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CHAPTER

DR. ERIC HETZLER

THE ACTOR'S AWARENESS: AN EMPIRICAL EXAMINATION FROM THE SURVEY OF THE ACTOR'S EXPERIENCE

From September 2005 to June of 2007, I conducted an on-line international survey entitled *The Actor's Experience*. In it, I asked actors to describe their experiences when performing. It asked for their ideas about characterization, emotion, awareness, even what they do after the show. Similar in approach to William Archer's 1888 survey described in *Masks or Faces*, my study made use of both a questionnaire and in-person interviews. In examining the data, I observed that many of the respondents repeatedly described a kind of multiple-consciousness wherein they say they are performing a role in a very deep and engaged way – feeling real emotions, yet they are always monitoring what is happening around them on stage and in the audience. I found this very interesting, because given the nature of a lot of the training for actors, how could they be engaged in a role – feeling the emotions, focusing on the action, performing behind a fourth wall – and still be aware of outside influences like the audience? The following will examine this by using data from specific questions asked in the survey as well as the responses of actors that volunteered to be interviewed. I will discuss awareness and attention and how the actors in this study describe the ways in which they experience life on stage, looking at how they view their relation to and with the audience and how the audience fits into their world view. I will also explore actor awareness of the performance itself, and attempt to tease out more about the notion of “dual” or “multiple consciousnesses”. Simply put, I examine how an actor can “be the character” and still be aware of what is going on around them as the actor, such as standing in their light, dealing with props that break, and of course, other actors. I will conclude by discussing some of the similarities that exist between the responses of modern actors and their 19th century counterparts that participated in Archer's survey. I should note that for the purposes of this study, I am not so much

interested in the *how* of the actors' awareness as I am interested in the experience and how the actors describe it.

In his essay, "The Return of Multiple Consciousness", Roland Littlewood discusses awareness and attention in this way:

"...Immediate awareness fluctuates, dependent on what we recognize as intended perception; the quality of our will being variable, dependent on our immediate interests and customary procedures: you can eat an apple whilst riding your bicycle but you are not equally 'in' each activity at any one moment, you are not generally aware of switching from one to the other deliberately for your stream of awareness appears a seamless web. To be conscious is to focus attention on something..." (Cohen 1995, 158)

This could just as easily be applied to actors. Instead of eating an apple whilst riding a bicycle, the actor is remembering lines and blocking while attending to the needs of the performance. Something I wondered about is whether the actor is conscious of making the switch between each area of focus. Littlewood implies that the actor would not be aware. However, there might be occasions where this is not the case, an accident on stage, for instance where a prop is missing or an actor misses a cue. At these times, the actor might be very much aware of shifting their attention between focus points in order to adjust to the new situation that the accident introduces. There is also the issue of whether the actor is engaged or to use Littlewood's term "in" each activity. When attending to the laughter of the audience, is the actor no longer engaged or "in" the activity of the performance or does the attention somehow expand?

An early question¹ asked the respondents to place themselves on a scale from one to ten in terms of how they viewed their engagement with the role/character they play in performance.










"In terms of your relationship to your character, where do you fall on the scale below:

1 = My body is a neutral puppet operated from a conscious distance. I have no emotional engagement with my character.

5 = Depending on the circumstances, I step in and out of complete emotional engagement with my character.

10 = I have full engagement of emotion with my character. I feel what my character is feeling."


Frequency Analysis							
Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1	2	0.65%					





2	6	1.95%	
3	11	3.57%	
4	17	5.52%	
5	77	25.00%	
6	28	9.10%	
7	60	19.48%	
8	49	15.91%	
9	27	8.77%	
10	34	11.04%	
Total	308	100%	

Since the largest portion of this population placed themselves on the engaged end of the scale (64.30% chose “6” or higher) it might be assumed that they would tend to say that they are, for instance, unaware of their lines while performing because they are more engaged with their character. To test this, we can look at a series of questions that asked specifically about what the respondents are aware of when they perform. The first asked:

“How aware of your lines are you while you are on stage?”

As the data reveals, the largest number of respondents, 44.74%, state that they are “Somewhat Aware”.

Frequency Analysis							
Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1 - Not at all aware. Its like they come spontaneously.	23	7.80%					

2 - Somewhat Aware. I know I have lines, but I'm not trying to remember them.	132	44.74%	
3 - Aware. They're there in the back of my mind.	100	33.90%	
4 - Very aware. I'm listening for cues to say my next line.	34	11.53%	
5 - Totally aware. I'm always thinking of my next line.	6	2.03%	
Total	295	100%	

The next question asked:

When you are performing, which of the following are you aware of? Choose one.

- 1 - Your character
- 2 - Yourself
- 3 - The audience
- 4 - The action of the story
- 5 - All of the above
- 6 - Nothing at all

This question was framed to determine what sorts of things the respondents are aware of while performing. It might be assumed that in a population of actors that define themselves as being primarily engaged in the role they are playing that their awareness would tend towards “the action of the story”. It might also be assumed that there would be little awareness of the audience as that would indicate a lack of engagement in the role and the belief that the action on stage is

“real” for the character. Simply put, to be aware of the audience is to not be “in character”. However, the data reveals something far more interesting.

Frequency Analysis				
	Answer	Count	Percent	20% 40% 60% 80% 100%
1.	Your character	30	10.27%	
2.	Yourself	12	4.11%	
3.	The audience	20	6.85%	
4.	The action of the story	48	16.44%	
5.	All of the above	181	61.99%	
6.	Nothing at all	1	.34%	
	Total	292	100%	

“All of the above” is by far the most common choice for (61.99%), with “The action of the story” in distant second (16.44%). This is a somewhat unexpected result as it implies that these actors are aware of everything that is going on around them while they are performing. This would run counter to those acting theories that insist that actors immerse themselves completely in the role, because if they were fully engaged in that way, then certainly the actors would not be aware that they were being watched because they would be performing behind a “fourth wall”. As noted already, the majority of respondents placed themselves on the engagement end of the scale in relation to their character but then they also said that they are aware of everything that is going on around them. How can the actor be fully engaged with the character and still be aware of what the audience is doing? The respondents’ comments on this question provide some insight into this issue:

“My attention moves between most of these things...I am generally 'checking in' with a lot of different things - other actors, the parameters that I have set for the character, the audience's energy and response, the environment, including tech...sometimes I am aware of nothing at all, just letting the words or action carry me along. I have always found this to be a lovely feeling.” - Respondent #1132731² (Hetzler 2007, 168)

“The mind of the actor works on many different levels during a live performance. Part of the mind is aware of blocking and lines and sight lines. Another part is thinking 'it's hot' or 'it's cold'. Another part notices the cute blonde in the third row.” - Respondent #476528 (Hetzler 2007, 167)



“My character's involved with the story; the 'observer/actor' part of me is aware of the externals and technicalities.” - Respondent #531458 (Hetzler 2007, 168)




Another way to examine the awareness of actors on stage is to explore the concept of “listening”. When actors are performing, they must be listening for their cue in order to say their next line at the correct moment. However, it might be assumed that if an actor tends toward being fully engaged with their character (which this group has said is the case), then it might be further assumed that these actors would say that they are listening as the character, rather than as themselves. In that case, they are not listening for their cue, rather, they are listening to the action and responding accordingly. The line is merely the proper response to the action. This next question asked the respondents to choose as many of the statements about listening that apply:

When performing with others, you are... (choose all that apply)

- 1 - Listening to what they are saying as yourself.
- 2 - Listening as the character.
- 3 - Listening for a cue.
- 4 - Listening to what is being said.
- 5 - None of the above

The results show a fairly even split between “Listening as the character” and “Listening to what is being said”.

Frequency Analysis				
	Answer	Count	Percent	20% 40% 60% 80% 100%
1.	Listening to what they are saying as yourself.	68	12.27%	
2.	Listening as the character.	181	32.67%	

3.	Listening for a cue.	100	18.05%	
4.	Listening to what is being said.	200	36.10%	
5.	None of the above	5	.90%	
	Total	554	100%	

The comments explain this:

“As the character, one must listen for the dialogue or the cue that will elicit the proper response. As the actor, one must listen word-for-word in case the other actor makes a mistake or neglects to provide the correct cue. It is then one’s duty to meld these two forms of listening together into a seamless performance, so one can respond convincingly in any event.” - Respondent #667033 (Hetzler 2007, 172)

“I’m just listening on so many different levels. Listening as my character, because I need to respond with corresponding energy and emotion, listening as myself, because if they miss a line or ad lib a line, I need my own brain to respond; listening for cues for myself and others, in case I or another actor miss and there’s a need to cover a missed cue, and listening to what is being said overall, because again, the wrong thing might be said, or said differently.” - Respondent #483557 (Hetzler 2007, 172)

So to clarify, the respondents say that they must be listening (be aware) in different ways in order to respond to the events as they unfold. They listen as the character to respond to the situation, but as themselves to be on guard against mistakes.






The next question asked directly about awareness on stage:

How aware are you of your own performance?

- 1 - Completely unaware. When I come off stage, I have no idea of how I did.
- 2 - Mostly unaware.
- 3 - Aware. I know I’m on stage
- 4 - Mostly aware.
- 5 - Completely aware. I am always critiquing my work while I’m on stage.

It might be presumed that an actor that falls on the engagement end of the scale would tend more towards being unaware of the performance event as it occurs

on stage. If the actor is fully engaged in the character and reacting as the character, then it would seem logical that they would be less aware of the fact that they are performing. This is not what the results indicate. As the graph shows us, the majority of respondents are “Aware” or “Mostly Aware”.

Frequency Analysis							
Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1 - Completely unaware. When I come off stage, I have no idea of how I did.	8	2.71%					
2 - Mostly unaware.	42	14.24%					
3 - Aware. I know I'm on stage.	112	38.97%					
4 - Mostly aware.	100	33.90%					
5 - Completely aware. I am always critiquing my work while I'm on stage.	33	11.18%					
Total	295	100%					

Given the percentages here, it seems clear that these actors are generally aware of the fact that they are on a stage even though they might say they are more engaged with the character. The comments are fully reflective of this.

“I'm extremely aware of my movement onstage, my physicality. I'm also very aware of my lines. I know when I've goofed/dropped a line. I will admit that, at times, it's like I'm standing outside myself, watching myself.” - Respondent #412461 (Hetzler 2007, 174)

“I’m aware I’m on stage and what I’m doing is not real, but in my minds eye I can ‘see’ the world I’m meant to be in.” - Respondent #758207 (Hetzler 2007, 175)

“It is much like athletics - as a cyclist is constantly checking form in feet, knees, arms, etc., I am constantly checking in with the various aspects of what I am doing - qualities of movement, vocal choices, physical tension, awareness of surrounding and other actors, the text...I am constantly making adjustments.” - Respondent #1132731 (Hetzler 2007, 175)

Unfortunately, no one who chose “1 – Completely unaware” or “2 – Mostly unaware” left any comments so we are left without being able to better discriminate at this end of the scale.





The survey also contained a series of questions aimed at getting the respondents to describe their relationship with their audiences. Because theatre is a live event, the audience becomes an integral part of the performance. If the performance is comedic and there is no laughter, it ought to have an effect on the performers. Thus, the first question of this series asked specifically about the respondents’ awareness of the audience:

How aware of the audience are you while performing?

- 1 - Completely unaware. I forget there is one.
- 2 - Mostly unaware. I know they are there, but I am unaffected by them.
- 3 - Aware. I notice laughter and applause.
- 4 - Mostly aware. Sometimes I notice individual audience members.
- 5 - Completely aware.

Given the responses to the previous questions regarding awareness and despite the tendency to place themselves on the engaged end of the scale, it might be assumed that the responses will be on the awareness end of this scale. As the data shows, assumption does hold up.

Frequency Analysis							
Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1 - Completely unaware. I forget there is one.	0	0.00%					

2 - Mostly unaware. I know they are there, but I am unaffected by them.	54	18.49%	
3 - Aware. I notice laughter and applause.	68	23.29%	
4 - Mostly aware. I notice individual audience members.	119	40.75%	
5 - Completely aware.	51	17.46%	
Total	292	100%	

No one chose “Completely unaware” and only 18.49% chose “Mostly unaware”. To me this calls into question the idea of there being a concrete “4th wall” which the actors place themselves behind, blocking the audience out. What the statistics demonstrate is that the actors in this population are aware of the audience enough to notice individuals as well as laughter and applause. I think this suggests that actors maintain a separation between themselves and their character and so they are able to monitor what is going on around them by doing so.

The respondents were also asked if the reactions of the audience affect the performance. This was asked as a simple “yes” or “no” question and then followed with a comment box asking how the respondent is affected. The overwhelming response to this question was “yes”.

Frequency Analysis				
	Answer	Count	Percent	20% 40% 60% 80% 100%
1.	Yes	259	88.10%	
2.	No	35	11.90%	
	Total	294	100%	

The comments on this question are wide ranging and sometimes quite revealing:

“The audience feeds a performance - they can give or take energy from it. The less focused and engaged the audience, the less focused and engaged I become on stage. When an audience really enjoys themselves, and really buys into the show, there's no better high as a performer.” - Respondent #457027 (Hetzler 2007, 183)

“It's less their reactions that affect the performance; rather it is the energy the audience gives off. The audience is an active participant in the telling of the story, and therefore has an effect on the performance. Theatre is a dialogue between the actors and the audience...” - Respondent #459812 (Hetzler 2007, 183)

“Especially in comedy the audience can greatly affect the play. As an actor you have to listen carefully to the audiences reactions because you have to hold for the laugh before saying your next line or text will be missed...The audience also lets an actor know what works and what doesn't by their reaction.” - Respondent #960077 (Hetzler 2007, 183)

This question and its comments were followed by an open-ended text question which asked, quite simply, for the respondents to describe their relationship with the audience. The most common responses were that there is a “love/hate” or “a feedback/symbiotic relationship”. Here are a couple of more expansive responses:

“This can change from play to play and night to night. There is no fourth wall. It isn't there, even in a totally naturalistic play. The audience can be ignored, but it is always there. That's the beauty of live theatre.” - Respondent #847991 (Hetzler 2007, 185)

“I'm always aware of them. I'm always aware of their reactions. I'm sometimes puzzled - not sure what they're thinking. Sometimes I dislike them. I've learned to trust them over the years - how they respond, what they do/do not respond to. Unless the show requires it, I don't act to please them, but their energy, attention,

and focus guides my performance. Always.” - Respondent #866619 (Hetzler 2007, 183)

We know then, that for the majority of actors in the study, awareness extends outside of themselves and goes as far as the audience. But what about their awareness of the other performers they work with? They should certainly be aware of their presence as characters in the action, but how aware are they of what that actor might be experiencing? To investigate this, I asked the respondents to think about their relationships with other performers by exploring how they are affected by their fellow cast members:

Can you tell if another actor on stage with you is having an off night?

1 - Yes

2 - No

Unsurprisingly, the overwhelming response was “Yes”.

Frequency Analysis							
Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1. Yes	247	89.50%					
2. No	29	10.50%					
Total	276	100%					

The follow-up asked the respondents to explain/describe how they could tell this. Almost all of the respondents mentioned the missing of lines, or fumbling with props or missing entrances. Some of the respondents went into more depth as to *how* they could tell. These explanations range from very specific observations about the other performer’s physicality (something in their eyes) to descriptions of “energy” and the “sense” that the other performer “isn’t there”.

“Usually their timing is off. You can also tell when another actor is able to 'connect' with their character or if they are just 'going with the flow'” - Respondent #848019 (Hetzler 2007, 189)

“Usually it's when they look at me like a 'deer in the headlights' and I know they're lost. Or when they are looking in my direction, but their eyes are glazed over and they're not really focusing on anything physical.” - Respondent #458935 (Hetzler 2007, 190)

“If another actor is off, then you don't have the interaction that you need to propel your character forward. If they aren't 'tuned in', then they aren't present for you. I guess it is in the eyes, usually.” - Respondent #463773 (Hetzler 2007, 190)

The respondents were then asked whether they were affected by the other performers on stage with them. This was a simple “yes” or “no” question with a follow-up asking them to describe how they are affected.

Frequency Analysis							
Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1. Yes	256	92.42%					
2. No	21	7.58%					
Total	277	100%					

Based on the numbers, it is quite clear that actors are affected by the other members of the cast.

“Acting is reacting. If someone else isn't in the moment with me, I can't reach them, and they aren't going to react, which means that I cannot react to them - they are giving me nothing.” - Respondent #766569 (Hetzler 2007, 192)

“This goes back to listening. I gauge my reactions to the situations/actions on the stage. If an actor, who is supposed to make you angry by an action falls short of their action then I react based upon what they give me. If I suddenly get angry because that is what the playwright noted or the director and am not given the impetus by the other actor then I come across as 'overacting'.” - Respondent #848019 (Hetzler 2007, 193)

“I don't know how you can't be affected by your fellow cast mates. If they are having an off night, I try not to let that effect me. But their energy plays into the show just as much as my own does- it's hard to ignore that.” - Respondent #486381 (Hetzler 2007, 193)

The statistics and comments show that actors are very much aware of the other performers on stage and they are affected by them. They are conscious of

the energy and focus that they can perceive in those other performers. The statistical data, then, supports the idea that actors on stage have multiple levels of consciousness that allow them to be fully engaged in the action of the performance while still being able to monitor their own performance, the performances of their fellow actors, and the responses of the audience. It also seems that they are able to switch their attention rapidly between these things in order to attend to their task – they check-in. They describe themselves as being aware of many different things on many different levels. It seems unlikely, then, that the respondents could ever be so immersed in a role that they would be unaware of these externals because a fully engaged performer would be unlikely to notice that they are seeing “the actor” and not “the character” when they look into the eyes of their scene partner.

Many of these ideas were explored in much greater depth during the interview process. Interviewees volunteered by providing an e-mail address. In all, I conducted 37 interviews in the US and UK.

A question asked during the interview process was:

“While you’re on stage, do you ever forget why you’re there, becoming completely immersed in the performance or are you always aware you’re in a play?”

As expected, the answers were both wide ranging and greatly illuminating. The initial reaction to the question was most commonly, “of course I’m aware”. That is, all of the interviewees “know” they are on a stage when they are performing. The differences in response lie where they draw the line between that awareness and the world of the play.

Cynthia Urich says that “about 75% of the time I’m aware”, while Tim Gadzinski says that “any actor that says they aren’t aware are, I believe, lying...because you know you’re on stage”. This is probably best summed up by David Coral who says “I’m always aware I’m on stage, but I suspend my disbelief.”

What we find is that the respondents are very mindful of the fact that they are on stage, yet they are trying to stay within the action of the performance. This can be a rather difficult proposition as noted by Barbara Kingsley who calls it a “very fine line... I don’t want to be on the stage with neurotics” What follows is a clip from the documentary I made of the interviews:

“There has to be a bit of me that’s responsible enough that when you and I are on stage and suddenly your eyes roll back in your head that Barbara is aware of a life outside of it even as we continue to dialogue. So I think we live in two places at once.” (Hetzler 2007, 200)

These thoughts are further supported by Jane Bass who says of being completely immersed in the action and forgetting the audience:

“I mean what would you do? Would you sort of keep going into what’s happening with the character? You always have to have some reserve. If your character is emotionally distraught...if you’re still not able to bring the words across and get the story, you know, moved along in the right direction, you’re useless as an actor. I mean you may have the whole audience crying with you but then everybody might be sitting there going ‘Uh, where were we? What were we doing?’ So you have to always, I think, have some part of you that’s watching.” (Hetzler 2007, 201)

Improvisational clown Jacob Mills talks about awareness in terms of opportunities:

“I’m always aware that I’m on stage. Even though I’m operating through a character, there is another part of me that’s watching what I’m doing and looking and thinking about opportunities. Should I do that now or is that not gonna work...making some judgement calls or throwing out opportunities. Do you wish to take this opportunity or are you gonna keep going that way, is this opportunity better than what you’re doing now in terms of the improvisation or maybe I should go over here and try to do this?” (Hetzler 2007, 204)

In the course of the interviews, I asked about how they can be immersed in the actions and emotions of the performance while still being aware enough of the audience to do things like hold for laughs or deal with accidents, like broken props or missed lines. This came out of the discussions about how the actors describe being able to observe themselves while they are performing and how they can adjust to an audiences’ reaction. I wanted to get deeper inside the idea that actors feel that they can be fully engaged with the action of the scene yet still be conscious enough to adjust to the audience. How can this be achieved without completely dropping out of engagement with the character?

Barbara Kingsley discusses it in terms of “multi-tasking”. Dealing with the reactions of the audience is no different, in her mind, than dealing with people in her everyday life.

“... if you have any kind of partnership with another human being, be it a lover, a child, a whatever, if you’re cutting carrots and you have one kid in the bathtub, the phone is ringing and your husband is yelling at you about something, you’re multi-tasking all over the place. You have to make choices, you have to make decisions. Now you could, you know, rail at the child and tell them to ‘be quiet’. You could say ‘I can’t hear you get the phone’. I mean anger could come out; you could just laugh hysterically and sit on the floor. There are many choices you

could make. And they are all part of your audience, so to speak. We multi-task all the time.” (Hetzler 2007, 205)

Peggy O’Connell says that in order to deal with something like a laugh, you have to “suspend your concentration”.

“Suppose there’s a drunk in the audience and your thing is, like this one guy comes off the train and he goes ‘Hello America!’ and this drunk stood up and said ‘Hello to you!’ Well the guy’s got to stay in the scene, but he’s got to suspend the action sort of, he’s got to keep the action going yet he can’t say his next line while the audience laughs. So he is aware of that but he is still in character, but he has to kind of suspend it.” (Hetzler 2007, 205)

David Coral describes it as a kind of shifting of gears:

“There’s those gears, ‘cause when I’m on stage I think the character’s thoughts. Now, I can only think one kind of thought at a time. I can either think the character’s thoughts, or my thoughts. So if I’m on stage and everything is going the way it’s supposed to go, I’m thinking the character’s thoughts. When something goes askew or when there’s a laugh going on, and the actor sense has to come in then I’m thinking the actor’s thoughts. And I kind let the character go on autopilot for a little bit. Just for a second or two. So the character will go on autopilot for a second, David will talk to himself, do what he does, back to the character. So it’s always doing this.” (Hetzler 2007, DVD)

At the beginning of this talk, I mentioned William Archer’s survey of actors from 1888. What I find most compelling is the similarities between what the actors in my study said and what the actors in his study said. Archer, in his chapter on awareness called, “The Brownies of the Brain”, quotes a Mr. Stevenson, who observed:

“There are many ‘brownies,’ in the actor’s brain, and one of them may be agonising with Othello, while another” is criticising his every tone and gesture, a third restraining him from strangling Iago in good earnest, and a fourth wondering whether the play will be over in time to let him catch his last train.” (Archer 1957, 184)

He then quotes several actors as they discuss their experiences of having double or triple consciousness. Here, for instance is a quote from Fanny Kemble:

“The curious part of acting, to me, is the sort of double process which the mind carries on at once, the combined operation of one’s faculties, so to speak, in diametrically opposite directions; for instance, in that very last scene of Mrs. Beverley, while I was half dead with crying in the midst of the *real* grief, created by an entirely *unreal* cause, I perceived that my tears were falling like rain all over my silk dress, and spoiling it; and I calculated and measured most accurately the space that my father would require to fall in, and moved myself and my train accordingly in the midst of the anguish I was to feign and absolutely did endure.” (Archer 1957, 185)

Then there is Miss Clara Morris:

“There are, when I am on the stage, three separate currents of thought in my mind; one in which I am keenly alive to Clara Morris, to all the details of the play, to the other actors and how they act, and to the audience; another about the play and the character I represent; and, finally, the thought that really gives me stimulus for acting.” (Archer 1957, 186)

The responses of actors in the 1880’s are remarkably similar to the modern actors. I think this is important because the older actors were talking about their work in a pre-psychological context. William James hadn’t published yet, nor had Ribot or Freud. The ideas of psychology, which are a standard part of the modern actor’s life – as it is for pretty much everyone, these days - had not yet entered the popular consciousness. And there was certainly no actor training that could have incorporated any of it. So we get a fascinating sense that the experience of acting, and the perception of awareness during performance has not changed in the least in 120 years.

Given the statistical data and anecdotal comments of the more than 300 actors that took part to my study, it is apparent that modern actors do experience multiple levels of awareness when they perform. These multiple levels allow them to complete their various performance tasks of which “being the character” is just one. The actors are continually moving back and forth between different states. They are engaged in the moment of the performance, reacting to the circumstances as the action dictates, but they are also capable of maintaining contact with their audience in order to adjust their performance. If there is a big laugh, the actors must maintain their focus on the action, while holding for the laughter to subside. If an actor misses a line or drops a prop, they must be able to take corrective action while still maintaining the action of the scene. When they leave the stage, they must not drop their awareness of the action on stage because they might have to re-enter at a later time. Therefore they must keep one ear open in order to know where the performance is in the script/score and how close it is to their next entrance. It seems then that whether 120 years ago or in the present, without having the ability to keep their awareness open and

shift their attention as needed, actors would be unable to complete their tasks and would, quite likely, fail.

Notes

¹The survey was distributed to more than 150 theatres, universities and individuals in the U.S.A., U.K., Ireland and Canada. In the tables included, the 'total' box represents the number of respondents to that particular question. Not every question was answered by every respondent; therefore some questions have higher totals than others.

²All respondents to the questionnaire portion of this study were anonymous. They are identified by Respondent #. All spelling and grammatical errors have been maintained

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