Investigating the Spiritual Dimensions of the Theatrical Rehearsal Process

Dorothy C. Bryan-Ployer Mrs.

Lesley University, dbryanpl@lesley.edu

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INVESTIGATING THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS OF THE THEATRICAL REHEARSAL PROCESS

A Dissertation Presented

by

DOROTHY BRYAN-PLOYER

Submitted to the Graduate School of Education

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Investigating the Spiritual Dimensions of the Theatrical Rehearsal Process

Dorothy Bryan-Ployer
Graduate School of Education
Lesley University

Ph.D. Educational Studies
[name of] Specialization

Approvals
In the judgment of the following signatories, this Dissertation meets the academic standards that have been established for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

Dr. Shaun McNiff
Doctoral Committee Chair

Dr. Anne Pluto
Doctoral Committee Member

Dr. Maureen Shea
Doctoral Committee Member

Dr. Caroline Heller
Director, Individually Designed Specialization

Dr. Paul A. Naso
Co-chair, Ph.D. Educational Studies

Dr. Amy Rutstein-Riley
Interim Dean, Graduate School of Education
STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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SIGNED: Dorothy Bryan-Player
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot Study</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Overviews</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Rehearsal Process</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theatre and Spirituality</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Inspiration: Konstantin Stanislavsky</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theatre and Religion</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristin Linklater: Freeing the Natural Voice</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy, Vulnerability, and Courage</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Rehearsal Space as Sacred</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathic Leadership</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review: Summary</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Sessions 1-4: Logistics</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehearsal Practices</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Final Session and Next Steps ................................................................. 49
Distilling and Synthesizing Outcomes .................................................. 53
Video as Evidence ................................................................................ 55
Methodology Summary ......................................................................... 57
CHAPTER IV – RESULTS .................................................................... 58
Question 1 Outcomes .......................................................................... 59
  1. Manifesting Connectedness .............................................................. 59
  2. Integrating Body, Voice, and Spirit .................................................. 63
  3. Investing in the Human Experience ................................................ 64
Question 2 Outcomes .......................................................................... 66
  1. Empathy .......................................................................................... 66
  2. Vulnerability ..................................................................................... 70
  3. Courage ............................................................................................ 72
Question 3 Outcomes .......................................................................... 75
  1. Maintaining a Safe Space ................................................................. 76
  2. Making Room for Exploration ........................................................ 77
  3. Possessing Knowledge of Craft ......................................................... 79
Results: Summary ............................................................................... 84
CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION ................................................................. 86
APPENDIX A: Shakespeare Workshop .................................................. 96
APPENDIX B: Dance Education Laboratory Workshop ...................... 97
APPENDIX C: Invitation to Participate .................................................. 98
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Acting as a Vessel .................................................................61
Figure 2. Physical Release=Letting Go ..................................................62
Figure 3. Linda/A Integrating Body, Voice, and Spirit ...............................63
Figure 4. Embodiment: Emily, Linda/A/Linda/B/Lloyd ............................64
Figure 5. Discovering Lloyd’s Voice .......................................................65
Figure 6. Acting through Imagery ..........................................................79
ABSTRACT

Using an art-based research design this study explored a possible link between spirituality and the theatrical rehearsal process. Drawing from three pre-selected monologues, four participating actors and I engaged in an abbreviated rehearsal process. I met with each participant individually four times over the course of two weeks where they explored and rehearsed their monologue. We met again (individually) four weeks later to reflect on the study, and each performed their monologue one last time. All sessions were audio and video recorded. The videos, along with their respective transcripts, and the study’s work product were used to determine the study’s outcomes, as evidenced in individual and summary videos. The study yielded the following outcomes. 1: The rehearsal process manifests connectedness, integrates body, voice, and spirit, and is invested in the human experience. 2: The sacred and spiritual dimensions of the rehearsal process are evidenced through empathy, vulnerability, and courage. 3. Rehearsal spaces are sacred spaces facilitated by artistic leaders who exhibit knowledge of craft, make room for exploratory work, and possess confidence and empathy.

Keywords: art-based research, artistic leadership, connectedness, empathy, rehearsal process, sacred space, spirituality, vulnerability
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Through lifelong engagement in the theatrical rehearsal process, I have come to value spiritual knowing and being as inevitable outcomes. Professionally, the enlightenment I have drawn from the rehearsal process influences the way I conduct my work, connect with performing artists, honor sacred spaces, and approach artistic leadership. Personally, it informs how I commune with the world. It is this history that led me to formally explore the relationship between the rehearsal process and its link to spirituality. This study is born of those experiences.

Eager to engage in this study, I could not have imagined scheduling it during a global pandemic. Out of necessity, rehearsals as I knew them would need to be adjusted. Within the body of this paper, I explain how these adjustments were made and managed.

The Pilot Study

Prior to this study, I conducted an art-based pilot study to investigate the link between the rehearsal process and spirituality. Framing spirit as the essential being of a person and spirituality as that which triggers and moves the spirit, I immersed myself in a rehearsal process centered around the preparation of a song and monologue. I followed the procedures of a traditional rehearsal process as sensibly as working alone would allow. This preliminary study suggested that there can be a relationship between spirituality and the rehearsal process evidenced by expressions of empathy, vulnerability, courage, immersion, and ritual.

Notably, a study of one has limits, especially when the one participant tends to one side of the outcomes. Nonetheless, personally engaging in the rehearsal process for the distinct purpose of investigating if and how spirituality presents itself took me down unexpected paths.
and deepened my appreciation for each phase of the rehearsal process and for the artists who engage in them. The pilot study tuned me into the sensitive role of the artistic leader, the vulnerability and courage of the performing artist, and the significance of maintaining a sacred rehearsal space. Inspired by the pilot, I expanded the study with the addition of four participating actors.

Following an art-based research design and continuing with the same definitions of spirit and spirituality, the participating actors took part in an abbreviated rehearsal process, which I led and facilitated. With the support and counsel of my advisor, three monologues were chosen to serve as the rehearsal material for the study, including Emily from the metatheatrical play Our Town by Thornton Wilder (1938), Lloyd from the farce Noises Off by Michael Frayn (1982) and Linda from the tragedy, Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller (1949). To allow for deep excavation, each selection was kept intentionally short, roughly one minute in length.

These selections pose universal questions about life, death, relationships, and the frailty of artists. Each of these selections, while varied in style and form, features characters urgently looking for ways to escape their suffering. At the same time, there are notable differences among these plays’ styles (epic drama, farce, and realistic tragedy) and characters (dead young mother, self-obsessed theatre director, and middle-aged housewife). I contend these plays and these characters’ individual distinctions will uniquely illuminate the research questions. Since each participating actor chose to rehearse their role in context, it will be helpful to the reader to have a sense of the circumstances that drive each selection.

In the selection from Our Town, Emily’s need to be seen by her mother continues in death and, in fact, proves stronger in death. After pleading to return to one day of her life to Grover’s Corners, Emily is awakened to the countless missed opportunities of the living world
and ultimately asks to return to her grave. *Our Town*, and this monologue in particular, challenges the priorities of the living and the significance of asking questions about the meaning of life. In *Noises Off*, Lloyd is suffering the incompetence of a traveling acting troupe as concerns about his reputation as a theatre director weigh heavily on his mind. The company is nearing the completion of a bumpy run-through of their play-within-a-play, *Nothing On*, when Brooke Ashton, (one of the company members with whom Lloyd is carrying on an affair) stops to ask a question that has already been addressed. Exhausted and frustrated, Lloyd enters into a rant, leaving his young love interest in tears. *Noises Off* offers an exaggerated look at the excruciating pains of mounting a play, begging the question, “Is it worth it?” In *Death of a Salesman* Linda Loman defends her husband Willy Loman to her sons, Biff and Happy, all the while secretly carrying the weight of knowing about Willy’s suicide attempts. Despite how she is treated by Willy, Linda remains loyal as she fights to preserve the dignity of her failing husband and keep her family together. *Death of a Salesman* takes an unapologetic look at marriage, family, parenthood, and the often-lost pursuit of the American Dream. These selections were the vehicles by which the following research questions were investigated:

- Can the theatrical rehearsal process, along with being a creative endeavor, be a spiritual and sacred one as well?
- If there are spiritual/sacred dimensions to the rehearsal process, what are they and how do they present themselves?
- What can a director do to create and maintain a sacred rehearsal space?

**Key Terms**

**Acting**: Taking on the life and story of a fictionalized or historic character.

**Being in the Moment**: A state of mind, body and spirit that is present, available, and open.
Communion: The relationship actors have with their fellow actors, environment, properties, and themselves.

Faith: Referring to the trust artists have in the wisdom of creative work.

Incarnation: Bringing a fictionalized or historic character to life.

Monologue: A theatrical piece of text spoken by one character.

Participating Actor/Actor/Participant: Referring to the study participants.

Ritual: The act of repetition with the intent of deepening an experience.

Sacred Space: A space that honors creative work and performing artists. An atmosphere that is safe, exploratory, and welcoming.

Scoring: Marking a monologue for beats, adjustments, allusions, breaths, emphasis, progression, objectives, obstacles, and tactics.

Spirit: The essential being of a person.

Spirituality: That which triggers and moves the spirit.

Study Session/Session: Referring to the rehearsal hours in which the participating actors will engage, these study sessions include periods of reflection on how rehearsal engagement illuminates the research questions.

Theatrical Rehearsal Process: A liminal period where theatrical work is rehearsed and prepared for performance.

Chapter Overviews

Chapter II – The Literature Review. Chapter II includes an overview of theatre trailblazers and theorists whose influence is significant to this study, beginning with Konstantin
Stanislavsky\(^1\) and then considering proteges of his method—those who furthered his theories and those who broke away from them. Kristin Linklater is also seminal to this study for her groundbreaking work on the voice. While I found no prior studies empirically investigating the theatrical rehearsal process and its possible link to spirituality, I examined associated studies that address elements of this investigation, and my review of those studies is included in this chapter. Additionally, I drew from studies investigating art in general and its link to spirituality.

**Chapter III – Methodology.** Chapter III discusses the manner in which the participating actors and I engaged in the study’s rehearsal process, including warm-ups, prompts, monologue run-throughs, and reflection periods. All sessions were audio and video recorded; these recordings were key in distilling the findings as was editing the individual videos and the final aggregate video. This chapter details how I reflected on the work product from the study, prepared the individual video summaries, determined the study outcomes, and chose the best footage to communicate the outcomes via the aggregate video. The methods used in this study are personally significant because they reflect recent engagement (within the past 10 years) in a variety of courses and workshops that have expanded my rehearsal repertoire. Many of the exercises and practices included in the pilot study and again in this study are drawn from those experiences. This is notable since both inquiries not only afforded me the opportunity to investigate the link between the rehearsal process and spirituality; both gave me the opportunity to refine and refresh my rehearsal methods. Attached are two workshops I recently attended, a Shakespeare workshop (Schwinke & May, 2020) and a Laban workshop, (Biddle, 2019) the practices of which were incorporated into this study. (Appendix A; Appendix B).

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\(^1\) Depending on the author, Stanislavski’s name is spelled differently. Constantin vs. Konstantin; Stanislavski vs. Stanislavsky. For consistency and reader ease, this paper uses the spelling, Konstantin Stanislavsky. Staying true to authorship and publication, the reference section honors individual spelling variations.
Chapter IV – Results. Chapter IV includes the seminal findings from the study. Question 1.) The rehearsal process can be spiritual because of the ways it manifests connectedness, integrates the body, voice, and spirit, and is invested in and concerned with the human experience. Question 2.) Key elements to a sacred and spiritual rehearsal experience include empathy: through investing oneself in the life of another, vulnerability: through sharing parts of oneself with another, and courage: through opening oneself up to the entirety of the human experience. Question 3.) Artistic leaders who possess knowledge of craft, confidence, and empathy are best equipped to maintain an atmosphere conducive to the sensitive nature of theatre work and theatre artists.

Chapter V – Discussion. Chapter V harkens back to the literature and its connection to the study.
CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Introduction

Using art-based research, four participating actors and I engaged in an abbreviated rehearsal process seeking insights into the following questions 1.) Can the theatrical rehearsal process, along with being a creative endeavor, be a spiritual and sacred one as well? 2.) If there are spiritual/sacred dimensions to the rehearsal process, what are they and how do they present themselves? 3.) What can a director do to create and maintain a sacred rehearsal space?

This chapter opens with a literature review about the theatrical rehearsal process, what it is and what theatre artists have to say about it. It then reviews theatre and its possible link to spirituality, including how spirituality is framed in this study and how the framework was determined. This is followed by a brief overview of theatre’s relationship with religion. The review then moves to theatre trailblazers and their philosophies on the spiritual nature of theatre work, including Konstantin Stanislavsky’s System of Acting and former protégés who broke away from his methods in pursuit of their own ideas. This chapter concludes with a review of the literature based on the study’s outcomes including knowledge of craft, the importance of exploratory work, empathy, vulnerability, courage, the sacredness of the rehearsal space, and empathic leadership.

The Rehearsal Process

Traditional theatre rehearsals involve scheduled gatherings intended to prepare a show for performance, typically 8 weeks in length. The first communal rehearsal traditionally begins with a table reading of the play and the final rehearsals conclude with “tech week,” the days
SPIRITUALITY IN THE REHEARSAL PROCESS

before opening night when all technical elements are added to the production. What occurs in between varies by director but traditionally rehearsal processes include an exploratory phase that attends to the body and voice, blocking phase (the actors’ movement/placement within the world of the play) and run phase. Prior to the table read, the director spends dedicated time with the script. This immersion, though apart from the actors, is significant to the rehearsal process. In this study, the rehearsal process was abbreviated; the actors rehearsed short sections of text from pre-selected plays and engaged in physical and vocal warm-ups, character exploration, and script work, including repeated opportunities to run their individual monologues. This process was investigated for evidence of spirituality. What follows is a review of studies that were also interested in investigating the nature of the rehearsal process.

John Lutterbie (2006) was interested to learn how advancements in neuroscience and cognitive philosophy that dispelled the Cartesian mind/body split might inform the creative process. To shed light on his curiosity, he interviewed two actors trained in two diverse acting techniques to learn how each approached the rehearsal process. His interviews revealed that the actors, one whose training was primarily text-based and one whose training was primarily body-based had more in common than not. Each actor spoke about a process that involved clearing their minds and attending to the moment at hand. Lutterbie took this to mean that each actor was somehow trying to push away cognitive thoughts, or “bracket” (p. 152) cognitive interruptions, which he admitted is not how the body works but “he understood what the actors meant” (p. 149). This immediately drew me to the research of Csikszentmihalyi who identifies as one of the features of “flow” (2007) the exclusion of distractions from consciousness (p. 111), begging the question, do actors clear their minds before rehearsal or does the rehearsal process free the actors of routine burdens? Maybe both, but in following the findings of Csikszentmihalyi’s
SPIRITUALITY IN THE REHEARSAL PROCESS

theory of flow, one could argue that engagement precedes mental release, which could fairly apply to actors engaged in the rehearsal process. Perhaps it is the act of engaging in the rehearsal process that washes clean mental preoccupation. I do agree with Lutterbie that intrusive thoughts cannot be willfully pushed aside; in fact, I would argue such an effort only intensifies cognitive burdens, but I wonder what the results of his study might have revealed had he observed the actors in rehearsal before interviewing them. I wonder if there was a disconnect between what the actors said they did in the rehearsals and what actually took place. Theorizing about the rehearsal process is vastly different from engaging in the rehearsal process. In defending the rehearsal process as a spiritual as well as creative endeavor, I am inclined to think observing the actors would have been more telling, because much of what occurs in the rehearsal process cannot be easily or adequately described. Witnessing, I would argue, is key.

Bento-Coelho, (2018) set out to investigate the rehearsal process as a constant act of care grounded in mindful listening. Using the acronym DAR—Direction, Action, and Reflection, Bento-Coelho guided dancers through a performative installation of This is Not About Dance exploring how the body actuates space through ordinary movement (p. 65). Through somatic practices including Alexander Technique, the Feldenkrais Method, and Body-Mind centering, attention was paid to the well-being of the dancers, their awareness, and their relationship between their bodies and minds (p. 68). Bento-Coelho found that treating the rehearsal process as an act of constant care fostered collaboration, and co-listening, meaning all involved had equal agency. Through the study, Bento-Coelho observed that the “participants are the work” (p. 78).

According to Schechner, the “essential ritual action of theatre takes place during rehearsals” (1977, p. 248). Schechner argues that while all art undergoes its own set of procedures before its completion – before it is displayed or performed for public viewing – the
theatrical rehearsal process does so in the company of other performing artists with an end goal that is less defined. Schechner points to the early exploratory stages of the rehearsal process, which are often fragmented, resulting in work that may or may not be included in the final performance. He reminds us that it is in the rehearsal process actors play out and discard character choices, designers render and re-render sketches, lighting plots, and set drawings, all while directors, negotiating between creative interference and confident vision, carefully monitor the incremental changes in shape of a potential something, the exactness of which, remains unknown. Schechner’s review of the theatrical rehearsal process is anecdotally validated by Ann Bogart who claims that when she is watching a rehearsal that is going badly, she stands up from her seat, confidently states, “I have an idea!” and walks to the foot of the stage. Though in truth she has no idea, she trusts that by the time she makes her way to the stage, an idea will emerge. According to her, one always does (as cited in Loewith, 2012). Stage director, Peter Brosius warns his actors in advance that he has a terrible idea, an idea that will never work but one he would, nonetheless, like them to try (p. 48). Trusting the intelligence of the creative process (McNiff, 1998) is not mere sentiment in theatre-work; it is essential.

Theatre and Spirituality

Claiming or even suggesting that theatre work promotes spiritual growth or includes spiritual practice is sticky. Spirituality, even when associated with terms such as mindfulness, contemplative practice, presence, flow, reflection, and chanting, still conjure up experiences with organized religion and all the alienating dogma that goes with it. Despite the growing practice of alternative approaches to spirituality, ones noted for their fluidity and forgiveness, the connection to rigid rules remains. In fact, theatre educator Jo Beth Gonzales (2018) admits to avoiding the term “spirituality” altogether, though her article addresses the spiritual development of her
SPIRITUALITY IN THE REHEARSAL PROCESS

students. Nonetheless, she opts for the phrase “intentional wakefulness” (p. 30) and makes no bones about explaining why. “[Even though] activities described as spiritual, mindful and ritualized are normalized components of actor/crew training…these terms are rarely used for fear skeptics…will accuse teachers of blending church and state” (p. 30.) I appreciate her decision to avoid the muddle. Like Gonzales, I too am using provocative language within a process that includes a population of the same skeptics she fears. Adding to the topic’s controversy, theatre practitioners have taken heat for their uninhibited use of the term’s spirituality and sacredness. (Myers, 2012). Spalding Gray illuminated this criticism when asked to describe the spiritual dimension of his work. He replied tersely, “Spirituality is as vague a term to me as politics…spiritual what?…what the hell is it?” (as cited in Myers, 2012, p. 162).

In 2012, Benjamin Myers argued that theatre practitioners too often label their discipline as spiritual and sacred with little effort to define or describe either. He compared this tendency to The Elan Vital, a concept that assumed a “life force” differentiated a living thing from a non-living thing (p. 164). Both assumptions left Myers unsatisfied because each failed to provide “tangible explanation[s]” (p. 164). Myers insists that practitioners of performance studies should not be allowed to “get in free” (p. 166) with sacred/spiritual claims, coming down particularly hard on qualitative researcher and professor of performance studies, Norman Denzin. Denzin, asserts Myers, “uses the terms sacredness and spirituality synonymously…this conflation,” he contends, “clouds any attempt to understand what these terms offer” (p. 166). Meyers admits that he does not see it as inappropriate to address spirituality or sacredness in performance studies, he only advocates for greater “reflexivity when they are labeled as [such]” (p. 172).

Myers (2012) and Gonzales (2018) express opposing concerns on the same topic. Where she fears the tight religious connection to the term spirituality, he is irked by zealous overuse.
Definition bias vs. definition vagueness. Differences aside, they remind us, directly and indirectly, that artists who claim spiritual enrichment in art-based activities—artists who are not interested in adopting pseudonyms—are best served to provide a framework of an otherwise ineffable term. To this query, I turn to the outcomes of the pilot study that preceded this dissertation.

1.) Performing requires immersing oneself completely in the act of creation and trusting the outcomes to the wisdom of the process.

2.) Performing requires radical empathy—radical because it asks actors to find what is beautiful, likeable, and sympathetic in characters who are not necessarily seen that way.

3.) Performing requires vulnerability; actors open themselves up to the stories and circumstances of diverse characters while sharing pieces of themselves with the characters they play.

4.) Performing requires courage to explore, commune, allow, expose, and trust.

These outcomes suggest spirituality is an action, i.e., *immersing, creating, trusting, empathizing, exposing, communing, allowing*, etc. The pilot study suggested spirituality lies in the *doing*.

**Defining Spirituality**

Considering the outcomes from the pilot study and the inferences therein, along with the previously mentioned working definitions of spirit (the essential being of a person) and spirituality (that which triggers or moves the spirit) each participating actor was prompted to write their own definition of spirituality. These personal definitions guided the participating actors when responding to the question of spirituality and its possible link to the rehearsal process.
From Lloyd. Spirituality makes me one with myself and the world. Whole. So, I am placed in myself with others and with the encompassment of the world and what that means. Spirituality is to me connection, and connection is the essence of who we are, our humanity and our happiness. If I am truly connected, I am never alone.

From Linda/A. Spirituality is a deep connectedness that transcends me into a higher vibration, where I feel more aligned. I feel present while simultaneously feeling detached from the materialistic world.

From Linda/B. Spirituality is being guided by forces that I don’t have to question, that seem to come from above and reach into my heart and then flow into every part of me filling me with warmth and allowing me to trust that I have reached a deep place where I am being embraced and held by loving entities that are looking out for me. A letting go. A fall into a warm soft glow. A balm of love.

From Emily. Spirituality is a connection to something.

Connection

Theatre is all about connection. In the rehearsal process, directors connect with the story and the playwright. They dive deeply into the text to unearth what lies beneath. Directors make connections to draw out themes that determine the spine of the play (Clurman, 1972). From early training, actors learn to connect their internal and external instruments. Beginning with exercises designed to bring awareness and connection to breath, further training moves into connecting the breath to the body and voice (Feldenkrais, 1949; Linklater, 2006; Madden, 2014). Stanislavsky talks about the importance of a motivated gesture, that the body must always be connected to character (1989, pp. 44-45). He cautions actors against external mechanics absent of internal connection (p. 150). Theatre rehearsals provide actors a variety of ways to commune with their
SPIRITUALITY IN THE REHEARSAL PROCESS

characters, environment, circumstances, and story; rehearsals are where actors connect breath, language, and imagery to intuition and imagination. It is in the rehearsal process where such connections help actors arrive at performances that have depth, presence, and emotional truth.

Notably, all four participating actors describe the experience of connection in their personal definitions of spirituality; three of them speak to it directly. In this way, the participating actors’ echo Brené Brown’s findings in her twelve-year qualitative research study focused on vulnerability, courage, worthiness, and shame (2010). “Connection,” states Brown, “is why we are here…it is what gives meaning and purpose to our lives” (TED, 2010, 3:16).

Additionally, a 2021 mixed-methods study that sought to better understand spirituality in the U.S. identified as one of its key findings “a strong sense of connection to all humanity” (Selzler, Gonda, & Mohammed, p. 23).

I found it interesting that the theme of connection proved prevalent in studies occurring during a global pandemic when in-person theatre experiences were put on hold. Who is to say if the subject of connection would have garnered more or less attention had these studies commenced under routine circumstances? It is true that the pandemic has provided a long stare of what life would be like absent of in-person art-based engagement. This reminded me of letters Hayward (as cited in Hayward & Hayward, 1997) wrote to his nine-year-old daughter out of concern for her development in a complex, scientifically driven world. Hoping to instill in her curiosity for wonder and appreciation for the transcendent, Hayward takes preemptive action by describing in visceral detail the differences between a dead and a living world. Hayward’s dead world is appropriately devastating, emphasizing the hopelessness and disconnection befitting a world that is dead. That his description is one he says science promotes is the subject of much debate, but even as an allegorical reflection of what a disconnected world might look like is
sobering. Much like William Ball (1984) suggests, it is in imagining the absence of something we discover its power and significance.

Theoretical Inspiration: Konstantin Stanislavsky

My first introduction to formal acting training took place in undergraduate school and was chiefly grounded in the teachings of Konstantin Stanislavsky. Stanislavsky’s System as detailed by Sonia Moore in 1984 and cleverly illuminated in *An Actor Prepares* (1989) *Building a Character* (1949) and *Creating a Role* (1961) became my primary sources for acting and directing.

In brief, Stanislavsky’s history is the story of a child born of good fortune who had an interest in theatre as a teen and in his early thirties had the means to start his own theatre company where he experimented a new method of acting. Weary of overdone, stock performances, an impassioned Stanislavsky, with the support of like-minded artists, set out to develop a procedure for acting that was natural and believable. Instead of actors indicating their emotions, Stanislavsky designed a system for actors to actually feel the emotions of their characters, thus helping actors achieve expressively gripping, nuanced performances. Stanislavsky’s contributions led to drastically different performances from what theatregoers were experiencing at the time (Darvas, 2010; Kapadocha, 2016). Former students of Stanislavsky argued that his methods were overly analytical and broke away from his teachings and developed their own techniques.

**Joseph Chaikin.** Joseph Chaikin (1972) disliked naturalistic theatre and believed an actor who comes to rehearsal with emotions at the ready has already intruded upon the internal life of their character. He believed the presence of the actor relies on an alert body, an open mind, and an uncluttered internal vessel sensitive to actual and imaginary stimuli. Chaikin spoke
of the haziness of creative work where there are no conclusions to be drawn and no data to be exchanged, where man is baffled and has no distinct self. “It is at this level,” Chaikin contends, “it is possible to meet him” (p. 57).

**Vsevolod Meyerhold.** Vsevolod Meyerhold (as cited in Braun, 1979) focused on the training and development of the actor’s body. Contending art should be based solely on scientific principles, Meyerhold developed *Biomechanics*, a process where actors developed expressive bodies that could quickly and economically respond to stimuli, bodies that were agile and balanced. Meyerhold noted how ordinary laborers worked rhythmically, efficiently, and stably, likening them to dancers. He wanted to see the same level of physical prowess in actors and set out to realize his goal. Meyerhold thought the actor’s body and voice was diminished under the weight of heavy emotion and argued that a theatre based on psychology was akin to “a house built on sand” (p. 245).

**Michael Chekov.** Michael Chekov (2014) valued imagination and theatricality over personal experience and cautioned actors against too much thinking. Placing intuition ahead of intellect, Chekov developed *psychological gesture*, an embodied approach to character work where an actor would explore a full-bodied gesture befitting their character. If Chekov had worked with an actor playing Lloyd from *Noises Off* for example, he would have guided him through a process of embodying Lloyd’s frustration, exhaustion, and fear of public humiliation. Chekov would have asked the actor to explore a gesture that contains all of those emotions as a way to orient the actor to the internal life of Lloyd. Instead of analyzing a character in stillness, Chekov believed everything an actor needed to know about a character could be accessed through their body (2014.)
**Jerzy Grotowski.** Jerzy Grotowski saw the theatre as a sacred space and developed an acting process based on Via Negativa, a process of stripping everything down to its essential elements. In response to the theatre of his time, coined “rich theatre,” where lights, costumes, and sound effects were maximized for effect, Grotowski championed “poor theatre” where all artifice was removed. Of any materials that were used—costumes, properties, or scenery—they were stripped to their absolute minimum so that all focus would be on the actors. Even the space itself, including where the audience would sit or stand, would be redesigned according to the needs and intention of the performers. An actor involved in Grotowski’s theatre was identified as a “holy actor,” because their acting work was considered a personal sacrifice (as cited in Grotowski & Barba, 1968 & Cynkutis, 2015).

Kapadocha argued that “Stanislavsky’s System in conservatory acting training is logocentric…indicat[ing] an objectification of the actor’s experience perpetuating binaries such as mind and body, inner and outer, self and other…impl[y]ing a mechanistic and homogenizing universalization of the human body that denies the actor’s multiple subjectivities” (2016, pp. 9-10). Alexander coach, author, and actress Cathy Madden (2014) put it this way: “We are whole. We are whole. WE ARE WHOLE” [emphasis in the original] (p. 4, 2014).

Kapadocha acknowledges that while Stanislavsky set out to explore the body in acting, he was limited by the ideology of his time (2016, p. 12).

In defense of Stanislavsky, his exact contributions are the subject of much debate and the interest of many theatre historians. Depending on who is referenced, the details of his life in the theatre vary. It is a history complicated by errors in publication, inaccurate and inadequate interpretations, assumptions, excessive ego (his and those of his protégés), the inevitable changes in thought that occur over a 40-year career, and the era in which Stanislavsky’s System was
prominent (Darvas, 2010). As Darvas points out, the confusion surrounding Stanislavsky’s life and legacy include professional controversies about the original intention of his work to more personal concerns including the correct spelling of his name. Between questions surrounding the true originator of the “method,” and whether the term “System” is identified with a lower- or upper-case “s”, there is little about Stanislavsky’s life that has not been challenged (Darvas, 2010). What we do know is that his name, however one spells it, and his System, whether capitalized or not, is synonymous with revolutionary theories on acting technique.

**Konstantin Stanislavsky: Summary** Konstantin Stanislavsky responded to the presentational theatre of his time with a revolutionary acting technique that provided actors a system to realize honest, emotionally compelling performances. His critics, including former protégés, accused his work of being overly cerebral, underemphasizing the significance of the actor’s body, intuition, and imagination. These criticisms might be overstated since much of Stanislavsky’s history is ambiguous. His legacy, and the controversies surrounding it, is summarized well by protégé Jerzy Grotowski, who makes clear that both he and Stanislavsky asked the same methodological questions; they just often arrived at different answers (Grotowski & Barba, 1968, p. 15).

**Theatre and Religion**

Preliminary research for this study revealed that comparing my time in theatre practice to my time in religious practice was unsurprising. To this point, Johnson and Savage (2009) proved particularly illuminating. Their book, *Performing the Sacred: Theology and Theatre in Dialogue* offers not only an overview of the alternating cooperative/contentious history between theatre and theology, but more significant to this study, principles shared between them. While in many
instances one wants little to do with the other, there are curious commonalities between theatre and theology. Johnson and Savage paid particular attention to the following three:

- **Incarnation**—the story breathed to life, the word made flesh.
- **Community**—the gathering of live artists, live audience.
- **Presence**—the sense of the holy, the taste of grace. From its beginning theatre has existed to invoke or examine the transcendent. (2009, p. 7)

Weinert-Kendt put it this way, “Theatre is an arena where narrative is incarnated…a story made flesh…by actual people with whom we share breathing space…it is metaphor with the sweat and spit of life in it” (2011, p. 19) and Johnson and Savage point to theatre and theology’s shared processes of “narrative” and “ritual” (p. 21) referencing Aristotle’s contention that humans have a need to role-play and tell stories (as cited in Johnson & Savage, 2009, p. 21).

The tug-of-war between religion and theatre is evidenced throughout theatre’s history, an example of which is clearly seen in the work of Jerzy Grotowski. In 2020, Kris Salata hypothesized that Grotowski’s holy actor, in an act of self-sacrifice, presented “herself before the spectator in *carnal prayer* [emphasis added]…fundamentally confessional and revelatory” (p. xii). Salata defends the religion-laden language of his thesis through defamiliarization by holding strong to its appropriateness and usage in the creative process rudimentary to the Grotowski actor (p. 7). Not only does Salata see the declaration as valid; he sees it as fundamental (p. xii). To begin, he makes clear that his assertion in no way intends to align theatre with religion. Instead, his hypothesis recognizes that both theatre and religion share a cultivated practice that “seeks to be in the world while simultaneously *ascending from the world*” [emphasis in the original] (p. xii). Salata orients prayer in a pre-religious context, “a
 SPIRITUALITY IN THE REHEARSAL PROCESS

performative act...of self-examination...openness, transparency, and the submission of the self toward another” all elementary to Grotowski’s philosophy on theatre (2020, p. 7).

Salata’s exhaustive effort to negotiate the debate between secular and religious matters is peacefully reconciled by Thomas Moore (2014) who asserts that a truly religious life is one that includes both the holy and the profane (p. 139). Moore further asserts that religion should not always be “calm and lovely” (p. 164) and recognizes that the boundaries that are pushed in art force us to see beyond our everyday lives and are essential to the development of our souls and the fulfillment of our spiritual existence. Pointing to theatre exclusively, Salata echoes Moore’s summary contending that it is in the theatre our “potentiality of being” is rehearsed (2020, p. x) or as Brook famously states, in his description of the Holy Theatre, it is where the “invisible is made visible” (1968, p. 42). Arguably, it is easier for Moore to postulate on the benefits of an individual designing a religion of their own than it is for theatre artists (or all artists for that matter) to defend their inclusion of terminology that could potentially label or alienate them from the very culture in which they seek inclusion and asylum.

To this concern, I point to university professor and theologian, Paul Tillich, who positions art ahead of religion in bringing radical attention to the truly religious matters, courageously tackling the complexities and vulnerabilities of the human experience. He makes examples in all art genres, a sampling of which I include here.

It is the religious question which is asked when the playwright lets the emptiness of a life's work end in self-destruction...when the poet opens up the horror and the fascination of the demonic regions of his soul... when the painter breaks the visible surface into pieces, then reunites them into a great picture which has little
similarity with the world at which we normally look, but which expresses our anxiety and our courage to face reality. (Tillich, 1959).

Looking at creativity through a religious lens, Buckenham contends that through creation we become who we are in the image of God (2011, p. 61). Theologian, Matthew Fox observes that every time artists create, they begin afresh, start over, and learn anew (as cited in Buckenham, 2011, p. 64). Fox goes on to say the best thing a potter creates is the potter [emphasis added] (p. 64), reminiscent of what Linda/A suggested when she said, “by discovering our characters, we discover ourselves,” an observation I imagine Tillich and Fox would applaud.

Integration

Attending to the Body and Voice. In this study, warming up the body and voice was grounded in attention to breath and sensory awareness. Physical and vocal warm-ups were inspired by Alexander Technique, the Feldenkrais Method, Tai Chi, and Kristin Linklater’s, Freeing the Natural Voice.

Moshe Feldenkrais. Scientist and engineer Moshe Feldenkrais suffered two back-to-back unrelated injuries to his knees. He chose to forego surgical intervention and instead practice a way of moving that would prevent him from putting any undue pressure on his knees, approaches he reasoned from his experience as a scientist and engineer, and while applying the nature of imagining movement he learned through practicing judo (Feldenkrais, 1949). It was through this work the Feldenkrais Method was born. Through slow, methodical, body movements students of the Feldenkrais Method undergo a process of discovery where they learn to identify and correct habits that interfere with optimal wellness.
Feldenkrais practitioner and university professor, Sheets-Johnstone describes a body-centered process that runs counter to traditional technique classes where all students are expected to perform the same stretches without taking into account any differences in physical ability. Instead, the Feldenkrais method limits movement to only that which is pleasurable, paced slowly and with purposely scheduled breaks. Sheets-Johnson admits that it still surprises her that practicing the Feldenkrais method, albeit over a dedicated period of time, results in a “dramatic increase in range of movement” (as cited in Sholl & Sheets-Johnstone, 2021, p. 75). Kampe, 2021 (as cited in Elgelid, Kresge, & Kampe) notes an increase in literature on the Feldenkrais method and its significance in acting training, pointing to “issues concerning performer-agency, skills acquisition, and holistic communication…[a] trend in western acting training that embraces 20th century somatic practices as a resource for a holistic education” (para. 1).

Frederick Matthias Alexander. In a similar story, Frederick Matthias Alexander was an aspiring actor showing professional potential, when he began suffering hoarseness while reciting classical text. Eager to correct his condition, he sought medical intervention. His doctors’ recommendations improved his condition until he returned to the stage, where again his voice would become hoarse. Alexander reasonably surmised that if daily conversations were causing no vocal issues, there must be something he was doing on stage responsible for the loss of his voice. Like Feldenkrais, Alexander set out on his own experiment. While watching himself in a mirror, he observed himself speaking in everyday conversation and then while reciting text. He noted marked postural differences between the two, and over the course of many years came to what today is known as the Alexander Technique, a system that calls for the awareness of one’s movement to recognize and then inhibit habitual patterns of movement that interfere with optimal wellness (Madden, 2014).
In 2018, Eric Kildow, Assistant Professor of Theatre at Kent University and Alexander Technique practitioner, began integrating Alexander Technique into his introductory acting program in response to the spike in student stress he and his colleagues had been observing. While mindfulness approaches were showing some promise, Kildow gathered that student actors might best be served with a holistic mind/body method of stress reduction, since acting is largely rooted in action. While he admits the results of integrating Alexander Technique into his classes were largely anecdotal, he found Alexander Technique “invaluable” in the management of stress in student actors. Additionally, Kildow (2018) like Kampe (as cited in Elgelid, Kresge, & Kampe, 2021) noted mind/body practices like the Alexander Technique more routinely included in college and university theatre programs.

**Tai Chi.** Tai Chi is a movement meditation performed slowly and mindfully through a series of martial arts postures wherein energy is moved externally and internally. Andrew Hearle, 2016 hailed Tai Chi as a useful tool for actors, citing its gentle and calming characteristics. He also pointed to Tai Chi’s benefit on posture and ease, as well as its “portability.” Tai Chi requires no props or strict dress code; dressed comfortably, Tai Chi can be practiced virtually anywhere there is space enough to perform the fluid movements.

In 2014, Lese conducted a study testing the benefits of Meyerhold’s biomechanics and Tai Chi in acting training. Lese hypothesized that specific exercises inspired from biomechanics and Tai Chi influence the psychological and motor potential of aspiring actors. She designed a study that invited first year students to participate in biomechanics and Tai Chi and 3rd year students to participate in practical courses in physical education. Each group was given a series of physical challenges to accomplish in the time frame of the study, i.e., juggling, free falls, jumping on toes, etc. Both groups were tested before and after engaging in the practices to which
they were assigned. The initial scores favored the third-year students; the scores following the scheduled practices favored the first-year students, which proved Lese’s hypothesis. As a result, Lese strongly recommended the inclusion of biomechanics in all movement disciplines in the curriculum of the drama schools and Tai Chi in all undergraduate years and the MA program with the Drama School (2014, p. 502). Lese went on to say the “effects of [Tai Chi] are significantly more beneficial than we were able to present in this experiment.” (p. 502) In 2018, Lese again champions Tai Chi as a form in which actors can practice both motion and stillness in the body and mind, skills critical to their profession (p. 151).

**Kristin Linklater: Freeing the Natural Voice**

Kristin Linklater, like Stanislavsky, developed her own revolutionary method. Her name is synonymous with freeing the voice, specifically helping actors and non-actors rid themselves of inhibitions that interfere with their ability to communicate fully, authentically, and freely. As detailed in her pivotal book, *Freeing the Natural Voice* (2006), Linklater, a protégé of master voice teacher, Iris Warren, came to New York in 1963 in response to a plea from former students who recognized a weakness in American acting training they were confident Linklater could correct. Under the strong influence and allure of Stanislavsky’s books, The Group Theatre, and Lee Strasberg’s Actors Studio, American actors were excelling in psychological and emotional exploration while all but deserting their external skills. Given the need, Linklater viewed the timing of her arrival to America as “exact” (p. 1).

The heart of Linklater’s voicework, like Grotowski’s via negativa, Alexander’s technique and Feldenkrais’ method lies not in the acquisition of skills but in the removal of blocks – blocks that have accumulated over time and are inhibiting optimal performance. The following captures Linklater’s work and mission beautifully and is deserving of exact representation.
The basic assumption of the work is that everyone possesses a voice capable of expressing, through a two-to-four-octave natural pitch range, what gamut of emotion, complexity of mood, and subtlety of thought he or she experiences. The second assumption is that the tensions acquired through living in this world, as well as defenses, inhibitions, and negative reactions to environmental influences, often diminish the efficiency of the natural voice to the point of distorted communication…the natural voice is transparent, it reveals, not describes, inner impulses of emotion and thought, directly and spontaneously. *The person is heard, not the person's voice* [emphasis added]. (2006, pp. 6-7).

Linklater’s work includes a range of exercises designed to help students discover (or perhaps rediscover) their voices. The work is slow, personal, and progressive requiring equal parts imagination, technique, and discipline.

**Empathy, Vulnerability, and Courage**

Empathy, vulnerability, and courage were identified as evidence of the spiritual and sacred dimensions of the rehearsal process. In the context of this study, empathy is described as investing oneself in the life of another without judgment. Vulnerability is evidenced through sharing parts of oneself with another, and courage is recognized through opening oneself up to the entirety of the human experience. In this study, where the participating actors set out to know their characters and their stories, these elements were repeatedly identified. Inevitably, to look at one of these elements, is to introduce the other two. Empathy requires vulnerability; vulnerability relies on courage; and it takes both vulnerability and courage to empathize with characters whose
stories find actors wrestling with topics such as death, liminality, loneliness, artistic aspirations, and lost dreams as did the participating actors in this study.

The importance of developing empathy in creative work is well documented (Allen, 2005; Ball, 1984; Csikszentmihalyi, 2003; Hagen, 1973; Leavy, 2015; Knowles & Cole, 2008; McNiff, 1998). The participating actors in this study found empathy possible when they were willing to be vulnerable, when they opened themselves up to their characters. As Hagen reminds us, when letting a character in, an actor is served to be “more [emphasis in the original] vulnerable” than they are in life because in life our efforts are often directed toward being seen as “invulnerable” (Hagen, 1973, p. 215). Acting calls for equal parts empathy, vulnerability, and courage expressions that extend beyond well-meaning conversations and socially acceptable boundaries. These are qualities that are fearlessly applied in rehearsal processes by actors interested in, concerned with, and unafraid of tapping into all human experience.

The Rehearsal Space as Sacred

Perhaps by now it is little wonder why some consider the rehearsal space a sacred space. The literature offers mixed reviews. Using a broad brushstroke, Susana Pendzik (1994) suggests that a sacred space is one that is distinct from other spaces, a space that has been rendered significant within a wider homogenous context (p. 25). The features unique to a rehearsal space include anonymity, freedom of expression, non-judgment, and respect – for one another and the work being pursued. Where Pendzik is primarily concerned with actual theatres, and as such speaks to elaborate architecture along with the history of where and why theatres were erected (1994, p. 26), Trungpa (1984) pays closer attention to the humble qualities associated with a sacred space, reminding us that sacred spaces do not require great expense or ornamentation;
they are made sacred by the attitudes of the occupants (p. 75), a viewpoint that aligns with both the physical and ideological nature of the rehearsal space.

Rehearsal spaces are working spaces, often windowless, unadorned areas large enough to house a roomful of actors. Their greatest quality is space and if at all possible, floors that are anything but cement. Given their high demand, theatre companies often find themselves scrambling to secure rehearsal spaces, and as such are willing to adapt their needs to whatever possibilities arise. Rehearsal spaces frequently need airing, sweeping, as well as clearing of furniture, props, and abandoned coffee cups. Preparing them for rehearsals is part of honoring their sacredness as is tidying them when rehearsals are through, affirming Trungpa’s position that a sacred space is marked by how well it is attended to and organized (1984, p. 74).

Woodruff (2013) defends the theatre as sacrament and considers anything sacred as “untouchable,” suggesting that theatre spaces are made touchable only to those who are permitted entry (p. 9). He offers as an example anyone other than an actor entering the stage during a live performance. The ethics of sacrament, he suggests, require that anything sacred should not be interfered with, sacred ground, sacred person, and sacred object. He points to theatre, music concerts, and sporting events – events occurring in a liminal time period made sacred by human action. Interestingly, when referencing theatrical rehearsal processes, he said this is where the rules “relax” (p. 11). In rehearsal, he contends, “the space is not sacred.” He qualified this distinction stating that rehearsals are where “directors and costumers and set dressers are free to roam” (p. 12).

It is easy enough to defend the presence of directors and designers in rehearsals; they do have entry, and they are not merely roaming. Their presence has a purpose specific to their role and their role is critical to the performance Woodruff rightly holds in high esteem. In Woodruff’s
defense, he is staying true to his position on sacrament in the framework of a public event. It is true enough that a costume designer would not enter the stage to repair a torn costume during a live performance. Still, to blanketly state that the rehearsal process does not qualify as a sacred space, to my mind, suggests a line too narrowly drawn. In the spaces where I work, college and community theatre, it is not unusual to find a stage manager preparing the stage for rehearsal, or a costume designer taking measurements; theatre is a team sport, and all members of the team have access. Most importantly, those who do enter the rehearsal space proceed respectfully and with sensitive care because they well understand the sacredness of the space they occupy, behaviors that align with Trungpa’s contention that a sacred space is upheld by the attitudes of those who engage in it.

The rehearsal process is where the work happens, it is where actors “lay bare and make gifts of [themselves.]” (Grotowski & Barba, 1968, pp. 15-16). It is the rehearsal process where actors immerse themselves in the human experience, absent of judgment; it is where actors open themselves up to the lives of others and share parts of themselves with the characters they play; it is where “actors allow forbidden things in [themselves] to come forward” (Hausman as cited in Schiffman 2007, para. 14); it is where the “invisible is made visible” (Brook, 1968, p. 42). I cannot imagine any scenario where such a procedure could be considered less than sacred. While I appreciate Woodruff’s discussion and I agree with the sacred value he places on the theatre event itself, we part ways where the rehearsal process is concerned.

Furthermore, I favor different terminology when describing the sacredness of theatre work and the rehearsal process; I prefer ceremony or ritual over sacrament, perhaps in my own effort to steer clear of religious dogma, but also because I see ceremony and ritual more clearly honoring the procedures and repetition of theatre work. I would also position incarnation ahead
SPIRITUALITY IN THE REHEARSAL PROCESS

of consecration because my experience has been that this is the order in which they occur in the rehearsal process. While notably both carry the burden of religious implication, it is the very act of incarnating a character that I contend makes the rehearsal process sacred; it is the act that sanctifies the event. I also see incarnate as more effective in describing the human and imaginative procedures that take place in rehearsal spaces, including the revelations and the setbacks. Perhaps this is due to the etymology of the word incarnate and the Latin root “caro” or “carn” meaning flesh, which to me emphasizes the raw, exposed, unapologetic human story those engaged in the rehearsal process are eager to tell.

**Empathic Leadership**

Given the nature of the actor’s work, the participating actors identified empathy as an essential quality in artistic leadership (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003). The participating actors described an effective artistic leader as one who possesses confidence, and a non-anxious presence, a leader who is empathetic to the work actors take on (Ball, 1984). Additionally, they described a leader who is skilled and sensitive to the exploratory nature of the environments where rehearsal processes take place, taking care to design and uphold safe, affirming, and respectful spaces where actors have agency and feel comfortable taking risks, the kinds of spaces previously described. According to Roncero (2021) empathetic leaders are approachable, compassionate, collaborative, flexible, and motivating, all fair descriptions to the role of artistic leadership. Within the condensed timeframe of this study there were opportunities for me to practice all five identified expressions. Servant leadership (Greenleaf, 2002) is born out of a desire to serve, to help, to step up and make a way when there is no clear path, again, all drives evidenced in artistic leadership. While I see the value in both frameworks, personally, I lean
toward a mantra the actor who played Emily carries with him into rehearsal processes. “I see you – you see me,” he says, meaning “I am human, you are human, let’s start from there.”

**Literature Review: Summary**

This review is dedicated to literature that speaks to the study’s overriding questions: 1.) Can the theatrical rehearsal process, along with being a creative endeavor, be a spiritual and sacred one as well? 2.) If there are spiritual/sacred dimensions to the rehearsal process, what are they and how do they present themselves? 3.) What can a director do to create and maintain a sacred rehearsal space?

The chapter begins with an overview of the rehearsal process, what it is and what other researchers interested in its nature have to say about it. The review then takes a bold look at spirituality and its connection to theatre, those who champion the relationship and those who criticize it; this includes a brief look at theatre’s association with religion. The rehearsal process is reviewed and described through the voices of some of today’s contemporary theatre directors and is also considered through the lens of spiritual and ritual practice. This review also includes attention to acting theorists who influenced the design of this study, starting with an overview of Konstantin Stanislavsky and the significance of his contributions alongside former protégés who broke away from his methods in pursuit of their own methodologies. Rehearsal practices employed in this study, including Alexander Technique, the Feldenkrais method, Tai Chi, and Linklater voicework are reviewed for their attention to breath, integration, and awareness. Finally, literature speaking to the outcomes of the study, including connectedness, vulnerability, empathy, and courage are reviewed followed by a defense of the rehearsal space as sacred. The chapter closes with a look at the nature of artistic leadership.
CHAPTER 3

Methodology

After years of benefitting from the spiritual enrichment bred of countless rehearsal processes, I set out to formally investigate the relationship between the nature of the rehearsal process and its possible connection to spirituality. This formal investigation began with the pilot study previously mentioned. Art-based research grounded the pilot study and was again used here. This chapter discusses the methods of the study, the elements of the rehearsal process used in the study, and the manner in which the outcomes were realized.

Overview

This study involved 4 participating actors engaging in a rehearsal process that took place over the course of 9 weeks. The first 4 sessions occurred over a two-week period (2 sessions per week), the fifth and final session occurred 4 weeks later. Each actor chose one of three pre-selected monologues and I served as the facilitator and director of the study. The pre-selected monologues include Emily from the metatheatrical play *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder (1938), Lloyd from the farce *Noises Off* by Michael Frayn (1982) and Linda from the tragedy, *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller (1949). These selections were the vehicles by which the following research questions were investigated.

- Can the theatrical rehearsal process, along with being a creative endeavor, be a spiritual and sacred one as well?
- If there are spiritual/sacred dimensions to the rehearsal process, what are they and how do they present themselves?
- What can a director do to create and maintain a sacred rehearsal space?
**Invitation to Participate & Participants.** An invitation to participate in the study (Appendix D), informed consent form (Appendix E), and a list of the pre-selected monologues (Appendix E) was forwarded to Theatre 411 and Stage Source, platforms where actors check for audition notices, workshops, and classes. I also sent invitations and informed consents to my list of theatre colleagues. While it was unnecessary that the participants be professional actors, I was seeking established actors who had both life and acting experience, actors over the age of 21. The invitation asked potential participants to write briefly about their interest in the study, their best availability, and the monologue they would be most interested in exploring. To this last instruction, I encouraged the potential participants to choose any monologue regardless of age, gender, or “type.” Four actors responded, one through Theatre 411, and the remaining three through invitations I sent to theatre colleagues. Though the study was originally designed for three participants, via email I invited all four to join the study in the event one participant was unable to complete the study. I received positive, prompt responses from all four participants and all did complete the study.

In a follow-up email, I sent each participant a PDF copy of the play from which their monologue was taken and a separate document with their monologue, double spaced for room to make notes. This email also included a proposed rehearsal schedule (Appendix F) for each participating actor based on the conflicts originally presented. Only a few adjustments were necessary. Three of the actors identified as female, one as male. Two of the identified female participants chose to explore Linda from *Death of a Salesman*. The third identified female chose Lloyd from *Noises Off* and the one identified male chose Emily from *Our Town*. As indicated in my IRB application, the participating actors are referred to by their characters’ names only. In the case of Emily and Lloyd, the participating actors agreed I differentiate pronouns dependent
upon whether I refer to the actor or the character. When referring to Lloyd the character I use the pronouns he/him/his and Lloyd the actor with the pronouns, she/her/hers. Similarly, I use the pronouns, she/her/hers when referring to Emily the character and he/his/him when referring to Emily the actor. In the case of two actors playing Linda Loman, I refer to one as Linda/A and the other as Linda/B; each agreed to these distinctions. The participating actors were not asked their ages; I estimated the ages ranged between late-twenties through mid-sixties. The backgrounds and levels of experience among the four participating actors varied. Lloyd and Emily are degreed in theatre and have professional credits; Linda A attended performing arts schools throughout grade school and high school and participates in community theatre; Linda B has taken a variety of theatre workshops and participates in community theatre. These 4 actors engaged in 5 individual rehearsals (hereinafter, study sessions/session). There were 20 study sessions in total. The first session was scheduled on January 6, 2021; the final session was scheduled on March 7, 2021.

**Virtual Engagement.** This study was conducted in the winter of 2021 during the Covid-19 pandemic. Since the study would only involve three people at a time, (the participant, the videographer, and me), the Internal Review Board (IRB) at Lesley agreed that I could conduct sessions in-person as long as I followed Covid protocols as detailed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), including mask wearing and generous social distancing (Appendix G). The invitation that was sent to potential participants asked them to identify if they would prefer in-person or virtual participation. Three out of the four participants chose virtual engagement. Linda/B chose in-person work but ultimately found the mask mandate too distracting and after her second in-person session decided to continue virtually. In the end, virtual work proved a better fit for this study. While there were challenging moments, technical
and otherwise, I learned, out of necessity, ways to optimize the format, let go of what was not possible and focus on what was possible.

**Situating the Study.** This study was designed to mimic a traditional rehearsal process as closely as possible, however there were distinctions worthy of note. Traditional rehearsal processes (ones of which I am most familiar) are designed to prepare full scripts for a live audience, the process of which occurs roughly over an 8-week timeframe. The participating actors in this study explored a small amount of text, the bulk of which occurred over a two-week timeframe and no live performance was planned. These distinctions were intentional. Meeting with the participating actors 4 times, each time for 2 hours, within a two-week timeframe made for an immersive experience. Assigning a small section of text allowed the participating actors to explore their characters and stories deeply and in a variety of ways. The exclusion of a live performance kept the focus on the rehearsal process, which was the chief interest of this study. That four weeks passed in between each participating actor’s fourth and fifth session gave the work time and space to breathe and process. The layout of sessions 1-4 involved rehearsal practices that are common in traditional rehearsal processes, including: a period of warming up the body and voice, character prompts, script exploration, monologue rehearsals, and a closing period of reflection. Notably, as the sessions progressed, the focus narrowed in on the monologues. This narrowing is also reflective of a traditional rehearsal process where attention moves from exploration and discussion to repeated run-throughs of the material. The practices mentioned above are discussed in what follows.

**Study Sessions 1-4 Logistics**

**Preparing a Virtual Space.** Since the study would largely be conducted in a virtual space (and in the end entirely so), I emailed the participating actors an outline of how they
should organize their space and provided a list of the supplies they would want to have on hand. I recommended a quiet, open space where they could comfortably engage in the planned activities without fear of interruption. The space they create should afford them room to move freely and comfortably either sitting, standing, or lying down, with approximately two to three feet in front, behind, and to the left and right of them. Supplies they would want on hand included a yoga mat, hard chair without arms, crayons, markers, pens, and pencils, drawing paper, water, journal, access to the script I sent and a printed copy of the monologue. To the one participant who was attending in-person, I told her I would be happy to supply and sanitize any materials she needed, or if more comfortable, she could provide her own. She opted to provide her own.

**Scheduling and Zoom Links.** Once the participating actors signed and scanned their informed consent forms to me, I emailed the three virtual participants their schedule along with a private, recurring Zoom link for sessions 1-4. I emailed the in-person participant directions to the MMAS Academy in Mansfield, along with her proposed schedule. When she moved to virtual participation, I advised her how to create a working virtual space and sent her a recurring Zoom link.

**Researcher and Participant.** I played a dual role in this study, serving as both the researcher and study facilitator/director. In the role of study facilitator/director, I was also an active participant in the study, providing feedback and offering suggestions to further the creative work of each participating actor. Every director has preferred ways of conducting rehearsals that reveal artistic biases. Rather than squash or camouflage artistic preferences, which would no doubt result in unclear direction, I chose to perform my role confidently, recognizing that another artist in the same situation would do things differently. More importantly, I used
caution when engaging in conversations regarding the research questions, appreciating that what I say and how I say it could bias the study and influence responses from the participating actors. To this concern, I strove to empower the participating actors to respond authentically by frequently reminding them that my only interest was in their experience, which would be investigated through the research questions, the results of which I was leaving in the hands of the process itself.

**Rehearsal Practices**

**Orientation.** Session 1 is where I officially welcomed each participating actor to the study, reviewed study protocols, and reminded them that all sessions would be video, and audio recorded via Zoom and would be available for viewing through a private YouTube channel. I reminded participants that their involvement was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from any exercise or the entirety of the study at any time. I spoke briefly about my interest in the study, the pilot study that preceded it, and assured the participating actors that while both my personal experiences and the outcomes of the pilot study were the catalyst for this project, they would be set aside for the duration of this study. I confirmed the schedule of sessions and asked if there were any questions prior to starting the rehearsal. The participating actors posed no questions. I encouraged the participants to comment and ask questions at any time during the study. At all subsequent sessions, participants were reminded of their rights, encouraged to offer feedback, and given generous opportunities to reflect on the study in consideration of the research questions. Following introductions, we then took a few moments to check camera angles. By the time of this study, all participating actors had previous exposure to the Zoom platform; as such, checking camera angles for sitting, standing and lying down went
quickly. When casual conversation reached its natural end, I segued into the physical and vocal warm-up.

**Physical and Vocal Warm-up.** Before guiding the participating actors through the physical warmup, I asked if there were any physical limitations requiring modifications. Three of the actors noted general tightness and stiffness from extended periods of sitting due to Covid-19, and one actor spoke of chronic back issues due to an injury occurring many years prior. I adjusted the warm-up to address these conditions. The planned exercises were inspired by modern dance, ballet, Yoga, Tai Chi, Alexander Technique, Authentic Movement, and the Feldenkrais Method. In the first session, I explained and performed the exercises with the participating actors to provide a visual guide. In subsequent sessions, I vacillated between serving as a visual guide and observer. As an observer, I offered gentle suggestions to improve alignment, release notable tension, and help the participating actors maximize the benefit of any given exercise. Attention was given to coordinating the participants’ breath with slow, mindful movements matched by steady inhalations and exhalations. The movements were presented in a way to support each actor as they attuned to their body, noted sensations, and smoothed their energy while identifying cool or blocked areas. To help the participants resist self-judgement, I encouraged them to identify such areas as “curious” spaces for further consideration. Prompts to guide this process included, “imagine moving through water,” “use only the amount of energy you need,” “do less,” and “listen to what your body is telling you.” Subsequent sessions included select practices from the first session, choices of which were made based on what appeared to best serve each participant. As the sessions moved forward, additional exercises were added to the physical and vocal warm-up including tongue twisters, vocal therapy exercises, and facial and jaw massage, again chosen to serve the individual needs of each participating actor.
Following the physical warm-up, I taught Linklater’s vowel resonance ladder (Appendix H) via scaffolding, adding subsequent vowels incrementally in pace with each participant’s confidence in performing and remembering the progression. When a new vowel was added, we returned to the beginning and ran the exercise up to that point. I continued in this fashion until all sounds and movements had been reviewed and practiced. All participants benefitted from practicing small sections at a time and they all took time to write out the exercise in their journals. While two of the participants had distant exposure to the exercise, all participants appreciated a detailed breakdown. Depending on the participant, the physical and vocal warm-up ran between 30-60 minutes, taking less time in subsequent sessions. Following the physical and vocal warm-up, we paused for a break.

**Character Prompts.** Character prompts were designed to provide the participating actors a variety of creative ways to explore their characters. Examples include, Emily walking a graveyard as if returning to her grave after returning to Grover’s Corners and then capturing the experience in a Haiku; Lloyd writing a letter to the producers of *Richard III*, explaining why he will be delayed in starting their rehearsals; Linda/A and Linda/B each writing a letter to Biff asking for help with and compassion for Willy. Upon completion of these prompts, participating actors were asked to read aloud their work product and then go immediately into their text. Follow-up questions and discussions centered around how the exercises informed the characters and monologues. Questions included, “What did you learn about Lloyd after writing that letter?” “How did you feel about Biff before the letter; how do you feel about Biff now?” “What surprised you as you walked through the graveyard?”

**Script Exploration.** Each session included time dedicated to script work. Drawing from the text, the participating actors were asked to consider what their characters wanted, the
obstacles interfering with those wants, and the strategies their characters were employing to overcome those obstacles. Participating actors were asked to mark beats, adjustments, and tactics in their text. Time was spent on each character’s “moment before,” focusing on the specific conditions that led to each character’s opening line. Attention was given to the arc of the monologue – how it progressed, where it started, moved, and ended. Participating actors were asked to identify where in their monologues their characters might pause and why. Study sessions also focused on language and each participating actor’s personal relationship with various words from the text. Following the completion of each of these tasks, the participating actors spoke their text and reflected on anything new or surprising that resulted from their script work.

Monologue Rehearsals. The participating actors were afforded generous opportunities to perform their monologues. These repeated runs typically followed a character prompt, and constructive feedback was provided following each run-through. Very often, a run-through would inspire a spontaneous idea or discussion. These impromptu moments were evidenced throughout the study, but especially in session 4 after in-depth exploratory work had taken place.

Reflecting on the Process. In each session, the participating actors reflected on the work performed and its influence on their character and monologue. Prompts guiding these reflections were in some instances broad, i.e., “Tell me about that experience” or more specific, i.e., “What were your expectations when you returned to Grover’s Corners?” The work of each session was also discussed in consideration of the research questions. In this way, the study underwent ongoing review in real time. During these periods of reflection, I chose not to write while the participating actors spoke; I preferred to listen and observe and follow up later with the audio and video recordings and transcriptions. It was then I made notes in a dedicated journal.
Final Session and Next Steps

Session 5 took place 4 weeks following each participating actor’s fourth session. Session 5 included a final interview/reflection/discussion and an opportunity for each participating actor to present their monologue one final time. During the interim period, I built the individual videos for each participating actor to view prior to their final meeting. Like sessions 1-4, session 5 was also videotaped and audio recorded, the content of which proved notable. Footage of the actors performing their monologues and speaking at length to the entirety of the study in relation to the research questions was significant in the compilation of the final video as well as in the identification of the study’s outcomes.

Determining Outcomes. This study progressed in time with the scheduled sessions with the participating actors and then for a period of time after the active study was complete. I began noting possible themes following the first session, some of which were furthered in subsequent sessions and some of which were set aside as potential curiosities for further research. In subsequent sessions, I carefully reviewed and cross-referenced video footage, video transcripts, rehearsal materials, and personal notes looking carefully for patterns and categories worthy of further consideration. As repeated patterns emerged, I made note of possible outcomes that spoke to the study’s research questions.

Post-sessions and in-between sessions I journaled the participating actors’ responses to various exercises and prompts, highlighting similarities and differences among them. I paid attention to repeated themes and patterns, noting exercises or circumstances that seemed to draw them out. As I scanned for repeated evidence addressing the research questions, I paid attention to subtle and overt expressions, surprise discoveries, and non-verbal moments that informed the research questions. After careful examination and synthesis of the study’s work product, I
marked video footage for further consideration. As previously mentioned, the weeks between sessions 4 and sessions 5 is when I built the individual videos, a process which further narrowed and strengthened the study’s potential outcomes. The outcomes were further refined following session five, when the participating actors responded to their individual videos, presented their monologues after notable downtime, and engaged in a final reflection of the study. During the weeks that followed session 5, I revisited noted timestamps in the videos and transcripts and engaged again with the rehearsal work product before ultimately and confidently determining the study’s outcomes and building the aggregate video. An in-depth breakdown of this process is detailed below.

**Organizing work product.** There is much to be said about the process of organizing and preparing for review a generous amount of material, like that which was generated from this study. It is similar to the process of dividing a script into beats; it makes the larger task manageable. The following details the materials that were prepared for review in this study.

**Videos.** Study sessions 1-4 generated 16 separate videos totaling approximately 32 hours of video footage. Fourteen of the sixteen preliminary sessions were audio and video recorded via Zoom; two sessions were audio and video recorded via the video App on my iPad. All videos were labeled by name and session number and placed in an online folder dedicated to each participating actor. In iMovie I created 4 projects: Emily, Lloyd, Linda/A and Linda/B. I downloaded the associated session 1-4 videos to each project in preparation of editing the individual videos. After selecting footage to feature in each participating actor’s individual video, the process of which is discussed later, I brought in a professional videographer to enhance, as much as possible, the visual and audio quality of the videos. I sent the preliminary cuts to the videographer who edited, color corrected, and audio enhanced the videos in DaVinci
Resolve. Going forward, the videographer recommended we record sessions 5 in Stream Yard, a more versatile platform in his opinion. Sessions 5 were recorded via Stream Yard and generated 4 videos, each video running between 45-60 minutes. These videos were likewise labeled and organized. Individual videos and the aggregate video were uploaded to a private YouTube page, (Appendix I) accessible solely to the participants, me, and our videographer. The videos were also placed in a secure external hard drive stored in my home.

**Transcripts.** Given the breadth of material generated in this study, I purchased an on-line transcription service, Otter.ai. Following each session, I uploaded the Zoom videos to Otter.ai and then downloaded the transcriptions to each participating actor’s online folder, labeling them as I did the videos, by character name and session number. I also printed the transcriptions to make notes and categorize sections of the study sessions. Otter.ai was notably helpful, but not perfect. I corrected incorrectly transcribed scripts while playing and pausing the associated video. This process, while time consuming, was edifying since it required a slow scan of a generous amount of material. This process proved to be an unplanned but comprehensive approach in the early stages of focused immersion. It became key in the process of culling through upward of 38 hours of video feed, the process of which inspired other organizational strategies. Reviewing the transcripts while the videos played allowed me to highlight curious moments, silences, and laughter worthy of further review. While correcting misunderstood and missing words or phrases, I marked off and labeled sections of each transcript, each with an identifying header (i.e., physical warm-up, vowel resonance ladder, reflection of letter writing, etc.). I used different colored highlighters to distinguish possible outcomes along with footage and narrative in support of those outcomes. I highlighted these passages for later consideration and made notes in the margins as to why a section caught my attention. I blocked off in black
marker sections that had nothing to do with the study itself, including commentary about camera angles, moments when participating actors had to step away from their cameras, minutes when actors were engaged in artmaking and letter writing, and occasions when conversations beyond the scope of the study took place. These notated documents became primary sources, especially helpful in triggering my memory and providing quick access to moments in the study I saw as significant. After correcting the transcription errors, I reviewed the transcripts in two ways. First, I read each participating actor’s preliminary sessions in order. Then I read the preliminary transcripts by session. The first approach confirmed how each participating actor progressed in the study and how the study was unique to them. In the second approach, I was able to distinguish the differences and similarities among the participants, including common threads in potential outcomes. I reviewed the final interviews in the order in which I met with the participants.

**Rehearsal Materials.** The rehearsal process in this study generated work product including artwork, poetry, letter writing, free writing, journaling, script scoring, and images. Given that the majority of the study was conducted virtually, the participating actors scanned and emailed their work product to me; I also have hard copies of work product from the participant who started the study in person. I printed the work product that was emailed to me, and all hard copies are held in a lockbox in my home. PDF copies of work product were labeled and placed in each participating actor’s online folder and downloaded to a secure external hard drive kept in my home.
Distilling and Synthesizing the Outcomes

Determining the outcomes of this study progressed through periods of open immersion, focused immersion, shedding and sculpting, and building the videos. These processes were not always linear, often overlapped, and naturally informed one another.

Open Immersion. When I refer to open immersion as a process of discovery, I am coming from the point of view of a performing artist, meaning an early period of immersion when I let the research “in,” where I allowed the study to inform and direct me. This was especially evidenced while actively engaged in the study. There were few moments when the study was not on my mind. Especially when I was teaching outside of the study, I noted how I would adjust a lesson according to the influence of a particular session, something a participating actor said, or something I noted “in need of refreshment” pertaining to my role as the study facilitator. Even in activities that had nothing to do with theatre, I noted shifts in my engagement including heightened enthusiasm and clearer focus. I engaged with the study in meditation, movement, and conversation with family and colleagues. While always protecting the anonymity of the participants, talking about the study helped me better appreciate and confirm what was taking place, without any need to identify outcomes. I would describe these periods as fluid, energized, and open, enjoyable moments where I welcomed the influence of the process to wash over me. This prepared me well for upcoming excavation that required more formal action and decision-making.

Focused Immersion. Focused immersion naturally followed open immersion. It marked a significant period in the excavation process where the videos, transcriptions, and work product were repeatedly viewed and notated, the process of which I describe below.
Shedding and Sculpting. The theatrical rehearsal process could be viewed as a period of shedding and sculpting: getting rid of what is unnecessary and shaping what remains into an audience-worthy story. In this study, the monologues served as the grounding for those decisions. In the process of determining this study’s outcomes, I underwent a similar process of shedding and sculpting. The grounding in this instance: the research questions. When considering edits in the videos, transcriptions, and rehearsal materials, I asked myself, “Does this shed any light on the research questions?” This is how the process of shedding and sculpting began. Of course, some edits were obvious, but others required more consideration. There were many compelling moments in the study, that in the end, did not shed any light on this study’s inquiry. Preliminary edits found me distinguishing footage that directly spoke to the research questions from footage that raised unrelated curiosities worthy of further exploration. What remained was substantial and required my attention as an artist. I marked this period as “putting myself back in the research” because it awakened the responses I experienced in real time. I noted how elements of the study made me feel and visceral responses I experienced when reviewing the videos. I found myself smiling, laughing, and recalling with genuine affection the hours the participating actors and I spent together. I made note of video and transcription segments to which I repeatedly returned and rehearsal materials I continued to examine—my persistent draw to them heightening my curiosity. During this period of the study (when I journaled extensively) I started to recognize how the videos, transcriptions, and work product overlapped. It was at this point I felt ready to begin building the individual videos. This process proved sensitive, slow, and notably satisfying. It was here I felt that my role as a researcher and artist had blended.
Video as Evidence

Audio and video recordings are frequently used in rehearsal settings to provide actors guides to rehearse performance material outside of rehearsal. These videos often include recordings of music tracks, choreography, staging, and rehearsal run-throughs. The videos in this study were used to capture the process of rehearsing: i.e., physical and vocal warm-ups, character prompts, and exercises that led up to the performances. The videos created in this study served two purposes. The individual videos were designed to highlight the work product of each participating actor drawn from sessions 1-4, which provided them an audio and visual summary of their work (Appendix I). The aggregate video features visual and audio evidence of the study’s outcomes (Appendix I). Prior to each participating actor’s final session, I forwarded them a copy of their individual video.

I organized the videos and transcripts generated from the final sessions as I had previously with the videos and transcripts generated from sessions 1-4. I immersed myself in the session 5 videos and transcriptions until saturation with the material was reached, noted by fast forwarding past segments that were of little consequence to the study, repeatedly returning to select segments, and gaining nothing new from repeated viewings. I then returned to the videos and transcripts generated from sessions 1-4, paying particular attention to the individual videos I built. It was after this process I began building the aggregate video. In retrospect, I came to appreciate that the process of editing the individual and aggregate videos blended in-depth engagement into the study’s work product (videos, transcripts, and rehearsal material) with my imagination, the process of which was instinctive, exciting, and visceral. It was this process that shed the strongest light on potential outcomes, because I experienced the process not only in my mind and imagination but in my body as well. The process is detailed below.
**Individual Videos.** The way in which I determined the content of each participating actor’s individual video had to do with the manner in which each participant responded to the rehearsal process. I searched for the rehearsal practices that best served and furthered each actor’s character incarnation, which influenced the rendering of each actor’s monologue. For example, Emily and Linda/B’s monologues are presented with an audio of each actor speaking their text while images they selected move in time with the corresponding lines. Lloyd’s monologue is presented through a line-by-line cut of various takes and Linda/A’s monologue is presented while the actor performs household chores. These choices were inspired by the cumulative work of each participating actor and my experience working with them. The process of arriving at these videos led to a rough draft of the study’s outcomes.

**The Aggregate Video.** The aggregate video included footage that was chosen after the outcomes had been determined, which occurred in the weeks following the final sessions. These outcomes were then presented to and confirmed by the participating actors. From there, I considered each outcome separately and re-examined the videos and corresponding transcripts for footage to support and speak to each finding. Select moments from the preliminary and final videos along with feedback and responses made by the participating actors throughout the study evidenced the study’s outcomes. As demonstrated throughout this study, there was much overlap among the outcomes and the selected edits reflect the cyclical nature of the study.

**Aesthetically Speaking.** The videos produced from this study reveal my aesthetics as an artist. To what I qualify as valuable and interesting, another artist-researcher may think less so. What inspired me directly correlates with my artistic preferences. The videos from this study reflect those preferences.
Methodology Summary

Using art-based inquiry, I invited four participants to individually engage in an abbreviated rehearsal process. The participating actors chose 1 of 3 pre-selected monologues and over the course of 9 weeks engaged in five study sessions, 4 of which focused on rehearsing the chosen material. These sessions were followed by a 4-week hiatus and concluded with a fifth and final session that included a reflection on the study and an opportunity for each participating actor to present their monologue one last time. The study generated art-work and various writing prompts, along with video and audio recordings of all sessions. The outcomes emerged after a slow and deliberate process of imaginative and concrete immersion into the materials. Five compositive videos were created from these materials, 4 of which highlight the individual work of each participating actor through sessions 1-4 and a summative video including material from the final sessions supporting the outcomes generated from the study. These outcomes are discussed in detail in the following chapter.
CHAPTER IV

Results

This study was grounded in the following questions. 1.) Can the theatrical rehearsal process, along with being a creative endeavor, be a spiritual and sacred one as well? 2.) If there are spiritual/sacred dimensions to the rehearsal process, what are they and how do they present themselves? 3.) What can a director do to create and maintain a sacred rehearsal space?

To question 1, the participating actors held that the rehearsal process is spiritual and expressed the following rationales:

- The rehearsal process manifests connectedness.
- The rehearsal process integrates body, voice, and spirit.
- The rehearsal process is invested in and concerned with the human experience.

To question 2, the participating actors identified the following elements as evidence to the spiritual/sacred dimensions of the rehearsal process:

- Empathy – through investing oneself in the life of another without judgment.
- Vulnerability – through sharing parts of oneself with another.
- Courage – through opening oneself to the entirety of the human experience.

To question 3, the participating actors identified the following conditions an artistic leader can support to maintain a sacred rehearsal space:

- Design and lead a safe, brave, and affirming space where actors can freely immerse themselves.
- Design rehearsal processes that make room for exploration.
- Possess Knowledge of Craft, Confidence, and Empathy

What follows is a detailed narrative of how each outcome was determined supported by testimonials, work product, and photographs generated from the study.

**Question 1: Can the Theatrical Rehearsal Process, Along with Being a Creative Endeavor, be a Spiritual and Sacred one as well?**

The three findings identified in question 1 overlap. It is challenging to discuss one finding without introducing another. Still, I chose to keep them separate because each highlight unique features from the study and responses from the participating actors, both of which are worthy of stand-alone attention.

1. The Rehearsal Process Manifests Connectedness

Connectedness in this rehearsal process was demonstrated and discussed in a variety of ways. The participating actors discussed an ethereal sense of connectedness simply by engaging in the rehearsal process. It became evident throughout the study that the very nature of opening oneself up to the journey of incarnating a character stimulated an overall sense of connection. In fact, experiences of connection seemed key to what drove these actors to engage in this study and theatrical rehearsal processes in general. Connectedness is discussed through two processes of the study: the incarnation of the characters and the nature of the physical and vocal warm-ups.

**Connection Through Incarnation.** The participating actors experienced connectedness through the process of incarnating their characters. Each warm-up, exercise, prompt, run-through, and reflection (other than discussions intended to inform solely on the research questions) was designed to further and deepen the incarnation of each participating actor’s character. Each identified outcome references, directly or indirectly, the overarching process of
incarnation. In the process of incarnating their characters, the participating actors were charged with connecting to their bodies and voices, to their characters, to the environments where their characters lived and where their monologues took place, to their relationships with other characters, to the immediate circumstances driving their monologues, and to their own characters’ backstories.

These connections began with broad associations made between the actors and their characters. For example, the actor rehearsing Emily related to the traditions of growing up in a small farm town and how such rearing influences family, relationships, and manners of communicating. The actor playing Lloyd understood empirically the frustration and fatigue of directing a troupe of well-meaning but fledgling actors and the issues that inevitably arise before a scheduled opening night. Linda/B related to the role of wife and mother and a woman’s instinct to keep her family from falling apart and Linda/A identified personally with the angst of watching a family member decline. Not only did these early associations ground deeper connections as the study progressed; they also affirmed the intimate and courageous nature of acting work. This was validated by Linda/B who said an actor essentially “becomes a vessel” for their character. “What is ultimately spiritual is allowing something to come through [the actor] so that [the actor] can give it to the world and trust that it will be of value somehow” (Figure 1). Her narrative speaks not only to connecting oneself entirely to the character, but to the process itself. The experience of connection was furthered through the physical and vocal warm-ups.
Connecting Through the Body and Voice. In every session, the participating actors were afforded generous opportunities to warm-up their bodies and voices. More than traditional stretches and vocal drills, the warm-ups in this study were designed to bring awareness to breath, physical sensations, and vocal impulses. The warm-ups were designed to help the participating actors connect to the experience of their bodies and voices in preparation for the work that lie ahead. Through a slow and deliberate process, the participating actors were encouraged to listen to their bodies, identify areas in need of release, and use breath as a way to free blocked areas. Lloyd reported how the experience of a physical release led to an overall experience of letting go (Figure 2).
Feeling Sound. Practicing Linklater’s vowel resonance ladder (Appendix H) encouraged the participating actors to feel where in their bodies they experienced the impulse to phonate. Emily reported feeling strong vibrations throughout his body while performing the exercise. Continued practice clarified where in his body sounds originated and where in his body Emily’s voice was predominantly situated. Lloyd said the exercise was like “oiling the vocal cords” and said she felt very warm inside after practicing it. Linda/A said, “This is a workout!” She was surprised at her range and although the exercise caused her physical fatigue, it did not cause her any vocal fatigue. Linda/B was at first unsure of where in her body the sounds were originating, but by the end of the sessions she noted sensations that “seemed to make sense” to the vowels she was phonating. She also discovered where in her body Linda’s voice felt most authentic.

While the participating actors’ experience with the physical and vocal warm-ups varied, (the study including a mix of trained and untrained dancers and trained and untrained singers), in the end, they all learned and executed with varying degrees of mastery the selected physical and vocal exercises and through that work spoke to a deeper understanding of the connection between body, voice, and spirit. Particularly, after having had the opportunity to watch their
SPIRITUALITY IN THE REHEARSAL PROCESS

individual videos in session 5, all participating actors noted that viewing the videos furthered their appreciation of integration, an example of which is echoed by Linda/A who remarked, “I was fascinated watching how we isolated each of those areas [body, voice, spirit] in the various exercises and then how they all connected in the end” (Figure 3).

**Figure 3**

*Integrating body, voice, and spirit.*

2. The rehearsal process integrates body, voice, and spirit.

**I Come From.** The second outcome is best explained through an embodiment exercise the participating actors performed. Starting with a writing prompt, the actors wrote eight sentences about their characters starting with the prompt, “I come from.” From the eight, they selected three to embody. After creating a phrase of movement for each selected sentence, they created a gesture for their character’s name. Following a period of working privately, the participating actors performed their character “dance,” beginning and ending with the gesture they designed for their character’s name. Footage of the participating actors performing their “dances” is featured in the individual and aggregate videos.

The exercise generated much discussion. Linda/A said, “I felt more emotional…more vulnerable [performing] the movements.” Emily echoed Linda/A’s experience saying, “[Through movement] I feel like I’m able to connect on a deeper plane than if I were just saying the words” and stated further that “my first way of learning to act was through my body.” Notably, Linda/B who had limited exposure to body-centered exercises reported in session 5 that in a Zoom
performance outside of this study she found herself being “led not so much by [her] head but [by] what was coming up out of [her] body.” She further stated that when it comes to the integration of mind, body, voice, and spirit, she thinks there is a bit of “magic” involved.

Lloyd said confidently, “This exercise has informed me, the actor, about Lloyd, the character.”

In the final interview, Lloyd admitted that she was surprised at how clearly her individual video validated integration. She said, “When I saw the video…it was so obvious how necessary all the connections are to get you to where you want to go as an actor.”

Figure 4

Embodiment: Emily, Linda/A, Linda/B, Lloyd

3. The Rehearsal Process is Invested in and Concerned with the Human Experience.

The final finding to question 1 contends that the rehearsal process is invested in and concerned with all things human. As an active witness in this study, I can speak generously to this outcome. To begin, I was struck by the seriousness in which the participating actors pursued their work. The care, thoroughness, and passion I witnessed throughout all of the sessions was inspiring. Punctuating the human endeavor in which we all participated, the sessions evoked hearty laughter, authentic tears, and vulnerable shares. The hours were rich in empathy, humor, and occasional curse words. There were periods of elation and frustration, aside moments of doubt and moments of discovery. There were stumbling blocks to overcome followed by weightless stretches of flow. The process, like this outcome, covered all things human. That there
was a palpable expression of melancholy at each participating actor’s final session was easily foreseeable. When speaking about the nature of investing in the human experience, Lloyd remarked, “Anytime we invest in people, in terms of who they are, what they are doing…when we try to know someone different from ourselves, that’s spiritual (Figure 5).”

Figure 5

*Discovering Lloyd's Voice*

**Question 1 Summary**

Question 1 introduces the possibility that the rehearsal process can be experienced as spiritual due to the sensitive nature of incarnating a character, the connection between the body, voice, and spirit and the actor’s investment and interest in honoring all human experience.
Question 2: If There are Spiritual/Sacred Dimensions to the Rehearsal Process, what are
They and how do They Present Themselves?

The findings generated from question 2 include the significance of empathy, vulnerability, and courage elements the participating actors identified as key dimensions to a sacred and spiritual rehearsal process. While there are commonalities among these elements, each is reviewed individually for the specific way in which each emerged from the study.

1. Empathy

Empathy, for the purposes of this study and coming from the perspective of the actor, is defined as investing oneself in the life of another without judgement. Each participating actor explored their character through various prompts, and it was through these prompts empathy was evidenced. For example, one of the circumstances of Lloyd Dallas is that he is scheduled to direct a production of Richard the III with a reputable theatre company after he opens Nothing On, the farce he is struggling to mount throughout Noises Off. With this circumstance in mind, I prompted Lloyd to write a letter to the producers of Richard the III requesting a later start time due to the complications of his current project. The following is part of that letter.

Dear Mr. Chauncy, Paul, and dear, dear Mrs. Smith, Bettina,

I am so very much delighted and looking forward to directing your wonderful company in Richard III, one of Master Shakespeare’s most effective and dramatic scripts…I must ask, and absolutely regretfully so, for an additional week or so to complete the current production I am directing where I am working with a very incompetent, albeit pleasant, cast of actors…If I did not have Richard III to look forward to, you may very well have read of my demise. With great respect, Lloyd
I asked the actor to read the letter and then go immediately into the text. Following the exercise, she reflected on how the letter furthered her understanding of Lloyd. “Well,” she said, “Lloyd is more intelligent than I originally thought.” She went on to talk about her personal experience with “incompetent” actors. She was very candid in admitting that she, like Lloyd, can be a bit snobbish about actors’ who know little about classical theatre or major playwrights. She was unapologetic when speaking about actors who do not know their lines, change blocking on a whim during live performances, or have little understanding of the connection between body and voice. She said, “I know it’s snotty, I admit it, but it’s how I feel, and I think that’s Lloyd.” The letter helped her empathize with Lloyd’s circumstances. She better understood Lloyd’s frustration and predicament. Not the sort of feel-good empathy with which most of us are familiar, but she—without question—invested herself in the life of Lloyd without judgement – at least no judgement on Lloyd.

In Act III of *Our Town*, recently deceased Emily Webb asks permission to return to her home in Grover’s Corners for one day. To this circumstance, I prompted the actor playing her to journal Emily’s expectations of her highly anticipated visit. He wrote the following:

1.) I expect my family will have missed me terribly.
2.) I expect my mother/family to embrace me.
3.) I expect to be able to interact with the people of the past.
4.) I expect to fit in with the living.
5.) I expect everyone will know what I know about the future and if they do not, I will be able to inform them.
6.) I expect this moment to be joyous and full of love.
7.) I expect my town and family to look as I last left them; I expect attention.
The prompt intensified this actor’s response to Emily’s unexpected and disappointing realization that the deceased are actually more present than the living. A strong example of empathy, his reaction is palpable and emotional and best experienced via video (Appendix I).

Having empathy for Linda Loman was not a long leap for participating actor, Linda/B. She related to Linda Loman’s circumstances, namely Linda’s heartfelt desire to protect her husband and keep her family together in the process. From the first session, she acknowledged Linda’s state of denial about Willy and Linda’s tendency to pretend “everything is okay” when everything was, in fact, not at all okay. But it was when prompted to consider the end of *Death of a Salesman*, after Willy has died, that Linda/B began to embody that empathy. The assigned exercise asked her to walk a graveyard as if to visit Willy’s gravesite and then write a poem about the experience.


While listening to Linda/B read the poem, I noted melancholy, confusion, loneliness, and surrender. Her eyes appeared tired and her body weary. She would occasionally shift her gaze to the sky as if speaking to the universe and then wait as if hoping to hear back. She spoke slowly in between many pauses, which I found curious. I asked her about them. Thoughtfully, she said, “Over the course of the poem, I feel like there are a lot of transitions [Linda] is going through, Willy, the house, living alone, not being able to cry…” Even as she reflected on it, the overarching sorrow remained. I asked her if she could feel in her body what I was witnessing. She said, “Yes.” The prompt inspired additional pauses in the monologue that spoke to a mind
burdened by too much thought, something she discovered after walking the graveyard and
cornerstone. Another noteworthy illustration of empathy was expressed by Linda/A, who came to
realize that Linda Loman’s frustration with her sons was eerily similar to ongoing frustrations
she was having in her family of origin, a connection she did not anticipate. While sharing the
familial conflicts that were unfolding in time with the study, her speech became animated while
her body spontaneously communicated her irritation. After a few moments, I asked her, “Can
you feel what’s happening to your voice and body right now?” She nodded, “Yes.”

When prompted to write a letter to Biff asking for compassion and support on behalf of
his father, she drew inspiration from her own story and after reading the letter aloud had no
difficulty expressing the requisite angst in Linda’s monologue. Later, reflecting on the same
session, she suddenly referenced the scene in *Death of a Salesman* where Willy’s children
abandon him in a restaurant. “I hate that part of the play” she said as her eyes filled. “I can’t
believe they just left him there. That’s awful. Nobody wants to feel like that,” emotions that
seemed to harken back to her personal situation.

Linda’s monologue evoked visceral empathy and raw emotion in this actor and time was
afforded her room to express those feelings. Through the progression of the sessions, she found it
possible to use her personal story as a way “in” to Linda’s monologue. It was not the sole
strategy, but it proved relevant and manageable life experience to draw upon. This was especially
helpful to this actor since she did not share Linda’s circumstances, that of an aging wife and
mother. It would be many years before this actor would be a traditional candidate for such a role.

To applying personal experience to a character’s experience, it should be emphasized that
while actors commonly draw from personal stories, they are encouraged to do so responsibly,
avoiding memories or circumstances that are fresh or trigger difficult and complex responses. In this instance, the actor was relating to a situation that was ongoing, one she had been processing for more than a year. While not always comfortable, she was able to use her experience in service to Linda and the monologue, and as an added bonus, release some of her personal angst. Still—and this cannot be overstated—actors, acting coaches, and stage directors are wise to be sensitive to the appropriateness of applying a personal story to a character’s story, assuring that the former does not overwhelm the latter.

2. Vulnerability

Vulnerability in this study refers to the ways in which the participating actors were willing to not only open themselves up to their characters’ stories and circumstances but the nature of the rehearsal process itself in concert with the questions grounding the study. The following discusses vulnerability in four parts: participation, willingness, exposure, and courage.

**Participation.** Vulnerability in this study began when the participating actors signed the study’s consent form, which outlined the questions being pursued, the content of the rehearsals/how the rehearsals would be conducted, and how their work product would be presented, including audio and video footage intended for public viewing. That the four participating actors agreed to the totality of the study spoke to their willingness to be vulnerable. Moreover, that no participating actor refrained from any aspect of the study spoke to the seriousness of their involvement. Unsurprisingly, as communicated by all participating actors throughout the study, it is the deep and unpredictable dive into the human experience that attracts them to the rehearsal process in the first place, followed by the opportunity to share their interpretations with an audience.
**Willingness.** As the study progressed, I began to consider if the catalyst for vulnerability is willingness. Willingness to open oneself up to the experience of others. Willingness to venture into uncomfortable circumstances. Willingness to find what is likeable in an unlikeable character. When considering the scope and power of willingness, I asked myself, “What is it that willingness permits?” To answer this question, I reflected on the willingness exercised by each participating actor in the study.

The actor playing Emily was willing to let Emily’s painful recognition of the living world infuse him. The actor playing Lloyd was willing to admit her own attitudes about acting and theatre. Linda/A was willing to open up about her personal struggles with family and lay bare her emotions and sensitivity. Linda/B was willing to walk a graveyard in an “as if” scenario to further her understanding of Linda Loman and her complex relationship with Willy. These are not inconsequential actions, and each led to notable degrees of exposure.

**Exposure.** If willingness is the catalyst to vulnerability, perhaps exposure is its evidence. Take, for example, Emily. Featured in his individual video (Appendix I) the actor playing Emily talks about Emily’s experience returning to Grover’s Corners and then Emily’s choice to return to her grave. If you watch closely, you will note how impassioned this actor becomes as he reflects on both experiences. He begins talking about all the big things that he thought were important (or Emily thought were important, it is challenging to distinguish between the actor and the character here). He quickly dismisses those ideas and talks instead about “being in the moment and happiness,” and how “those are the things that really matter.” When he emphatically states, “This is what’s important. Just being together. Just this! Just this!” I cannot tell if he is referring to the scene between Emily and Mrs. Webb, or the moment between him and the viewer(s) watching the video. His willingness to immerse himself in Emily’s experience makes it
challenging to determine where he ends, and Emily begins. The seriousness with which he performed the assigned prompt and then consequently responded to the process of performing the prompt, left him and Emily entirely blended and entirely exposed.

Another example of exposure is captured when during a period of reflection, the actor playing Lloyd suddenly uttered, “If I don’t act, I am not alive.” Even more than what she said, was what I witnessed after she said it. Her face turned solemn, and her shoulders rounded. Seated, with her hands firmly planted on her knees, she looked away from the camera and stayed silent for several beats before repeating it a second time, “If I don’t act, I am not alive.” She was completely exposed, completely vulnerable, as was Linda/A after recalling the image of Willy sitting alone in a restaurant and Linda/B after reading the poem she wrote based on her walk through the graveyard. The participating actors unwavering willingness gave their character’s free access; it invited their characters “in.”

3. Courage

The final element identified in question 2 is courage. In this study courage is defined as opening oneself up to the entirety of the human experience. A heavy lift. When considering this framework of courage, it is easy for performing artists, myself included, to overlook several critical steps and jump headfirst into “acting.” In this study, actors initiated the process of opening themselves up at the beginning of each session, through a process of emptying, letting go, opening, and then acting.

**Emptying.** Actors are charged with taking on the weight of representing someone other than themselves. The participating actors in this study expressed their characters through their bodies, voices, spirits, and imaginations. As such, the sessions began with a period of emptying to make space for the characters they were preparing to play. This period included opportunities
for the participating actors to identify through word or gesture how the rehearsal found them and through concentrated breath and body work let go of any/thing, thought, or preoccupation that might interfere with becoming a vessel for their character.

**Letting go.** The exercises performed in the rehearsal process require the participating actors to let go. Let go of right and wrong, the risk of appearing foolish, and the fear of revealing physical and vocal shortcomings. At the same time, they were asked to free their bodies, voices, imaginations, and emotions, not easy in a world that applauds discipline and self-control.

Linda/A pointed out the courage it takes to engage in practices that place actors in awkward or unusual positions, i.e., holding the tongue as a way of practicing articulation, executing the sounds and movements that make up Linklater’s vowel resonance ladder, massaging the face and jaw with the mouth open, expressing the body freely and spontaneously. Emily spoke about the importance of emotional vulnerability. “It’s everything,” he said, “People are afraid to be vulnerable, but for the actor, it’s everything.” Lloyd likened the acting process to walking to the edge of a cliff, stepping off, and trusting. Throughout their study sessions, the participating actors practiced unrestrained liberation physically, emotionally, and spiritually, and in doing so opened themselves up completely to their characters.

**Opening up: Acting with our Scars.** A question asked of the participating actors during their final interviews was based on a statement made by Shelley Winters during a 1992 interview (Governick). “You act with your scars,” said Winters referring to the in-depth and unrelenting personal demands of acting. Reflecting on Winters statement, I posed the following questions to the participating actors: “What do you make of that quote and where do you act from?”

Linda/B replied, “What I take from that quote is that instead of trying to run away from our scars…we need to access them…expose them …they’re what give us power and depth and
resilience.” Linda/B also pointed to the importance of actors identifying how their characters push their scars away, hide them, and run from them. Linda/B noted how Linda Loman minimized Willy’s condition, evidenced in a writing prompt where she wrote, “I come from lots of denial,” and “I come from pretending everything is okay,” two examples of Linda Loman hiding her scars.

Lloyd associated the quote with “the personal pains of needing to act…the absolute need to create.” To “where she acts from,” Lloyd thought for a moment before saying, “Everything.” Linda/A related the quote to the ways in which actors draw from personal experiences and said the same was true for her, an admission that echoed her experience in this study. Emily thought “scars” referred to “secrets,” and what “lies behind the eyes…the whole life you create for your character.” In all instances, the participating actors opened themselves up to the lives of their characters. Emptying, letting go, and opening were the processes these actors underwent to bring themselves to their roles.

**Performing the Role.** Evidenced in the study was the extent to which the participating actors exposed themselves to the lives of their characters. In the pilot study that preceded this study, I described the acting process as “a complex journey designed to bring flesh and blood to [a character], the process of which gives [the actor] courage to permit [a character] access to [their] flesh and blood” (2019, Sept 9). The participating actors in this study embraced their characters in their entirety – the good, the bad, and the ugly. To play Emily Webb was to wrestle with mortality and the meaning of life. To play Linda Loman was to grapple with ageing, illness, and loneliness. To play Lloyd was to suffer the life of an artist.

Over the course of this study, I witnessed the symbiotic relationship between actor and character in each participant. I am tempted to argue that each participating actor was negotiating
and sharing their own experiences with the lives of their characters, imbuing themselves with their characters’ stories, but I am not talking exclusively about method acting, or any sole acting technique. Instead, I am more apt to wonder if what I witnessed was a process of nurturing, perhaps a spiritual exchange between each participating actor and their character, naturally resulting from the combination of deep and diverse exploration, reflection, repetition, and perhaps, as was suggested in this study, a little bit of “magic.”

**Question 2: Summary**

The findings in question 2 pointed to empathy, vulnerability, and courage as elements suggestive of a spiritual dimension in the rehearsal process. From agreeing to participate to reflecting on what it means to act from their scars, the participating actors amassed countless examples of these elements in their warm-ups, character explorations, prompts, monologue run-throughs, and reflections.

**Question 3: What can a Director do to Create and Maintain a Sacred Rehearsal Space?**

Question 3 is chiefly concerned with artistic leadership, namely how artistic leaders design rehearsal spaces to honor the work of performing artists. The term “sacred space” refers to a space that is private, safe, exploratory, and welcoming, a place to exercise creativity and make choices without fear of ridicule. In this study, due to Covid, the sacred spaces the participating actors and I shared were primarily virtual, but for 2 in-person sessions as previously discussed. As I would learn from this study, a sacred space has less to do with location than it does with the intention of the occupants. Physical separation and periodic technical setbacks did not deter from the work that ensued and though I missed being physically present with the actors, especially when emotions overcame them, the genuine nature of the sessions easily overcame the artificial nature of Zoom. This study demonstrated that a sacred rehearsal space is possible
virtually anywhere. When asked what a director can do to create and maintain a sacred rehearsal space, the participating actors had several recommendations. What follows are details of three findings that topped the list.

1. **Design and Lead a Safe, Brave, and Affirming Space Where Actors can Freely Immerse Themselves**

   Likely due to the sensitive nature of the rehearsal work in which the participating actors engaged, as detailed in the findings from question 2, the first outcome in question 3 is unsurprising. The participating actors unanimously and generously described a rehearsal space that is safe, brave, and affirming, where actors can freely immerse themselves. As the study suggests, actors are best served to be open, uninhibited, and willing to take risks. Reasonably, these attitudes are more likely to take place in spaces where actors feel protected, encouraged, and supported. The participating actors named universal elements that support such spaces, including safety, trust, respect, openness, honesty, and inclusivity. They expanded on these ideas by describing conditions they would personally consider valuable. For example, Linda/B said she would appreciate a space where an actor is allowed to grow into a role and be permitted to work through the stages of performance aside a director who is supportive.

   Linda/A described a rehearsal space that exudes a level of comfort that allows actors to engage in exercises without feeling “silly.” Emily described a progressive space, one that is human-centered, where everyone involved in the process recognizes everyone else in the process, a space where each person acknowledges each other’s shared human qualities and artistic interests. For these participating actors, a creative space is led by an artistic leader who sets a tone of humility and acceptance of themselves and everyone else and in doing so creates a level playing field that nurtures freedom to create, explore, and take risks grounded in an
SPIRITUALITY IN THE REHEARSAL PROCESS

environment rich in acceptance, forgiveness, transparency, and willingness. While certainly respecting and calling upon the experience, talent, and creativity of all involved, Emily described a space where the collective group esteems the intelligence of the creative process above all else. This echoed an outcome from the pilot study where I came to appreciate that often the best action a director can take is to concede to the wisdom of the process.

2. Design Rehearsal Processes That Make Room for Exploration

The participating actors spoke to the importance of rehearsal processes that dedicate time for exploration. Linda/B, whose experience in community theatre rehearsals is largely centered around putting a play on its feet, was struck by the variety of exercises she was asked to perform. She said plainly, “I’ve never done what we did here.” While she acknowledged the importance of preparing for a public performance, she wished “maybe one or two rehearsals” in the settings where she regularly performs be set aside for character exploration. She pointed to the letter I asked her to write to her son, Biff. “I’m sort of a writer, so it was fun…it came easy and gave me a chance to see how I really feel about him.”

Dear Biff, I love you dearly and completely. You are my first born, my miracle. I felt complete when you came into the world. I didn’t know if I could ever be happier than the moment they put you into my arms. But my darling you are lost, and it breaks my heart to see it. You are floundering. You are raging at the wrong things. Your father cannot hurt you anymore, but you seem determined to hurt yourself over and over again. You are all grown up now. You are not mine to fix anymore. You have to find it within you to fix yourself. When you do, I will be the first to rejoice.
Evidenced in Linda/B’s work, the various exercises helped clarify the complex motives and emotional landscape of Linda Loman, which Linda/B effectively brought to the monologue. In her final session, she mentioned using the warm-ups and acting techniques presented in this study in anticipation of her performance in *Women and Wallace* scheduled during the weeks in-between her fourth and final session. Much like the other participating actors in the study, she spoke meaningfully and richly to the research questions, but the clarity she gained through exploring Linda Loman through various prompts brought about a succinct wrap up I am confident I will be echoing in future artistic endeavors, “Murky rehearsal, murky performance.”

Linda/A also appreciated the various exercises presented in the study. “The more diverse the exercises, the better,” she asserted. “Actors can then choose which ingredients work best for them.” Her comment reminded me of an anonymous quote I happened upon that asks, “When an actor delivers a moving, effective performance that depicts a whole human being, does it matter what method or technique they used to arrive at that performance?” Linda/A and Emily’s dance background found them particularly drawn to embodiment exercises. Both said those exercises helped them feel in their bodies their character’s stories and circumstances. The actor playing Lloyd experienced Lloyd’s frenetic emotions through her body when she performed Lloyd’s monologue through gesture instead of language. She said the exercise made her realize that she has felt how Lloyd feels. Emily pointed to the multiple intelligences that were utilized in the study. “We were on our feet...writing...coloring... cutting things out and pasting them...we were dancing and moving and warming up...it is so great to have an experience where you can explore more...try different things.”

One of the creative exercises Emily was assigned asked that he searches out images that speak to his monologue, one image for every line of text (Figure 6). His selections inspired a
SPIRITUALITY IN THE REHEARSAL PROCESS

video presentation of Emily’s monologue captured through an audio of his voice speaking over the images he selected, moving in time with the associated lines (Appendix I). Personally, it was affirming that the study generated feedback as to the exploratory nature of this study since, as mentioned in my introduction, the study design was the culmination of my own exposure to new and diverse rehearsal strategies.

Figure 6

*Acting through Imagery*

3. Possess Knowledge of Craft, Confidence, and Empathy

Acting is a vulnerable pursuit; a good deal is asked of actors. I equate the work of actors to firefighters who run into buildings while passersby run in the other direction. The participating actors in this study underscored this metaphor; they too ventured into places most prefer not to go. The participating actors spoke to leadership qualities they deemed as important, both directly and empirically based on situations that presented themselves throughout the study. In the end, they suggested a combination of leadership skills grounded in knowledge of craft, confidence, and empathy. From those overarching categories, other qualities of significance emerged, all of which are detailed below.
**Knowledge of Craft.** Knowledge of Craft in this study refers to the artistic leader’s know-how, skills, and experience. The participating actors in this study described effective artistic leaders as those who are trained in their craft demonstrated by guiding actors through a process that is often abstract in nature, a requirement that calls upon an ability to make nontangible concepts accessible to the actor and breakdown dense theories into digestible pieces. Emily and Linda/A emphasized a leader who can tailor a rehearsal to the experience and abilities of the actor, stating that an artistic leader acts in service to actors when they meet them “where they are at,” identify where they “want to go,” and help them “get there.” Qualities associated with the artistic director’s knowledge of craft include creativity, clarity, and adaptability.

**Confidence.** The participating actors described a confident artistic leader as one who prepares and leads a creative and stimulating rehearsal, one who is as excited as the actors to be engaging in the work. Emily described a confident leader as one who creates a welcoming space and nurtures a feeling of community where actors feel held and supported (Bento-Coelho, 2018). Linda/B described an effective artistic leader as one armed with an arsenal of creative strategies to bring to the actor, and Lloyd and Linda/A referenced artistic leaders who are unafraid of emotion, vulnerability, and conflict. They described leaders who are available and curious, leaders who roll with the punches and manage setbacks with a cool head and soft touch. Qualities associated with the artistic director’s level of confidence include preparedness, focus, non-anxious demeanor, enthusiasm, and attentiveness.

**Empathy.** Key to the role of artistic leadership, as repeatedly highlighted in this study, is empathy and a sweeping understanding of the human experience. The empathetic leader is concerned with the safety and anonymity of the actor, honoring the adage, “what happens in the rehearsal, stays in the rehearsal.” Artistic leaders are not easily shocked or offended and they
favor compassion over judgment. They listen, support, and encourage demonstrating an
investment not only in their art but in the overall wellness of the artists they serve. Qualities
associated with the artistic director’s capacity for empathy include compassion, love,
understanding, and kindness.

**Testimonials.** The participating actors spoke candidly about what they like and do not
like in artistic leaders. Here is a sampling of their comments.

Lloyd was adamant about directors who give line readings or “traffic cop” rehearsals. She
punctuated her point by performing an example. “Go here. Pick up the cup. Drink. Put the cup
down. Go over there. Sit.” She finished with a sigh. “*That,*” she said adamantly, *is not* direction.”
She described an effective artistic leader as one who demonstrates decency, respect, someone
who does not degrade anyone, and she described a talented director as one who respects the
actor’s craft and their ability to do good work. Linda/B echoed Lloyd’s point, implying that it is
uninspiring to be told how to say a line or made to feel that “you’re doing everything wrong.”
Emily admitted that he was scared attending the first session because he was not sure what to
expect. He said he relaxed when I asked him, “So, what do you think of all this?” He said he felt
that his opinion mattered. Throughout our sessions he said he felt like we “were always together”
and that he felt valued. Emily, who is also a director and choreographer, spoke personally about
his approach to artistic leadership. He adopts the mantra, “Never too proud,” and explained why.
“There are things I don’t know,” he said with a laugh. He alluded to recognizing that as a
director and choreographer he will not have all the answers; he will make mistakes, but by giving
himself that concession, he can then in turn give the same concession to others. “Actors come to
rehearsals scared,” he said, “I was scared coming here!” I told him, “So was I!” After we shared
a laugh, he told me, “I want actors to feel seen and recognized and to know I have their back.”
Linda/A appreciated that I reminded her throughout the process that “there were no right or wrong answers.” She further noted feeling comforted whenever she struggled starting an exercise because when I noted her apprehension, I gently encouraged her by saying, “You can’t do this wrong.” She said both statements gave her the confidence to try things that were unfamiliar. She further said she respects artistic leaders who acknowledge that acting is both “a craft requiring technique, and a personal calling that lives and breathes within the actor.”

**Practicing Leadership: First do no Harm.** During the study, there were two occasions where I found it necessary to temporarily table the planned rehearsal activities to best serve the actors. Both examples speak to the nature of rehearsal work and the challenges of artistic leadership.

The first example occurred in session 3 when one of the participating actors came to rehearsal in a low mood, laden with unshakeable self-criticism. They tossed it off as an experience they occasionally go through, dismissing it as something to which we did not need to pay any further attention. Their frustration, whatever the source, was palpable. After a few attempts at light-hearted humor fell flat, I decided to table the scheduled activities and move in another direction. I spent the first 30 minutes facilitating a guided meditation followed by an authentic movement exercise. In the end, I noted brighter eyes and a relaxed face. Both practices seemed to release some of the tension that accompanies unsettled emotions, or at the very least shake loose the actor’s preoccupation and sufficiently redirect their energy and attention. With the time remaining, we segued back into the scheduled activities.

A second instance, one which was previously referenced, occurred when Linda/A broke down after speaking about a scene in *Death of a Salesman* that caused her distress. My instinct was to offer some meaningful gesture of compassion, but for the first time in the study, I felt
strangely limited by the virtual separation. In this instance, it seemed best to allow her emotions breath and space to process and resolve. When it seemed appropriate, I gently offered, “What we do as actors is very personal and it is also deeply, deeply emotional.” She agreed.

Both examples illustrate the sensitive nature of theatre work, and the challenges artistic leaders face in mediating self-doubt and strong emotions. Actors are called to act; they bring themselves to the work, their lives, their habits, their circumstances. Directors who say, “leave it at the door” fail to recognize that the same sensitivity that makes actors great is the same sensitivity that occasionally trips them up. They are not drawing from two different pools. An artistic director is served to recognize that.

As to my response in both scenarios, in reflection it seemed I was primarily interested in making sure I did not make either situation worse. Were there better alternatives? Perhaps. I did what seemed best in the moment. More importantly, both experiences affirmed the nature of the rehearsal process and the role of artistic leaders. Both are human endeavors, often messy human endeavors, and perhaps the best approach in mediating an actor’s sensitivity is to follow the physician’s decree, “First, do no harm.”

**Question 3: Summary**

The participating actors in the study suggested that an artistic leader can create and maintain sacred rehearsal spaces by designing environments that are safe, respectful, and welcoming aside leaders who model confidence and a non-anxious presence. They further described a sacred rehearsal space as one that is respectful, encouraging, and creative led by an empathetic artistic leader who is well-versed in their craft. Additionally, the study pointed to exploration as an integral part of the rehearsal process and that time be dedicated to providing actors diverse ways to fearlessly search their characters and their character’s circumstances. The
study also pointed to the delicate nature of theatrical work and the challenges artistic directors face in honoring and navigating the far-reaching sensitivity actors bring to their work.

Results: Summary

This study explored a connection between the rehearsal process and spirituality, chiefly if and how spirituality presented itself, and finally how an artistic leader might design a rehearsal process to honor such an experience. The participating actors in this study found that the rehearsal process is spiritual because of the ways it manifests connectedness, integrates the body, voice, and spirit and is invested in and concerned with the human experience. Testimonials about the experience of the rehearsal process included feeling “put back together,” “connected to energies beyond the physical,” and “senses of higher vibrations.”

The participating actors noted the following elements as key to a sacred and spiritual experience: empathy, expressed through investing oneself in the life of another, vulnerability, expressed through sharing parts of oneself with another, and courage, expressed through opening oneself up to the entirety of the human experience. Given these elements, the participating actors pointed to rehearsal spaces that are regarded as sacred, meaning spaces that are welcoming, private, safe, and affirming wherein actors can freely and comfortably immerse themselves without worry of ridicule or harsh criticism. These sacred spaces are maintained through respect, compassion, encouragement, and love. They are led by artistic leaders who possess knowledge of craft—leaders who are well-versed and experienced in designing and facilitating creative rehearsal processes wherein actors are allowed to fully and confidently develop their characters. To this last point, the participating actors stressed the importance of reserving rehearsal time for character exploration before addressing the logistics of blocking and staging. They emphasized leaders who are respectful of rehearsal environments and the actors occupying them,
demonstrated by an abundance of confidence (through craft, creative depth, and the ability to inspire) and empathy (through a sensitive understanding of the human experience, patience, and a non-anxious presence). These findings were corroborated throughout the duration of the study as evidenced by summary video footage that includes excerpts of the participating actors engaging in the rehearsal process and responding to the research questions, Aggregate Video.
Chapter V

Discussion

This study was grounded in the following questions. 1.) Can the theatrical rehearsal process, along with being a creative endeavor, be a spiritual and sacred one as well? 2.) If there are spiritual/sacred dimensions to the rehearsal process, what are they and how do they present themselves? 3.) What can a director do to create and maintain a sacred rehearsal space? For the participants in this study, the theatrical rehearsal process proved a spiritual experience based on the following outcomes: 1.) The rehearsal process manifests connectedness, integrates body, voice, and spirit and is invested in and concerned with the human condition. 2.) Spiritual elements, such as empathy, vulnerability, and courage were repeatedly evidenced throughout the entirety of the study. 3.) A sacred space can be maintained by empathic artistic leaders who demonstrate knowledge of craft and design safe, affirming, and brave spaces that allow room for exploration. This chapter looks further at these outcomes through the selected literature.

Connectedness

Connectedness in this study was evidenced in a number of ways. First, it was evidenced in the work; exercises were performed to scaffold connections—to breath (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2017), body (Feldenkrais, 1949; Madden, 2014), voice, language, and emotion (Linklater, 2006). The actors then performed exercises to help them connect to the lives of their characters (Linklater, 2006; Schwinke & May, 2020), and the worlds of their stories. In their individual definitions of spirituality, each participating actor, directly and indirectly mentioned the significance of connection, echoing results from Fetzer Institute’s mixed methods study on spirituality in the United States (Selzler, Gonda, & Mohammed, 2021) and Brown’s study that
suggests connection is the reason for our existence (2010). Additionally, the participating actors saw their definitions of spirituality transferable to their experiences in the rehearsal process.

**Integration**

In the rehearsal process, the participating actors engaged in exercises intended to connect the breath to the body, the body to the voice, the voice to authentic emotion, and authentic emotion to language (Feldenkrais, 1949; Linklater, 2006; Madden, 2014). In fact, in the participating actor’s follow-up interviews, each spoke to how watching their videos clarified the degree to which integration was practiced and expressed. As Lloyd recognized, “It was all so clear how the voice, body, emotion, character et cetera worked together.”

**Commitment to the Human Experience**

The theatrical rehearsal process is where the human story is brought to life; it is where characters are incarnated (Weinert-Kendt, 2011). Actors agree to take on the complexities of all human behavior (Buckenham, 2011). For the participating actors in this study, issues of aging, suicide, and familial struggle (Miller, 1949) the meaning of life and death, (Wilder, 1938) theatre careers, ego, and exposure (Frayn, 1982) were meaningfully unpacked and explored.

**Empathy**

Empathy for actors is not unlike empathy for non-actors who, in an effort to understand a person before judging them, consider what it might like to “walk in their shoes” (Eisner, 2017, Goleman, 1995). This idea is explored through Stanislavsky’s “magic if” (Moore, 1984, Stanislavsky, 1989, 1949) where the actor imagines, “what might I do if I were in the exact same circumstances of my character?” Empathy can be further realized through affective memory (Meisner, 1987), when the actor draws upon lived experiences similar to those of their character. For the participating actors in this study, both strategies were employed. Lloyd considered what
she might do if she found herself in the same situation as Lloyd, and in doing so recognized that she too would respond in frustration because, like Lloyd, this actor has “been there.” Linda/A drew from familial conflict arising from the sudden health decline of her father. She could relate to the resentment and frustration Linda Loman was feeling toward her sons, similar to what she was feeling toward her family of origin. The actor who played Emily was raised in a small farm town, much like Emily Webb. He could relate to small town rearing, how everyone knows everyone, and how love was most routinely expressed through work, house chores, and task completion. He could imagine himself in Emily’s shoes, vying desperately for his mother’s attention. Linda/B said plainly that the nature of having lived a life gave her the courage to draw upon the deeper “sadness[es]” she had experienced, which served the circumstances surrounding Linda Loman’s monologue. She understood Linda Loman’s fear and struggle and could imagine the emotional tension that would arise while addressing her sons.

**Vulnerability and Courage**

Vulnerability and courage in this study were evidenced through the work the participating actors performed. The nature of warming up the body and voice requires a process of letting go (Feldenkrais, 1949; Linklater, 2006; Madden, 2014; Thich Nhat Hahn, 2017), exercises that require at the very least that the actor be uninhibited. These exercises also risk exposure and the possibility of unleashing long held trauma (Pallaro et al., 1999). Even in this small study, the exercises caused the participating actors to recognize chronic areas of tension and tightness that had been left unchecked due, in part, to the sedentary lifestyle that had become routine during the pandemic. As Linda/B reflected, “You’ve pretty much pointed out every area where I hold tension.” Linda/B admitted that she “holds onto things,” and that these “things” show up in different areas, like her neck, shoulders, and lower back. She spoke openly about various habits
SPIRITUALITY IN THE REHEARSAL PROCESS

that lend to her physical tension, including issues with trust, startle responses, worry, and vigilance.

Vulnerability and courage proved also key when incarnating a character. When performing a role, the actor and character are always present (Chaikin, 1972). Rehearsing over a period of time, as was evidenced in this study, made it challenging to distinguish actor from character. To my eye, an example of this duality occurred when the actor who played Emily shared what he had journaled about Emily’s expectations in returning to Grover’s Corners and then why she returns to her grave. While reading his reasons, he became vulnerable and exposed; actor and character merged. I witnessed the potency of the exercise take over his senses, which caused Emily to authentically emerge through his voice, body, and spirit.

Designing a Safe, Brave, and Affirming Space

Evidenced in this study was the significance of maintaining a sacred space (Grotowski & Barba, 1968; Trungpa, 1984). According to the participating actors in this study, a sacred rehearsal space is safe, brave, and affirming. It is common knowledge that safety is the highest priority in the rehearsal process, and includes not only the physical well-being of the actors, but their emotional and psychological health as well. Given the nature of work actors willingly take on, it is critical that environments are designed to safeguard the actor’s overall well-being (Ball, 1984). Caring for the participating actors in this study was pursued when asking about physical limitations and providing modifications as necessary, adjusting rehearsals to the needs of the participating actors when deemed appropriate, and allowing time and space for emotions to air and settle without any efforts to fix or interfere. For these participating actors, a safe rehearsal space is maintained by an empathetic artistic leader who is sensitive to the fluctuating temperature changes that naturally occur when actors are engaged in creative work.
A brave space is one that invites risk and an opportunity to explore far-reaching choices; it is a space that allows performing artists chances to reach, make mistakes, and change their minds (Ball, 1984). Linda/B, pointed to her time spent in community theatre settings. “I wish time was dedicated to exploring characters before being told, ‘say the line like this, say the line like that.’” Putting aside for the moment the many opinions of directors who give line readings at all, let alone out of the gate, Linda/B perhaps unknowingly makes an observation that is key in respecting the actor’s process and critical in maintaining a sacred rehearsal space. She stated, “I think actors should be allowed time to – you know – not [perform] so great and have everybody be okay with that.” Her observation is reminiscent of William Ball, 1984, who reminds directors that in the early stages of rehearsal, actors will generally make safe choices. Ball encourages directors to give actors room to explore those early choices, because in doing so, actors will feel trusted and be more apt to experiment and take risks as the rehearsal process progresses.

The actor who rehearsed Lloyd tried many approaches to Lloyd’s monologue. She even gave naturalism a try, going against the farcical style of Noises Off. In the end, she found the choice unsuitable to Lloyd and the style of the play as she saw it, but was content having had the opportunity to practice that choice, a strategy stage director Peter Brosius employs when he states, “I have a bad idea…let’s try it” (as cited in Loewith, 2012). An affirming space is one where the actors feel respected, valued, and held (Bento-Coelho, 2018). Not to be confused with a space free from conflict or human fallibility, an affirming rehearsal space respects the creative ideas of all involved and makes room for open dialogue when inevitable disagreements and tensions arise, which McNiff contends is healthy and can birth new ideas (1998).
Making Room for Exploration

Each participating actor spoke to the importance of a rehearsal process dedicating time to exploratory work (Linklater, 2006; Schwinke & May, 2020) before engaging in rehearsal logistics such as blocking, staging, and pacing. The actor playing Lloyd described a “good rehearsal” as one that provides insights into character that may otherwise remain unknown. Emily appreciated that the exercises performed in the study honored multiple intelligences, and Linda/A spoke to how the exercises helped “put Linda in her body” and feel Linda’s circumstances. Linda/B was especially vocal about the value of exploratory work, hoping that future endeavors would include “the kind of exploring we did here.”

Empathic Leadership

The participating actors in this study spoke to the importance of an artistic leader who is empathetic to the human experience (Bolman and Deal, 2001; De Pree, 2004; Clurman, 1972; Czikszentmihalyi, 2003; Hillman, 1995, 1996; Schuyler, 2012), a leader who is sensitive to the complexities of human behavior. Empathy and sensitivity are key to the overseer of a rehearsal process due to the vulnerable load actors carry; empathy and sensitivity are also vital to the maintenance of a sacred rehearsal space (Trungpa, 1984). It is helpful for the artistic leader to have within them an effective barometer that keeps them attuned to the changing dynamics of an emotionally charged pursuit. In this study, empathic leadership felt initially challenged by virtual engagement. Would I be able to sense in a virtual setting when a change of direction was warranted? Would it be possible to maintain a sacred space over the internet? In the beginning, I questioned if the unfamiliar and impersonal nature of our gathering might weaken my barometer and turn a procedure I held as sacred, cold and detached. However, once virtual logistics were
clarified, the process itself overcame worry of disconnection. The nature of the work maintained my gage, and to my mind, made a sacred virtual space possible.

**Knowledge of Craft**

Knowledge of craft in the rehearsal process was identified as critical to the maintenance of a sacred space. This includes not only an understanding of acting, discussed by theorists including (Chaikin, 1972; Chekov, 2014; Grotowski & Barba, 1968; Hagen, 1973; Meisner, 1987; Moore, 1984; Stanislavsky, 1989, 1961, 1949; et al.) and directing, (Ball, 1984; Bogart, 2012, 2014; Bogart and Landau, 2005; Clurman, 1972; Loewith, 2012, Miller, 2018, et al.), but also a keen understanding of people and craft as described by Clurman (1972, p. 14). In this study, knowledge of craft was demonstrated through the organization of the study’s procedures, facilitation of exercises, as well as coaching the actors through their monologues, including attention to script scoring and the embodiment of language. Knowledge of craft was also expressed in responding to the needs of the participating actors.

**Reflection**

In this study, the theatrical rehearsal process and its possible connection to spirituality was explored through an art-based inquiry involving an abbreviated rehearsal process with four participating actors rehearsing pre-selected monologues. The rehearsal process included attention to the body and voice, character exploration, script work, monologue rehearsal, and reflection. Key to this study was trusting the wisdom of the process (McNiff, 1998) and letting the outcomes organically emerge without imposing my personal experiences and contentions on the participating actors. While I was transparent about my experiences serving as the impetus to the study, I was clear that those experiences would be set aside—that I was only interested in what the participating actors would discover through the process. Each participating actor
demonstrated notable autonomy; there was no concern that they were drawing conclusions disingenuously; their participation seemed only concerned with responding to the inquiry honestly, thoroughly, and clearly. That said, these actors came to the study with their own rehearsal process experiences. Even unconsciously, their past experiences likely influenced their responses to this study.

**Limitations**

This study involved four participating actors with prior theatre experience rehearsing pre-selected material over the course of an abbreviated rehearsal period; each participant rehearsed in a one-on-one virtual setting. The limitations of these conditions make ample space for similar studies to expand on this inquiry. A study focused on untrained actors would generate perspectives from the beginner’s mind. A study where the participants gather together would add the element of witnessing, scene work, and group improvisation. A study that ends in a public presentation adds the excitement and anticipation of performance. A side-by-side comparative study involving a virtual group and in-person group would shed light on the nature of both and better distinguish theatre in a virtual world, a world in which theatre artists have been conducting their work over the course of the pandemic. Additionally, the participants in this study involved three Caucasian females and one Asian male; each were middle class, college graduates, able-bodied, able-minded, and highly motivated. The study would be served by a more diverse group.

**Noticeably Absent**

Finally, I noticed a curious pattern while researching studies appropriate to this dissertation’s literature review. When researchers identified art genres, it was very often the case that theatre was not specifically referenced. Lists included, “painting, sculpting, poetry, dance, music, etc.” but rarely theatre, at least not outright. I was left to assume that theatre was
honorably mentioned in the “et cetera” and “et al” pile. To my mind, this begs the question, “Why?” Why not name theatre next to poetry or sculpting or dance? Is theatre viewed “less than” as an art form and if so, why?

Conclusion

The theatrical rehearsal process was empirically investigated for its possible connection to spirituality. The participating actors in this study suggest that the theatrical rehearsal process is spiritual evidenced by its procedures, its requirements, and its interest. The procedures of the rehearsal process include body and voice work, exploration, and repetition. The requirements include connection (to self, other, and the world), empathy (feeling for another without judgement), vulnerability (openness and exposure), and courage (trust and willingness). The interest of the rehearsal process is the breadth of the human experience. For these reasons, the participating actors found the rehearsal process to be a spiritual as well as a creative endeavor.

The Procedures of the Rehearsal Process. In this study, the rehearsal process began with connection. The participating actors performed exercises to connect to their breath, bodies, and voices in preparation of connecting to the characters they chose. They engaged in a variety of prompts to explore their characters viscerally and poetically as well as through metaphor and imagery. The participating actors worked through their text and practiced embodying language. They rehearsed their monologues continuously, an act of repetition not unlike ritualized prayer (Grotowski & Barba, 1968). These procedures required empathy, vulnerability, and courage and each expression’s associated elements.

Empathy, Vulnerability, and Courage. The study’s outcomes included the significance of empathy, vulnerability, and courage in the theatrical rehearsal process. Empathy was practiced through Stanislavsky’s “magic if” (Moore, 1984; Stanislavsky, 1989, 1961, 1949) and Meisner’s
“affective memory” (1987). The expressions of vulnerability and courage and their associated
elements washed over all of the rehearsal procedures, from warming up to performing the
monologues. Linda/A pointed out the vulnerability of acting in general. “To get up and perform
is vulnerable …you have to believe you are worthy of the craft.” The images Emily chose for
each line of Emily Webb’s text caused an expressive lift in his delivery that I experienced
viscerally. Vulnerability and courage sometimes showed up spontaneously, an example of which
was evidenced when the actor playing Lloyd stated outright that acting is what makes her feel
alive. Often, vulnerability and courage were captured non-verbally, through a look or gesture.
That the rehearsal process in this study engendered palpable mystery connects to the expressions
of empathy, vulnerability, and courage evidenced throughout the duration of the study.

Artistic Leadership and Sacred Space. Artistic leadership in this study proved tempered and
sensitive, a process of knowing when to move toward and when to move back. This study
reinforced the various roles the artistic leader assumes, i.e., leader as witness, (Pallaro, 1999)
leader as servant (De Pree, 2004; Greenleaf, 2002), and leader as mindful overseer (Trungpa,
1984). As Trungpa reminds us, a sacred space is best maintained by a leader who possesses
gentleness within (1984). It was pleasurable to engage in a rehearsal process absent of the
pressure of a public performance. Preparing actors for an audience does not always lend to gentle
approaches. Still, this study reinforced that, given the nature of what is asked of actors within a
theatrical rehearsal setting, its procedures, rituals, and interest, it is reasonable to hold these
spaces where such sensitive work takes place as sacred. Given these outcomes, it is my hope
further studies will look more closely at the theatrical rehearsal process based on this study’s
suggestion that there is a connection between the rehearsal process and spirituality, a suggestion
worthy of further review.
APPENDIX A

SHAKESPEARE WORKSHOP

May 13, 2020

Dori Bryan-Bloyer
dori.bryan@verizon.net

Dear Dori,

Congratulations! I am pleased to welcome you to our online class: Shakespeare from the Whole Self: The Creative Voice. Since 1978, actors have found Shakespeare & Company training to be an experience that has shaped and redirected their professional lives. I have every expectation that it will be so for you, too.

The dates of the class are May 23 to June 27, 2020. Class sessions will meet via Zoom on Saturdays from 1:00pm to 3:00pm U.S. Eastern Time.

Please bring any potential conflicts to our attention before accepting a spot in the workshop, and it is up to the discretion of the teachers to allow you to miss any class sessions. It is advised that you plan to attend all class sessions.

You will need to prepare some text for the class and have other materials available. Please refer to the separate Class Prep document for details.

Tuition for the class is $275.00 USD. Please pay online by clicking “Make a Payment” on the Actor Training Page. Please note: Your place in the program can not be guaranteed until the full tuition payment has been made. Thank you!

Training program payments are not refundable. If you are unable to attend due to a personal or professional emergency, any payment made may be applied to a future training program for up to 2 years with the following stipulations: If you withdraw from the program less than 7 days in advance, a $75 late cancellation fee will be deducted from the rollover amount. If you withdraw from the program less than 48 hours in advance, you will receive no credit for any payments.

If you have any questions about the class, do not hesitate to call our office at (413) 637-1199 ext 114 or email at training@shakespeare.org.

Sincerely,

Macomba Chester
Administrative Director
Shakespeare & Company
Dear DEL Workshop Participant,

We look forward to welcoming you to Jacob's Pillow this Sunday, November 18, 2019 for the Dance Education Laboratory (DEL) Mini-Workshop, led by DEL Founding Faculty Ann Biddle. The workshop will be located in the Perles Family Studio at Jacob's Pillow.

Space is still available for this workshop - friends and colleagues are welcome!

Please read below for important notes and reminders about the workshop and your time at the Pillow:

- **Parking:** Parking is available in the Main Parking Lot off of George Carter Road. To reach the Perles Family Studio, walk up the Main Path (expansive gravel path) and turn right after the Pillow Store. The Perles Family Studio is located on your left (just behind Sommers Studio).

- **What to Bring:**
  - Please be advised that the weather in Becket can be unpredictable and there may be snow in the forecast. Please dress for cold weather and uneven, gravel pathways.
  - For the workshop, please dress in layers with comfortable clothes to move in. If you are interested in taking notes, a notebook or journal. We will have paper available.
  - We encourage reusable water bottles. A water fountain is inside the studio. We will have cups available.

- **Liability/Media Release Waiver:** All participants are required to sign a Liability/Media Release Waiver Form. The forms will be available at check-in. Please know that the workshop may be filmed and photographed. Please let us know if you have an issue or concern at check-in.

- **Meals:** Lunch will be provided. There are vegetarian options, but if you have any dietary restrictions or allergies that require additional arrangements, please let us know right away.

**Schedule at-a-glance:**

- **10:30-11am** Studio open for Registration & Check-in; Perles Family Studio
- **11am-1pm** DEL Mini-Workshop led by Ann Biddle
- **1-1:30pm** Lunch

If you have questions or concerns about the workshop, please contact Thasia Giles at tgiles@jacobspillow.org or 413.243.9919 x161.

For any communication on the day of the workshop, please call my cell at 610.416.3916.

We look forward to moving with you!

Sincerely,

Thasia

Thasia Giles
Director of Community Engagement
O: 413.243.9919 x161
C: 610.416.3916
F: 413.243.4744
tgiles@jacobspillow.org

Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival

APPENDIX C
SPIRITUALITY IN THE REHEARSAL PROCESS

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

ACTORS SOUGHT FOR RESEARCH

I am seeking three experienced, volunteer actors to engage in an art-based research project, *Exploring the Ritual of the Theatrical Rehearsal Process: Working a Monologue Through Body, Voice, and Spirit*. This study is being pursued to better understand the nature of the rehearsal process and is grounded in the following questions:

- Can the theatrical rehearsal process, along with being a creative endeavor, be a spiritual and sacred one as well?
- If there are spiritual/sacred dimensions to the rehearsal process, what are they and how do they present themselves?
- What can a director do to create and maintain a sacred rehearsal space?

This study will involve 5 individual rehearsals taking place over the course of 6 weeks where participating actors will explore one of three of the attached monologues, selections of which are drawn from the following plays: Emily from the metatheatrical play *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder (1938), Lloyd from the farce *Noises Off* by Michael Frayn (1982) and Linda from the tragedy, *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller (1949). All sessions will be audio and video-recorded by an experienced videographer and photographs will be taken by the student researcher.

The study will take place over the course of 6 weeks between December/2020-January/2021. The first four study sessions will occur over a two-week period with each participating actor meeting twice each week, each session running between 90-120 minutes. The fifth and final session will occur 4 weeks following the fourth session. Individual schedules will be determined once the acting participants are selected. All sessions will be video and audio recorded by an experienced videographer and photographs will be taken by the student researcher. Participating actors are being asked to commit to the entirety of the study, but participation is voluntary, and you have the right to exit the study at any point and may abstain from any portion of the study if so desired.

Due to the covid-19 pandemic, this study is being offered in two formats: in-person and virtual. For those interested in participating in-person, the study will be conducted inside a 1,600 ft.² studio theatre at The Massachusetts Music and Arts Society (MMAS) Arts Center at Great Woods, 888 South Main Street, Mansfield MA. Each session will be limited to 3 participants: one participating actor, the videographer, and me. This location was chosen as it is a spacious area with room for three people to easily maintain 15’ of social distance. The space is well-ventilated and has 7 large sliding windows that can be opened for increased air and ventilation.

Participating actors will have access to two adjoining bathrooms in the studio. Care will be given to adhering to all public health recommendations during the covid-19 pandemic. The studio and bathrooms will be fogged, cleaned, and sanitized prior to the start of every session and all touched areas will be sanitized and cleaned between rehearsals. For the safety of all involved, prior to the start of each session, participating actors will have their temperatures taken and asked a series of health questions as recommended by the CDC. In keeping with current safety measures, masks will be worn at all times, social distancing of a minimum of 15’ will be maintained, no physical contact will occur, and materials will not be shared. There will be hand sanitizer and washing stations available throughout the duration of
SPIRITUALITY IN THE REHEARSAL PROCESS

the study. Virtual participation will take place via Zoom. While the risk of covid-19 transmission is lowered when in person gatherings adhere to CDC guidelines, virtual participation poses no risk.

To volunteer for this study, please email student researcher, Dori Bryan-Ployer at dbryanpl@lesley.edu. Write briefly about your interest in the study, if you would prefer in-person or virtual participation and identify the monologue(s) for which you would like to be considered. You may ask to be considered for any of the pre-selected monologues regardless of “type.” Please attach in your email an updated performance resume. In the subject line, please type research submission.

I will consider emails of interest for two weeks following this initial announcement. I will vet the submissions and choose three actors who attract as diverse a representation as possible while assuring that each pre-selected monologue is represented in the study. Weight will be given to gathering a group whose interests, race, gender-identity, and age vary. While it is unnecessary that the participating actors be professional actors, I am looking for established actors who have both life and acting experience, actors over the age of 21; no minors will be involved in this study.

Thank you in advance for considering this study. I look forward to reviewing all submissions and I will promptly respond to all email inquiries.

Looking forward,

Dori Bryan-Ployer
PhD Candidate, Graduate School of Education, Lesley University

APPENDIX D
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

You are being invited to participate in a research project titled *Investigating the Theatrical Rehearsal Process through Monologue, Body, Voice, and Spirit*. The purpose of this research is to investigate the nature of the rehearsal process.

**Participation:** The researcher is seeking three experienced actors of various genders, identities, and backgrounds to engage in an abbreviated rehearsal process where they will explore one of three monologues, selections of which are drawn from the following plays: Emily from the metatheatrical play *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder (1938), Lloyd from the farce *Noises Off* by Michael Frayn (1982) and Linda from the tragedy, *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller (1949), (See Appendix B). One actor will be assigned to each monologue. Participating actors will be asked to attend all sessions and participate in all prompts and exercises. As a participating actor, your feedback and insights are encouraged and of great value to both the artistic and research purposes of this study. While your full participation in the study is requested, you have the right to withdraw from portions of the sessions or the entirety of the study if necessary.

**Procedures:** The study will take place at The MMAS Arts Center at Great Woods in Mansfield MA. You will be asked to engage in 5 individual rehearsals (hereinafter, study sessions/session) over the course of 8 weeks, schedule pending availability. Each study session will run between 90-120 minutes. Sessions 1-4 will be scheduled weekly and exclusively reserved for rehearsal. These sessions will include physical and vocal warm-ups, monologue exploration, and a closing reflection where the work will be considered in relation to the research questions. Session 5 will take place four weeks after session 4 and gives you the opportunity to perform the monologue one last time, view edited footage of your work throughout the course of the study, and engage in a final reflection that considers the entirety of the study in relation to the research questions. Like sessions 1-4, this final meeting will be individual. All sessions will be video and audio-taped. One week prior to session 1, you will be asked to attend a virtual meeting to meet the other participating actors, review study protocols, solidify the schedule, assure all paperwork has been submitted, confirm contact information, and address any study-related questions.

**Benefits:** You will have an opportunity to individually rehearse a monologue over the course of several concentrated hours; these sessions, in many ways, mimic private acting lessons. This is a notable benefit and value. Also, by the study’s end, you will have added a monologue to your repertoire, and practiced techniques that will serve future monologue work. **Risks:** The risks involved in this study are very low. Worth mentioning is that the participating actors will be engaged in acting, which calls for heightened emotions since characters are written to be in extreme circumstances. Discomfort often reaps creative ideas. Participating actors may experience mild stress or fatigue from the work. Experienced actors understand this likelihood and they know how to manage/self-regulate. To mitigate this possibility further, the actors will be given frequent breaks and I will redirect any exercise that appears to cause the actor more discomfort than what may be revealed from it. The sessions will also involve physical exercises. The nature of the exercises is such that the risk for injury is very low but to mitigate that risk even further, participating actors will want to clarify any physical limitations that require modification prior to the start of the study.
Confidentiality, Privacy and Anonymity: In this study, you will be identified through video and audio recording. There are three categories of videos, strictly limited to the purposes of the study.

- **Session videos:** These include all video and audio footage from session 1 through session 5. These videos, resulting in approximately 22+ hours of footage, will be limited to the participating actors, the videographer, the study’s advisor, and me.

- **Individual video:** This video, 5-7 minutes in length, will feature a composite of your work throughout sessions 1-4. It will be limited to the participating actors, the videographer, the study advisor, and me.

- **Dissertation Video:** This video, 5-7 minutes in length, will highlight select moments from sessions 1-4 with special attention on session 5 where the monologues will be performed for the last time and closing reflections will be conducted. This video will be limited to the participating actors, the videographer, the study advisor, and me, as well as those attending the dissertation defense. Following the defense, there will be no further showing of the video footage.

Participating actors can ask to be identified by their name or by a pseudonym. A pseudonym will be used for any actor wishing to withhold their identity in the dissertation and/or video. Last names, names of employers, and theatre affiliations will not be used. These videos will be held in a secure shared drive throughout the rehearsal process. Following the research process, all recordings and materials will be moved to a secure hard drive kept within the researcher’s home for five (5) years-time, after which it will be destroyed. All work product from the study will be returned to each actor no later than the conclusion of the dissertation defense.

A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the researcher, Dori Bryan-Ployer (dbryanpl@lesley.edu), or her faculty supervisor, Shaun McNiff (smeniff@lesley.edu).

*There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairperson at irb@lesley.edu.*

Signatures
*I am 21 years of age or older. The nature and purpose of this research have been satisfactorily explained to me and I agree to become a participant in the study as described above. I understand that I am free to discontinue participation at any time if I so choose, and that the investigator will gladly answer any questions that arise during the course of the research.*

Participant Signature ___________________________ Print Name _____________ Date_______

Investigator Signature ___________________________ Print Name _____________ Date_______
MONOLOGUE SELECTIONS

Emily Webb, *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder

Emily’s monologue occurs in Act III of *Our Town*. Emily is dead and asks the Stage Manager if she can return to one day of her life in Grover’s Corners. She chooses her twelfth birthday.

Oh, Mama, just look at me one minute as though you really saw me. Mama! Fourteen years have gone by! – I’m dead! – You’re a grandmother, Mama – I married George Gibbs, Mama! – Wally’s dead too. – Mama! His appendix burst on a camping trip to Crawford Notch. We felt just terrible about it, don’t you remember? – But, just for a moment now we’re all together – Mama, just for a moment let’s be happy – Let’s look at one another! (Wilder, 1938, p. 107).

Lloyd Dallas, *Noises Off* by Michael Frayn

Lloyd’s monologue from *Noises Off* comes at the end of Act I. Following a long and frustrating run-through of the play within the play, *Nothing On*, Lloyd responds when the last line of the act is delayed.

Poppy! Bring the book! Is that the line Poppy? “I don’t understand why the Sheik looks like Philip?” Can we consult the author’s text and make absolutely sure? “What’s that Dad?” Right. That’s the line, Brooke, love. We all know you’ve worked in very classy places up in London where they let you make the play up as you go along, but we don’t want that kind of thing here, do we? Not when the author has provided us with such a considered and polished line of his own. Not at
one o’clock in the morning. Not two lines away from the end of Act One. Not when we’re all about to get a tea break before we all drop dead of exhaustion. We merely want to hear the line, “What’s that, Dad?” (Frayn, 1982, pp. 64-65).

**Linda Loman, *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller**

In Act I of *Death of a Salesman*, Linda defends her husband, Willy Loman to her sons, before revealing that Willy has been attempting suicide.

Instead of walking, he talks now. He drives seven hundred miles, and when he gets there no one knows him anymore, no one welcomes him. And what goes through a man’s mind, driving seven hundred miles home without having earned a cent? Why shouldn’t he talk to himself? Why? When he has to go to Charley and borrow fifty dollars a week and pretend to me that it’s his pay? How long can that go on? How long? (Miller, pp. 26-27, 1949)
APPENDIX F

SESSION SCHEDULE

**Linda/A**
Wednesday, Jan 6 – Sun. March 7, 2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session 1</td>
<td>Wed. Jan. 6</td>
<td>4:15-6:15</td>
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<td>Session 2</td>
<td>Fri. Jan. 8</td>
<td>4:00-6:00</td>
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<td>Session 4</td>
<td>Fri. Jan. 15</td>
<td>4:00-6:00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Session</td>
<td>Sun. March 7</td>
<td>1:30-2:30</td>
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</table>

Linda/A’s final session was delayed because she contracted Covid.

**Linda/B**
Sunday, Jan. 10 – Tuesday, February 23, 2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
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<tr>
<td>Session 1</td>
<td>Sun. Jan. 10</td>
<td>1:30-3:30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Session 2</td>
<td>Tues. Jan. 12</td>
<td>12:00-2:00</td>
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<td>Session 3</td>
<td>Sun. Jan. 17</td>
<td>1:30-3:30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Session 4</td>
<td>Tues. Jan. 19</td>
<td>1:30-3:30</td>
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<td>Final Session</td>
<td>Tues. Feb. 23</td>
<td>1:30-2:30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lloyd Dallas</td>
<td>Sunday, January 10 – Sunday, February 21, 2021</td>
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<td>11:00-1:00</td>
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<td>Final Session</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Emily Webb</th>
<th>Monday, January 11 – Friday, February 19, 2021</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Mon. Jan. 18</td>
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<td>Fri. Feb. 19</td>
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APPENDIX G

LESLEY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
DATE: 12/08/2020

To: Dorothy Bryan-Ployer

From: Robyn Cruz and Ulas Kaplan, Co-Chairs, Lesley IRB

RE: IRB Number: 20/21-014

The application for the research project, “Exploring the Ritual of the Theatrical Rehearsal Process: Working a Monologue through Body, Voice, and Spirit” provides a detailed description of the recruitment of participants, the method of the proposed research, the protection of participants' identities and the confidentiality of the data collected. The consent form is sufficient to ensure voluntary participation in the study and contains the appropriate contact information for the researcher and the IRB.

This application is approved for one calendar year from the date of approval.

You may conduct this project.

Date of approval of application: 12/05/2020

Investigators shall immediately suspend an inquiry if they observe an adverse change in the health or behavior of a subject that may be attributable to the research. They shall promptly report the circumstances to the IRB. They shall not resume the use of human subjects without the approval of the IRB.
LINKLATER’S VOWEL RESONANCE LADDER

Linklater’s vowel resonance ladder combines body movements performed in time with a progressive range of vowel sounds.

ZZOO-OO (as in “zoo”) PELVIS AND LEGS
WO-e (as in “woe”) BELLY
SHAW-AW (as in “short”) SOLAR PLEXUS
GOh (as in “got”) CHEST CENTER
MAA-AAH (as in “mark”) HEART
FUh (as in “fun”) LIPS
HU-UH-UH (as in “hurt”) MOUTH
BA (as in “bat”) MID-CHEEKS
DEh (as in “den”) CHEEKBONES
PE-EY (as in “pale”) EYES
KI (as in “kick”) FOREHEAD
RREE-EE (as in “we”) CROWN


ZZOO-OO is the lowest sound, felt in the pelvis and legs and RREE-EE is the highest sound, felt in the crown of the head. The exercise is designed to help actors experience sound production through the body. The participating actors were introduced to the vowel resonance ladder in session 1 and practiced the exercise in all subsequent sessions.
APPENDIX I

PRIVATE YOUTUBE LINKS TO THE PARTICIPATING ACTOR’S INDIVIDUAL VIDEOS AND AGGREGATE VIDEO.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Video Link</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linda Loman/A</td>
<td>Linda Loman (A) Individual Video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda Loman/B</td>
<td>Linda Loman (B) Individual Video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily Webb</td>
<td>Emily Webb Individual Video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lloyd Dallas</td>
<td>Lloyd Dallas Individual Video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggregate Video</td>
<td>Aggregate Video</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


Lese, A. C. (2014). *The contribution of Biomecanics and of Tai Chi exercises to the psychological and development of Training Actors* [Doctoral dissertation]. http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/


Woodruff, P. (2013). Theatre as sacrament. *Ramus, 42*(1-2), 5-22. [https://doi.org/10.1017/S0048671X00000047](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0048671X00000047)