9 The Constricted Muse: Acting

Thalia R. Goldstein*

Pace University

Anne G. Levy

University of Alabama

Abstract

While most laypeople and audience members would easily and quickly put acting in the "creative arts" category, what is actually creative about portraying the words of a playwright, in a realistic and recognizable manner, for many performances? Acting does not necessarily involve generation of new material – rather, most acting takes place in a collaborative environment, as an interpretation of a playwright's, director's, and designer's combined and unified vision. We therefore break down the issue of creativity in acting into three components: the process of creating a performance, the person creating the performance, and the product of the performance itself. We review the scant literature in this area, and conclude with research suggestions both for how to determine if an actor's performance is creative, and for how to define and measure the process of acting through the lens of creativity.

Lynn Fontanne, a famous stage actress of the mid-twentieth century, when asked to explain what actors do when they act, replied "We read the lines so that people can hear and understand them; we move about the stage without bumping into the furniture or each other; and, well that's it" (Lyons, 1955). And while Fontanne was speaking of certain style of acting needed for a certain style of playwriting, there may be a larger truth to the way she describes her craft. Put the way Fontanne describes, it can be easily argued that acting is not very creative. And, even if you disagree with Fontanne's assessment of what an actor does, it still raises the question: "What is essentially creative about acting?" If acting is supposed to be the authentic portrayal of the world, human emotion, behavior, and relationships, can the claim be made that acting is creative, or is it more of an interpretive practice? In the same way that one may make the claim that a photo-representational piece of art is aesthetically pleasing, engaging, or representative of talent while not being creative, it may be that acting can be powerful, moving, aesthetically pleasurable, and impressive in its virtuosic performance. Yet, because acting is necessarily representational and extends the work of the playwright, it cannot be creative.

However, as most actors and laypeople might disagree with the assessment that acting is not "creative," it is important to clarify the various aspects of acting and how each may or may not involve creativity. This requires us to look in three places: the actor, (i.e., is a person who engages in acting creative?); the process, (i.e., as a

person creates a performance, or learns how to act, are they engaged in a creative process?); and the product (i.e., is what audience members actually view, when they watch actors, be considered creative?). This can be linked back to previous findings of actors' self-reported creativity as involving three stages: general preparation (i.e., person), rehearsal (i.e., process), and performance (Nemiro, 1997).

These questions may not be unique to acting of course. Any art form, really any domain included in this volume, involves a person, a process, and a product. However, acting is unique in that the expectation of product is an expectation of heightened or reflected reality. If an actor is (to use an over-quoted phrase) "Holding the mirror up to nature", (HAMLET III.ii) can the mirror itself be creative, or only where the actor chooses to point the mirror to create the reflection? Is acting simply interpretive? Is it merely responsive? Or is there an element of creative generation?

Likewise, can a "mirror pointing" choice be attributed solely to the single actor or must we include the group of artists collectively and collaboratively working on the play? Acting is unusual in that it is necessarily a collaborative art form. Even a solo show of monologues written by the actor requires (at the very least) someone else to run the light board and take the tickets, and it is a rare solo show that can be successfully performed without the guiding hand of a director or producer. Most acting takes place in a highly collaborative environment (Kogan, 2002): scores of other actors, the director, producers, the playwright/ librettist/lyricist, the lighting, set and costume designers, and the audience with their various reactions all affect the actor's performance and must be kept in mind as the actor goes through the process of forming that performance.

One area of acting that is unquestionably creative is improvisational theatre. Theatrical (and other artistic) improvisation has been studied and discussed well and thoroughly by Keith Sawyer (2014) and is beyond the scope of this chapter, in which we are focused on creativity in acting of scripted theatre, film, and television. However, there are connections between the types of creative work done in improvisational theatre settings and the types of work done in a rehearsal room for scripted theatre. Improvisers must quickly come up with new and appropriate responses, characters, words, and actions in order to participate in an ongoing improvisation. This type of quick-thinking, in-the-moment creation is the product seen by the audience in the moment of performance. In contrast, Sawyer (2012) conceptualizes modern, scripted, European-based performance (how acting is seen by most modern American audiences) as the least open to improvisation, and therefore the least creative.

Even in scripted theatre, however, we believe that there is room for a certain type of bounded or constricted creativity. Whereas the acting experienced by most modern American audiences might appear to be less reliant on improvisation as a process, the essence of improvisation is at the core of every well-trained actor. Throughout the history of theatre, there have been influential elements of performance that relied heavily on the creative power and pleasure of improvisation. *Commedia del'Arte*, for example, was never scripted, but instead improvised from a set of known character types, including rough plots and comic "bits" known as a "lazzi" (Worthen, 1996). Commedia can trace it roots back to the Atellan Farce of

ancient Rome, and forward to the Punch and Judy puppet shows of Victorian England and even to the variety shows and late-night talk shows of today. Most of these forms rely on stock characters, a series of comic encounters, and bawdy humor (Worthen, 1996), with improvisation happening in the spaces created by these outlines. In America, modern improvisation began near the Southside of Chicago in the 1930s with children's theatre workshops taught by Viola Spolin and Neva Boyed (Spolin, 1999). By leading children through a series of games (games which remain the basis for most improvisational troupes today, now called *handles* or *formats*), Spolin and Boyed saw that children, who by choice or circumstance were sworn enemies, were able to open up and connect to each other. Spolin saw the improvisation necessitated by these games as an "openness of contact with the environment and each other and a willingness to play" (Spolin, 1999, pg. 25) rather than a "clever rearranging of the known" (Schwartz, 2012, n.p.).

All acting training, improvisational or not, revolves around this idea of "willingness." Even with a written text, acting is a process of choice making that requires the practitioner to trust their instinctual response to the situation. The central metaphors of many great acting texts mirror the idea of acting training as a leap into the unknown with the faith that your choice will be supported (much like in improvisation) (Hodge, 2010). This training allows actors to feel free within its structure, nurturing the creative impulse. While the product/performance of acting may look uncreative, as it is bounded by the script and constraints of authenticity, the process by which actors train and then rehearse involves creative generation, and a level of openness and willingness to employ the kinds of trial-and-error and experimentation that many creative endeavors require.

Conceptualizing Creativity in Scripted Acting

Conceptualizing Process

The environment in which the rehearsal process takes place may be the best bet for conceptualizing creativity in scripted acting. This can include a rehearsal space where actors create characters based on scripts for performance, more improvisational spaces in which scripts or pieces are devised as they are rehearsed, and classrooms in which actors are taught to act through a variety of exercises and experiences in scene study. Directors and teachers can set the tone for either a generative and creative environment or a stifling and restrictive environment. When conceptualizing the process of directing actors, we can think of directors coming in many forms along a continuum: At one extreme, telling the actor the exact inflection of their words, and where they must stand, walk, face, etc. as they say each line, allowing for no generation or creation on the part of the actor (or, to look at it another way, requiring actors to justify choices made for them by the director – which takes creativity in connecting these choices into a believable character; Nemiro 1997). On the other extreme of the continuum, directors may provide almost no guidance for the actor, telling him or her to "trust themselves" and go with

whatever type of feeling they have in any moment in the script (and in this situation, actors must individually create their own boundaries and rules in order to stay within the world of the play). The best environments, we propose, use a mixture of these two that best serves the text, with a director allowing for freedom and generation of ideas, while providing enough guidance and feedback to allow for a successful performance and allowing for interchange between actor and director (Arnold, 1991). Trying a variety of ways of expressing a thought or feeling as put in a script is how we may think of a creative process – attempting many different options, and narrowing in on which is not only true to the intentions, beliefs, desires, and emotions of the character and the plot of the story, but also is interesting for an audience to watch, and is appropriate for the performance space itself, technically (for example, one acts out a scene differently in a 2,000-seat Broadway theatre than a 50-seat black box theatre, or for film).

Training. Beyond the process of what goes into making a performance, there is also the process of what goes into becoming an actor. Ignoring the fabled story of Lana Turner's discovery in an ice cream parlor and subsequent MGM movie contract, all at the age of 16, most actors begin their career path with many years of formal training. While it may be understood that actors "get" most of the information necessary from other people (the playwright provides the words they are to say, the director tells them where to move and when), knowing how to (1) read a script, (2) receive the information contained in the script and synthesize it, (3) follow the director's direction, and (4) integrate their knowledge about themselves and broader human psychology into a character as one part of a larger story takes considerable practice.

The creative process is deeply entrenched in the training of actors – before they ever get a script and start to work on anything concrete, the entire way actor training is framed in the United States, and has been since Stanislavsky and The Group Theatre, is entrenched in creative process (Benedetti, 2007). Actors have to decide how to interpret each line, where and how to pause, how to place emphasis, and allow for how the others on stage are going to enact their characters (Sawyer, 2012). They must become fluent in the collective body of rules and conventions of their field, the domain of acting (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988; Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). However, the process of achieving fluency in that domain (and it is often argued that an actor never finishes training; Dixon & Smith, 1995; Wooster, 2007) is further complicated by the number of possible techniques that an American actor may use. Anyone who remembers Diana Morales from *A Chorus Line* knows there are many different approaches to acting training, and not every one is right for everyone.

In the foundational history of American acting technique, there is Lee Strasberg and his Method, which noted that actors may get their ideas from the script, but need to create the character from themselves, their own experiences, and their knowledge of the way in which humans and the world work (Hull, 1985). Stella Adler's technique emphasized imagination, character work, and strict adherence to the given circumstances of the play and actions. Through careful and thorough script analysis, actors determine their characters' actions (what they physically do on

stage), the justification of those actions (why they are performed), and their overall actions (what the character ultimately desires to accomplish) (Adler, 2000). Sanford Meisner taught that the only thing that is real is what's happening in the moment on stage – one actor responding to another in the moment. Therefore, instead of deciding *in advance* on how to act and react, moment to moment, actors must strive to experience each scene now, putting their focus on their partner so they can experience the scene as it is happening rather than be cut off from the moment by being self-conscious (Meisner & Longwell, 1987). What links these three schools of training (other than their origin in Stanislavsky) is a focus on building (and later trusting) the creative impulse in the actor. Concentrating on building this impulse enables the actor to be able to use and trust their creative impulse while rehearsing a script. Many acting training programs or schools take several years to complete, the logic being that it takes time for actors to learn to break down their own bad habits and trust themselves as creative forces (Hodge, 2000). The promise of the training is not fame or constant work, but the knowledge that they will be able to trust themselves to make good choices once they are hired.

Conceptualizing Person

There are two options when discussing the creativity of the people in acting: Are the people who are actors creative *actors*, and are the people who are actors creative in other areas of life, such as in classic cognitive creativity or in other art forms?

Given the constructed nature of most characters (either because of the necessities of the script or the necessities of time period, cultural roles, and known human nature), the room an actor has to "play" within a portrayed character may be rather minute. In 2015, Eddie Redmayne won an Oscar for his portrayal of Stephen Hawking in the biographical movie *The Theory of Everything*. The "biopic" with a highly lauded central performance is a common Oscar theme. Many other actors have been rewarded similarly: Benedict Cumberbatch (nominated) as Alan Turing in *The Imitation Game*, Reese Witherspoon as June Cash in *Walk the Line*, Daniel Day-Lewis as Christy Brown in *My Left Foot*, Robert DeNiro as Jake LaMotta in *Raging Bull*, Jamie Foxx as Ray Charles in *Ray*, Colin Firth as King George IV in *The King's Speech*, Sean Penn as Harvey Milk in *Milk*, and Helen Mirren, who has won both an Oscar and a Tony for playing Queen Elizabeth II in *The Queen* and in *The Audience*, respectively. One sees a similar theme in recent Tony awards: Bryan Cranston as Lyndon Johnson, Frank Langella as Richard Nixon, Audra McDonald as Billie Holiday, and Zoe Caldwell as Maria Callas. The list could continue. These performances are even more constricted than standard scripted theatre with fictional characters. Are these portrayals creative, even though they are, in physical and vocal performance, mimicry of a kind? Perhaps the creative actor is the person who can decide what to portray and what to hold back in such performances.

For standard measures of creativity, are actors more creative than other people? There are examples of actors who have been creative in other fields, such as Danica Keller, who is a mathematician and author, Mayim Bialik, who holds a PhD in neuroscience, (Kaufman, 2009), or Johnny Depp and Dennis Hopper, who are both

painters. Actors are also writers, diplomats, directors, or representatives of nonprofits. However, it is important to separate out the notion of creativity from simple fame. There is no research on whether successful actors are more likely to be successful in other creative or public domains than other kinds of artists or public figures. Perhaps the perception of creative success in one field is transferrable to another. Actors are some of the most perceived individuals in society – everyone knows their name, their personal lives, and their struggles. Perhaps they are simply *considered* more able and more creative than others, despite what the real story may be.

Conceptualizing Product

The conceptualization of creativity in acting also must be cleanly defined in the way that most of the lay public may think of acting: in the product presented in a theatre, on a television, in a film. Is there such a thing as a "creative" acting product? It is certainly easy to think of "appropriate" acting – that is, acting that is true to both real-world behavior and the world created in the play or movie. The character who is appropriately acted makes sense to an audience, reflects back to them truths about the world, and fits within the confines of the piece it is presented in. However, what is different, new, or innovative about that product? History is full of moments where the performance of theatre was ready to go in bold new directions but the audience was not ready to go with it, so what was different, new, or innovative may not be able to survive (Aronson, 2000). For example, in 1896, a Parisian audience rioted over Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, which is now considered the beginning of twentieth-century modernism (Taylor, 2007). The first production of *The Seagull* in 1896 St. Petersburg was met with jeers (Allen, 2001). Early performances of *Waiting for Godot* caused audiences to walk out of the play in frustration (Knowlson, 1996).

With a script, there is a blueprint that has been set out by the playwright that the actor must not only follow verbally, but also must remain true to the obstacles, emotional lives, plot arcs, and characterization that the playwright has written out (Noice & Noice, 1997). Of course, there are playwrights that provide more or less guidance when it comes to characterization, movement on stage, and emotionality. Tennessee Williams and Eugene O'Neil are known for their overly descriptive stage directions (Poyatos, 2002). Samuel Becket provides the details of how a role is to be performed down to the speed and vocal qualities that the actors are to use (Weiss, 2013). Some playwrights such as Charles Mee are more willing to allow for "interpretation" of their work. Mee writes that "There is no such thing as an original play . . . And so, whether we mean to or not, the work we do is both received and created, both an adaptation and an original, at the same time. We re-make things as we go" (Mee, 2015). However, the generation of new material in all of these cases simply does not exist. It is all already there!

There are admittedly differences between performances of any type of script – no two nights of a theatrical performance are ever the same, even with the same actors and script, because the audience reactions and the decisions the actors are making throughout the moments of the performance may change the product. But differences do not mean creativity. Many scripts are performed many times over by

different casts and directors, from major revivals on Broadway, to multiple school performances of popular musicals such as "The Wizard of Oz," to the multitudes of Shakespeare productions that take place around the English-speaking world every year. These performances are never identical, even though the scripts are the same, due to both choices made by the designers, directors, and of course the actors in how they are performing the characters, the words of the script, and their interpretive and performance talent.

Important to keep in mind is that because thousands of years of theatrical scripts are so far away from real-life conversations (lacking of overlap, pauses, coughs, stops and starts, change of topics, unfulfilled thoughts and points), performing even the most realistic script could be considered creative (Sawyer, 2012). Of course, in the past forty years there are many playwrights and theatre companies dedicated to creating theatre pieces that attempt to mirror the realities of communication, but these too need to be carefully composed and rehearsed in order to authentically capture what it is to be alive right now – in other words, constructing an interpretation.

The moment of creative product also necessarily includes an audience, and perhaps that sharing of experience; the audience reacting to the performance and the performers reacting to the audience is formed performance by performance, collaboratively with the community (Bennett, 2013). The feelings of flow that occur during performance individually (Konijn, 1991), and especially between members of an ensemble, where the performance seems to be occurring naturally and cohesively, can include feelings of creative achievement, emerging from the group (Sawyer, 2012). There is also creation in the head of the audience member, filling in the gaps of what is not realistically presented on stage, ignoring the fact that they're watching an intimate scene between two lovers in the company of 2,000 other people, or not thinking it strange when a man dressed as a lion breaks into song.

Many acting coaches and theorists (McGaw, Stilson, & Clark, 2011) speak of "infecting your subconscious" with the gestation of a character, and then giving birth to a character that consumes the actor and performs on stage. Others (e.g., Brestoff, 1995) discuss acting in terms of doing as much research and work in the rehearsal process as possible, but then "leaving it alone" on stage and allowing the rehearsal to become so automatic that the actor does not think about anything on stage. In this conceptualization, rehearsal may be creative, and require conscientious preparation, but performance therefore is not creative. Instead, performance may require "task-emotions" of modulating voice, physical state, facial expression, and the conscious processes of remembering the words, blocking, etc. (Konijn, 2000). Thus, defining and further study on the "activeness" of actors while performing is necessary.

Measurement of Creativity in Acting

If the creativity inherent in acting can be divided into the subdomains of a creative process, a creative person, and a creative product, the question of how to

measure creativity is bound by which aspect of acting you wish to measure. This also raises the question of whether the creativity in these subdomains can or should be intertwined. Can a "non-creative" actor come up with a creative process, or simply follow the open and creative process of his or her collaborators? Can a creative product come from a non-creative process?

Measuring Process

Measuring the creative process of acting may be the place in which the most fruitful investigations can be made. The rules of the games in improvisational theatre are not drastically different from the rehearsal structure. We can consider the words on the page and the given circumstances of the script as "rules" as they are laid out in improvisational forms.

Fully improvised theatre such as Comedysportz, improvised comedy games and devised theatrical pieces from such companies with extensive ensemble training such as SITI Company (Anne Bogart, Artistic Director, New York, NY) and Lookingglass Theatre Company (Chicago, Il) are not that dissimilar from the rehearsal or teaching process in acting. Similarly, devised theatre, as defined by Allison Oddey, one of the first scholars to formally write about devising, is "work that that has emerged from and been generated by a group of people working in collaboration" (Oddey 2013). This is theatre that does not begin with a pre-written script, but rather with either a non-textual source (such as a piece of visual art, a founding question, or simply an idea to explore), with a library of found or generated texts (news articles, poems, short stories, freewrites by actors in the ensemble) or some combination of text and no text. Devised work features an ensemble of actors who become the collaborative group working alongside a facilitator or artistic director or leader.

In both devised and improvisational theatre, a director or facilitator plays a large role in the allowance for or rejection of ideas in the process of forming a story and character, given how much freedom he or she gives to the actors in his or her stead. Measurement of this process, of the variety of newness of ways in which an actor can try out characterizations, line readings, and interpretations, and directions that the performance of a script could possibly go may be the key to measuring process. Taking cues from previous work on improvisation in comedy or jazz could also provide direction (Sawyer, 2012). To note, this is also where process in theatre differs from that of film and television; in theatre the actor has some length of time during the rehearsal process to try out different ways of playing the role without anything, such as a camera or live audience, seeing this work. In film or television, there is significantly less time to explore without compromising the continuity of the work being done.

Measuring Person

The measurement of creative persons in acting may not be any different from the measurement of creative persons whose primary domain is not acting, at least if the goal is to measure cognitive creativity in the style of standard tests. Previous work on a related topic, pretend and role-play, as engaged in naturally by young children, has

found strong associations between role-play, pretend play, and measures of creativity (Russ, Robins, & Christiano, 1999). It seems likely that anyone whose main work is producing various possible responses to stimuli (that is, creating a specific interpretation of a character by trying out multiple ways of performing that character and then choosing one) may also score higher on tests of divergent thinking, although as far as we know, this study has not been conducted.

However, to measure whether someone is a creative actor, perhaps you need to look at that person's performance of an iconic character, such as Hamlet or Juliet. Multiple and different interpretations of the same character may be one way of measuring creativity in acting. Careful work would have to be done, however, to separate the performance of the character per se from the ways in which the situation of the play influences the character (for example, playing Hamlet in London in 1999 as compared to London of 1609). There is also the question of whether an internal choice, which perhaps is not seen externally or explicitly by the audience (either because it is not well performed or because it doesn't actually affect the performance) could be considered a creative choice? An actor may make an unusual or creative choice in their interpretation of lines and character, but because they are not very good at expressing those choices, or because those choices may not affect the performance in a discernable way, can the acting itself be considered creative? Or perhaps we cannot consider those choices creative because they are not appropriate – they do not affect the acting. Did the creativity "really" happen in these cases? How someone taps into his or her inner self in order to bring out the correct, appropriate, or masterful performance may be the key question into process creativity. Alternatively, how someone taps into the environment to read and synthesize what the other actors or creative forces in the room are doing may be the key to the creative process.

Measuring Product

The most standard way in which acting is measured is not creative output, but in rewards for talent and the reflection of the audience. An audience or a critic who is prompted to think or feel in response to someone's acting will reward that acting as "good." However, the connection between what is considered "good" and what is considered "creative" in acting is understudied. Is *creativity* in acting the same as *success*?

Awards and the biggest money do not necessarily reward the most creative performance (i.e., the most innovative and different from the past), but rather the most appropriate performance, the most recognizably "true" performance. As with many fields, just because something breaks the boundaries of the traditional does not mean it is worthy – although, with other art forms such as music and painting, many are the anecdotes of new styles and new forms that at first were considered too extreme, and not appropriate, such as Cubism or Atonal music, which are now considered groundbreakingly creative and a central part of the current artistic form (Dempsey, 2010). With acting, the transition has been different – styles of acting have gotten more realistic over time (Benedetti, 2007; Goldstein & Bloom, 2011), but the ultimate goal of a good actor, to be unaffected and present on stage, has not

changed. Even with the first writings we have on acting, the goal is to reflect the reality of the world on stage, using the constraints of the theatres available at the time, large amphitheaters, available only to men (Cole & Chinoy, 1949). In the modern era of performance, new questions arise in the broader field of theatre and film that do not necessarily speak to the creative act of acting. For example, a show that is cast race or gender blind may be considered creative in its casting. The fact that the actors are different from the norm for a particular part may be enough to create a creative performance, but could we then say that the actual actions of the actor – the actual acting – is creative?

The gatekeepers of performances, heads of theatre festivals, Tony voters, Oscar voters, and studio heads, are not necessarily looking for creative performances to reward. Rather, they are looking for actors who will attract consumers of their product, and who will give acting performances that are recognizable and emotionally true. Rarely would you hear a virtuosic performance called "creative." In fact, looking through critical and media quotations of the winner of Best Actor, Best Actress, Supporting Actor, and Supporting Actress for the last two years, there is not a single quote that discusses the actors' creativity. Instead, the quotes use words to describe actors including "remarkable," "brilliant," "precise," "powerful," "beautiful," "towering," "crisp," "explosive," "unerring," "literally transformative," "raw," and "emotionally devastating." Not a single advertisement that we could find included the word "creative" as a descriptor for an actor's award-winning performance. It is not part of the language of judging and thinking about acting. Similarly, creative responses in schoolwork are not necessarily considered appropriate (Beghetto, 2007). We propose that creative actors may be viewed by the general audience as taking away from the most critical goal of acting: providing the representation of reality that is somehow deemed as "correct."

Key Studies of Creativity in Acting

Given all of the variables at play in acting, it is unsurprising that as far as we know there have been almost no published empirical studies that take a psychological or social science viewpoint on acting and investigate how actors, acting processes, or acting products are creative. Instead, many studies take as a given that rehearsing and performing a character is a creative act and therefore the measurement of the actor as a person *is* the measurement of someone who is creative. This is most likely not unique to acting as a domain, but rather the arts more generally. Often, when people speak about research in creativity, the assumption is that something artistic is occurring. Both for children's creativity, and in fact the term creativity is often used to simply mean engagement in the arts. The idea that there are more and less creative actors (as opposed to more and less talented) is an unanswered question. Is a more talented actor simply a more creative actor? Are talent and creativity one and the same when it comes to acting? Or is talent a handicap when it comes to creativity and vice versa? What role does intuition (as opposed to *explicit work*) play in an actor's talent and creativity?

Studies on Process

While there are also no empirical or social science studies that we know of on the process of creating a role and engaging in the rehearsal process for scripted work, again, there is a considerable body of work on improvisational acting. The main findings in this domain come from R. Keith Sawyer's (2014) book *Group Creativity: Music, Theater, Collaboration*. Sawyer focuses on how creative improvisation in theatrical forms relies on each individual listening closely to each other individual member, not paying attention to their own need to stand in a spotlight, but rather paying attention to the best needs of the group. The keys here are the interactions in both gesture and language, which each actor needs to see as highly contingent on other actors. Actors also must realize that each individual actor can independently change the collective meaning of the improvised scene or dialogue based on whether they choose to take it in a new direction, causing performances to emerge holistically. The situations and ways in which actors present scenes in improvisation start as broadly general as possible so that each subsequent actor has many options to start to narrow down into a coherent scene. But there is an art and a strategy to work broadly at first, to allow for many different possible outcomes: to allow for creativity within the form. The key to creativity in the improvisational process for acting, then, is to allow for the group to steer the direction of the outcome more than any individual decision, each minor decision narrowing down the direction, without overwhelming it. Openness for as long as possible is the preference.

This can relate to scripted acting in a few ways: While the actors begin considerably more bounded (by the words of the playwright and the ideas of a single director) they can still think through many other possibilities in the interpretation of a script, keeping themselves as open as possible to multiple interpretations, until they decide on the most appropriate response. Actors in scripted theatre can also take from the work on improvisation that creativity in performance is highly dependent on the creativity of others and using their inputs to shape their own work, without overwhelmingly preferring their own interpretation, at least in the beginning.

One of the only published studies (that we know of) that investigated the creative process in scripted actors specifically is by Nemiro (1997). In extensive qualitative interviews with three professional actors, Nemiro described the various influences that the actors reported helped their creativity. These were collaboration, unity with audience, clear direction (in performance and choices), trust with the director, freedom to develop personal interpretation, lack of evaluation, respect and recognition, and being challenged. The actors also reported on what harmed or stifled their self-reported creativity, including poor directions that were inflexible, feeling interchangeable and not special, having an evaluator or feeling judged, acting only for reward (e.g. money), when others stopped listening, and distrust. Nemiro also concluded that most of the findings on creativity for actors could be subsumed within standard social psychological theories of creativity such as Amabile (1996), again looking to group and collaborative creativity. Important to note, however, is that Nemiro and her actors did not actually take any standard measures of creative

thought, nor did they particularly define what they meant by creativity. Instead, they used the word "creativity" to define their engagement with acting as a whole.

Studies on Person

There has been considerable work done on non-creativity outcomes for actors. Actors have been found to have more potential for dissociative disorders, dissociative depersonalization, and more unresolved trauma (Thomson & Jaque, 2011, 2012; Thomson, Keehn, & Gumpel, 2009) than nonactors. Acting training has also been found to be associated with social understanding. Adolescents and adults engaged in acting training have higher levels of theory of mind, empathy, and adaptive emotion regulation than adolescents and adults without acting training (Goldstein & Winner, 2010; Goldstein, Tamir, & Winner, 2013; Nettle, 2006; Schellenberg 2004). One study compared children (ages 8–10) and adolescents (ages 13–15) who signed up to take a one-year acting class with same-aged children who signed up to take one year of visual arts or music class. Participants in both arts groups were similar on socio-economic status, IQ, gender distribution, and age. Over the course of the year, both the children and adolescents in the acting group gained in self-reported empathy, and adolescents also improved in theory of mind. An ethnographic analysis of the acting classes found that for 8–10-year-olds, classes focused on physical action and paying attention to others, while in the adolescent acting classes, teachers focused on theory of mind concepts (i.e., thinking about the mental and emotional states of the character) (Goldstein & Winner, 2012).

Actors have been found to be higher on measures of absorption into imaginative worlds, changeability through absorption into work, and depersonalization of self (Goldstein & Winner, 2009; Panero, Goldstein, Rosenberg, Hughes & Winner, 2016; Thomson & Jaque, 2011, 2012; Thomson et al., 2009). Elite actors score highly on measures of extraversion and openness to experience (both of which are highly correlated with standard measures of creativity) (Goodman & Kaufman, 2014). Taken together, this work paints a picture that perhaps actors are more able to be changed, or more malleable than individuals who generate their own work, but this does not mean they are more creative – almost, it is as if they are more responsive to engaging with others' creativity rather than coming up with their own solutions to problems they work out.

One notable in-depth study investigated what emotions and thoughts actors are having and experiencing while actually performing. Elly Konijn, a Dutch psychologist and professor of media psychology, asked what actors are actually feeling as they create characters (Konijn 2000). The main conclusion of this study was that actors are much less reliant on the emotions of their characters, or even their own personal emotions as related to their characters in the moment of performance. Instead, actors seem to focus on "task emotions" of engaging with the audience in a way in which their performance is most clearly given, and most focused on presenting the character as they would like to have the audience react. The only mention of creativity comes within the context of "spontaneous" performance; that is making highly rehearsed and highly scripted performances feel like they are

occurring anew each night. In fact, the theory is that this spontaneity only comes from the development of habits and habitual performance! The more preparation, the more the "creative magic" can occur onstage. This falls in line with the "infection of the subconscious" theory of acting training (McGaw et al., 2011).

Actors themselves have of course written about their process, and there are entire media genres devoted to exploring acting and actors and their progress. Magazines are filled with long profiles of actors, and how they do what they do. Since 1994 "Inside the Actor's Studio" has plumbed the depths of what actors do and how they do it. It has become enough of a cultural touchstone that its inquiries have been satirized on Saturday Night Live. The variety of processes echo the variety of training techniques and theories – some actors spend months conducting in depth research and focusing in on the details of everything that can find out about a character. Others spend time on themselves, imagining how their own lives are echoes in the lives of the characters. Still others (e.g. Caine, 2000) simply show up and read the lines on the script in the best, most honest, and most clear way they can for that moment. All of these methods are acts of creation, and the idea of which is most creative or even best suited for performances of different types is empirically unstudied (although of course every acting coach, teacher, director, and actor has their individual opinion, based on personal experience).

Studies on Product

The performance of acting in theatre and films can often be thought of as successful in one or more of three ways: financially, critically, or through awards (Simonton, 2009). Note that "creative" success is not part of this conversation. While research has not been conducted on theatre, for film awards, acting awards tend to "cluster" with other dramatic parts of a film such as directing, writing, and editing, and separately from visuals such as art and costume direction, technical aspects such as sound editing and mixing, and the music awards for score and song (Simonton, 2004). Female Oscar winners for acting are significantly less likely to come from films that won another Oscar in any other category, while male Oscar winners for acting are more likely to come from films that also won awards for best picture (Simonton, 2004).

Otherwise, there are no studies we know of that measure creative acting products or outcomes as a result of creative process. (Perhaps because the product of acting is not considered a creative product?) One study found that undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in theatre programs reported creativity correlates – flow experiences and high levels of intrinsic motivation – when engaged in rehearsal and performance (Martin & Cutler, 2002), but without a comparison group or real-time measurement. Research on which kinds of rehearsal process are most conducive to creative and successful work, or which kinds of elements come into a creative work, from a systematic and empirical viewpoint, would be welcome. The number of variables to control, however, would be difficult, as not every acting approach would be right for every individual performer or the medium of performance.

Going Forward

The future of the study of creativity and acting is wide open. Certainly in this chapter we have raised more questions about the nature, measurement, and allowance for creativity in scripted acting than we have provided findings and conclusions. There is so small of a research base for this topic that it is almost impossible to say where research in this field should or may travel over the next years. However, we have a few recommendations. The process of acting generally is vastly understudied from a psychological viewpoint. While there are huge numbers of books telling actors how to act, and, as mentioned, the public fascination with actors' processes via magazine interviews and television programs seems to be endless, the science is limited. A systematic study of expert actors, of awarded actors, of student actors, of experimental actors, with a psychologist's eye, has never been conducted. Such a study would go a long way to answering and bringing together the three aspects of acting – the people, the process, and the product – to investigate how creativity in acting works. Clearly defining creative acting, keeping in mind other artistic forms, such as visual arts and music, as well as the distinction between generative forms, which acting is not, and interpretive forms, which acting shares with music and dance (Thomson et al., 2009), is also critical.

Finally, comparisons of how different actors process, interpret, and perform similar roles could provide much in the way of both exploratory evidence for how creativity in acting works, and help answer the question as to how bound actors actually are by the roles themselves as compared to the environments in which the roles are generated. Comparison is always going to be a reality of judgment in acting, as is personal taste. Similarly to music, audience members and expert gatekeepers can have their judgments as to who has the best interpretation of a symphony, so do acting experts have their opinions of the best Tybalt in Romeo and Juliet (besides their nephew in the local high school production, of course). The question of creativity in the performance of a role, however, is unanswered. Bring on the research!

References

Adler, S. (2000). *The art of acting*. Hal Leonard Corporation.

Allen, David. 2001. *Performing Chekhov*. London: Routledge.

Amabile, T. (1996). *Creativity in context*. Westview press.

Arnold, N. (1991). The manipulation of the audience by the director and actor. *Psychology and Performing Arts*, 75–81.

Aronson, A. (2000). *American avant-garde theatre: A history*. New York: Routledge.

Beghetto, R. A. (2007). Does creativity have a place in classroom discussions? Prospective teachers response preferences. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 2(1), 1–9.

Benedetti, J. (2007). *The art of the actor: The essential history of acting, from classical times to the present day*. New York: Theatre Arts Book.

Bennett, S. (2013). *Theatre audiences*. Routledge.

Brestoff, R. (1995). *The great acting teachers and their methods*. ERIC.

Caine, M. (2000). *Acting in film: An actor's take on movie making*. Hal Leonard Corporation.

Cole, T., & Chinoy, H. K. (1949). *Actors on acting*. Crown Publishers.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1988). In Csikszentmihalyi, M, Csikszentmihalyi, I.S., (Eds), Optimal experience: Psychological studies of flow in consciousness, (pp. 15–35). New York, NY, US: Cambridge University Press.

Csikszentmihalyi, M., & Csikzentmihaly, M. (1991). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience* (Vol. 41). Harper Perennial New York.

Dempsey, A. (2010). *Styles, schools and movements: The essential encyclopaedic guide to modern art*. Thames & Hudson.

Dixon, M. B., & Smith, J. A. (1995). *Anne Bogart: Viewpoints*. Smith & Kraus Pub Incorporated.

Goldstein, T.R. & Bloom, P. (2011). The mind onstage: Why cognitive scientists should study acting. *Trends in Cognitive Science*, *15*, 141–142.

Goldstein, T. R., & Winner, E. (2009). Living in alternative and inner worlds: Early signs of acting talent. *Creativity Research Journal*, *21*(1), 117–124.

Goldstein, T. R., & Winner, E. (2010). Engagement in role play, pretense, and acting classes predict advanced theory of mind skill in middle childhood. *Imagination, Cognition and Personality*, *30*(3), 249–258.

Goldstein, T. R., & Winner, E. (2012). Enhancing empathy and theory of mind. *Journal of Cognition and Development*, *13*(1), 19–37.

Goldstein, T. R., Tamir, M., & Winner, E. (2013). Expressive suppression and acting classes. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, *7*(2), 191.

Goodman, G., & Kaufman, J. C. (2014). Gremlins in my head: Predicting stage fright in elite actors. *Empirical Studies of the Arts*, *32*, 133–148.

Hodge, A. (2000). *Twentieth century actor training*. Routledge

Hodge, A. (2010). *Actor training*. Routledge.

Hull, S. L. (1985). *Strasberg's method as taught by Lorrie hull: A practical guide for actors, teachers, and directors*. Ox Bow Pub.

Kaufman, J. C. (2009). *Creativity 101*. Springer.

Knowlson, J., *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett.* London: Bloomsbury.

Kogan, N. (2002). Careers in the performing arts: A psychological perspective. *Communication Research Journal*, *14*(1), 1–16.

Konijn, E. A. (1991). Empirical analysis of emotion processes in the theatre. *Psychology and Performing Arts*, 59.

Konijn, E. A. (2000). *Acting emotions: Shaping emotions on stage*. Leiden University Press.

Lyons, D. (1955). Morning Advocate, The Lyons Den by Leonard Lyons (Syndicated), Quote Page 4A, Column 2, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Martin, J.J & Cutler, K. (2002). An exploratory study of flow and motivation in theater actors. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, *14*, 344–352.

Mee, C. (2015). Retrieved on September 15, 2015 from http://charlesmee.org/.

McGaw, C., Stilson, K., & Clark, L. (2011). *Acting is believing*. Cengage Learning.

Meisner, S., & Longwell, D. (1987). *Sanford Meisner on acting*. Vintage.

Nemiro, J. (1997). Interpretive artists: A qualitative exploration of the creative process of actors. *Creativity Research Journal*, 10(2–3), 229–239.

Nettle, D. (2006). Psychological profiles of professional actors. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *40*(2), 375–383.

Noice, T., & Noice, H. (1997). *The nature of expertise in professional acting: A cognitive view*. Lawrence Erlbaum.

Oddey, A. (2013). *Devising theatre: A practical and theoretical handbook*. Routledge.

Panero, M.E., Goldstein, T.R., Rosenberg, R. Hughes, H., & Winner, E. (in press). Do actors posses traits associated with high hypnotizability? *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity and the Arts*.

Poyatos, F. (2002). *Nonverbal communication across disciplines: Paralanguage, kinesics, silence, personal and environmental interaction* (Vol. 2). John Benjamins Publishing.

Russ, S. W., Robins, A. L., & Christiano, B. A. (1999). Pretend play: Longitudinal prediction of creativity and affect in fantasy in children. *Creativity Research Journal*, *12*, 129–139.

Sawyer, R. K. (2012). *Explaining creativity: The science of human innovation*. Oxford University Press.

Sawyer, R. K. (2014). *Group creativity: Music, theater, collaboration*. Psychology Press.

Schellenberg, E. G. (2004). Music lessons enhance IQ. *Psychological Science*, *15*(8), 511.

Schwartz, G. (2012). Viola Spolin. Retrieved on September 23, 2015 from www.spolin.com/?p=864.

Simonton, D. K. (2004). Group artistic creativity: Creative clusters and cinematic success in feature films1. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *34*(7), 1494–1520.

Simonton, D. K. (2009). Cinematic success criteria and their predictors: The art and business of the film industry. *Psychology & Marketing*, *26*(5), 400–420.

Spolin, V. (1999). *Improvisation for the Theater: A Handbook of Teaching and Directing Techniques*. Northwestern University Press.

Taylor, J. (2007). *Ubu and the Truth Commission*. University of Cape Town Press.

Thomson, P., & Jaque, S. (2011). Testimonial theatre-making: Establishing or dissociating the self. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, *5*(3), 229.

Thomson, P., & Jaque, S. (2012). Holding a mirror up to nature: Psychological vulnerability in actors. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, *6*, 361–369.

Thomson, P., Keehn, E. B., & Gumpel, T. P. (2009). Generators and interpreters in a performing arts population: Dissociation, trauma, fantasy proneness, and affective states. *Creativity Research Journal*, *21*(1), 72–91. DOI:10.1080/10400410802633533

Weiss, K. (2013). *The plays of Samuel Beckett*. A&C Black.

Wooster, R. (2007). *Contemporary Theatre in Education*. Intellect Books.

Worthen, W. B. (1996). *The Harcourt Brace Anthology of Drama*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.