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Susanne Shawyer, Kim Shively

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Education in Theatrical Intimacy as Ethical Practice for University Theatre

Susanne Shawyer and Kim Shively

This article examines the practical application of theatrical intimacy training in undergraduate theatre, in particular the use of boundary-establishment protocols as an ethical practice. The authors explore how theatre facilitates ethical relationships of obligation to the Other. Moving from theory to practice, they describe how they applied theatrical intimacy techniques for physical and emotional boundary management in two productions at Elon University. Student reflections on the process demonstrate that theatrical intimacy training empowered students and encouraged their ethical awareness. This essay argues that incorporating theatrical intimacy into theatre training can inspire an ethical and cultural shift in university theatre.

Keywords: *theatrical intimacy, pedagogy, ethics, acting, theatre*

In a November 2019 *Saturday Night Live* sketch, Will Ferrell plays a domineering drama teacher casting a high school production of *Bye Bye Birdie*.[1] Ferrell portrays his character as the ultimate authoritarian director who asks his eager students to cross personal boundaries to demonstrate their desire to perform in his production. He spies on his students through peepholes in his office door, demands that students ignore their religious beliefs, and instructs two of his students to consummate their relationship so that they will not "read like virgins" when playing romantic partners.[2] Anxious for their director's approval, the students tell him that they will do "whatever it takes" to be cast. This *SNL* sketch was widely shared on social media by theatre practitioners, theorists, and teachers who enjoyed its funny commentary on the theatrical casting process and its wry acknowledgement of the intense emotional stakes of high school theatre. *Playbill* also shared the video, noting that it "highlights the trials and tribulations of every musical theatre students' worst nightmare: the posting of the cast list."[3] But the comedy of the sketch is tempered by its sobering depiction of the lengths that

Susanne Shawyer is Assistant Professor of Theatre at Elon University, where she teaches theatre history, dramaturgy, and theatre for social change. Her research on dramaturgies of protest and theatre pedagogy has been published in *Theatre Journal*, *Theatre Topics*, *Research in Drama Education*, *Performance Matters*, *Canadian Theatre Review*, and multiple anthologies. She is Affiliate Faculty—Dramaturgy Specialist with Theatrical Intimacy Education, an organization dedicated to training students and theatre professionals in theatrical intimacy best practices. She holds a PhD in Theatre History and Criticism with an emphasis in Performance as Public Practice from the University of Texas at Austin.

Kim Shively is an Assistant Professor at Elon University, where she teaches acting and directs. She is also Assistant Faculty with Theatrical Intimacy Education. A member of Actors' Equity Association and SAG-AFTRA, her professional acting credits include: Shakespeare Orange County, Laguna Playhouse, and the Asolo Rep; roles on *Guiding Light*, *As the World Turns*, *The Young and the Restless*, *CSI: Miami*; and over a dozen national commercials. Her chapter "Transformational Tactics" in the book *Objectives, Obstacles and Tactics: A New Volume on Acting* was published by Routledge in 2019. Shively earned a BFA in Theatre Performance at Chapman University and an MFA at the FSU/Asolo Conservatory.

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young actors are willing to go to in order to participate in theatre. The nightmare it portrays is the myth that actors should ignore personal boundaries in order to please directors and theatre teachers.

In the past twenty-five years, theatre scholars and practitioners have questioned how to train student actors to identify and manage personal boundaries in an emotionally healthy way. A survey of this scholarship reveals repeated calls for ethical actor training that acknowledges the importance of boundary management, and for the development of tools to teach actors to distinguish self from character, and past trauma from present stage moment. For example, in their 1999 article on the emotional distress that can arise from a blurring of actor/role boundaries, Suzanne Burgoyne, Karen Poulin, and Ashley Reardon argue that "until the profession has developed and tested techniques for boundary management, it seems to us that an ethical first step would be to incorporate discussion of boundary issues into the curriculum for acting and directing students."[4] Fifteen years later, Tzachi Zamir similarly calls for an ethical approach to actor training, one that clarifies "the moral stakes involved in acting [and] the process of negotiating boundaries and legitimizing them."[5] Recently the Australian researcher Mark Cariston Seton insisted that acting teachers "need to ethically consider the duty of care that we owe to those who may potentially be traumatized, either directly or vicariously, through the performing of, and participation in, dramatizations and simulations of physical, sexual, and psychological violence."[6] These appeals for an ethical approach to acting pedagogy nevertheless leave unanswered the following questions: What does an ethical approach to theatre pedagogy look like today? In what ways can boundary management contribute to ethical actor training in educational theatre?

The development of theatrical intimacy practices in the past decade offers one possible response to the need for ethical actor training in boundary management. Practitioners like Kate Busselle, Adam Noble, Chelsea Pace, Laura Rikard, Alicia Rodis, and Tonia Sina have developed a variety of theatrical intimacy techniques aimed at staging scenes portraying sexual and emotional intimacy or sexual violence in a safe and effective manner.[7] These practices include methods for establishing clear communication around consent, boundaries, and intimacy choreography, which are widely applicable in the acting classroom and rehearsal hall. Since we introduced theatrical intimacy protocols to the undergraduate theatre training program at Elon University, our students have found the work useful for boundary management. For example, in a written reflection on the creative process, one student wrote:

> The process of theatrical intimacy for this production changed the game for me as an actor. The physical process of showing our scene partner what we were comfortable with and working as a team to craft the scene specifically for the story became an empowering experience. I never had trouble being comfortable on stage with [my partner] and I knew that I held power as an actor but also as a woman on that stage. I was able to dive fur-

> ther into the work for my character and my process because I never felt uncertain or unsafe.

Compare this actor's experience with the students in the *SNL* sketch. Although the comic sketch is fictional, it nevertheless represents a reality of the entertainment industry. We, our colleagues, and many of our students have been pressured to ignore personal, religious, or emotional boundaries when working professionally. The contrast between our confident student actor and the stereotyped actor desperate to please demonstrates the value of theatrical intimacy techniques that allow actors to manage their own personal boundaries in an empowering way.

In this article, we investigate the practical application of theatrical intimacy training in undergraduate theatre as an ethical practice. First we explore the intersections of ethics, theatre, and acting pedagogy. By examining the relationship between ethics and actor training, we place ourselves in conversation with theatre practitioners who approach ethics as a relationship of care toward others. We argue that theatrical intimacy practices offer a way for theatre educators to establish and encourage ethical relationships in the classroom. Next we move from theory to practice as we demonstrate how we applied theatrical intimacy techniques for physical- and emotional-boundary management in two recent productions at Elon University. Finally we use student writing and self-reflection on these practices to demonstrate that this theatrical intimacy training empowered student confidence, autonomy, and ethical awareness. This article argues for incorporating theatrical intimacy into the work of student actors, directors, stage managers, and dramaturgs in order to inspire a cultural shift within academic theatre. With the recent creation of the Chicago Theatre Standards, HBO's adoption of intimacy choreographers, and movements like #MeToo and #NotInOurHouse, the entertainment industry's approaches to emotional safety are changing. To remain relevant, undergraduate actor training needs to participate in this cultural change with ethical theatre practice.

The Need for Ethical Theatre Training

The apprenticeship model, acting conservatory, and college theatre class exist within hierarchies of power and privilege that may be open to abuse, especially if an ethics of care is not prioritized.[8] In particular, artistic environments that position an acting teacher, director, or producer as the most powerful authority in a creative process are at risk for blurred boundaries. The pressure to please a faculty member who assigns grades may be intense. In *An Actress Prepares: Women and the Method*, Rosemary Malague notes that "acting students are under tremendous pressure to do as they are told—and to *please* the patriarchal authority figure in the room."[9] Hierarchies unquestioned in theatre training and replicated in the entertainment industry may encourage actors to believe that they work at the pleasure of the director or producer and discourage them from prioritizing their personal boundaries, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation. For example, Harvey Weinstein and Louis C. K. were accused of using their creative authority to prey upon colleagues,[10] and *American Theatre* reported multiple instances of theatre artists

afraid to speak out against harassment or assault for fear of retaliation and blacklisting by a powerful perpetrator.[11] Moreover, training that celebrates the quality of vulnerability as essential for creativity and good acting may dissuade students from establishing and maintaining healthy boundaries necessary for protecting their health and autonomy.[12] In *Staging Sex: Best Practices, Tools, and Techniques for Theatrical Intimacy*, Chelsea Pace notes that "*Actors are trained to say yes*. Acting school is an exercise in saying yes to everything…By sending the message that an actor is a person that says 'yes,' and takes risks, it comes through loud and clear that a person looking to protect themselves and says no isn't cut out to be an actor."[13] In other words, through power hierarchies and the culture of saying *yes*, theatre students may be afraid to question directors, choreographers, designers, stage managers, or others in positions of authority. Such pedagogical and professional environments have given rise to the need for movements like #MeToo and #NotInOurHouse, which revealed the extent of the problem of harassment and abuse in the workplace.[14] Because power discrepancies can result in exploitative practices, it makes sense that theatre programs training students for the industry should prepare students to encounter hierarchies, and faculty should acknowledge how everyone in the room participates in structures of power.[15]

Structures of power and privilege may also intersect with students' trauma experiences; therefore common sense demands that theatre training programs should also be mindful of students' emotional health and safety. To be clear, theatre faculty untrained in counseling should not attempt to be counselors, but sensitivity to the potential for trauma response can benefit the entire acting ensemble. Acting can blur boundaries between self and character, which in turn can lead to emotional distress in the acting classroom and rehearsal hall.[16] Moreover, statistics suggest that a large number of American students have experienced sexual harassment, sexual violence, or other forms of psychological or physical trauma.[17] Theatre faculty may also have experienced assault or harassment in their professional or personal lives.[18] These experiences may trigger an emotional and physiological response in the classroom, the rehearsal hall, or while attending theatrical performances. Trigger warnings for material and reminders about self-care can help here; however, a student actor may disregard these devices if pressured to please an authority figure.[19] A more holistic approach is needed, as studies have shown that trauma response is not just confined to the survivor: empathy can spread it to others.[20] An empathetic body cannot always distinguish a trauma response between the self and another, or between a performance and reality. Therefore the entire company—including dramaturgs, stage managers, designers, directors, and choreographers—are at risk for empathetic trauma response when working on dramatic material that references or stages physical or sexual trauma. Theatre educators should be aware of the potential for triggers and trauma responses in the acting classroom and rehearsal hall, and seek out tools to teach students how to establish physical and emotional boundaries that help distinguish self from character.

Theatre educators taking steps to empower students' understanding of boundaries in the acting studio must start from a place of respect and care toward stu-

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dents. In other words, they must consider ethics. In *Theatre & Ethics*, Nicholas Ridout notes that our English word *ethics* derives from the Greek "ethos," or character.[21] He writes that in a classical understanding, "ethics is about acting in character"—that is, doing good things that allow us to think about ourselves in a positive way.[22] This is a common, and common sense, understanding of ethics. But, as Ridout also points out, theatre is a social experience.[23] Theatre is created through collaboration with others, and it is enacted in the presence of spectators. As Phillip Zarrilli explains, theatre happens in an intersubjective space—that is, in theatre (as in life) the presence of others shapes our experience.[24] Because theatre is social, any formulation of ethics in theatre training must go beyond understanding ethics as good character to also consider ethics within a social relationship, within encounters with others.

In works such as *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (1961) and "Ethics as First Philosophy" (1984), Emmanuel Levinas proposes that we come into being through our ethical relationship with the Other.[25] The face-to-face encounter with the Other "introduces into me what was not in me" and challenges us to choose unconditional obligation toward the Other.[26] By prioritizing our ethical responsibility to the Other, even though we cannot truly know and understand the Other, we recognize our existence in a shared world. Levinas offers an understanding of ethics not as a moral code of good behavior but rather as an obligation to the Other. Where a classical approach to ethics would view theatre as a vehicle for a moral lesson—for example, following Horace's advice in "Ars Poetica" that poetry should both teach and please, a Levinasian understanding of ethics instead recognizes the importance of the ethical relationship between people, a relationship that theatre can facilitate. For example, in *Theatre and Everyday Life: An Ethics of Performance*, Alan Read references the ethical relationship when he argues that "good theatre stands face to face with its audience."[27] Writing about the connections between theatre and empathy, Stanton B. Garner notes that "empathy is an attempt to engage alterity—to enter a relationship with another through the encounter with what is not me."[28] For Garner, empathy is a component of the ethical relationship with the Other, a relationship that theatre engages as a "site for the staging of otherness."[29] In other words, theatre can participate in ethics by means of the empathetic encounters between actors and audience.[30] James Thompson similarly uses Levinas to consider theatre's ethical relationship to the Other through the lens of affect. The encounter with the Other, Thompson writes, is "the feelings that flow between people as they share space: sensations that exist in one body as a result of the care (or animosity) it feels for the other."[31] Theatre can therefore engage in ethics through our emotional and physical responses to the Other.[32]

These examples suggest that perhaps there is something inherently ethical about theatre because of its facility at engaging with the Other through affect, empathy, and dramatic storytelling. Engaging in physical and emotional responses to character, scene partner, and spectators in the rehearsal hall or acting classroom implies an ethical relationship. But Ridout cautions against broadly considering theatre and the theatrical as ethical. "The problem with the ethical turn in the study

of theatre and performance," he writes, "lies not so much with Levinas's thought, but with the idea that anything substantial by way of guidelines for the conscious encouragement of the good life could be derived from it, or that it has anything to say about the specific problems of theatre."[33] In other words, while Levinas's approach to the ethical relationship with the Other is useful for considering social relations in theatre, it should not be divorced from specificity and context.

For our inquiry into ethical approaches to acting pedagogy, it is necessary to consider specific contexts of theatrical relationships of care toward others. Here scholarship by practitioners can help articulate and define ethical relationships in theatre practice and pedagogy. For example, the drama therapist Sally Bailey and the psychologist Paige Dickinson argue for an ethical code in the field of applied theatre to ensure informed consent from participants and to "yield responsible, reflective practitioners."[34] Working from a medical research background and citing the Hippocratic oath, Bailey and Dickinson define ethics as "a set of principles and guidelines to help individuals make choices in order to avoid doing harm while working with others."[35] Bailey and Dickinson map a classical approach to ethics as a moral code onto their discussion of applied theatre as a relationship of care between practitioners and participants. In another example, Mark Cariston Seton also approaches ethics from a medical research perspective. In his ethnographic research into the psychological well-being of actors and the ethics of training actors in vulnerability, Seton uses the Australian *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* to define ethics as "more than simply doing the right thing. It involves acting in the right spirit, out of an abiding respect and concern for one's fellow creatures."[36] While Bailey and Dickinson's definition of ethics primarily focuses on the Hippocratic vow to "do no harm," Seton's use of the Australian statement instead focuses on the ethical relationship of care toward others.

The Australian *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* is similar to *The Belmont Report*, which outlines ethical principles to guide human subjects research in the United States. *The Belmont Report* articulates three key ethical concerns: respect for individuals, beneficence or protecting others from harm, and justice or treating people equally.[37] Rooted in established guidelines for human subjects research, the ethical principles outlined by Bailey, Dickinson, and Seton position the ethical relationship between artist and practitioner, ethnographer and subject, or teacher and student as outward facing: focused on respect, concern, and care for others. This ethical approach finds a parallel in *Chicago Theatre Standards*, a statement of principles intended "to create awareness and systems that respect and protect the human in the art."[38] After survivors of abuse in Chicago theatre shared their experiences online in 2015, the #NotInOurHouse movement formed to establish codes of conduct for the theatre community.[39] Published in 2017, *Chicago Theatre Standards* grounds its ethics in open communication and respect for the other. In these specific examples, theatre practitioners find practical codes of ethical principles useful to help artists, teachers, and scholars think through and act on the philosophical obligation to the Other.

Theatre educators may already be using an ethical approach in their craft and

pedagogy as they train directors to take care of a specific audience by crafting and shaping dramatic storytelling with them in mind, or as they teach actors to take care of a scene partner by placing their attention on them. Pedagogy is inherently ethical, as Levinas proposes, because it involves encounters between the self and the Other.[40] In the acts of teaching and learning, both teacher and student offer and receive in an ethical relationship, and ideally grow in awareness of self and in regard for the other. As the educational theorist Rubén A. Gaztambide-Fernández explains, "Pedagogy takes place in an encounter between subjects who are also made—and therefore transformed—in and through the encounter as subjects. Pedagogy thus hinges on a turn toward ethics."[41] Similarly, Sharon Todd argues that "Levinas' focus on the centrality of otherness to teaching, learning and ethics lends insight into the demand for alteration pedagogy makes, and enables teachers to begin to consider what responsibilities they have towards those whom they teach."[42] To approach pedagogy as an ethical relationship, theatre teachers must prioritize their obligation of respect and care for each student.

Just because the pedagogical encounter can be understood as ethical does not mean that theatre artists and educators are necessarily engaging in ethical practices, either by acting morally or by focusing their obligation to others. Likewise, just because theatre is an intersubjective and collaborative art form, one cannot assume that theatrical work is always ethical. For example, in their analyses of the emotional damage that can be caused by acting pedagogy, both Seton and Zamir note that actors are rarely engaged with ethical questions of performance in authoritarian training models that demand their unquestioning response to directorial decisions.[43] In his appeal for ethical actor training, Zamir argues that a "moral vocabulary" is needed to help actors "specify their own limits, or to understand, *before* the event, what maintaining or forgoing these limits entails."[44] For a more ethical approach, Seton argues that "there needs to be a conscious acknowledgement that teachers and students particulate in the circulations of desire, power and resistance."[45] In other words, we need an intentional actor pedagogy—one that considers the ethical relationship between educators and students as well as actors and audience, and that also helps student actors specify their physical and emotional limits, understand how their boundaries interact with structures of power, and approach theatre as a relationship of care toward others. We propose that one way to do this is to add theatrical intimacy boundary-management techniques to theatre training.

Boundaries and the Theatre Artist

In order to explore boundary management as part of ethical actor training it is important to consider how theatre artists identify their physical and emotional boundaries. Identifying personal boundaries is often a new concept for the undergraduate theatre student. Writing of her experience in youth theatre, Elizabeth Brendel Horn notes that "impressionable young theatre students, taught that 'the show must go on' and to 'leave their baggage at the door' are often times trained to ignore their bodies instead of to honor them."[46] Training actors to honor their bodies and minds requires instructors both to acknowledge what is being asked of

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the actor and also to create a pedagogy that places the individual actor in control of the process. After all, in *Staging Sex* Chelsea Pace acknowledges that "actors don't always believe directors and choreographers when told they get to set their own boundaries."[47] Patsy Rodenburg offers a useful pedagogical model of placing the performer in control in *The Right to Speak* as she writes: "I never force any student to perform an exercise that will make them panic or surrender emotional control. It has to be someone's choice to go in that direction when they feel ready…I never use these exercises unless I am sure of their purpose and when there is a high level of safety and familiarity in the group or trust within an individual."[48] Rodenburg's description of her pedagogical process focuses on the agency of the individual performer, and an understanding that each actor brings their own individual experience to the work. In their article on feminist approaches to voice training, the philosopher Ann J. Cahill and the voice instructor Christine Hamel describe the actor's unique experience as "existential location."[49] They write, "what distinguishes different individual human beings from each other is not the nature of their own essential self—almost always framed as an other-than-material interiority, walled off from social influences, a 'who' one is—but rather the fact that they are situated, in a bodily and material way, at an intersection of a multiplicity of forces that coalesce in a way that cannot be reproduced with complete verisimilitude for any other human being."[50] Students will come to the work differently from unique existential locations; an instructor acknowledging this in the acting studio and rehearsal hall can be the first step toward helping students to discuss and identify boundaries.

Establishing personal boundaries and agency for the individual actor then takes repetitive and intentional work. Student actors must first develop an awareness of the state of their boundaries. A useful example of cultivating this awareness comes from the Theatrical Intimacy Education co-founder Laura Rikard. In workshops, Rikard uses the parallel image of the violin and violinist when teaching about boundaries, the artist, and the actor's instrument. Rikard explains that when the musician plays their violin, the instrument undergoes exercise as it moves through the musical activity for which it was created. After playing the violin, the musician tunes and polishes the violin in order to restore the instrument. Rikard then presents the participants with a scenario where the conductor asks the violinist to produce a certain sound by stepping on the violin, thereby destroying it. Stepping on the violin might result in an effective musical or theatrical experience, but the workshop participants are generally in agreement that this request crosses a boundary because it causes trauma to the instrument. From this metaphor, participants realize that sometimes a director may ask something of them that crosses a boundary if it has the potential to cause physical or emotional distress to their instrument.

Actor training ensures that the artist is prepared to face a variety of experiences that a dramatic circumstance may necessitate and a range of behaviors that portraying a dramatic character might require. The goals of many actor training programs are for the actor to develop a voice and body that are flexible and able to respond intuitively to multiple possible given circumstances. For example, if

the script requires that a character must scream in order to move the dramatic action forward, the actor's training in voice mechanics helps them repeatedly play the heightened dramatic action without injury. The ideal is that a well-trained actor understands the physical demands of acting and how to safeguard their vocal health.

The emotional demands of actor training should be similar—an actor should be able to understand the emotional demands of playing a variety of dramatic experiences and know how to protect their emotional health. Yet, as Suzanne Burgoyne writes, actors often use their own life history as material for characterization, and directors and theatre teachers are not always aware of "the potential psychological hazards inherent in actor training" related to character creation.[51] Our acting students have told us that previous teachers have asked personal questions about the student's life as a means of helping the student generate emotional responses to the dramatic circumstances. Some students were expected to draw on personal experiences of loss, anguish, and even trauma as a part of their training. This approach is derived from a portion of Stanislavski's system, which became a foundational piece of the American Method. In his comprehensive article on approaches to Method in educational theatre, David Krasner explains that "Method acting is not simple. Affective memory, physical actions, motivation, experiencing the role, and relationships must work simultaneously. The Method also breaks down barriers. Barriers come in many forms…The Method seeks ways to reverse defensive postures."[52] What Krasner describes here is Method's goal of removing emotional barriers, or "defensive postures," in an effort to allow actors to react instinctively and act truthfully in imaginary circumstances. These barriers are inhibitions, such as a fear of failure, that prevent the actor from fully yet safely exploring possibilities of their instrument; they are not the physical or emotional boundaries that protect that instrument from trauma. The question remains: How does one help an untrained actor remove emotional barriers if they do not understand the difference between a boundary and a barrier? If the teacher is simply replicating what they experienced in actor training without an awareness of the difference themselves, an attempt to remove barriers might easily lead to circumstances where boundaries become blurred or crossed.

When theatrical practitioners ask actors to mine personal experiences for the purpose of producing emotions, they may not intend to harm the actor; however, the use of personal experience or trauma can create unhealthy working conditions for an actor without the tools to identify or manage boundaries. This is compounded when student actors in subordinate positions of power feel that they must expose themselves personally in order to please the instructor. Moreover, student actors in programs like Elon University's, where many students work professionally in the summer, may also feel pressure to demonstrate their potential for professional success. As Nicolas Ridout writes in *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems*, "An actor's training based on Stanislavski requires a degree of introspection as the basis for successful simulation of emotion…the actor is asked to merge private and public life in such a way as to make his or her most intimate experiences and recollections the basis for professional success. It is not

just the actor's professional credibility or employment prospects that are at stake when he or she steps on stage, it is his or her self."[53] The actor's need to understand boundaries and personal agency are complicated by educational and professional power structures that feed the pressure to please the teacher or director.

Theatrical intimacy methods for communicating consent, managing boundaries, and choreographing intimacy can teach actors techniques for identifying boundaries and managing them for the purposes of self-care, and mitigate the possibility of emotional crisis in the classroom, rehearsal hall, and on stage. For example, in his Extreme Stage Physicality technique, Adam Noble asks actors to communicate "no-fly zones," or physical boundaries, to their partner before choreographing a scene of intense physicality.[54] This process can be used by scene partners even if the scene does not require physical touch, to encourage communication about touch and consent. Theatrical Intimacy Education teaches a boundary-establishment exercise where a scene partner demonstrates on their body areas that are off-limits to touch by others, which are then confirmed and verbally reinforced by their partner. Rikard says that "areas that are off limit to touch have 'fences.' This way the partner can physically visualize the boundary of a fence and remember not to cross the boundary established by their partner."[55] The goal of establishing physical boundaries, fences, or no-fly zones is to ensure that contact is consensual, but it is also an ethical practice: actors engaging in boundary exercises reinforce respect for the individual actor's existential location, a desire to prevent doing harm to another, and an ethical relationship with scene partners.

Protocols for establishing emotional boundaries are also important for ethical actor training. Theatrical Intimacy Education recommends the use of a verbal self-care cue that actors can use "to stop the action when the actors feel there may be something amiss in the choreography or if the actor needs a moment for mental self-care."[56] The self-care cue is a verbal signal communicated to the entire company before the start of rehearsals. If any company member in the rehearsal hall uses the self-care cue, it will momentarily halt the action. The self-care cue stops rehearsals until any physical issues of safety, boundaries, or choreographic confusion are attended to. It also allows for the company member to have brief time for emotional self-care, addressing potential triggers in the moment instead of waiting until rehearsal is over, and without needing to give detailed explanation to others in the room. The use of self-care cues reminds everyone in the rehearsal hall that emotional boundaries exist, are as valid as physical boundaries, and that respecting them is part of an emotionally healthy rehearsal experience. Establishing a technique for managing emotional boundaries in rehearsals empowers performers, dramaturgs, and technicians to take responsibility for their emotional health. Both physical and emotional boundary-management methods foster respect for individual autonomy while simultaneously adding an ethical lens toward others as part of the culture of the rehearsal room.

Theatrical Intimacy Protocols for Boundary Management in Practice

Recently we used theatrical intimacy boundary-management protocols with undergraduate students in rehearsals for *Moment*, by Deirdre Kinahan, and *Tro-*

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jan Barbie, by Christine Evans, both directed by Kim Shively and dramaturged by Susanne Shawyer at Elon University. After each production we asked student participants to reflect on what these techniques added to their production experience and how they might use boundary-management methods in the future.[57] The student responses demonstrate that even as we argue for physical and emotional boundary-management techniques as part of ethical actor training, our students also see the ethical value of using theatrical intimacy protocols in the classroom and rehearsal hall.

We produced *Moment* at Elon University in 2018. The play tells the story of an Irish family rocked by the murder of a child. The character Nial Lynch has, as a teenager, killed his sister's friend in an impulsive moment of violence, served his time in juvenile detention, and then launched a career as an artist. When he arrives home after a long absence to introduce his new wife to his family, years of unexpressed anger explode. In our production, several characters kissed and caressed to express their physical and emotional intimacy. As a first step in introducing theatrical intimacy to our student cast and creative team, Laura Rikard consulted with the director, dramaturg, student dramaturgy team, and student stage management team. Rikard instructed the creative team on ways of establishing personal boundaries for the actors and best practices for staging intimacy. With our stage management and dramaturgy teams acting as advocates and support staff in the rehearsal hall, we introduced theatrical intimacy protocols to our cast in scaffolded steps. The actors, director, and dramaturgs talked through the scenes that contained intimacy, exploring in open discussion the dramatic story of each specific moment. Next, the intimacy was choreographed in a closed rehearsal without understudies, assistant stage managers, or student dramaturgs. Here the actors worked through boundary-establishment exercises with their scene partners, verbally discussed their fences and consent to touch, and tested the intimacy choreography without the pressure of peers or other onlookers in the room. At this point we also instituted the use of placeholder choreography (high-five gestures) instead of kisses for any rehearsal during which the actors chose not to kiss.[58] In subsequent rehearsals, the student actors played through the scene using the placeholders until they chose to perform the kisses using their intimacy choreography. Guided by the director, the actors agreed on a date for the execution of the kisses between their characters. This agreement assured actors and creative team that the choreography could be executed by the final run-through before tech rehearsal in order to give time for adjustments if needed. Because of the nature of the choreography, the actors, director, and stage manager opted for an intimacy call along with the fight call before each show. These calls helped maintain the integrity of the choreography throughout the two-week run.

In their reflective writing after the production closed, our students noted the significance of this approach to intimacy for increasing their sense of autonomy as actors. Several student actors and creative team members described the intimacy work as "empowering." We saw this in the example included in the introduction to this essay, and also from another student:

> So often, the actual process of acting can blur the lines between healthy and unhealthy mental/emotional commitment. I think that any practical applications of safeguarding this process are invaluable in our work as collaborators and artists. It is also empowering to the actors, to be treated like the human beings that they are conveying, rather than props being told to do anything and everything with no say for themselves.

Other students also found the work useful for helping to maintain the boundary between self and character. For example, one student explained the significance of the work in relationship to their personal life and potential boundary blurring:

> The process also allowed us to protect our relationships and emotional lives. Our [creative team] had the wherewithal to understand that repeated intense physical intimacy could elicit emotions or feelings that were parallel to our characters but not rooted in reality. This was especially true as my scene partner and I became closer over the rehearsal process…[But] at no point did I confuse my physical and hormonal responses with romantic feelings for my scene partner. This process supported full engagement and acknowledgment of those natural responses while preventing any sort of bleed-through of the dramatic world into reality.

It is important to note that these student responses to intimacy work are personal and qualitative reflections; however, their responses do show that the theatrical intimacy work had an effect on their ability to maintain healthy emotional boundaries. Moreover, our student actors felt empowered by being included in rehearsal discussions of dramatic storytelling.

Because of this modest success in using theatrical intimacy for characters who kiss in *Moment*, we wanted to expand the use of theatrical intimacy techniques for our production of *Trojan Barbie*, produced in 2019. *Trojan Barbie* is a modern retelling of Euripides's classic tragedy *Trojan Women*. In it, the city of Troy has fallen to the victorious Greek army, and the women of Troy wait in a camp to learn their fate. While characters like Hecuba, Cassandra, and Andromache are familiar from myth, their experiences echo those of women from modern wars, including traumatic events such as sexual violence or the death of children. Like *Moment*, this production included moments when characters kiss. *Trojan Barbie* also contained a few instances of physical violence toward female-identified characters by male-identified characters. These moments demonstrate the vulnerability of civilians during war and highlight the privilege of American audiences who may have experienced war only through the safety of their television sets. It was important to the production team to honor the words of the playwright while also acknowledging potential audience trauma related to war, violence, the #MeToo movement, and recent mass shootings. We therefore chose to stylize as much of

the violence in the production as possible without compromising the spirit of the story. For *Trojan Barbie*, we wanted everyone in the company to be familiar with theatrical intimacy practices, partly as an educational experience and also because of our understanding of ethics as a relationship of respect and care to others. We hoped that our students would learn to identify and communicate clearly if their own or their peers' physical or emotional boundaries seemed at risk.

To do this, we set aside several hours of rehearsal for intimacy training for the entire company. We talked through the goals of theatrical intimacy protocols and discussed key ideas of consent, boundaries, and the purpose of maintaining choreographic integrity. Senior students who had previously taken a sixteen-hour theatrical intimacy training workshop with Theatrical Intimacy Education demonstrated a basic boundary-setting exercise, and the entire company—including dramaturgs, stage managers, designers, dancers, and actors—practiced establishing physical boundaries with a partner. Though the exercise was voluntary, all our students were eager to participate and learn more about theatrical intimacy best practices. With the actors' consent we held open pre-rehearsal and pre-performance intimacy calls for the entire company. Because we had the opportunity to teach the best practices to a large student population, we asked the actors participating in the intimacy if it worked for them to open these calls. We were prepared to close the calls if open rehearsal did not work for the actors' boundaries; however, the student actors were eager to share these practices with the entire company. Everyone saw intimacy procedures modeled under the supervision of the faculty director. Everyone observed the intimacy call, listened to the feedback from the stage manager, and witnessed the actors discussing the choreography.

In postproduction, post-assessment reflections collected and used here with permission, our students recognized the value of including the entire company in the boundary-setting exercise as a way to establish respect for others' emotional and physical safety in the rehearsal hall. One student wrote:

> Workshopping theatrical intimacy with the whole cast of *Trojan Barbie* before we blocked the intimate/violent scene set the standard for expectations…In the past I have felt uncomfortable expressing my fences but the theatrical intimacy work normalized that fence without the need for justification on why I had that [boundary].

Another student also noted how theatrical intimacy work reinforced their ethical relationships to others in the acting company:

> We as actors emotionally respond to the simulated violence and intimacy, therefore the theatrical intimacy training allowed me to invest myself in the scene, without the mental roadblock of fear for my fellow actor. As actors we have an obligation to our art, but also to our fellow professionals to maintain a safe environment for all performers in all performances.

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While we did not explicitly talk students through our ideas that theatrical intimacy protocols assist an ethical approach to theatre training, students on their own realized the ethical concern for others inherent in boundary-setting exercises. For example, a student reflected:

> Even if a director does not use [theatrical intimacy protocols] to block intimate or violent moments, I will take it upon myself to incorporate my training. This would include asking if my partner has any fences or areas where they are not comfortable with me making contact with, or asking to create a choreographed sequence for a particular moment. There is no harm in asking to take time to make sure everyone is comfortable.

These responses from students demonstrate how teaching theatrical intimacy protocols engaged their thinking about ethical obligations to others.

A Cultural Shift in Theatre Training

After integrating the work of theatrical intimacy into the rehearsal hall, we recognized that practices of staging intimacy and violence could also be useful in the acting classroom. By introducing boundary exercises to the acting classroom prior to scene work, we encouraged students to use theatrical intimacy practices in their learning process and homework assignments. Because students often rehearse scenes without faculty or peers present, they may need safeguards to protect emotional health. Noble notes the need for such guidelines in actor training, writing that he has "spoken with far too many students who, at one time or another, have felt uncomfortable fleshing out such a scene. Whether it was a love scene that, out of necessity, was rehearsed in a dorm room or apartment, or a violent scene rehearsed without any technique, guidelines or safety net."[59] With this in mind, we established some basic guidelines for the acting class. First, moments of intimacy and violence are not to be worked or run in rehearsals where only the scene partners are present, but instead actors should use placeholders to mark those moments. Second, students can partner with another group or use teaching assistants or the instructor to work on intimacy or violence during rehearsals that occur outside of class. These guidelines reinforce the ethical obligation to scene partners inherent in theatrical intimacy work.

Although these basic guidelines encourage awareness and accountability about intimacy and violence, we advocate for continuous conversation in the acting class about managing personal boundaries. One way to do this is to use the process of *de-roling*, a systematic approach based on the work of Augusto Boal that involves stepping out of scene work and the world of the play and reentering the everyday world of the actor. In theatrical intimacy workshops, Rikard explains how she developed this practice while in graduate school as a way to reinforce boundaries between self and character, real life and dramatic circumstances. Many professional actors develop their own de-roling practices over the

course of their career through post-show rituals or social bonding outside of the theatre, but our student actors tell us that they have little experience shifting out of the world of the play. Now they find Rikard's step-by-step de-roling practice very useful. De-roling, which takes place at the end of rehearsal, asks students to articulate the embodied actions of the character in pursuit of the objective and to describe the techniques used to achieve them. Articulating the techniques they used in rehearsal helps to remind student actors of the boundary between actor and role, and also serves to reinforce our acting pedagogy. Through this process, the student practices their acting technique while also developing agency to take responsibility for their boundaries and the boundaries of their partner.

Even though our undergraduate students have not been performing or working in the entertainment industry long, their experiences with blurred boundaries and power hierarchies make them well-aware of the potential for acting and theatre training to precipitate emotional crises, and the need to safeguard physical and emotional health. A cultural change in theatre training is required, and our students already see theatrical intimacy protocols as part of that change. For example, one student, who is training in theatrical intimacy and hopes to use these practices in a career in both theatre and film, reflected:

> [Theatrical intimacy] is more than choreography but rather, a change in culture. From the actual choreography to the physical boundary establishment exercise, theatrical intimacy education opens a healthy dialogue that more content creators should be having. It is about establishing new boundaries in the entertainment industry to keep everyone from a rehearsal hall to a stage to a set safe and comfortable.

As we engage students in the work of intimacy practice and the language of consent and boundaries, we encourage them to undertake deeper critical reflection about their own embodiment of physical and psychological experiences, and about the kind of theatrical experiences they want to have in the future. Seton suggests that "ethical and sustainable practices built in training will flow through to ethical and sustainable practices in actor employment."[60] While the ultimate goal is a cultural shift toward ethical practice in the entertainment industry at large, theatre educators who engage in theatrical intimacy work in a spirit of exploration and inquiry will discover meaningful outcomes for students and instructors alike.

Notes

1. *Saturday Night Live*, "Cut for Time: Cast List," YouTube, November 24, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ve1kmdHTY24.
2. *Saturday Night Live*, "Cut for Time."
3. Dan Meyer, "Watch Will Ferrell Play a Terrifying High School Drama Teacher on *Saturday Night Live*," *Playbill*, November 25, 2019, http://www.playbill.com/article/watch-will-ferrell-play-a-terrifying-high-school-drama-teacher-on-saturday-night-live.
4. Suzanne Burgoyne, Karen Poulin, and Ashley Rearden, "The Impact of Acting on Student Actors: Boundary Blurring, Growth, and Emotional Distress," *Theatre Topics* 9, no. 2 (1999): 171.

5. Tzachi Zamir, *Acts: Theater, Philosophy, and the Performing Self* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 143.

6. Mark Cariston Seton, "Traumas of Acting Physical and Psychological Violence: How Fact and Fiction Shape Bodies for Better or Worse," *Performing Ethos: International Journal of Ethics in Theatre & Performance* 4, no. 1 (2013): 26, https://doi.org/10.1386/peet.4.1.25_1.

7. For an introduction to theatrical intimacy practices, see Kate Busselle, "When the Problem is Personal: Working on Naomi Iizuka's *Good Kids* as a Sexual Assault Survivor," *Fight Master* 39, no. 2 (2017): 9–13; Kate Busselle, Heartland Intimacy Design and Training, https://www.heartlandintimacydesign.com/; Intimacy Directors International, "The Pillars," https://www.teamidi.org/theatre; Adam Noble, "Sex and Violence: Practical Approaches for Dealing with Extreme Stage Physicality," *Fight Master* 33, no. 1 (2011): 14–18; Chelsea Pace, *Staging Sex: Best Practices, Tools, and Techniques for Theatrical Intimacy* (New York: Routledge, forthcoming); Carey Purcell, "Intimate Exchanges: Sex Scenes Require as Much Careful Choreography as Fights or Dances, Especially in the #MeToo Era," *American Theatre*, October 23, 2018, https://www.americantheatre.org/2018/10/23/intimate-exchanges/; Tonia Sina, "Safe Sex: A Look at the Intimacy Choreographer," *Fight Master* 36, no. 1 (2014): 12–15; and Theatrical Intimacy Education, https://www.theatricalintimacyed.com/.

8. Ross Prior, Ian Maxwell, Marianna Szabó, and Mark Seton, "Responsible Care in Actor Training: Effective Support for Occupational Health Training in Drama Schools," *Theatre, Dance, and Performance Training* 6, no. 1 (2015), 65, http://doi.org/10.1080/19443927.2014.993568.

9. Rosemary Malague, *An Actress Prepares: Women and the Method* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 33; emphasis in original. See also Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement on the desire to please and be pleasing in "Editors' Introduction," *Upstaging Big Daddy: Directing Theater as if Gender and Race Matter*, ed. Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 3.

10. Amanda Hess, "Critic's Notebook: How the Myth of the Artistic Genius Excuses the Abuse of Women," *New York Times*, November 10, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/10/arts/sexual-harassment-art-hollywood.html.

11. Diep Tran, "Unmuffling a Culture of Silence," *American Theatre*, December 6, 2017, https://www.americantheatre.org/2017/12/06/unmuffling-a-culture-of-silence/.

12. Mark Cariston Seton, "The Ethics of Embodiment: Actor Training and Habitual Vulnerability," *Performing Ethos: International Journal of Ethics in Theatre & Performance* 1, no. 1 (2010): 6, https://doi.org/10.1386/peet.1.1.5_1.

13. Chelsea Pace, *Staging Sex: Best Practices, Tools, and Techniques for Theatrical Intimacy* (New York: Routledge, forthcoming), part 1, 13; emphasis in original.

14. These movements facilitated public discussions of sexual harassment and abuse while highlighting the experiences and concerns of survivors. Survivors of abuse in Chicago's theatre community shared their experiences online in 2015, resulting in the formation of the #NotInOurHouse movement to establish community codes of conduct to fight harassment. For an introduction to #NotInOurHouse, see Ruth Lopez, "Not in Our Theatre: The Fight against Sexual Harassment," *American Theatre*, January 19, 2016, https://www.americantheatre.org/2016/01/19/not-in-our-theatre-the-fight-against-sexual-harassment/. The feminist activist Tarana Burke first founded the Me Too Movement in 2006 to support survivors of sexual violence. The viral spread of #MeToo on social media in October 2017, partly in response to allegations of abuse by the film producer Harvey Weinstein, revealed extensive sexual harassment and abuse in the entertainment industry. For an introduction to #MeToo, see "About," *Me Too Movement*, 2018, https://metoomvmt.org/about/#history; Stefanie Maiya Lehmann and Celeste Morris, "Facing (and Fixing) the Problem of Sexual Harassment in Theatre," *Southern Theatre* 59, no. 4 (2018): 8–23; and Abby Ohlheiser, "#MeToo Made the Scale of Sexual Abuse Go Viral. But Is It Asking Too Much of Survivors?" *Washington Post*, October 16, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2017/10/16/metoo-made-the-scale-of-sexual-abuse-go-viral-but-is-it-asking-too-much-of-survivors/.

15. Seton, "The Ethics of Embodiment," 6.

16. Burgoyne, Poulin, and Rearden, "The Impact of Acting," 157. See also Robert Barton, "Therapy and Actor Training," *Theatre Topics* 4, no. 2 (1994): 105–18. https://doi.org/10.1353/tt.2010.0081.

17. "Campus Sexual Violence Statistics," RAINN.org, 2019, https://www.rainn.org/statistics/campus-sexual-violence.

18. Busselle, "When the Problem is Personal," 9; Christin Essin, "Provoked and Triggered: Content Warnings and Student Spectators," *HowlRound*, July 21, 2019, https://howlround.com/provoked-and-triggered.

19. For practical discussions of trigger and content warnings related to audience experiences in the theatre, see Essin, "Provoked and Triggered," and Sydney Isabelle Mayer, "Responsible

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Theatremaking: Content Warnings and Beyond," *HowlRound*, May 13, 2019, https://howlround.com/responsible-theatremaking. For a practical discussion of how to be attentive to potentially triggering material in the rehearsal room, see Amelia Parenteau, "How an EDI Advocate Can Improve Your Rehearsal," *American Theatre*, January 28, 2019, https://www.americantheatre.org/2019/01/28/trigger-warnings-are-not-enough-why-you-need-an-edi-advocate/.

20. Seton, "Traumas of Acting Physical and Psychological Violence," 28.

21. Nicholas Ridout, *Theatre & Ethics* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 9.

22. Ridout, *Theatre & Ethics*, 10.

23. Ridout, 13.

24. Phillip Zarrilli, "Toward an Intersubjective Ethics of Acting and Actor Training," in *Ethics and the Arts*, ed. Paul Macneill (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer, 2014), 116. doi:10.1007/978-94-017-8816-8_11.

25. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), and "Ethics as First Philosophy," trans. Seán Hand and Michael Temple, in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1989), 75–87.

26. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 203.

27. Alan Read, *Theatre and Everyday Life: An Ethics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1995), 6.

28. Stanton B. Garner, *Kinesthetic Spectatorship in the Theatre: Phenomenology, Cognition, Movement* (Basingstoke: UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 236.

29. Garner, *Kinesthetic Spectatorship*, 237.

30. Some scholars argue that the ethical relationship facilitated by theatre can train participants in empathy. For scholarship that makes the argument that actor training can cultivate empathy, see Colette L. Rabin, "The Theatre Arts and Care Ethics," *Youth Theatre Journal* 23, no. 2 (2009): 127–43, https://doi.org/10.1080/08929090903281436, and Susan Verducci, "A Moral Method? Thoughts on Cultivating Empathy through Method Acting," *Journal of Moral Education* 29, no. 1 (2000): 87–99, https://doi.org/10.1080/030572400102952.

31. James Thompson, *Performance Affects: Applied Theatre and the End of Effect* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 162–63.

32. The affective possibility of theatre's ethical relationship with the Other has encouraged investigations into the ethical dimensions of spectatorship and reception. This research lies outside the scope of this article's exploration of ethical acting training related to theatrical intimacy; however, we acknowledge that it can be useful for considering the ethics of spectatorship in the acting studio. For discussions of the ethics of spectatorship, particularly the witnessing of trauma, see Tom Burvill, "'Politics Begins as Ethics': Levinasian Ethics and Australian Performance Concerning Refugees," *Research in Drama Education* 13, no. 2 (2008): 233–24, https://doi.org/10.1080/13569780802054935; Lisa Fitzpatrick, "The Performance of Violence and the Ethics of Spectatorship," *Performance Research* 16, no. 1 (2011): 59–67, https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2011.561676; Anna Harpin, "Intolerable Acts," *Performance Research* 16, no. 1 (2011): 102–11, https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2011.561681; Adrian Kear, "Troublesome Amateurs: Theatre, Ethics, and the Labour of Mimesis," *Performance Research* 10, no. 1 (2005): 26-46, https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2005.10871394; Julie Salverson, "Taking Liberties: A Theatre Class of Foolish Witnesses," *Research in Drama Education* 13, no. 2 (2008): 245–55, https://doi.org/10.1080/13569780802054943; Ken Urban, "An Ethics of Catastrophe: The Theatre of Sarah Kane," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 23, no. 3 (2001): 36–46, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3246332.

33. Nicholas Ridout, *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problem*s (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 31.

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35. Bailey and Dickinson, "Generating Ethics," 225.

36. Quoted in Seton, "Ethics of Embodiment," 6.

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38. NotInOurHouse.org, *Chicago Theatre Standards*, 2019, https://www.notinourhouse.org/wp-content/uploads/Chicago-Theatre-Standards-12-11-17.pdf.

39. Lopez, "Not in Our Theatre."

40. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 51.

41. Rubén A. Gaztambide-Fernández, "Decolonization and the Pedagogy of Solidarity," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 51, https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/18633.

42. Sharon Todd, "'Bringing More than I Contain': Ethics, Curriculum and the Pedagogical Demand for Altered Egos," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 33, no. 4 (2001): 438, https://doi.org/10.1080/002202701300200911.

43. Seton, "The Ethics of Embodiment," 6; Zamir, *Acts*, 144–45.

44. Zamir, *Acts*, 145, emphasis in original.

45. Seton, "The Ethics of Embodiment," 16.

46. Elizabeth Brendel Horn, "And so She Plays Her Part: An Autoethnographic Exploration of Body Image, Consent, and the Young Actor," *Youth Theatre Journal* (July 2019): 7, https://doi.org/10.1080/08929092.2019.1633720.

47. Pace, *Staging Sex*, part 2, 7.

48. Patsy Rodenburg, *The Right to Speak: Working with the Voice* (New York: Routledge 1993), 87.

49. Ann J. Cahill and Christine Hamel, "Toward Intervocality: Linklater, the Body, and Contemporary Feminist Theory," *Voice and Speech Review* 13, no. 2 (2019): 139, https://doi.org/10.1080/23268263.2019.1543151.

50. Cahill and Hamel, "Toward Intervocality," 139.

51. Suzanne Burgoyne Dieckman, "A Crucible for Actors: Questions of Directorial Ethics," *Theatre Topics* 1, no. 1 (1991): 1, https://doi.org/10.1353/tt.2010.0006.

52. David Krasner, "I Hate Strasberg: Method Bashing in Academia," in *Method Acting Reconsidered: Theory, Practice, Future*, ed. David Krasner (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 34. The Method explored by Krasner includes theories and practices developed by Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, and Sanford Meisner. While those teachers would have taken particular exception to be included in a singular approach, Kranser's inclusion of the work of these three recognizes acting approaches developed from Stanislavski's system in the early twentieth century. For further reading on the pedagogical philosophies of those teachers, theoretical discussions of Method, and the applications of techniques, see David Krasner, ed., *Method Acting Reconsidered: Theory, Practice, Future* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

53. Ridout, *Stage Fright*, 51-52.

54. Noble, "Sex and Violence," 16.

55. Laura Rikard, "Working on Intimate Scenes in Class," *Theatrical Intimacy Education*, September 12, 2017, https://www.theatricalintimacyed.com/blog/2017/9/9/working-on-intimate-scenes-in-class.

56. Rikard, "Working on Intimate Scenes."

57. Students responded in writing to this brief questionnaire:
    1. How did you first encounter theatrical intimacy techniques?
    2. What lessons did you learn through theatrical intimacy training and intimacy choreography?
    3. How did theatrical intimacy techniques affect your work for this production?
    4. What other observations do you have about theatrical intimacy techniques?
    5. How might you use theatrical intimacy techniques in the future?

The questionnaire was optional and sent to students after the production closed and after grades for production work assigned. Students emailed their responses to the authors, and gave written consent for their responses to be used anonymously in this article.

58. Pace, *Staging Sex*, part 2, 23.

59. Noble, "Sex and Violence," 14.

60. Seton, "Ethics of Embodiment," 5.