affects and I would say that I have been brought closer to the actor because of the relationship of the characters being in a play or driven apart as it may so be.³⁸⁶

Jake describes his process in actor communication where he projects the feelings he has towards the other character onto the actor. He suggests that this projection occurs because the moment of actor communication seemed real, life-like. Jake notes that his emotional responses during actor communication are real emotional responses and reactions within the circumstances of the play. He notes that the impact of actor communication and the blurring of emotions may remain for some time between actors. He suggests that, depending upon the emotional relationship between the characters, the impact of blurring emotions may bring actors closer together or farther apart.

Blurred Perception of Acting Partner. Participants note that there is a blurring in their perception of their acting partner during actor communication. Ashlyn describes her experience of blurring perception of acting partners: “Yeah, you forget they're actors. They're not your fellow actors anymore. They're whoever you're talking to.”³⁸⁷ Ashlyn describes perceiving her acting partners as their characters. She notes that she stops thinking of her acting partners as other actors, but rather sees them as characters in the

³⁸⁶ Jake, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

³⁸⁷ Ashlyn, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

play. She also suggests in “they’re whoever you’re talking to” that there is also a blurred perception of self as character in actor communication. Greg describes actor communication as: “When you, when you stop thinking of them in terms of ‘I know this performer. I’ve had classes with him,’ but you start thinking of it as, you know, ‘This is my son, my cousin, my brother.’”³⁸⁸ For Greg, actor communication begins when he perceives his acting partner in terms of their character relationship rather than as his acting partner. He notes that actor communication begins at a point where the actor stops thinking of the other person in terms of the actor and starts thinking of the other person in terms of his character. Greg’s experience suggests that there is a change of thought on the part of the actor, but it is not clear if the change is conscious or unconscious choice on the part of the actor.

Abigail echoes Greg’s experience of blurred perception of acting partners. When Abigail describes her experience of connection through eye contact, she describes it as an experience where she would “completely forget that they were that person. Like they just became someone else completely....”³⁸⁹ She suggests that during actor communication she forgets, or suspends, who the actor is as a person and perceives her partner only as the character. Although Abigail notes that she “forgets” who the other person is, she suggests that the transformation is somehow not within her perception, but within the other actor. Abigail’s experience may suggest that the “transformation” or blurred perception of an acting partner may be an unconscious shift in that she does not perceive the shift to be within herself, but rather her partner.

³⁸⁸ Greg, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

³⁸⁹ Abigail, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

Lucille describes her experience of blurred perception of acting partners, as being the partner who was mistaken for her character:

I have a sort of an experience with this. I was in a community theatre show a little while ago and I was cast across from this guy and...we struck up a good relationship for a little while and for the first month during rehearsals and everything, we had this great relationship. And then all of a sudden, it flipped and it was really, really odd, but it all stemmed from that show and had we not been in that show together, none of that..."Oh, you're so wonderful" - because that's what the show is about was this idyllic version of whoever X thought. I kept saying to him, "I am not that person. I am not that character. (tapping on table for emphasis) You've got me mixed up with whoever this is in the show. I'm not her. I'm me. Hello!" And he, it wouldn't, he couldn't not grasp the fact that I was not whatever character I was playing onstage and it was really to his detriment because I was like, "Yeah, hmm, not that. Okay, go away now."³⁹⁰

Lucille describes a situation of actor communication where she and her partner developed a good working relationship (and possibly personal relationship). She describes how a shift suddenly occurred in their relationship and Lucille felt that her partner began to perceive her as her character. She suggests that, regardless of her attempts to clarify her identity, her acting partner could not perceive her in any way other than as her character. She also suggests that because he only perceived her as her character, he interacted with her as if she were her character whether onstage or offstage. Lucille suggests that the roles and relationship they portrayed in the play may have had an impact in his perception of her and their relationship. Lucille notes that because of his inability to distinguish between her character and herself, she did not wish to maintain their relationship.

³⁹⁰ Lucille, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

Transfer of Onstage Relationships Offstage. Lucille's experience of blurred perceptions of acting partner begins to suggest the potential for transferring onstage relationships offstage. Abigail describes how blurred perceptions of an acting partner may lead to offstage relationships:

My thing is that I'm really glad I never played the romantic lead in a show because when that actor communication thing begins to happen you start to think that you have feelings for someone when you really don't. And you think you are getting to know a person and maybe you're not. You like their character, not them....You know? And when an actor communication thing is happening too good, it sends people into relationships and I don't think that's healthy.³⁹¹

Abigail suggests that actor communication may blur the lines of perception and attraction: an actor is attracted to the other character not to her acting partner, not perceiving the difference between character and actor. She notes that when actor communication is occurring an actor may feel as if they know the other actor due to the emotional connection between the characters. She suggests that when actor communication is successful (perhaps too successful), the blurred perception that actors may have about the other actors may lead them to develop an offstage relationship based on onstage feelings.

Thadeus describes blurred perceptions of acting partners in terms of sex appeal:

I believe when, when you're in a show sometimes and you're portraying your character well, your sex appeal goes up. Like as far as the audience... and other cast members...Like suddenly...Like suddenly, like, people think you're sexy and then the show's over and it's like...“Am I still sexy?”³⁹²

Thadeus suggests that during rehearsal and performance his attractiveness increases. He notes that he feels he is more appealing to both audience members and cast members.

³⁹¹ Abigail, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

³⁹² Thadeus, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

Thadeus notes that he feels that once a production is over, the feeling of sexiness is over as well. Eva and Lucille agree with Thadeus and note that they find actors attractive because of talent and skill:

Eva: Girls see guys, like, a talented man onstage and they're like...

Lucille: Well, because they're so committed to it.³⁹³

Eva suggests that women are attracted to a man's talent and Lucille suggests that it is the actor's level of commitment to the role that is attractive. Thadeus' experience of increased sex appeal may suggest that blurred perceptions of acting partners may also include a blurred perception of the actor during the production.

Audience Expectations of Transfer. Participants suggest that because of actor communication with its blurring of perceptions and emotions, there is an inherent expectation of transferring an onstage romantic relationship offstage. Greg and Abigail describe the expectation:

Greg: I think it's more common outside of it that you hear a lot of commentary from people when they see a movie or a show, they're like, "They look so in love. There had to be something going on." Where if you're a part of the process, you know how easy it is to fake looking that in love....I think that people always assume that it's going to happen or that it is happening because how can you feel that way for someone and then just turn it off?

Abigail: And people want to believe that, too...

Greg: And the answer is you just turn it off.

Abigail: because it's a sweet idea, right?

Greg: Yeah, that they've really seen real love.

Abigail: Oh, it's love.

Greg: People want to really be seeing it and that...³⁹⁴

³⁹³ Eva and Lucille, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004. I would like to note that my participants' responses are in terms of a straight perspective. However, I do not wish to imply that gay (or LGBTQQAIP) perspectives on this issue are not of value.

³⁹⁴ Greg, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

Greg and Abigail suggest that, with romantic onstage relationships, audiences have an expectation of an offstage relationship. However, Greg notes that actors understand how artificial the process can be to appear “in love” and that actors have the capacity to turn off the connection with their partners. Greg and Abigail note that audiences may find it difficult to accept onstage emotional connections between characters as fictional and it is out of this inability to reconcile “what is seen” with “what is real” that audiences expect actors to transfer romantic relationships offstage. Participants suggest that actors are aware of the audience’s implicit expectation of blurring as well. In addition to the expectation of blurred relationship boundaries, the blurring that actors experiences during actor communication between what is real and what is not, between actor and character, between actor relationship and character relationship, may also contribute to the blurring of the boundaries between onstage and offstage relationships for actors.

Boundaries

Healthy Limits. Participants describe the limits of blurring within actor communication and suggest that there is a limit to blurring and when that boundary is crossed the blurring can become unhealthy for the actor and have real repercussions in the actor’s life. Abigail and Greg describe the importance of limits to actor communication:

Abigail: It makes you sane.

Greg: Yeah, yeah. I think there has to be an, you know, there has to be an emotional distance.³⁹⁵

³⁹⁵ Abigail and Greg, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

Abigail suggests that limits help maintain an actor's mental well-being. Greg supports and expands on Abigail's perspective, suggesting that in order to maintain mental health an actor has to create emotional distance between himself and his character, between himself and his partner's character. Ashlyn describes the challenges towards an actor's mental health that actor communication may elicit:

Don't you think that there's a fine line between living in the moment every single night and acting like you're living in the moment every single night? Like, you're a good actor, but you can act like you're living in the moment...It's not as rewarding, but if you're going to do a show for six months...I mean, you can't do that as yourself. It's just nuts.³⁹⁶

Ashlyn suggests that actor communication is difficult to maintain due to the mental impact or strain that it may have on an actor for an extended period of time. She suggests that an actor may choose to appear to be engaging in actor communication as a means of preserving one's mental health. She notes that giving the appearance of actor communication is not as rewarding as actually engaging in it; however, attempting to engage in actor communication in each performance of an extended run may be damaging to an actor's mental well-being.

Actor Responsibility. Participants suggest that the creation of limits or boundaries with actor communication rests in the hands of the actor. Greg describes actor communication limits in terms of actor responsibility:

I think there's a line where you have to be able to step back. If my character is sleeping with your character, it's important that I'm comfortable with being with you. I don't think I should be sleeping with you... That there's a line to which, you know, maybe I'm just not good enough a method performer (laughter) that people I want to kill I shouldn't

³⁹⁶ Ashlyn, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

spend time thinking about how I'd like to kill them...I think that the characters I'm sleeping with I shouldn't be sleeping with the performer, but, you know, that's just me.³⁹⁷

Greg suggests that the actor needs to recognize the limit of actor communication and not to cross that boundary. He notes that if he is playing a character who has an intimate relationship onstage with another character then the intimate relationship is onstage only, that there is no necessity in carrying that intimacy offstage. He provides an extreme example to clarify his point of the healthy limits of actor communication, creating a parallel between intimate actions and violent actions. The parallel he creates suggests that transferring an intimate relationship offstage is just as unhealthy as transferring a violent relationship offstage. For Greg, in order to maintain healthy limits, the blurring that occurs between actors in actor communication must remain onstage only.³⁹⁸

Dissociation (from cast or character). Participants describe different means of setting the boundaries of blurring in actor communication. Thadeus describes the line he draws between actor and character so that blurring between actor and character may occur:

I was just thinking in that situation...acting, like, for me, is kind of like, like looking at a dead body, like, cause, like, when my, my grandma died, like, during, uh, the first show here at...Um, like it was weird like when we went to the visitation, I looked at her, but it was her shell, looked like her. She was lying there eyes closed, but she wasn't there and it's kind of like that when I feel like when I'm acting...Say I'm in a scene with Lucille, like, it looks like her, but the soul is the person in the script. It's the per-

³⁹⁷ Greg, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

³⁹⁸ Although participants describe directors attempting to elicit actor communication in rehearsal through exercises, no participant explicitly suggests that the director has any responsibility in setting boundaries for actor communication.

it's not her, you know, so it's really easy, like, even though I like Lucille, as a person, to kill her. It's not a problem at all....It's not her, you know?³⁹⁹

Thadeus describes how he creates boundaries or distance in the blurring of actor communication using an analogy of seeing his deceased grandmother at her funeral. He suggests a change in perception where he sees a separation between his acting partner and the character similar to the empty shell of the body of his grandmother and her soul. Thadeus notes the body of his acting partner may look like his partner, but the character is the soul. He suggests that the soul is the character with whom he interacts and it appears that the actor's soul no longer exists, which allows him to carry out actions that may be difficult if he thinks of his acting partner as a person he knows. Thadeus' dissociative technique allows him to move beyond the challenge of knowing an acting partner too well.

Abigail describes her own experience of coping with the blurring of boundaries between self and character:

I did it so the audience would walk away with something hopefully because that show was so "This is a lesson" type thing and so it was just one of those instances where it quit being about me and it was like, "let's give the dogs a bone" or something because I had to detach....Yeah, there were times I wished I could have shut down, but I couldn't just because those issues were my issues as well so I really don't know what happened. It's one of those things where you get done with it and it's a blur, what happened, and you just know that you got through it and you know that it wasn't comfortable, but something happened and people seemed to respond to it.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁹ Thadeus, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004. Thadeus and Lucille performed a scene from a Shakespearean tragedy, which is why he describes wanting to kill her.

⁴⁰⁰ Abigail, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2001.

Abigail describes an experience of actor communication where she felt she needed to detach from her character due to blurring between herself and the character. She notes that the issues that her character dealt with were also issues that she deals with in her own life and the similarity created an uncomfortable situation for her. She also notes a strong urge to shut down and that in order to cope she rationalized the importance of the blurring in that the audience would gain something from her experience. Abigail also describes the performance as a blur, which suggests that she was able to dissociate from the experience while it was occurring.

Participants also describe creating boundaries to contain or limit the blurring of actor communication between actors. Some participants, such as Lucille, create close “show relationships” that exist only for the duration of the production and then she disassociates herself from those relationships once the production is finished. Lucille notes that the close relationships between cast members are “kind of a mutual understanding between a whole lot of people.”⁴⁰¹ Lucille suggests that there is an implicit understanding among actors and is a shared practice of actors. Jake expands on the practice of show relationships:

You get thrown into this show and they see you at your best and your worst and you experience something really honest and really truthful with them and then it's over because you're moving on and you have to do your thing. I don't necessarily think that's a bad thing.⁴⁰²

Jake describes show relationships as incredibly intimate and honest relationships, which may suggest that blurring of relationships may be due to the vulnerable nature of the

⁴⁰¹ Lucille, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

⁴⁰² Jake, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

relationship. He also notes that once the show is over, the relationship between actors is over as well. Jake suggests that disassociating from acting partners is a positive practice.

Participants also describe setting boundaries and maintaining emotional distance in the experience of actor communication through separation, fragmenting of the self, or intellectualizing. Greg describes how he deals with the blurring of relationships:

...it's easy for me to play a character who's madly in love with someone and understand why I would be madly in love with them and actually not feel that way. That I let my character take the brunt of my emotions, I mean, he's probably all screwed up over it, but I'm just him for a couple hours a day.⁴⁰³

Greg describes the ease with which he can portray an intimate connection and not blur his emotions with that of the character. He suggests that how he does this is through separation between his character and himself. He notes that his character takes on the emotional responses that are evoked in actor communication and through this splitting or separation of character and actor, Greg suggests that he is able to maintain healthy limits of actor communication. Greg suggests that an actor needs to keep in mind that “it's not real....Those aren't your words. That's not your life. That's not your personality.”⁴⁰⁴

Greg describes the use of simple conscious reminders to maintain boundaries, intellectualizing the experience of blurring during actor communication.

⁴⁰³ Greg, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid. What Greg describes may be interpreted as his use of a defense mechanism of intellectualizing, or focusing on the intellectual components of a situation, which is a means of distancing one's self from an anxious situation.

Summary of Theme Four: Blurring/boundaries

Actor communication is experienced as a blurring of perception. The field of blurring ranges from how actors perceive reality, identity, emotions, and relationships to the impact of blurring on performance as well as everyday life. Actors experience a blurring of reality in what is experienced as “real” or “fake” and out of the feeling of authenticity arises a blurring of perception of the actor’s sense of self and a blurring of an actor’s identity with the character’s identity. The impact of experiencing authentic emotional responses with an acting partner may blur the line between what is real and what is fictional. The blurred sense of self and emotional responses may impact an actor’s perception of her acting partner, in that due to identification with the character and an experience of authentic response, the actor may then start to perceive her acting partner as the character he is portraying. Blurring of emotional responses may lead to blurring boundaries between an onstage character relationship and an offstage actor relationship. Participants note a general audience expectation of transferring an onstage romantic relationship offstage and with that transfer come real life repercussions. Participants note that there is a healthy limit to actor communication for an actor’s well-being as well as for maintaining functioning working relationships with acting partners. The responsibility of creating boundaries of actor communication seems to fall on the actor and participants suggest multiple means of maintaining boundaries such as disassociating from cast members at the end of a production, separating one’s acting partner from the character as well as separating or fragmenting an actor’s own sense of self, and the use of other coping mechanisms such as intellectualization or rationalization of the experience of blurring. The tools that participants suggest for creating or

maintaining boundaries of actor communication seem to fall within the category of defense mechanisms, which may suggest that the experience of actor communication creates some anxiety for actors.

Theme Five: Location

The fifth theme of actor communication is *Location*, which reflects how the participants shaped, gave space, and created boundaries to their experience of actor communication. *Location* not only reflects space of actor communication, but also a destination or place where actor must enter in order for actor communication to occur. The subthemes of *Location* are: Creating Space and Creating Place. Creating a defined space or place also begins to define the boundaries of where actor communication can occur. Participants describe actor communication as both a container, meaning an object with defined boundaries or limits that an actor may enter or exit, and as a location to be reached in the rehearsal or performance process, which also has a limit or border that must be passed in order to experience actor communication. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson suggest that we use metaphor to give grounding to abstract experiences:

We experience many things through sight and touch, as having distinct boundaries, and, when things have no distinct boundaries, we often project boundaries upon them – conceptualizing them as entities and often as containers....we typically conceptualize the nonphysical *in terms of* the physical.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰⁵ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 58-59.

Location becomes the “container” for actor communication. Participants’ use of a container metaphor gives spatial dimensions and limits to the abstract phenomenon of actor communication. Participant narratives suggest that the boundaries of actor communication exist in an “in between” space that is in between time, in between people, and in between relationships. Actor communication as a location suggests that the lived experience exists within in a defined space in a particular place that has specific limits or boundaries. The use of a container metaphor may help to provide boundaries for the process of actor communication, not only providing limits to the experience, but also giving location to actor communication as something to achieve in an actor’s process. Participants also suggest that it is not sufficient that two actors create a space for actor communication, rather actors must also be willing to “go there” by committing to their characters, the scene, and the play, which suggests that commitment may be part of the journey towards arriving at actor communication.

While participants describe actor communication as occurring in an abstract location, they also describe elements of literal space as well: performance vs. classroom space, large vs. small performance spaces, and onstage vs. offstage. Although these physical spaces may impact actor communication, they do not create a space for actor communication.⁴⁰⁶ Rather than literal space, participants suggest that the space for actor communication is an abstract space created out of interrelationality, or the interpersonal space that they share with other actors.

⁴⁰⁶ Theatre space and performance space are discussed as part of Requirements. Onstage and offstage spaces are used to denote location of relationships as discussed in Connection and Blurring/boundaries.

Creating space

Participants describe actor communication occurring within a space. Some participants describe it as an imagined yet physical space. Abigail describes actor communication occurring within a defined space:

...looking back on it, it feels like if I'm communicating with another person, we are in this black box where there's just nothing but us. There's emptiness and like.... There are lights there 'cause we can see each other, yeah, but all this external stuff doesn't matter. There's no set. There's no audience. There's just us and this little world of ours. That sounds cheesy, but it's, it's, it's just a black box and there's nothing but us.⁴⁰⁷

Abigail describes actor communication as existing in a black box space that includes only her and her acting partner. She suggests that it is empty of externals and is a world created out of the actors. Abigail suggests that the world created in actor communication belongs to the actors as well.

Several participants describe actor communication existing in an “in between” space. Leon describes her experiences of actor communication:

It's really close to or maybe it's the same place as the place, you know, where you're dozing off right when you go to sleep?...Like I recognize that there's still a world outside of this weird bubble of quasi-subconscious...but I don't quite, I don't, like I stay in this weird little between place between asleep and awake, if that makes sense.⁴⁰⁸

Leon describes her experiences of actor communication as occurring in a space much like the state in between consciousness and unconsciousness when she is falling asleep. She notes that she recognizes the external world, but suggests that the world of actor communication is separate from the outside world. She describes actor communication

⁴⁰⁷ Abigail, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

⁴⁰⁸ Leon, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

as occurring in an “in between place,” which has correlations to actor communication occurring in a space outside of the regular structure of time and space. She also describes the space of actor communication as a bubble, suggesting that it occurs in a space that is a fragile and isolated space that exists outside the normal realm of reality.

Other participants describe the space of actor communication as a bubble.

Thadeus and Lucille describe their experiences of actor communication:

Thadeus: I don't think it's so much your, um, performance space... as it is your performance space as far as like we learned in Act... as far as performance spaces as far as... (pause - thinking)

Lucille: Personal bubble space?

Thadeus: Yes! Bubble space. As a, as a...

Lucille: ...the space between people.

Thadeus: Yeah, like... Okay, I'm going to be, sound weird, but it's like, yeah, everyone has their bubble, you know, and when you, when you mesh two bubbles or two individuals' energies together then, then it perform, it, it, it, it molds... into a performance space around those two individuals...⁴⁰⁹

Thadeus and Lucille describe performance space as a personal bubble, a concept from one of their acting classes. Thadeus suggests that during actor communication personal bubbles or energies of actors mesh to create a bubble or performance space around the actors. Lucille describes the space of actor communication as “the space between people,” suggesting not only that actor communication occurs in the literal space between actors, but also an interrelational space between them, dependent on the other person, the connection between actors, the necessary conditions, and the blurring that occurs during actor communication. Scooter, my sound technician, who is also an actor, was asked in the second group interview by the participants to talk about actor communication.

Scooter echoes the participants' description of space: “so many of us describe it as being

⁴⁰⁹ Thadeus and Lucille, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

in like a bubble and it's just you and the other person.”⁴¹⁰ Ashlyn also describes the space of actor communication as a separate world and bubble:

And my uh little world is like um, is kind of like what uh Leon was saying, but not the sleepiness. Like, uh, it, I feel fuzzy kind of, um...Fuzzy and buzzy. And um, but it's like, like we're in a bubble kind of and the bubble's like, like soft and fuzzy. And I...this is weird....And I definitely don't see anything else. I don't see the audience. I don't see...and it gets a little dim, like whatever the lighting is, like if it's like in a classroom, those aren't the real lights. Like it's just this little dimly lit fuzzy bubble.⁴¹¹

Ashlyn describes actor communication as occurring in a fuzzy bubble space. She notes that her space is not a quasi-conscious bubble as Leon describes, but she notes that that inside the bubble of actor communication her visual perception grows dim and suggests a softened “fuzzy” visual texture to the experience. Ashlyn describes a space where she does not see anything else during actor communication, suggesting she does not see the audience or other externals, but implies that she sees her acting partner, as he/she is part of the phenomenon of actor communication within the bubble. In their descriptions of space, participants begin to give space to the experience of actor communication, but in so doing, they begin to create limits or boundaries to the phenomenon, which as previously discussed in *Blurring/boundaries* may help maintain healthy limits of actor communication. As actor communication occurs within an abstract space or bubble, time

⁴¹⁰ Scooter, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004. Scooter goes on to suggest that actors cannot/should not maintain the bubble of actor communication throughout an entire show because “you sort of exclude the audience and I think that if you do that for the whole show, the audience feels a sort of exclusion like they're not part of it anymore and I think it's kind of selfish and doesn't allow the audience into the emotional content of the play if you do it constantly. And so I think that there are moments...where you can just set back and allow the audience to feel with you because if it's just you and the actor then the audience is isolated from it.” Scooter suggests that the bubble space of constant actor communication does not allow the audience to participate in the live performance. Scooter’s description brings up another type of communication: actor-to-audience communication, and while I think it is a vital element of performance, actor-to-audience communication is not within the scope of my study.

⁴¹¹ Ashlyn, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

as it relates to the everyday world is no longer relevant to the experience of actor communication. When actor communication occurs, time no longer functions in a regular or predictable fashion; rather it becomes nonlinear or nonexistent.

Participants note in their experiences of actor communication that the linear concept of time is mostly irrelevant to the phenomenon in that time is not a concern or issue to the actor. However, time is described with frequency as something that has dimension and gives space to actor communication. Jake describes time in actor communication as passing “really really quickly” and notes: “We aren't concerned about time... You have a disregard for time.”⁴¹² Jake suggests that the linear passage of time is irrelevant in the experience of actor communication. While Jake notes that time passes rapidly, Abigail describes actor communication occurring in a pause of time.⁴¹³ Greg also describes actor communication occurring in a gap or space in time:

...it's one of those things where like, if it involves music, the music isn't going any slower, but the space between the beats is so large that you couldn't imagine not doing the right thing when you're supposed to or you know, it, it's almost like they slowed the film down, you know, if somebody's throwing a paper airplane, you could just go, "eh" [gesture of catching it with ease] and catch it 'cause it's just right there. It's just hanging in mid-air.⁴¹⁴

Greg describes actor communication with analogies to music and film, which suggest a medium that can be sped up or slowed down. He suggests that actor communication occurs between the beats in a large space that allows for ease and natural responses. He also describes actor communication occurring in a slower sense of time, much like

⁴¹² Jake, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

⁴¹³ Abigail, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

⁴¹⁴ Greg, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

slowing down the speed of a film. He notes that the space where actor communication occurs is spacious, non-linear, which provides the actor with a feeling of facility. Greg's description of the slowed down paper airplane suggests that actor communication is also something that hangs in mid-air or exists outside of the normal passage of time. Lucille describes actor communication as an experience where: "There really is no time. You forget about it. It just sort of turns into a big blur....everything, time and space, stops."⁴¹⁵ Much like the other participants, Lucille suggests that time, in a linear fashion, is not relevant to actor communication. She notes that actors forget about the passage of time. Although the passage of time appears unimportant to Lucille's experience of actor communication, she notes that she perceives that time and space stop. Lucille also suggests that actor communication occurs in a space created during a pause or a halt in time.

Creating Place

While participants describe actor communication as existing within an abstract space, they also describe actor communication as an abstract place where one moves in or out of, gets back to, goes up or down into, a groove, mark, a point, which suggests that actor communication may be more of an emotional or relational space than a literal place. Greg describes actor communication as a place he "comes out of" or "steps out of," suggesting that actor communication is a defined place that he may enter or leave.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁵ Lucille, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, September 30, 2004.

⁴¹⁶ Greg, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004; Group Interview #2, May 11, 2004; Individual Interview, September 30, 2004. Greg consistently describes his experiences with the phrase of "come out of it," "coming out of it," "slip into it," "drop out of it," or "step out of it."

Lucille also describes actor communication as a place: “I go into and then I fall back down out of it again.”⁴¹⁷ Lucille also suggests that actor communication is a place in which she may move in or out. She also suggests that movement into actor communication is vertical, moving up into and down out of actor communication. Jake describes his experience of actor communication: “you could be dropped into it [actor communication] and then perform in it.”⁴¹⁸ Jake suggests that actor communication is a place he is placed into and performs within the boundaries of the phenomenon. Jake’s concept of being dropped into actor communication suggests a passive entrance into actor communication. Abigail describes the place of actor communication as a location that she “gets into”, suggesting that for her, access to actor communication is an active process.⁴¹⁹

Leon describes actor communication as “a certain energy place” from which actors may “drop out.”⁴²⁰ She also notes that in her experience of actor communication in *Show P*, “the others had to compensate until they could get back in the zone...if somebody dropped out there was something missing and somebody else had to make up for it, otherwise we all would have crashed.”⁴²¹ Leon describes actor communication as a place or zone and actors work actively to remain or get back into that place. She suggests that if one actor left the place of actor communication, the other actors had to make up for

⁴¹⁷ Lucille, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, September 30, 2004.

⁴¹⁸ Jake, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

⁴¹⁹ Abigail, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

⁴²⁰ Leon, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

⁴²¹ Ibid.

the loss of one so that the rest of the actors could sustain actor communication. Within the same experience of actor communication, Leon notes that she would “leave that show every night...in physical and mental pain because I had been in this place for so long.”⁴²² Leon describes actor communication literally as a place. She suggests that remaining within the boundaries or place of actor communication takes its toll on an actor physically and mentally.

Location also suggests a journey that actors take in the process of actor communication. Ashlyn suggests that in order to engage in actor communication actors have to be willing “to go there.”⁴²³ She suggests that actors are not already in a state of actor communication, but rather actor communication is a place at which actors must arrive. Lucille describes actor communication as a location that she and her partner “could get there.”⁴²⁴ When discussing the audience’s impact on the actors’ process, Jake also describes actor communication as a location, noting that the audience may “allow you to go there.”⁴²⁵ Greg describes his experience of actor communication with Jake: “we were, we were there.”⁴²⁶ Greg suggests that he and Jake had arrived at actor communication, as if to suggest that it is a destination to be reached by actors. Lucille also describes actor communication as a location to reach: “I think if it's a scene that you really, really want to get into and they don't allow themselves to go there with you, then it

⁴²² Leon, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

⁴²³ Ashlyn, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

⁴²⁴ Lucille, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

⁴²⁵ Jake, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

⁴²⁶ Greg, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, September 30, 2004.

would be unrewarding.”⁴²⁷ She describes how experiences of actor communication may be unrewarding if an acting partner does not let himself to “go there.” She implies that if her acting partner is unwilling to go to the place of actor communication, whether because of an unwillingness to risk or to commit to the work, then she is unable to reach that place as well. Greg supports Lucille’s perspective: “So it’s a level of commitment with who you’re working with as to whether or not you’re going to get there.” Greg suggests that an uncommitted acting partner may prevent one’s ability of getting to the location of actor communication.

Summary of Theme Five: Location

Actor communication is described as a location, both in terms of space and specific place. Participants describe the space of actor communication with defined limits or spatial boundaries such as an imagined black box or a bubble. Participants also describe the space of actor communication existing in an in-between space: a pause in time or where time and space stop. Actor communication not only is described as a space, but also a place, a site-specific location that actors can move in or out of and journey towards in rehearsal and performance.

Theme Six: Impact of Presence

The sixth theme of actor communication is Impact of Presence, which examines the impact of actor communication on an actor’s perspective of his talent, skills, process, and development. Impact of Presence uncovers how actor communication is meaningful

⁴²⁷ Lucille, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, September 30, 2004.

to an actor's process – how actors perceive their work, skills, talents, as well as how actors perceive their acting partners and working relationships in rehearsal and performance. The two subthemes of Impact of Presence are: Perception of Self and Process and Perception of Partner.

Perception of Self and Process

When reflecting on their performance work, participants describe their experiences of actor communication as rewarding and positive in nature.⁴²⁸ Several participants describe how their experience of actor communication impacted their perception of their own work, talent, and ability as an actor. Abigail notes that actor communication makes her feel “appreciated” by her acting partners and finds the experience “satisfying” as an actor.⁴²⁹ Greg describes his response as: “I usually feel pretty good about it because it's not purely random.”⁴³⁰ Greg notes a positive response to actor communication in that it is not a random event, but rather he suggests that actor communication is a phenomenon that is not random, but rather is crafted by the actors. Greg elaborates on his response to experiences of actor communication:

Absolutely rewarding. Not immediately thereafter, but when you've had a chance to reflect...it is kind of a mark that I shoot for. You know, I'll really feel like, not that anyone else cares, but I'll really feel like I've gotten somewhere as a performer.⁴³¹

⁴²⁸ To clarify, I used the terms “rewarding” and “unrewarding” in the interview process rather than using biased terms such as positive or negative, which is why participants use these terms in their descriptions of their experiences.

⁴²⁹ Abigail, Individual Interview #1, University of Missouri, October 7, 2004.

⁴³⁰ Greg, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, September 30, 2004.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

Greg suggests that actor communication is a mark of achievement for him as an actor, a point where he can see the rewards of his training and talent. Jakes suggests that the experience of actor communication builds or reinforces an actor's confidence in his acting abilities: "it made me feel like I actually could act and that's a nice feeling to have."⁴³² Lucille describes her response to actor communication in terms of personal achievement:

...you live for those little moments, just to see if you can get them back and if you can challenge yourself to get there again. So that just gives me hope when you have one that you can, "Yes, I can, I can actually can get into that place."...It's rewarding, like I was saying earlier, just because it proves to you that you can get to that point.⁴³³

She suggests that actor communication is a goal an actor can strive for in her work.

Lucille notes that actor communication proves her ability and commitment as an actor to herself. Leon describes the impact of actor communication as an experience that boosts her level of confidence in her acting work:

Very cool. I felt very proud of myself. Really good. There's a certain confidence when you reach that place, like afterwards..."Okay, if we can do this, then I can probably do this with anybody and work it out." So yes, it was definitely a boost in confidence.⁴³⁴

Leon notes that if she is capable of actor communication with one partner, she has the skills and ability as an actor to have actor communication with any acting partner. Leon and the other participants describe positive responses to actor communication, which also includes positive perceptions about their development and training as actors.

⁴³² Jake, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

⁴³³ Lucille, Individual Interview #1, University of Missouri, September 30, 2004.

⁴³⁴ Leon, Individual Interview #1, University of Missouri, October 3, 2004.

Perception of Partner

While participants describe how they perceive themselves and their acting process, they also describe how actor communication impacts their perception of their acting partners. Just as participants describe their perceptions of their work and process in positive and rewarding terms, they also describe their acting partners in a similar and positive light. Leon describes her perception of her acting partner after actor communication as: “I was really proud of her”⁴³⁵ and “I think they are the coolest freakin’ person in the entire world.”⁴³⁶ Leon describes having a feeling of pride and satisfaction about her acting partner’s performance. She also describes her perception of her acting partner as someone worthy of admiration and respect. Greg echoes Leon’s positive perception of his acting partner after actor communication:

At the time, it was one of those things where I felt like, "Wow, I am really lucky to be with this group of people who are all, you know, who are so talented." That this is really working, that you know, you get that sort of rush of "we could do almost anything." After the fact, you realize that you're doing *Show C*, take it or leave it. So that feeling was probably because of those experiences.⁴³⁷

Greg’s experience suggests that positive feelings towards cast mates arise out of the experiences of actor communication. He also describes his perception of his acting partner in terms of a shared response to the experience: “I think we view each other more positively for having gone through it together.”⁴³⁸ He suggests that there is a mutually

⁴³⁵ Leon, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, October 3, 2004.

⁴³⁶ Leon, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

⁴³⁷ Greg, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, September 30, 2004.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

supportive or encouraging attitude that arises after sharing the experience of actor communication. Abigail also describes her response towards her acting partners after actor communication in terms of positive feelings:

My experience of actor communication with them makes me, I just admire them. I admire that they have let themselves open to me and I'm open to them and there's something taking place that's not, that's rare. Like you don't always get that. You don't always get people who care, a partner. I just, I respect them for it and I respect them more as actors because they can do that.⁴³⁹

Abigail's experience suggests that a feeling of respect may also arise from an acting partner's reciprocity in that her acting partner recognizes her willingness to be open and vulnerable and returns that willingness towards her in kind.

Summary of Theme Six: The Impact of Presence

Participants suggest that the experience of actor communication alters their perceptions of themselves and their acting partners. They note that actor communication is a rewarding experience, which builds self-confidence in their abilities, talents, and skills as actors. Participants also suggest that actor communication helps create a positive perception of their acting partners. They describe having feelings of admiration, respect, and care for their acting partners. Some participants also suggest the experience of actor communication may create mutual feelings of admiration and respect, which helps create a mutually supportive working relationship between actors, based on a willingness to reciprocate and to risk with one's partner.

⁴³⁹ Abigail, Individual Interview #1, University of Missouri, October 7, 2004.

Theme Seven: The Impact of Absence

The seventh and final theme of actor communication, *Impact of Absence*, examines the impact of the absence of actor communication on an actor's perspective of his talent, skills, process, and development. *Impact of Absence* uncovers how the absence of actor communication is meaningful to an actor's process – how actors perceive their work, skills, talents; and how actors perceive their acting partners and working relationships in the absence of actor communication. The two subthemes of *Impact of Absence* parallel those of the previous section: Perception of Self and Process and Perception of Partner. Participants' descriptions reflect experiences of dis-communication, when the absence of actor communication was a result of active disengagement by their partners or themselves, and experiences of non-communication, the failure of actor communication due to external variables. Participants' reflections do not suggest that moments of non-communication, that is when external variables interfere with actor communication, had significant impact on their perceptions of themselves, their process, or their acting partners.

Perception of Self and Process

When reflecting on their acting work, participants often describe their responses to the absence of actor communication in negative terms. They describe the experience of the absence of actor communication, or dis-communication, as leaving them feeling bitter, numb, embarrassed, self-conscious, talentless and hollow, just to name a few reactions.⁴⁴⁰ Ashlyn describes a visceral response to the absence of actor

⁴⁴⁰ Abigail, Ashlyn, Jake, and Greg, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

communication: "Ill. Vomit. Bleh!...Actually it doesn't make me want to vomit...It makes me want to cry."⁴⁴¹ Ashlyn's experience suggests that the absence of actor communication has a deep impact on actors' performance experiences. Greg describes his feelings after the absence of actor communication in terms of embarrassment:

...it's also hard to go out to the lobby on the night that you know...It's bad...And everyone's like, "Wow, you were so great!"...You can't handle it because you know it didn't work for you and you know how awkward it was, but nobody else knows...And so they keep trying to tell you you're wonderful and you just want to crawl in a hole.⁴⁴²

Greg suggests that when audience members praise an actor after an experience of dis-communication it brings about feelings of shame. He notes that dealing with both the pleased audience members and the awkward experience of a bad performance is difficult for actors. He notes that his reaction to the dis-communication and the audience is a desire to hide or disappear. Greg's experience suggests that actors may have a desire to escape the gaze of the audience after experiences of dis-communication, perhaps out of a fear of further judgment or disappointment, guilt, or the inconsistency between what the audience witnessed and what the actor experienced.

Lucille describes her response to an experience of the absence of actor communication as abandonment:

Like you're out there all by yourself, just kind of hanging out onstage with people looking at you and you're going "I'm up here and if they mess up their line, they're not going to know how to fix it because they're not thinking." And you're concentrating so hard that it's no longer natural and it's sort of a sink or swim situation. Not that I didn't think that she was reliable, it just makes you nervous. So I just felt like a sitting duck.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴¹ Ashlyn, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

⁴⁴² Greg, Group Interview, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

⁴⁴³ Lucille, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, September 30, 2004.

Lucille's experience suggests that the absence of actor communication may either cause or confirm a feeling of distrust of one's partner and in turn, may create a feeling of distrust of one's acting abilities.

Jake describes his negative response to the absence of actor communication in terms of reaction and impacting his process as an actor:

You feel silly. You feel stupid. You feel like you're doing a skit. You wonder, "why am I doing this at all?" You, it cheapens everything. It's horrible. It feels like you've got toilet paper stuck on your shoe and you just can't get it off and you just don't know what's wrong and you feel like you're drowning and you feel you're suffocating...And you feel like everybody hates you and just wants it to be over. It's the worst feeling in the world, the worst feeling.⁴⁴⁴

Jake suggests that it devalues an actor's work: rather than performing in a play, he is merely acting in a "skit." He describes his response to the absence of actor communication in terms of intense feelings of embarrassment, allusions to death, and an overwhelming inability to repair the situation. Greg supports Jake's description of the absence of actor communication: "it's a good thing that we don't have sharp edges and loaded weapons onstage because I think more actors would...kill themselves during these moments than any other time onstage."⁴⁴⁵ Greg jokingly suggests that the absence of actor communication is such a terrible experience that it may make actors feel suicidal.

Ashlyn echoes Jake's perception of dis-communication as an experience that devalues an actor's work:

⁴⁴⁴ Jake, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

⁴⁴⁵ Greg, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

It cheapens everything that you've done up to that point...if they're not willing to go there, then you can't bring them up to your level and all that can happen is they can bring you down. (pause) And that's depressing.⁴⁴⁶

Ashlyn suggests that the absence of actor communication strips away all the work that went into a performance up until the moment that dis-communication begins. She notes that if one's acting partner is unwilling to engage in actor communication, an actor cannot correct or change the situation, but rather is dragged down to a lower quality of performance, which she notes is a depressing aspect of the experience of dis-communication. Ashlyn's experience suggests that there is a "doomed" or "fated" perspective about the success of a performance concerning the absence of actor communication: if one partner has actively disengaged, then the other partner cannot cause or take action that might cause an acting partner to re-engage. Jake expands upon the idea of control and the absence of actor communication:

I just feel like you're forcing everything like, you know when you're...when you need to go to bed and you're not tired and you're trying to force yourself to get to sleep and you try all these tricks and just like it feels really odd and uncomfortable and, like, stuffy. It's that kind of feeling. Where it's like you know what's supposed to be happening right now, but it's the complete opposite and there's nothing you can do to fix it.⁴⁴⁷

He suggests that, regardless of insight or acting ability, correcting or changing the experience is beyond the actor's control. Jake's and Ashlyn's experiences suggest that when actor communication is absent in performance, the only possibility of re-engaging lies in the acting partner who has chosen to dis-engage in the first place, which seems unlikely.

⁴⁴⁶ Ashlyn, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

⁴⁴⁷ Jake, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

Participants suggest that absence of actor communication impacts their ability to perform or to engage fully in performance. Lucille describes her response to discommunication: "It made me feel like there was no point in bothering to try because it's such a team effort....Eventually, you just kind of give up."⁴⁴⁸ She notes her reaction to the absence as feelings of pointlessness in that actor communication requires all actors to willingly engage in the connection. She suggests that she gives up or resigns herself to the lack of connection between actors and to the absence of actor communication as a present condition of the performance. Greg echoes Lucille's surrender to the absence of actor communication and the perceived "lesser" performance:

I can't, I can't even, I can't even muster that much feeling when it's, when it's clearly that far. My ability to give a damn...I'm like, "Ah, I'm 3 feet away from my mark. Oh well. I'm supposed to turn around. I'll gradually shuffle in a small circle." It's horrible. It's unprofessional and I disgust the other person.⁴⁴⁹

Greg's response to the absence of actor communication may suggest that actors may engage in passive-aggressive reactions to the experience.

Participants note their immediate reactions and the impact that the absence of actor communication may have on their performances with their acting partners. They also describe the long-term impact that the absence of actor communication has on their development as actors. Abigail describes her own experiences with the absence of actor communication:

And you feel like you can't take bigger risks, you can't, you can't do... You feel like you can't do any better because there's not going to be someone with you who's doing that, too. It's almost like they begin to hold you back in a weird way because, yeah, because it takes two. Otherwise,

⁴⁴⁸ Lucille, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, September 30, 2004.

⁴⁴⁹ Ashlyn, Jake, Greg, Abigail, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

you're just doing all this stuff on your own and you begin to feel unsure because it's supposed to be a scene. And if you're just up there going off on your own, like doing everything you can, then it just doesn't feel right.⁴⁵⁰

Abigail describes the impact of the absence of actor communication as limiting her sense of confidence in her acting abilities or her willingness to take risks in performance. She notes that regardless of her work, commitment, or talent, the performance does not feel appropriate because of the lack of connection between actors. Abigail's experience suggests that the absence of actor communication may aid in deteriorating performances as well as actor's sense of ability and sense of play in performance, which may have long-term effects beyond the performance in which the absence was experienced.

Although participants describe a negative response to the absence of actor communication and a negative perspective on their acting process or abilities, interestingly, some participants still view the experience as rewarding in that it was a learning experience – never to be repeated, but now recognizable. Participants describe different lessons learned from the absence of actor communication. Greg suggests that his experience may help him “portray one of these thoroughly reprehensible human beings onstage.”⁴⁵¹ While Greg's comment is imbued with some aggression towards non-engaging acting partners, he does note that the experience exposed him to people who think and behave differently than himself. Leon notes that her experiences of actor communication's absence have taught her that there are “other things that you can get out of it” such as new script development or developing a more tolerant attitude towards

⁴⁵⁰ Abigail, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

⁴⁵¹ Greg, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

acting partners: “I made myself realize that we weren’t all in the same place as actors and then it made a lot more sense. So it wasn’t all bad. It was all actor communication.”⁴⁵²

Leon suggests that because of her experiences of the absence of actor communication, she began to understand that not all actors are in the same place developmentally, which helped her be more compassionate with unwilling actors. She also suggests that while her experience with these actors was not fully engaged actor communication, there was a level of actor communication that was achieved. Her experience suggests that an actor may be able to recognize varying levels of actor communication or its absence. Ashlyn suggests that experiencing the absence of actor communication is important and rewarding to an actor’s development:

I think it’s beneficial to, at one time, in your acting career, or multiple times (laughter), um, feel like you have no control. Like you can’t do anything about the fact that you’re sucking. Because it shows you how acting really is not about you. It teaches you something and so that’s why you pick partners more carefully next time and you know that you have to maybe rehearse a little more next time. Like it teaches you things that you need to know for next time.⁴⁵³

Ashlyn notes that when an actor experiences the lack of actor communication, she learns valuable lessons, such as selecting strong scene partners and providing adequate rehearsal time for performances. She suggests that while the lessons may not help an actor during their experience of the absence of actor communication, the knowledge gained may help an actor in future endeavors.

⁴⁵² Leon, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004 and Individual Interview, University of Missouri, October 3, 2004.

⁴⁵³ Ashlyn, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

Perception of Partner

Whereas participants describe the absence of actor communication as still rewarding despite the negative experience, participants do not tend to describe their acting partners in such terms. Participant responses towards acting partners range from aggression to pity, but all acting partners in the experience of the absence of actor communication are perceived as dis-communicative, meaning they actively choose not to engage with their acting partners. Responses from the same participant may also show a wide variety of reactions towards acting partners. Ashlyn's perceptions of her acting partner after the absence of actor communication are on a vast spectrum, ranging from what may be considered rational to the irrational. She notes that after the experience: "You lose trust for them. You lose a lot of trust for them as a person."⁴⁵⁴ She suggests that her acting partner may or may not have taken certain actions during the experience, which would cause her to no longer trust her acting partner not only as an actor but also as a person. Ashlyn goes on to describe the impact that these experiences may have on an actor's perception of or interactions with a dis-communicative acting partner:

It makes me want to kill them...It makes me never want to work with them again. Ever. It makes me...Yeah. It makes me think they're a bad person. And it makes me seriously not want to audition for a show that I know that they might audition for. That's how, it's so painful.⁴⁵⁵

Ashlyn describes a very aggressive emotional reaction to the absence of actor communication and her perception of her acting partner. She suggests that the experience creates feelings of ill will towards her acting partner and a desire to do her partner bodily

⁴⁵⁴ Ashlyn, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

harm. She notes that she perceives her acting partner as a morally evil or unacceptable person and describes the experience as distressful. She also notes that the experience of absence impacted her willingness to work with her acting partner again. Ashlyn's experiences suggest that the absence of actor communication may permanently alter an actor's perception of her acting partner. Greg describes his response to his acting partner as a kind of betrayal, which alters his perception of his acting partner:

"We were part of something special...I was really opening up to you. Uh, you decided to cheat on me with my best friend basically." Same feeling...."I can, I can never be with you again."...It's a pathetic sense of betrayal.⁴⁵⁶

While Greg's description is humorous, the parallels between the onstage relationship in actor communication and the everyday intimate relationship between lovers are worth noting. He notes that the relationship and experience onstage had the potential, just like an intimate relationship, to become something worthwhile. Greg suggests that the feelings of the "betrayed lover" and the "betrayed actor" are the same.

Leon, who may be the eternal optimist of the participants, also described a negative perception of her acting partners after the absence of actor communication:

Yeah, I was really unhappy with some of them. And some of them I grew to like as the class went on...(lost words) and some of them kind of stayed that way the rest of the semester and didn't want to open themselves up to things happening naturally. They're interesting people. (laughter) I think they'll be better off in modeling perhaps than in theatre.⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁶ Greg, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

⁴⁵⁷ Leon, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, October 3, 2004. Suggesting a modeling career is the professional acting world equivalent of "have you considered another major? Maybe biology?" for a theatre major.

Leon describes her disappointment with acting partners due to the absence of actor communication, suggesting they held responsibility for its absence. She also suggests her general disinterest in working with her classmates further due to their unwillingness to engage in actor communication.

Greg also describes a negative perception of his acting partner not just at the level of actor, but at the level of person. He notes that the experience makes him “dislike them as a person.”⁴⁵⁸ He goes on to elaborate upon his perspectives of his acting partners in experiences of the absence of actor communication:

When, when you're dealing with somebody who is just the prince of darkness incarnate onstage and you just try shouting at them and railing at them and they just stare at you, you know, the way a cow does at an oncoming train....That's why I can't imagine having the sort of experience that, I just have to assume that the people who cause it, these psychic vampires that ruin plays..."I can't imagine why you got mad. That was fantastic! I'm going to come back next year and fuck up somebody else's career!"⁴⁵⁹

Greg describes his acting partner in experiences of actor communication in derogatory terms, i.e., “the prince of darkness” and “psychic vampires.” Greg’s descriptive names for acting partners conjure up “evil” creatures: either Satan who has come to take one’s soul or succubae who feed on the blood of the living for sustenance. Both descriptions imply that the acting partner is taking something essential from the actor in experiences of the absence of actor communication. He suggests that his acting partner completely disregarded or did not comprehend his efforts to connect with him. He likens his partner to a cow who is about to be hit by a train, unable to comprehend what is happening because they have the mental capacity of a cow. Greg’s experience suggests that there is

⁴⁵⁸ Greg, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

a level of aggression felt towards his acting partner, not only in the open use of names, but in the implied mental ineptitude of his acting partner during the absence of actor communication. Greg also notes his own lack of comprehension in the behavior of dis-communicative acting partners when they are surprised to find aggressive responses from the actors. He suggests that dis-communicative acting partners ruin productions and are unaware of their impact on the production and other actors. Greg suggests that the absence of actor communication may have devastating consequences on a performance as well as an actor's career.

Participants describe reciprocal disengagement as a response to their acting partner in the absence of actor communication. Several participants describe feeling a lack of concern for their acting partner, which may be due to a loss of trust or simply the breakdown of actor communication. However, there is a strong implication from the participants that the responsibility for the breakdown lies with their acting partner. As previously mentioned in *Requirements*, Greg describes his reciprocal disengagement as a response to his partner:

I have a personally reserved armchair past the orbit of Jupiter that I go during shows when I'm obviously not communicating with anyone.... but when I've gotten to that point I care so little that I completely disengage and unfortunate for them [scene partner], but they're the reason that I'm out there [in the armchair past Jupiter].... for the most part, I just completely disengage and go away.⁴⁶⁰

Greg describes his experience of disengaging as a response to his acting partner. He describes it as going to his "happy place" – an armchair just past Jupiter where he can disappear. Greg notes that he disengages only when it is clear that actor communication

⁴⁶⁰ Greg, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

is not going to happen with his acting partner. He suggests that his rationale for disengaging is that a) actor communication will not be occurring, b) because of that he has lost all care or personal investment in the performance, and c) his acting partner's disengagement is the reason for his own disengagement. Greg's experience suggests that his disengagement is a coping mechanism for his acting partner's refusal to engage in actor communication.

While several participants had responses that altered their perceptions of their acting partners in a negative and aggressive manner, Abigail and Lucille described negative feelings of pity and shame, however, both had empathy towards their acting partners after experiences of an absence of actor communication. Abigail describes her response towards acting partners after an absence of actor communication as: "I felt kind of sorry for him."⁴⁶¹ She notes a strong sense of sympathy for her acting partner when actor communication does not occur. Abigail's compassionate response to her acting partner may have roots in her own experiences in which she was responsible for the breakdown of actor communication:

it wasn't authentic, it wasn't real and I'm able to achieve that with other people, but for some reason I just had up this wall. I created this wall and I think, yeah, I'm going to go ahead and say it was my fault, although I'm sure there's something he had to do with that, too. It just didn't work, I guess. We just didn't have the chemistry for performing together, but we had always wanted to and I think because of, because of many other things that we know about each other, it just makes it difficult...I regret that because separately we're really good, but when we perform together, it's just insincere and I don't know there's, I guess it's having to do with the believability that we can be different people to each other.⁴⁶²

⁴⁶¹ Abigail, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

⁴⁶² Abigail, Individual Interview #1, University of Missouri, October 7, 2004. These experiences were with the same acting partner, who was also a participant of my dissertation focus group.

Abigail's experiences of failed actor communication may suggest that a compassionate response may only occur if the actor is able to recognize her own responsibility for the absence of actor communication. Whereas Abigail sympathizes with her acting partner, for Lucille, the experience of absence raises questions about her acting partner:

...it makes me wonder why they won't commit to an idea. Why won't they let themselves go to that point?...So it makes me wonder why they won't and how you can change that and what their family life has been like in order to keep them from getting there and do they actually want to? Maybe they're just not comfortable, maybe they don't care, maybe that's as far as they want to go. So I just turn into a psychologist when I, which is annoying because then my brain's doing that instead of acting.⁴⁶³

Lucille's experience suggests that there are multiple factors that may impact an actor's ability to engage in actor communication, some of which the actor may or may not consciously recognize.

Summary of Theme Seven: The Impact of Absence

Participants suggest that the experience of the absence of actor communication alters their perceptions of themselves and their acting partners. They note feeling embarrassed, abandoned, and have a desire to disappear. Participants suggest that the absence of actor communication makes them devalue their work and leaves actors feeling doomed or out of control. The experience of absence impacts participants' willingness to engage during a production and their confidence in their own abilities and talents as actors. Some participants note that the absence of actor communication is rewarding, only in that it serves as a learning experience from which to grow as an actor.

Participants also suggest that the lack of actor communication helps create a negative

⁴⁶³ Lucille, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, September 30, 2004.

perception of their acting partners. They describe having feelings of aggression towards their acting partners as performers and as people. However, some participants also suggest that compassion is a necessary response towards one's acting partner, in that through compassion we may gain understanding of the reasons behind an actor's choice to disengage, some of which the actor may not be consciously aware of during or after the experience.

Summary of Themes

The purpose of this study was to uncover a deeper understanding of the lived experience of actor communication and it is here that I return to my original question, "What's it like?" The answer is not so simple or matter of fact. What is uncovered is a complex, interwoven, interdependent and abstract phenomenon.

My participants experience actor communication as a shared connection between actors in a working relationship both as actors and as characters, which allows for the exchange of emotions, thoughts and ideas. Participants suggest that in order for actors to experience the connection of actor communication, there are certain conditions that must be present, obstacles that must be avoided, and variable conditions to neutralize. Actor communication requires at least two actors who have developed a trusting relationship with each other and their director. Actors develop trust based on knowing each other as both people and performers. They must learn to let go of personal restraints, which may hinder the connection between actors. The major obstacles to actor communication arise when either the audience inadvertently blocks or the actor directly blocks the connection between actors. Actors may block the connection with their acting partner due to self-

focus or due to a prior history with an acting partner. There are several variable conditions that may impact the connection between actors such as professional development, daily life, directorial style, rehearsal length, script, style of production, size of theatre or audience proximity. A debate that arises among my participants is the frequency and sustainability of the connection between actors, whether it is fleeting or whether actor communication is a phenomenon which can be sustained for an entire performance, whether it is the goal of acting and whether it is a healthy or ethical demand to make upon the actor.

A question that arises about the phenomenon is: “How does one know that he or she is experiencing actor communication?” Actor communication is a phenomenon that is understood only after it has occurred. Participants suggest that actors are not consciously aware that the experience is happening until it is over and they have opportunity for reflection. Actors recognize an emotional or physical sense of knowing after the experience of actor communication. Actor communication seems to be an impulse-based experience, in which thinking or conscious thought about the experience may interfere with the phenomenon. A debate arises as to whether the phenomenon is a teachable or innate skill or experience amongst actors, which suggests one needs to study the phenomenon to understand how and why it works and then perhaps one may teach it to others.

Actors experience actor communication as a blurring of perception, which includes how they perceive reality, identity, emotions and interpersonal or onstage relationships. Actors may experience blurring between onstage and offstage, between actor’s sense of self and that of the character, between acting partner’s behavior and that

of the character, between character emotional responses and that of the actor. Blurring of emotional responses may cause a blurring of the boundary between onstage and offstage, between fiction and reality, with real-life repercussions. While the blurring of boundaries may seem dangerous, there seems to be an expectation of it from audience members with regards to romantic onstage relationships transferring offstage. The blurring of boundaries gives rise to the necessity of limits to actor communication for one's personal well-being and one's working relationships with acting partners. Actors may create healthy limits by utilizing common coping or defense mechanisms such as disassociation, separation, or rationalization to deal with the anxiety that arises from the blurring of boundaries in actor communication. Actor communication is also described as a location, giving both a defined space with limits that actors may traverse, but also a goal to be reached in an actor's development.

The final question about actor communication is, "How is it meaningful to an actor's experiences?" The experience of actor communication has great impact on the actor's development and perception of his talents and abilities. Actor communication is perceived as a rewarding phenomenon that builds an actor's sense of self-worth, talent, and capability and creates feelings of admiration and respect for one's acting partners. Experiences of actor communication may increase an actor's willingness to take positive risks in rehearsal and performance, which may lead to growth in the actor's craft. When actor communication is absent, the opposite is true as far as perceptions of ability and of one's partner. While a negative experience, participants suggest that there are valuable lessons to be learned in experiences of the absence of actor communication about one's own process and choices. Absence of actor communication may have a devastating

effect on an actor's belief in his sense of ability or talent. Whereas actor communication fills an actor with a sense that their own skill and ability lead to the experience, the absence of actor communication fills an actor with a sense of being unable to control his own work or talents. The experience of the absence of actor communication seems to create a vicious cycle of disengagement in that one actor disengages, which makes the other actor wish to disengage as well, leaving no space for actor communication to occur anymore. Actors not only take on negative perspectives of their work, but they also perceive their acting partners in a negative light. Feelings of aggression towards an acting partner are common during experiences of the absence of actor communication. However, a more compassionate and inclusive perspective may help actors gain a better understanding as to the unconscious pressures that may be at work when actor communication is absent.

Chapter 5

The Space Between – The Structure of Transference

The actor's love, of course, is a kind of greed to be the other, to know the other by being the other...you are crossing a threshold, invading, occupying an area, where, in reality, you don't belong. Caution, perhaps, is the best approach.⁴⁶⁴

Thematic analysis uncovered seven themes that are integral to the lived experience of actor communication. In this chapter, the focus of my dissertation shifts to explore the structure of transference within the phenomenon of actor communication, to uncover what Richard Hornby describes as the “unconscious process that energizes art.”⁴⁶⁵ The structure of transference is a particular interpersonal relationship where each person holds a particular position and function for the other person, one who lacks and one who knows. I will explore transference through the uncovered themes of my participants' experiences as well as through the identifiable, conscious effects of transference in the participants' first-hand accounts, as made evident in the final two themes, *Impact of Presence* and *Impact of Absence*. The use of Lacan's theories of transference may help clarify the unconscious structures that actors must navigate and respond to within actor communication.

My application of a Lacanian lens is not meant to detract or lessen the value of my participants' experiences or to dispel the “magic” of the phenomenon, but rather to enrich and reinforce the importance of their experiences, providing a corollary structure

⁴⁶⁴ Anna Deveare Smith, *Talk to Me: Listening Between the Lines* (New York: Random House, 2000), 240.

⁴⁶⁵ Hornby, *The End of Acting*, 9.

with which to examine the phenomenon. By illuminating transference structures at play in the experience of actor communication, this examination may help ground emotional responses, alleviate anxieties or frustrations, and give a logic to actors' responses about their process and their scene partners. The immense depth of Lacan's work with transference and the unconscious is more than could possibly be handled in one chapter; therefore I will limit my exploration of transference to a cursory look at the subject-supposed-to-know, transference effects, full speech, and desire as well as how these four concepts connect with the themes and experiences of my participants.

Transference

Transference is described as an unconscious process whereby emotions are redirected or displaced from one person to another.⁴⁶⁶ In psychoanalysis, the feelings of the analysand (or patient) are typically redirected or displaced upon the analyst and unless actions are taken to disrupt the transference, the patient continues to repeat or enact his or her symptoms and fantasies with the analyst. Whereas continuing to displace feelings and repeat a fantasy would seem an unhealthy choice in psychoanalysis, the repetition of fantasy (or fiction) seems to be what is to be achieved in actor communication: the ability to repeat the same story, actions, interactions, and responses performance after performance. In actor communication, actors utilize transference in order to create an emotional connection with their acting partners. Lucille describes how she was able to redirect feelings onto her acting partner in order to create a character-to-character connection:

⁴⁶⁶ WordNet; <http://wordnet.princeton.edu/>, accessed on December 9, 2007.

Once I finally figured out how to put...my relationship with my significant other and put that into my partner...then I actually saw him as an individual who I was very connected to...and I actually felt that I was talking to him as who my partner is, as if we were in an actual relationship.⁴⁶⁷

Lucille's experience suggests that transference is an important aspect of creating the connection of actor communication.

Sigmund Freud originally described transference as:

certain intense feelings of affection which the patient has transferred on to the physician, not accounted for by the latter's behavior, nor by the relationship involved by the treatment. The form in which the affectionate feeling is expressed, and the goal it seeks, naturally depends upon the circumstances of the situation between the two persons.⁴⁶⁸

Just as transference occurs between analysand and analyst, transference also occurs between actor and actor. Participants describe the connection of actor communication in a similar fashion to that of transference: a shared connection where emotions, thoughts, ideas are exchanged between actors. A patient may transfer feelings towards her analyst, and an actor may also transfer feelings towards her scene partner and/or the other character. The context of the trusting relationship between two people may change from therapy to theatre, but the occurrence of transference persists. Freud suggests that the transference occurs regardless of the analyst's behavior; however, participants' experiences suggest that an acting partner's behavior has an apparent impact on the

⁴⁶⁷ Lucille, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, September 30, 2004.

⁴⁶⁸ Sigmund Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, trans. and ed. Joan Riviere (New York: Pocketbooks, 1963), 448. A person who is skilled in a set of techniques developed by Sigmund Freud for the treatment of various mental disorders. The analyst encourages the analysand to talk freely about personal experiences. An analysand is a person who is undergoing psychoanalysis or psychoanalytic patient. Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary; <http://www.m-w.com>, accessed December 9, 2007. Lacanian psychoanalysts focus on the agency of language in constituting subjectivity as opposed to traditional ego psychologists who focus on the functions of the ego.

process of actor communication and one may assume on transference as well. Whereas analysts seek a reprieve or a cure from the suffering of their symptoms, actors, on the other hand, seek to connect with other actors, to portray a role with other actors for an audience, to relive and repeat the fantasy night after night and in order to do this, a blurring of reality and identity occurs.

The blurring of identity, reality, and boundaries that occurs during actor communication may also give rise to transference in actor communication. Most American actors are taught in their actor training to perform a character based on the premise of “as if”: it is *as if* the actor is this character in this situation. The premise is based on a lie, but a lie all actors and audience must believe in order to sustain the fantasy. While very similar to the theatrical concept of “willing suspension of disbelief,” the deception of actor communication and transference goes further in that it is believing a lie to be true in order to (re)-enact a fantasy and consequently, making those lies true for the duration of the performance.⁴⁶⁹ The deception of transference is more akin to Uta Hagen’s concept of “substitution” in which an actor searches within her own experiences to discover something that will trigger an emotional experience in order to make the actor believe that what she is experiencing is real.⁴⁷⁰ According to Lacan, in transference, truth

⁴⁶⁹ The concept was developed by Samuel T. Coleridge in order to give justification for the use of non-realistic elements in literature. As a dramatic convention, it asks the audience to look past certain implausibilities in order to understand the playwright’s meaning or to be entertained by a play. Suspension of disbelief is accepting another person’s lie. Transference and blurring of boundaries is based on a lie an actor tells to herself as well as other actors.

⁴⁷⁰ Uta Hagen, *Respect for Acting* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1973), 35.

only occurs with the assistance of a lie.⁴⁷¹ To get at the unconscious truths of the subject, deception or half-truths must be spoken. In order to create the connection between actors and the space for containing that connection, deceptions must be told as well. Actors must deal with at least two layers of blurring: character-to-character and actor-to-actor, which can complicate the process of communication and transference. It raises the question, if I may borrow from Ellie Ragland, “who is transferring what to whom?”⁴⁷² Is the transference between characters, between actors, one or the other, or both?

Transference Effects

What is at work for French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan in communication, and by extension actor communication, is the unconscious process of transference, which often reveals itself in the form of strong affects such as love or hate, such as the examples of admiration, respect, dislike, and deathwishes from the themes of *Impact of Presence* and *Impact of Absence*: “I think they are the coolest freakin’ person in the whole world” and “the feeling that they’re actually sucking the very soul and desire to live out of your body... This is not the sort of person that you continue to favor living.”⁴⁷³ According to

⁴⁷¹ Pierre-Gilles Gueguen, “Transference as Deception” in *Reading Seminar XI: Lacan’s Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, eds. Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink, and Maire Jaanus, SUNY Series in Psychoanalysis and Culture, ed. Henry Sussman (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995), 81.

⁴⁷² Ellie Ragland, “Who is Transferring What to Whom?”; accessed on the Internet at <http://www.aademyanalyticarts.org/library.htm> on 2 November 2002, presented at “On the Transference,” an international conference at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, in 1985.

⁴⁷³ Leon and Greg, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004. Transference effects are also evident at the level of character – responding as the character would, feeling what the character feels towards another character.

Lacan, however, transference does not consist of emotions.⁴⁷⁴ Rather, love and hate are conscious and therefore recognizable *transference effects* that communicate that transference occurred. Just as participants become aware or conscious of the process of actor communication through feelings, they also become aware or conscious of transference through recognizable transference effects. Lacan describes transference effects as imaginary effects, a deception, or a distraction from the symbolic transformation that occurs in transference, which “changes the nature of the two beings present.”⁴⁷⁵ Both transference effects and symbolic transformation have a real impact on the experience of actor communication. The transference effects of love or hate may transfer to the actors’ relationship offstage.⁴⁷⁶ Participants suggest that there is an audience expectation of blurring the boundary between onstage relationships and offstage, which may suggest that the transfer of relationships offstage is expected by actors as well. As a result of positive or negative transference, an actor may feel affectionate or aggressive towards her acting partner in the experience of actor communication as well as in its absence.

Lacan describes both positive and negative experiences of transference to further clarify transference effects: “It would be truer to say that the positive transference is

⁴⁷⁴ Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977), 225.

⁴⁷⁵ Jacques Lacan, *Freud’s Papers on Technique, 1953-1954 (The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I)*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller and trans. John Forrester (New York; London: W.W. Norton, 1998): 109. I use imaginary and symbolic with very specific meanings in Lacanian theory. The imaginary order is the field of the ego, image, and deception. The symbolic order is the field of the signifier, lack, and the Other. The third order is that of the real, which may simply be seen as that which is not imaginary or symbolic, but it is the realm of the unbearable, the unspeakable, limitless pleasure and suffering.

⁴⁷⁶ The transfer of onstage relationships offstage alters the circumstances of the relationship and the transference, which may be why “show romances” are doomed to fail in the real world – what one hopes for onstage cannot be sustained offstage.

when you have a soft spot for the individual concerned...and the negative transference is when you have to keep your eye on him.”⁴⁷⁷ Participants’ responses to the presence and absence of actor communication correspond to Lacan’s sense of positive and negative transference. Abigail describes an experience connecting with her acting partners in terms of the genuine care of positive transference:

And we just have these moments when we’re making eye contact and I see their characters seeing me as my character and not as Abigail, Tiana*, Bette*, but, you know, it’s, there’s something happening and there’s a real genuine care for each other.⁴⁷⁸

Abigail describes a connection between her and her acting partners that is transformative, no longer seeing each other as actors, but rather as characters. Abigail notes that she is aware of a process occurring during actor communication, but does not describe the process; rather she describes her emotional response towards the other characters, noting a true sense of care between the actors. Ashlyn, on the other hand, describes succinctly the distrust that arises from negative transference: “You lose trust for them. You lose a lot of trust for them as a person.” She suggests that if the connection is broken between actors, the distrust she has for her acting partner exceeds the working relationship to include distrusting the person in everyday life. Although transference effects are not transference, they are the real repercussions of positive or negative transference and are the conscious phenomena that actors must negotiate within actor communication.

⁴⁷⁷ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 124.

⁴⁷⁸ Abigail, Individual Interview #1, University of Missouri, October 7, 2004. Emphasis follows Abigail’s emphasis during the interview. * denotes character names were changed.

Subject Supposed to Know

“As soon as the subject who is supposed to know exists somewhere . . . there is transference.”⁴⁷⁹

Transference, for Lacan, is not merely a sending and receiving of emotions, but rather an unconscious interplay between a subject’s desire, speech, and a subject-supposed-to-know.⁴⁸⁰ The very backbone of transference is the “subject who is supposed to know,” or *Sujet supposé Savoir*, a concept that holds there is a person who *knows* the analysand and *knows* what it is to be (another person in the world). Transference occurs once a subject believes that there is another person who “knows” or holds some knowledge of the subject’s identity. The subject transfers her feelings and expectations of help onto the other person. The subject is one who desires in language and the subject-supposed-to-know is one who holds the knowledge that a subject desires about her being, and because of that knowledge the S.s.S. is the one who can help the subject “become” who he or she is supposed to be. The concept of “becoming” has resonance in actor communication in that it is through the connection with the other actor that characters, plot lines, relationships come into being. Participants note that actors must let go of their sense of self and self-focus in order to become their character: “You need to get rid of you before I’m going to see anybody else onstage.”⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷⁹ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 232.

⁴⁸⁰ Lacan’s use of the term “subject” is not in the traditional sense of subject/object. Rather an individual becomes a subject through his/her “subjection to speech and language.” Silvia Rodriguez, “Subject” in *A Compendium of Lacanian Terms*, ed. Zita Marks, Sarah Murphy, and Huguette Glowinski (London: Free Association Books, 2001), 192.

⁴⁸¹ Greg, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004. Greg’s description also may imply that the negative response to a self-focused actor may contribute to the obstruction or breakdown of actor communication – it may be difficult to overcome in order to have a constructive working relationship.

Robert Brooke describes Lacan's concept of transference as a structure that exists between people, requiring each to play his own role in the structure:

For Lacan, transference is best understood as a dynamic structure located partly within a person and partly between people. On the one side is a divided self (perhaps a patient) who does not understand some part of her own action. . . On the other side is an authority figure, a person whom the "divided self" *supposes to know* how to interpret the behavior. The person who feels divided looks to the authority figure for interpretation.⁴⁸²

The subject-supposed-to-know is based completely on a supposition made by the analysand: she supposes that the analyst knows. Brooke's description is quite fitting for the experience of actor communication. He notes that on the one side is the divided self, which we may take as an actor in the context of actor communication, and on the other, S.s.S., or the acting partner. Actors hold the position of S.s.S. for each other in that both people are subjects of desire and in order for actor communication to occur, each must hold a position of knowing for the other. The necessary condition of "Knowing a Person" relates to Lacan's concept of subject-supposed-to-know: actors must know each other in a performance way, which presupposes that actors have some knowledge of what it is to be the other within the context of rehearsal or performance. Actors, much like analysands, are in search of certainty in the other person, someone they can depend upon, look to, connect with onstage, someone to reinforce the reality of their characters and their talents as actors, who they are trying to become onstage.

The supposition of one who knows is evident in participants' experiences of how knowing a person too well can obstruct actor communication. Lucille suggests one

⁴⁸² Robert E. Brooke, "Lacan, Transference and Writing Instruction," *College English* 49, (Oct 1987), 681. Actors may deal with multiple S.s.S in rehearsal: multiple acting partners as well as the director. Brooke's description as a structure "partly within a person and partly between people" is similar to participants' descriptions of actor communication as a location or a space between people.

reason for the breakdown of actor communication with people who have a personal relationship offstage:

Maybe it's because you know that they know that you're not fully there?
Like they know you so well that they'll be able to tell if you're not fully committed to whatever you're doing, maybe?⁴⁸³

She suggests that an actor who has a prior relationship with her partner knows if the actor is truly present or committed to a performance. The supposition that an actor can tell or “know” may interfere with the specific relationship between actors, blurring the boundaries of one who knows offstage with one who knows onstage. Freud’s description of transference notes that the relationship exists under particular circumstances, which may be disrupted if actors cannot make clear delineations between offstage circumstances and onstage circumstances with their acting partners.

Desire – Love – Transformation

According to Lacan, a person’s desire is for *being*, which is constituted in and through language. We are subjects of language in that we are subjected to it and consequently created out of it: “in the beginning, there was the Word.”⁴⁸⁴ Lacan also stated many times that “man’s desire is the desire for the Other,” meaning we want to be desired by another and we have a desire for recognition by another.⁴⁸⁵ For desire and its subsequent transference to be at play in a subject, there must be interaction in speech with

⁴⁸³ Lucille, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

⁴⁸⁴ Rodriguez, “Subject,” 192. The subject, referred to as either the barred subject (\$) or the speaking being, is not considered a unified whole, rather it is divided and inconsistent, lacking. The subject comes into being and is shaped through the experiences of speech, which create his/her own desires, drives, etc.; John 1:1 (New International Version).

⁴⁸⁵ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 235.

another person. Transference is an *intersubjective* relationship that occurs in speech because of one's desire. Meaningful speech or *full speech* includes the recognition of the subject, which can act in transforming the subject. Much like an analyst/patient hopes to be transformed by the analyst, an actor looks to his partner to be transformed, to blur the boundaries of identity, of perception, to see each other in a new way: "...looking at the other person onstage, you don't think 'That's Jake, he's playing this character.' You think 'That's the character.'"⁴⁸⁶ The actor finds himself transformed from the exchange because of the recognition by the other actor. When recognition occurs, there is transformation and when rejection occurs, there is stasis, no blurring occurs and the actor remains himself:

...they just stare at you, you know, the way a cow does at an oncoming train. You feel like every emotion that you've ever had was clearly a lie because this person is unmoved by your existence.⁴⁸⁷

Emotional responses are conscious and identifiable imaginary *effects* of full speech in that transference is a symbolic and unconscious *recognition* or *rejection* of a person at the level of being a subject of language and desire. Lacan suggests that what a subject is looking for from the S.s.S. in transference is love, in that love is transformative: "Love gives being. The object you love gives you some being; your love gives you being."⁴⁸⁸ Acting seeks to create moments of full speech, speech that transforms the speaker, gives being to a character, and blurs the boundaries of identity in the intersubjective act of actor communication. The interrelational nature of the connection of actor communication,

⁴⁸⁶ Greg, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

⁴⁸⁷ Greg, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

⁴⁸⁸ Marie-Hélène Brousse, "The Drive (I)," in *Reading Seminar XI*, ed. Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink, and Maire Jaanus (New York: SUNY Press, 1995), 104.

where two characters are engaged in dialogue, two actors are looking to each other for recognition and help in becoming, suggests that actors are not only engaged in actor communication, but also in transference.

Becoming

Theatre is based on the lie: it is a world upon the stage filled with illusion. Actors lie to themselves, to each other and to the audience in performance because the act of performing a play says, “This is real. I am real. This is really happening,” which all involved parties know to be a lie. Transference is also based on a lie. The blurring of boundaries of actor communication, the blurring between what is real and what is not, may be interpreted as the lie that sustains both actor communication and transference. In “Bodies, Selves,” J. David Velleman argues that participants who engage in online “virtual worlds” engage in transference as well, noting that as virtual or alternative selves of such games as *Second Life*, they are performing fictional actions or lies for others, which given the context makes their actions “fictionally true.”⁴⁸⁹ While the lie may sustain the structure (or relationship), actors do not experience actor communication as a lie, but rather as feelings of “really communicating” and feeling “very natural” in their interactions with their acting partners. The blurring of boundaries is deception as truth. By creating a character, the actor takes on signifiers that represent her “self” for the audience’s (Other’s) gaze. However, what allows an actor to perform a “believable” or authentic character upon the stage does not rest simply in the creation of character, but rather it comes from actor communication and the transference that is inherent

⁴⁸⁹ J. David Velleman, “Bodies, Selves,” *American Imago* 65, no. 3, 409.

underneath and through the dialogue, which allows the acting partner to say in effect, “I acknowledge you. I see you.” Registering the recognition or rejection occurs on an unconscious level, with very real conscious transference effects, real love or real hatred towards another actor. When the recognition occurs, participants note positive feelings towards their work and their acting partners. When it does not occur, more to the point, when a rejection occurs, actively as in dis-communication, participants note negative feelings about their abilities as actors and have negative transference effects about their acting partners ranging from shame to deep hatred for the actor at a level beyond acting, at the level of being another person in the world.

Summary

The seven themes and the structure of transference help to deepen the understanding of actor communication – how it is described and how it is meaningful to those who experience it. The themes of actor communication: connection, requirements, awareness, blurring, location, impact of presence and impact of absence are correlative to the structures of transference: transferring of emotions onto another person as connection and location; transference effects as awareness and impact of presence and absence; subject supposed to know as the requirement of trust and knowing a person; the lie as blurring of boundaries; desire as impact of presence and absence. Both hermeneutic phenomenology and psychoanalytic theory point out the challenges for actors within the experience of actor communication: complex conscious level of negotiating seven multidimensional aspects of actor communication and a complex intersection of unconscious forces with recognizable conscious effects. There is a need to help students

navigate actor communication and transference – to understand and develop limits for blurring, creating connection, awareness, and responding to the real impact of both the presence and absence of actor communication on the student actor’s process and working relationships with other actors. As theatre educators, we can develop an approach to actor communication that takes into consideration the lived experience of the actors and incorporate these themes and the structure of transference into the curriculum for acting students and in rehearsal practices to help our students understand the experiences that exist in those imaginary spaces between actors.

Chapter 6

Discussion and Implications

My final chapter allows me the opportunity to summarize my findings; compare my findings with the bracketed extant literature, assumptions and experiences; explore the implications for research and reflect upon my own experience and future research goals.

Summary of the Study

I began this study to uncover the student actor's lived experience of actor communication. I created a conceptual framework for the study, providing an in-depth dimensional analysis of the current literature of communication theory and acting theory and practice, exploring the necessary conditions, problems, salient debates, prevalent assumptions, and represented perspectives of actor communication. The dimensional analysis revealed that while actor communication seems to be an integral part of acting, and is mentioned in several texts under different names, no single text exists which has systematically explored actor communication as a singular phenomenon.

This hermeneutic phenomenological research attempted to uncover the lived experience of eight student actors who shared their experiences, both positive and negative, as part of an actor communication focus group. The research methodology of Moustakas and van Manen was followed carefully and included the bracketing of literature, assumptions, and my own personal experiences of actor communication as well as constant comparison, data reduction, and thematic analysis.

The methodological approach requires semi-structured group interviews and individual follow-up interviews, which were transcribed and analyzed through a systematic approach of comparison, coding, and reduction. Thematic analysis revealed seven major themes of actor communication: 1) connection, 2) requirements, 3) awareness, 4) blurring/boundaries, 5) location, 6) impact of presence and 7) impact of absence. The secondary critical analysis supports the presence of transference as part of the experience of actor communication, which draws parallels between the conscious experience and the unconscious structure.

Unbracketing the Literature

Communication

This study supports several of the dimensions uncovered in the analysis of literature, but also points out the apparent gaps in current research on actor communication. As no single text exists on actor communication, the dimensions of the extant literature were extracted from general acting theory and communication theory texts. Some of the themes of my study are mentioned or described within the bracketed literature of the dimensional analysis. Other themes uncovered in this study expand beyond the ideas and perspectives of the extant literature, opening new venues of research. This study both supports and enriches many of the perspectives within the current research.

Communication theory describes interpersonal communication as an ongoing meaning-making process whereby individuals interact with each other to create meaning

from shared goals, mutual support, and confirmation of identities.⁴⁹⁰ A primary dimension of interpersonal communication is that it is *transactional*, which corresponds to the theme *Connection* in that connection is dimensionalized as an interrelational exchange, a transaction, between acting partners. The participants described experiences of actor communication as a process in which actors interact with each other in order to tell the story to an audience based on trusting, supportive and inclusive working relationships, which helped to confirm character identities and relationships onstage.

The study also supports the conditions of interpersonal communication: an interaction between two or more people with exchanges of receiving and responding and the presence of verbal and nonverbal language. Participants describe an interdependent connection between actors in which there is an exchange of thoughts or emotions. Whereas interpersonal communication theory describes the connection as consisting of both verbal and nonverbal language, and while they do not discredit this perspective, participants describe the connection of actor communication as primarily nonverbal in nature.

Actor Communication

The study confirms many of the primary dimensions and conditions of actor communication uncovered in the literature. Whereas the acting literature makes general observations about acting, the findings from my participants flesh out each dimension

⁴⁹⁰ Borman, *Small Group Communication*; Burton and Dimbleby, *Between Ourselves*; Cathcart, Samovar, and Henman, *Small Group Communication*; Harper, *Human Communication Theory*; Phillips and Wood, *Communication and Human Relationships*; Smith, *Speech-Communication*; Trenholm and Jensen, *Interpersonal Communication*; Wood, *Communication Theories in Action*; Wood, *Interpersonal Communication*.

through salient experiences specific to actor communication. The study provides a deeper understanding of what each of those dimensions means to an actor, her process, and her acting partners. The study confirms, expands upon, and places in context the primary conditions of actor communication: communion, connection, chemistry, exchange, impulse/instinct, and action.

Primary Dimensions

Communion is described within the extant literature as a current of energy flowing between individuals.⁴⁹¹ The study also acknowledges this dimension of actor communication describing energy as what is exchanged in the connection between actors. Leon in particular describes actor communication in terms of an energy flow between actors. However, participants' experiences suggest that the exchange of energy is one of several overlapping dimensions of actor communication.

The findings are consistent with the literature in the dimension of connection, as it is the most prevalent theme among my participants' experiences of actor communication. Actor communication is rather described as an intimate or invisible nonverbal connection between actors.⁴⁹² Professional actors comment on the connection, or use the word "connect" or "connected" when describing their acting experiences. Professional actor Terry Kinney however, describes the connection as "a space between us not just in our

⁴⁹¹ Communion: Brestoff, *The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods*; Chekhov, "Stanislavski's Method of Acting"; Moore, *Stanislavski Revealed*; Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*; Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*; Vakhtangov, "Preparing for the Role"; and Zakhava, "Principles of Directing"; Vineberg, *Method Actors*.

⁴⁹² Alda, "A Conversation with Alan Alda"; Chaikin, *The Presence of the Actor*; Channing, "Where Contradictions Meet"; Kahn, "Like a Piece of Music"; Nixon, "A Good Intimacy of Feeling"; Robertson, "Warren Robertson"; Vineberg, *Method Actors*.

own spaces,”⁴⁹³ which resonates with the study’s theme of *Location*, which also describes in part a space created out of the connection between actors. Participants describe the boundaries of actor communication as an “in between” space as well, which suggests there is some significance or logic to the conceptualization of connection as a space. Brestoff, Brecht, Spolin, Grotowski, and Suzuki describe actor communication in terms of chemistry.⁴⁹⁴ Chemistry is subsumed in the study as a part of *Requirements*, and holds its own definition among participants of the study. Chemistry equates to ability to communicate and specifically types of people with whom an actor can or cannot communicate, which helps to demystify what “chemistry” is as a quality or dimension.

Actor communication is dimensionalized as an exchange by acting theorists, practitioners, and professional actors.⁴⁹⁵ The dimension mirrors that of the transactional nature of interpersonal communication, which is included within the section above.

Actor communication is dimensionalized as an impulse or instinct in the current literature. Meisner and his followers, such as William Esper, Larry Silverberg, and Mary Steenburgen, as well as Chaikin and Grotowski, describe acting and actor communication as impulse based.⁴⁹⁶ Julie Harris also describes actor communication or acting as an

⁴⁹³ Kinney, “A Skin I Can Crawl Into.”

⁴⁹⁴ Brestoff, *The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods*.

⁴⁹⁵ Albright and Albright, *Acting, the Creative Process*; Benedetti, *The Actor at Work*; Brestoff, *The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods*; Carlson, “Acting and Answerability”; and D’Angelo, *The Actor Creates*; Daw, *Acting: Thought into Action*; Huston, *The Actor’s Instrument*; Kahn, “Like a Piece of Music”; McGaw, Stilson, and Clark, *Acting Is Believing*; Phillips, *Take It Personally*.

⁴⁹⁶ Chaikin, *The Presence of the Actor*; William Esper and Damon DiMarco, *The Actor’s Art and Craft* (New York: Anchor Books, 2008); Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*; Meisner and Longwell, *Sanford Meisner on Acting*; Silverberg, *The Sanford Meisner Approach*.

impulse-related experience. In her book, *Julie Harris Talks to Young Actors*, she describes great acting performances as a process of unconscious impulse or instinct:

There is a kind of surrealism in great acting performances. No one understands it fully. Great actors are sometimes referred to as somnambulists – sleepwalkers. Why and how they do it, nobody knows – not even the actor himself.⁴⁹⁷

In the theme *Awareness*, participants describe actor communication as an impulse-based process and confirm that during the experience the actor is unaware of actor communication, but can recall that the experience occurred afterwards. However, participants agree that they are unaware of their actions or good acting moments that occurred during actor communication. Meisner's approach does not endorse Harris' perspective; rather his Technique is meant to train actors to become aware of their impulses and how to perform from their impulses at a conscious level.

The final primary dimension of actor communication in the literature is that of action. Wangh and Hodge dimensionalize it as an action, a literal or physical action or interaction between actors. The study supports Wangh's perspective that actors must engage in conversation about their needs as actors. Jake and Ashlyn's experience of creating safety in their scene relates the importance of communicating needs and boundaries with one's acting partners as an important part of developing a trusting working relationship.

Conditions

⁴⁹⁷ Julie Harris and Barry Tarshis, *Julie Harris Talks to Young Actors* (New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Company, 1971), 55.

The primary conditions of actor communication in the bracketed literature are few: the other actor⁴⁹⁸ and listening⁴⁹⁹ with other salient conditions as: concentration, mutuality, reacting, vulnerability (trust), and responsiveness. The study confirms both the primary and salient conditions, suggesting that actor communication requires at least two actors and that listening is part of giving one's focus to the acting partner. While the extant literature does describe necessary conditions of actor communication, the study goes into more depth to suggest other necessary conditions that are needed to establish actor communication which include: confidence in performance, commitment, concentrating on partner, pressure, a willingness to let go, and knowing a person. Of the further dimensions of necessary conditions uncovered by the study, one can find reference to most of them within texts on general acting approaches.

The dimension of "knowing a person" does not arise in the extant literature, except in a debate on the nature of the self. For the most part, participants do not consider the nature of the self or ego to be up for debate; it is a non-issue. However, Abigail notes putting up a wall when interacting with an acting partner with whom she shared a close offstage relationship. She suggests that she cannot reconcile the two different relationships or "how she knows her acting partner." Participants suggest that an

⁴⁹⁸ Adler, *The Technique of Acting*; Albright and Albright, *Acting, the Creative Process*; Brestoff, *The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods*; Daw, *Acting: Thought into Action*; Zakhava, "Principles of Directing"; Grotowski, "An Interview With Grotowski"; Harris, ed., *Conversations in the Wings: Talking About Acting*; Hornby, *The End of Acting*; Meisner and Longwell, *On Acting*; Lewis, "Dialogue with Robert Lewis"; Krasner, ed., *Method Acting Reconsidered*; Rotté, *Acting with Adler*; Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*.

⁴⁹⁹ Albright and Albright, *Acting, the Creative Process*; Brestoff, *The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods*; Cairns, "Zen and the Art of Acting"; Daw, *Acting: Thought into Action*; Dean, *The Fundamentals of Play Directing*; Harris, ed., *Conversations in the Wings: Talking About Acting*; Hornby, *The End of Acting*; Meisner and Longwell, *On Acting*; Lewis, "Dialogue with Robert Lewis"; Krasner, ed., *Method Acting Reconsidered*; McGaw, Stilson, and Clark, *Acting Is Believing*; Owen, *The Stages of Acting*; Richardson, *Acting Without Agony*; Silverberg, *The Sanford Meisner Approach*; Weston, *Directing Actors*; Zakhava, "Principles of Directing."

actor must let go of his sense of ego or self in order to engage in actor communication, which implies that whether the self is fluid or fixed it can be suspended. Kim Abunuwara suggests that the self is fixed and that an actor rises beyond her self through her relationship with her partner. However, as is the case with Abigail, if an actor is unable to reconcile the double bind of actor relationship and character relationship, she cannot transcend her self and subsequently, actor communication does not occur. Michael Quinn suggests that having knowledge of an actor's actual life may undermine an audience's ability to accept or believe an actor because it triggers associations between actor and spectator that have nothing to do with the performance.⁵⁰⁰ The same may hold true for actors; personal knowledge of an actor or an offstage relationship may inhibit an actor's ability to blur her perceptions of her acting partner.

Problems and Debates

The problems noted in the extant literature concerning actor communication are the breakdown of the process and the blurring of boundaries. The study confirms the breakdown as an issue of actor communication as well citing major obstacles and variable conditions, which may hinder actor communication between actors. Both the literature and the study confirm that a major obstacle of actor communication is found in the actor or acting partner. The study also suggests that the audience actions and perception of audience may also impact actor communication. The other salient issue concerns the blurring of boundaries between actors, which occurs due to intense feelings that may arise during actor communication. In *Blurring/boundaries*, participants suggest

⁵⁰⁰ Michael Quinn, "Celebrity and the Semiotics of Acting," *New Theatre Quarterly* 20, 1990: 155

that blurring of identity and perceptions is part of the experience of actor communication. Blurring raises questions of identity and reality. The study suggests that the blurring of perceptions in actor communication is a causal element of transferring onstage relationships offstage and that limits are necessary for the mental and everyday well-being of actors' offstage lives.

In "The Impact of Acting on Actors: Boundary Blurring, Growth, and Emotional Distress" Burgoyne, Poulin, and Rearden explore student actors' experiences of boundary blurring and developing a means to manage the impact of blurring on the actor.⁵⁰¹ While Burgoyne's study does not look explicitly at experiences of actor communication, it still has relevance with its exploration of blurring boundaries between an actor and her character and the potential damage that can occur without healthy limits of those boundaries. Participants of her study note both artistic and personal consequences of blurring and suggest that control over blurring is important for actor safety. Burgoyne's investigation suggests that once actors are aware of the blurring, they can then develop strategies to managing the impact. My study suggests that actors are aware of the blurring and develop strategies on their own for managing the blurring of boundaries. My participants note implementing various defense mechanisms or coping mechanisms to handle the blurring of boundaries or to create boundaries in a response to what psychologists would call trauma. This study reveals that not only do student actors develop strategies to manage the blurring of boundaries, they also take responsibility for managing the experience. However, I argue that the responsibility for it should rest in the hands of theatre educators and directors, not in the hands of student actors.

⁵⁰¹ Suzanne Burgoyne, Karen Poulin, and Ashley Rearden, "The Impact of Acting on Actors: Blurring Boundaries, Growth, and Emotional Distress," in *Theatre Topics* 9, no. 2 (1999): 165.

There are two debates that arise in the extant literature, which deal with whether the self is fluid or fixed and whether actor communication is a conscious or unconscious. As suggested above the concept of fixed or fluid self is not an issue concerning the participants of the study. However they do suggest that the ego is something that can be suspended or discarded during actor communication.

Regarding the second debate of actor communication, the study explores the phenomenon as both a conscious and unconscious process. Participants describe their experience as something they are not aware of while it is occurring, but can reflect upon the experience afterwards. Although there is an unconscious element to the experience, participants suggest that there is also conscious skill, technique, and conditions that must be present within the actor in order for actor communication to occur. As Greg says, “it’s not purely random.”⁵⁰²

The study also suggests an unconscious structure of transference within the experience of actor communication, which is experienced as conscious emotional responses towards acting partners. The emotional affect towards acting partners is in response to the presence or absence of actor communication. Within the extant literature, the impact of the presence or absence of actor communication is mentioned only anecdotally and is not the focus of any particular acting text or interview. The study suggests that actor communication’s presence or absence has a crucial impact on an actor’s sense of ability, his development as an artist, and how he perceives his acting partners. How an actor perceives his partner has real life consequences on the working relationships between actors and impacts the atmosphere of rehearsals and may have

⁵⁰² Greg, Individual Interview, University of Missouri, September 30, 2004.

damaging effects on performances as well. Participants note positive and negative emotional responses towards their acting partners, which are experienced as actors, not as characters. These emotional responses may contribute to a sense of willingness to risk and reciprocity or unwillingness and disengagement.

The emotional responses towards acting partners also may suggest another level at which actors experience a blurring of boundaries. According to Lacan, transference includes the deception of love as a lure to engage within the structure. When acting partner's function in positive transference, there is acknowledgment of the actor, i.e., he is loved. Conversely, when there is negative transference, the actor is rejected. Within the process of actor communication, transference functions as a means of transforming the actor into character and creating believability in performance. However, due to the blurring of perceptions that occurs in actor communication, actors could easily misread the acknowledgment, or love, that is experienced within transference coupled with character love as "real love" misinterpreting a very specific context as one that could transfer offstage. It is at this point that participants suggest that real life consequences and damage may occur. As Abigail notes in *Blurring/Boundaries*:

My thing is that I'm really glad I never played the romantic lead in a show because when that actor communication thing begins to happen you start to think that you have feelings for someone when you really don't. And you think you are getting to know a person and maybe you're not. You like their character, not them....You know? And when an actor communication thing is happening too good, it sends people into relationships and I don't think that's healthy.⁵⁰³

Perspectives

⁵⁰³ Abigail, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

The representative perspectives within the extant literature are predominantly those of acting teachers, directors, theorists, and professional actors. The study contradicts the represented voices and places the mantle of “expertise” in the hands of student actors. The study demonstrates that student actors are articulate, thoughtful, and have a wealth of knowledge to offer about their experiences in our classrooms and upon our stages.

Assumptions of the literature

The study confirms, dispels and expands upon the assumptions that are made about actor communication in the extant literature. The study dispels the assumption that actor communication is a given of the acting experience. Participants described multiple experiences of non-communication and dis-communication, which suggest that it is not a given to the experience of acting. The study suggests that rather than state that actor communication is a given of the experience, it can be stated that transference is always a given of the experience, which may be positive or negative in nature.

The second assumption of actor communication is that it is essential to believable acting. The perspectives of my participants suggest that for the most part this is true. They suggest that one may give a passable performance without it, but they also suggest that actor communication is the goal of acting.

The third assumption of the literature is that actors are willing to participate in each conceptualization of actor communication. The study dispels this assumption as well. Participants suggest that there are actors who are unwilling to participate. The findings describe unwillingness in terms of actors’ perception of their partners’ behavior

as well as personal confessions regarding putting up walls or disengaging from their acting partners.

The fourth assumption of the literature is that an actor's experience of the exercises designed to elicit actor communication will transfer over into rehearsal and performance practices and that an actor cannot experience actor communication without first being led to it by an acting instructor or director. The study suggests that exercises may help elicit actor communication and directors can and should facilitate the transfer of the exercise into rehearsal, but exercises are not a necessary first step to experiencing actor communication. That being said, participants suggest that having more exercises in rehearsal would be helpful. In the first group interview, Lucille suggests the importance of exercises in rehearsal:

I don't think that we do enough of them during a rehearsal process in general with any type of show because they take you out of it and you pull from them later and that's when I've always connected, in exercise kind of things. And when those get put into the show, then I connect better in the show for some reason.⁵⁰⁴

The fifth assumption of the literature is that actor communication is a means of building character. The study supports this perspective and expands upon it. Actor communication is a means of creating character and character relationships from the connection between actors.

The sixth assumption of actor communication is that it occurs at a conscious and/or unconscious level. A rather all encompassing assumption, but the study suggests that actor communication is an impulse-based process, comprised of conscious effort and

⁵⁰⁴ Lucille, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

emotional responses; however, the actor is not conscious of her actions during the experience.

The seventh assumption is that actor communication is a process that reaffirms, reifies, or recreates the actor's self. The study suggests that the process of actor communication does not reaffirm or reify the self, but perhaps recreates the actor's self upon the stage, transforming the actor into the character. While participants note the difference between the actor and the character, they also describe a blurring of identity and reality that occurs in actor communication, which suggests a recreation or re-interpretation of the actor as character.

The final assumption in the extant literature is that actors can experience communication or know what the experience is without a meaningful description of the lived experience of actor communication. The study confirms that actors can experience actor communication, as participants of the study had several experiences of actor communication without a meaningful description. However, the study does not affirm that actors can know what communication is without a meaningful description of the experience. The study demonstrates the importance of developing a deep understanding of actor communication, a meaningful description to help actors navigate the complexities of the experience. Beyond the rich findings of this study, the interviews of eight undergraduate actors points up how important it is for actors to put their experiences into perspective, to reflect and develop knowledge about their process. The study provides a touchstone by which student actors can contextualize their own experiences.

Unbracketing My Assumptions and My Experiences

Researcher bias is always a risk of any qualitative study. The data collection and analysis methods that I employed as well as the findings of this study could be challenged on the basis that I am a) an actor and b) have had prior personal contact with my participants as all of us were students of the Theatre Department and/or former cast mates of Theatre Department productions at the University of Missouri. At the time of the interview, I had acted with only one of the eight participants in a production in 2001. However, over-rapport was a concern when selecting participants, which is why Scooter was eliminated from the sampling pool – our relationship is too close for me to minimize my own biases regarding his perspectives.⁵⁰⁵ There is a possibility that I was unable to set aside my own perceptions, assumptions and experiences of actor communication enough to truly understand the stories of my participants. There is no satisfactory disproof to researcher bias, except to say that my assumptions and experiences that were bracketed in Chapter Two have similarities and differences with the findings of the study. Qualitative studies does put in place specific safeguards against researcher bias and protect the credibility of the research and its findings, among them are: clarifying researcher bias (bracketing), prolonged engagement (multiple interviews), triangulation (multiple participants), member checks (soliciting confirmation from participants), and thick description (Chapter 4).⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰⁵ In field research this is referred to as “going native,” which is an interesting perspective when dealing with actors. What does it mean to go native with people who pretend to be other people from other places in circumstances other than their own?

⁵⁰⁶ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 201-203.

When I began this study, I set before me my own assumptions, concepts or perspectives that I felt might arise in the investigation concerning both the interview process and the findings of the study. Participants both confirmed some of my preconceived notions about actor communication and dispelled others. They confirmed certain assumptions that I held: a) actor communication more closely resembles interpersonal communication (*Requirements*); b) relationships between people exist (*Requirements*); c) actor communication is more than an exchange of dialogue and acting cues (*Connection*); d) trust and vulnerability are a part of actor communication (*Requirements*); e) trust and a willingness to connect with another person are necessary for actor communication (*Requirements*); f) the world of the play is important to creating connections between characters and consequently actors (*Requirements*); g) actors may experience feelings of love or aggression towards their acting partners during the experience (*Impact of Presence/Absence*); h) actors may experience emotional reactions/responses towards the other character or actor in the experience of actor communication (*Impact of Presence/Absence*); i) actors may develop personal relationships with acting partners outside of rehearsal for the duration of a production in their experiences (*Blurring/Boundaries*); j) positive experiences of actor communication/transference occur when there is trust of the acting partner or director or both (*Requirements/Impact of Presence*).

Participants' experiences and the findings of the study dispel or challenge certain assumptions that I held about actor communication and my participants' experiences. They helped me to dismiss the following assumptions: a) if actors do not experience communication in rehearsal, the phenomenon will not occur in performance between

actors; b) experiences of actor communication in rehearsal will lessen the impact of actor-to-audience communication on the lived experience of actor-to-actor communication; c) the size of acting space is not a determining factor in actor communication (*Requirements*); d) actor communication does not happen as much in classroom situations compared to rehearsal or performance; e) some participants may confuse actor communication with emoting or mugging; and f) an actor expends more energy to sustain a good performance without actor communication/connection from scene partner.

Participants also both confirmed an assumption that I held about the focus group interview process: it may create a learning, healing, or empowering environment for the actors involved. I believe that it created a learning community, which empowered the participants in building their own knowledge about actor communication. I cannot speak to whether or not the process had any healing capacity with participants or whether my participants experienced positive transference during the focus group interviews as these concepts were either never mentioned by participants or outside the parameters of the study.

I also bracketed my personal experience of actor communication at the beginning of my study. Comparing my own experiences to that of my participants, I discovered that while we have shared both experiences of actor communication and dis-communication and our responses to both are similar, our perspectives are not identical. I must admit that if I were to revisit those bracketed experiences, I would find it very difficult not to place my experiences within the context of the findings. Perhaps the major differences between my experiences and that of my participants is a) sending out receptive or

acknowledging energy to my partner, b) discussing the differences between my working relationship with my acting partner and my emotional relationship with another character, c) my enjoyment of both the working relationship and the character relationship, and d) delineating a specific boundary for blurring. When discussing both experiences of actor communication and dis-communication, my descriptions of connection and necessary conditions, and my responses to my work and to my partner are similar to that of the participants. When discussing experiences of dis-communication, I think that I am far less forgiving of my acting partner than a lot of my participants were of their partners. For example, in my dis-communication experience with Derwood, I was far more likely to let him fumble with his lines and suffer embarrassment in front of the audience than I was to help him “save face” in front of the audience. If my participants engaged in this sort of passive-aggression, they did not bring their actions to the table. Greg and others mention disengaging, or giving up, but I cannot say that my own actions were so neutral.

Limitations of the Methodology and Findings

The original intent of my study was to gain a deeper understanding of the abstract phenomenon of actor communication: how actors perceive and understand their experiences; what conditions, skills, or techniques must be present; the impact of the presence and absence of actor communication on an actor’s process and perception of acting partner. Hermeneutic phenomenology has been the best approach with which to explore actor communication. The interview and data analysis processes as developed by Moustakas and van Manen have been useful tools for analysis. Each step was methodical and logical and allowed me the opportunity to confirm or question or expand my

analysis. When describing the methodology to my friends or family, I have often made the comparison of thematic analysis to an algebra equation, in which one must show all of her work. The analogy is simplistic, but the analytic process allowed me to “check my work” through constant comparison of words and phrases during transcription, coding and conceptualizing the themes of actor communication. The process allowed me to compare my work to my field notes, bracketed assumptions and prior experiences, ensuring against researcher bias as much as possible. It also allowed me to take a fresh perspective towards the data, not assuming anything about the experience. During coding and constant comparison, I found myself exploring the etymology of participants’ words or exploring the world of metaphor in order to understand participants’ experiences of actor communication as location. From finding horizons and creating invariant horizons to using imaginative variation and intentional analysis in order to create descriptions of my participants’ experiences, all of these facets of the process facilitated my ability to extract, identify, and give shape to the seven themes of actor communication. Thematic analysis was a long and rigorous process. However, when I consider the richness of my findings as well as the immense understanding that I have gained from my participants’ experiences, I am satisfied that hermeneutic phenomenology was the best approach for my investigation.

The focus group interviews were also a successful tool for uncovering the experience and also creating a learning community. It is important for actors to share their experiences, not only for confirming experiences, but to process their experiences with peers who have gone through similar situations or responses with regards to acting, rehearsal, performance, interactions with acting partners. By allowing participants to

reflect on their experiences as a group, they help inform each other, both confirming and expanding on each other's knowledge. While focus group interviews were successful, they were not without their challenges.

Participants discuss the audience with frequency in their experiences of actor communication in performance. While the audience is a factor in the experience of actor communication, actor-audience communion is a separate phenomenon with its own set of dimensions and variables and is worthy of its own study. Therefore, I narrowed my focus to actor communication and included audience when it impacted the phenomenon under investigation.

Group interviews created their own unique challenges in a few particular areas: management of the interviews, transcription of the interviews, and certain individual descriptions of themes. When I began the interviews, I was prepared for a group dynamic, including tangential conversations and the common sidetracking of which we actors are very capable. I was prepared for the group, but I did not want to control the group per se, but I knew that I needed to keep the interviews focused on the phenomenon of actor communication. I tried to maintain an egalitarian atmosphere within my interviews, not placing myself above my participants, since they were the experts, not me. Participants were allowed to ask each other questions – they were furnished with the list of potential guiding questions and were encouraged to ask for clarification if necessary. At times, it seemed the conversation took a left turn at Albuquerque and had no hopes of return, but in retrospect, the conversation amongst my participants went exactly where it needed to go. It had not occurred to me to ask about the things some participants discussed, which turned out to be particularly relevant to their experiences

and played an integral role in many of the themes. For example, when Jake decided to discuss erections. To some, it may seem out of place within an interview on actor communication, but Jake's query brought up a very relevant issue about blurring boundaries between actor and character. I admit I have no answer to that conundrum, except to say that the blurring of actor and character boundaries and the physiological responses within it merit further research.

Transcription of five to eight individuals was demanding; however, it allowed me the opportunity to hear my participants at a much deeper level. An obvious issue lay in the fact that I had two women participants, Ashlyn and Lucille, whose voices were quite similar on tape at times. I spent a considerable amount of time differentiating between the two and what unfolded before me in my attempts to make a distinction between their vocal qualities was the difference of how each of them participated within the focus group interviews.⁵⁰⁷ I discovered that instead of vying for a space to speak, Lucille would often defer to Ashlyn. She gently agreed with her "mm-hmms" and would find opportunities to ask questions of the other participants instead. My follow-up interview with her confirmed her gentle agreements with her own narratives of actor communication experiences. I did guide and manage the interviews; however, there were times when the flow of the discussion seemed to have a life of its own.

The final challenge of using a focus group interview process lies in coding and creating descriptions of the participants' experiences. Since participants were interviewed as a group, except for follow up interviews, some of the data from the group interviews was coded as if it were almost one person, one consciousness – the group.

⁵⁰⁷ Being able to differentiate between the two participants was necessary for guiding follow-up interviews.

While each participant brought varied and unique perspectives to the interview, some themes emerged due to group agreement, i.e., coding participants' words of agreement "Yes", "yeah", "mm-hmm" or "uh-huh" within the same code as a particular participant's narrative. The affirmations helped to confirm certain themes, especially, *Requirements*. Here's an example from the first interview concerning types of people actors cannot communicate with, which led to the subtheme of major obstacles: self-focused actors:

Abigail: Can I ask you guys a question?

Lucille: Mm-hmm.

Greg: Sure.

Abigail: Do you believe in chemistry, as in there are just some people you cannot communicate with?

All: Yes.

(laughter)

Ashlyn: Hell, yes.⁵⁰⁸

Writing a description of an individual participant's experience almost turns silly when my supporting data or his or her first-hand account is a "yes," or in this case "Hell, yes" in reference to another's participant's perspective.

In retrospect, I can see other possible alternatives for approaching a study using focus group interviews, which may include: 1) following actors individually over time and then conducting a focus group interview or 2) conducting focus groups over the course of a semester or production, in which all focus group participants are either classmates or cast mates, which may introduce new dimensions to the themes of their experiences.

The data for this study was collected from focus group interviews over four years ago. The interviews were audio-taped with recording equipment. Although the quality

⁵⁰⁸ Abigail, Ashlyn, Eva, Greg, Jake, Leon, Lucille, and Thadeus, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

of the audio-cassettes was adequate, the technological limitations in comparison to today's digital recorders are quite evident. As a result, participants' comments were sometimes indistinguishable from each other due to several participants speaking at the same time. Some of the stories that may have been important to this study were excluded due to social risk. Also, my participation as the interviewer may also have had an impact of which I am unaware. There is no way to assess the impact that I had on my focus group. However, through member checks, I made every effort to ensure consistency between my interpretations and my participants' understandings of their experiences. It is also possible that the themes uncovered may potentially be bound within the context of my focus group: undergraduate student actors at the University of Missouri; however, the bracketed literature seems to substantiate the findings of the study.

Implications for Pedagogy and Practice

I think that learning actor communication is possible. It's a matter of knowing how it happens and why it occurs and how you do it.⁵⁰⁹

Acting and Directing:

The implications of this study impact both acting and directing pedagogy and practices. After analyzing the data, as the researcher, I understand the importance of integrating the findings of this study into acting and directing curricula as well as our approaches to academic theatre rehearsal practice. The study provides insight into actor communication that will augment the work of Stanislavski and his followers, giving shape to what Stanislavski called an "unseen process" – an abstract process that was

⁵⁰⁹ Greg, Group Interview #2, University of Missouri, May 11, 2004.

sensed, but not studied. Actor communication is a complex multi-dimensional phenomenon that exists within the phenomenon of acting – an enigma indeed. When actor communication occurs it builds self-confidence and belief in one’s abilities and talents as an actor. When actor communication breaks down, it may drive actors out of the profession unnecessarily. This study sheds light on what it is like for student actors to experience actor communication from conditions and obstacles to the blurring connection between actors and the coping skills needed to navigate both the presence and absence of the experience in performance. The findings of this study provide educators a means to help students understand, experience and re-experience actor communication in the classroom, rehearsal and performance.

The study also reveals the heavy load of responsibility that actors take on in actor communication. Although participants describe several conditions, variables, and obstacles of actor communication as well as experiencing it as a connection and blurring of reality and the emotional repercussions of the phenomenon, actors take responsibility for the presence or absence of actor communication. The findings suggest that perhaps acting educators need to develop a new means of looking at acting, in a way that removes and decentralizes acting and actor communication away from the actor and places it within the context of the relationship of actors, the ensemble and the production as a whole. Educators may even create course work that focuses specifically on actor communication.

The study also raises the questions: “What can educators or directors do to foster actor communication? What can be done to minimize the impact of variable conditions or negate obstacles to actor communication?” The study suggests, first of all, that we

should take nothing for granted. For example, even what may seem an obvious necessary condition of actor communication of “at least two actors” has great impact on the experience. Two actors must be present and participating in that both has an active role to play for the other. If one necessary condition is missing the phenomenon does not occur. If two actors are not present, and I would argue they must be more than simply physically occupying the same space, but mindfully present, actor communication fails. If one element is missing a domino effect ensues: if two people are not present, a connection cannot be made to exchange emotions or ideas, no blurring of perceptions will occur, therefore no location arises, no sense of awareness after the experience, etc. What an actor is left with is the lack of actor communication and the real impact of that experience. According to the elements of transference, each actor has dual roles to play within the connection: one who lacks and one who knows and each actor must serve the same purpose for the other actor. Again, if two people are not present and playing their role for the other actor, no transference occurs and consequently, no actor communication.

Acting teachers need to develop means or implement exercises to establish the necessary conditions of actor communication, which also includes findings ways of minimizing or negating obstacles and variable conditions. I am not suggesting that educators reinvent the wheel, but there is a need to develop a workable approach or approaches for actor communication. Another important element for acting teachers to consider is the importance of establishing boundaries for actor communication and part of establishing those boundaries begins with starting a dialogue or discussion with student actors about actor communication, its impact and why boundaries are important to their

work. Another significant step that educators can take towards fostering actor communication and minimizing its obstacles is through teaching students how to develop healthy working relationships with acting partners, in which they can develop trust and come to know their partner “in a performance way.” The study suggests that it is important for educators to teach actors about fostering working relationships with acting partners which includes developing open communication so that they can discuss needs, boundaries, connection or disconnection. Incorporating the elements of transference and the impact of presence and absence on an actor’s work, perceptions, and the production as a whole into teaching strategies may also help student actors understand the process and also confirm their own responses to the experience.

The study also suggests that educators develop curriculum that deals with the blurring of boundaries. The participants of this study as well as those of Burgoyne’s study suggest that the blurring of perceptions is a real issue and challenge of actor communication. Janice Rule suggests that an actor has the ability “to suspend temporarily his own boundaries” in order to create an “amalgamation of the actor and the character,” which may cause problems if the actor carries this into his everyday life, as participants suggest.⁵¹⁰ The critical analysis of this study suggests that if actors and directors understand the structure at play (transference), actor communication becomes more concretized, less abstract and because of this understanding an actor has the ability to recognize *why* it is occurring rather than merely recognizing that the experience is happening and implementing techniques to manage it. Psychotherapy techniques and discussions allow for the *what* of blurring boundaries, but not the *why* – Lacan’s theories

⁵¹⁰ Janice Rule, “The Actor’s Identity Crises: Postanalytic Reflections of an Actress,” *International Journal of Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy* 2.1 (1973): 53-54.

of transference answer the why beyond “art,” beyond the “amalgamation of actor and character,” which I feel is important knowledge for an actor to navigate her experiences of actor communication; transference may also help actors understand the emotional responses they may have towards their acting partners in the presence and absence of actor communication. With regards to the absence of actor communication, not only do Lacan’s theories of transference remove the onus from the actor for the failure, but also may help an actor develop compassion for her acting partner when actor communication is absent.

The study also suggests that there are actions that directors may take as well to foster actor communication and minimize the elements that inhibit actor communication. First of all, a director needs to establish boundaries in rehearsal, or ground rules. I do not suggest that a director give a set of boundary rules to her actors, but rather incorporate boundaries when appropriate – when establishing connections between actors/character, during rehearsals of emotionally intense scenes, or when there is a breakdown in the connection. I do feel that it is appropriate for a director to begin rehearsals with expectations: what she expects from her cast and what they can expect from her. In those expectations, a director can suggest positive expectations that coincide with the necessary conditions of the connection of actor communication. The study suggests that a director incorporate exercises that elicit actor communication into rehearsal. The integration of exercises may also require a longer rehearsal period, which participants suggest can lead to a stronger bond between cast mates. The study also suggests that cast debriefing sessions may help the actors process their experiences of actor communication, to put

them in context, and develop strategies for re-experiencing actor communication in subsequent rehearsals and performances.

Focus Group as Pedagogical Tool

The group interview began simply as a means of data collection, but I was also intent on creating an environment where the participants would have the opportunity to delve into their experiences of actor communication as part of an artistic and educational community. I wanted to create a safe space for student actors to explore their experiences without judgment and to develop their own knowledge about their experiences, in effect to create their own learning community based on their own experiences, not on my dissemination of knowledge to them about actor communication. The focus group created a new and different opportunity for student actors to learn about their own processes, by creating a learning community of “experts.” More than anything, the focus group provided a space for reflection about their experiences, which I feel, in turn, created a sense of empowerment in my participants. The success of my data collection tool opened my eyes up to the idea of focus groups as an effective, ethical, and necessary pedagogical tool for student actors.

Since my dissertation interviews, I have led a few group discussions framed within the same guidelines as my focus group interviews. One of the focus group interviews I led on the last day of an IAT acting class. Class participants stated afterwards that they felt that the opportunity to reflect upon their experiences was important to their process and they showed interest in further focus group discussions. I

know for myself, as an educator, I now have an invaluable tool for my future acting students.

Future Research

The results of this study contribute to the current body of research on acting theory, pedagogy, and practice in that no current literature exists that specifically and systematically explores the phenomenon of actor communication. The findings give rise to the possibility of new studies on actor-audience communication; new studies on actor-director relationship; the development of new acting and directing methods based on the lived experience of student actors; and further application of psychoanalytic theory to understand the unconscious processes of actor communication.

While the impact of actor communication can have dazzling results in performance, a question that arises and deserves further exploration is “How can directors alleviate the impact of the presence or absence of actor communication for their actors in their everyday lives and working relationships with other actors?” The study suggests that further practical research may be necessary in order integrate the actor’s lived experience of actor communication into acting and directing methods.

The findings reveal the importance of the audience within the context of actor communication. An audience and an actor’s relationship to an audience are mentioned with noted frequency within the interviews. Participants ultimately place actor communication within context of an audience, whether it was classmates or a theatre audience. An audience serves as both witness and community to whom the actors

connect: “it’s built off of the people that are around it.”⁵¹¹ On a practical level, actors perform plays for audiences to enjoy. Actor communication is a means of creating believable relationships onstage for an audience. The strong presence of the audience also brings up a question of control over the fourth wall. Participants suggest that an actor may break the boundary of the fourth wall and maintain actor communication, but once an audience member crosses that boundary, an actor may lose focus and a breakdown in actor communication may occur, impacting the overall performance. The study suggests further research is indicated to better understand actor-audience communion. It should be noted that the nature of the University of Missouri audiences is unique in that 80% of audience members are students who are required to attend performances for classes. The dynamics of a “captive” audience include a wide variety of audience disengagement, which includes talking and texting during performances, and create a challenging environment for performances and connecting with an audience.

The process of actor communication resembles interpersonal communication models and functions under the same criteria as everyday personal relationships, complete with trust, a need to know someone, a willingness to risk and be vulnerable. The similarities in the structure suggest further research exploring actor communication dynamics either through communication or psychological studies.

The study supports the correlation between the themes of actor communication and the elements of Lacan’s theories on transference. Since Chapter Five was a cursory overview of the structures of transference, the study suggests a more thorough study of actor communication and transference is necessary, which may also incorporate other

⁵¹¹ Greg, Group Interview #1, University of Missouri, May 7, 2004.

facets of Lacan's work on the unconscious such as discourse theory (who is talking to whom and from where?), the Other, as well as the orders of the Real, Symbolic, and the Imaginary.⁵¹²

Personal Epilogue

Many a friend, colleague, and family member has said to me during this scholarly journey something to the effect of, "you know when you've hit upon something important when the study still sparks your interest." That certainly has been true with my dissertation. From idea to investigation to data analysis and presenting my findings, I have yet to tire of it. I recall being filled with nervous energy before the first interview and filled with enthusiasm after the group interviews. In writing the final chapter of my dissertation, I came across an entry that I made the day after the second group interview:

I have been overwhelmingly excited and elated over my focus group interviews. Wow, I feel like one of the luckiest people, privileged to have been able to be a part of this. They are such amazing young people with great capacities for articulate, reflective, and critical thought. I had a great time witnessing their ideas and thoughts and experiences. They are a very fun bunch of young actors, but I think they are also very serious about their work in theatre. There was a lot of laughter over these two interviews, which I think was necessary to break the tension surrounding some very difficult issues that they deal with as young actors and young people. Again, I am so... WOW!⁵¹³

It may not be the most scholarly of entries, but it certainly captures my enthusiasm and admiration for my participants and their willingness and ability to share their experiences of actor communication with me. It was a privilege indeed.

⁵¹² To put it mildly, Chapter Five was like scratching on the surface of a very deep theoretical lake.

⁵¹³ Shawna Kelty, Reflexive Journal, May 12, 2004.

Appendix 1 – Research Informed Consent Form

CONSENT TO SERVE AS SUBJECT IN RESEARCH

1. I hereby consent to take part in research directed by Shawna Kelty. I understand that other persons may assist Shawna Kelty or be associated with her. All interviews are transcribed.
2. I understand that:
 - 1) This research is a dissertation study investigating the lived experience of actor communication and my understanding of that experience.
 - 2) This will be my part in the research: I will participate in audio-taped focus group meetings/interviews in which I will be asked to reflect upon my own experiences of actor communication. The focus group meetings will be conducted in the Fine Arts Annex, Room 116, or other locations that are mutually agreeable for the focus group participants and the interviewer. I understand that I may be contacted to answer any follow-up questions only with my express written consent, which I may or may not give at the end of the initial focus group meeting/interview. My initials in the following space indicate that I give my permission to be recontacted: _____.
 - 3) Participation in the focus group will take from 2-4 hours per interview.
 - 4) My participation is voluntary. I am free to stop participation at any time. If I do not volunteer or if my participation is ended for any reason by the researcher or me, this will have no effect on any other benefits to which I am entitled, including my casting opportunities at the University of Missouri.
 - 5) I will be told of any significant new information that might affect my willingness to take part in this research.
 - 6) The benefits that I may receive through participation in this research include any possible insights that I may gain into the significance of my theatrical experiences and any satisfaction that I may feel in contributing information to a study that may: 1) provide a service to the profession of theatre in education by documenting that important learning does take place during theatrical production and 2) uncover the lived experience which will stimulate research into ways in which theatrical production as learning process might be designed to make the experience more meaningful for production team members.
 - 7) The risks of participating in this research are minimal and do not exceed those of everyday life. It is not the purpose of this project to endanger any

psychological or social distress; however, it is possible that in the course of my participation in the focus group interview, I will disclose personal opinions about actor communication, the rehearsal process as I have experienced it in production at the University of Missouri, and the performance of my classmates and directors.

- 8) There is no other satisfactory way to get the information needed for this research.
 - 9) The following steps will be taken to protect the confidentiality of my identity and the information that I share during the course of this project: the focus group interviews will be recorded, since these recordings constitute the research data. However, all data that I contribute will be attributed to a code name. The key listing my identity and the subject code name will be kept separate from the data in a locked file accessible only by the investigator. This key listing my identity will be destroyed at the end of the research. My name, as well as specific names of others I might mention, will not appear anywhere in the transcription of the interview. I may contact the investigator at any time to request that all identifiers linking my identity to the data be destroyed. The recording of the focus group interviews and this documentation will be stored in a locked cabinet for 3 years after the completion of the project.
 - 10) The results of this research may be published, but I will not be identified by name, nor identifiable by specific description, in any such publication. At any time within six months following the focus group interview in which I participate, I may contact the investigator to request that any particular piece of personal information which I have contributed not be included in published research results.
 - 11) The researcher understands that there were no minors in the actor communication focus group. I verify that I am a member of the focus group and at least 18 years of age. My initials in the following space indicate that I am 18 years of age or over.

 - 12) The researcher understands that there were no pregnant female actors during the course of the focus group interviews. My initials in the following space indicate that I am not now, nor was pregnant during the focus group interviews.

3. My questions about this research have been answered. If I have any further questions, I am to contact Shawna Kelty at Fine Arts Building Room 129 (882-2021).

4. I agree to allow Shawna Keltly, her assistants, or associates, to perform procedures referred to above, report their findings in a dissertation, to scientific bodies, and to publish their findings.

PRINT NAME _____

SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

REMINDERS:

- You have six months from the date of this interview to notify the investigator if you wish to request that any particular piece of personal information which you have contributed not be included in published research results. Any such request must be made by _____ (date).
- Any and all data will be stored in a locked cabinet for 3 years after the completion of the project.
 - 1) For additional information regarding the use of human subject research, please feel free to contact the UMC Campus Institutional Review Board at (573) 882-9585.

Appendix 2 - Participant Selection Email

Hello Actors!

Have you ever experienced actor communication? That feeling of connection between you and another actor? Would you like to get together with other actors and talk about your experiences? Would you like to be a part of my dissertation study focus group?

What am I researching?

I am researching the experience of “**actor communication**” or what Stanislavski called “*communion*.” By the term “actor communication,” I mean the interaction among scene partners, the experience of sharing, interacting, relating and being in contact with another actor, which includes both verbal and nonverbal communication. I hope to uncover the experience of what it is like and what it means for actors to interact, to relate, to be in contact with each other onstage. By actor communication, I also am referring to an *onstage* connection during rehearsal or performance, not offstage discussion between actors.

Time commitment?

Are you available this semester? Are you available this summer? Are you available through email?

Initial interview: I would like to set up a time to interview you **the week of April 5th**. The initial interview shouldn't take more than 15-30 minutes.

Focus group interview: There will be at least one group interview of the 5 lucky participants this Winter 2004 semester, ideally in **the month of April**. The group interview may take anywhere from 2-4 hours depending on what we talk about. We may determine that a second group interview or individual interviews are necessary to expand upon experiences discussed in the first group interview.

Follow-up sessions with the group: I would like to set up follow-up sessions (3-4) with the entire group to discuss my findings with all of you at the same time. Ideally, these follow-up sessions will occur this summer. Again, time commitments for these meetings are between 2-4 hours, depending on what we discuss.

What will you gain from being a part of my research group?

My undying appreciation, for one thing. I cannot offer you pay, but one of my goals with this focus group is to create a space where you and your fellow student actors can discuss the experiences you have had as actors and draw your own conclusions and create your own knowledge about your experiences.

If you are interested, **please email me by April 2, 2004**, with you're your schedule and times that you are available for an individual interview next week, and times that you

could set aside for a group interview.

Here's my schedule:

Monday: available anytime, except for 3-6 p.m.

Tuesday: available from 11-12 p.m. or 2-4 p.m. or after 6:15 p.m.

Wednesday: available all day

Thursday: available from 11-12 p.m. or 2-6 p.m.

Friday: available all day

Weekends: I can clear my schedule from 12-5 on either day if necessary.

If you have any questions about the study, time commitments, etc., please email me and I will get back to you ASAP.

Thanks,
Shawna Kelty

Appendix 3 – Focus Group Interview Guide

Can you tell me a story about a time when you experienced actor communication?

What's it like for you to experience actor communication?

Context questions:

How old were you at the time?

When did this take place?

How long had you been an actor?

Have you experienced this more than once?

At what point in rehearsal or performance did this experience occur?

Where did this take place?

Were there any external circumstances that may have affected your performance?

What did it feel like?

How did it make you feel? Physically? Emotionally?

Do you remember what you were thinking or feeling during your experience?

How did it make you think or feel about yourself?

How did it make you think or feel about your acting?

How did you think or feel about yourself as an actor?

How well did you know your scene partner at the time?

Do you think that knowing or not knowing that actor had an impact on your experience?

If so, why or why not?

What was the relationship between your characters?

What was your physical proximity or boundaries (physical closeness) with your scene partner?

How did your experience of actor communication make you feel about your partner?

How did the experience make you think or feel about your partner's acting?

How did you think or feel about your partner as another actor? As a person?

Was the experience rewarding or not rewarding? Why or why not?

Appendix 4 – Sample of Horizontalization from Group Interviews

1. It's a big energy rush. It's so exciting. And then you leave and you walk out with your partner or whoever, and you're like, "That was so awesome. We rock!" And it's cool. (laughter)
2. I just don't think some people can, and, and, like, they're, you know, they're the type of people, like, like, that'll leave you hanging, like throw up onstage or stage, you know, a fall or something like that. That's like...
3. I thought it was effective because if you just, so often...we were talking about over-rehearsing why I thought exercises were so important. I don't think that we do enough of them during a rehearsal process in general with any type of show because they take you out of it and you pull from them later and that's when I've always connected, in exercisey kind of things. And when those get put into the show, then I connect better in the show for some reason. But it's always in the exercises or the small little "let's work on this little part of the scene"...
4. Um, it, it's one of those things where like, if it involves music, the music isn't going any slower, but the space between the beats is so large that you couldn't imagine not doing the right thing when you're supposed to or you know, it, it's almost like they slowed the film down, you know, if somebody's throwing a paper airplane, you could just go, "eh" [gesture of catching it with ease] and catch it 'cause it's just right there. It's just hanging in mid-air. All of the words are there. You're timing is exact. You're doing exactly what you have to, exactly what you can. There's no other way it could work. And that feeling of rightness is what comes along with that. That you're like, "And I'm going to turn around when they say that because why wouldn't I?" That's purely what is supposed to happen and it feels absolutely right. That you can watch everything just very leisurely coming up at you and the time does feel really weird, but I don't know. I generally don't completely blank out on it. I know things happened; the specifics get weird.
5. I think it has a lot to do with how willing the person is to try...
6. Both times when we were together, the times that seemed most connected are when there's actually physical touch going on between actors.
7. Um, well, I personally have never had that problem on the female-female end of things, but on the male-female end of things, it seems to sometimes come up and

not so much with me personally, but at least I see it in people with the male-female relationship. And, uh, sexual tension...

8. But then afterwards, you feel about that actor like you guys have this, like, bond or this secret that no one else knows and it kind of unites you as performers.
9. You can stretch each other.
10. The way I try to perform is to be comfortable enough with the script and the character to always be on the verge of actually answering and letting my actual answer just be in the form of the words that I'm supposed to say right then. So I'm usually close enough to that line if I care about the show that I'm doing that when I slip under, it's not until I'm starting to come out of it that I realize that it's been happening automatically the whole time I've been doing it. And I think it's interesting that your question to all of us back before this started, you didn't really lead a definition of actor communication and never have really that all of us, 'cause we're describing similar but very different things that it's interesting that it all falls under the one category.
11. It also doesn't always take place with just two people. There's a show that I wasn't necessarily proud of, Show W, but there was, there was some moments in it. And what would happen was actor B, I guess,... Okay, one actor made another actor really upset then he would say something that was really pathetic and I knew that one of the actresses onstage was always affected by his line because she always said, "I just always feel for you." So she would get affected by what he said and I would always turn to that actress so that I could get what I needed from her rather than him. So it was bouncing off each person.
12. It changed me as a person because now I have no idea who I am and I just do stuff and I just audition for stuff and hope that...
13. In some aspects of life, you can bring a person up to your level. Like if someone's slacking off and you're doing a really good job, like, it's possible to for them to come up to your level. It's not so much in theatre. Like, if you're, if you're experiencing it and you're at a higher level, you can't, they can't, if they're not willing to go there, then you can't bring them up to your level and all that can happen is they can bring you down. (pause) And that's depressing.
14. I felt like a pathetic loser, like I really did. Like the confidence and the normal like "give it right back." Like take what she was giving to me and just turn it around to her and attack her didn't happen because emotionally I felt inadequate to be able to do that, which normally in real life, when I'm being Jake, I never have those sort of feelings, um...

15. I just, I was just thinking in that situation, like, if I liked the person or whatever, like, as far as like communicating with them, acting, like, for me, is kind of like, like looking at a dead body, like, cause, like, when my, my grandma died, like, during, uh, the first show here at...
16. I love that game. And you're up to like 153 and you think you're the coolest people in the world. It was totally like being in the counting game for the entire show. Because we had all of these lines and all of these movement things that were just completely dependent on five other people also knowing their shit and not getting in the way of your shit. So you totally, um...(laughter) like, once we got into the show, um, yeah, like, if someone dropped their line, you know, I'm sure stuff like that happened, but somebody else was already right there to pick it up or to get where the other person was supposed to be or whatever. We just covered each other so well without really knowing we were doing it was just because we had all such a connection for so long and had gotten to know each other as a unit so well that we were really functioning as one character. It was super cool.
17. And that's always a really weird feeling 'cause you kind of feel betrayed, really betrayed because you, you just had so much together and they're like, "I'm going home. I, no, I don't..."
18. And every now and then you become aware that something has gone wrong, you have to go run screaming back to your body to make sure nothing, you know, gets caught on fire, but for the most part, I just completely disengage and go away.
19. I don't mean that in a show, in a show that's not possible. I just mean in a show, I don't know that it's possible the entire span of an entire show. Like definite chunks...
20. You lose trust for them. You lose a lot of trust for them as a person, and it, I mean, it's really unfortunate that it's a show that it's happening in because you know that you have to do it seven times for an audience and you feel shitty about it, but you do it and...it's awful. I don't know. I was going to say something more clever than that and I forgot.
21. Well, even sometimes, just switching the character you're playing in a scene, I've had someone make us do that and 'cause we weren't listening to each other, we were just playing the scene. But then having to take on the other person's role for just two run-thrus, made you look at the entire scene differently and you were listening to what they were saying because you actually thought as if you were that person and it made the scene a lot more dynamic. So I think exercises like that, 'cause it's just, the rehearsal period's too short it seems here and it's not, they're not as productive because people aren't coming prepared and people

aren't ready to work. They kind of want to socialize and have fun and then they want to take a smoke break. So...I think that's the problem.

22. I think you have to trust to be able to communicate.
23. That's really interesting. Did you ever catch yourself going into those, like, having the communication even though it was in sort of an uncomfortable situation?
24. I think, like, it's kind of a double-edged sword in a way. There's some merit to "Hey guys, we should bond" because I think sometimes it is apparent, the cast that don't have any connection with each other. When you have to be onstage, as a large group, I mean, it, it's helpful, for me, at least, sometimes, to go out and have beer with those people and find out what they're like in real life.
25. Talent is sexy.
26. My personal manifestation of my desire to succeed or if this character is, you know, the rage part of my personality or the benevolent part of my personality. The closer that I feel to that character's motivation is to a part of myself that I can identify, the more likely I am to slip into that character.
27. Okay, I'm going to be, sound weird, but it's like, yeah, everyone has their bubble, you know, and when you, when you mesh two bubbles or two individuals' energies together then, then it perform, it, it, it, it molds...
28. And I definitely don't see anything else. I don't see the audience. I don't see...and it gets a little dim, like whatever the lighting is, like if it's like in a classroom, those aren't the real lights. Like it's just this little dimly lit fuzzy bubble.
29. I've always been one of those people who I hang out with the cast members that I'm around and once the show is done, I switch to a new group of people, but there's always a few individuals that are consistent all the way through that I'm like, "Yeah, we connect on a certain level" but I'm a fairly independent person so I don't cling to anyone in particular really.
30. It's rarely a talent thing. I, it's, I actually get this feeling less from inexperienced actors than people who have become aware of their brilliance...well, actors who are no good.
31. I needed to know that they were okay with me and that I was okay with them as people to let some of those things happen.

32. But the moments on film, onstage, in person, the moments where somebody has so masterfully and powerfully connected with the audience and just had this, this pure moment within themselves and everyone else and it was completely real, just right out of their soul and right into your brain. That's when I went, "I might want to work in the theatre."
33. I had this part where someone was my granddaughter. The protagonist was a relative of mine and I just couldn't get into it until I touched her and I felt like somebody she knew and somebody I should know. And then I began to care for the things that happened to her many selves...
34. I think it's like when you start to forget that you're you. Like you really do start to get... Like if you're supposed to be angry, you really do feel angry and you're like, "Holy shit, I'm really feeling angry right now. Okay, okay good." And, (coughing), whoa. And you can tell when the person is responding to that you're pissing them off. You know what I mean? Like, I don't think it's something you can put in words. It's something that you feel.
35. Um, that we can really kind of compare notes and even during the process of a single show people that I've worked with that are sitting right at this table are saying, "I can't believe, this isn't going to work, I can't stand how this is going, there's no way this is going to happen." And then there's other people who are going, "I think this is fantastic and this is exactly where we need to be and I love this process." And we're still talking about the same production and the same director and the same style in the very same scenes that, you know, some of us are saying "it was the most rewarding experience I've ever had" and then not. And I guess with, with something like this communication question, it is so much, I mean, there's no, I mean the most brilliant director that I've ever worked with may do nothing for you guys...
36. I was frustrated. We also had two very different working methods, um, in the last minute sort of "Yeah, I'll get this eventually" kind of thing.
37. But the difference there was trust and planning. Before we ever got it on its feet, it calls for really disgusting things to happen in it and so we sat down and I was like, "I think, at this moment, I'm going to lick your face."
38. There was this one time, I was in this production that was really difficult for me to get through because it hit so close to home and because I was typecast and because I didn't really agree with my character because she was just kind of a vehicle to make some points about how wrong she was. I, uh...But, um, it quit being for me. I didn't communicate with actors for my own personal enjoyment because it wasn't enjoyable in that show.

39. And you feel like you can't take bigger risks, you can't, you can't do... You feel like you can't do any better because there's not going to be someone with you who's doing that, too. It's almost like they begin to hold you back in a weird way because, yeah, because it takes two. Otherwise, you're just doing all this stuff on your own and you begin to feel unsure because it's supposed to be a scene. And if you're just up there going off on your own, like doing everything you can, then it just doesn't feel right.
40. That I think knowing "what a person is" is more important than knowing "who they are." I could read your biography, but it's not going to help me perform with you.
41. Well, and that particular exercise, we weren't given a line or a character or anything else to take on, so you really got the opportunity to focus on just connecting with your...and it wasn't like, "Here's your line where you say this."
42. Well, um, if you've seen them perform before and they can't make words seem like they're their own or they completely don't make an effort to understand what's coming out of their mouth then like it's, it becomes painfully obvious and it's kind of sad that they shouldn't be there. And that's an awful thing to say, but if a person can't give into the, the stuff that's there in the writing. Sometimes a writer gives you so much that you can't help but go with it, if you just give into it and some people are incapable of doing that. And if you see them, time after time, do the same thing and make the same mistake and stop at the same wall then they aren't going to person who's willing to take that journey with you and communicate with you and give you something meaningful in return.
43. I think a lot of it depends on how big you have to be because there's a falsity about having to project your voice as loud as you can when they're sitting right here and your gestures, like if you're in the Rhynsburger, your gestures can't be like, because the people in the back row aren't going to pick up on that so have to bring it out like that and it's kind of a little absurd because you're being like a magnified hyper version of yourself to the person in the back row can see it. Where you don't have to do that in the Corner Playhouse so it's more realistic and therefore more honest and therefore more susceptible to actor communication.
44. But if you have a director who puts you almost overly prepared for a dress rehearsal that frees you as an actor to be...
45. I think you can and I think that's the goal and what we should strive for, but it's hard to connect, like, you know, like with uh...

Appendix 5 – Invariant Horizons & Themes

From the data of the eight focus group participants, I derived 36 invariant horizons, which I then clustered into the following seven themes.

- I. Theme One: Connection
 - a. Interrelational
 - b. Nonverbal
 - i. Physical contact
 - ii. Eye contact
 - c. Emotional connection
 - d. Actor-to-Actor Connection
 - e. Character to Character Connection
 - f. Actor to Character Connection
 - g. Connection as Exchange

- II. Theme Two: Requirements
 - a. Necessary Conditions
 - i. At Least Two People
 - ii. Trust (Safety)
 - iii. Confidence in Performance
 - iv. Knowing a Person
 - v. Commitment
 - vi. Concentrating on Partner
 - vii. Pressure
 - viii. Lack of Restraint: Willing to Let Go
 - b. Major Obstacles
 - i. Actors block actor communication
 - ii. Audience as Obstacle
 - c. Variable Conditions
 - i. Actor's professional development
 - ii. Daily life
 - iii. Directorial Style
 - iv. Length of Rehearsal
 - v. Script/Style of the show
 - vi. Audience Proximity/Size of Theatre
 - d. Frequency & Sustainability

- III. Theme Three: Awareness
 - a. Awareness of Experience
 - b. Feeling as Knowing
 - c. Learnable: A Debate

- IV. Theme Four: Blurring/boundaries
 - a. Blurring
 - i. Blurred Reality
 - ii. Blurred Identity
 - iii. Blurred Perception of Acting Partner
 - iv. Transfer of Onstage Relationships Offstage
 - v. Audience Expectations of Transfer
 - b. Boundaries
 - i. Healthy Limits
 - ii. Actor Responsibility
 - iii. Dissociation (from cast or character)

- V. Theme Five: Location
 - a. Creating Space
 - b. Creating Place

- VI. Theme Six: Impact of Presence
 - a. Perception of Self and Process
 - b. Perception of Partner

- VII. Theme Seven: Impact of Absence
 - a. Perception of Self and Process
 - b. Perception of Partner

Appendix 6 – Coding Sample

Reflexive Journal Entries	Coding	Interview Text
<p>5/24/06: there is an implication that the blurring of emotions from onstage to offstage can result in inappropriate relationships. No one comes out and says this is inappropriate, but they do make references to “appropriate” relationships to provide a comparison to how AC can lead to “hooking up” offstage. I think this may be an important element. No, I know it is – that the blurring of the lines between onstage emotions (how characters feel towards each other) and offstage life (how the actors relate to each other offstage) can create problems. It is my belief that these emotions that occur onstage are just as real as what we experience in everyday life. However, they are brought about in a fiction. The as-if principle allows these emotions to arise out of the context and objectives of the play, not out of the other actor. When these lines blur (how a character relates to another character and how actors relate to each other as themselves not as characters), this is where things get messy, where people get hurt from either “positive” or “negative” affect.</p> <p>Know – Etymology: Middle English, from</p>	<p>Offstage relationship interferes with AC Obstacle – unwilling to connect Obstacle – unwillingness to open up to partner Obstacle – offstage relationship Variable condition – knowing person Feel Personal responsibility for AC breakdown Avoiding AC Communication breakdown Obstacle – past relationship with acting partner Block AC Interrelational Knowing – “how I know them” Knowing – knowing you as a person Negative emotional response Breakdown of AC</p>	<p>Abigail: I’ve done scenes with really close friends when we’re supposed to be having these intense moments, like, “Oh, I’m going to slit your throat” or “Oh, I’m breaking up with you and we’re going to get divorced” and it just, I never felt like it worked...</p> <p>(laughter)</p> <p>Abigail: and it wasn’t because of my friend. It was because of me...</p> <p>(laughter)</p> <p>Abigail: and because of all this stuff that had been in our friendship past. It just got in the way for me and I wasn’t willing to take that journey. I put up a block and I’m sorry. I’m sorry.</p> <p>(laughter)</p>

<p>Old English <i>cnAwan</i>; akin to Old High German <i>bichnAan</i> to recognize, Latin <i>gnoscere, noscere</i> to come to know, Greek <i>gignOskein</i> <i>transitive senses</i> 1 a (1) : to perceive directly : have direct cognition of (2) : to have understanding of <importance of <i>knowing</i> oneself> (3) : to recognize the nature of : DISCERN b (1) : to recognize as being the same as something previously known (2) : to be acquainted or familiar with (3) : to have experience of 2 a : to be aware of the truth or factuality of : be convinced or certain of b : to have a practical understanding of <<i>knows</i> how to write> 3 archaic : to have sexual intercourse with <i>intransitive senses</i> 1 : to have knowledge 2 : to be or become cognizant -- sometimes used interjectionally with <i>you</i> especially as a filler in informal speech</p> <p>7/12/04: Abigail – mistaking AC for real communication/romantic relationships</p>	<p>Blurring of onstage and offstage emotions, actions, thoughts Blurring of identity – knowing partner as character Blurring of identity – seeing acting partner as character Variable condition – romantic role Variable condition – relationship onstage Trust Space – onstage vs. offstage Real vs. Fake Real feelings or reactions Projected feelings Perception Love Knowing – knowing person in performance way Interrelational Impact of show on offstage relationship with actor Healthy limits of AC Happening for both partners Emotional response to AC Feelings for character not actor Interrelational – inappropriate relationship</p>	<p>Abigail: And the other thing that...</p> <p>(laughter)</p> <p>Jake: Break it, break that wall.</p> <p>Abigail: My thing is that I'm really glad I never played the romantic lead in a show because when that actor communication thing begins to happen you start to think that you have feelings for someone when you really don't. And you think you are getting to know a person and maybe you're not. You like their character, not them.</p> <p>Lucille: Mm-hmm.</p> <p>Abigail: You know? And when a actor communication thing is happening too good, it sends people into relationships and I don't think that's healthy.</p>
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VITA

Shawna Mefferd Kelty was born in Grand Island, Nebraska, and was raised all over the great plains of Nebraska - Grand Island, St. Paul, North Platte, Valentine, and Gothenburg. She is the youngest of four children: Kathy, Brett, Chad, & Shawna. Her parents are Leona Ketteler and Charles Mefferd. In her free time, Shawna enjoys running, reading, traveling, quilting, rockclimbing, dancing, spending time with dogs, baking cakes, singing for her own pleasure, and gardening.

In addition to her Ph.D. from the University of Missouri-Columbia in Theatre, Shawna also holds a Bachelors of Arts in Dramatic Arts from the University of Nebraska-Omaha and a Masters in Theatre from the University of Missouri-Columbia. A life-long learner, her next academic goal is to become fluent in Spanish.

Shawna is the co-founder and Artistic Director of Independent Actors Theatre, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit public theatre organization in Columbia, Missouri. Her fringe theatre company is finishing its fledgling second season and doing quite well, producing works ranging from David Hare and Craig Wright to Albee, Busch, and LaChiusa. With the help of Dr. David Crespy, she also founded the annual IAT short Women's Play Festival in Columbia, offering women playwrights and directors in Columbia an opportunity to showcase their talents.