INTERACT: A THEATRE EXPERIENCE FOR

THE MODERN AUDIENCE

by

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THE MODERN AUDIENCE

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ABSTRACT

If traditional theatre is a reflection of life, interactive theatre goes one step further and can be classified as an imitation of life. In a world dominated by immediate gratification and artificial closeness due to the inescapable presence of the Internet, modern audiences crave a non-traditional theatre experience. Interactive and improvisational productions seek to fill this void through immediacy, audience involvement, and creative thinking. Techniques from this theatrical genre are being applied in business, education, and many other fields due to its ability to bring people together, spark new and exciting ideas, and create unique, memorable experiences.

In order to gain more insight into the interactive theatre experience, my literary research culminated in the production of "Birthday Party," an interactive, improvisational theatre event that was performed at the end of February 2016 in Fort Worth, TX. During the course of five weeks, my six actors improved their improvisational skills and developed characters with backgrounds, shared memories, and secrets. At the performances, guests were invited in to the world of Daniel Duncan's twenty-third birthday party and were encouraged to engage with the characters and the environment personally.

Through the research, production, and reflection processes, I was able to dive into the power of this unique theatrical medium and its effect on modern audiences. The life-likeness of the characters, encouragement of participation, and necessary flexibility of both actors and audience alike created a memorable, connected, and personal experience that can touch every walk of life.

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Inspiration

While studying abroad in Sydney, Australia, I had the opportunity to join the Sydney University Dramatic Society, which was where I had my first exposure to immersive, interactive, improvisational theatre. "House Party" was a production with eight actors who worked to create a world in which audience members had full range of participation. The audience was invited into the space, designed to look like the living area of an apartment, and were welcomed by, introduced to, and mingled with the characters. Over the course of approximately one hour, tensions within the room rose as characters gossiped or caused mischief. At the highest peak of the tension, two or more characters broke into a spat and quickly after, everyone was asked to leave. The audience left a bit unsure of what had just occurred but eager to discuss the event in which they had just participated.

After seeing "House Party" (three times, I may add), I was intently curious about the workings of this production and of interactive theatre as a whole. I discussed the audition, rehearsal, and performance processes with my friend, who was a member of the "House Party" cast. I also began to do some independent research on this genre and other performances that had been produced around the world as well as begin to think of production ideas and draw mock character webs. This all led to my desire to produce my own interactive, improvisational performance. I knew that this would be new territory for the Theatre Department at TCU, so it would be a unique opportunity for actors and audience, as well as for myself, to grow and experience a lived theatrical form. When I returned to TCU, I began planning my own spin-off of "House Party" after receiving approval from the John V. Roach Honors College and the Theatre Department to use this

project to fulfill my Departmental Honors in Theatre. The final incentive to not simply research, but to produce, this project came from receiving a generous grant from the Honors College. This allowed me to conduct my research and purchase the necessary props and set dressings for the performances.

After conducting a generous amount of literature research on improvisation as well as interactive and immersive theatre outlined in Part I of this paper, I was able to devise the concept of my own production, "Birthday Party," with a basic thesis in mind: to create a real, connected, and memorable theatre experience.

Part I – Research

In the typical theatrical experience, long hours of rehearsal prepare a cast of actors to tell a pre-determined story to a sedentary, mostly silent audience. This is not the case for immersive theatre, where the process and the product occur simultaneously and the collaboration between actor and audience influences each subsequent step in the action. The blurring of the lines between reality and performance, of life and theatre has been in effect for many years. Agusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed desired to close the gap between stage and audience by changing monologue into dialogue (Burgoyne 108). When this desire was combined with the Italian tradition of commedia dell'arte, an improvised performance with stock characters and situations, early forms of immersive theatre were created. As more people spend time online, they are losing touch with each other but do not realize it. This false connectivity is creating a real need for human contact. Interactive performances offer a visceral experience for which these audiences are keen; it is a work that can remind an individual what it is to be alive (Machon 72). Adam Blatner sums up this cry wonderfully in his introduction to *Interactive and Improvisational Drama: Varieties of Applied Theatre and Performance*: "Our culture nowadays cries out for a theatre that counters tendencies towards regulation and repetitious tasks. Improvisation cuts through the barrier of conventional verbal thought and unleashes the imagination (xviii)."

In order to create this type of experience, actors must be highly trained. The process is the product, which means that their improvisational skills must be honed and polished in order to work with non-actors and deal with the various situations presented

in performance (Izzo *The Art* 41). Actors are taught to rely on the genius of others (trust), make their partners look good (support), and relinquish their own ideas (cooperate) (171); without these foundations, interactive theatre will not succeed. Across the literature, the following six tenants of improvisation are recognized as foundational to interactive theatre: trust, spontaneity, accepting offers, listening and awareness, storytelling, and presence.

Trust – The techniques of the theatre, and of improvisation specifically, are the techniques of communication and community building (Koppett 11). Ensemble cohesion is essential in interactive theatre. Without trust in oneself as a performer and in the group as a whole, the interactive event becomes transparent and loses its power for change. Creating a performance such as this requires an incredible amount of give and take, and without trust, actors will never relinquish their creative power to others and nothing new can be created. In traditional theatre, performers retain authority over the story and audience members have control of the reaction to that story; interactive performance asks both parties to give up some of their control and trust one another to create something new.

Spontaneity – Interactive theatre returns both actor and audience to the creative, non-judgmental child within themselves. From a very early age, we are taught to censor our thoughts, but this stifles the work of interactive theatre. Common blocks to spontaneity include the fears of judgment, failure, and exposure (Izzo *The Art* 145). The interactive theatre environment seeks to eliminate these fears by creating a safe space in which risk is encouraged and failure is celebrated.

Accepting Offers – Also known as the "Yes, and" technique of improvisation, actors must accept every choice or action as reality and subsequently add more to the storyline. Judgment is the great destroyer of creativity, and if it is introduced into the performance space, it will destroy the ensemble. Saying yes can be very difficult in practice (Koppett 15), which is why actors must overcome their desire to control a scene and learn to collaborate. Actors must yield to what is created in the moment or has been established in performance, eliminating any competition or pre-conceived plot points.

Listening and Awareness – In any improvisation, actors must be aware of the other performers in addition to themselves. The best way to do this is through actively listening to everything that is occurring in the performance space. Listening to others also allows an actor to communicate more clearly.

Storytelling – Telling stories is one of the most natural human tendencies. The story is "the heart of the theatre's power to entertain, move and provide catharsis" (Koppett 81), and like any theatre production, interactive theatre seeks to display a dramatic re-creation of life through story. It may not be presented in the Aristotelian structure of exposition, complication, climax, and denouement, but the unique way in which interactive theatre tells stories taps into reality. Indeed, an interactive show as a whole really need not even conclude (Izzo *The Art* 34), allowing for more creative license in the process. The storytelling environment bleeds into the real world, creating a more intense experience (Machon 87); this heightened experience of the everyday allows guests to work through dicey situations in a completely safe environment.

Presence – Actors and audience alike must live in the moment during an interactive performance in order for all the elements of the performance to come together. Actors are

encouraged to develop a ritual for getting into and out of character in order to engage this presence. In a technological age, our minds are consistently thinking about the past or contemplating the future; rarely are we ever fully present. But our bodies have no choice but to be in the moment (Koppett 105). When actors connect with their bodies, they can achieve this presence and present a more engaging and successful performance.

It is clear that the actors play a pivotal role in the success of interactive theatre. Their improvisational skills and careful characterizations create the space in which the story can be told. Developing an interactive character is no simple task, but once it is established, their actions will be more grounded and real than instant characters created in comedic improvisational skits (Izzo *Acting* 115). This characterization begins in the devising process when the director creates a general backstory. The backbone of the entire interactive production is the relationships between the characters and their connections to the narrative that create contrast and tension (Izzo *The Art* 188; Szilas 6). Much of the interactive characterization is really an extension of the actor (Burgoyne 110), but these characters do not have the luxury of having private lives—audience members should be able to observe everything that a character thinks and says and does. This interactive characterization leads artists "back to their initial innocence, their connection to their creative source" (Izzo *Acting* 203), which is a vulnerable yet essential place that actors should more often explore.

These performances are designed to be experienced, not observed. Within an interactive narrative, guests are active participants who "make decisions that directly affect the direction and/or outcome of the story being told" (Riedl 1). In this sense, the story can change whenever any player—actor or guest—makes a choice within the

creative space. The actors must create a safe and welcoming space, in which they are able to get "the audience out of its comfort zone, [mostly] without them realizing it" (Gillinson). In order to accomplish this, actors must work to create create a safe space, known as the tenemos, where guests are invited in as co-creators. Guests are placed at the heart of the work, because the work does not exist "until there is an audience present to watch, listen and appreciate, and to interact" (White 29).

The role of the director in an interactive production is twofold—both as the dramatist and as the protector of the tenemos. It is a job of the upmost responsibility that requires one to teach techniques with gentleness and patience (Izzo *Acting* 203). The event must be fully developed even before casting begins, but then one must be willing to relinquish a majority of the creative license to the actors. As the director, one must strike a balance between clearly outlining a character and allowing the actor to develop that character from his or her own perspective (Blatner 299). However, this does not mean that once the show is cast that the director can no longer make changes. On the contrary, the director always has the final say; but he or she must guide the actors in their direction when they stray in a more patient way than a traditional director might.

The interactive and improvisational genre is filled with many sub-genres, such as bibliodrama, drama therapy, and mystery theatre. Each of these utilize the above characteristics of improvisation, character development, audience participation, and direction to create unique experiences in the tenemos. In my project, I followed the model of "House Party" in producing a structured improvisational performance (also known as polished improvisation). In this form, detailed characters are developed during the rehearsal process and perform without a written script or outline. All they have to go off

of is a general direction of the tension; this is given so that the ensemble of actors has a unified focus for each performance. Structured improvisation has no set solution, is fully participatory and requires high energy, clear characterization, and audience inclusion to be successful (Blatner 296-8). It is not aware of itself as a play nor is it a place for tentative choices from hesitant actors. Structured improvisation displays a heightened reality in the tenemos to which the actors know the general trajectory, but the actions and decisions of guests and actors alike shape the outcome. Much of my devising process and work with my actors is based off of Gary Izzo's books *The Art of Play* and *Acting Interactive Theatre*, where he outlines the basic rules and techniques for creating an interactive production.

Interactive theatre, when done well, is engaging, exhilarating, and transcendent (Gillinson), and art's ability to engage mentally, physically, and emotionally plays a major role in the memorability of the interactive drama format (Boggs 833). The theatre itself is not a sheltered place, nor was it ever intended to be. It is a place for the growth of creativity, skills, and passion through exposure to different, difficult situations. I wanted to see this growth in myself, my actors, and the guests by creating a space in which creativity and interaction would be fostered. My goals in producing this project were threefold. First, for myself, I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the interactive theatre experience from the directorial role. For my actors, my goal was to help them develop real, responsive characters and get more in touch with their creative instincts. Lastly, for the audience, I wanted them to feel connected and create a memorable event that could shape their views of the theatre and of the world.

Part II – "Birthday Party"

Before casting, I had to devise the foundational details of my production; specifically, I had to decide the general reason for the performance, how many actors I wanted, and the location of the performances.

Reason – The most successful interactive productions are those which center around a recognized ritual, such as a wedding, funeral, or birthday party (Izzo *The Art* 49). This allows audience members to connect to the performance quicker since they have some idea of how these rituals function in reality. "House Party" had been centered around the twenty-second birthday party of one of the characters, so I played around with other party options, like a family gathering or a welcome home celebration. However, none of these seemed to have the versatility and range as a birthday ritual; so, "Birthday Party" it was.

Cast size – "House Party" had a cast of eight, but I knew that my performance space and audience size would both be smaller than that of the Sydney University Dramatic Society. Dozens of revisions later, I decided on a cast of six—three men and three women. I established the basic relationships between the characters (friends, siblings, or romantic partners) and their general connection to the ritual, but then my theatrical devising had to come to a slight halt since I wanted my actors to develop their own characterizations.

Location – I knew that I wanted the performances to be on TCU's campus for ease of access, and I originally looked into hosting my project in the Brown Lupton University Union. However, I faced some difficulty with this location due to my inability to use the same room for the dress rehearsal and both performances and their strict contract with Sodexo catering which would only allow me to serve one outside food or beverage. So instead, I chose to hold the performances in one of the theatre practice rooms in Ed

Landreth Hall, as it allowed me the most flexibility in setting up the creative space of

"Birthday Party."

Once the creative ins-and-outs of the production were worked out, it was time to

hold auditions. Besides the requirements of casting three men and three women, I came

up with some qualities I was looking for in cast members. These included: creativity,

flexibility, open to direction, comfort with improvisation, commitment, availability,

passion, and those who are easy to work with as well as work well with others in

collaborative environments. I held an open casting call on Tuesday, January 19, 2016.

Actors filled out a basic info sheet with their information, experience, and availability

then came into the audition rooms in pairs. I briefly explained the premise of the show to

them and answered any questions they may have had. Then using prompts from

Improvisation Starters by Philip Bernardi, the pair presented a short, improvisational

scene. After I cut them off, I gave some direction and tips, then gave a second prompt and

cut that scene off when I felt necessary. The qualities I was looking for were immediately

evident in some of those who auditioned, so I was drawn toward those actors. After

putting together a few potential groupings, I decided to cast Austin Devault, Ryan Lynch,

and Jesse Elgene Thomson as the men and Celeste Spangler, Tori Twomey, and Linzey

Weden as the women. I placed these actors into the character web and created notebooks

with essential questions and demographics for character development (Appendix I), and

awaited our first rehearsal.

Over the course of five weeks, I expanded my actors' improvisation skills and

guided them in developing their characters. I utilized techniques and activities from my

research to expand my actors' listening, awareness, and trust. Along with improvisational

games, we spent time crafting and discussing characters. Since my actors were TCU

students (most of whom study theatre), we were able to start our work a few steps ahead

of most interactive productions, due to the trust they already had in each other. Below is a

brief summary of our rehearsal process:

Rehearsal 1 (1/27/2016) – Typically this rehearsal would be a meet-and-greet, but since

my actors already knew each other, it was essentially an information session. I gave an

overview of the show, my expectations of them, and some general thoughts about

characters when we went over the basic connections. I passed out the actor notebooks for

them to look over and begin working in before our next rehearsal.

Rehearsal 2 (2/3/2016) – To begin the skills work, at this rehearsal I focused on building

trust within the group and expanding the actors' spontaneity. We worked through some

games, then I sat down with smaller groups to discuss character details. This is where the

basic who-what-where questions were established—names of characters, age, education,

where they met, where they are from, etc.—which were foundational to developing the

deeper aspects of character, such as passions, vices, and job satisfaction. These details

were subject to change, if the actors agreed that something else would be stronger; but for

the most part, once the actors made a character decision, they stuck with it. A more

detailed summary of the basic character relationships is included in Appendix II.

Rehearsal 3 (2/10/2016) – This rehearsal was focused on accepting offers and

listening/awareness. This was also when we really got to start working with the

characters, as the actors had spent a week creating shared memories and secrets. The

majority of this rehearsal was conducted in character, so that the actors could work on

their own character development but also so that they could get a better glimpse of the other characters with whom they would be playing.

Rehearsal 4 (2/17/2016) – Our final rehearsal rehearsal involved a lot of talk about logistics—performance space, dates and times, costumes, snack suggestions, spreading the word, etc.—along with some improvisational games in character

Group Texts - In order to keep the actors thinking about the show outside of our weekly rehearsal time, I created group text messages for the smaller groups and one for all six actors and myself. These allowed me to easily communicate with actors about scheduling details as well as facilitate character development by asking questions such as "what was your biggest fight to date?" or "which Hogwarts house would your character be in?". Tiny and convincing details such as these helped actors remain consistent in their characterizations which keeps the improvisation clean and easy to follow. These texting conversations were not as effective as discussing characters in person, but due to our limited rehearsal time, they were very helpful.

In-Character Meal (2/21/2016) - After about four weeks of character development, we gathered for an in-character meal the weekend before the performances. This allowed us to workshop the characters in order to give the actors an experiential connection to their characters. Actors arrived in character and got to see how they all worked together as a group. It was very interesting to watch this unfold from the end of the table. Revelation and discussion of the past and present through the lens of the characters rather than the actors allowed natural tensions to rise between some of the volatile characters. I cut the activity off after about an hour and talked through what I had just seen and offered my suggestions. My main point here was to point out how naturally a tension was built, even

without a prompt. But I also wanted them to recognize how much easier and quicker it will be in the performances to build toward a previously-determined conflict. I also discussed and a few logistic details for the performances before we paid our checks and headed home.

Since no rehearsal compares to working with the guests in performance, once the actors had spent a significant amount of time working together in character, I wanted to bring in a "test" audience to an open dress rehearsal. This would allow the actors to get a feel for how the performances would operate so that they could face the first performance with eagerness rather an apprehension. Before, I met with the actors to discuss some goals and logistics, and I chose the direction of the tension. The dress rehearsal was on Wednesday, February 24, 2016 and had seven guests in attendance, who were sent an online questionnaire the next day to express their impressions and suggestions. This was immensely helpful, since my actors had never performed this type of show before and they wanted to know how it translated to an audience. It allowed them to understand the flow of the performance, what worked well and what did not. The guests loved the atmosphere of the production and appreciated how open and well-prepared the actors were. Their suggestions for improvement were in line with what I saw during the dress and wanted to improve before the first performance: clearer building of the tension and inclusion of more guests in the action. One respondent also noted that a having more guests in attendance would be helpful to the action of the performance. I shared these responses and my own with the actors to consider before our show-dates.

We had two performances of "Birthday Party," which were advertised within the theatre department via email and publically via a Facebook event (Cress). The guest list

was limited to twenty spots for each performance due to space constraints and to make sure each guest got ample attention from the actors. Guests secured their spot for performances by sending their RSVP to an email address. Performances were held on Saturday, February 27 and Monday, February 29, 2016 at 7:30pm in the second floor theatre practice room in Ed Landreth Hall at Texas Christian University.

For the performances, actors were called about forty-five minutes before show-time in order to help set up the space (decorations, snacks, etc.) and briefly talk about the performance and establish that night's tension. I then went outside of the room to greet and check-in the guests while the actors got into character. Right before show-time, I informed the audience about what they were about to see. I introduced myself and the show as my Senior Honors Project in Theatre and briefly touched on the nature of the show—guests were encouraged to be as open and as involved as they felt comfortable. I also made sure that the guests knew there were food and drinks inside, but to be careful of any allergies they may have. The last piece of information was the safe word—not that I expected the action of the show to take a turn for the worse, but due to the unpredictable nature of improvisation, if the guests felt uncomfortable at any time they could say the safe word (which was "safe word"). At that point, an actor would bring the guest to me and I would escort them out and make sure they were alright. Thankfully, we never had to use this in practice. After these introductions, guests entered the world of Daniel Duncan's twenty-third birthday party.

During the dress rehearsal, I had been willing to make suggestions to actors during the action—for example, if there were too many actors talking to too few guests, or if there were guests who were not being engaged, or if actors were talking to each

other too much. But it was incredible to sit back and watch the actors work on their own during the performances. At the Saturday performance, the tension was between Sarah and Denise, and we had thirteen guests in attendance. The Monday performance's tension was between Daniel and Denise, and we had twenty-three guests. This was a bigger audience than I had originally wanted, but the actors adjusted very well (especially since they had the dress rehearsal and first performance under their belts).

Part III – Reflections and Applications

From research and brainstorming to casting, directing and producing, I have seen many sides of theatrical production during this journey. It is incredible to look back on this production, from inspiration to final product, and realize how much I have learned in the process. I am overwhelmingly proud of my actors' commitment, my audience's willingness to participate, and my own work to make my vision a reality. I never expected to uncover such a passion for non-traditional theatre events, but my experience and research have revealed the power of this art form to me. More than just a personal response though, I sought to understand how "Birthday Party" had impacted my actors and the guests who participated.

None of my six actors had ever performed in an interactive production before "Birthday Party," but each one had some background in acting and improvisation. So this was a new experience which forced them to get out of their wheelhouse and stretch their character and performance knowledge. Their favorite parts of the process were creating their characters and implementing them into the actual performances. They also recognized the importance of creating a complete character and the freedom of being spontaneous in an acting setting. One actor shared that in "Birthday Party," instincts were all he had, so he had to learn how to trust them. Another actor commented that she thought this was something every actor should do in order to learn the ins and outs of character development and know how to stay in character at all times. All of these reflections were in line with my goal for my actors, which was to help them develop real, responsive characters and get more in touch with their creative instincts.

As gathered from my research and experience, interactive performances are memorable, realistic, and unique. My goal through this project was not only to produce a show and give actors a new experience to put on their resume; I wanted to gauge how audiences responded, since I think this could become a typical theatrical form for the modern theatre-goer in this technologically-advanced and connection-deprived world. In order to look at this, guests from both performances were emailed a link to a post-show questionnaire a few days after they attended "Birthday Party."

Between all three public performances, we had a total attendance of forty-one guests, and I received responses from twenty-six. Of these twenty-six, only four had ever been to an interactive performance before attending "Birthday Party," and every respondent agreed that this event was memorable in one way or another. Most felt this way because it was a new and unique experience of art to enjoy in a realistic environment. Others appreciated that they got to take part in the creation of the art and impact the outcome of the performance as an insider. In other words, the interactive nature of the performance made the event memorable. One respondent felt that by getting to be an active participant rather than just a bystander, he was able to contribute more than just his attendance to the experience. Some guests did not know the actors previously, so they enjoyed the mystery of the performance; and even if they did know who was acting, guests commented on how fun it was to interact with their friends as their characters. Guests were also asked to describe their experience at "Birthday Party" in three words or phrases. Common descriptions included fun, life-like, thought-provoking, unpredictable, exciting, entertaining, creative, and personal. Each of these responses revealed the powerful nature of interactive theatre to make a lasting impact on

theatre-goers, and achieved my goal of creating a connected and memorable event that could shape the audience's views of the theatre and of the world.

When guests of "Birthday Party" were asked "How do you think improv like this can translate into your life?" I received a wide array of responses. Some lined up directly with my overarching thesis—that we all participate in a form of improvisation in every encounter we have. Guests recognized the unpredictable nature of the performance (as is the nature of life) and commented on the necessity of adapting to situations, thinking on one's feet, the power of your actions to influence a situation, and the freedom to create one's own image in social situations. Respondents also remarked the necessity of making some much needed creative energy and though processes more common-place and the power of this type of theatre to increase one's creative aptitude and extroversion. Many also said that they would love to attend a performance like this one again.

The power and potential of this type of art to touch almost any walk to life is incredible, but the overall response of audiences to interactive theatre is a historically under-researched area (Burgoyne 110). The power of improvisation, both on stage and the application of "improv" skills into the workplace and every day life, is slowly picking up speed in areas like psychology and business. What follows are summaries of a few applications of improvisation and interactive theatre.

Increased Divergent Thinking – Our education system emphasizes the analysis and manipulation of what already exists, but "hardly ever asks us to see or create that which has not yet been seen or done" (Izzo *The Art* 148). Improvisational thought has been linked to an ability to break away from set patterns of thinking (Lewis). The creative process of interactive theatre requires that both actor and audience let go of the fear of

failure (or embrace failure completely) in order to come up with new ideas and engage in rewarding interdisciplinary collaboration. Because of its ability to generate new ideas, improvisation skills are used in the professional world to ensure that companies remain relevant and innovative.

The Professional World – Many improvisational companies also offer corporate training, and books like *Training to Imagine* by Kat Koppett have been written specifically for managers and trainers who want to enhance the creativity, teamwork, leadership and learning of their company through improvisation. Skills like emotional intelligence, quick-thinking, flexibility, listening, and ability to learn from failure are all qualities of an improviser and qualities that are required in the work force (Blatner 130; Leonard 3). They allow one to become both a better leader and follower by listening deeply and fully in the moment. Employers can also benefit from improvisational thought, because the more power one has, the more it matters when he or she rejects or accepts ideas. Recognizing this power and learning to accept and agree more often creates environments where problems are solved and there is more action (Koppett 45, 60). Alan Alda's Center for Communicating Science at Stony Brook University uses intensive improvisation workshops to make the presentation of science more tangible. This is mainly because in improvisation, the scientists are taught to listen to themselves and others and be aware of others' responses.

Psychology and Recovery – Permanence is the basis of much of the fear in our lives, but the place space is impermanent where one can discover oneself without the danger of loss (Izzo *The Art* 13). This invitation to relinquish inhibition and doubt leads to a creative freedom that brings empowerment and the affirmation of self. A "convergence among

acting/improvising training, practical wisdom in the recovery community, and empirical research in personality psychology" (Bermant 2) has been recognized in the "fake it 'till you make it" or "act well to be well" strategies used in recovery programs like Alcoholics Anonymous. Personal disclosure, itself, is also therapeutic (Herwitz 2000); so even healthy people can benefit from this type of catharsis. Interactive theatre allows for the enhancement one's well-being through increased awareness and trust among ensemble members so that people can learn to enjoy themselves and life more fully (Bermant 1; Blatner 272).

Education – In the modern education system, there is a disconnect between the teacher and the learner (White 24). Schools tend to teach "to the tests," while students cry out for a balanced curriculum that emphasizes creative capacity through "the integration of right and left cerebral hemispheric functions, intuition and imagination as well as straight reason, emotional sensitivity and material practicality" (Blatner 82). The experiential approach to arts education allows for the stimulation of ideas and the understanding of how to deal with an ambiguous and partially ordered world (Boggs 833). Since abstract theories and skills are more tangible once they are observed in real life, learning them in a more interactive way has been shown to increase retention and understanding. Interactive theatre has also been used to approach education on subjects like racism or sexual violence by allowing students to see and work through these difficult situations in a safe environment.

As is evident from my research and project, immersive theatre's ability to spark creative thought and identify the power of one's choices is limitless. Improvisational and interactive theatre allows adults to return to the art of play, to exercise their curious and

creative selves. Telling one's story offers a connection to one's sense of identity, place in the world, and compass of the world itself (Blatner 5). This process "touches the human condition on a more profound level than is plumbed by even the great tradition of the theatre" (Izzo *The Art* 262). Truly, we are all improvising every day; every aspect of our past, every passion and fault, has shaped and developed our own unique character. That character may have a general goal in life—maybe to go to medical school or raise a family—and he or she lives in a reality where each encounter is improvised and outcomes are shaped by that person's character. Interactive theatre allows actors and audiences to remember what it is to be human and experiment with their own characterizations. Because, in the words of George Gershwin, "Life is a lot like jazz – it's best when you improvise."

APPENDIX I – Character Notebooks

<u>**Character Overview**</u>
Name _____
Occupation _____
Passion _____
      Origin: _____
            _____
            _____

Foible _____
      Origin: _____
            _____
            _____

Virtue _____
Primary Activities *(Activities key to passion fulfillment, and performed most often)*
      1. _____
      2. _____
      3. _____
      4. _____
      5. _____
      6. _____
      7. _____
      8. _____
      9. _____
      10. _____
Primary Needs *(Based on primary activities, and in order of importance to the character)*
      1. _____
      2. _____
      3. _____

<u>**Personality**</u>
Appearance:
      Age: _____
      Grooming: _____
      Stature: _____
      Movement: _____
      Dress: _____
      Speech: _____
Disposition and Tendencies Toward Others: _____
_____
Intellect: _____
_____
Nature: _____
_____

Energy: _____
_____

Honesty: _____
_____

Materialism: _____
_____

Will: _____
_____

Idiosyncrasies: _____
_____

Habits: _____
_____

Gestures and Mannerisms: _____
_____

Childhood Development
Parent(s) Name(s): Mother: _____ Father: _____
Siblings: _____
Parent(s) Occupation(s): Mother: _____ Father: _____

Dwelling: _____
Economic Status: _____
Hobbies or Interests: _____
_____

What *was* more important to you than anything else while growing up? _____
_____

What special skills did you acquire while growing up? _____
_____

Describe your feelings toward your childhood experience. _____
_____

Describe any ambitions you had. _____
_____

Describe your fondest moment as a child. _____
_____

Professional Life
Dwelling: _____
Social Position: _____
Economic Status: _____
Values and Beliefs: _____
_____
_____

New Interests: _____
_____

Attitude Toward Other Classes of Society:
Upper: _____

Middle: _____

Lower: _____

Vices: _____

_____

Influential Friends: _____

_____

Skeletons *(actions or acquaintances you wish to hide)*: _____

_____

_____

What are your career goals? _____

_____

Are you successful in your profession? _____

What is your attitude toward your profession? _____

_____

What skills are required? _____

_____

How are others involved? _____

_____

What is your greatest fear? _____

What was the biggest moment of your life? _____

_____

_____

Motives

Action:
- Conquest
- Mischief
- Manipulation
- Seeking
- Obstacle to desire
- Instruction
- Misunderstanding
- Vengeance
- Competition

Emotional:
- Love
- Fear
- Jealousy
- Wrath
- Sloth
- Lust
- Greed
- Vanity
- Envy

Affirmations

I will put forth more energy onstage than off.

I will establish the "givens," and be identifiable.

I will make positive choices.

I will take risks.

I will fully commit to action, character, and period.

I will accept everything offered me in performance.

I will listen.

I will initiate trust, without fear.

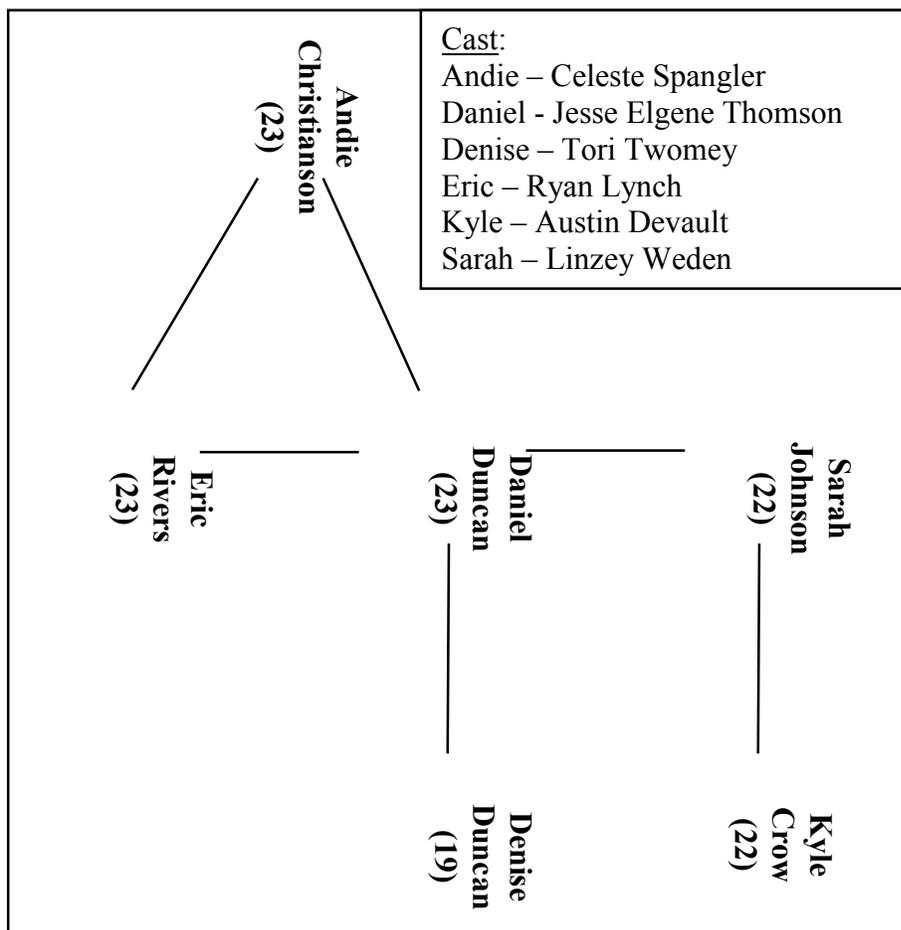I will work to include and celebrate the guests.

I will let the guest answer my questions.

I will be funny.

I will fascinate.

I will be available and approachable to all.

APPENDIX II– Character Web and Summaries

Cast:
Andie – Celeste Spangler
Daniel - Jesse Elgene Thomson
Denise – Tori Twomey
Eric – Ryan Lynch
Kyle – Austin Devault
Sarah – Linzey Weden

Andie Christianson (23)

Eric Rivers (23)

Daniel Duncan (23)

Sarah Johnson (22)

Denise Duncan (19)

Kyle Crow (22)

Figure 1. Character Web.

<u>Andie, Daniel, and Eric</u>– Daniel and Eric, both from Fort Worth, have been friends since middle school, but went to different high schools. They went to the University of Texas in Austin to study philosophy (Daniel) and business (Eric). This is where they met Andie, a local Austin-ite studying communications. Daniel and Andie graduated last year, and Eric had to take an extra year of school.

<u>Daniel and Denise</u> – Their parents split up nine years ago, and they now have a half brother from their father's re-marriage. They have an overall positive sibling relationship but are definitely not inseparable. Denise is a freshman at the University of North Texas,

and has not declared a major yet, while Duncan lives at home with their mother and works at Best Buy (a great use of his expensive philosophy degree!). Denise is hosting this party for her brother's twenty-third birthday party.

<u>Daniel and Sarah</u> – They met at a bar two and a half years ago and have been dating ever since. Sarah is a senior photography major at the University of North Texas and is quite close with Denise, Daniel's sister.

<u>Kyle and Sarah</u> – Their mothers went to Virginia Tech together and are both engineers at Lockheed Martin, so Kyle and Sarah have been friends since before they can remember. Kyle followed in his mother's footsteps and is studying engineering at Virginia Tech. This party will be the first time that Kyle will meet Daniel.

<u>Tensions of the performances:</u>

Dress Rehearsal – Andie, Daniel, and Eric

First Performances – Denise and Sarah

Second Performance – Daniel and Sarah

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