THE VIEWPOINTS: A POSTMODERN ACTOR TRAINING FOR A POSTMODERN
THEATRE

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ABSTRACT

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The Six Viewpoints, a set of performance training techniques devised by choreographer

Mary Overlie, emerged from the post-modern dance movement of the 1960s. While dancemakers

whose work may be classified as post-modern (or alternatively, postmodern) have a complicated

relationship to other artistic postmodernisms, not to mention the economic and social conditions

of postmodernity, Overlie explicitly identifies her work as postmodern. Similarly, Anne Bogart,

whose revision, rearrangement, and self-described "theft" of Overlie's work in the form of the

Viewpoints method of actor training, credits postmodern pioneers in the arts – Overlie, John

Cage, Robert Rauschenberg, Yvonne Rainer – for their influence on her teaching and her

directing. Though Bogart's Viewpoints have received considerably more attention in the popular

media, little scholarly attention has been given to either Bogart or Overlie.

This dissertation investigates both iterations of viewpoints training to determine their

practical, aesthetic, and philosophical relationship to one another. In doing so, it interrogates

Overlie and Bogart's claims that the Viewpoints are a postmodern mode of performance training.

I analyze Overlie and Bogart's writings in which they outline their techniques as well as

interviews they and their students have given to articulate their similarities and differences,

placing them each alongside the ongoing discourses of postmodernism and poststructuralism.

Finally, I demonstrate the ways in which these trainings provide actors with a set of skills which

aid in the staging of postmodern performance texts. I argue that the postmodern narrative

structures of María Irene Fornés' *Fefu and Her Friends* and Suzan-Lori Parks' *The Death of the

Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World,* and conceptions of character in Sarah Ruhl's

Eurydice, James Ijames' *White*, and Sarah Kane's *4'48 Psychosis* create problems for actors who

lack the skills that Viewpoints training develops.

For Summer,

Who gave me the push I needed to start this work, and found the patience to let me finish it.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

"These postmodern pioneers forged the territory upon which we
now stand. They rejected the insistence by the modern dance world
upon social messages and virtuosic technique, and replaced it with
internal decisions, structures, rules or problems. What made the
final dance was the context of the dance. Whatever movement
occurred while working on these problems became *the art. This*
philosophy lies at the heart of both Viewpoints and Composition."
-Anne Bogart and Tina Landau[1]

By explicitly identifying their work with that of the "postmodern pioneers" of the Judson

Church Theatre, Anne Bogart and Tina Landau pay homage to Mary Overlie, the

dancer/choreographer most closely associated with the SoHo arts scene of the 1970s, whom

Bogart has frequently acknowledged as her source of inspiration for The Viewpoints system of

actor training. Though Overlie's training method, The Six Viewpoints, is substantially different

from Bogart and Landau's Viewpoints, Overlie also contends that postmodern philosophy is at

the heart of her approach.[2] Therefore, contrary to what my title may imply – "The Viewpoints" –

viewpoints training is not just one thing. Furthermore, the foundational texts of both The

Viewpoints and The Six Viewpoints are vague regarding what they mean by postmodernism, a

term which is notoriously resistant to definition. Just as there are multiple viewpoints trainings,

there are multiple postmodernisms. What makes viewpoints trainings reflective of postmodern

conditions, why specifically postmodernist modes of actor training are a necessary antithesis to

dominant pedagogies, and how viewpoints trainings maintain or shift their use-value in a "post-

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[1] Anne Bogart and Tina Landau. *The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and*
Composition. (Theatre Communications Group, 2004), 4.
[2] Overlie, Mary. *Standing in Space: The Six Viewpoints Theory & Practice*. (Fallon Press, 2016), 87.

postmodern" world – if indeed the postmodern is in the past – are the questions that guide my research in this dissertation.

Since my inquiry is focused on actor training, I am primarily interested in viewpoints trainings narrowly applied in this way. Readers might assume, then, that this study will privilege Bogart and Landau's revision of the Viewpoints, given Overlie's reputation as a teacher and practitioner of dance. Yet to determine the constitution of Bogart and Landau's postmodernism, it will become necessary to distinguish their training methods from Overlie's, which I will refer to as "The Six Viewpoints" in an effort to avoid confusion. Perhaps some of the differences between these two modes of training can be attributed to the divergent backgrounds of their creators. On the one hand, Overlie, with strong influence from interdisciplinary artists like Yvonne Rainer and John Cage, conceived the Six Viewpoints with an eye toward a broad spectrum of performatic[3] creativity. Still, I argue that this interdisciplinarity should not diminish the significance of the Six Viewpoints as a technique for actors. On the other hand, Bogart and Landau's adaptation, The Viewpoints, was specifically designed to train actors to work collaboratively in a theatre company. Their focus on theatre production may come at the expense of the development of the actor as an artist in the larger sense. Disciplinary or generic concerns cannot fully account for these differences. Bogart and Landau, developing The Viewpoints in the 1990s and writing in the mid-2000s, are informed by a postmodernist philosophy that diverges from that which Overlie experienced in the 1970s. While postmodernist history is generally suspicious of periodization, there are key distinctions between these two waves of postmodern

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[3] Diana Taylor coins this term in *The Archive and The Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Duke University Press 2003), 5-6, as an adjective form of the noun, performance, which avoids the confusion that so often arises from the more common adjective form "performative" and its association in the field of Performance Studies and with J.L. Austin's use of the word to describe an utterance that performs an action beyond the act of speaking.

art which require a more nuanced investigation than they often receive. An important part of my project is to clarify these distinctions.

Literature Review

My research in this dissertation is informed by a much wider list of texts than I will enumerate in this review of literature. The texts I have chosen to highlight in this summary serve a dual purpose: first, to provide an overview of the primary sources that articulate viewpoints training practices and summarize the limited scholarly discourse that has been generated around them; second, and perhaps more significantly, to address one of my primary research questions outlined above which will factor less prominently in the body of the dissertation – why a specifically postmodernist mode of actor training is a necessary antithesis to dominant pedagogies. Here I outline a growing number of texts that point to major problems or insufficiencies in trainings derived from Stanislavski's System and the American Method, the prevailing modes of actor training in the United States for much of the last century, without offering solutions of a comparable magnitude. I demonstrate the relationship between these problems and insufficiencies with epistemological shifts that scholars have identified, and artists have made manifest in their practice, between approximately 1970 and 2010, a time frame which I consider as an era of postmodernist prominence. I conclude with an examination of works through which I connect these shifts in epistemology to a reimagining of the actor's scope of duties in theatre production. This literature review encompasses a sprawling variety of discourses; demonstrating the ways in which these discourses speak to one another and filling out the connections between them is one of the major contributions this dissertation makes to the field.

Although viewpoints training has existed in some form since the late 1960s, prior to Bogart's revisions and her work with the Saratoga International Theater Institute Company (SITI) in the 1990s, it was only practiced by Mary Overlie, her dance company, and a handful of students who studied under her at the New York University Experimental Theatre Wing (ETW). Bogart's encounter with Overlie's teachings when the two worked together at the ETW in the late 1980s marks the moment that knowledge of viewpoints-based practices began to spread. No literature on viewpoints training existed before 2005 when Bogart and Landau published *The Viewpoints Book*. Though Bogart and Landau acknowledge that The Viewpoints developed out of Overlie's work on The Six Viewpoints, there are significant differences between the two methods. Overlie did not publish anything about The Six Viewpoints until her 2006 essay, "The Six Viewpoints" in Arthur Bartow's anthology, *Training of the American Actor.* The complete articulation of her practice was not published until *Standing in Space: The Six Viewpoints Theory and Practice* in 2016. These are all practical guides written for pedagogical purposes. Given the relatively recent arrival of viewpoints trainings in the broader community of acting teachers and anti-theoretical sentiments among the small community that is aware of The Viewpoints, little scholarly writing has been done on the subject. Even those academic accounts of postmodern dance and the SoHo arts scene that address the movement's history and theoretical attitudes, which I will return to shortly, rarely mention any contribution from Mary Overlie.[4] The upshot is that there is a great deal of historical and theoretical work that remains to be done on the subject; this dissertation stands as my endeavor to add to that still emerging field of study.

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[4] Sally Banes foundational text *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Wesleyan University Press, 1987), for example, names Overlie as a choreographer who "could be considered part of the post-modern movement" but is not included in her study because of her position as a relative newcomer with a "still evolving" style (18-9).

A notable exception is Scott Cummings' 2006 monograph, *Remaking American Theater: Charles Mee, Anne Bogart, and the SITI Company.* Cummings chronicles the coalescence of Bogart and SITI Company with playwright Charles Mee to devise and produce *bobrauchenbergamerica* in 2001. This collaborative work was inspired by postmodern visual artist Robert Rauchenberg, though his influence is on the style of the work rather than the content. Cummings' project is a historical account of a Viewpoints-based devising process; he does not discuss the techniques involved in this process in any great depth. Rather, his observations are focused on the aesthetic sympathies of Bogart, Mee, and Rauchenberg's and their common embrace of "collage as a basis for structuring new work and…'stealing' as a method for filling out that structure."[5] Cummings' depiction of this process provides insight into the differences between the analytical postmodernism of the 1970s and the synthesis-driven postmodernist projects of the turn of the century. His book informs my understanding of how Bogart and company used The Viewpoints as a creative tool, and the ways in which their process was distinct from Overlie's.

In addition to Cummings' book, the history I have constructed is aided by a 2017 journal article by Tony Perucci entitled "On Stealing Viewpoints," which highlights the contrasts between the ways in which viewpoints training is conceived and practiced by Overlie and Bogart. The article does not attempt to give reasons for these differences, but I conducted an interview with Perucci as part of my research in which we discussed those differences. His writing and comments have a visible impact on my effort to draw distinctions between iterations of viewpoints training and determine the rationale behind them.

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[5] Cummings, Scott T. *Remaking American Theater: Charles Mee, Anne Bogart, and the SITI Company.* (Cambridge UP, 2006), 4.

To that end, I examined other modes of actor training that were emergent in the 1980s and 90s through Stephen Wangh's *An Acrobat of the Heart: A Physical Approach to Acting Inspired by the Work of Jerzy Grotowski* (2000) which offers a guide to Grotowski's early teaching as his influence began to reach the United States, as well as Tadashi Suzuki's *The Way of Acting* (1986), in which Suzuki, a close collaborator of Bogart's, describes his own training methods. Though these latter texts are not frequently referenced in the body of this dissertation, I must acknowledge traces of influence of artists such as these on Bogart's understanding of postmodernism that spring from the intercultural values of those two decades, further distinguishing it from Overlie's postmodernism.

As I have previously noted, little scholarly attention has been devoted to the theoretical underpinnings of viewpoints training. In contrast, recent decades have brought a great deal of research into the underlying theory behind the more established actor training practices of Stanislavski, Strasberg, Adler, and Meisner. This research extends beyond the well-rehearsed quibbles regarding the validity of their connections to Freudian and Pavlovian psychoanalysis.[6] Over the past two decades, scholars of feminist, queer, and critical race theory have examined ways in which these dominant modes of actor training are hostile to their interests. For instance, Rosemary Malague's *An Actress Prepares: Women and "The Method"* (2012) dissects the teachings of Strasberg, Adler, Meisner, and Uta Hagen to locate their aesthetic and philosophical points of view. In each case, Malague finds that to some degree they rely on assumptions and practices grounded in misogyny and gender essentialism. More recently, Sharrell D. Luckett and Tia M. Shaffer's edited anthology, *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches* (2017) argues that the dominant modes of actor training in the United States assume a Eurocentric positionality

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[6] See Krasner, David. *Method Acting Reconsidered: Theory, Practice, Future.* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 2000).

where whiteness is neutral, and artists of color are "others." I contend that the poststructuralist roots of these critiques link Stanislavski-based actor training to the positivist assumptions of modernism; they imply the need for an acting technique liberated from those assumptions. The deconstructionist values I see in viewpoints training will ally it with these poststructuralist theories in opposition to "traditional" methods.

To be sure, the alliance between postmodernist deconstruction and the identity-based movements that comprise poststructuralist discourse is complex. For example, bell hooks reminds readers that the Black Power movement of the 1960s was influenced by modernist, universalizing philosophies. She points out the irony that "decentered, marginalized black subjects who had at least momentarily successfully demanded a hearing, who had made it possible for black liberation to be on the national political agenda" and obtain agency just as the idea of subjectivity, of identity, is being pronounced dead.[7] Nevertheless, hooks goes on to argue that despite this frustration, the postmodernist "politics of difference" presents opportunities for new ways to talk about racism and resist the "politics of domination." This is the type of intervention that Luckett and Shaffer stage in *Black Acting Methods* by seeking an "Afrocentric centripetal paradigm where Black theory and Black modes of expression are the nucleus" and "provide diverse methodologies for actors and teachers of all races and cultures to utilize and highlight performance practitioners' labor in social justice issues and activism."[8] These diverse methodologies, and their availability to actors and teachers of all races and cultures suggests that Luckett and Shaffer's ideas of Afrocentrism are not intended to inscribe a monolithic "essence" of Black identity. It is instead, "to critique essentialism while emphasizing the significance of

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[7] hooks, bell. *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics.* (Boston, South End Press, 1990), 25.
[8] Luckett, Sharrell and Tia Shaffer. "Introduction" in *Black Acting Methods*. (Abingdon, Routledge, 2017), 2.

'the authority of experience.'"[9] A strategy that hooks argues allows for the "recogni[tion] of multiple experiences of black identity that are the lived conditions which make diverse cultural productions possible."[10] Luckett and Shaffer are convincing in their criticism of Stanislavski's essentialism.

At the same time, *Black Acting Methods*, perhaps in an effort to avoid the same essentialism, may be critiqued for its lack of specificity regarding the development of skills for the actor. Many of the book's "offerings" including the editors' contribution, "The Hendricks Method" focus on devising techniques, adaptation, social issues, and teacher-student relationships. An actor with previous training in Viewpoints may find their skills much more adaptable to a Hendricks Method process than would an actor trained by one of the teachers Malague discusses in *An Actress Prepares*. To understand this alliance more fully, the dramatic texts I analyze in the chapters that follow focus on female, queer, and nonwhite authors, and their sympathy with poststructuralist identity discourse. Moreover, in chapter four, I offer a detailed description of how viewpoints trainings might be deployed to support an Afrocentric process of staging a dramatic text.

To understand how acting theories may be aligned with or opposed to the master narratives of modernism, I turn to philosophical texts on postmodernity and postmodernism. J. F. Lyotard, in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), notes that modernist discourses seek to establish themselves as objectively true in accordance with given, immutable conditions of nature. These discourses attempt to obscure the ways in which they are constructed "grand narratives" and delegitimize any knowledge that would undermine these "grand narratives." This, according to *The End of Acting: A Radical View* (2000), by Richard Hornby, is

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[9] hooks. *Yearning.* 29
[10] hooks. *Yearning.* 29.

what "Strasbergian" acting techniques have done.[11] They have posited themselves as acting itself, with anything outside their sphere of influence existing in the realm of style. My observation is that this modernist move to totalize the "Strasbergian" approach as neutral, or the absence of style represents a Neoplatonic epistemology. When System or Method-based techniques are acknowledged as essential first-principles – as is suggested by their dominance in courses entitled "Basic Acting" or "Principles of Acting" – these techniques become lodged in actor training discourse as the Platonic ideal or "form" of knowledge on the subject.

Postmodernism, on the other hand, is the skeptical response to this attempt at totalization. As Fredric Jameson suggests in his introduction to *The Postmodern Condition*, "Lyotard's ultimate vision of science [is] a search, not for consensus, but very precisely for 'instabilities' as a practice of paralogism, in which the point is not to reach agreement but to undermine from within the very framework in which the previous 'normal science' had been conducted."[12] Jacques Derrida recognized this 'very framework' as artifice and frequently detrimental to understanding the world. In "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," Derrida argues that any structure derives from culture - not from nature, which is independent of any social structure - and may vary from one social structure to the next. This infinitude and omnipotence makes the platonic project of locating its center or essence impossible, and any success in locating a center is merely the center of a structure that is culturally conceived and vulnerable to such instabilities as Lyotard identifies. Instead, recognizing that these centers are not essential, but cultural, constitutes "the joyous affirmation of the freeplay of the world and without truth, without origin, [is] offered to an active interpretation…*This affirmation then*

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[11] Hornby, Richard. *The End of Acting: A Radical View*. (Applause Theatre Books, 2000), 5.
[12] Jameson, Fredric. Introduction to *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* by Jean-Francois Lyotard. (University of Minnesota Press, 1979), xix.

determines the non-center otherwise than as the loss of center."[13] I argue that viewpoints training makes use of this knowledge of a lack of center to locate instabilities within dominant methods of performance training and offer the actor this joyous affirmation of freeplay.

Beyond the epistemological view of postmodernism, texts on postmodern artistic movements help me translate their use of semiotics to the language of actor training. Colin Counsell's *Signs of Performance: An Introduction to Twentieth Century Theatre* (1996) illustrates that in actor training influenced by the Stanislavski system, the goal of the actor is to represent a character with a cohesive internal subjectivity based in the logic of cause and effect. A character desires something from another character, performs actions with an aim to getting that thing, and those actions have consequences which inform the character's next move. The character inhabits a world which is meant to represent the world that the audience inhabits – the "real" or "natural" world. The implication is that the world outside the play, like the world of the play, is governed by the logic of cause and effect. Counsell notes, however, ways in which postmodern styles look to undermine this worldview. In his chapter on Robert Wilson's "Theatre of Images," it becomes clear that the actor in that performance context does not represent a psychological subject, but instead presents a corporeal body. The Stanislavskian actor, even with the training in yoga, dance, and gymnastics that the Russian master advocated, uses that training to attain a body that could better express the psychological subject he or she represents. This type of representation is incompatible with the living landscapes that Wilson, inspired by Gertrude Stein, hoped to create. This incompatibility is evinced by Wilson's frequent choice to use untrained performers, a choice which highlights a gap in performance training that existed at this time. Overlie, in her proximity to Wilson collaborators such as Merce Cunningham and John

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[13] Derrida, Jacques. "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." In *A Postmodern Reader*, (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1993), 223-241.

Cage would likely find such a gap notable. Had viewpoints trainings been prevalent when Wilson was making work, he may have had access to a pool of actors with training in modes of presentation closer to his aesthetic.

Other texts on postmodern art have been useful in my effort to address the problem of distinguishing the postmodern from the modernist avant-garde. Sally Banes' *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (1987) argues that Martha Graham's Modern Dance was never truly modernist. In fact, Merce Cunningham's search for "pure dance," movement devoid of point of view is only "post-modern" in the chronological sense relative to Graham. Banes argues that philosophically, Cunningham was a modernist. Ramsay Burt, in *Judson Dance Theater: Performative Traces* (2006)*,* pushes back against Banes, arguing that Graham's modernism was about finding universal grand narratives and that Cunningham's postmodernism was not about asserting the essence of dance, but about exploring the elements of movement. "Pure dance," in this sense, searches for movements other than those the dominant ideology of the discipline might consider as proper dance. *Theorizing the Avant-Garde: Modernism, Expressionism, and the Problem of Postmodernity* (1999), by Richard Murphy offers the possibility that the modernist avant-garde is epistemologically allied with postmodernism, and that the differences between the two are merely aesthetic or technical. Conversely, Antoine Compagnon argues in *The Five Paradoxes of Modernity* (1994) that the avant-garde seeks to supplant the modern as the cutting edge in a positivist dialectic toward the end of history by positioning itself as ahead of its time, futuristic. While modernism and the avant-garde quibble over which has located the correct grand narrative, postmodernism, in Compagnon's configuration, rejects the assumption that a progressive dialectic is desirable, or even possible. Instead, postmodernism opts for nonhierarchical or horizontal theories of artistic motion similar to those Overlie argues for in

Standing in Space. Taken together, these texts depict the early days of the postmodernist movement as one with an interest in elements, rather than essences, of artistic practice. All these perspectives have been useful in my analysis of the influences that informed Overlie's Six Viewpoints. Furthermore, they provide useful contrasts with the impulse to create fusions, noted above, which I argue informed Bogart's revisions.

As noted above, the preceding represents only a small portion of the source material I have consulted in preparing this study. Additional relevant literature will be reviewed as the need arises. My purpose in this review has been to indicate the wide array of discourses I will attempt to synthesize in the service of understanding the work that viewpoints trainings have undertaken. In the next section I discuss how my study situates that work within the historical moment of a so-called postmodern era. I sketch out the trajectory of the dissertation – the structure I follow, the purpose of each chapter, and I define a set of key terms. In constructing this outline, I look back to the first two research questions I posed at the outset: how do viewpoints trainings fit into a postmodernist worldview, and why is a postmodernist mode of actor training necessary? The body of the dissertation addresses these two questions and I conclude with an exploration of what this work means for actor training moving forward from the postmodern era in which resistance to totalizing narratives remains, but the dangers of radical skepticism have been brought into relief.

Terminology, Structure, and Argumentative Focus

This study is divided into two main parts. Part one is comprised of two chapters in which I map out the principles of viewpoints training and search for metaphysical and epistemological justification for its claims to a postmodernist orientation. I also present historical information; chapter one is concerned with Overlie's development of the Six Viewpoints, while the next

chapter addresses the substance of Bogart's revision of the Viewpoints and how they reflect shifts in or departures from the ideals of the previous generation of the postmodernist movement. Part two includes a review of the epistemological beliefs that define postmodern styles and explores the ways in which stylistically postmodernist dramatic literature requires performers to exercise a set of skills which are distinct from those possessed by the Stanislavskian actor. I contend that these distinctions are the result of contrary metaphysical assumptions and attitudes between Stanislavskian actor trainings and viewpoints trainings.

Since a primary argument of this dissertation is that viewpoints training refers to at least two different forms of actor training with significant differences between them, it is vital that readers understand which I am referring to in any given moment. Thus, as I have already begun to establish, "The Six Viewpoints" refers to Mary Overlie's version of the training. "The Viewpoints" or "Viewpoints training" as a proper noun refers to Anne Bogart and Tina Landau's revisions of the training as outlined in *The Viewpoints Book* and the closely related training carried out by Bogart and SITI Company. When used as a common noun, "viewpoints training(s)" is used to discuss things held in common by both forms. Additionally, I refer to the individual "Viewpoints" under both systems as proper nouns, just as Overlie, Bogart, and Landau do. Thus, "Shape" is a Viewpoint in both The Six Viewpoints and The Viewpoints, while "shape" is a geometric spatial formation.

Another potential source of confusion is the use of the word "postmodern" and its variously suffixed facsimiles such as "postmodernity" and "postmodernism." The literature is frequently unclear about these distinctions, but they are meaningful and require precise definition. For me, the postmodern is a historical period in which the conditions of human existence are dominated by postmodernity – the economic and cultural conditions that emerged

during the period of rapid globalization, technological advance, and postindustrial capitalism that defined the latter part of the twentieth century. The postmodern follows the modern but, like any other attempt at periodization, also overlaps with its predecessor. Therefore, if the period of postmodern dramatic literature is defined in this work as a period between 1978 and 2017, it does not mean that the period of modern dramatic literature concluded in 1977 or that postmodern dramatic literature is no longer being written. Nor would I argue that there are not examples of dramatic literature with postmodernist (or perhaps proto-postmodernist) elements produced previous to the working dates I have identified as the postmodern era. This literature, written in and around the postmodern era and reacting to the conditions of postmodernity, is considered to adhere to the tenets of postmodernism and/or take a postmodernist view of the world.

To address the research question, articulated on page 1, of why a mode of actor training that can be described as postmodern is necessary, it is important to establish that dominant actor training is often insufficient to prepare the actor for the problems of the postmodern theatre. Here I present a brief analysis of the Stanislavski System and its cousins, American "Method" trainings. The overwhelming consensus in the literature is that these are the dominant strains of actor training in Europe and North America, and their influence on actor training worldwide has been documented in separate studies by Jonathan Pitches and Phillip Zarrilli (among many others).

I use the term "Method" as a shorthand for the various teachings descended from members of the Group Theatre starting in the 1930s whose Stanislavskian influence comes from the Moscow Art Theatre's American tour in 1924 and subsequent lectures at the American Laboratory Theatre. Though perhaps the term "Method" denotatively refers only to the work of

Lee Strasberg at the Actor's Studio, David Krasner, Richard Hornby, and others use the term much more broadly to contain the teachings of Meisner and Adler; occasionally even Harold Clurman and Elia Kazan are considered to be method practitioners.[14] The thrust of my analysis of the Method is confined to Strasberg, Meisner, and Adler to avoid redundancy. If my study were more focused on these individual trainings, it would be vital to make the distinctions among them explicit. Since, however, my study views Stanislavski-based training as a "grand narrative," it is advantageous, efficient, and appropriate to treat its American iterations as the prongs of a single fork.

Stanislavski-based training is limited by the assumptions of enlightenment-era modernist philosophy – that human subjectivity is complete and self-contained, that the world is governed by a logic of linear cause and effect, and that the grand narratives of institutional discourses describe the essence of the natural world. By extension, a theatre that does not share these assumptions cannot be served by a mode of actor training that depends on them. Others have gestured toward this idea. Hornby, in *The End of Acting: A Radical View*, makes two promises in his title and fails to completely satisfy either one. His critique of Method training's reliance on Freudian psychoanalysis and the false cause-and-effect relationship between emotions and physical actions imply an awareness of the Method's link to modernist sensibilities.[15] Yet in his chapter "Realism and Style," after a lengthy discussion on how acting styles differ across time and cultures because of differences in conceptions of what a human being is in relation to the world, he seems to come to the conclusion that the modernist conception of humanity and consciousness that developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries retains currency. The performance texts I analyze in chapters three and four of this dissertation have

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[14] Krasner, David. *Method Acting Reconsidered: Theory, Practice, Future.* (St. Martin's Press, 2000), 4-5.
[15] Hornby, Richard. *The End of Acting: A Radical View.* 126.

been selected for their rejection of linear cause-and-effect and individual subjectivity, respectively, as accurate descriptions of the human experience.

Rhonda Blair's *The Actor, Image, and Action: Acting and Cognitive Neuroscience* argues that computer technology has significantly altered our conceptions of time, space, and self – the development of an individual's consciousness is not unidirectional or even completely contained within the body we think houses it. Still Blair concludes that modernist acting techniques, which rely on assumptions about time, space, and self that she contradicts, remain useful because they give spectators a vision of the world that is easy to understand. Scott Balcerzak offers examples of students of Stella Adler who have had success using Adler's techniques and admonitions for actors to be faithful servants of the text to bring postmodern elements to their performances. The most recognizably postmodern performance that Balcerzak analyzes is Henry Winkler's pastiche performance as the character Fonzie on the television series *Happy Days* (1974-84). In this iconic performance, Winkler decouples the signifiers assigned to the 1950s greaser persona from the threat of violence and subversion that it once signified. Balcerzak is clear, however, that *Happy Days* does this to recuperate a popular character to serve the master narrative of the 1950s as an essentially innocent time. He also recognizes that Winkler's character's essential "coolness" is a modernist construct. All of these works gesture toward the need for a mode of actor training more consistent with the postmodern conception of human experience and/or the requirements of postmodern performance, yet none of them explicitly articulates that need, let alone claims that it exists.

Acknowledging System-based actor training as exceedingly well-suited to training actors to excel in the performance of modern mimetic realism, I posit viewpoints training as the postmodern counterpoint whose necessity is implied by Hornby, Balcerzak, and Blair. Just as

there are significant practical and philosophical differences among Stanislavski and his American revisionists, viewpoints training has undergone significant alterations to suit the purposes of its second-generation practitioner. While Bogart has insisted that she "stole"[16] viewpoints training from Overlie in an apparent effort to share credit and/or bolster the legitimacy of the Bogart/Landau idea of Viewpoints training, this apparent admission elides major substantive discrepancies between the two. In my first two chapters, I seek to disentangle each from the other. I analyze each of their articulations of what viewpoints training is and what work it does, and account for the differences by tracing each of their influences and determining their objectives. This work involves not only close reading of Overlie and Bogart's writings on viewpoints training and analysis of performances that they created; it also requires placing those readings in dialogue with texts that attempt to describe postmodernism and/or the conditions of postmodernity. My theoretical analysis of these texts is part of a historical narrative in which I track changes in the ways postmodernity has been understood. The influence of multiple postmodernisms on Overlie and Bogart accounts for the ways in which their viewpoints practices differ. It also serves as an example of how postmodernism resists definition as a strategy to maintain its position as a subversive discourse. Overlie and Bogart's disparate influences and objectives will reveal that, in keeping with postmodernist opposition to positivist thinking, The Viewpoints are not an evolution from Overlie's Six Viewpoints, but an allied pedagogical system with a different intended result.

     The two chapters that comprise part two of my study focus on the performance demands of performance texts with a postmodernist sensibility. While the term "postmodern" has been

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[16] Perucci, Tony. "On Stealing Viewpoints." *Performance Research: A journal of the Performing Arts.* Vol. 22, no. 5, (2017). 113.

applied to literature since at least 1934,[17] I am focused on an era of dramatic literature – and in some cases postdramatic literature[18] – which coincides with the postmodernisms that impacted Overlie and Bogart. Thus, I will be analyzing a selection of works that debuted after 1970. The works I select offer a variety of challenges to traditionally trained actors. The idea is that, having demonstrated the validity of Overlie and Bogart's labeling of viewpoints training as postmodernist, the next, perhaps more crucial step is to show the efficacy of such a mode of training. The argumentative focus of these chapters is that Viewpoints training produces actors who possess skills which are required for postmodern performance, skills which are not developed by modernist actor training methods. In each of these chapters, I will assert one such skill and offer case studies to demonstrate its various applications in dramatic literature of this postmodern era.

Chapter three investigates alternative narrative structures. While Stanislavski-based training demands that the actor mold their performance to suit a definition of Aristotelian unity of time based on linear cause and effect, postmodernism allows the artist to consider multiple possibilities for describing bodies' movement through time. First, I take Maria Irene Fornes' *Fefu and Her Friends* (1978) and explore its narrative structure which plays and replays multiple scenes which must be understood to occur simultaneously. Then, I analyze Suzan-Lori Parks' *Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World* (1990) which takes an epichronic view of time depicting four hundred years of racial injustice over the course of an hour to show that it

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[17] Hassan, Ihab. "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism" in *A Postmodern Reader* (ed. Natoli and Hutcheon). (SUNY Press, 1993), 274.

[18] Hans-Thies Lehman's book *Postdramatic Theatre* (2006) describes a style of theatrical performance whose emergence roughly coincides with the postmodern era I am examining. This style, according to Lehman, expands the definition of theatre to include performances in the lyric mode of poesis similarly to Brecht's expansion of the theatre to include the epic, not only the dramatic.

is constantly evolving, yet always the same. The disjunction and unmaking of time are not only accounted for in viewpoints training, they are also foundational to it.

In chapter four I explore theatre which requires actors to eschew mimetic functions which restrict them to representing totalized psychological subjects known as characters and consider alternative possibilities for what can be expressed by the placement of a body onstage. Theatrical performances that deploy actors in this way and are most easily connected to viewpoints trainings are those that bridge the gap between viewpoints as a postmodern dancer's concept and Viewpoints as a way of training actors. Theatrical performance which presents the actor in this way can be traced back to Robert Wilson's use of archetypal figures such as Albert Einstein, Abraham Lincoln, and Sigmund Freud. These archetypes are not meant to be coherent representations of the lived experiences of their referents, just as Elinor Fuchs observes that an actor "imagining an Oedipus at the level of individual psychology does not so much enhance him with lifelike detail as dissipate his moral force."[19] Wilson provides connections to John Cage and Merce Cunningham, whose work Overlie acknowledges as a major influence on the SoHo arts scene from which her work developed. Wilson's work, which is often associated with Gertrude Stein's oft-cited desire for a "landscape theatre," extends forward to Bogart's expanded vocabulary of viewpoints including "topography" and "architecture." Wilson also exemplifies the postmodern use of "language games" identified by Lyotard in which the sign systems of institutional discourse are manipulated, not necessarily to win the game, but to find new moves – replacing the paradigm of conflict-based drama with an aesthetic of the cool.

Building on this examination of the function of the actor as an iconographic presentation of a human body, the bulk of my chapter on this subject will consider the actor as the

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[19] Fuchs, Elinor. *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater after Modernism.* (Indiana University Press, 1996), 24.

representation of a consciousness or character. While Blair contends that Stanislavski-based training provides the actor with a blueprint for replicating the typical way in which humans conceive their consciousness – as a stable one-to-one relationship between body and mind – she acknowledges that cognitive science shows us that this conception is not strictly accurate. Here I will examine aspects of three plays that use alternative notions of consciousness.

I require three examples because none of these posits itself as "the way" that the mind works, and all are significantly different. James Ijames' *White* (2017) requires its lead actor to contain multiple subjectivities within one body and asks the actor to confront essentialized notions of race and gender that Stanislavski-based training reinforces. Conversely, Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice* (2006) features a "chorus of stones" that I argue spreads one collective consciousness across three bodies and forces the actor to consider what degree of subjectivity they can give to a character that is an inanimate object (Ruhl has written elsewhere about the ideologically charged choice most playwrights unconsciously make by populating their plays solely with human beings.)[20] Finally, Sarah Kane's *4:48 Psychosis* (2000) offers potential production teams no clear sense, either of how many actors the play requires, or of how many characters are in the play. Kane supplies only the text that is to be spoken, giving no indication of who is speaking to whom. In conversation with the theoretical assumptions I locate in part one, this analysis will argue that while the Stanislavski-trained actor might see these playwrights' ideas about character as difficulties, or even defects, the Viewpoints-trained actor might see them as creative possibilities.

In the conclusion of this study, I look beyond the temporal and stylistic limits of postmodernism to ask what place viewpoints training has in whatever artistic paradigm is to

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[20] Ruhl, Sarah. "People in Plays." In *100 Essays I Don't Have Time to Write* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2014), 20-1.

follow. The recent announcement that Anne Bogart's SITI Company will cease touring and performing operations in 2022 – combined with Mary Overlie's death in 2020, not to mention the transition of Mabou Mines, another icon of theatrical postmodernism, away from Lee Breuer's artistic direction after his death – suggests that something new is on the horizon. The generation of theatremakers that was the force behind the postmodernism that I explore here is phasing out. The present interruption of live performance worldwide is an opportunity for practitioners to reimagine what the medium can be. SITI Company plans to focus all its efforts on actor training. Bogart says, "There's an appetite for the classes like you wouldn't believe."[21] If viewpoints are postmodernist modes of performer training, and the time of postmodernity is past, why is – as Bogart implies – demand for Viewpoints training rising?

Limitations

Of course, this project is limited in its scope. In contrasting Stanislavski-based training with viewpoints training, I imply a false dichotomy between the two. I acknowledge that not only does the history of actor training in the United States precede the arrival of the Moscow Art Theatre in New York, but that throughout the twentieth century there have been significant movements in actor training that are not covered by this study. Some of these emerged from the same sources that inspired Stanislavski, Overlie, and Bogart. Others take influences from sources running the gamut between religious rites and circus clowning. The purpose of this study is not a comprehensive examination of a century of actor training, but to explore connections between philosophical and aesthetic postmodernism with a style of actor training which claims to be allied to that philosophy and aesthetic.

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[21] Bahr, Sarah. "Siti Company Announces Final Season." *The New York Times.* 10/7/2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/07/theater/siti-company-final-season.html.

Furthermore, it is not my aim to invalidate a century of System and Method-based training. These approaches have produced generations of fine actors. Nearly all critical studies that challenge the System or the Method make that acknowledgement. Critiques of the Method typically challenge their faithfulness to Stanislavski or whether the ability to access "real" emotion can truly be called acting. I am not interested in retracing these steps. I am more concerned with dislodging the persistent idea that these methods of training are the way that acting is made; that any other approach to acting can be simply dismissed as "style."

Another boundary for my work here is the choice to focus on the value of Viewpoints training in the production of single-authored texts. This choice may seem counterintuitive since Overlie seems to have conceived The Six Viewpoints as a method for generating new performance material rather than bringing an existing text to the stage. Yet I argue that Bogart's Viewpoints distinguish themselves from Overlie's by their interest in engaging with text in a similarly horizontal way and that while plenty of attention has been paid to viewpoints trainings as a devising technique, their value for engaging with text has been overlooked. For example, it is perhaps not well-known that in preparation for her Viewpoints workshops, Bogart asks students to memorize short pieces of text before they arrive. Therefore, this literary focus is intended to refute the common assumption that viewpoints trainings are useful merely as a warm-up activity or a devising tool.

It is well-established that viewpoints-based practices are successful in the creation of a collaborative, non-hierarchical working environment. Such an environment empowers the actor to exercise creative autonomy over not only the act of performance, but of the content being performed. It is no wonder then, that viewpoints training is popular among artists whose work develops from a communal devising process rather than from the selection of a single-authored

text for production. The assumption tends to be that staging a preexisting text implies that the text is the most important element of the production, and that all other production elements must be arranged in a hierarchy beneath the text and its author. However, neither Overlie nor Bogart makes this argument. Both allow for the possibility that a text may be assimilated into a production just as any other element. Viewpoints practitioners acknowledge that postmodernist performance does not achieve the absence of hierarchy, but merely shows that supposed "natural" hierarchies can be deconstructed and rearranged. They do not suggest that the use of a text does not imply textual superiority any more than the use of an extant theatre space implies the primacy of the Viewpoint, Space, in whatever hierarchy is being constructed by a performance.

This study is also not intended to be a definitive work on postmodern(ist) drama. Others have attempted to define postmodernism with clear beginning and end points. The term has been in use since before the First World War, and though its demise has been oft-reported,[22] some contend that the current age of "alternative facts" signals that the ethos of postmodernism has been absorbed into the mainstream and is now the dominant discourse rather than a move to subvert it. There is an element of historical periodization implied in Part I of this study. The attempt to draw distinctions between iterations of viewpoints training relies in part on cultural influences that shifted over time. Yet my aim in articulating the existence of these (hopefully) distinct postmodernisms is to indicate, following Jameson, that the postmodern always exists in response to the modern. Therefore, while references to modern avant-gardists like Jarry, Beckett, Grotowski, and Brecht may crop up to demonstrate this slippage and disrupt the false binary I refer to above, they are not strictly part of my project. They may, as part of the continuation of

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[22] See Rudrum, David and Nicholas Starvis. *Supplanting the Postmodern: An Anthology of Writings on Art and Culture of the Early 21ˢᵗ Century.* Bloomsbury, 2015.

this work, show the value of viewpoints trainings beyond the limited period of performance literature upon which I am focusing (1980-2017).

Methodology

The near-complete reliance of this document upon close reading can be most accurately described as a pandemic methodology. When I initially conceived this project, my intent was to include a significant amount of participant-observation in a variety of university and independent studio acting class situations. The uncertainty surrounding the advent of COVID-19 has caused many of these trainings to be either cancelled or significantly altered. Additionally, any in-person training being offered would require significant travel which was not possible during the time in which I conducted my research, the spring of 2020 through the spring of 2021. Given these adverse conditions, close reading of the foundational texts of System, Method, and Viewpoints training – which were always going to be part of my study – became the focus of chapters one and two.

In part two, I integrate the findings of my analysis of the primary sources with my readings of the scripts I mentioned above. Beyond the basic production requirements of those scripts, I search for the deeper philosophical values of those works. In what ways are they ideologically and epistemologically aligned or opposed to modernist and postmodernist worldviews? How do those worldviews manifest themselves in challenges for the actor?

This is not to say that my research for this project is devoid of practical experience with the materials in question. Before embarking on this particular research journey, I had multiple opportunities to engage with viewpoints practices. A few examples: The first time I (unwittingly) encountered Viewpoints exercises was in a 2008 audition for Dexter Bullard, head of the DePaul University MFA Acting Program. In 2015, I attended a workshop given by Emmanuelle

Delpeche, an instructor at Philadelphia's Pig Iron School, which applied Viewpoints techniques toward performance in Greek Chorus work. A three-day intensive workshop with Anne Bogart in 2018 brought me in touch with several acting teachers working in university programs as well as educational theatres and private acting studios, and I owe a great deal to the impact that Bogart and this cohort of practitioners had on my understanding of Viewpoints practices.

I also call upon my extensive experience with Adler training. I completed my Master's degree at Villanova University, where Joanna Rotte, a close Adler disciple, taught for many years. Though Rotte retired shortly before I arrived, her status as Professor Emeritus and the presence of her former students and colleagues – especially in the Script Analysis course – provided a strong Adler influence on the program. I will also recall workshops I have taken in Meisner technique.

I supplement my own experience by conducting interviews with teachers who employ these practices, including Bogart. This was originally intended to be a much larger part of my methodology as well, but due to travel restrictions and a growing fatigue of virtual meetings cited by several potential interlocutors, I have not been able to speak with nearly as many practitioners as I had hoped. Still, correspondence with Bogart and a real-time virtual interview with a former student of Overlie figure prominently in my analysis. Hopefully, future iterations of this work will include conversations with a greater variety of pedagogues, some of the playwrights whose work I analyze, as well as actors and directors who have worked on the pieces. I think these conversations would illuminate the ways in which this training continues to morph as it disseminates, what these playwrights think their work asks of the actor, and how creative teams have worked to meet those demands.

Ultimately, the entire project is informed by a poststructuralist theoretical frame. My observations about Stanislavskian modernism are rooted in the work of feminist, queer, critical race, and postcolonial scholarship. These discourses do not explicitly connect their critiques of the System and Method to modernism, hence the need for me to do so; still the connection would be less clear without this work that has gone before. Conversely, Overlie and Bogart have explicitly identified their work on viewpoints trainings with the discourse of postmodernism as though the connection were a matter of fact. My task here is to situate viewpoints trainings more specifically within that discourse in order to demonstrate its sympathy with the poststructuralist theories whose critiques of the System and Method I mention above.

Potential Benefits

I see two major contributions to the field potentially coming from this study. The first is that I have sought to provide a theoretical unity among several strands of critique of the dominant modes of actor training that have come from feminist, queer, and critical race discourses in recent years. Each of these has identified practical ways in which Stanislavski-based training excludes people and ways of thinking from full participation. Through this theoretical unity, I hope to bolster those arguments for diversifying acting pedagogy, especially in the academy, by showing that these flaws are not incidental, but part of the structure of these techniques. The second is to position viewpoints trainings as possible alternatives and demonstrate their affinity with emergent feminist, queer, and BIPOC modes of actor training.[23] Among popular alternatives to System and Method based trainings being practiced in the United States, viewpoints trainings are unique in both their complete separation from the dominant

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[23] In addition to *Black Acting Methods*, mentioned elsewhere in this introduction, I would eventually like to read Viewpoints training for compatibility with Gina Young's Feminist Acting Classes, the forthcoming anthology, *Latinx Acting Methods: Critical Approaches and Culturally Inclusive Pedagogies*, and Lisa Peck's forthcoming *Act Like a Feminist: Towards a Critical Acting Pedagogy*, none of which are presently available.

forms and its establishment of coherent curricula. Yet aside from the training offered by SITI Company, The Viewpoints is generally not considered as a stand-alone method of actor training. Rather, it is practiced as a warm-up activity before real training begins, or at best, as a pathway to making devised work. Hopefully, this study is a step toward acknowledging viewpoints trainings as viable alternatives to the dominant forms.

The inspiration for this study springs from my long-held opinion that since the mid-20th century popular interest in theatre has declined in the United States, and that one reason for that decline is the institution's insistence on clinging to "realistic" representation. In the late 19th century, realism as a genre was a revolutionary development. Since that time, film and television have emerged as superior media for realistic representation just as the photograph proved superior to painting in this respect. The discipline of painting altered to find styles of presentation where it could do what photography could not – poetic rather than mimetic functions. Theatre has done this too, of course, but popular and commercial theatre have not found the same success with moves away from realism that other artforms have found. These are broad generalizations that I use to articulate my hope that with the emergence of an alternative actor training not bound to the stylistic assumptions of realism, a uniquely theatrical performance practice can thrive on the contemporary stage.

CHAPTER I: THE CONSTRUCTIVE DECONSTRUCTION OF MARY OVERLIE'S SIX

VIEWPOINTS

Space, Shape, Time, Emotion, Movement, Story. It might be tempting to think of these "Six Viewpoints" as a revision of Aristotle's essential, or "natural," qualities of drama: Plot, Character, Thought, Diction, Music, and Spectacle. After all, the premise that "The Viewpoints approach to both dance and theater as physical entities akin to natural landscapes that can be entered and traversed…dedicated to reading the stage as a force of nature"[1] seems to suggest that Overlie is articulating the components which nature dictates constitute a theatrical performance in a way that is similar to Aristotle's codification of the elements of tragedy. For Aristotle, drama is a mimetic artform, the object of its mimesis is human action, and the genre came to rest in the form he describes "because it had attained its natural state."[2] Such a premise implies that to neglect or omit one of these components is to render the final product a less-accurate imitation of nature, and therefore inferior. If indeed Overlie is conceiving performance in this way, it hardly seems that she has engaged in an act of deconstructing metanarratives to reveal their foundation in culture as opposed to nature. Rather, she has offered a re-mixed metanarrative under the guise of postmodernist indeterminacy. It raises the question: has Overlie fallen into the all-too-common trap for postmodernists of replacing one totalizing narrative with another? Though they address their object with similar-sounding language to ground their observations in its natural qualities, the reading that Overlie moves to supplant Aristotle's universalizing narrative on drama with one of her own would mischaracterize the effect of The Six Viewpoints as a performance pedagogy.

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[1] Overlie, Mary. *Standing in Space: The Six Viewpoints Theory and Practice.* (Billings, MT, Fallon Press, 2016), vii.
[2] Aristotle. *Poetics.* Translated by Malcolm Heath. (London, Penguin Classics, 1996), 8.

A fine point, one that is easily overlooked, is that Aristotle was not setting down a rubric by which a performance could qualify as theatre, or as poetic art. While contemporary readers may prefer to think of drama as a medium of performance, *Poetics* was describing the constituent parts of the best tragic dramas of its time from the perspective of a literary critic. Comedies, dances, and other modes of performance began to be judged under these criteria centuries later, when neoclassical artists used Aristotle as evidence to convince ecclesiastical officials that the performing arts were not inherently immoral.[3] Overlie, on the other hand, is explicitly addressing The Six Viewpoints to performance, and a much broader spectrum of performance than only dramatic tragedy. Yet while Aristotle formulates the stage as a site where a text's mimesis of nature is embodied by actors and Overlie conversely implies that the stage itself mimics "natural landscapes," they seem to agree that there are essential elements, dictated by nature, to which all staged material must conform. For Overlie, a "card-carrying postmodernist,"[4] such an assertion seems contrary. My purpose in this chapter is to reconcile the metaphysical position that Overlie's Six Viewpoints exist *a priori* and independent of their application to a given performance with the postmodernist epistemology that rejects the idea that there are "natural" truths, or at least that it is possible to know them.

In pursuit of this objective, in this chapter I scrutinize Overlie's claims about the Six Viewpoints and attempt to nuance the position I have laid out above. What I hope will become clear is that the Six Viewpoints are not so much a prescription for how performance is to be made, but a description of how performance can be conceived and experienced. I place The Six Viewpoints within the context of Overlie's artistic influences and consider how they manifest themselves in Overlie's own work, both as a creative artist and as a teacher. Placing those

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[3] Brockett, Oscar and Franklin J. Hildy. *History of the Theatre.* 8th ed., (Boston, Allyn and Bacon, 1999), 126.
[4] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 89.

findings in dialogue with the postmodern epistemology that was gathering momentum in the 1970s and 80s, I identify significant overlaps, if not alliances. In the end, it is evident that Overlie has indeed created a structure, but one that exists to deconstruct – to dismantle other structures. It is a structure that the postmodern field of performance studies can deploy to untangle performance from theatre, and theatre from drama. It is a structure that does not banish Aristotelean logic to the attic but makes space on the table alongside it.

The Six Viewpoints: Substance and Structure

In her writing on the subject, Overlie refers to The Six Viewpoints – Space, Shape, Time, Emotion, Movement, and Story – in a variety of ways: as Viewpoints of course, but also as voices, materials, languages, and as the acronym the SSTEMS. Significantly, she does not refer to them as "tools" for artists to "use" as Anne Bogart and Tina Landau sometimes do. At first, the significance of these descriptors, particularly the choice between calling the Viewpoints materials as opposed to tools, may not seem especially meaningful. Materials and tools are both things people use in the making of new things. Yet materials, such as a piece of cloth, will become part of the final product. Tools will not. The cloth that I use to make a shirt might move in ways I don't anticipate as I stitch it, so I use a tool – a pin – to hold the fabric in place as I sew. The tool is a temporary means by which I make the material do my bidding. The implications of this distinction will come into focus during my discussion of Bogart and Landau's version of the Viewpoints in the next chapter. Suffice it to say that for Overlie, these materials, the SSTEMS, move independently of the artist throughout any given performance. They are co-producing agents with which the performer learns to be in dialogue rather than to manipulate.
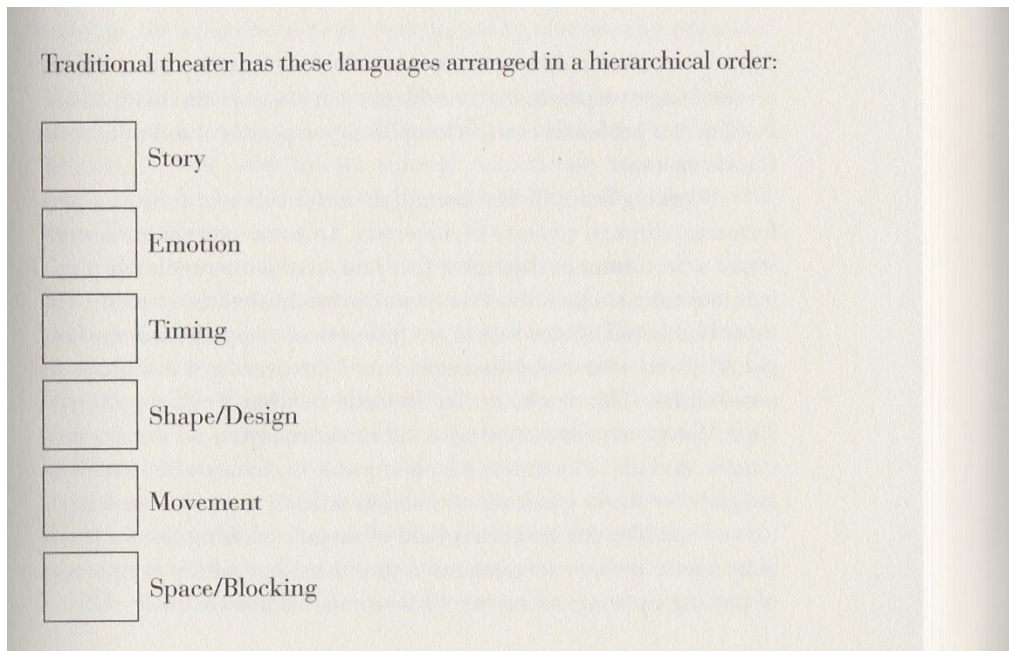
In her first publication outlining The Six Viewpoints, an essay in Arthur Bartow's edited anthology, *Training of the American Actor,* Overlie claims that all performance is made from these six "existing materials."[5] The modern realistic theatre, which she terms "Solid-State Theater," sought to integrate Space, Shape, Time, Emotion, and Movement into a logical hierarchy at the service of Story – which Lyotard would call Narrative and Aristotle would call Plot. Such a hierarchy would leave no doubt in the minds of the audience as to the "definitive message" of the performance and obscure the existence of the individual materials coming together to create that message (See fig. 1.1-1.2). In these first two figures, Overlie illustrates the rigid hierarchy in which the "solid state" theatre organizes the materials of performance, the Six Viewpoints. This hierarchy conditions the audience to believe that as long as they perceive the Story, they have perceived all that the performance has to offer. Overlie argues that the postmodern theatre of the 1960s and 70s is no longer interested in clear or definitive narratives. Instead, it seeks "inclusiveness and equality of information,"[6] and pursues that objective by separating the materials of art from one another and removing the hierarchy typically imposed upon them (See fig. 1.3-1.4). In figure three, the traditional hierarchy is flattened out. No single viewpoint supersedes any of the others. Ultimately, in figure four, the Six Viewpoints are set free, moving independently, yet always in relationships with one another.

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[5] Overlie, Mary. "The Six Viewpoints." *Training the American Actor.* Ed. Arthur Bartow (New York, Theatre Communications Group, 2006), 188.
[6] Overlie. "The Six Viewpoints." 192.

Traditional theater has these languages arranged in a hierarchical order:

☐ Story

☐ Emotion

☐ Timing

☐ Shape/Design

☐ Movement

☐ Space/Blocking

Figure 1.1: Illustration of the "traditional" hierarchy of theatrical elements

THE SIX VIEWPOINTS

SOLID-STATE THEATER

Theater and acting training based on using all six languages simultaneously.
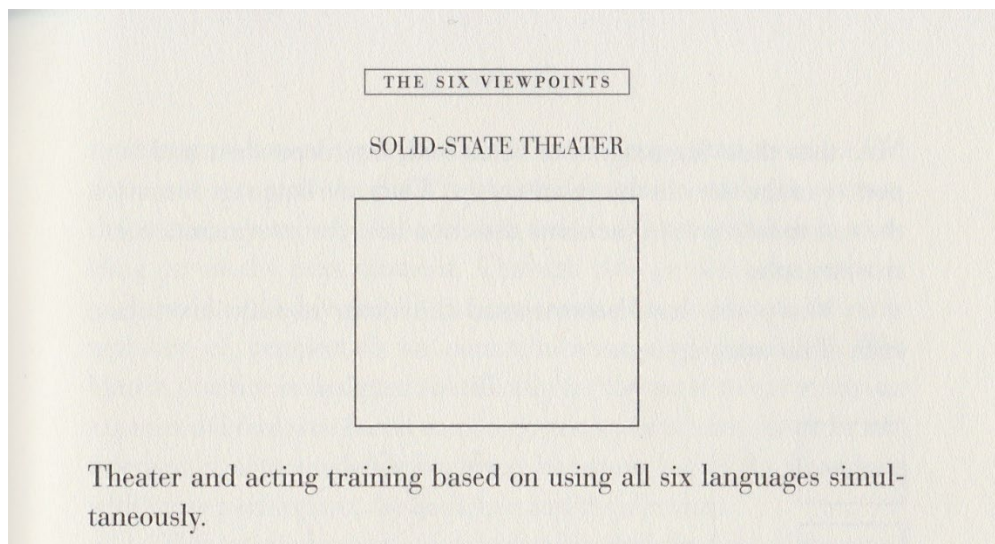
Figure 1.2: The illusion created by "solid state theater" in which the individual materials of performance are rendered invisible beneath the Story
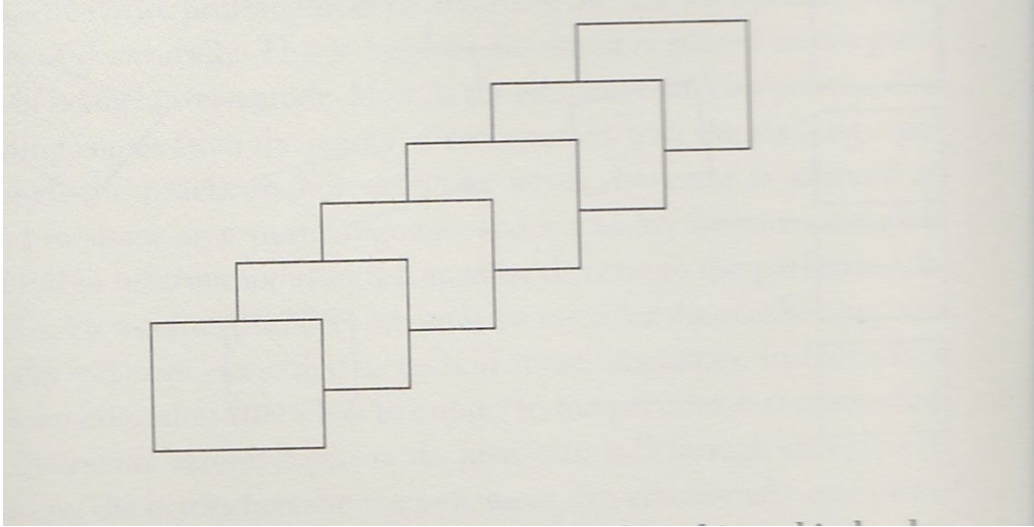
Figure 1.3: Training in the Six Viewpoints allows the actor to examine the materials independently of one another and of the traditional hierarchy.
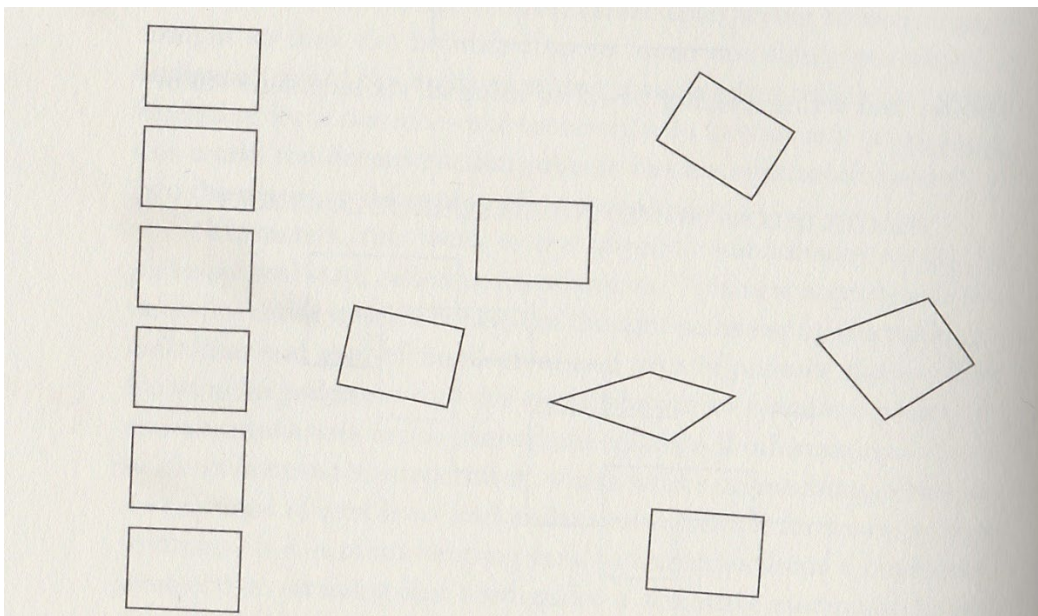
Figure 1.4:[7] The Six Viewpoints freed from not only the traditional hierarchy, but from any hierarchy at all.

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[7]All figures in this section excerpted from Overlie. "The Six Viewpoints." 193-4.

Associating each of these materials with a single "primary practice" for the artist, Overlie presents a clearer process for deconstructing the traditional theatrical hierarchy and isolating each Viewpoint from the others than she does in her monograph on the subject. Having already done this work, the book, *Standing in Space* (2016)*,* is able to offer a more circumspect view of how Overlie teaches each of these "languages" to her students, what other artists have accomplished in their unique dialogues with them, and the variety of ways in which the artist might consider Space, Shape, Time, Emotion, Movement, and Story beyond the obvious. Yet *Standing in Space* is not merely an expansion of Overlie's attempt to separate the Six Viewpoints from one another. It substantively expands the curriculum of Six Viewpoints training, giving the student/artist a series of perspectives from which to engage the SSTEMS.

Overlie calls these perspectives "laboratories" and claims they "focus attention on philosophical concepts that are used to disintegrate and then reintegrate performance."[8] Collectively, these nine laboratories – News of a Difference, Deconstruction, The Horizontal, Postmodernism, Reification, The Piano, The Matrix, Doing the Unnecessary, and The Original Anarchist - form "the bridge." Overlie argues that "The Bridge forms a sort of double helix with the six materials by initiating discussions that reach beyond simply identifying the material structure of performance."[9] The terminology is mixed, the imagery is muddled, and the content is esoteric, but it is helpful to imagine that working across this bridge transports the student/artist from mere awareness of the Viewpoints to artistic facility with them. Dr. Tony Perucci, a former student of Overlie's, claims that the laboratories "for a long time were called 'the frames' as in the bridge support."[10] This term is also useful because it gives the image of a frame that puts a

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[8] Overlie. *Standing in Space.*67.
[9] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 67.
[10] Perucci, Tony, interview by author, Zoom, July 21, 2021.

border on a painting, photograph, or window – a context for viewing. Each laboratory along the bridge then, offers a new frame through which the student/artist may observe experiments with the SSTEMS. By the time they reach the final frame on the bridge, which Overlie calls The Original Anarchist,[11] the artist no longer needs to have structure imposed upon them. They can "rely on their own judgement; confident enough to wait until the positive ideas or action are clear [sic], able to be generous; able to interact on a vast variety of planes of communication…able to be cooperative without being locked into an arbitrary unity."[12] Such could be said to be the objective of postmodern art and of deconstructive theory in the postmodern era more broadly.

Historical Context

Postmodernity and postmodernist art as Overlie and her contemporaries came to know them, emerge from a variety of socioeconomic, political, and aesthetic narratives. Foundational among these was the existence of a natural "World Order" of nations: Western capitalism constituted a "First World," ideologically superior to both the communist "Second World" and the as-yet-preindustrial "Third World." The fact of this superiority was unquestionable in the West, and yet needed to be enforced through a policy of containment.[13] The dramatic conflict between the First and Second Worlds was narrativized as a Cold War, one whose battle lines were drawn with metaphorical curtains of iron and bamboo; but, in his study of postmodern theatre, Johannes Birringer reminds readers that real space was reconfigured as well: "The Berlin Wall with its borderline, a fortified no-man's land that encloses and doubles the condition of the city, can be seen as a complex image of our postmodernity. The Wall constructs boundaries of

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[11] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 123.
[12] Overlie. *Standing in Space*. 124-5.
[13] Though I use this term in reference to the Truman Doctrine and its commitment to opposing the spread of communism in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, Bruce McConachie has also used this term to describe a cultural mindset in the Cold War US, which studies in cognitive science have suggested is characterized by binary, essentialist thinking; that activities were American or Un-American, for example.

difference but also contorts space in a way that postpones a clear territorial or categorical 'break' as long as the city remains the east of the west and the west of the east."[14] The construction of these boundaries, material and ideological, allowed the heat of this conflict to be transferred to theatres of war in the Third World: Vietnam, Afghanistan, Cuba, Nicaragua. It allowed for imperial powers on both sides to recast themselves in the role of liberators: "Postmodernism in this sense could be called a retrospective process in which a myth or imaginary construction as a mode of cultural (re)production is tied to the physiognomy of modern industrial society and to the historical trajectory of its political and aesthetic transformations." [15] Though in this context, I might change Birringer's "postmodernism" to "postmodernity;" industrial society constructs these myths to make postmodern structures of power appear natural while postmodernism seeks to deconstruct those myths to reveal their artifice.

More specifically, postmodernist art of this time is reacting to modernist artistic conventions that propped up the totalizing mythologies of both democracy and communism. Lyotard identifies a set of intellectual and artistic movements taking place in the 1970s that urge an end to experimentation and diversity in favor of "a politics of totalitarian surveillance in the face of nuclear warfare threats." He argues that this embrace of totalitarianism is echoed in Habermas' fear that the "totality of life" is being "splintered" and that the remedy for this splintering is an artistic culture that provides unity in which aesthetic experience is no longer expressed in "judgements of taste," but is "put in relation to the problems of existence."[16] Habermas' problematic assumption, which Lyotard gestures toward, is that the "problems of existence" are the same for all humankind. If they were, it might be possible for them to be

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[14] Birringer, Johannes. *Theatre Theory, Postmodernism.* (Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 1991), 2.
[15] Birringer, Johannes. *Theatre, Theory, Postmodernism.*2.
[16] Lyotard, Jean-Francois. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge.* Translated by Régis Durand. (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 72.

represented in their totality through "realistic" mimetic representation. Lyotard suspects that institutional calls from each side of the Cold War for artists to suspend experimentation and adhere to its particular version of realism arise out of a desire "for order, a desire for unity, for identity, for security," not, as they may pretend, due to the attainment of perfect artistic expression.[17] Jameson likens the endeavor to homogenize the postmodern aesthetic and intellectual landscape to "the massive and repressive Order of Aristotle and his successors," against which nonhegemonic Greek philosophies such as Stoicism, Cynicism, and Sophistry mounted a "guerrilla war of the marginals, the foreigners, the non-successors."[18] Now, as in the ancient world, the Aristotelean logic of unity is received, endorsed as natural, while alternative artistic modes are relegated to the margin.

It is fitting then, that Birringer argues: "the very notion of a dominant or unified culture, a traditional notion traceable back to historical idealizations of the theatre of the Athenian *polis*, will become obsolete," that the still-hegemonic Aristotelean theatrical structure would come under a "guerilla" assault from feminist and racially minoritized artistic communities. Yet, while Hans-Thies Lehman observes that these marginalized performance traditions all have "the power to question and destabilize the spectator's construction of identity and the 'other' – more so than realist mimetic drama, which remains caught in representation and thus often reproduces prevailing ideologies,"[19] postmodernist artistic practice was not limited to those communities alone.[20] In East Berlin, Heiner Müller's fragmented dramaturgy critiqued the false teleology of Aristotelian drama, while in the United States, Robert Wilson's theatre of images replaced Plot

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[17] Lyotard. *The Postmodern Condition.* 73.
[18] Jameson, Fredric. Foreward to *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge.* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xix.
[19] Lehman, Hans-Thies. *Postdramatic Theatre.* Translated by Karen Jürs-Munby. (London, Routledge, 2006), 5.
[20] Birringer, Johannes. *Theatre, Theory, Postmodernism.* xi.

and Character with Spectacle and Music at the top of the theatrical hierarchy. Both of these artists operate from white male positionalities; still both oppose the imposition of false unity of aesthetics through deconstructive practices.

For the most part, however, poststructuralist criticism - which takes aim at the same hegemonic structures - is launched from positions of alterity. Jaques Derrida, the Jewish-Algerian philosopher, articulates the necessity for deconstructing the structures of written language generally. For Derrida, hegemonic powers falsely posit orthographic writing as natural signifiers for diacritical sounds. In doing so, these powers hope to arrest divergent evolutionary processes of spoken language.[21] The implication is, that by preserving language as it is in their moment of dominance, institutions can maintain control over domestic operations and export their language abroad as an instrument of imperialism. This also has the effect of placing those geographically further from the seat of institutional control at the disadvantage of not having the proper relationship between spelling and pronunciation, and therefore creates a justification for keeping power consolidated. This is a process with which Derrida would likely have personal experience.

As a teenager from the spacious prairies of Montana arriving in San Francisco in the late 1960s, Overlie was not aware of Lyotard, Jameson, Derrida, or poststructuralism in any sense. How could she be? Most of that work had yet to be written, let alone translated into English. Instead, she encountered Yvonne Rainer and Barbara Dilley, who had journeyed West after being members of the Judson Dance Theater in New York. These dancers, perhaps Rainer most of all, were the pioneers of the "post-modern" dance movement. Sally Banes, in the introduction to a revised edition of her foundational work, *Terpsichore in Sneakers* argues that Rainer and the

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[21] Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology.* Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 35-42.

rest applied the term "post-modern" to their work in order to signal a temporal and aesthetic

break with the modern dance of the early to mid-twentieth century rather than an alliance with

the philosophical postmodernism of which they were likely unaware. As discussed in my

introduction, Banes argues that modern dance was never truly modern*ist* because it does not task

itself with identifying the essence of the artform in the way that modernist painting, specifically

abstract expressionism, does. Banes perceives a move toward abstract expressionism in the

"post-modern" dance of practitioners and concludes that the work of the Judson Dance Theater is

more closely aligned with the modernist aesthetic than with philosophical postmodernism.[22]

Moreover, Merce Cunningham's description of his work as a search for "pure dance" suggest

that his aim is to locate the essential qualities of his artform. More than three decades after

Banes' revisions, the simultaneous primitivism and avant-gardism which she recognizes in

modern dance seem much more comfortably aligned with the theatrical modernism of Yeats,

Artaud, and Grotowski, thus allowing post-modern dance to feel truly postmodern.[23]

The significance of the Judson Church group has been well-chronicled, but my particular

interest is in how it emerged at a time when there was supposedly a "lack of theaters in New

York that are both suitable and available for dancing and dancewatching," and "Most dance

people, be they of balletic or modern persuasions, acknowledge this deficiency and feel

themselves limited by it."[24] This claim comes from a 1964 column in *The New York Times* which

simultaneously praises and patronizes the group for their ability to "tailor their dances to fit the

limitations of the performing area." The author, Allen Hughes, assumes that the Judson Church

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[22] Banes, Sally. *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance.* (Middletown, CT, Wesleyan University Press, 1987), xiii-xv.

[23] Ramsay Burt has made this argument in greater detail in his 2006 book, *Judson Dance Theater: Performative Traces.*

[24] Hughes, Allen. "At home Anywhere: Avant-Garde Dancers Adjust to Anything." *New York Times (1923-Current File),* Feb 09, 1964. https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.bgsu.edu/historical-newspapers/at-home-anywhere/docview/115683826/se-2?accountid=26417.

dancers could not secure a "real" venue to perform in, so they made do with whatever space they could find. What Hughes refuses to recognize is that for Judson group, it is the traditional theatre space that is hampered by limitations. It is constructed to suit the aesthetic needs of dance forms in which a choreographer-auteur controls every move the dancers make so as to manipulate the attention of the spectator. Rather, the work of the Judson group is collaborative, chaotic, improvisational, and indeterminate. It requires a space that is not beholden to the ways in which performers and spectators are trained to recognize hierarchical positions under the proscenium arch.

These artists understood without articulating the semiotician's concept of "language games" and applied them in time and space. Lyotard, drawing upon Wittgenstein, explains that speech acts fall into a variety of categories, and that in order to make a given type of statement, certain conditions must be met; rules must be followed. These rules create a metanarrative about language, what it is, how it is used, and what is capable of. Yet Lyotard observes that these rules, and the moves they allow, are not fixed: "A move can be made for the sheer pleasure of its invention: what else is involved in that labor of language harassment undertaken by popular speech and literature? Great joy is had in the endless invention of turns of phrase, of words and meanings, the process behind the evolution of language on the level of *parole*." [25] In other words, although the rules of a language are defined prior to the birth of a given individual, those rules cannot anticipate all of the possible arrangements of phonemes in that language. Nor do the rules preclude one from inventing new uses for words, incorporating words from other languages, or outright inventing new words. The rules handed down by the metanarratives governing the use of space and time in art are similarly pliable. In classical and modern dance forms, the

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[25] Lyotard, Jean-Francois. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge.* Translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 9.

metanarrative was that to perform dance, a proscenium theatre space was required, or at least preferred. By bringing dance to other kinds of spaces – gymnasiums, art galleries, out in the woods on somebody's farm in New Jersey – these postmodern dancers incorporated new moves for both the dancers and the audience into the artform. I mean this both in the Lyotardian sense that "new moves" were possible in the language game of dance, and the literal sense that movements which would not have qualified as dance before, now could. That is what Cunningham and his cohort meant by a search for "pure dance." The Judson Church Group, reconceived the dance space and generated new possibilities for dance moves. Rainer and Dilley, by introducing these ideas to Overlie, with her experience living in open space, "deconstructed dance in some strange way, and in the process the Viewpoints fell on the floor."[26]

When Rainer and Dilley returned to SoHo in 1970, Overlie came along to join Dilley's new improvisational dance company, Natural History of the American Dancer. Both in her writings and in interviews, Overlie describes an incident in which each of the dancers in the company made a solo to introduce themselves to the group. Overlie says she decided it would "smart and 'avant-garde'" to do a solo outdoors. She does not describe the dance she made, but the piece did not have the effect she had hoped for. After an uncomfortable silence, Rachel Lew, another member of the company asked, "Do you know where you are?" After Overlie's confused and panicked response, the other dancer explained: "You are about two feet from the building behind you, three-quarters up the block, and 12 feet from the building across the street."[27] Evidently, Overlie's solo had not considered the buildings and streets as delimiting markers for

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[26] Overlie, Mary. Interview by Anne Bogart, *Conversations With Anne.* (New York, Theatre Communications Group, 2012), 476.
[27] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 10.

her performance space. It was a revelation for Overlie, and a foundational moment in the development of the Six Viewpoints.

Lew's comment reveals the flaw in Allen Hughes' *New York Times* review of the Judson Church dancers. Their work did not simply place the dances they wanted to do in the spaces they had access to when no "suitable" dance space was available. Nor were they using nontraditional spaces simply for the sake of contrariety. It was an act of guerilla warfare such as Jameson described, rejecting traditional spaces and purposefully making dances that placed Movement and Space in conversation with one another. Although the Story of their dances may not be one that adheres to the Aristotelean conventions of Plot, in which one event directly causes the next in a way that is easily surveyable (as modernist works such as Martha Graham's always do), the Movement, Shape, Emotion, and Space used by each dance unfolds through Time using its own carefully selected logic. It is an artistic methodology designed to deconstruct the Aristotelean hierarchy leaving the pieces available to be applied in ways which had previously been prohibited.

In the next section, I explore the philosophical impulse toward deconstruction which motivates Overlie's teaching; I conclude this chapter with an exploration of the Six Viewpoints in practice, the skills that Viewpoints-trained performers value, and the ways in which they apply those skills to satisfy a deconstructive artistic impulse.

Postmodern Theory and Viewpoints Practice

There is a degree to which Overlie's articulation of the Six Viewpoints does not escape the essentialist language of modernism. She describes performance as "a dialogue with the natural elements themselves,"[28] and that these natural elements are "universal languages."[29] It

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[28] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* xi.
[29] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 50.

might be tempting to argue that Overlie errs or is insufficiently precise in her description of the Viewpoints as a postmodern structure. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that there is a gap between how the artists and the philosophers define the term, or that there are multiple ways of understanding distinctions between postmodernity and postmodernism. Perucci, who, in addition to being a former student of Overlie's is a leading member of the Mary Overlie Legacy Project Team, points out that the relationship between the postmodern artists of Overlie's generation and the scholars of postmodernism with whom they were contemporary was one of mutual indifference at best: "for the most part [post-modern dancers including Overlie] were actively disinterested in high theory…and then the French [philosophers], I mean, they had no idea what was going on in American performing arts and you can see this in the writing for the most part."[30] With that in mind, I argue that it is neither the case that Overlie errs, nor that there is a significant gap in understanding of terms. Instead, it is a case of postmodern conditions operating in different areas of study inspiring similar conclusions reached by traversing different pathways.

The lack of proliferation of French poststructuralist discourse among postmodern dance artists in the 1970s United States is no reason to suspect antipathy between the two. As I mentioned above, what there was of poststructuralist discourse had yet to make its way across the Atlantic by this time. Perucci asserts that once it did, people who worked with Overlie, or read early drafts of her manuscript, pointed out how her use of the word deconstruction was similar to Derrida's, so she eventually became familiar with that work.[31] Moreover, the distrust between theory and practice is not unique to this time and situation, yet since both are created by and respond to the increasingly globalized culture of postwar capitalism, they frequently reach similar conclusions.

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[30] Perucci interview.
[31] Perucci interview.

In that light, while poststructuralist philosophy and postmodernist practice seem to be at odds with declaring that the SSTEMS are "natural elements" of performance and/or "universal languages" through which artists engage in dialogue, a deconstructive reading offers different possibilities. The idea that performance has a set of "natural elements" may suggest that the presence of all those elements is necessary and sufficient for performance to have occurred, just as two hydrogen atoms and an oxygen atom, nothing more or less, are required to make a water molecule. As I have already argued, this is how Aristotle positions his elements of Tragedy: for Tragedy to occur, there must be Plot, Character, Thought, Diction, Music, and Spectacle. The absence of any of these elements results in a lesser version of Tragedy, if Tragedy can be said to have occurred at all. This type of certainty and dogmatism is not how Overlie positions the SSTEMS.

The first word of the introduction to *Standing in Space* is "Materials."[32] The word has a strong denotation of the physical world: materials are of matter, which can neither be created nor destroyed, only rearranged. A plot, a character, or a turn of phrase is invented by the poet, but Space, Shape, Time, Emotion, Movement, and Story exist in the physical world of their own accord, whether the poet chooses to acknowledge them or not. A performance that moves to exclude any of these may strengthen the awareness of the excluded material by drawing attention to its absence. It may be challenging to think of Emotion as a physical material, but Richard Hornby unpacks it well in *The End of Acting: A Radical View*: "I can hide the workings of my mind, as I would if I told a lie, just as I can hide my emotions by suppressing them. But…Most of the time, the mind is not hidden." The actor may suppress or disguise their emotions, but they can never be eradicated. Emotions and the physical sensations that human beings experience as a

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[32] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 3

result of their emotions, are always already present in the body. As such, they are physical

materials that cannot be separated from any performance. "You do not first have to feel

something 'inside,' and then merely 'express' the emotion outside."[33]

The evidence to support my reading is strongest in Overlie's chapter on Story, which she

is adamant is not equivalent to Plot. For Aristotle, the absence of Plot from a work is absolutely

disqualifying for aspiring tragedians. Overlie, on the other hand, does not insist upon a sequential

narrative or even a "structure of events"[34] in order to have a Story.[35] Rather, she "insisted that

there was Story in abstraction." When an artist intends their work to be completely devoid of

"narrative logic," Overlie argues that an audience member may impose one anyway. Even if the

artist is successful in performing an absence of narrative, the "enormous effort to have no Story

is itself the Logic."[36] Story, in this case, is represented in the performance by its absence, and

because Overlie argues that each performance creates its own temporary hierarchy for its

component parts to exist in, the absence of one in a given performance may indicate its outsized

importance to that work.

Overlie does not provide much description of the ways in which the other five

Viewpoints might impact a performance when the artist endeavors to exclude them, though she

does give a brief nod to the "kinetic sensation" of stillness amidst her discussion of Movement.[37]

In the case of Emotion, it seems particularly postmodern to imagine its absence as detachment or

distance and Overlie's strong association of Emotion with presence lends credibility to that

impulse. The actor may not be imitating the overt signs of Emotion, as a Strasbergian actor

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[33] Hornby, Richard. *The End of Acting: A Radical View.* (New York, Applause Books, 1992), 113.
[34] Aristotle uses the phrase "structure of events" to describe Plot, which seems to absolve the poet from adhering to a sequential order, but by asserting that "well-being or its opposite ill-being" are the ultimate outcome of the structure of events implies that sequence is necessary after all.
[35] Aristotle. *Poetics.* 11.
[36] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 46.
[37] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 36.

would, but as I argue above, there will still be emotions present in their body and in the bodies of the audience. Time may be negated in performance either by extreme brevity or indeterminacy, both of which have been explored in postmodern performance. Space and Shape present interesting questions about the possibility of their elimination which may provide more insight regarding Overlie's claim to the abolition of hierarchy from her practice.

The first question I would pose: "Are Space and Shape two discrete materials?" It appears the Shape of a body or an object is inexorably tied to the space it occupies. Anne Bogart and Tina Landau imply this in their version of the Viewpoints, which I discuss in the next chapter. Why then, does Overlie articulate these two as separate from one another? It is certainly possible to think of Shape as the way in which an artist has chosen to arrange bodies or objects in Space. At the same time, however, it is also possible to think of Space as defined by how bodies or objects are circumscribed around it. It seems that Rachel Lew was asking Overlie to consider Space in this way in her comment on Overlie's outdoor solo mentioned above. Both ways of conceiving the relationship are possible, and both are useful to the artist. It is true of the organization of this page. The shape of the paper, (perhaps "paper" if the reading takes place on a digital page) an eight-and-a-half by eleven-inch rectangle, defines the area where the writing takes place. The organization of shapes *on* the paper is where meaning is conveyed, and that meaning can be literal or abstract. If I type a colon, hyphen, and close parenthesis, one after another, I have presumably arranged shapes in a nonsensical way. :-). Shape and Space work together to mutually define each other. Neither can be said to be fully independent from, nor superior to, the other. This ends up being true for the relationships among all of the Six Viewpoints.

Overlie asks her reader to test this theory in her "News of a Difference" laboratory, the concept of which "expands awareness through a physical interrogation that collects miniscule, seemingly useless, details."[38] She derives this concept from Transcendental Meditation practices in which the practitioner notices greater detail through prolonged investigation of a given structure. In the example above, examining a shape brings awareness of both the Space it contains as well as the space beyond its borders. Conversely, examining a Space brings awareness of the Shapes created by bodies and objects within. The Emotional practice of meditation brings awareness of how the interior Space of bodies shifts over Time; on the microscopic level, Emotions take up Space in our brains and bodies. The process also works in reverse: zoom out far enough, and one becomes aware that the Movement of the Earth over Time means that my house is not in the stable location I imagine it to be. If that example is overly concerned with the cosmic, then consider how the edifice will crumble and decay over time. Thus, none of the individual Viewpoints can be completely detached from the others even if the artist's focus may be trained upon them one at a time. The boundaries are porous and resistant to the rigid differentiation that modernity wants to impose on the world.

The second question is "Is performance possible without Space and/or Shape – can they be absent in the way that the other Viewpoints can?" At the time of this writing, in the Fall of 2021, this question has recently become complicated in a profound way. A massive global pandemic has brought about the closure of traditional theatres as well as a wide variety of other venues in which people share Space. Not only performing artists, but workers of all stripes have had to become accustomed to performing in spaces which elide the physical distance between the bodies in them and reducing our experience of one another to two-dimensional shapes. Much of

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[38] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 69.

the conversation surrounding this newly commonplace mode of mediated, yet live performance has revolved around fatigue and dissatisfaction. From what I have seen, this is due to persistent attempts to recreate familiar types of performance in these new virtual spaces. An examination of these "rooms" at the microscopic level of News of a Difference may reveal a way in which this absence of distance as a factor in Space can be used to generate a performance logic that resonates among my contemporaries the way that nontheatrical spaces did for Overlie's in the 1970s.

Overlie's second claim, that the Six Viewpoints are "universal languages," also carries the baggage of modernist essentialism. Yet, when examined in context, the phrase carries a different meaning from its colloquial usage. Overlie frequently uses linguistic metaphors to describe her work: "I can speak space. A lot of people who can do Viewpoints can speak space,"[39] is exemplary of the kind of claim she makes about the linguistic qualities of the SSTEMS. It has a Saussurian sensibility in it, suggesting that the physical material of space can be theorized as a linguistic sign. This, in and of itself, does not pose a challenge to Overlie's claims about the Viewpoints as a postmodern form of training. The idea that these languages are somehow "universal," however, does carry with it some of the more troubling connotations of modernism – to what degree is universality imposed upon colonized communities? To what degree does the experience of the "universal" translate from individual to individual? If the speech or writing of linguistic signs is "universal," does it necessarily follow that the reading of those signs is also?

Derrida provides a possible explanation. Considering alphabetic writing, or the arbitrary binding of phonemes to written characters, he explores the limits of these arbitrary assignments.

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[39] Overlie. Interview by Anne Bogart, *Conversations With Anne.* 476.

The number and variety of these characters is limited by and organized within the phonetic structure of the spoken language it comes from: "As phonetic writing, [alphabetic writing] keeps an essential relationship to the presence of a speaking subject in *general*."[40] Still, there are a greater number of phonemes in a given language than there are characters that are authorized to describe them. There are a greater number of phonemes that can be created by a human voice than become codified by speaking subjects into any given language. Yet there are a finite number of phonemes that can be produced by a human voice. It may be said then, that those phonemes approach nearer to universality than any structured language allows. Phonemes are the materials that humans have access to in order to create language; Space, Shape, Time, Emotion, Movement, and Story, which Overlie also refers to as materials, are those which we have access to in order to create performances. Not all articulations of those materials could be used in a performance, or even in a style or genre of performance. Each limits the materials that it will use, and their mode of application, in the way that each language limits the sounds that it will use. Thus, when Overlie tells Anne Bogart that she "speaks space," [41] she means that she has developed a spatial vocabulary, which may be different from the one developed by another Viewpoints practitioner, but recognizable as cognates across languages.

Viewed in this way, perhaps Perucci clarifies the relationship by insisting that the Six Viewpoints are not like written languages, which Derrida has observed are a way for people to have power over language and preserve it so as to sustain their power over others. Rather, the SSTEMS are not "more things that you can manipulate."[42] They are "first and foremost about how you relate to those materials. That the performance space, event, studio is an active

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[40] Derrida. *Of Grammatology.* 303. Original emphasis.
[41] Overlie. Interview by Anne Bogart, *Conversations With Anne.* 476.
[42] Perucci Interview.

ecology," akin to how Derrida imagines spoken language to be, when untethered by writing. Perucci identifies the chilling influence of power here as well: "If you think about industrial capitalism's interference with ecologies, that we know what the danger is," of trying to impose structure on forces of nature. Ideology has imposed structure upon Space, Shape, Time, Emotion, Movement, and Story, but Overlie wants the Viewpoints-trained performer to deconstruct that structure, notice that those materials predate human existence, and try to engage with them as materials rather than tools. Perucci believes that "it makes it much more radical…than even other kinds of post-method acting approaches, because it's fundamentally not about mastery. It's anti-mastery and anti-control." It places the materials on a plane of equal importance with the performer, rather than in the position of being subjugated. In doing so, it resists the ideological problems that come along with modern concepts of the natural and universal. In the next section, I demonstrate what this looks like in practice.

The Six Viewpoints in Action

To give a clearer sense of how Overlie's Six Viewpoints bring themselves to bear on a performance, what they enable performers to do, and the features of a performance which employs them, I turn to Overlie's 1977 work, *Window Pieces.* This set of short dance explorations was performed by Overlie, Wendell Beavers, and David Warrilow in two street-level windows of the Holly Solomon Gallery in the Soho neighborhood of Manhattan. [43] The piece is over ninety minutes long, so my analysis addresses the piece in general terms of its holistic aesthetic, its philosophical disposition, and affective qualities. With Overlie's explanations of her artistic and pedagogical practices as a guide, I examine how the performers in *Window Pieces* apply each of the Six Viewpoints with an eye toward revealing the skills that

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[43] Overlie, Mary. *Window Pieces.* With Wendell Beavers and David Warrilow. The Mary Overlie Archive, 2021, video, 1:38:53, https://sixviewpoints.com/window-pieces.

these performers exhibit in the making of the work. In later chapters, I seek to identify calls for some of these same skills in scripted works.

Space:

If, as Overlie suggests, the idea of horizontal, or nonhierarchical, composition is less about the complete banishment of structural scaffolds from the performing arts and more about the idea that "Any juxtaposition of the SSTEMS, outside scripts, objects, timings, sources, etc. can be rearranged to form temporary hierarchies,"[44] Space would have to be near the top of the temporary hierarchy that Overlie constructs in the making of *Window Pieces.* The use of space in this piece is the most remarkable thing about it. Overlie's dancers occupy a pair of storefront windows, a space that seems completely wrong for dance. If one were to imagine a typical venue for dance, it would include a great deal of open area for the dancers to move about in. Instead, Overlie examines how bodies move in tight, compacted spaces. Perhaps for a choreographer whose upbringing took place in an environment with abundant space, coming to New York City makes a lack of space compelling. Overlie also uses two adjacent windows in ways that frequently separate the performers from one another, and in the times when all three are in the same window, they carefully avoid both physical and eye contact. This sets up a paradox in which the actors can be both isolated and crowded at the same time, which further evokes the sense of life in New York.

Additionally, the storefront windows separate the performers from the audience in a way that typical dance spaces do not. The setting for this performance is not shared between the performers and the audience. Rather, the audience views the performers through glass, perhaps as though they were exhibits in a museum or items for sale in a department store. Yet, because

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[44] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 79.

the performance takes place during the day, there is light on both sides of the glass and the performers are able to see out. The audience might be justified in feeling as though they are being watched as much as they are doing the watching. Therefore, while the performers are putting themselves on display for the audience in the street, people passing by are also on display through glass – performing for the dancers without consenting to do so.

This brings up another way in which the storefront is different than spaces in which dance performance is usually encountered. There is no barrier to entry. The audience is not self-selected through the purchase of tickets or even the desire to attend a performance. Rather, they are confronted with this performance by virtue of coincidence. The democratization of the performance speaks to both a desire for high art to be available for public consumption rather than reserved for an imagined elite, and to remind the audience that their lives are dictated by chaos however much we may try to impose order on them. These two desires are consistent with a postmodernist philosophy which recognizes that the dicta which govern much of day-to-day existence do not come from nature and thus may be subverted.

The use of an unconventional space demands that the performers do more than merely execute their choreography. They must, as Overlie phrases it, "speak space." Perhaps though, it is more precise to think of "speaking space" a shorthand for speaking *with* Space. A performer who is in conversation with Space understands the amount of space available for performance, how their body fits into it alongside or in between any other solid objects there, and how their presence in the space affects what the audience can perceive. How many walking steps take them from one side of the space to the other? How many running, bounding, or shuffling steps? Can all three performers face the audience directly without touching, or must someone turn in profile or move slightly downstage? If they move downstage, what part of the other performers is

hidden? Does the amount of Space between the performers suggest comfort or tension? Does that change if they rotate toward or away from each other? How does the space change when someone leaves? When someone enters? This is not to say that conventional theatre spaces do not require performers to answer these questions. Rather, the limits of the unconventional space in *Window Pieces* draw attention to themselves and prohibit the space to be used merely as an area to perform from, but as a fourth scene partner for the dancers. Attending to the demands of the space as a co-performer demands a heightened sense of cooperation from the dancers as an ensemble.

<u>Shape:</u>

The narrowness of the storefront space means that for all three dancers to occupy one of the windows at the same time, they must create narrow shapes with their bodies. They make compositions composed of long, lean shapes that reach upward into the vacant space above their heads. Any lateral movement means that one performer is covering or upstaging a peer. In these moments of overlap, the shallowness of the space is most evident; it appears almost two-dimensional so that the spectator is unsure if the performers can go in front or behind without touching. In contrast, when Overlie and Warrilow exit the window to give Beavers an extended solo, they leave him in the extreme stage right portion of the window, still in a tall narrow silhouette, with what now seems like a massive empty space to his left. Slowly, Beavers begins to explore that chasm vacated by his compatriots until he is lunging all the way across it. The space, which seemed infinite upon Overlie and Warrilow's departure, really only allows for one step and a gentle reach of the arm.

When Beavers moves into the center of the window, the spectator may notice that although he retains the same narrow, upright posture he adopted at the beginning, his form

appears to fill much more of the frame. The elbows can come away from the torso when he reaches up. The arms form diagonal lines toward the corners of the window to provide contrast to the vertical lines they were restricted to before. On the other hand, when Beavers moves into a low crouch in the center of the window, the negative space almost threatens to consume him. He appears smaller than ever.

When the performance expands to incorporate the second window, Overlie joins Beavers in a lively duet while Warrilow returns to the first window and stands alone, resuming his long, slender posture. Though he is perhaps only an inch or two taller than Beavers, and five or six inches taller than Overlie, his upright form is so stark in comparison with the knee and waist bends taking place in the second window, in this moment it seems his head nearly scrapes the ceiling. Meanwhile, the figures cut by Overlie and Beavers in their duet echo one another so perfectly and maintain such consistent space between them, it is as though their bodies are magnetic with like poles facing each other.

Not only do the three bodies create shapes individually, they also create shapes together. When the three performers inhabit one window together, for example, the order that they stand in changes the shape of the negative space visible behind them. If Beavers stands between Warrilow, the tallest of the three, and Overlie, the shortest, the tops of their heads trace a straight, downward-slanting horizon across the storefront. If Overlie stands between the two men, the horizon takes on a V-shape. Overlie connects the practice of reading Shape in performance to what people do when observing natural land formations: "We notice the patterns of the waves, the peaks, the snowflakes as a way of taking readings to know what is happening or what has happened long ago."[45] In this sense, my application of the horizon analogy seems apt. The

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[45] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 17.

straight downward slant recalls a gently sloping hillside while the more severe V-shape conjures the image of a deep ravine. The compact storefront window confronts the spectator with these shapes, narrowly focusing the gaze like the lens of a camera, in a way that a cavernous proscenium theatre does not. Furthermore, the conventions of ballet and modern dance demand that the Story proceed toward its resolution and would likely prohibit the performers from holding a given spatial arrangement long enough, or repeating it often enough, for a spectator to perceive them. In Overlie's practice however, "Shape observation begins with a minimalistic 'particalized' level of awareness," which requires "a sense of calm and contemplation" and "a focus that has a meditative type of attention" to achieve.[46] Even if the performer achieves such an awareness, it must be honed still finer so that the audience may apprehend it.

Even though I have turned the focus toward Shape in the *Window Pieces*, I have not been able to avoid being drawn back into how Shape works with Space. That is evidence to Overlie's decision to place Shape at the gravitational center of this dance, and to her acknowledgement that structure, even hierarchy, is not the enemy, but instead the assumption that those structures are natural and permanent.

Time:

Similarly, embedded in my discussion of the Shape of *Window Pieces* is the seed of how Time is experienced. I noted that slowness and repetition allow the audience to observe that these subtle Shapes are being made, and that they are important. In service of that objective, the piece begins with two and a half minutes where the three performers stand shoulder-to-shoulder in what might be described as an "actor's neutral" posture facing out into the street. At length, each of the performers takes up a simple, isolated gesture. Overlie almost imperceptibly slides her

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[46] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 15, 17.

right palm across her thigh; Warrilow draws his thumb and forefinger across his brow as though tracing the brim of an invisible baseball cap, and Beavers, bending at the elbow, extends his forearm out to the left, palm opening wide to the audience and covering Overlie's waist. Over the next minute, all three repeat these gestures at irregular intervals. These gestures return throughout the piece, and when they do (just before the fourteen-minute mark, for example), they serve as a reset. The stillness and slowness with which they are executed establishes a baseline rhythm for the entire piece which never allows the pace to run away from the performers. In Overlie's conception this rhythm is "an all-out attack on the overbearing rhythms that dominate music, traditional dance and drama, and socialized conversation." In which "Time becomes a living, breathing, ephemeral material that unfolds itself so that you can physically inhabit it." This practice of time rejects the notion that the frenetic pace of life taking place outside the gallery window is natural: time does not have to be experienced as something that slips away before a person can experience it. Rather, it can be fully and consciously experienced as a "long string of anatomical operations."[47]

In other moments, the three dancers perform synchronized gestures in more regular rhythms. Approximately twenty minutes into the piece, they once again take places facing the street in a line across one of the windows. At this point, rather than the random repetition of individual gestures, they execute the same gesture – moving their hands to their hips, then dropping them at their sides – repeatedly. It seems that this could go on forever until suddenly, and all at once, they change the gesture. Now they raise only their right hands to touch their right shoulder blades. The rhythm is so regular as to become hypnotic, and then they change the gesture again without missing a beat. Now their right hands come to their hearts as they gaze

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[47] Overlie. *Standing in Space*. 22-3.

over their right shoulders. At the beginning of the dance, the unsynchronized, randomly occurring gestures showed the performers exploring their own individual ways of experiencing Time, and how achieving that experience requires intentionality and focus. Conversely, this series of gestures in unison seems automatic, and obscures the spectator's sense of how much time is passing. The section lasts about a minute and a half by the clock, but for some audience members it may feel interminable. Others may be entranced and feel as though no time has passed at all. In my repeated viewings of the recording, I had both experiences.

These experiences of time are exaggerated by the absence of musical accompaniment, at least in the conventional sense. Although there is no orchestra playing, or speakers broadcasting a recorded track out onto the street, the performance is underscored with sound. Wind blows. Car horns blare. People passing by call to one another. In a sense often associated with John Cage, the rhythms of life outside the performance provide it with underscoring. Those rhythms contrast with Overlie's deliberate, highly focused choreography with their constant, chaotic motion. The ensemble's ability to toggle between individual experiences of limitless time and perfect unison, especially with a musical score that somehow works against both these aims, articulates a postmodern understanding of time as much more pliable than calendars, watches, and metronomes. It is a testament to the Six Viewpoints primary exercise for practicing time, the Walk and Stop, which "concentrates awareness on the length of time the practitioner stands, the length of time others stand and the length of time used to move from one place to another."[48]

Emotion:

Emotion is the Viewpoint which perhaps feels most contrary to the postmodern sensibility, and – not coincidentally – the greatest infringement upon the territory of the

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[48] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 22.

American method and Strasberg's obsession with bringing the actor's experience of emotion from the inside to the outside. Postmodernism, as I discuss in chapter three, is frequently characterized by ironic detachment or an "aesthetic of the cool," which suggests a rejection of, or at least indifference to emotion and emotive practices. Indeed, the three performers in Overlie's *Window Pieces* do not appear to be attempting any overt displays of whatever emotions they may be experiencing. They shun the facial and bodily iconographies which are central to method acting's efforts to "unblock emotion" in pursuit of an "authentic" performance.[49] In Overlie's formulation, the ability to affect these iconographies is merely part, and perhaps the latter part, of the performance of Emotion.

At a more basic level, Overlie argues that Emotion is "the active self-awareness of the performer," which she calls presence.[50] In order to be fully present, the actor must be able to recognize and be at ease with the internal and external processes of their body and how those are impacted by the watchful presence of the audience. Skipping over this awareness to the production of external emotive signifiers is frequently an effort "To avoid the task of being present" by resorting "to faux realistic activities."[51] She advocates meditative practices which draw the awareness inward to interrogate the state of the mind and body in the moment of performance and engage the audience from that state without trying to construct anything on top of it: "This act assures that they are not avoiding any aspect of acknowledgement that they are there before a witness. If all is going well, the performer will accumulate the ability to be *present* and gain a thrilling experience: the gift of being seen."[52]

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[49] Counsell, Colin. *Signs of Performance: An Introduction to the Twentieth-Century Theatre.* (London, Routledge, 1996), 55-9.
[50] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 29.
[51] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 32.
[52] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 32.

Overlie, Beavers, and Warrilow display remarkable ease with being seen in *Window Pieces.* The long periods of stillness I have described in the performance offer them regular opportunities to check in with their own physical and mental states; rather than being casual or inert, these moments suggest to the audience that something important may happen at any moment, and when it does, they will not want to miss it. Nothing about the performance suggests that they feel pressure to "raise the stakes" in order to maintain the interest of the audience. There is no sense of dramatic conflict. Yet, whenever the camera pulls back enough to capture people passing by, it is clear that they have captured that interest. They generate intensity rather than tension. And even though they do not produce the outward indicators of Emotion, their presence with the audience has emotional impact which I alluded to in my discussion of Time: the thrill of exploring new and individualized movement vocabularies, the tedium of being stuck in a pattern, the relief of a return to stillness. Emotion, as a Viewpoint, does not value the performer's ability to construct the outward signs of feeling more believably. Rather, it asks the performer to examine the feelings present within them from moment to moment on a molecular level, accept those feelings and that the audience is a producing partner in this endeavor. Whatever emotions the audience receives are the ones their mirror neurons will reflect back to the performers.

Movement:

Overlie, in the telling of her origin story as a dancer, describes the first dance class she attended. It was led by Harvey Jung, a former company member of the Metropolitan Opera Ballet company. Jung's classes were "strictly conducted and did not include any learned movement beyond the ballet barre." The barre was useful for training the body to find useful forms, but dictating combinations of steps was excised from the curriculum because Jung

believed that it "was all that learned movement that had caused him to be inhibited as a creative spirit."[53] That value for a precise movement vocabulary uninhibited by authority of the teacher/choreographer is clearly reflected in *Window Pieces,* which is not to say that the piece does not include learned movement.

Learned Movement in this dance gives evidence of Yvonne Rainer's influence on Overlie. Rainer, who "deplored the idea of dance defined by how high dancers could lift their leg, spin or jump," because it "reduced the art form to something close to a carnival show"[54] integrated pedestrian movement into her artistry. I mean "pedestrian" both in the sense that she made dances seeking to elevate everyday movements into works of art, and in the sense that those everyday movements included actual walking. While *Window Pieces* does not take on the gestural lexicon of everyday life in a mimetic way, as realist/naturalist acting seeks to do, neither does it require the dancers to exhibit the athletic virtuosity of the dance forms Rainer condemned. Instead, it makes use of movements which are easily legible as abstracted versions of quotidian gestures executed with uncommon discipline, gracefulness, and intentionality. It is as though the performers have devoted the hours on the ballet barre necessary to dance with the Balanchine or Graham companies, to then deploy those skills toward hailing a taxi, adjusting an item of clothing, or relaxing in a chair.

Steven Paxton's contact improvisation also exercises influence on Overlie's work in ways which are apparent both in her explanation of Movement as a Viewpoint and *Window Pieces*. Overlie notes that contact improvisation "achieves a familiarity with kinetic motion that interfaces directly with the physical sensation" and "breaks the formal social barriers between

[53] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 40.
[54] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 36.

bodies."[55] The first part of this quotation is foundational to the way Overlie sees Movement as a Viewpoint, but I must take up the second part of the quote first.

Given its name, contact improvisation, it seems a safe assumption that Overlie means the practice helps the performer develop facility and comfort with touching and being touched by other performers, which it does. For example, contact improvisation and other postmodern dance techniques have been applied for this purpose by practitioners in fight and intimacy direction.[56] In *Window Pieces,* however, Overlie interrogates the formal social barriers that govern proximity without touch.

Bodies in close proximity are frequently deployed in performance to suggest intimate relationships: physical closeness is a sign of emotional closeness. *Window Pieces,* places the performers in situations where they must be close together and resist other signs of physical intimacy – touch, comfort, eye contact. Beginning around the fourteen-minute mark, there is a segment in which all three performers inhabit one of the windows together and attempt to move freely. The smallness of the window is emphasized by the presence of three bodies in it, and it soon becomes evident that moving freely without touching each other is a challenge. Their movements are frequently halting and constricted in an effort to avoid contact. The awkwardness is exacerbated by the performers' determination to also avoid meeting each other's gaze. In a larger space, this avoidance would likely escape notice, but in such close quarters, the urgency with which the performers do not touch or engage with among themselves is a strong source of tension for the audience.

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[55] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 37.
[56] Campanella, Tonia Sina. "Intimate Encounters; Staging Intimacy and Sensuality" MFA Thesis, Virginia Commonwealth University. 2006. https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd/1071.

This transmission of tension returns my consideration to Overlie's argument that contact improvisation "achieves familiarity with kinetic motion that interfaces directly with the physical sensation," Movement is not merely a means by which bodies or objects are conveyed from one location to another or, as is the case with much classical dance, from one shape to another. It is the medium through which a person interfaces with the physical world; even when the body is still, it senses the movement of the world around it. The performer trained in the Six Viewpoints does not develop muscular facility so as to execute extraordinary feats of athleticism or parlor tricks like juggling (though they might also possess those skills). They train their bodies as an instrument for "interrogation of the earth's forces," absorbing the information from that interrogation, and transmitting it "directly through kinetic sensation…right into the audience."[57] There are certain performers who seem to have an innate gift for this type of communication, so much so that it may appear to be supernatural, and something one either has or lacks. Viewpoints practices seek out a way to teach these telekinetic abilities.

Story:

It is tempting to synthesize the convergence of Space, Shape, Time, Emotion, and Movement in *Window Pieces* to divine some kind of message or hidden plot. Indeed, viewers may be unable to prevent themselves from it. It is likely that in my analysis here, that despite my efforts at neutrality, I have alluded to what *Window Pieces* means to me. I see the use of the storefront window as a device for putting the dancers on display like mannequins in the shop windows on Fifth Avenue. Their everyday dress, as opposed to leotards or even sweatsuits, suggests to me that the dancers are everyday people doing everyday actions – constantly on display, but never really seen. Their routines are tedious, but any attempt to break out of those

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[57] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 38-40.

routines reminds them that they are constantly crowded out by other people going about their own daily routines. Perhaps worst of all, they are so consumed by their mundane tasks and staying out of each other's way, that they do not commune together. They are packed into this window, practically on top of each other, yet they do not meet. This, to me, is life in the city, specifically and especially New York City. Yet all those observations say more about me than they do about *Window Pieces.* They represent inferences I make about the performance, not something that is essential to it.

For Overlie, Story is not synonymous with terms like "meaning," "fable," or "plot." Rather, she uses Story to refer to a chosen set of organizing principles. She says this definition is synonymous with logic, but that term carries the baggage of the rhetorical sequence of syllogism. Under this definition, the Story of *Window Pieces* is revealed in its title, the only concrete information Overlie provides regarding the logic governing the work. It is an exploration of the window as a space for performance. The performers execute short bits of action in the windows with intermittent breaks for changes of personnel and shifting ideas. These breaks divide the performance into an episodic series of vignettes, each of which explores one way of using the space. They are pieces in the window, but we can also deconstruct the title a bit further and think of the "pieces" as being *of* the window. Overlie metaphorically shatters the ordinary ways of viewing dance by using the window, and what falls on the floor are these little shards of performance glass – prisms that reflect something different based on the perspective of the viewer. Thus, while my interpretation of the dances as commentary on life in New York City remains valid, a viewer in another position might interpret something completely different. The Story of *Window Pieces* is that there is a wide variety of dance work that can be explored using

the gallery window as a performance space. Any other meaning that accrues is a function of the angle at which the spectator stands.

Points of View (and Contention)

In the beginning of this chapter, I mused on whether Overlie's Six Viewpoints were doing anything fundamentally different from Aristotle's six elements of tragedy. I noted that the Aristotelian elements are a prescription as to what things are necessary in order to properly call a work "tragic." What becomes apparent is that postmodern dance is more interested in what is *not* necessary for dancemaking: a theatrical space, bodies of a certain size and shape, virtuosic athleticism, etc. The modernist language used to describe postmodern dance as a search for "pure dance" is as misleading as the apparent essentialism in Overlie's description of the Six Viewpoints as "natural" or "universal." What appears to be an attempt to reduce dance, or distill it to purity, is in fact an expansive act that moves to include more Spaces, Shapes, Emotions, Movements, and Stories under its disciplinary umbrella. It unmakes the false borders that classicism and modernism have placed around dance and scatters them on the floor in a postmodern act of deconstruction. This is all well for dance, but what does it have to do with theatre, and particularly acting?

The prevailing perception is that Overlie created the Six Viewpoints as a tool for dancers and choreographers. I am sure that some of this perception comes from her relatively well-known work in that field – not so well known as the giants of postmodern dance like Merce Cunningham, Yvonne Rainer, or Deborah Hay, but enough to merit mention in *Terpsichore in Sneakers*. My use of her choreographic work as an object of analysis in this chapter certainly does nothing to unseat this perception. Still, I suspect that the idea has taken such a firm root because of the way it has been framed in Anne Bogart and Tina Landau's account in *The*

Viewpoints Book, and the remarkable impact that book has had on the popular awareness of Viewpoints training. Bogart and Landau say:

> Mary immersed herself in these innovations and came up with her own way to structure dance improvisation in time and space—the Six Viewpoints: Space, Shape, Time, Emotion, Movement and Story. She began to apply these principles not only to her own work as a choreographer, but also to her teaching.

For anyone not familiar with Overlie's work as a teacher – which is probably to say most people – the assumption here would be that Overlie designed, applied, and taught the Six Viewpoints as a dance practice. They go on to say that "To Anne (and later Tina), it was instantly clear that Mary's approach to generating movement for the stage was applicable to creating viscerally dynamic moments of theater with actors and other collaborators."[58] I want to be clear that I do not presume any ill intent on the part of Bogart and Landau, but the implication is clear that they believed Overlie had *not* recognized the possibility for Viewpoints work to be useful for actor training.

There are certainly points of difference, both theoretical and practical, between Overlie's Six Viewpoints and the version put forth by Bogart and Landau. Locating and analyzing those points of difference is my task in the next chapter. That Viewpoints training is a useful experience for theatre actors is not one of those points of difference. Perucci observes that when Overlie and Bogart taught together at NYU in the 1980s, Overlie "was charged with developing the Experimental Theatre Wing. Like, she wasn't teaching in a dance program…it is an approach derived from her experience as a dancer and a choreographer including choreographing for

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[58] Bogart, Anne and Tina Landau. *The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition.* (New York, Theater Communications Group, 2005), 5.

theatre works with Mabou Mines."[59] In her own words, Overlie announces her intention for the Six Viewpoints as a theatrical practice in her first published writing on the subject, an essay in which she outlines her ambition to "find the materials and principles involved in making theater." The essay is "written from the perspective of actor training."[60] *Standing in Space* takes examples from both dance and theatrical perspectives. Ultimately, while Overlie's intention for and practice of Viewpoints training has been stated, it has not, as yet, been able to overtake the preexisting narrative of *The Viewpoints Book* which has been received with much greater fanfare. Perhaps this fact anticipates some of the points of difference I will discuss in chapter two.

Moreover, I argue that Overlie's Six Viewpoints have applications in the field which are even broader than practical performer training. They provide a framework for scholars in the field of performance studies who want to analyze non-artistic events through the lens of performance. Thinking about the ways in which the sport of golf makes use of Space, Shape, Time, Emotion, and Movement versus the ways in which basketball uses those same elements may prove useful for understanding the Story that each event tells—who is it for? What are its values? What purpose does it serve in our society? The same could be said for all sorts of performances: protest, religious observations, ceremonies, social gatherings, and so forth. Since the discipline is still in its infancy, and is generally thought to be conducive to the postmodernist view of the world,[61] the potential for Overlie's work to have an impact on performance studies merits serious consideration in the years to come.

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[59] Perucci, interview.

[60] Overlie, Mary, "The Six Viewpoints," in *Training of the American Actor,* ed. Arthur Bartow. (New York, Theatre Communications Group, 2006) 187-8.

[61] Henry Bial and Sara Brady articulate this compatibility between postmodernism and performance studies in their introduction to *The Performance Studies Reader:* "The positive promise of performance studies—its potential to illuminate, instruct, and inspire—is enhanced, not diminished" by its resistance to definition and lack of identifiable essence.

All of this is do say that while Overlie makes use of some language with strong modernist connotations, her work remains both philosophically and practically postmodernist. Rather than an Aristotelian checklist of things performance must have, the Six Viewpoints offer a set of independent and dependent variables for the exploration of performance – how is it altered by their abundance or lack. It emerged at a time when received narratives about world order and social hierarchies were beginning to show deep cracks, and it extends the skepticism regarding those narratives to the ways in which theatrical performance is made and the assumptions that theatre reflects about the reality of experience in an increasingly postmodern world. Chief among those assumptions was that an easily surveyable narrative is necessary or sufficient to describe the human experience. Overlie's choreographic works provide a powerful example of how Viewpoints training helps performers deconstruct narratives about human existence through unscripted movement. In later chapters, I will demonstrate the desperate need for actors with the ability to portray this kind of discontinuity in performance texts that increasingly reject the idea that life, and therefore theatre, "can essentially be expressed in interpersonal speech" and "action that unfolds primarily in an absolute present."[62]

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[62] Lehman. *Postdramatic Theatre.* 49.

CHAPTER II: ANNE BOGART AND THE RECONSTRUCTIVE IMPULSE

"Every work of art contains a recognizable reference to another work and this can be traced historically throughout the development of the arts and sciences. Innovation, and indeed originality, arises from the act of recombining and editing what has come before."

-Anne Bogart[1]

If Mary Overlie's creation of The Six Viewpoints is grounded in a 1970s-era postmodernism focused on the deconstruction of oppressive hierarchies and master narratives, born from a Cold War mentality and set in opposition to the hegemonic world order, it follows that Anne Bogart and Tina Landau's subsequent iteration of the training, circa the 1990s, moves to exercise this newfound flexibility and construct a new, more equitable, worldview. In their account of the Viewpoints, Bogart and Landau recall that "Anne met choreographer Mary Overlie, the inventor of the 'Six Viewpoints,' at New York University, where they were both on the faculty of the Experimental Theater Wing" in 1979. Eight years later, Bogart and Landau met at the American Repertory Theatre and "collaborated extensively, experimented theatrically, and gradually expanded Overlie's Six Viewpoints."[2] Around this time, *perestroika* – restructuring – was already at the forefront of the global consciousness, and US President Ronald Reagan was calling for what seemed to be, not merely the destruction of a physical boundary, but the symbolic deconstruction of the Warsaw Pact: for Mr. Gorbachev to "tear down this wall." Only the disintegration Soviet Union in 1991 could surpass the dismantling of the Berlin Wall as a deconstructive gesture, and the two events occurred in what now seems like the same moment. While, as I outlined in chapter one, deconstructing the narratives of modernism and/or modernity was an animating impulse for postmodern artists from the 1960s into the 1980s, the events of the

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[1] Bogart, Anne. "Copy, Transform, Combine." *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art.* Vol. 40, no 1, (January 2018), 6.

[2] Bogart, Anne and Tina Landau. *The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition.* (New York, Theatre Communications Group, 2005), 5-6.

last decade and a half of the twentieth century necessitated a shift toward a reconstructive impulse.

This chapter seeks to account for differences between Overlie's concepts of what Viewpoints training involves, Bogart and Landau's articulation of the Viewpoints in *The Viewpoints Book* and the new possibilities it envisions, and Bogart's continuous development of the training with the ensemble with which she is most frequently associated, SITI company. Some of these differences are substantial and overt, such as Bogart and Landau's reimagined taxonomy of the viewpoints – moving from six to nine physical viewpoints and the addition of a set of five "vocal viewpoints." Others are more subtle and signal compatibility with new movements in poststructuralist discourse. I investigate the ways in which the impulse toward *perestroika* – restructuring – manifest themselves in 1990s aesthetic postmodernism. I argue that this reconstructive postmodernist philosophy may be viewed as a new tactic against the old metanarratives rather than an abandonment of the task of their deconstruction; that the rearrangement of the components of these narratives implies their prior deconstruction and gives evidence of their initial cultural construction as opposed to natural essentiality. In the process, I interrogate Bogart's claim that "We have already deconstructed to the point of no return."[3]

In the title of this chapter, and indeed, throughout, I refer to this iteration of Viewpoints training as the work of Anne Bogart. This is not an effort to erase Tina Landau from the narrative or to diminish her contribution to the development of the practice from 1987 to 2005. Rather, it signals the divergent career paths of these two figures since the publication of *The Viewpoints Book.* Landau's work has focused almost completely on production, and she has become a major

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[3] Anne Bogart, email message to author, June 25, 2021.

director in the US commercial theatre.[4] While it seems likely enough that Landau continues to

use Viewpoints methods of composition in her work, and an investigation of her development of

Viewpoints on that front would be rich ground for another study, in this chapter I am focused on

Viewpoints in the context of actor training, which Landau's recent work does not engage in any

meaningful way. Bogart, on the other hand, continues to write, lead workshops, and give

interviews, including one that I conducted via email which is quoted extensively throughout this

chapter, that focus on the Viewpoints as a mode of actor training. Though SITI Company retains

an active touring and production schedule, their impact on the global theatre scene has been

much greater for actor training. The company's decision to "cease to operate in its current

iteration as a touring, teaching performing ensemble," while some members, including Bogart

will continue "teaching and licensing SITI Company works,"[5] seems to confirm their awareness

of the value of their pedagogical work. Thus, unless I am referring specifically to *The Viewpoints*

Book, I refer to the development of this strand of Viewpoints actor training as Bogart's work.

Historicizing the Split

In chapter one, I argued that Overlie's Six Viewpoints were grounded in a

postmodernism with theoretical connections to Derrida and Lyotard as well as practical

connections to the Judson Dance Theater. Though I have already outlined her philosophical

alliance with the French poststructuralists, it bears repeating that Overlie insists that her

postmodernism "was not sourced from academic influence. It evolved as the art of SoHo evolved

and as the structure of the Viewpoints took shape from within." She also makes it clear that her

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[4] In addition to being a long-time member of Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Landau's commercial credits extend to Broadwaay, where she has directed Tracy Letts' *Superior Donuts,* and *SpongeBob Squarepants: The Broadway Musical.*

[5] "SITI Company Announces Legacy Plan and Prepares for Final Season." SITI Company online, October 7, 2020, https://siti.org/about/press/.

postmodernism is exemplified by "the dramatic changes that took place in dance in the late sixties, seventies and eighties," and that to know the work of the artists of that time and place is vital to "being well educated as a Six Viewpoints-influenced artist."[6] A hallmark of this work is a technique Overlie terms "proper deconstruction." She gives the example of taking apart a shirt without destroying it:

> We require some extremely sharp cutting tool, such as a razor blade…The seams must be opened, just as the stage must be opened, and each part—the sleeve, the collar, the pockets, the back, the front, and the cuffs—must remain intact. When a shirt is taken apart in this manner, the information about how the shirt is made is fully available. The person doing the deconstructing is then in a position to make a calculated and significant contribution by improvising with the parts to discover a new design logic.[7]

This is the work, which to Bogart's mind, is already done – aesthetically if not politically – by the time her work with the Viewpoints becomes independent of her collaboration with Overlie. The question becomes, does this constitute the completion of postmodernism?

Tony Perucci frames the question in a useful way: "When we say, 'is postmodernism over?' Do we mean, 'is postmodernity no longer an accurate way to describe the age in which we live' or that the aesthetics that we ascribe to postmodern*ism* are played out?"[8] The two ways of considering whether postmodernism and/or the postmodern condition continued beyond the apparent collapse of modernist institutions will have great bearing on whether one considers Bogart's Viewpoints to be an extension of Overlie's work into the new frontier of the postmodern, or a betrayal.

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[6] Overlie, Mary. *Standing in Space: The Six Viewpoints Theory and Practice.* (Billings, MT, Fallon Press, 2016), 88.
[7] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 77.
[8] Perucci, Tony, interview by author, Zoom, July 21, 2021.

Bogart and Landau admit the latter as a possibility: "Mary's approach to the Six Viewpoints was…absolute. She is adamant about their purity. To her chagrin and delight, her students and colleagues, recognizing the genius of her innovations and their immediate relevance to the theater have extrapolated and expanded her Viewpoints for their own uses."[9] Overlie's paradoxical "chagrin and delight" reflects the paradox of postmodernity in the post-cold war era. The 1990s signaled the possibility of an open, global society in which oppressed people could bend the world toward justice, but as Linda Hutcheon observes, "it can be hard to achieve activist ends (with firm moral values) in a postmodern world where such values are not permitted to be grounded, where no utopian possibility is left unironized."[10] The institutionalization of postmodernist relativism and skepticism had made it so that no construction could claim legitimacy and all truth claims carried equal moral weight. If deconstruction was an end unto itself, and the lack of universal truth was a universal truth, it meant that the metanarrative was dead; long live the metanarrative.

Overlie was committed to this vision of postmodernism. Her idea of "proper deconstruction" and radical insistence on the artist as "original anarchist" or "one who is directly connected with nature and needs no outside rules as guides," becomes its own set of outside rules – a deconstructive orthodoxy. Overlie is highly critical of what she calls "Kitsch Postmodernism," which "represents a misunderstanding of the process and purpose of deconstruction." She argues that pulling elements from multiple sources and arranging them in collages, what others may refer to as pastiche, renders the pieces useless and unavailable for

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[9] Bogart and Landau. *The Viewpoints Book.* 5.

[10] Hutcheon, Linda. "Gone Forever, But Here to Stay: The Legacy of the Postmodern." In *Supplanting the Postmodern: An Anthology of Writings on the Arts and Culture of the Early 21ˢᵗ Century.* Ed. David Rudrum and Nicholas Stavris. (New York, Bloomsbury, 2015), 11.

future reexamination.[11] This style may not have been aesthetically pleasing for Overlie, but it does reflect the volatile political environment of the postcolonial era. Considering the condition of the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa after the ouster of European colonial powers, it seems more than apt. These regions had complex ethnic and social structures torn asunder and rearranged with the arrival of the imperialists, then were thrown into chaos trying to negotiate new political boundaries upon the abrupt departure of the colonizers. And while western artists may have been privileged enough not to experience the rise of those "third world" conditions in the mid-twentieth century, the 1990s gave the process much greater visibility.

In the early 1990s, Fredric Jameson also argued that pastiche signaled the capitulation of postmodernist works of art in any effort to generate new ideas. His writing on the postmodern embrace of pastiche criticizes the technique as "a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction," and "the random cannibalization of all the styles of the past."[12] Jameson's critique is focused on pastiche in hegemonic culture represented by the theme park architecture of Las Vegas and EPCOT Center, but takes no notice of how it was being deployed by drag and hip-hop artists to appropriate many of the same cultural signifiers and deploy them subversively.

The issue that Jameson takes with pastiche as an aesthetic practice is shared by those who object to postmodern theories of history. Tobin Siebers critiques Hayden White's argument that traditional historiographic practices have imposed narratives on the events of the past to conform to the historian's agendas, biases, or conveniences; White acknowledges that a history without such narrative would appear to be "a list of stark and random happenings." Siebers takes White

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[11] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 97.
[12] Jameson, Frederic. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 1991), 17-8.

to mean that the presence of these agendas, biases, and conveniences are an indictment of narrative history as inherently wrong, concluding that for White, "reality is a mere sequence of brute facts" with no relationship between one and the next.[13] While this is not White's argument, it is indicative of an impulse to move away from deconstruction and toward the construction of narratives, which while they may not have any more truth value than those of the modernists, are, in Siebers' estimation, more desirable conditions for existence. He scolds White, who "provides no demonstration of why we should want to believe that desire is ordered, whereas reality is not." For Siebers, finding an ordered worldview that one wants to believe in, then ordering the world to conform to it, has greater utility than recognizing that this order has no greater claim to "capital T" Truth than any that preceded it. At the end of the twentieth century, the reconfiguration of geopolitical power represented a victory for those who had perceived the world order as an arbitrary construction. It became possible to imagine an eventuality in which the world would not be dominated by the colonial powers of the past, but it also created a deep sense of anxiety at being so unmoored.

Simultaneously, the world wide web emerged as an "information superhighway," leading users to digital spaces and facilitating the creation of virtual identities. I suspect that this may have dismayed Jameson as a further erosion of the legibility of spaces and of stable subjectivity. Yet for readers of Stuart Hall, these phenomena are posited as an exciting opportunity in which "The Postmodern subject is conceptualized as having no fixed, essential or permanent identity. Identity becomes a "'moveable feast': formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us. It is historically,

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[13] Siebers, Tobin. *Cold War Criticism and the Politics of Skepticism.* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993), 14-5.

not biologically defined"[14] When history defines the subject, but is no longer contingent on a received narrative, or any definite narrative for that matter, infinite possibilities for artistic expression are opened up. A longer discussion of the continued fragmentation of narrativity and subjectivity awaits in part two of this study; suffice it to say that fragmented subjectivity is the new normal and that pastiche provides the artist with a way to express existence in a rapidly atomizing society. It is at this newly-felt turning point in the deconstructive project of postmodernism that Bogart begins her intervention on Viewpoints training.

Bogart's Practice of Pastiche

"I am a scavenger. I am not an original thinker and I am not a true creative artist. So the notion of scavenging appeals to me." This is how Bogart explains the process by which she has made her work dating back to her undergraduate thesis in which she cut and pasted segments of Ionesco plays into a single text for performance. She pairs this approach with a "nesting impulse, of taking this and that and weaving it together to make some sort of marriage of ideas." [15] This combination of scavenging and nesting lends itself to the formation of a pastiche aesthetic is not only a hallmark of the work that Bogart and SITI Company have produced onstage, but extends to the structure of the books she has published, composition of SITI company itself, Bogart's reimagining of Viewpoints training, and her methods of administering that training. Here, I analyze each of these aspects of Bogart's work to illustrate how a pastiche-driven postmodernism, or what Bogart might refer to as "New Constructivism," is her gravitational center.

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[14] Hall, Stuart. "The Question of Cultural Identity." In *Modernity and its Futures.* Ed. Stuart Hall, David Held, and Tony McGrew. (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1992), 277.

[15] Cummings, Scott T. *Remaking American Theater: Charles Mee, Anne Bogart and the SITI Company.* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006), 39.

Book Projects:

Bogart's first book, *A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre* (2001)

announces in its title that it is a pastiche of Stanislavski's iconic instruction manual, *An Actor*

Prepares. Yet this loaded title seems to be where the similarities to Stanislavski's work end.

Bogart does not mimic Stanislavski's framing device of the platonic dialogue between teacher

and student, and the book can hardly be described as a textbook on how to direct for the theatre.

Instead, *A Director Prepares*, and indeed all the books discussed in this section, are pastiches in

the sense that they weave together a disparate set of sources to create a series of textual tableaux

on the concepts of memory, violence, eroticism, terror, stereotype, embarrassment, and

resistance. My use of the word tableaux refers to a technique that Bogart and Landau prescribe to

aid the Viewpoints-trained ensemble in devising work. It is an exercise in which each participant

arranges a group of objects on a table in a series of tableaux. The re-placement of the objects in

space in sequence develops relationships between them. The audience is then able to fill in the

relational gaps between the one tableau and the next. I have seen this technique adapted

effectively using actors onstage instead of objects on a table. With *A Director Prepares,* Bogart

has sought to achieve a similar effect with text on pages.

Bogart advises the reader that these seven concepts create "problems" for the director that

"do not go away." They are not practical problems that relate to the work of a director insofar as

it concerns the staging of plays; instead, Bogart suggests that by confronting these problems head

on, they become "tools we have inherited and the procedures we use to make work in the

theatre," or "helpful allies in the artistic process." Still, they are not the concrete sort of tools that

Bogart's Viewpoints are, giving the artist a method to explore and reimagine the ways in which

bodies make use of space and time. *A Director Prepares* argues that its tools assist the artist in

finding "new shapes for our present ambiguities and uncertainties." In her view, the end of the twentieth century is a moment in which "inherited myths lose their value because they become too small and confined to contain the complexities of the ever-transforming and expanding societies," and these new shapes will help the artist in their task to construct new narratives that "include ideas, cultures and people formerly excluded from the previous mythologies." [16] The memories, violences, eroticisms, terrors, stereotypes, embarrassments, and resistances that the director carries with them are the building blocks that they will use to construct a new cultural *mythos.* Thus, like Overlie's Six Viewpoints, these seven problems are not placed into a linear hierarchy; unlike the Six Viewpoints, they are not posited to be materials that are the fabric of existence. They are knitted together from loose cultural threads that Bogart has rummaged through and gathered up.

The composition of the book reflects Bogart's artistic methods. For example, her textual tableau on the theme of "Memory," the first chapter of the book, begins with an anecdote about a friend, an American, who studied briefly with Jerzy Grotowski. This friend had difficulty finding the energy to sustain herself through long days of grueling physical work, while students from other cultures derived seemingly boundless energy from the "familiar patterns and codes from their respective indigenous backgrounds."[17] Bogart invokes Grotowski and alludes to his interest in tracing contemporary embodied performance to ancient cultural sources. She does this to argue that that US artists lack sufficient cultural memory to turn to for this kind of support. To explain why, Bogart proposes that the specter of Joe McCarthy speaks so loudly from his grave that it drowns out the memory of the Federal Theatre Project, the Mercury Theatre, the Group Theatre, and so many others whose deep political engagement was erased, leaving only "the stale

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[16] Bogart, Anne. *A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre.* (London, Routledge, 2001), 2-3.
[17] Bogart. *A Director Prepares.* 22.

influence of a watered-down version of the Stanislavsky System."[18] The chapter, and ultimately the entire book, arranges for the narrative quality of a memoir and the didacticism of an artistic manifesto to speak in turns. Yet, Bogart engineers it so her memoir is told by Grotowski and McCarthy, joined later in the chapter by (among many others) Gore Vidal, TS Eliot, Richard Rorty, Isaac Newton, and a judge in Colonial Virginia. The plurality of voices in the memoir section anticipates the diversity of sources from which Bogart draws in the manifesto:

> And it is for this reason that I'm trying to remember and study the past and combine it with the newest ideas in philosophy, science and art. In order to contribute to an artistic explosion I am researching new approaches to acting for the stage that combine vaudeville, operetta, Martha Graham and postmodern dance. I want to find resonant shapes for our present ambiguities.[19]

Reviewer Katie Rodda observes, quite rightly, that "This collection of essays will not teach the fledgling artist how to be a better director; rather it is a glimpse into the mind of one of the most influential directors of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries."[20] I would add that Bogart not only tells her reader how her artistic mind works in this book, but also provides an example of what the mind of a scavenger produces, even to those who have never seen a SITI Company production.

Bogart's next solo-authored book, *And then You Act: Making Art in an Unpredictable World* (2007), is very much in the same style as *A Director Prepares.* Bogart continues to employ a multivocal approach to a series of brief thematic essays: context, articulation, intention,

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[18] Bogart. *A Director Prepares.* 25.
[19] Bogart. *A Director Prepares.* 39
[20] Rodda, Katie. 2004. "A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and the Theatre. By Anne Bogart. London: Routledge, 2001; Pp. 155. $15.95 Paper." *Theatre Survey.* Vol. 45, no. 1. Cambridge University Press: 147–48.

attention, magnetism, attitude, and content. Again, each of these themes represent, in Bogart's view, an examination of "tools for action,"[21] that are available to the artist. She frames this new set of tools as particularly useful to artists who find themselves in a shattered cultural moment that is focused on survival and hostile to the work of the artist who values nuance, empathy, and beauty. The book argues that the aftermath of the attacks on September 11, 2001 constituted such a cultural moment.

David Rudrum and Nicholas Stavris note that September 11 and the collapse of the Soviet Union are frequently cited as major historic events that commentators point to as the date of the demise of postmodernism.[22] Earlier in this chapter, I briefly addressed the ways in which the former is viewed by some as the completion of the project of deconstruction – hence the emergence in the 1990s of postracial and postfeminist discourses. The massively destructive events of September 11 should not be mistaken for the type of dispassionate deconstruction for which Overlie and Derrida advocate, and moreover reveal the continued existence of racial, gendered, and economic hierarchies. In *And then You Act,* Bogart provides an example of how those hierarchies used that horrific occasion to reinforce colonialist/imperialist master narratives: "In the case of post-9/11, patriotism rushed in to fill the gap of this fertile and palpable silence. Patriotism served as a way to replace disorientation…with certainty. And certainty, if taken to its extreme, always ends in violence."[23] In the wake of the attacks, the narrative of American exceptionalism was threatened and along with it the white heteropatriarchy that it underpinned. The certainty with which that narrative was thrust into the public consciousness brought about two decades of violence. As Ihab Hasan puts it, "cultural postmodernism has mutated into

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[21] Bogart, Anne. *And then You Act: Making Art in an Unpredictable World.* (London, Routledge, 2007), 6.
[22] Rudrum, David and Nicholas Stavris. *Supplanting the Postmodern: An Anthology of Writings on the Arts and Culture of the Early 21st Century.* (New York, Bloomsbury, 2015), xviii-xix.
[23] Bogart. *And then You Act.* 3.

genocidal postmodernity."[24] It is strange then, to suggest that either the fall of the iron curtain or the World Trade Center towers signaled that hierarchy and master narrative had been "deconstructed to the point of no return."[25]

Still, in the wake of events where the world seems to have been shattered, it is understandable for Bogart to argue that "Rather than the experience of life as a shard, art can unite and connect the strands of the universe. When you are in touch with art, borders vanish and the world opens up."[26] The image of vanishing borders opening up the world remains in step with a desire to dismantle oppressive structures. Without a border to distinguish two things, neither can be placed above the other in a hierarchy. Considered in this way, Bogart's move to "unite and connect the strands of the universe" through pastiche is not a move to replace postmodernism with what Bogart has suggested might be called "new constructivism."[27] Instead, I contend that, paradoxical as it may seem, pastiche, an act of conspicuous construction, represents a fresh tactic of the deconstructive process.

I am certainly not the first to make this argument. Lee Barron's analysis of pop singer Kylie Minogue's 2002 touring concert, *KylieFever2002*, argues that Minogue's postmodernist performance text draws upon the various modes of self-styling that the singer had attempted over her career to that point. Barron sees the performance as a demonstration of how in the face of modernity's effort to fix identity within a rigid set of norms, "as the pace, extension, and complexity of modern societies accelerate, identity becomes more and more unstable, more and

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[24] Hasan, Ihab. "Beyond Postmodernism: Toward an Aesthetic of Trust." In *Supplanting the Postmodern: An Anthology of Writings on the Arts and Culture of the Early 21ˢᵗ Century.* Ed. David Rudrum and Nicholas Stavris. (New York, Bloomsbury, 2015), 19.
[25] Anne Bogart, email message to author, June 25, 2021.
[26] Bogart. *And then You Act.* 4.
[27] Anne Bogart, email message to author, June 25, 2021.

more fragile, a process whereby identity is not reducible to a set of roles,"[28] but rather a game in which one attempts to deconstruct their identity in order to subvert and confound societal expectations. The concert's pastiche of Kylies turns the singer's identity into a collage of audio/visual images so that "Any ideology or meaning-fixing 'meta-narrative is simply discarded and creatively neutralized in the pursuit of style."[29] For Barron, by constructing a pastiche of identities for its star, *KylieFever2002* deconstructs the idea of identity writ large. In a time when destruction is a guiding principle of the dominant culture, there is an appetite to subvert that culture of destruction through rebuilding. Perhaps when Bogart says: "This is a time to not only pick up the pieces left all over the ground from the explosions of postmodernism, but then to start the process of a new construction of meaning,"[30] it would be more apt to say that the contemporary artist's instinct is to pick up the pieces from the explosions of postmodernity as Hasan describes it.

The culmination of pastiche as a writing practice for Bogart is *Conversations With Anne: Twenty-Four Interviews* (2012)*. At over five hundred pages, this is by far Bogart's longest publication. Yet it would not be accurate to describe it as her writing; the book consists of excerpts from the transcripts of two dozen interviews Bogart conducts with "colleagues I admire and respect."[31] Bogart provides a brief biographical sketch of each of her interlocutors to give the reader a sense of who the person is and what personal or professional relationship Bogart has to them. The interviews themselves read as a series of vignettes; they are vaguely related through their connection to theatre and dance in general, but they resist any attempt at a more specific

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[28] Barron, Lee. "Droogs, Electro-Voodo and Kyborgs: Pastiche, Postmodernism and Kylie Minogue Live." *Nebula.* Vol 6, no 1. 79-80.

[29] Barron, Lee. "Droogs, Electro-Voodo and Kyborgs." 89.

[30] Bogart, email message to author, June 25, 2021.

[31] Bogart, Anne. *Conversations With Anne: Twenty-four Interviews.* (New York, Theatre Communications Group, 2012), ix.

throughline other than Bogart's interest. In her two-paragraph introduction to the volume, Bogart – as in *And then You Act* – invokes the aftermath of 9/11 as an animating force behind the work. Yet few, if any, references to that day occur in the remainder of the text. The effect is a pastiche of conversations which place Bogart in a dialogue with a largely homogenous community of artistic peers; Tina Landau, the youngest of her interlocutors, was fifty years old at the time of publication, and only two of the interviews are conducted with nonwhite artists (Bill T. Jones and Eduardo Machado). As such, it is much more instructive about Bogart, her artistic beliefs and values, than about any of her interviewees.

My analysis of this collection of written work illuminates two points which are key to understanding the design of Bogart's Viewpoints. First is the difference in perspective between Bogart and Overlie. Where Overlie was interested in identifying the materials that comprise performance, Bogart searches for tools that the artist can use to produce work. The second is Bogart's practice of pastiche in all things. Her seemingly random selection, arrangement, and rearrangement of scraps of notions, stitched together with the seams readily visible, is not presented as though its pieces belonged together all along. When the reader or spectator comes to the obvious conclusion that the arrangement is not "natural," the removal of the scraps from their "original" locations is made plain, the fact of their deconstruction is implied, and the falseness of the "original" construction can be inferred. Together, these two attributes of Bogart's approach also suggest how it is possible that she came to Viewpoints training in its second decade of existence, but published her book on the subject twelve years before Overlie, the training's originator. Overlie saw every act of construction as an act of violence against all other possible constructions. She resisted making a statement about what The Viewpoints are for fear of destroying what else they might be. Bogart, on the other hand, sees in all things what can be used

in a different way, and that each construction provides something that can be excised for use in the next one.

<u>Company Organization and Leadership</u>

Scott Cummings, in *Remaking American Theater: Charles Mee, Anne Bogart, and the SITI Company,* argues convincingly that *bobrauschenbergamerica,* a play "written by Mee, directed by Bogart, and created and performed by the SITI Company" for the 2001 Humana Festival reflects the collage aesthetic of its namesake, visual artist Robert Rauschenberg, and that this aesthetic is also visible in the way in which the work was created.[32] In analyzing Bogart's production oeuvre more broadly, Cummings observes that it can be broken down into two categories: "she puts original pieces together ('Devised Works') or she takes established plays apart ('Classic Explosions')"[33] Implied in this observation is the same tendency toward pastiche as a deconstructive tactic. The "Classic Explosions" represent pastiche in the Jamesonian sense of the word, as parody which does not mock. Take as an example SITI Company's 2021 adaptation of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, in which "this classic play is re-imagined as a memory-scape of Irina, the youngest sister."[34] On the other hand, *bobrauschenbergamerica*, an example of one of SITI's "Devised Works," which accomplishes pastiche by assembling a variety of images for the audience to peer through, like prisms, at a theme of the company's choice (in this case, America). Here I extend Cummings' claim to assert that this "collage aesthetic" is not only practiced in the company's devising process, but it is integral to the constitution of the company itself.

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[32] Cummings. *Remaking American Theater*, 2-3.
[33] Cummings. *Remaking American Theater, 38.*
[34] "Production History," SITI Company, accessed October 19, 2021. http://www.siti.org/production-history.

SITI Company states that its mission is "the creation of new work, the training of theater artists, and a commitment to crossing boundaries." The methodology by which it accomplishes all three of these objectives stems from the combination of performance practices brought by its cofounders, Anne Bogart and Tadashi Suzuki who brought Viewpoints and Suzuki training to the company respectively with an "emphasis on cultural exchange and collaboration." [35] It is Tony Perucci who first suggested to me that "putting Suzuki training and the Viewpoints together, you could argue is itself a pastiche gesture."[36] The remark was an aside in a longer answer to a question about whether Bogart's work is representative of a multicultural trend among 1990s postmodernists. Yet despite the offhanded nature of Perucci's observation, it illuminates the intentionality with which SITI Company, and 1990s multiculturalism more broadly, functions as collage rather than genuine integration wherein the components would meld into a single, unified practice. When I asked Bogart what made the Viewpoints and Suzuki methods compatible with one another, she responded:

> We do keep them quite separate. There is no intention to mix them. To put it over simplistically, Suzuki training can be seen as the equivalent to a ballet barre for the actors, pointing out issues of balance, strength, support of vocality, breath etc. The Viewpoints is more like 'combinations across the floor' or something much more improvisatory. The fluidity of the Viewpoints and the emphasis on focus and stability of Suzuki are a magical combination. [37]

The fact of this separation is borne out in the structure of SITI Company's training regimen. In the company's workshops and classes, there are sessions in which the training is focused on

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[35] "About," SITI Company, accessed October 19, 2021. http://www.siti.org/about.
[36] Perucci, Tony. Interview with the author, July 21, 2021.
[37] Bogart, email message to author, June 25, 2021.

Suzuki work, and there are sessions in which the Viewpoints are practiced. In one such

Viewpoints workshop that I attended, Bogart told participants that Suzuki training cultivates a

vertical energy, imagining the actor as a conduit between the earth and the cosmos. In contrast,

she said that Viewpoints training makes use of a horizontal energy, connecting us to each other.

The two practices meet one another in composition work, but as guardrails to prevent the

performer from bringing a superfluity of one type of energy at the expense of the other. By

bringing the two practices together in this way, SITI company reaches across boundaries. These

boundaries may be geographical – Asia and North America. They may be philosophical –

playing to the gods versus playing for community. They may be aesthetic or pedagogical,

emphasizing the embodiment of culture versus its intellectual or subliminal articulation. Yet, as

is evident in their mission statement, they do not erase these boundaries. Their cross-cultural

exchange is one which deconstructs and reconstructs but does not blend.

Bogart tells me that the greatest skill Viewpoints training imparts unto the actor is a

facility with seeing each element of performance, "such as, text, space, time, light, sound,

emotion," as a building block, then "walking around, picking up and examining the blocks,

playing with them, rearranging, and bringing the contagion of their interest to the audience who

can join them in the adventure."[38] It is in that spirit, that Bogart and Suzuki brought together the

building blocks that make up SITI Company. After Suzuki's departure, which was planned from

the beginning, Bogart continued with the company in that spirit; hardly any of the artists that

would constitute the core of SITI Company were initially recruited or trained by Bogart. Some

were Japanese actors who came from Suzuki's Toga company. Some were Americans who had

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[38] Bogart, email message to author, June 25, 2021.

studied with Suzuki and toured in his productions. Still others became part of the company through its relationship with the Actor's Theatre of Louisville and the Humana Festival.[39]

Bogart's adaptation of Viewpoints training in this context is perhaps ungenerously characterized by Perucci as a way "to empower actors to make directorial choices…in a flexible economy. You know? A neoliberal distribution of labor kind of thing: you do the work, and then I'll have directed it."[40] While there may be a grain of truth there, it overlooks the value that Bogart's adaptations have in giving this group of artists with such diverse backgrounds a shared vocabulary. This vocabulary sustained the institution in its simultaneous functions as "part theater company, part training center, part think tank, part international forum"[41] for thirty years. Perucci's comment is also surprising because it is rooted in the modernist conception of the director as the auteur whose singular vision all others must mold themselves to fit. It insinuates that to empower the rest of the creative team to impart their own sense of what the production can be is lazy or plagiaristic on the part of an indecisive or unimaginative director. It reinscribes the hierarchy – more specifically patriarchy – of the art-making process which Overlie wanted to deconstruct. As such, it is demonstrative of the ways in which Bogart and SITI Company's practice of pastiche in their Viewpoints training continues Overlie's deconstructive work in ways which are more radical than they receive credit for.

Adaptation and Administration of Viewpoints Training

The key feature in *The Viewpoints Book* that signals Bogart and Landau's move away from the deconstructive postmodernism that grounds Overlie's original practice is their recommendation for introducing the individual Viewpoints. When a student is working with the

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[39] Cummings. *Remaking American Theater,* 94.
[40] Perucci, Tony. Interview with the author, July 21, 2021.
[41] Cummings. *Remaking American theater,* 90.

Six Viewpoints for the first time, Overlie recommends "at least 36 hours of data collection in each of the SSTEMS as a good starting point." And "resist[ing] the impulse to add several SSTEMS to any practice unless you make a conscious choice to mix focuses."[42] The idea is for the student to acquire a deep understanding of the individual viewpoints in isolation from the others. In this way, the developing artist learns to appreciate each of the elements for its own unique qualities.

Conversely, Bogart and Landau propose that "it is most effective to introduce most, if not all, Viewpoints in a single session. Rather than getting stuck on any one Viewpoint, allow the first session to be messy and confusing and exhilarating and overwhelming." They emphasize the "overlaps and connections between the separate Viewpoints," and explain that "An especially open group of participants will often jump ahead or add on even before you've introduced the next Viewpoint" as something which "happens naturally."[43] Although they caution the reader against layering the Viewpoints together too quickly, Bogart and Landau accelerate the process of accumulation so that all of their nine viewpoints can be combined in less time than any one of Overlie's six can be adequately examined. This acceleration, alongside the framing of overlap between the Viewpoints as a virtue, is antithetical to Overlie's deconstructive philosophy. Rather, it reinforces Bogart's preference toward scavenging and reconstruction.

A less obvious clue to Bogart and Landau's philosophical differences with Overlie is nonetheless the most significant practical departure that they make from the Six Viewpoints: their reorganization of the Viewpoints themselves. To review, Overlie identified Space, Shape, Time, Emotion, Movement, and Story as her Six Viewpoints. Overlie imagines that each of the six exists unto itself, independent from the others until they are brought into conversation with

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[42] Overlie. *Standing in Space,* 4.
[43] Bogart and Landau. *The Viewpoints Book,* 35-6.

one another by the artist. While I implied in chapter one that it can be a challenge for the artist to achieve this complete independence, Overlie insists that it is both possible and necessary to do so. Bogart and Landau, however, identify nine physical Viewpoints in their formulation: Tempo, Duration, Kinesthetic Response, Repetition, Spatial Relationship, Topography, Shape, Gesture, and Architecture (plus six vocal Viewpoints, implying that vocalizing is somehow distinct from physicality). Furthermore, they refute Overlie's premise that the Viewpoints operate independently from one another by placing them into two categories, Viewpoints of time (Tempo, Duration, Kinesthetic Response, and Repetition), and Viewpoints of space (Shape Gesture, Architecture, Spatial Relationship, and Topography). What is telling is that these two categories have the same name as two of Overlie's Six Viewpoints.

Overlie's conception of the Six Viewpoints is that they are elements of performance which cannot be reduced to anything simpler. It is akin to the way scientists classify living things. The Six Viewpoints are like the five kingdoms, the base level determination of difference between one life form and another. There is no more basic description to distinguish the pink parfait rose, for example, from any other living thing than to say that it is a plant. By placing their nine Viewpoints into two categories, Bogart and Landau imply that enumerating the most elemental building blocks of performance is not their ultimate concern. By making those categories coterminous with two of Overlie's, they concede that Overlie has succeeded in doing so. What Bogart and Landau have done is explore the "kingdom" and construct some rooms within it. Time and Space remain truly elemental.

What, then, of Overlie's four remaining Viewpoints? Shape, for one, still exists as one of Bogart and Landau's Viewpoints, but here it is a compartment within the Space kingdom. Overlie defines Space narrowly, confining it to the distance between one thing and another:

"Measure the Space you have entered using the tools of mathematics…Use your body to begin to know the distances in the room by how many aikido rolls it takes to cross from end to end; walk all the steps in every diagonal."[44] Bogart and Landau understand Space in a more capacious way. They recognize that at any given moment, "your body is already making a shape, i.e., an outline against space, a silhouette."[45] Their Shape Viewpoint acknowledges that shapes can only exist in Space. For them, Space includes not only how far it is from the actor to the chair, to the table, to the walls; but also how the actor, the chair, and the table are arranged in the room. This would fall under Overlie's definition of Space. Bogart and Landau call it "Architecture;" what bodies are sharing the space with you, and how can they be manipulated?[46]

The case of Movement in Bogart and Landau's revision is not altogether different. Movement, as a Viewpoint, is fundamental to the work Overlie – and postmodern dance broadly – was doing to dislodge "dance" from the limitations imposed upon it by perceptions of its exclusively formal, technical, or athletic nature. Of Yvonne Rainer, Overlie says: "Her inclusion of pedestrian movement as dance flipped the genre upside down and allowed it to fully enter the art world" where before it had been "something close to a carnival show."[47] A thorough examination of the quality of movement was necessary to move the field. It demanded its own Viewpoint.

For Bogart and Landau, Movement is taken somewhat for granted. It cannot take place outside of Space and Time, and we do not experience Space or Time except through movement (or its absence, stillness). The actor is constantly observing their quality of movement; therefore, movement cannot be considered in isolation. In distinguishing between the Viewpoints of Tempo

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[44] Overlie. *Standing in Space,* 5.
[45] Bogart and Landau. *The Viewpoints Book,* 47.
[46] Bogart and Landau. *The Viewpoints Book,* 52-3.
[47] Overlie. *Standing in Space,* 36.

and Duration, Bogart and Landau begin, "Tempo asks you to be aware of *how fast* you perform an action; Duration asks you to be aware of *how long* you stay in that action…"[48] Action – Movement – is by definition, part of each. Kinesthetic Response is "your spontaneous physical reaction to movement outside yourself."[49] For Repetition: "Let when you move (Kinesthetic Response), how you move (Tempo) and for how long you move (Duration) be determined by Repetition."[50] No work is done without being impacted by movement, which for Bogart and Landau's purposes may be synonymous with action, and by the transitive property, performance. Perhaps it is true that Movement is inseparable from Time and Space. Bogart and Landau's assumption serves their urge to put things together more efficiently, but may foreclose the possibility to dismantle them more completely.

Emotion, too, is excluded from Bogart and Landau's Viewpoints. Once again, it is because they understand the word differently from Overlie. Bogart is openly hostile toward emotion in the role she understands it to occupy in the tradition of Western actor training, which explains her surprise upon being reminded that Overlie included it as one of the Six Viewpoints: "You know, when Mary went away I forgot what her six Viewpoints were [sic]. Then I think Brian Jucha said to me, 'I think one of them is emotion.' I said, 'No! No! It's not! It can't be." She admits that her "reaction is against a lot of the American misunderstanding of Stanislavski,"[51] which she connects to the Strasbergian emphasis on the manufacture, expression, capture, and repetition of the outward signs of emotion.

As I detailed in chapter one, this is not what Overlie means by Emotion as a Viewpoint. She considers Emotion as raw presence – unobstructed communication between performer and

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[48] Bogart and Landau. *The Viewpoints Book,* 40. Original emphasis.
[49] Bogart and Landau. *The Viewpoints Book,* 42.
[50] Bogart and Landau. *The Viewpoints Book,* 43.
[51] Bogart. *Conversations With Anne,* 486.

audience – which is not concerned with the outward signs of emotion, but with allowing the two parties to have an emotional impact upon one another. I have seen this communication process in action with students who, asked to simply allow themselves to be present onstage with their classmates witnessing them, spontaneously and uncontrollably laugh or cry. So unaccustomed are they to allowing themselves to be seen, that receiving the energy from a group of supportive, engaged spectators is emotionally overwhelming. Bogart and Landau value this type of emotion. They concur that "Viewpoints training allows untamed feeling to arise from the actual physical, verbal and imaginative situation in which actors find themselves together."[52] What is implied here is that emotion, rather than being one of the Viewpoints, is a byproduct of what the actor constructs using the Viewpoints.

For Overlie, Emotion is unleashed when the hierarchical structures that place the performer above the audience are broken down and the two simply exist together. In Overlie's version of the Viewpoints, the actor is active in the process of creating emotional impact (even while the action they take might be minimal). In Bogart's version, emotion is beyond the scope of the actor's control. It will be present, but it will not be manipulated. She offers Steven Spielberg's film *ET: The Extra Terrestrial* (1982) as an example: "You cry at all the right places, but everybody else is crying at those places and at the end you feel like a manipulated rag. It's actually easy to make a whole audience feel one thing. It's also called fascism." Instead, Bogart finds that "If I try to *make* emotions happen, the environment is cheapened. So I try to create the circumstances in which emotions can be free."[53] The perceived need to devise a set of circumstances to allow something to take place versus the perceived need to remove obstacles

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[52] Bogart and Landau. *The Viewpoints Book,* 16.
[53] Bogart, Anne. "Balancing Acts: Anne Bogart and Kristin Linklater Debate the Current Trends in American Actor-training." Interview by David Diamond. *American Theatre,* January 1, 2001. 34, 104.

preventing the same thing from taking place offers a succinct distillation of the difference between Bogart's 1990s pastiche postmodernism and Overlie's 1970s deconstructive postmodernism.

Perucci says Overlie's greatest lesson was that the Viewpoints is not about discovering "more things [the artist] can manipulate," but "first and foremost how you relate to those materials; that the performance space, event, studio is an active ecology" into which the artist enters. As such, "it's fundamentally not about mastery. It's anti-mastery and anti-control…it's letting go of your 'artist-creator' or 'artist-originator' as Mary calls it."[54] Conversely, Bogart and Landau formulate their Viewpoints as "points of awareness that a performer or creator makes use of while working."[55] They select their Viewpoints based on what they believe is possible for the theatre actor to control. Controlling emotion, which they concede is "Highly effective on film,"[56] where the actor must only achieve a given emotional state once, is impossible in the theatre, where a feeling may not be available to the actor in each performance of a lengthy run. I suspect this same belief is what leads Bogart and Landau to omit Story from their Viewpoints.

In *A Director Prepares*, Bogart describes her preface as "an attempt to organize the discontinuous blips and bleeps of my life into a story in order to create a context for reading this book." Immediately, she determines this endeavor to be useless: "Reality is a construct of thought that desires continuity. Actually, the expectation of continuity is a glorious fiction. Reality depends upon our choices of what and how we choose to observe."[57] Whatever story she chooses to tell will be incomplete because of what she leaves out. This incompleteness will be further compounded by what the reader does not retain or chooses to ignore. It should come as

[54] Perucci, Tony. Interview with the author, July 21, 2021.
[55] Bogart and Landau. *The Viewpoints Book,* 8.
[56] Bogart and Landau. *The Viewpoints Book,*16.
[57] Bogart. *A Director Prepares,* 8.

no surprise that this "death of the author" attitude is retained in *The Viewpoints Book* and its exclusion of Story as an element under the actor's control.

This is not to say that the logic of performance, which is how Overlie defines Story as a Viewpoint, are completely absent from Bogart and Landau's text. Nor is it to say that attempting to exert control over that logic is entirely futile. *The Viewpoints Book* does not include Story as one of its Viewpoints, true. Yet because of the book's title, it is all too easy to forget that the Viewpoints comprise only a portion of the technique covered by the text. The subtitle, "A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition," reminds the reader that there is a second technique to be covered by the book. Of its seventeen chapters, three consider the Viewpoints and Composition together and six are given over entirely to Composition. It is worth investigating, then, how this latter technique fits with Viewpoints training and what reasons there might be for the separation. This investigation will clarify the role of Story, or logic, in works generated by Bogart and Landau's Viewpoints.

"Composition is the practice of selecting and arranging the separate components of theatrical language into a cohesive work of art for the stage."[58] Bogart and Landau's claim contains an echo of Overlie's: "Story in the Six Viewpoints is simply seen as a specific logic that functions as an organization of sequences of information."[59] Both recognize the capacity of the placement of elements of performance in Time and Space to alter the meaning of the work. For Overlie, the ultimate decision about the placement of those elements rests with the performer who "shoulders the responsibility of communicating the 'message.' As such, this aspect of communication must be understood and practiced by the performer – hence its integration into the Six Viewpoints. If the performer does not include Story in their practice, they run the risk of

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[58] Bogart and Landau. *The Viewpoints Book,* 12.
[59] Overlie. *Standing in Space,* 43.

art that "fails to impress" which for Overlie, only occurs when "the performer has failed to accurately present a clear and engaging Logic."[60]

For Bogart and Landau, on the other hand, the performer may assist in the generation of performance material in a Composition process, but they are not the final arbiter in terms of the presentation of that material to the audience. In a brief aside entitled "That's *Vice*" the authors recount an anecdote about a member of the production staff of *Miami Vice* whose job it was to look at visual elements which might be used on the series and determine whether or not they fit into its aesthetic. The staffer would indicate approval or denial by saying "That's (not) *Vice.*" Though they ultimately contend that "early Viewpoint sessions are about leading the group to a collective agreement about what is and what is not '*Vice'* in a particular Play-World,"[61] it is telling that their chosen example gives the final say to one person who is not part of the performing ensemble. For them, Composition is not Viewpoints. It is "a natural extension of Viewpoints training."[62] It is in these chapters on Composition where Bogart and Landau, directors by trade, begin to reinstitute the separation (and therefore hierarchy) of the actor/director relationship which Overlie's Six Viewpoints aim to eliminate.

It becomes apparent that *The Viewpoints Book* considers its work in two parts. The first part is Bogart and Landau's vision of Viewpoints actor training: How does the actor manipulate the body within Space and Time? The second part of the book's work is as a guide for directors to optimize their use of Viewpoints-trained actors for their own purposes. When introducing Composition, Bogart and Landau propose that while early work may benefit from being generated by a leaderless collective, "There comes a point in Composition work when it is

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[60] Overlie. *Standing in Space,* 44.
[61] Bogart and Landau. *The Viewpoints Book,* 124.
[62] Bogart and Landau. *The Viewpoints Book,* 137.

invaluable to have people leading the Compositions."[63] These leaders give assignments to the group for what kinds of compositions they wish to see, impose and enforce (or decline to enforce) time limits for those assignments, and arrange the compositions into a logic that suits the production. Frequently, directors find this to be a useful way to generate a great deal of content for original devised works, but Bogart and Landau offer guidance for applying these principles to existing scripts as well. As the book explains: "Compositions can be centered on particular plays or can be used for generating work based on a theme or an idea or a hunch. Composition work functions the way sketching does for a painter: Compositions created from ideas sketched in time and space introduce notions that may be useful for a given production." In short, Composition work allows a director to lead an ensemble toward the creation of a pastiche. Their "Basic Building Blocks for Devised Work" offers a three-part formula of question, anchor, and structure that lends itself to the mixing of genres and styles.[64]

The examples they provide of work with existing plays imply that the text fills one of these three roles and Composition work transforms the play by filling the other two in surprising ways. For example, Bogart's production of Kleist's *Katchen von Heilbronn* uses the play as a structural element to explore the question of "What is German?" with cultural history as its anchor.[65] Cummings observes this recurring phenomenon in several of Bogart's "classic explosion" works: her adaptation of Gorky's *At the Bottom* performed by East Village Skinheads on an abandoned basketball court, Büchner's *Danton's Death* as performed by a group of Manhattan socialites during a French Revolution theme party, and Rogers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific* as drama therapy for a group of military veterans afflicted with post-traumatic

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[63] Bogart and Landau. *The Viewpoints Book,* 141-2.
[64] Bogart and Landau. *The Viewpoints Book,* 154.
[65] Bogart and Landau. *The Viewpoints Book,* 166.

stress disorder.[66] These framing devices anchor the productions in recognizable systems of signs that are not given by the play texts. They interact with the dramatic structure of the plays to pose new questions about their meanings in this world.

Through the use of Composition, Perucci's observation – quoted in full at the end of the previous subsection – appears to have merit: Bogart's adjustments to Viewpoints training are convenient for the director's work, "empower[ing] actors to make directorial choices." Still, his implication that it allows the director to assume credit for the ensemble's labor: "You do the work, and then I'll have directed it," is an overstatement. Composition invites the actor into the creative process, but the director - prior to the arrival of the audience - is the ultimate adjudicator of Story; of Logic; of what is and is not *Vice.*

What is it? And What is it Really?

Bogart muses that her practice of pastiche is perhaps the result of the completion of postmodernist deconstruction and articulates the beginning of "the process of a new construction of meaning" which she suggests "might be called 'new constructivism' or something like that." Upon examination of her publications and company organization, in addition to her training philosophy and methods, the sum of her work demonstrates a commitment to pastiche that reinforces a worldview of disassociated images in a nonlinear sequence. Bogart presents the unfamiliar rearrangement of the components of the pastiche as evidence of their deconstruction where Overlie prefers to examine the components individually and at great length. Both approaches existed within Cold War era postmodernism preceding Bogart's arrival on the scene. Consider the pastiche work of Rauschenberg and Warhol alongside the deconstructive work of Cage and Rainer. Yet after the dissolution of the old-world order and the globalizing influence

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[66] Cummings. *Remaking American Theater,* 39-40.

that followed, it makes sense that the impulse to rearrange came into ascendancy. In the 1990s, the telecommunications revolution and the advent of the internet would add the capacity for speed and a sense of urgency to this reconstructive impulse. Bogart is obviously influenced by this new global culture of speed, but if pastiche has a place in postmodernism, then Bogart's work is properly postmodern.

Both Overlie and Bogart seem to resist this association. Bogart does so through her desire to declare the deconstructive project of postmodernism complete, and therefore to suggest that postmodernity is no longer an accurate way to describe the conditions in which we live. Conversely, Overlie, argues that "we are only at the beginning of the era of Postmodernism," offering the continued struggle against oppressive and inequitable hierarchies in contemporary society as convincing evidence.[67] For Overlie, pastiche represents a facile approach to deconstruction which is careless about the ways in which it reassembles its elements. She terms the resulting product "Kitsch Postmodern Art" and contends that it does not realize the possibilities of deconstruction to dismantle hierarchy. Overlie's vision for this ultimate possibility is the artist who becomes what she names an "original anarchist." This is not the conventional definition of an anarchist as one who rejects all rules or laws, but rather one who is so in touch with the laws set forth by the physical universe that they need not impose any others in order to be a positive influence on the world.[68] Such an artist/performer does not need a director, choreographer, or playwright to guide them to meaningful work. At the same time, the idea that it is possible for one to attain such a deep understanding of these natural laws is yet another example of Overlie's flirtation with modernist essentialism.

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[67] Overlie. *Standing in Space,* 95.
[68] Overlie. *Standing in Space,* 124.

Bogart and Landau, in the final analysis, think of themselves as directors. For them to describe a mode of performance in which an "original anarchist" artist/performer can create without an external force keeping them from coloring outside the lines would write the authors out of a job. Bogart's company model, while it relies on empowering all members of the company to participate in the generation of the work, ultimately requires some vestiges of traditional theatrical hierarchy. Witnessing the anarchy that ensued from the Soviet expulsion from Afghanistan, the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, and the release of breakaway republics, it is not hard to imagine an aversion to anarchy and aleatory reasserting itself into the cultural consciousness at this moment. Thus, while performer/choreographer Mary Overlie can conceive of Story as a Viewpoint, no more or less important to performance than any of the others, someone who has a vested interest in the title of Director, needs to place Story, Logic, Composition in a position to be supported by the other Viewpoints. Overlie's Six Viewpoints commit themselves to a worldview in which Story, and by association, truth is made entirely contingent on point of view and exists in a constant state of flux.[69] Bogart's is a comforting, less radical skepticism that does not claim access to truth, but instead proposes to try on a variety of truths and see how they might fit together.

In retrospect, Perucci considers Bogart's less-radical stance a betrayal of the Six Viewpoints and of postmodernism more broadly: "I don't know why [Bogart] called it the Viewpoints, or once she realized it was not [the Viewpoints,] why didn't she give it a new name? And then there still would have been a kind of appropriation, but then you could really make the case that like, just as method acting is Strasberg's misreading and understanding of Stanislavski, you don't think [the Method is] Stanislavski technique."[70] Paradoxically, Perucci's insistence

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[69] Overlie. *Standing in Space,* 96.
[70] Perucci. Interview with the author, July 21, 2021.

that Bogart's Viewpoints are insufficiently faithful to Overlie to be considered Viewpoints at all, suggests the emergence of an orthodoxy that is inconsistent with Overlie's protestations of radical skepticism.

Overlie remarks that it took her nearly thirty years to develop the Six Viewpoints to the point where she was comfortable describing them as "a complete theory."[71] It took another four years to publish any part of that work, and a decade after that to publish *Standing in Space,* her definitive work on the subject. In 2006, a year after the publication of *The Viewpoints Book,* Overlie's essay, "The Six Viewpoints," explains that she felt a "need to present the entire logic," and was "very reluctant to publish anything less thorough."[72] In *Standing in Space,* she comments on the difficulty a postmodern artist has in achieving this thoroughness: "I had given up hope of ever finishing the Six Viewpoints. In fact I did not know that it was possible to finish a theory."[73] Overlie's inner artist "quailed at the prospect of fixed words on a page. She had a consuming fear that they might in some unknown way, damage the creative process."[74] Overlie's anxiety over codification as a calcifying force against further exploration of her work was apparently well-founded.

In the interim between the release of *The Viewpoints Book* and *Standing in Space,* this calcification is visible on both sides. Despite Bogart's frequent reminders that her Viewpoints are a riff on Overlie's Six Viewpoints, she has been unable or unwilling to specify the differences between the two and the reasons for creating those differences. The consequence is that Bogart's packaging of the Viewpoints as a series of acting exercises in the service of Composition-

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[71] Overlie, Mary. "The Six Viewpoints." In *Training of the American Actor.* Ed. Arthur Bartow. (Theatre Communications Group, New York, 2006), 187.
[72] Overlie. "The Six Viewpoints." 188.
[73] Overlie. *Standing in Space,* 127.
[74] Overlie. *Standing in Space,* 103.

focused directors has become the identifying feature of Viewpoints practitioners in high schools, universities, and professional training programs around the world. Some of those practitioners may have the vague recollection that Bogart's Viewpoints are derived from another source, but most likely return to the body of exercises in the book and skip over the brief mention of Overlie in the introduction. Even those that do remember Bogart's mention of a precursor are unlikely to feel compelled to investigate further so long as *The Viewpoints Book* serves their needs. For these people, Bogart's Viewpoints are The Viewpoints.

For Perucci, and a handful of others who studied with Overlie at the Experimental Theater Wing, The Six Viewpoints are the One True Way. They are aware of Bogart's revisions and regard them as a poor substitute that offers quick and easy answers to complex questions. Perucci explains: "You would not confuse a handcrafted espresso from something you get from the automatic machine in Starbucks. But the thing in Starbucks is still better than what you used to be able to get at McDonalds. So Starbucks…displaces and, you know, eliminates a whole bunch of authentic things and places." Though he does admit that "It's unarguable that it tastes better than McDonald's coffee," Perucci's suggestion that the source is necessarily purer and more authoritative than the innovations springing from it falls victim to the genetic fallacy and is out of step with the postmodernist rejection of essentialism.[75] The speed and convenience of Starbucks in this analogy is central to Bogart's purpose in her revision of the Viewpoints. It allows a director to bring a diverse group of actors with disparate previous trainings into a room and have them speaking the same language in a short period of time. It enables a pastiche of creative people to create pastiches together just as Starbucks is a corporate pastiche of a

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[75] Perucci. Interview with the author, July 21, 2021.

European café. It serves its purpose exactly but will always be unsatisfying to those "purists" who crave a deeper engagement with the materials themselves.

My purpose in this chapter has been to start a process of decalcification. I want to do what both Viewpoints camps have scrupulously avoided, which is to unpack the differences between the Six Viewpoints and the Viewpoints, understand the sources of and reasons for those differences, and acknowledge that each has value in the context for which it was created. Factoring in geopolitical events and the shockwaves they have caused in conceptions of postmodernity may seem overly grand for a discussion of two generations of a method of actor training and establishing causation between the end of the cold war and the emergence of Anne Bogart as a force in US actor training is not precisely my intent here. Nevertheless, ignoring the globalizing effect of these political changes, alongside technological changes that have made the world smaller, faster, and more incomprehensible minimizes the impact of those events on the function of the artist in postmodern society and on the lived experience of individual subjects. The political is personal, and the personal is artistic. Constructing connections between objects which authority has asked us to leave apart is an act of Viewpoints, and I suspect that both Overlie and Bogart would approve.

CHAPTER III: NARRATIVE

In this chapter I will explore the challenges posed to the actor by performance texts that defy the conventional narrative structures of dramatic theatre. Hans-Thies Lehmann, as a basis of comparison for postdramatic theatre, defines the narrative form of drama for which "the criterion itself remains unchallenged and valid as a matter of course," as a sequence of "Exposition, ascending action, peripeteia and catastrophe." This narrative structure is what "people expect of an entertaining story in film and theatre."[1] Lehmann also stipulates that this narrative form relies on a "dialectical essence" which depends on "exposition of the subject in its state of conflict," and which is resolved through a logical series of actions related to one another through cause and effect.[2] In *The Glass Menagerie,* for example, Tom Wingfield stays out late drinking, so his mother, Amanda, is angry with him in the morning. Amanda is angry, so Tom promises to bring home a gentleman to call on his sister. Tom promises to bring home a gentleman caller, so Amanda forgives him, and so on. Lehman observes that there is a strong association between this dramatic narrative structure and a modernist historiography asserting that "Marxist theoreticians have sometimes claimed drama to be the embodiment of the dialectic of history."[3]

Postmodernism rejects the notion of dialectical progress as both an epistemological and aesthetic given, as such, narrative is a key point of contention in its break with modernism. Lyotard, critiquing the discourse of modern science, observes that science is distrustful toward narrative because it is a human construction rather than a given fact of nature, and therefore lacks objectivity. Without objectivity, according to the scientist, narrative is unable to totalize itself as true knowledge. Yet, "Scientific knowledge cannot know and make known that it is true

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[1] Lehmann, Hans-Thies. *Postdramatic Theatre.* Translated by Karen Jürs-Munby. (London, Routledge, 2006), 34.
[2] Lehman. *Postdramatic Theatre.* 39.
[3] Lehman. *Postdramatic Theatre.* 39.

knowledge without resorting to the other, narrative, kind of knowledge, which from its point of view is no knowledge at all."[4] Though it attempts to disguise itself as an objective description of the natural, given, or common-sense, science can only explain itself as credible through a narrative form which dominant ideology deems acceptable: "True knowledge, in this perspective, is always indirect knowledge; it is composed of reported statements that are incorporated into the metanarrative of a subject that guarantees their legitimacy."[5] Postmodernism, in Lyotard's formulation, moves to expose the question-begging he sees as inherent within these meta or grand narratives. In doing so, it demonstrates the possibility for new knowledges which previously did not fit the grand narrative's prescription for linear progress and emancipation.

Modernist drama, too, can be described as attempting to erase its own narrativity in an effort to be perceived as an objective mimesis of human actions and conditions. It is important to note that by "modernist drama," I do not incorporate all modernist theatre. Recall that in Lehmann's definition drama requires a dialectical sequence of conflict and resolution. Modernist theatre practitioners such as Artaud, Beckett, and Stein eschew this logic in their work and thus for my purposes do not qualify as dramatists *per se*. Even Brecht, whose work makes use of a dialectic, is working in the epic mode rather than the dramatic. The Epic dialectic does not limit itself to dialogue between characters, but incorporates the audience, so Brecht may be excluded as well. Considering this, what remains of modernist drama is realism, naturalism, and possibly expressionism (such as that of early period O'Neill). All of these, to varying degrees, are committed to mimesis.

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[4] Lyotard, Jean-Francois. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Translated by Brian Massumi. (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 29.
[5] Lyotard. *The Postmodern Condition.*35.

There are a variety of ways in which modern dramatists went about this project. For example, in Strindberg's preface to *Miss Julie*, the author points out that he has done away with the convention of the act break, "because it seems to me that our declining susceptibility to illusion would possibly be disturbed by intervals, during which the spectator has time to reflect and thereby escape from the suggestive influence" of the play and its message. For similar reasons, he also advocates for the removal of footlights, painted backdrops, conventional stage makeup, and the orchestra pit.[6] Strindberg's stage directions also imply that the kitchen appliances he describes should be practical. The cook, Kristin, is discovered in the play's opening scene "standing at the stove, frying something in a frying pan," which she eventually serves to Jean. When Jean finishes eating, Kristin clears the table, "washes the plate at the sink, dries it, and puts it away in the cupboard."[7] In addition to these technical changes designed to convince the audience that they are looking through the proscenium and into another world that is an exact replica of the one they inhabit, Strindberg animates the content of his play with a modernist epistemology. Where previous generations of writers may have attributed the "fate" of their characters to their position on the great wheel of fortune, the whims of the gods, or being "star-crossed," Strindberg claims that "every event in life [and by extension in his play]—and this is a fairly new discovery! Is usually the result of a whole series of more or less deep-seated motives,"[8] in other words, the linear accumulation of causes and effects which Lehmann identified as the Marxist model of History. Strindberg and his contemporaries had discovered that the events of life could be totally captured by an Aristotelean plot structure. How convenient

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[6] Strindberg, August. *Miss Julie and Other Plays*. Translated by Michael Robinson. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998), 64-67.

[7] Strindberg, *Miss Julie and Other Plays.*73-5.

[8] Strindberg, *Miss Julie and Other Plays*. 58.

for playwrights that the structure of a play should be a perfect miniature of the structure of human experience.

The second strategy that modernist dramatic playwrights employ to disguise the constructedness and narrativity of their work is to link it to another discourse which, as Lyotard observes, had also succeeded in burying its traces of narrative, the discourse of science.[9] Science does this through a language game that makes it appear as though the denotative statements it generates are uncritical observations about the conditions of nature. Strindberg moves to make his drama appear scientific by this standard, first by holding up subjectivity as unsophisticated in comparison to the objectifying distance of *logos*:

> But the time may come when we shall have become so highly developed, so enlightened, that we shall be able to look with indifference at the brutal, cynical, heartless drama that life presents, when we shall have laid aside those inferior, unreliable instruments of thought called feelings, which will become superfluous and harmful once our organs of judgement have returned.

He then argues that his play considers both biological and behavioral science impacts on human actions equally and removed culturally-influenced considerations of morality from the calculus determining the fate of his characters in order to make them "characterless."[10] In Strindberg's conception, a characterless character behaves, not in accordance with the "bourgeois concept of the immobility of the soul," which results in melodramatic, stereotyped performances associated with romanticism, but more in line with the "naturalists, who know how richly complicated the soul is." Strindberg's "characterless character" behaves according to nature, which for

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[9] Lyotard. *The Postmodern Condition.* 27-8.
[10] Strindberg. *Miss Julie and Other Plays,* 58.

Strindberg, is understood empirically through Pavlovian Behaviorism and Social Darwinism
(which bolster the case for a positivist worldview).

Strindberg believed that even premodern characters could be made characterless since,
"Darwinism has existed in very age, ever since Moses's successive history of creation from the
lower animals up to man; it is just that we have discovered and formulated it now!"[11] Thus, Miss
Julie is a "man-hating half-woman" who has "existed in every age, just that she is now been
discovered, has come out into the open and made herself heard." Because she has always existed
and never won equality with men, her fate is natural: "she involves herself in an absurd struggle
in which she falls. Absurd because a stunted form can never catch up with the one in the lead."
Strindberg provides a narrative interpretation of scientific discourse to posit that women are
unequal to men because they are biologically inferior, not for want of "equal education, equal
voting rights, disarmament, or temperance."[12] He obscures the caveat that Pavlov and Darwin
created narratives to explain what they observed and that his own narrative merely absorbs these
scientific discourses in the service of the larger ideology. Strindberg falls into the trap that
Lyotard describes: the inability of scientific discourse to legitimate itself without resorting to
narrative which, as outlined above, science regards as "primitive, underdeveloped, backward,
alienated, composed of opinions, customs, authority, prejudice, ideology."[13]

Linda Hutcheon builds on Lyotard's ideas in her study of postmodern historiographic
metafiction, *A Poetics of the Postmodern.* Hutcheon observes the move by late-twentieth century
historiographers to recognize the dependence of their discipline on narrative and "question our
(perhaps unacknowledged) assumptions about what constitutes historical knowledge." By doing

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[11] Strindberg. *Miss Julie and Other Plays,* 59.
[12] Strindberg. *Miss Julie and Other Plays,* 60.
[13] Lyotard. *The Postmodern Condition*. 27.

so, these historiographers opened up space for history to be read against the grain by "minoritarian discourses" in both the disciplines of history and literature.[14] While the events of the past have been made to seem like a linear march toward the 'end of history,' postmodern historians and cultural theorists have argued that such a view does not represent the given reality, but serves the ideology of imperial, cis-hetero, and patriarchal power structures.[15]

Lyotard also argues that the modernist attempt to use the language of science to "judge the existence or validity of narrative knowledge," as Strindberg does when he evokes Darwin, fails categorically.[16] Narrative cannot purge itself of ideology. Even if it could be assumed, for example, that a neutral 'slice of life' is possible to present onstage, the directorial choice of which of the four walls to remove so that the audience may observe it imposes perspectival bias. Postmodern writers then, need not be concerned with hiding the seams of their narrative constructions. Nick Kaye observes that rather than "suppress[ing] the event of its own narrativity…the postmodern is marked by an awareness of the event of narrativity; the contingent aspect of narrative that is so completely other to discourse that it cannot be incorporated, accounted for or 'totalized' by it."[17] By highlighting its own emergence from a point of view, it not only undermines the master narrative which seeks to deny the existence of alternative perspectives, but it implies the impossibility of any "finished totality," including the Aristotelean narrative structure.[18]

All of this points toward my task in this chapter. Playwright Sarah Ruhl, whose work will be considered in greater detail in the next chapter, has posed the question "Do we think the arc is

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[14] Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism.* (London, Routledge, 1988), xi-xii.

[15] Gunn, Simon. *History and Cultural Theory.* (Harlow, England, Pearson Education Ltd, 2006), 1-25.

[16] Lyotard. *The Postmodern Condition.* 26.

[17] Kaye, Nick. *Postmodernism and Performance.* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1994), 18.

[18] See Kaye, 6-7 in which he cites Charles Jencks' reading of postmodernism as a rejection of the possibility of the "finished totality" and a "universally valid geometrical form" that Modernism sought.

a natural [narrative] structure because of the structure of the male orgasm?" Ruhl's question, placed next to her assertion that Aristotle "thought the natural form was always an arc"[19] demonstrates what Elinor Fuchs means when she argues that postmodern theory has forged an alliance with materialist feminism "in their effort to expose the concealed misogyny in conventional narrative structure."[20] Though postmodern feminist playwrights are certainly not the first to ask what other structures are available, they provide a useful template to demonstrate how rethinking narrative form can expose and resist this concealed misogyny (and I would add racism and colonialism). In the introduction, I noted several works on actor training that call attention to the ways in which modes of teaching actors rehearse this same misogyny and racism. Given that it is custom-designed for a racist, colonialist, misogynist form of drama, how could it not? Therefore, if Fuchs' argument that postmodern theory moves to undermine this oppressive narrative structure is applied to postmodern theatrical practice, it requires its own acting techniques. Here, I evaluate the degree to which Viewpoints training – a self-proclaimed postmodern acting technique – is equipped to prepare the actor to work within the narrative structures of postmodern performance texts.

The two texts I will consider as case studies in this chapter both emerge from minoritarian or oppositional discourses to challenge the positivist master narrative of emancipation with their content. Additionally, they reinforce their oppositional status through the use of narrative forms that undermine traditional Western notions of what a dramatic text 'is.' These forms alter the ways in which time is perceived onstage, and thus may flummox the actor whose training assumes that a plot moves through time on a unidirectional line with an inciting

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[19] Ruhl, Sarah. *100 Essays I Don't Have Time to Write: On Umbrellas and Sword Fights, Parades and Dogs, Fire Alarms, Children, and Theater.* (New York, Faber and Faber, 2014), 15.
[20] Fuchs, Elinor. *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater after Modernism.* (Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 1996), 9.

incident, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement, and that such a structure exists because it is natural. Instead, I suggest that an actor training based, not on hierarchical accumulation, but horizontal distribution of experiences, will give actors a way into these postmodern texts.

With Maria Irene Fornes' *Fefu and Her Friends* (1977) and Suzan-Lori Parks' *Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World* (1990), I investigate the ways in which alternative narrative structures dispel the myth of natural structure on one level, and on another, challenge the validity of master narratives. I search for ways in which these alternative structures not only expose the ideological biases of traditional plot constructions, but also make space for minoritarian discourses to better articulate themselves or more intentionally resist the dominant ideology. Ultimately, I locate philosophical and practical sympathies that Viewpoints trainings share with these disruptive narrative structures suggesting that these training techniques can prepare the actor for work on such texts.

Before embarking on this exploration of the play texts, I want to emphasize that merely deviating from traditional narrative structure does not, in and of itself, guarantee a work to be either antihegemonic or postmodern. Hutcheon acknowledges that it would be "naïve to ignore that art can just as easily confirm as trouble received codes, no matter how radical its surface transgressions."[21] Presumably the converse is also true—that truly subversive content can be packaged in a conventional structure. That, however, is not my present concern. Instead, I offer some clarity on how a work might demonstrate a postmodern sensibility if the fact of its narrative construction is insufficient.

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[21] Hutcheon. *A Poetics of Postmodernism.* 183.

Antoine Compagnon, in an effort to explain what is meant by "modernity," exposes the paradox that it is simultaneously consumed by its belief that each moment is a step toward the perfection of the universe, and its negation, which is that each new technology brings humanity one step further from its essence.[22] On its face, it seems absurd that naturalists like Strindberg and Ibsen can share the blanket of modernism with symbolists like Yeats and Wagner. I suggest that the paradox can be resolved by seeing both factions as searching for (or claiming to have located) a totalized representation of the universal human experience. The naturalists advocate for an Apollonian expression while the symbolists prefer the Dionysian. Some argue that humankind is advancing toward its ideal, while others lament the schism with the ideal that modernization has wrought. All express themselves through the classical, "natural" narrative structure. The modern ontology is Platonic, in that it assumes the existence of an essential quality of humanity, and these factions present conflicting epistemologies for coming to know that essence.

The twentieth century avant-garde calls the classical structures into question. Compagnon cites Kandinski and Mondrian, Woolf and Proust, but does not give much thought to the performing arts. Pirandello, Brecht, and Martha Graham would perhaps be appropriate historical analogs. Compagnon does not argue, however, that the avant-garde uses its formal innovations to dispute modern essentialism. Rather, they incorporate form into the positivist narrative as part of "the same doctrine of progress and the dialectical evolution of forms" in the pursuit of "art's purification, its reduction to its essence."[23] As part of the process in which humanity is working its way toward its most perfect incarnation, art is also working its way toward being a perfect

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[22] Compagnon, Antoine. *The 5 Paradoxes of Modernity.* Translated by Franklin Philip. (New York, Columbia University Press, 1994), 16-7.
[23] Compagnon, Antoine. *The 5 Paradoxes of Modernity.* 38-9.

expression of the human experience. Thus, although the avant-garde seeks new forms of expression, its commitment to Platonic progress toward representation of the essential allies it more closely with the modern than with the skeptical epistemology of postmodernism.

Though I do not doubt that Viewpoints training has plenty to offer for performers working on avant-garde and even modernist performance texts, that is not my focus. What I am interested in, and what I intend to show as Overlie and Bogart's interests, is how anti-hierarchical content, form, and technique can subvert the positivist assumptions about the world which are baked into modern dramatic literature and actor training. For the most part, I have tried to avoid direct comparisons between Viewpoints trainings and more established methods. To do so would set the two up as agonists in exactly the kind of dialectical relationship I am critiquing here. However, I think it is crucial to give an example of how training recapitulates dramatic structure so that the student internalizes that structure, and when the available pool of actors have internalized the hegemonic structure, it becomes increasingly difficult for subversive dramaturgies to emerge. For this demonstration, I have selected Sanford Meisner's "repetition" exercise.[24]

Meisner, like Stanislavski before him, structures his book on acting as a series of dialogues from his acting classes. The reader is meant to believe that, unlike Stanislavski, Meisner's dialogues are accounts of real acting classes which actually took place, but whether they are or not is irrelevant. The dialectical approach to constructing the textbook allows the reader to experience the back-and-forth feeling of the repetition exercise. Each successive repetition of a line, "Will you come to my house tonight?" for one, advances the text down the page and advances "plot" of the exercise until Meisner gives "a withering scornful look" and

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[24] Meisner, Sanford and Dennis Longwell. *Sanford Meisner: On Acting.* (New York, Vintage Books, 1987) 20-23, 27-31. These sections offer examples of how the exercise is played and what Meisner's desired results are.

drops the punchline: "You're a professional virgin!" replicating the masculine orgasmic structure which Ruhl identifies.[25] Meisner posits that this linear progression is "instinctive," informed neither by thought, nor by culture, but by nature. He encourages his students to abandon thought for nature just as Strindberg claimed that his characterless characters behaved according to the laws of nature with each external stimulus evoking an instinctual response.

Rosemary Malague offers a number of incisive observations about the relationship between dramatic structure and Meisner technique, especially the repetition exercise. To begin with, she points out that Meisner's emphasis on instinct and impulse discourages the actor from exercising their own thought or agency. In one of his dialogues, Meisner accuses a student of being "a thinker" and admonishes him to "stop immediately!"[26] Malague protests that "this removal of a subject's thought-process is also a removal of resistance, paving the way for whatever 'brainwashing' may follow."[27] Furthermore, Meisner sets himself up to be the judge of when the actor is behaving "naturally," and when they impose thought or cultural biases on their performances. It just so happens that behaviors which are "natural" also serve to create dramatic tension and move the plot of the scene forward in a way that mirrors the Aristotelean plot structure of conflict, climax and catharsis. The hierarchy that exists in the studio, with the master teacher at the head, parallels the hierarchy that supposedly exists in all dramatic texts, with everything focused toward the climax of the scene. The exercise is designed to give actors facility with a specific narrative structure; it is constructed to replicate that structure, which, as I have argued above, is also a construction.

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[25] Meisner and Longwell. *Sanford Meisner: On Acting.* 28.
[26] Meisner and Longwell. *Sanford Meisner: On Acting.* 21.
[27] Malague, Rosemary. *An Actress Prepares: Women and "The Method."* (London, Routledge, 2012), 112.

The repetition exercise also reinforces the cultural narrative that white masculinity is the neutral subjective position. Because Meisner insists that instinctive observations must pertain to the physical, rather than the emotional, intellectual, or spiritual aspects of an individual (as though humans do not make judgements about such things based on "gut-level" impulses), the exercise is limited to surface-level physical appearance of the actors for generating its inciting incident. Malague cites Peggy Phelan's argument that attempting to "read" the body in this way makes skin color and gender the defining attributes of identity thereby essentializing those qualities as "other."[28] Placing the dependence on dramatic conflict alongside the white masculinist tradition of regulating minoritized bodies – as Strindberg claims is natural in *Miss Julie* – leads Meisner to conclude that hostility is the most dramatically pleasing (and therefore correct) impulse, and that "the man's impulse *should* be to express anger, and the woman's impulse *should* be to receive it."[29] But what happens in a performance text that refuses the heat of escalating conflict as the natural storytelling structure? In the next section I consider some aesthetic strategies that authors may be employing, intentionally or not, in which traditional plot structure is disadvantageous. The aim is to make it clear that such texts require actors who can give compelling performances while resisting the temptation to search for conflict and climax.

Disrupting the Narrative: A Tangent

Thus far, I have focused on observations pointing to masculinist or phallocentric structures in playwriting. The first strategy for subverting those structures I discuss is inspired by observations about more deeply ingrained linguistic structures which are masculinist or phallocentric. As Luce Irigaray points out, "Alphabetical writing is linked historically to the civil

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[28] Malague, Rosemary. *An Actress Prepares.* 128.
[29] Malague, Rosemary. *An Actress Prepares.* 137. Original Emphasis

and religious codification of patriarchal powers,"[30] and the "cultural injustices of language and its generalized sexism have to be analyzed. These are to be found in grammar, in vocabulary, in the connotations of a word's gender."[31] Irigaray's criticism is aimed at romance languages, French in particular, in which all common nouns are assigned binarized gender – masculine or feminine. Yet, until quite recently, the structure of the English language required that subjective pronouns default to the masculine version unless the gender of the subject were specified beforehand: "If a student [of any gender] raises *his* hand, it means *he* wishes to be called upon by the teacher." There are also conventions that remain in place in which objects – ships, machines, nations – are referred to using feminine pronouns. In both cases, the structures of language bestow subjectivity on the male and objectivity on the female.

Hélène Cixous, the poststructuralist French theorist and playwright, proposes an alternative way of using language, termed *écriture feminine*, or feminine writing. Cixous claims that *écriture feminine* is "outside of and no longer bound by the rules of patriarchal discourse."[32] To that end, her works frequently borrow words from other languages and resist generic categorization. She takes those borrowed words and creates neologisms by adding gendered French suffixes. In coining words such as "foreigne," Cixous creates the sense that foreign-ness lives not only in speaking a second language, but also in existing as a female-bodied individual in patriarchal society.[33] Not only are her linguistic structures "feminized," but Cixous also looks to subvert received organizational strategies. Feminine discourse, "even when 'theoretical' or political, is never simple or linear or 'objectified.'" It is a force that will "knock the wind out of

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[30] Irigaray, Luce. *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*. Translated by Allison Martin. (New York, Routledge, 1993), 53.
[31] Irigary. *Je, Tu, Nous*. 63.
[32] Blyth, Ian and Susan Sellers. *Hélène Cixous: Live Theory*. (New York, Continuum, 2004), 3.
[33] Blyth and Sellers. *Hélène Cixous: Live Theory.* 9.

the codes" and "by some act of transgression…[has] overthrown successiveness, connection, and the wall of circumfusion."[34] *Écriture feminine* exposes the ways in which the dialectical *logos* that Lehmann identifies in realist drama and I argue animates Meisner (et al) are constructions. Furthermore, that these constructions are not arbitrary but designed to maintain a masculinist hierarchy

A frequent critique of *écriture feminine* is that by suggesting the existence of a way of writing which is inherently "feminine," Cixous grants the essentialist premise that an inherent femininity is possible. If it is the case that the essential feminine is different from the essential masculine, then there is an inherent inequality, and therefore hierarchy between them. Cixous, however, does not commit herself to that argument. In her view, feminine writing is only loosely connected to the sexed female body: "You can't talk about *a* female sexuality, uniform, homogeneous, classifiable into codes—any more than you can talk about one unconscious resembling another."[35] For Cixous, the feminine stands in for any positionality "marked" by difference from the "libidinal and cultural—hence political, typically masculine—economy."[36] Queer studies has produced a similar line of argument to the point that a move of this kind can be termed "queering." This metonymy may have the effect of eliding differences among and between marginalized positionalities, especially to a twenty-first century English-speaking audience. It becomes easier to understand given Irigaray's observation that the French language considers all things through the lens of the masculine/feminine binary and the ways in which it tends to assign subjective nouns to the domain of masculinity and objective nouns to that of the feminine.[37] These assignations do not indicate literal biological sex. Rather they concern those

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[34] Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs.* Vol. 1 No. 4 (Summer 1976): 881-2, 888.
[35] Cixous. "The Laugh of the Medusa," 876.
[36] Cixous. "The Laugh of the Medusa," 879.
[37] Irigaray. *Je, Tu, Nous.* 70-74.

nouns which are capable of action and the things which are acted upon, gendered as a consequence of performance rather than sexed as a consequence of essence. Additionally, much of the dialogue around sexual difference in early poststructuralism is grounded in psychoanalytic theory and Cixous' work is no exception. As such, she makes use of the Freudian notion that feminine sexuality, like the African continent, is mysterious and unknowable for a white man (the Freudian metonym for humanity writ large). From that perspective, moves by racial minorities to disrupt hegemonic linguistic structures also constitute *écriture feminine.* I will take up the significance of this possibility later.

Before leaving the topic of *écriture feminine,* I must also note that Cixous is ambivalent about its possibilities in writing for the theatre. On the one hand, she is taken in by the potential theatrical practice has for breaking down conventional hierarchies; the author is not the one who decides the meaning of the text. Ian Blyth and Susan Sellers note the "strong affinities" Cixous' conception of *écriture feminine* has with Mnouchkine and *Théâtre du Soleil* in that the latter "does not settle on a single, 'phallocentric' meaning of the text."[38] Cixous explains her frequent collaborator's work in similar terms: "Ariane's work is open, i.e. the parts aren't assigned permanently until the last minute…For two to three months, the troupe rehearses without any set casting, which means all the actors who want to try a role do so."[39] This process creates a multitude of possible meanings, not only due to different readings of lines that each actor might choose, but in the physical characteristics of each actor taking on a role. For instance, Gandhi means something different if he is represented by a short, stocky man than if he is taken on by a

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[38] Blyth and Sellers. *Hélène Cixous: Live Theory.* 53-4.
Cixous' theatrical writing has mostly taken place in cooperation with Arianne Mnouchkine and the *Théâtre du Soleil*. Anne Bogart has cited Mnouchkine's collaborative methods as part of the inspiration for her own work with SITI Company.
[39] Cixous, Helene. Interview by Hors Cadre, translated by Lucy Garnier, edited by Susan Sellers. *White Ink: Interviews on Sex, Text and Politics.* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2008), 108.

tall, thin woman. Neither of those representations are beholden to the meanings a spectator might take from an actor who closely resembles Gandhi, the historical figure.

On the other hand, Cixous has expressed concern that drama is too limited by the time constraints of theatrical convention to adequately explore this multiplicity of meanings. Blyth and Sellers argue that the constant, urgent, forward motion of theatre, a medium which exists only in the present, does not allow for the "poetic excess or 'waste' Cixous feels *écriture feminine* ought to produce."[40] The assumption here is that theatre necessarily adheres to a dramatic narrative structure such as I have described earlier in this chapter. This assumption does not apply to all performance texts, let alone theatrical performance as a whole. I suggest that the narrative strategies of performance texts with postdramatic elements are more conducive to being read as *écriture feminine*, and that the "poetic excess" Cixous misses in the theatre is provided for by Viewpoints trainings.

Friends, Not Agonists

I do not intend to argue here that Maria Irene Fornes' *Fefu and Her Friends* cannot be read and staged as a piece of dramatic literature in which conflict motivates action and opposing points of view, each *wanting* to either convince or defeat the other, are worked through in a normative dialogue. I do not doubt that such a reading is available. Rather, I would like to consider what it would be like not to assume that such *wanting* is necessary for a narrative to be enacted. Sarah Ruhl gives an account of an incident when Fornes was her teacher:

> She once said to us in class, "American actors are taught to have objectives—what does your character want from the other character? That is *business*. When I deal with other people, I don't *want* something from them; I want a rapport. Some people say that's an

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[40] Blyth and Sellers. *Hélène Cixous: Live Theory.* 56.

objective —it's not—it's a sensation of well-being. Life is not constantly about wanting

to get something from somebody else. Life is about pleasure."[41]

The desire for this rapport, for a "sensation of well-being," is what is at stake in *Fefu and Her*

Friends. It is not something an actor can "go after," any more than a director can achieve their

desired effect by admonishing an actor to "just relax!" Fornes states the problem through her title

character early in the play, comparing the way her husband, brother, and the male gardener (none

of whom appear onstage) relate to one another to her relationships with other women: "I envy

them. I like being like a man. Thinking like a man. Feeling like a man. – They are well together.

Women are not."[42] To Fornes' point, it is hard to think of "to be well together" as an actable

objective. In response to Fefu's lament, Christina agrees that she has "wished for the trust men

have for each other."[43] Again, while the objective "to *gain* trust" is a traditionally strong

playable objective, it is usually played in service of some larger objective to exploit that trust.

What Christina wishes for is "to *have* trust," which suggests the same anti-dramatic stasis that

"to be well together" implies. The difference, as with Fornes' observation above, is between

wanting something from another person versus aspiring toward a new status quo.

Bogart and Landau also trouble the notion that *wanting* is central to theatrical production.

They situate their critique of the word within the actor-director relationship, noting that "Many

young directors assume that their job is to know what they *want* and insist on it," while "Actors

assume too often that their job, first and foremost, is to do what the director *wants*."[44] They

[41] Ruhl. *100 Essays I Don't Have Time to Write*. 68.
[42] Fornes, Maria Irene. "Fefu and Her Friends," *Performing Arts Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 3, (Winter 1978): 117.
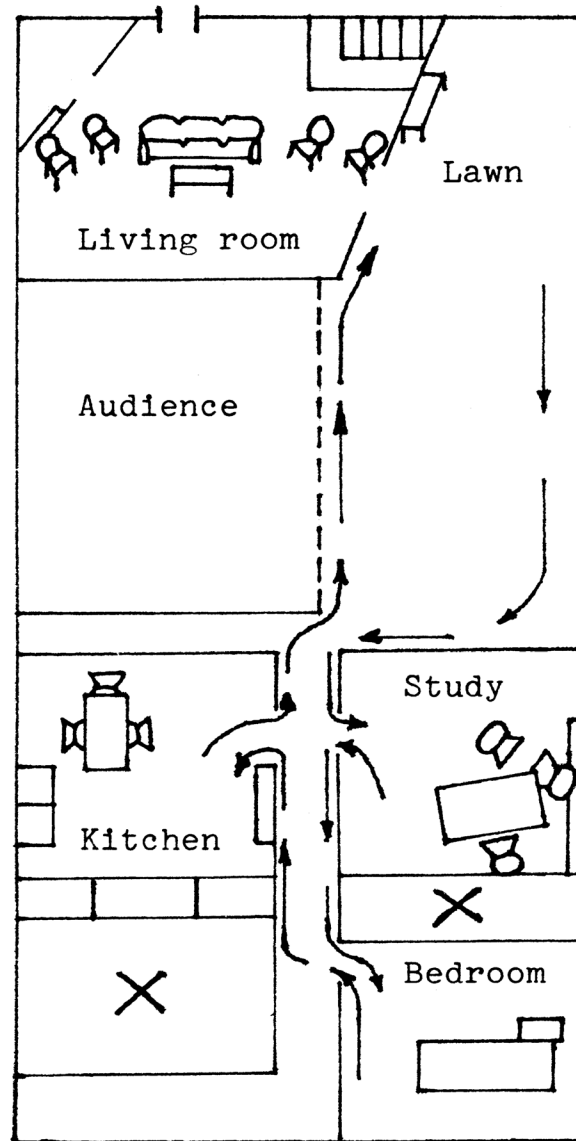[43] Fornes. "Fefu and Her Friends." 118.
[44] Bogart, Anne and Tina Landau. *The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition*. (New York, Theatre Communications Group, 2005), 18.

compare this to a parent/child relationship that places the actor in a subordinate position to the director, stifles creativity, and limits the possibility of collaboration – just the opposite of what Cixous admires about writing for the theatre. In this section, I analyze the ways in which the narrative content and of *Fefu and Her Friends* is reflected in its formal structure and how the relationship between the two reveals the postmodernist values of the text. At the same time, I hope to synthesize those values with those I have already identified in Viewpoints training practices by locating them within the various Viewpoints. Certain Viewpoints, which are more concerned with the performance choices made by individual actors rather than the design of a production more broadly, will be omitted. Because *Fefu and Her Friends* is historically closer to Overlie's development of the Six Viewpoints, my synthesis will hew nearer to her SSTEMS; but, in the spirit of the horizontal laboratory, some mixing and matching is not only inevitable, but desirable.

I begin with the play's use of Space. Space, as a Viewpoint outlined by Overlie, overlaps with Bogart and Landau's Viewpoints of Spatial Relationship and Architecture; as such, all three terms are useful for my purposes. The architecture of the space is so critical to understanding the text that Fornes' script provides a floor plan for the original 1977 production's set design by Linda Conway (see Fig. 3.1). It also includes photographs of the set design depicting each of its four rooms—living room, kitchen, study, and bedroom— and the area designated as the lawn. Fornes (who directed the production) and Conway stage the play so that the audience is surrounded by the set on three sides. Although most of the action of the play, parts one and three in their entirety, is written to take place in the living room, that room does not occupy what appears to be "center stage" on the published floor plan. That space is given to the lawn, while the audience

FLOOR PLAN FOR RELATIVITY MEDIA LAB

Figure 3.1: Ground Plan for 1977 Production of *Fefu and Her Friends* [45]

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[45] Fornes. "Fefu and Her Friends." 138.

would have to turn ninety degrees to the left to view the living room. This choice is even more puzzling considering that parts one and three seem to be the only times that the audience would be seated in its designated area. In part two, the audience is divided into four groups and move about the set as scenes are played and replayed simultaneously on the lawn, in the study, the bedroom, and the kitchen. Parts one and three, which for reasons that will become apparent shortly are the play's most conventionally dramatic, are decentered according to the orientation of the audience.

Sara Ahmed has argued that orientation is a starting point from which we perceive the world unfolding, and that the world is constructed to proceed in a "straight" path forward from the way we have been positioned. This construction makes it seem as though this forward path is the only "natural" way to proceed.[46] Prior to the start of the performance of Fornes' script employing the floorplan provided, the spectator might reasonably assume that the action of the play would be centered on the lawn which, ironically, is both on the exterior of the house and of the drama. The architecture of the space makes it easy for the spectator to orient their attention toward the lawn. The repetition of placing oneself in a theatre (or cinema, auditorium, or classroom, if the spectator is not a regular theatregoer) has conditioned the spectator to assume that the easiest possible orientation will be the most important. Ahmed admits that "bodies tend toward some objects more than others, given their tendencies," and such is the case in the theatre. However, "these tendencies are not originary; they are effects of the repetition of 'tending toward.'"[47] By presenting the audience with an assumed orientation and immediately deviating from it, Fornes "queers" the theatre space. In Cixous' terms, I might say that Fornes

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[46] Ahmed, Sara. "Orientations: toward a Queer Phenomenology," *GLQ: A journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies,* Vol. 12, No. 4, (2006). 543-574.
[47] Ahmed. "Orientations:" 553.

rewrites the space so that it is "feminized." In both sets of terms, what is conveyed is that the production subverts the spectator's assumptions of a didactic, hierarchically-constructed theatre space: the margin is now the center.

Not only does this set design queer the received architecture of the theatre space; it also dis-integrates the architecture of a house. The layout of the floorplan makes it clear where each room is in the performance space, but it is impossible for that layout to translate literally to the architecture of the fictional house it represents. Fornes' stage directions, especially in part three, dictate that characters frequently exit the living room to go to the kitchen. Judging by the floorplan, the only way to execute such a direction is to leave the house and walk through the lawn. The configuration of the space implies that the rooms of the house are not contiguous with one another making them, by definition, not part of the same structure. Without witnessing the action, this may appear to be a minor detail that the generous spectator could ignore through the willful suspension of disbelief. Yet for an actor, it is a bizarre challenge to walk through the lawn, which is situated "center stage," where the audience is conditioned to orient themselves, and create the sense that the character is not walking through a simulated outdoor space, but instead passing through some sort of spatial vacuum between the living room and the kitchen. A student of Overlie's Six Viewpoints could not avoid noticing this moment in the News of a Difference laboratory, in which the most microscopic details take on outsized importance. It allows the actor to recognize that the spatial logic of Fefu's house does not match up with that of any house in which the actor has ever been.

In addition to deconstructing the spatial hierarchies of the performance space and the represented house, in part two, Fornes uses another of Overlie's SSTEMS, Time, to level the structure of the drama. Rather than an ascending vector in which events build with each passing

moment toward climax and catharsis, the events of part two form a flat circle. The audience traces that circle on the floor of Fefu's house, first separating to view scenes played simultaneously on the lawn, and in the study, bedroom, and kitchen, then rotating to the next room as the scenes are repeated.

Playing the four scenes simultaneously for four separate segments of the audience flattens traditional dramatic hierarchy in several ways. Perhaps the easiest to identify is that it removes the convention of dramatic sequence. Since all four scenes occur over the same span of time, they cannot adhere to the logic of cause and effect which dramatic structure presupposes. Not only that, but because each quarter of the audience experiences the scenes in a different order, none of the scenes can be any closer to the climax of the play than any of the others. Each carries an equal share of the emotional payload. Thus, while many actors are trained to constantly search for ways to "raise the stakes" of each consecutive scene to build toward the moment of crisis, the actors in *Fefu and Her Friends* must reset the stakes to their previous level each time they play their scene. Beyond that, by having four scenes that allow the spectator to replay a segment of time over and over, expanding the spectator's understanding of it without advancing any closer to a moment of crisis, Fornes demonstrates the possibility of the type of "poetic waste" Cixous wishes for in theatrical *écriture feminine.*

Fefu and Her Friends is certainly not unique in its attempt to present multiple events that occur at the same diegetic moment. Sometimes this is done using a "split scene," in which a portion of one scene is played, then stopped at a critical moment wherein the other portion begins. Thus, the split scene convention redirects the audience's attention to another area of the stage, and a second scene proceeds until eventually the audience's attention is redirected back, and the action of the first scene picks up. The conceit of simultaneity is conveyed, yet the

audience still perceives the events in the sequence that they appear onstage and cannot help

ascribing a chronology to them. In other cases, two scenes may be occurring onstage

simultaneously creating a cacophonous effect. In these cases, the audience must decide where to

focus their attention. Each audience member will capture different bits of information and miss

others. Perhaps the audience will be drawn to pay attention to the actor with the loudest voice,

the brightest costume, or the strongest position onstage. These production strategies of directing

the audience attention reinforce the idea that some characters are more important than others.

This is not the case in *Fefu and Her Friends* since the audience is not forced to choose which

scene to give priority. Thus, the play not only preserves horizontality of the narrative structure,

but also prevents a hierarchy from emerging among the characters and their individual narrative

journeys.

Readers may notice that I have engaged in lengthy analyses of the ways *Fefu and Her

Friends* makes use of Space and Time, skipping over the "second" Viewpoint in Overlie's

SSTEMS, Shape. In doing so, I demonstrate a key component of Overlie's argument about her

practice. She repeatedly claims that the Six Viewpoints are practiced without any hierarchy, a

claim that is difficult to accept on its face. After all, artists practicing realism or naturalism claim

that their practices are merely neutral representations of the natural conditions of the world. The

impossibility of neutrality is one of postmodernism's major critiques of its predecessor. The

mere fact that Overlie has imposed order on the SSTEMS suggests a hierarchy among them –

Space first, Shape second, Time third and so on. Overlie clarifies her position on the lack of

hierarchy among the Six Viewpoints. Rather than claiming to have abandoned hierarchy, Overlie

intends her training to create "a working condition in which an infinite number of new

hierarchies may be formed and dissolved."[48] I have presented a reading which considers *Fefu and Her Friends* as a performance that works through the Viewpoints of Space and Time, with the other SSTEMS falling into place after that.

In my reading Shape, Emotion, Movement, and Story (Logic), take their cue from the ways in which the performance space is laid out, and the way time is experienced. In my analysis of Space and Time, I could not help but allude to how the other SSTEMS are impacted by these two. The placement of the lawn in the center of the stage creates the shape of a valley at center stage in between the mountains that are the living room and the kitchen/study/bedroom. The need for the audience to witness each of the four repeated scenes in Part Two means that they move through the performance space tracing out a circle. The need to repeat the four scenes in Part Two requires the emotional level to remain quite static. Placing the action of Part One out of the center forces the audience to reorient themselves, to move. The actors must determine how their frequent movements from the living room to the kitchen, which take them across the lawn make sense. To do this, they must determine the story, or logic, of the house. Overlie may have created a hierarchy by placing the SSTEMS in an order to appear in her book, but I have deconstructed and remade that hierarchy to suit my reading – and imagined performance – of *Fefu and Her Friends*.

The hierarchy I have implied here is not the only one that can exist. If the artists involved in a production of the play decided to make it an exploration of Movement primarily, they might do so by developing a movement vocabulary for each character and redesigning the performance space so as to give each of those movement vocabularies specific architectures with which to interact. Another production might alter the Story of the piece by allowing the audience to

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[48] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 79.

choose which of the four scenes they wanted to watch each time. Perhaps some might choose to watch the same scene all four times and therefore have a different idea of the Story of the play. Not only can hierarchies that appear to govern the ways in which Space, Shape, Time, Emotion, Movement, and Story operate in a performance be rearranged, so too can the hierarchy of those elements, impacting how they make meaning out of text, actor, design elements, and audience.

Whether or not a production is consciously engaging in a Viewpoints-based process, *Fefu and Her Friends*, as I have outlined here, poses problems for the actor that Viewpoints training may equip them to address. While the first part of this section has concerned itself with the philosophical intersections between the play and Viewpoints training, I conclude my examination of *Fefu and Her Friends* with a discussion of some Viewpoints practices that exemplify how the philosophical alignment of text and training support the actor in their work. All the actor tasks I am examining come from Part Two of the play. The first two illustrate how actors in *Fefu and Her Friends* are required to have keen awareness of themselves and one another as they move through time and space, while the latter two focus on moments in which characters are removed from the ensemble and must find their performances based in something other than dramatic conflict.

One challenging task that *Fefu and Her Friends* presents for the ensemble is that the four scenes in Part Two are not entirely self-contained. Some actors start in one scene, leave, and appear in another. Sometimes Fornes indicates in the stage directions that the precise moment of entry is not especially important, but even in those times there are things to consider when assembling the actors' tracks. For example, Fefu leaves the lawn scene and enters both the kitchen and study scenes as they are concluding. Fornes does not indicate whether Fefu goes to the kitchen or the study first, so the timing of each would have to be worked out in advance to

determine an order. The kitchen and study scenes also have about twice as much text to speak as the lawn scene, so the pace between Emma and Fefu on the lawn would need to be much more deliberate than the other two scenes.

Ultimately, it is important for the production to ensure that these four scenes are synchronized enough so that none of the scenes are either interrupted too early or forced to idle for longer periods of time than the actors are capable of filling with business. How can the ensemble train for this? Rather than starting with how to make the cogs in this complicated machine turn in watch-like precision, it might be useful to train the actors to fill longer segments of what some might consider to be "dead air." In describing an exercise she calls "Developing Courage," Overlie observes: "There is a common belief in theater and dance that you must keep your audience 'entertained.'" Nevertheless, she advises her reader not to "have a fear of stillness. Many people see stillness as emptiness;" but "it is very important to get past these ideas and establish an authority with timing, stillness, or non-activity so that your range of expression is not constantly in high gear."[49] In this exercise, she instructs her reader to explore the difference between a composition in which they execute a relatively small number of gestures over a relatively long period of time and one in which they execute more than twice as many gestures in a fraction of that time. The actor must find ways to use each composition to communicate clearly. Then the two compositions are put together to build a scene. Actors trained in this facility with manipulating rhythm and tempo will not only be able to execute all their tasks in the amount of time they have, but they will have the confidence to know that if they reach the end of the dialogue before the interrupting actor arrives, they can maintain a compelling performance in stillness or silence.

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[49] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 168.

With regard to coordinating the timing of the scenes together, Overlie offers a variation on her "walk and stop" practice that asks the performer to draw their attention to the passage of time as their body moves through it. This exercise is not necessarily based in the passage of seconds or minutes: "this work is most effective if it is approached with the sensual quality of 'feeling' time."[50] How many deep breaths does it take to move from one side of the stage to the other? How many shallow breaths? Benchmarks like these give the performer a more acute sense of the situation of their body within Time. Once this self-awareness is established, the performer might incorporate Bogart and Landau's exercise, "Peripheral Vision" into a time-conscious practice. In this activity, performers in a "walk and stop" select another member of the group to pay attention to without directly looking at them.[51] Such an effort prompts the performer to consider their own pace relative to that of their targeted other asking: "If I want to reach the front of the stage at exactly the same moment she reaches the stage right wings, how must I adjust my pace? If she stops along the way, how can I maintain that timing?" Developing this type of awareness translates directly to moving through the scenes in Part Two of *Fefu and Her Friends.* Being attuned to the moments in other scenes that would inevitably be audible throughout the "house" and knowing what those sounds denote about the progress of the other scenes, would allow actors to measure the pace of their own scene. The actor would have practiced the ability to divide the attention appropriately between playing their own scene and sensing the pace of the others.

Developing this skill flows nicely into the next ensemble challenge presented by the play, which involves reproducing the scenes in Part Two without altering the emotional intensity. It seems a simple task. Ostensibly, this is what actors do in rehearsals all the time: replay a

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[50] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 163-4.
[51] Bogart, and Landau. *The Viewpoints Book.* 29-30

theatrical sequence multiple times so that it becomes practiced and reproduceable in performance. Yet in rehearsals, notes are given and changes are requested. New ways of approaching a scene are tried, evaluated, and accepted or rejected. Exact repetition is rarely the aim. I have already discussed in this chapter how traditional actor training uses repetition to raise the dramatic tension of a sequence, so for many actors, the passage of time necessarily equates to "progress" toward climax and catharsis. Conversely, viewpoints trainings incorporate repetitive exercises that aim toward emotional stasis rather than progress.

In her introduction to the basic practices of Six Viewpoints training, Overlie emphasizes the importance of isolating each of the individual Viewpoints for much longer than seems necessary, until mastery is achieved: "avoid the usual hierarchical habit of combining materials in order to feel that you are 'making art,' 'getting somewhere,' or accomplishing something."[52] In these practices, work on Space, Shape, Time, Movement, or Story, by definition seeks to avoid the inclusion of variables in Emotion. In and of itself, that will prepare the actor to minimize emotional variability in performance. More specifically to *Fefu and Her Friends*, work on the timing of the scenes in Part Two will teach the actor to adjust the pace while maintaining emotional consistency. The practice starts small: "Set up a gesture, movement combination or text which you can repeat."[53] The repeated segment is stretched and compressed in time while the elements of the other five Viewpoints alter as little as possible. Incorporating another Time practice, which Overlie calls "Cartoon Coordination,"[54] one actor's composition can then be performed alongside another actor's. Gradually, through slight adjustments in rhythm, the two integrate like a living Rube-Goldberg machine. When the ensemble has mastered the

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[52] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 143.
[53] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 165
[54] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 169.

synchronization of their small compositions, they can feel confident in translating that skill into scenework, all the while aware of the timing of the scenes in other rooms without losing focus on the scene they are presently playing.

In addition to helping members the ensemble achieve greater awareness of their spatial, temporal, and emotional relationships to one another, viewpoints training is also useful for the performer as an individual. *Fefu and Her Friends* contains two important scenes in which an actor is challenged to speak an extended piece of text outside the dramatic mode – that is to say, without the benefit of another actor onstage that they are meant to be speaking to. One of these occurs in Part Two's lawn scene after a dialogue between Fefu and Emma. Fefu exits and Emma recites Shakespeare's sonnet number fourteen "improvising either movement or song."[55] This is a daunting task. The actor is completely exposed. Fornes has left them, not only without another actor to play against, but without any suggestion of a task. Being alone onstage is bearable for the actor when there is something to do: an object to search for, a secret to reveal, evidence to remove; no such business is implied here. Having lines to speak alone onstage is well-trodden ground for "classical" actors. Shakespeare's dramatic soliloquys give his characters an opportunity to speak directly to the audience and reveal things about themselves that they could not speak to other characters. In this case, however, the Shakespeare text provided is a lyric poem, and the word "recite" implies that the performance of it should be lyrical rather than dramatic. The actor is being asked to move and speak, or possibly sing, without a clear characterological reason for doing so.

Viewpoints training, with its influences from postmodern dance, works to make the actor comfortable being onstage without the "bits and tasks" so deeply ingrained in system-based

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[55] Fornes. "Fefu and Her Friends." 123.

trainings and their pursuit of objectives and superobjectives. A major part of this preparation

involves developing the actor's confidence that they need not exert a great deal of effort to make

themselves acceptable to an audience. For the audience, "It's the performer's acceptance and

willingness to open up to the underlying reality of being onstage, and being looked at, and unable

to hide, that creates what we call presence."[56] Overlie describes an exercise, which she calls

"Presence Practice," designed to acclimate the performer to being watched. The actor simply sits

in a chair facing the audience: "The performer should attempt to maintain all normal habits such

as blinking, breathing, thinking, emotional reactions, twitches, attention shifts, or swallowing." [57]

This is done for no less than five minutes – an eternity in stage time – especially with no "action"

to execute. Of course, part of what the actor learns in this exercise is that although they have no

task to complete, they are not inactive. Blinking, breathing, thinking, emotional reactions,

twitches, attention shifts, and swallowing are all actions. By attending to them on a microscopic

level, they become sufficient to engage the audience, who become aware of the fact of their own

spectatorship. This engagement reveals the audience, both to themselves and to the performer, as

another part of the performance, as Overlie outlines in her chapter on the "Piano Laboratory."[58]

Overlie's "presence practice" contrasts with solo exercises developed by Method teachers

such as Lee Strasberg's "private moment." The private moment asks actors to examine *behavior*,

such as walking, reading, bathing, or dancing as one does when no other people are present. It

asks the actor to act 'as if' nobody else were in the studio with them. These behaviors, while not

acted upon other characters, continue to serve objectives and build dramatic tension for the

character even as they eliminate tension for the actor. Presence practice requires the actor not to

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[56] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 172.
[57] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 171.
[58] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 105-110.

behave, but to deprive themselves of behavior and notice the actions and processes of the body that occur to support behavior. It also asks the actor not to pretend that nobody is watching, but to accept the fact of their co-presence and respond to it.

Yet in this case, Emma does not merely sit, breathe, and be watched; behavior is given in to her in the script. She recites the sonnet and improvises movement or song. Therefore, while the recitation may not be motivated by a desired outcome or even require the actor to feign unawareness of the audience, the actor may find Overlie's Movement practices useful for developing the ability to move without being judged or inhibited by the rational mind. The practice might begin with an exercise that requires the actor to clear their mind and respond to "lower brain" impulses rather than "thought-out command" and moving into one that invites the actor to respond to a "kinetic logic" in which "sensory dialogue to flow in a stream of consciousness."[59] Through these activities, Overlie contends that the actor comes to trust their body to respond to indirect stimuli from the brain without the need to justify that response in the mind. When the text of the sonnet is added as a stimulus, the actor's body will be prepared to respond to the text.

While Emma is on the lawn, improvising collaboratively with Shakespeare, the actor playing Julia is in the bedroom facing a different solo performance challenge. Fornes directs that "Julia hallucinates. However, her behavior should not be the usual behavior attributed to a mad person. It should be rather still and luminous. There will be aspects of her hallucination that frighten her, but the hallucinating itself does not."[60] Although Julia is meant to be perceived as alone in the bedroom, the scene is more conventionally dramatic than Emma's. Her hallucinations provide her with at least one, possibly multiple scene partners. The creative task

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[59] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 177-8.
[60] Fornes. "Fefu and Her Friends." 126.

for this actor becomes communicating the identity and location of these scene partners without disturbing the still luminescence of the hallucination.

There seem to be two possibilities for the identity(ies) of the scene partner(s). It may be that Julia is speaking to a hallucinated person or group about a torturous event she experienced in the past beginning: "They clubbed me. They broke my head. They broke my will." This person or group is different from "the judges" she refers to as the ones who tortured her, but at a certain point, Julia crosses a line and this person or group is revealed to be allied with "the judges" and begin to assault her indicated by the stage direction, "She moves her hand as if guarding from a blow."[61] The other possibility is that Julia begins telling the story about being clubbed and broken to a sympathetic scene partner (possibly the audience, which would add an element of the epic to the lyric and dramatic moments already discussed in the play) and is interrupted by "the judges" who renew their abuse of her. In either case, the beating she receives in this hallucination induces her to "say [her] prayer" which is both a performance for the abuser(s) and an invocation of some sort of deity. If you, as a reader of my analysis, had difficulty keeping track of these various targets of speech, you might have some sense of the challenge the actor faces.

The actor in the role of Julia can draw on one of Overlie's spatial practices to address this challenge. This practice, called "Near, Far, and Infinite Space," asks the actor to engage in performance that adjusts its intensity to address each of these three types of space. If she decides that in the beginning of the monologue she is hallucinating a person sitting by her bedside, or even inside her own mind, she might address them as though they occupied "near space," in which "the actor or dancer can appear self-contained." If she imagines that Julia is "hallucinating" the audience, she might address them in "far space," which Overlie defines as

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[61] Fornes, "Fefu and Her Friends." 126-7.

existing within "the walls, floor and ceiling (the container)" in which "the actor or dancer can metaphorically touch the walls of the theater." If she recognizes her abusers as a metaphysical rather than physical presence, or wishes to say her prayer to a deity that occupies cosmic space, then she may strive to speak through "infinite space," in which "the actor or dancer can project off the planet." As a way of coming to the type of dexterity with which Julia may have to move through these three levels of projection, Overlie asks the actor to find which of the three is her default spatial awareness. How easy or difficult is it for her to access the other two? With practice, it should become easier. From there, the actor may consider which of the three is Julia's default. Overlie contends that "Being able to discriminate between the three focuses is very helpful in doing character work." [62] For a character such as Julia, this discrimination may mean the difference between achieving legibility and not.

> Mary Overlie professes her admiration for Maria Irene Fornes' playwriting saying:
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> I tend to like the playwrights who work in a more horizontal, nonhierarchical
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> basis…When we watch a play by Irene Fornes, her situations, characters, costumes, and
>
> dialogue are odd companions. Nothing seems to be created to fit together. But this jagged
>
> juxtaposition is what generates the energy and empathy, humor and horror, of her Story.
>
> We are brought down from some clean, lofty, superior, organized place of traditional
>
> Story to wallow in the mud and then emerge to find ourselves floating in waters of
>
> beneficent forgiveness and acceptance. [63]

For me, that is the takeaway from *Fefu and Her Friends*; that rather than a drama that pits one ideology against another in a battle for the highest of high grounds, it might be more

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[62] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 150.
[63] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 47.

empowering, and a bolder political statement, to "be well together." That value is implied in Overlie's "Presence Practice," in which the performer does not aim to captivate the audience, but to be well with them. Together, they move toward a relationship among characters, and even a relationship between actor and audience that, in the spirit of *écriture feminine,* does not make one party the actor and the other acted upon. They are coproducing agents. Always trying, but because of systemic social structures, rarely succeeding at being well together.

Disrupting the Narrative: A Digression

A recurring theme in Hans-Theis Lehman's analysis of postdramatic theatre is that it possesses a quality of "coldness." Rather than using earnest, hot-blooded passion embroil the spectator's emotions in the *sturm* and *drang* of the events on stage, postdramatic theatre, owing to a Brechtian influence, has "a tendency towards 'disinvolvement' and ironic, sarcastic distance."[64] The invocation of Brecht as a shorthand for this tendency implies a received narrative that Brecht "invented" ironic detachment as an acting technique; perhaps a more sophisticated observer might say he "discovered" it in a performance by the Peking Opera. Either way, the narrative is tinged with the language of colonialism that assumes the concept did not exist until it was written down by Europeans. I want to take some time to observe a performance tradition which also exerts influence on postmodern performance and its affinity for coolness, what dance scholar Brenda Gottschild has called the "Africanist Aesthetic."[65]

Gottschild uses the term "Africanist" to address the problem, identified by Kariamu Welsh Asante, that "there are thousands of ethnic groups representing 150 million people of

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[64] Lehman. *Postdramatic Theatre.* 118.
[65] Gottschild, Brenda Dixon. "Stripping the Emperor: The Africanist Presence in American Concert Dance." *Moving History/Dancing Cultures: A Dance History Reader.* Ed. Ann Dils and Ann Cooper Albright. (Middletown, CT, Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 332-341.

African descent in the diaspora…and 400 million on the African continent itself."[66] Gottschild's term makes space for both groups while allowing for the plurality of aesthetic influences that must have impacted aesthetic sensibilities of diasporic groups over the past four centuries. Drawing from Asante, cultural anthropology, and ethnomusicology, Gottschild locates aesthetic elements, with cultural connections to the African continent within African-American dance, using 1920s cabaret star Earl "Snake Hips" Tucker as exemplar, and traces the influence of those elements forward in time to mainstream musical theatre dance as well as George Balanchine's ballets. One of these "Africanist characteristics" is the "aesthetic of the cool."[67]

Gottschild cites Robert Farris Thompson as the source of the term "aesthetic of the cool,"[68] and Thompson acknowledges that in both European and African languages "cool" refers to calmness in times of stress. He argues, however, that there is a difference in attitude between the two. In African definitions, the detachment implied by "cool" is accompanied by an understanding that it is "particularly admirable to do difficult tasks with an air of ease and silent disdain."[69] This attitude of disdain evidently traversed the Atlantic and filtered down through the centuries to Snake Hips Tucker's routine, which according to observers, engaged the audience "with dreamy and impartial hostility."[70] While in European ballet, coolness is embodied through neutrality, Africanist coolness demonstrates that distance can be achieved with intensity. Gottschild notes that this apparent paradox links the aesthetic of the cool with another characteristic of the Africanist aesthetic, Embracing the conflict; this is not a dramatic conflict that pits one person or ideology against another until resolution is reached. Rather, it is an

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[66] Asante, Kariamu Welsh. "Commonalities in African Dance: An Aesthetic Foundation." *African Culture: The Rhythms of Unity,* ed. Molefi Kete Asante. (Westport, CT, Greenwood, 1985), 145.
[67] Gottschild. "Stripping the Emperor." 335-8.
[68] Gottschild. "Stripping the Emperor." 335.
[69] Thompson, Robert Farris. "An Aesthetic of the Cool." *African Arts,* Vol. 7, No. 1, (1973), 41.
[70] Gottschild. "Stripping the Emperor." 333.

"aesthetic of contrariety" which "embraces difference and dissonance, rather than erasing or resolving it."[71] While the European idea of cool looks to hide the dancer's exertion in a metanarrative that posits the dance as graceful because of its effortlessness, Africanist cool presents the dance as easy for the dancer, but at the same time subverts that narrative, daring the spectator to try it.

Comfort within this dissonance, rather than refusal to acknowledge it, is much closer to what animates the work of many postmodern artists. These works tend to eschew the conventional expression of emotion, yet performers must be capable of working with emotion in the sense that Overlie means: "the active self-awareness of the performer" called "presence."[72] Merce Cunningham's work does not draw upon emotional character journeys in the way Martha Graham's modern dance does. Cunningham relies on a dispassionate execution of movements and nontraditional staging which, as Gottschild says of Africanist art, "suggests asymmetricality (that plays with falling off center), looseness (implying flexibility and vitality), and indirectness of approach."[73] Yet it would be misleading to say that Cunningham's dances lack intensity. Robert Wilson's so-called "landscape plays" do not depend on a linear assemblage of signs to create their logic or narrative. Their coolness articulates Wilson's polemic, pushing it toward satire.

I do not mean to suggest that these postmodern artists have appropriated an Africanist aesthetic in a way that is exploitative or offensive. Neither does Gottschild. In identifying presence of Africanist elements in Balanchine's dances, she does not condemn him for stealing them; she argues instead that living in a heterogeneous society, one cannot help but be influenced

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[71] Gottschild. "Stripping the Emperor." 332-3.
[72] Overlie. *Standing in Space.* 29.
[73] Gottschild. "Stripping the Emperor." 336.

by a multitude of cultural productions. Snake Hips Tucker's dance was subversive, and one effect of that subversion was a new, distinctly American classical dance. Any artist who seeks to topple received artistic hierarchies would do well to borrow from that aesthetic. In the next section, I will consider how artists in the African diaspora draw upon a variety of aesthetics to create a postmodernism that is uniquely Black. The result is a narrative that, for a white man like myself, crystalizes an experience that is not my own while making it clear that I can never fully understand.

Repetitive and Revisionist History

Just as non-Western influences are written out of the cannon of theatrical history, Suzan-Lori Parks' *Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World* reminds the viewer that antiblack violence has been written out of the cannon of social history. Parks signals that her play addresses the omissions of history through a narrative that Aristotle might argue is not surveyable or complete. They do not take place over the course of a single lifetime, let alone a single day. In that sense, the play seems to be more of an epic than a drama. Yet unlike classical epic poetry, or even conventional recordings of history—Parks has often referred to the play as a historical document—the narrative does not attempt to mimic the passage of years, decades, or centuries in its run time. She challenges the assumed linearity of Time with a cyclical, or possibly suspended model.

Parks, who has studied acting at a high level,[74] recognizes that this compression of time creates a challenge for the actor because "it requires them to be completely present. I do play with time, but it's because it's all happening right at once for me. Everything that ever happened,

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[74] Kolin, Philip C. and Harvey Young. "Watch Me Work: Reflections on Suzan-Lori Parks and her Canon." Introduction to *Suzan-Lori Parks in Person.* (London, Routledge, 2014), 5.

it's all happening right now."[75] While *Fefu and Her Friends* takes events that occur at the same time and shows them to an audience in an expanded form, *Last Black Man* attempts to show a history that began "Before Columbus"[76] and continues, even after the publication of the text, in a microcosm. In this section, I examine the narrative structure *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World* and commentaries on the play to illuminate the ways in which it attempts to recover a missing history and suggest that that history remains ongoing. I link that recovery project to scholarship which views postmodern philosophy as a tool for dismantling racial hierarchy. Finally, I identify some moments in which the play's politics manifest themselves in acting challenges and offer aspects of Viewpoints training that may help actors thrive in those moments as creative artists.

"Yesterday today next summer tomorrow just uh moment uhgoh in 1317 dieded thuh last black man in thuh whole entire world."[77] This recurring declaration in *Last Black Man* tells the audience that the titular death, which the statement references, is not the singular event that the definitive word "last" implies. Rather, it is a trauma that revisits itself on the African American community every moment of every day. The inability to pinpoint the moment of the tragedy even extends into the future in which the last Black man "falls twenty-three floors to his death. 23 floors from uh passin ship from space tuh splat on thuh pavement."[78] The implication is that even if the slow genocide of this community that has been in progress for four centuries were to reach its conclusion, the moment of the final death would not be determinable because history has not recorded these events. In writing this play, Parks appoints herself historian. The theatre,

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[75] Parks, Suzan-Lori. "Susan-Lori Parks." Interview by Han Ong. *Suzan-Lori Parks in Person.* Ed. Philip C. Kolin and Harvey Young. (London, Routledge, 2014), 46.

[76] Before Columbus is the name of one of the characters in the play.

[77] Parks, Suzan-Lori. *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World.* (New York, Samuel French, 2019), 8.

[78] Parks. *Death of the Last Black Man.* 8.

in Parks' estimation, is the perfect venue for doing history, because the purpose of history is to record and keep the memory of lived experiences, and "because so much of African American history has been unrecorded, dismembered, washed out, one of my tasks as a playwright is to…locate the ancestral burial ground, dig for bones, find bones, hear the bones sing, write it down."[79] But unlike the characters in her play, Parks does not intend to write it down and merely "hide it under a rock."[80] Theatrical history making is public.

The titles of scenes in *Last Black Man* give the reader a strong sense of the play. Rather than referring to the play's six episodes as "scenes," Parks calls them panels – an observation to which I will return. First, though, I must call attention to the opening moments of the play, which are not designated as a panel. Instead, Parks titles it "overture," a term generally associated with opera. Musical terminology figures prominently in the structure of *Last Black Man,* and indeed, much of Parks' work: "There are aspects of music that I borrow and use in my work: repetition and revision. A big part of jazz is repeat and revise, and repeat and revise. That's what my work is all about."[81] In opera, and later in US musical theatre, an overture acts as a musical thesis statement. It establishes the mood of the piece and frequently previews themes and leitmotifs that will occur in the musical numbers to come. Parks' overture does just that. The characters introduce themselves by name, the title of the play is spoken, and several of the themes which will recur in later panels through repetition and revision are introduced: "You should write that down and you should hide it under a rock;" "Where he gonna go now that he done dieded?" "The black man moves. His hands–;" "The worl usta be *roun*"[82] These thematic statements come back

[79] Parks, Suzan-Lori. Quoted in "Watch Me Work: Reflections on Suzan-Lori Parks and her Canon." Introduction to *Suzan-Lori Parks in Person.* Ed. Philip C. Kolin and Harvey Young. (London, Routledge, 2014), 9.
[80] Parks. *Death of the Last Black Man.* 8.
[81] Parks. "Susan-Lori Parks" 38.
[82] Parks. *Death of the Last Black Man.* 8-9.

throughout the play, particularly in the even-numbered panels, which Parks calls choruses –

another musical term for sections in which melody and/or text are repeated and revised. Using a

verse/chorus structure in an account of history implies a critique of the colonialist conception of

history as a linear narrative of progress from barbarism to perfect civilization. In defiance of this

assumption of linearity, Parks, not unlike Fornes, adopts an elliptical structure for her narrative.

The structure and the content of the history Parks presents is a move to reassert the right

to speak for oneself. Parks contends that the existence of the grand narrative of history meant

that this right had been curtailed, as Queen-then-Pharaoh-Hatshepsut summarizes: "We are too

young to see. Let them see it for you. We are too young to rule. Let them rule it for you. We are

too young to have. Let them have it for you. You are too young to write. Let them—let them. Do

it. Before you."[83] The result has been a history that works to exclude massacres in Wilmington,

North Carolina; Omaha, Nebraska; and Tulsa, Oklahoma. Parks, through her characters, advises

the strategic creation of a history of Black America produced by Black America. Yes and Greens

Black-Eyed Peas Cornbread says: "You should write it down because if you dont write it down

then they will come along and tell the future that we did not exist." Prunes and Prisms continues:

"It will be of us but you should mention them from time to time." And Yes and Greens Black-

Eyed Peas Cornbread agrees: "so that in the future when they come along and know that they

exist."[84] This rewriting of history not only intends to fill in the spaces left by previous erasure. It

intends to make future generations aware that the atrocities it records are the product of white

supremacy. It is a poststructuralist anticolonialist project in its content which through its

articulation, not in a textbook, but in a piece of theatre – a nonlinear piece of theatre – takes a

postmodernist form.

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[83] Parks. *Death of the Last Black Man.* 11.
[84] Parks. *Death of the Last Black Man.* 11.

A key link between the historical project of *Last Black Man* and anticolonial scholarship is the theatrical medium. While the grand narrative of history has traditionally relied upon transmission through the written word, Asante argues that an oral medium is more historically appropriate to African tradition. Asante notes that the oral tradition, "which is an art in and of itself and a form of documentation…preserves history and entertains in African culture."[85] The telling of history, in Overlie's terms, is the "Story" or "Logic" of the oral tradition, and the cast become the *griots* who take charge of the narrative, as Asante writes: "to reshape or to retell [it] within a shape" and give it back to the community.[86] Asante's assumption that the oral is inevitably tied to physical shapes is not only due to her positionality as a dance scholar. It is explicit that these stories are told, not through speech alone, as the name might imply. In this aesthetic, the storytelling is accomplished as much through movement as through speech. It is a different sort of artistic task from the mimetic, dialogical arguments of modern realist drama.

In *Last Black Man,* Parks refers to exactly this type of history telling. Take, for example, the series of monologues in the Second Chorus spoken by the character Ham. This character's name is significant for its connection to Judeo-Christian mythology in which Ham, the second son of Noah, was believed to be the patriarch of all the peoples living south and west of the Nile.[87] The character's only scripted function in the play is the recitation of his "begotten tree," which parodies the structure and cadence of biblical genealogies: "She goned begotten One who in turn begotten Ours. Ours laughed one day uhloud in from thuh sound hittin thuh air smakity sprung up I, you, n He, She, It."[88] This genealogy continues, with frequent interruptions, for

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[85] Asante. "Commonalities in African Dance." 145.
[86] Asante. "Commonalities in African Dance." 145.
[87] *The Book of Jubilees or Little Genesis.* Translated by R.H. Charles. (New York, MacMillan, 1917), 8:22-24. https://sacred-texts.com/bib/jub/jub22.htm
[88] Parks. *Death of the Last Black Man.* 35.

parts of eight pages. The obvious challenge for the actor is how to commit this list and its challenging syntactical constructions to memory. Asante's observations about the embodied traditions of African storytelling might aid the actor in this role.

Coupling oral storytelling with physical shaping of the body and a specific gestural vocabulary functions, not only as aesthetic embellishment, but as a mnemonic device. It turns the scripted text into a choreography of movements and speech acts. In the situation of African *griots*, it is likely that these choreographies pass from one generation to the next with gradual modification. In a production of *Last Black Man*, no such inherited choreography would exist, so it must be constructed freshly. Viewpoints training might prove useful for this creative task.

Creating an appropriate movement vocabulary for the history-telling moments in *Last Black Man* might draw upon Bogart and Landau's articulation of the Gesture viewpoint, which for Overlie might fall under the umbrella of Shape. Here, Bogart and Landau make a distinction between "behavioral" and "expressive" gestures: "Behavioral Gestures are those that belong to everyday life…things that people actually do in real life: ways of moving, walking, communicating." On the other hand, "Expressive gestures are those that belong to the interior rather than the exterior world…they express feeling or meaning which is not otherwise directly manifest."[89] Shifting from the actor's creative thinking from the more literal behavioral gesture to the more abstract expressive type would help the actor find movements that express the text and connect them to the elements of Gottschild's Africanist Aesthetic.

Bogart and Landau suggest that work with expressive gestures might develop directly out of work within the Shape viewpoint. In working with Shape, the authors prescribe the exploration of lines the body can form, both in silhouette and in movement through space. Some

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[89] Bogart and Landau. *The Viewpoints Book.* 49.

of those lines may be angular, including sharp bends of the elbows and knees or pacing the stage floor on a grid. Others may be curvilinear as the shapes Gottschild describes made in performances by Snake Hips Tucker. Bogart and Landau urge the actor first to isolate the angular from the curvilinear, then to find ways to integrate them. The end goal is to achieve "fluidity and spontaneity" in moving from one shape to the next. This seems as though it would be a good way to develop facility with the Africanist characteristic which Gottschild terms *ephebism*. Taken from the ancient Greek word for youth, *ephebism* places priority on flexibility and vitality with a "kinetic intensity that recognizes feeling as sensation, rather than emotion."[90] As if echoing Gottschild's argument that the Africanist aesthetic has permeated multiple aspects of culture, Bogart and Landau's method of practice indicates that *ephebism* is an attribute which is not an essential, inherited trait that one either has or does not. It is a skill that can be acquired through a systematic process.

Continuing to develop a choreography for Ham's begotten tree speech, the actor may begin to think about the ways in which Parks places the frame of a formal, solemn, and ritualistic recitation of genealogy alongside some very humorous commentary about the ridiculous nature of stereotyping, the shorthand people develop for talking about family members, and the incestuous relationships often implied in these religious genealogies: "Those strange relations between That thuh mother and Yuh Fathuh thuh son brot forth uh odd lot: called: Yes Massuh, Yes Missy, Yes Maam n Yes Suh Mistuh Suh which goes tuh show that relations with your relations produces complications."[91] This mixture provides an example of what Gottschild calls "high-affect juxtaposition" which aims for contrast that produces "surprise, irony, comedy,

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[90] Gottschild. "Stripping the Emperor." 334.
[91] Parks. *Death of the Last Black Man.* 36.

innuendo, double-entendre, and finally, exhilaration."[92] Creating a movement sequence that underscores this juxtaposition has the potential to enhance the affect. A solemn set of angular hand gestures accompanied by softer, fluid rotations of the pelvis or chest would provide an embodiment of the contrasting moods of the text, give the actor physical landmarks to help commit the text to memory, and incorporate another of Gottschild's Africanist characteristics, polycentric movements, in which movement emanates from multiple locations on the body simultaneously.[93] An actor who has the creative skill to translate the thoughts that underlie a piece of text like this into movement will have a great advantage in creating the appearance of ease that will infuse this performance with an aesthetic of the cool.

Perhaps a clearer connection between the text of *Last Black Man* and poststructuralist theory is *ècriture feminine.* Cixous' alteration of French words to deconstruct the masculinist biases of language have parallels in Parks' text, which may be deployed to similar effect. A poignant example of this deconstructive wordplay occurs in the Overture. Black Man With Watermelon recalls a time, long since passed, "When thuh worl usta be roun."[94] Such a statement is striking to the hearer, because the assumption it refers to the physical form of the planet Earth, which has always been round – spherical. Perhaps it was once thought to be flat, but that thought was erroneous. The contrary statement causes ears to perk up in the audience. Their questions will be answered, but not in a logical sequence. Queen-Then-Pharaoh-Hatshepsut explains: "Before Columbus thuh worl usta be roun they put uh /d/ on thuh end of roun makin roun*d.* Thusly they set in motion thuh end. Without that /d/ we coulda gone on spinnin forever."[95] There is a bit of new information here. Apparently "roun" is not the same as

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[92] Gottschild. "Stripping the Emperor." 334.
[93] Gottschild. "Stripping the Emperor." 333.
[94] Parks. *Death of the Last Black Man.* 9.
[95] Parks. *Death of the Last Black Man.* 9.

round, but the quality of that difference is still a mystery. Finally, Before Columbus speaks to what the world was like before Columbus:

> The popular thinking of the day back in them days was that the world was flat. They thought the world was flat. Back then when they thought the world was flat they were afeared and stayed at home. They wanted to go out back then when they thought the world was flat but the water had in it dragons of which meaning these dragons they were afeared back then when they thought the world was flat. They stayed at home. Them thinking the world was flat kept it roun. Them thinking the sun revolved around the earth kept them satellite-like. They figured out the truth and scurried out. Figuring out the truth put them in their place and they scurried out to put us in ours.[96]

In this speech the affected spellings that Parks uses throughout the rest of the play to indicate pronunciation disappear. This speech is of such magnitude that it must be understood clearly by all readers and listeners. The tone resembles that of a primary school history textbook, just as Ham's begotten speech resembled biblical genealogy. It clarifies that before the age of exploration, Europeans stayed in Europe for fear that they might fall off the edge of the earth and/or be consumed by the dragons that lurked near the edge. The discovery of the roun*d*ness of the world, the absence of such danger, and the accompanying understanding that European civilization was not the center of the universe, spurred exploration and the creation of colonial empires intended to create an earthly hierarchy with Europeans at the top. Parks plays with the homophonic usage of the word round, removes the *d* in a way that is consistent with the play's vernacular, and points out that the discovery of the shape of the planet changed the relationships among its inhabitants in a way that ceased to be equal. Eventually, the elliptical (round, or

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[96] Parks. *Death of the Last Black Man.* 9.

perhaps 'whirled') structure of the play brings back portions of this history in the first chorus – a repetition and revision.

Philip C. Kolin and Harvey Young have observed that wordplay is a major component of the repetition and revision that Parks appropriates from jazz into her writing: "This verbal shift, or revision of the words, charts the powerful ways in which black characters move from 'hiding' their history to 'carving it,' or preserving it, thus making history and not losing it."[97] Sometimes, as with "the worl usta be roun," there is considerable space between the initial statement and its "rep and rev." Other times, it comes almost immediately. In the First Chorus, Black Man With Watermelon recounts a narrative of an escape from slavery in which clothing with the man's scent is left in one location for the hounds to find while the man runs in another direction and crosses a river to wash away the scent from his body: "I jumped in thuh water without uh word. I jumped in thuh water without uh smell. I am in thuh river and in my skin is soppin wet."[98] The repetition of the "I jumped in thuh water" phrasing becomes almost chantlike, as though casting a magic spell to assist in his escape. The same phrasing appears on the next page: "I jumped in thuh river without uh word. My kin are soppin wet." In this repetition, Parks plays on the identity rhyme between skin and kin. While there may be many ways in which the nuances of these line readings might convey different meanings for this repetition, the general sense is that the impact of this escape – successful or not – is felt down through generations.

How can the actor best make use of these textual repetitions and revisions? The meanings that they produce will be dependent upon physicality, to be sure, but at least as much meaning will be conveyed through elements of Bogart and Landau's vocal viewpoints: Pitch, Dynamic,

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[97] Kolin, Philip C. and Harvey Young. "Watch Me Work: Reflections on Suzan-Lori Parks and her Canon." *Suzan-Lori Parks in Person* (London, Routledge, 2014), 8.
[98] Parks. *Death of the Last Black Man.* 23.

Tempo and Duration, Timbre, and Shape. Learning to isolate the manipulation of each of these viewpoints will help the actor create readings of these lines that reinforce the fact of their repetition while emphasizing the ways in which they have been revised. Perhaps the further apart the repetition is from the original statement, the more the Pitch, Dynamic, Tempo, Timbre, and Shape will have to resemble one another. The Before Columbus speeches may require the actor to find ways to emphasize the repetition over the revision. "I jumped in thuh river," on the other hand, because so little time passes in between, may ask for more revision. Bogart and Landau describe vocal repetition exercises in which a pair of actors repeat a word, phrase, or series of meaningless sounds to one another, first trying to replicate all the Viewpoints exactly, then altering each of the Viewpoints one at a time. The vocal control that exercises like these develop will help the actor strike a pleasing balance that communicates both the repetition and the revision that are so integral to making meaning from Parks' text.

In discussing *Last Black Man*, I have focused more on Bogart and Landau's Viewpoints practices. In part, this is due to the coincidence of their development in roughly the same historical moment as the play's premiere. Beyond that, however, the contemporaneity of this iteration of Viewpoints with *Last Black Man* means that they emerge out of a historical context which makes them compatible. The reconstructive impulse that, in chapter two, I argued had more influence over Bogart and Landau than the purely deconstructive postmodernism that preceded it, exhibits itself in *Last Black Man* particularly, and politically resistant aesthetic practices in general. My thinking is inspired by the work bell hooks has done connecting the labor of creativity and care Black women exert in quiltmaking, and the significance of that work as a resistant aesthetic practice.

She notes that her grandmother, "Sarah Hooks Oldham, daughter of Bell Blair Hooks," was a quiltmaker, like her mother before. It is important to "call their names in resistance, to oppose the erasure of black women—that historical mark of racist and sexist oppression."[99] Though hooks acknowledges the importance of "narrative quilts" and "fancy quilts" made by Black women through the centuries, often for white slaveholders, or later, employers, she is most interested the narrative significance of "crazy quilts." These quilts, made from a seemingly-random hodgepodge of fabrics and shapes became quite trendy among affluent white women in the early twentieth century, but their origin is in the labor of Black women: "Given that black women slaves sewed quilts for white owners and were allowed now and then to keep scraps, or as we learn from slave narratives occasionally took them, they had access to creating only one type of work for themselves—a crazy quilt."[100]

Post-emancipation, the narratives of these crazy quilts became even more personal as the source fabrics shifted from scraps of fabric purchased by and for someone else, to pieces of purchased clothing whose owners had tired of wearing them before the fabric was worn out. For Sarah Hooks Oldham, "these quilts were maps charting the course of our lives. They were history as life lived."[101] hooks alludes to the subversive power of taking the scraps, discarded as worthless by one's oppressor, and turning them into a source of pride and joy; of stitching together artifacts of one's history in the form of a pastiche or bricolage that retains its use-value long after the original artifact has been discarded. In *Last Black Man*, with its scenes called "panels," Parks assembles a narrative quilt from scraps discarded by the grand narrative of history placed alongside images that resonate with contemporary lived experience. In hooks'

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[99] hooks, bell. "Aesthetic Inheritances: History Worked by Hand." *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics.* (Boston, South End Press, 1990), 116.
[100] hooks. "Aesthetic Inheritances." 118.
[101] hooks. "Aesthetic Inheritances." 120-1.

terms, it acts as a way for "displaced African people to maintain connections with the past" and "counter assertions by white supremacists and colonized black minds that there [remain] no vital living bond between the culture of African-Americans and the cultures of Africa."[102] I want to think about ways in which Bogart and Landau's Viewpoints training shares these quiltmaking values and how these shared values might be useful for actors working on works like *Last Black Man*.

Viewpoints training extends into production through work on Compositions. These brief creative assignments given to the cast by the director have a variety of effects. They ask actors to take greater ownership of the production and democratize the traditional hierarchy of theatrical labor. They foster conversation among members of the cast about the project at hand and promote social bonds and trust among them. In a production of a piece like *Last Black Man*, in which the playwright has not been prescriptive about staging or design elements, composition assignments are a way to generate several ideas about how to stage specific moments or even what set pieces, costumes, or props might be useful. A composition assignment might ask small groups of actors to create a series of tableaux that present a distillation of what they believe the play to be about. It might ask them to research historical accounts of escapes from slavery and present their findings to the group. Or it might ask them to come up with multiple possible stagings for a pivotal scene. The possibilities for material generated by these assignments range from literal, which Bogart and Landau term "descriptive composition," or they may be more abstract representations of the ideas underneath the text, "expressive composition."[103] of the play's content. Even compositions that do not ultimately make it into the production contribute

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[102] hooks, bell. "An Aesthetic of Blackness: Strange and Oppositional." *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics.* (Boston, South End Press, 1990), 105.
[103] Bogart and Landau. *The Viewpoints Book.* 146.

to the group's ways of thinking about the piece, what they want it to convey and even what they want to deemphasize. The greater variety of compositions the cast generates, the more different colors and textures will show themselves on the metaphorical quilt that is the production.

Disrupting the Narrative: A Contradiction

By suggesting ways in which Viewpoints training shares epistemic, metaphysical, and aesthetic values with *Fefu and Her Friends* or *Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World*, I do not intend to posit Viewpoints as an inherently feminist or antiracist form of actor training, though in the next chapter I consider how it can be paired with other modes of actor training that are. Rather, my argument is that modernist modes of actor training were conceived under the assumption that theatrical narratives adhere to the realist dramatic structure based in conflict and resolution. When a theatrical narrative takes the radical approach of resisting conflict in favor or cooperation or adopts an aesthetic of the cool and contents itself with an unresolved conflict, it can frustrate the actor whose training is limited to these hegemonic approaches. When a narrative questions whether or not humanity is really following a unidirectional vector toward the perfection of society, and instead opts for a circular or elliptical way of conceiving time, the actor's techniques for advancing the plot can work against the material. Instead, Viewpoints prepares actors to consider the variety of possible logics that a text might work within and use that information to devise an appropriate performance.

CHAPTER IV: CHARACTER

The concept of "character" in theatrical performance has a long and complicated history, the recapitulation of which is well beyond the scope of my project. For my purposes, a few brief observations will suffice to provide relevant context. Although prevailing ideas about how character is expressed may have shifted, its importance in the hierarchy of the elements of Western drama remained fairly stable. Elinor Fuchs, in her review of the history of character recalls that Aristotle placed character second only to plot among the elements of tragedy, and that from the time of Shakespeare until the emergence of the twentieth century avant-garde, character was "the chief business of the actor."[1]

Over time, however, ideas about what constitutes character remained remarkably stable in its reliance on the assumed essential properties of an individual. Aristotle argues that in order for a characterization to be good, the character's qualities must be immutable: "even if the subject of the imitation is inconsistent, and that is the kind of character that is presupposed, it should nevertheless be consistently inconsistent."[2] For Denis Diderot, not only must a characterization be consistent throughout the performance, but it must hew as closely as possible to a Platonic ideal of the character's essence: "A sure way to act in a cramped, mean style, is to play one's own character. You are, let us say, a tartufe [sic], a miser, a misanthrope; you may play your part well enough, but you will not come near what the poet has done. He has created *the* Tartufe [sic], *the* Miser, *the* Misanthrope."[3] These essentializing impulses reflect a desire to

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[1] Fuchs, Elinor. *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater After Modernism.* (Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 1996), 22-31.

[2] Aristotle. *Poetics.* Translated by Malcolm Heath. (London, Penguin, 1996), 24.

[3] Diderot, Denis. *The Paradox of Acting.* Translated by Walter Herries Pollock. (California, Chatto &Windus, 1883, 1992), 49. (original emphasis)

present characters who are archetypes or icons, who advance the rhetorical thesis of a playwright looking to demonstrate a universal truth through a logical dialogue.

In the twentieth century, character maintained its place of importance in the mainstream Euro-American actor's job description, which is evidenced by the title of Stanislavski's second volume of text on actor training, *Building a Character*."[4] This hierarchical position has been reproduced by many subsequent acting teachers who follow a curriculum which begins the actor with work on the self, and follows it with work on character. This sequence produces a psycho-physical acting technique which breaks with Aristotle and Diderot's insistence that characters in the theatre must represent the universal through the portrayal of ideal types. Rather, what becomes universal is the possession of an individual psychology contained within each individual body, and that body and psychology accumulate experiences together which alter each, separately and constantly, in a unidirectional vector barreling toward the play's climax:

> If you put all these experiences into perspective logically, systematically, as the psychological complexity of the character requires, with its evermore complex development throughout the play, then you achieve a firm structure, a harmonious line in which the leading role is played by all the dependent parts in the tragedy of a great soul as it grows ever deeper.[5]

While the goal to use character as a representation of essential human qualities remains the same from the classical through the modern, the idea of what qualities are essentially human precipitates shifts. As Richard Hornby has observed: "the way in which actors approach roles or

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[4] This refers to the title of Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood's translation of volume two of Stanislavski's writings. Jean Benedetti has documented several problems with Hapgood's editorial adaptation of Stanislavski's materials in this volume in his own translation, which retitles part two "Embodiment."

[5] Stanislavski, Konstantin. *An Actor's Work.* Translated by Jean Benedetti. (Abingdon, UK, Routledge, 2008), 460.

playwrights create them will be to a large extent based on the prevalent ideas about what a human being *is*" The modernist conception of a human being, then is based upon the Cartesian paradigm of one consciousness dependent on, yet in control of one body; thus, the modernist character seeks to represent that same one-to-one ratio through a body as a signifier of a self-contained consciousness.[6]

The texts I examine in this chapter present challenges for the actor who is trained to think of a character as a sign in which a body signifies a unified, complete, conscious mind. In doing so, they implicitly challenge the Cartesian master narrative – as well as its capitalist consequences – that logical cause and effect is the basis of individual behavior.[7] Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice* (2003)*,* for example explores ways in which individuality is culturally constructed, and that through culture it becomes possible to experience a shared consciousness. James Ijames' *White* (2017), demonstrates how a body, especially a body which is marked by the codes of race and gender, must contain multiple consciousnesses over which they may or may not have complete control. Finally, *4:48 Psychosis* (2000)*,* the last work created by Sarah Kane before her death in 1999, offers a variety of ways for a production to present the unpresentable truth that unified consciousness is a mirage we show ourselves in an effort to cope with the chaos of the world. These diverse conceptions of character more closely mirror contemporary ideas of the "self" which is "multilayered and fluid, real and constructed." Rhonda Blair's 2008 investigation of how advancements in neuroscience might provoke new ways of thinking about acting identifies "studies that demonstrate that the mind basically creates a fictional self out of the very small portion of the brain's activities that actually reach consciousness," implying that "Our

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[6] Hornby, Richard. *The End of Acting.* (New York, Applause Books, 1992), 103, 140.
[7] Counsell, Colin. *Signs of Performance: An Introduction to Twentieth-Century Theatre.* (London, Routledge, 1996), 45-47.

conscious sense of self is necessarily selective and filtered, i.e. 'fictional,' depending on what story we're trying to tell ourselves."[8] Each of these performance texts, in its own way, suggests that the idea of consciousness imposed by modernity (and which artistic modernism has sought to replicate) is not the only option. Actors then, require training that does not insist that all individuals have the same sense of self. I argue that in all these cases, viewpoints trainings can be useful toward understanding how these texts can be brought to the stage.

Paradoxically, a key advantage that viewpoints trainings have in this pursuit is that Character is not a Viewpoint in either Overlie or Bogart and Landau's articulation. It is not that these teachers do not believe in the existence or value of placing characters onstage. Instead, they deny themselves, the author, and the actor the authority to limit the possibilities of what a character might be. "It frees us from the statement 'My character would never do that" according to Bogart and Landau.[9] It allows the viewpoints-trained actor to open themselves up to ways of (re)presenting characters beyond the one-to-one ratio of a body and a mind/soul/consciousness and challenge the assumption that all individuals experience consciousness equally. By excluding traditional character work from their practices, viewpoints trainings retain the flexibility to grapple with postmodern dramatic literature and its purposefully decentered, fluid conceptions of character (and by extension, contemporary notions of personhood).

As in Chapter three, I do not look to show that any iteration of viewpoints training solves all the problems for actors in these texts. Rather, I locate points of epistemological sympathy that these texts share with postmodern and poststructuralist philosophy and connect those points of sympathy to skills that viewpoints trainings aim to develop. In doing so, I aim to draw

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[8] Blair, Rhonda. *The Actor, Image, and Action: Acting and Cognitive Neuroscience.* (Abingdon, UK, Routledge, 2008) 58-9.
[9] Bogart, Anne and Tina Landau. *The Viewpoints Book.* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2005), 19.

connections between the philosophical points of view articulated in chapters one and two, and the application of the techniques toward production.

Sarah Ruhl's Objects and Subjects

Sarah Ruhl's postmodernist impulses are revealed in her firm contention that experience is shaped by culture, as opposed to nature, in ways that are easy to overlook. The tenth of Ruhl's *100 Essays I Don't Have Time to Write: On Umbrellas and Sword Fights, Parades and Dogs, Fire Alarms, Children, and Theater*, is titled "People in Plays." In it, the playwright declares: "The first choice any playwright must make is whether to people the play with people, as opposed to puppets, gods, voices, or inanimate objects."[10] This is a bold statement, considering that in the next sentence, Ruhl acknowledges that this decision is often overlooked – even by playwrights who make this choice unconsciously – because it is generally assumed that plays involve actors, that actors are human beings, and therefore plays must be populated with people. Yet, by reminding her reader that playwrights have the option not to include people in their plays, Ruhl points out the ideologically charged assumption that a body onstage necessarily represents an autonomous human subjectivity or consciousness that is confined within that body, over which that subject has complete power. That assumption is dependent on the Lacanian idea that subjectivity is defined by desire for that which is not itself, "the Other," and asserted through language.[11][12] Stanislavski, anticipating Lacan, declares that the actor's work is commanded by three "generals," the mind, which uses language to control the body; the will, which desires that which it lacks; and feeling, which is how the body sends feedback to tell the mind whether it has

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[10] Ruhl, Sarah. *100 Essays I Don't Have Time to Write: On Umbrellas and Sword Fights, Parades and Dogs, Fire Alarms, Children and Theater* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2014), 20-1.

[11] I mention Lacan here, but I am thinking specifically about Laura Mulvey's application of Lacan's "mirror phase" as the subject's entry point into the symbolic order to cinematic representations of women as object/images and men as the subjective "bearer of the look."

[12] Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema: (UK, 1975). In *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, by MacKenzie Scott, 359-70. University of California Press, 2014.

worked its will.[13] This paradigm of actor training fits neatly within a mode of playwriting that assumes plays to be populated by human subjects; by acknowledging that these assumptions are not, in fact, a set of given natural laws that govern the world (let alone playwriting), Ruhl implies that she is willing to allow a body to represent something other than that in her plays.

In *Eurydice* (2003), Ruhl uses actors to portray a set of characters who lack subjectivity in a variety of ways. It seems appropriate that the inhabitants of the world of *Eurydice*, an adaptation of the Orpheus myth, subvert the modern expectation of character subjectivity. It returns the piece to the classical way of thinking about characters in tragedy as subordinate to plot. Per Aristotle: "Tragedy is not an imitation of persons, but of actions and life…So the imitation of character is not the purpose of what the agents do; character is included with and on account of the actions."[14] *Eurydice* mocks the modern reader, whom Elinor Fuchs observes approaching the text "with the assurance that the rounded, inward character of the psychological stage has always been fundamental to the dramatic form and to the human mind," only to discover that "to read [it] for the psychological subtext is anachronistic."[15] In a play that straddles this world and the next, it is appropriate, if not necessary, that the playwright forces the audience to confront the limitations of subjectivity's ability to describe existence.

The classical Orphic myth places the masculine demigod, Orpheus, in the primary subject position. He makes decisions and takes action in pursuit of the object of his desire, Eurydice. For example, Claudio Monteverdi's early operatic treatment of the myth stages Orpheus and Eurydice together at their wedding in the first act, but leaves Eurydice out of most of the action that follows. A messenger informs Orpheus of his wife's death, and from there Monteverdi

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[13] Stanislavski, Konstantin, *An Actor's Work,* trans. Jean Benedetti (London: Routledge, 2008), 276.
[14] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Malcolm Heath (London, Penguin Classics, 1996), 11.
[15] Fuchs, *The Death of Character.* 22-3.

presents Orpheus' journey to Hades and back, a brief glimpse of Eurydice as she disappears, and the hero's mourning aria in the final act. Eurydice is denied the ability to act, even to perform the act of death. Her purpose in the opera is to be seen and desired.

In Ruhl's adaptation of the myth, her postmodernist sensibilities follow a poststrcturalist course. Taking the received classical narrative and placing the traditionally objectified heroine in the subject position, the play forces the audience to consider the original myth's use of the male gaze, as described Laura Mulvey, to establish masculinity as the neutral aesthetic perspective. The decision to title the play *Eurydice*, is of course, a dead giveaway that Ruhl is deliberately reversing that previously assumed neutral position. Then, in the opening moment, Ruhl confirms Eurydice as subject and Orpheus as object in the Lacanian sense. Eurydice has the power of speech, but Orpheus can only make "a sweeping gesture with his arm, indicating the sky," like an infant calling attention to a flock of birds upon noticing the phenomenon for the first time, at which Eurydice remarks approvingly, "All those birds?" and in response "He nods."[16] Also in contrast to the source material, Orpheus does not lose Eurydice because his anxiety makes him gaze back to her prematurely. Rather, Eurydice calls out to Orpheus and startles him into turning around. The play is not merely an update, or reboot, of the myth. It challenges the source material and, as classicist Christina Dokou puts it in her psychoanalytic reading of the play, "record[s] the missing or silenced pieces of women's past existences that patriarchal views of 'his-story' have always neglected or exploited, consigning women to the underworld of recorded annals."[17]

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[16] Ruhl, Sarah. *Eurydice* (New York, Samuel French, 2008), 9.
[17] Dokou, Christina, "Arrested Dev-elopement: Myth-Understanding Father-Daughter Love in Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice.*" In *The Drama and Theatre of Sarah Ruhl,* ed. Amy Muse (London: Methuen, 2018), 166.

Upon establishing these subject-object roles as the couple's default habits of being, Ruhl quickly destabilizes them. When Eurydice enters the underworld at the beginning of the play's second movement, even though her memory has been erased, the stage directions indicate that she still attempts to assert her subjectivity through speech: "She walks towards the audience and opens her mouth, trying to speak." But in Ruhl's play, as in life, death puts an end to human subjectivity. Instead of words, "There is a great humming noise," and despite the fact that Eurydice ostensibly has no memory of having had language, its loss prompts her to have "a tantrum of despair."[18] In order for the play to continue, Ruhl needs her title character to be able to make herself understood, so for a moment the chorus of stones translate for the audience: "Eurydice wants to speak to you. But she can't speak your language anymore." They implore the audience to pretend to "understand the language of stones," which Eurydice now speaks. Once the audience is aware that they are now listening to Eurydice speak, not in the language of subjects (people), but in the language of objects (stones and corpses), Eurydice is able to communicate with them once more.[19] Throughout this second movement, Eurydice's object-ness is reinforced by her inability to do for herself – to find shelter, to read, to remember herself. Her deceased father, who – not having had his mind properly erased in the journey across the river Lethe – retains his subjectivity in death, must do all these things for her. On the other hand, back in the world of the living, Orpheus finds himself in an untenable situation as an object without a subject.

Eurydice's absence after her death forces Orpheus to use language and his mind, which – as throughout the play Ruhl reminds the audience - he dislikes. In his first attempt to write Eurydice across planes of existence, he tries to excuse his ineloquence with "You know I hate

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[18] Ruhl, *Eurydice,* 27.
[19] Ruhl, *Eurydice,* 27-8.

writing letters."[20] Eurydice explains her husband's distrust of the mind, its logic, and its language saying, "Orpheus said the mind is a slide ruler. It can fit around anything. Words can mean anything. Show me your body, he said. It means only one thing."[21] It is significant that Ruhl does not allow Orpheus to speak this eloquently for himself.

Eurydice, as the play's avatar for the mind, thinks, reads, and speaks. When she unsuccessfully attempts to do these things in the second movement, the audience is reminded that thinking, reading, speaking, are also actions that a body performs. We could not see her attempt these things if this were not so. For her, music is merely a physical sensation; "either you hear it, or you don't."[22] Orpheus capitulates to that argument, unable to explain that one can think about music. In doing so, they designate him as a physical being. He does not argue. He does not think. He hears. Yet to understand music, let alone hold twelve melodies in one's head at once, as Orpheus does, requires precise mathematical thought. Despite his initial protestations, he ultimately succeeds in accessing his mind. In hatching his plan to venture to the underworld, he formulates research questions: "If a drop of water enters the soil at a particular angle, with a particular pitch, what's to say a man can't ride one note into the earth like a fireman's pole?"[23] Moments later, he has "consulted the almanacs, the footstools, and the architects, and everyone agrees"[24] that his plan will work. The death of Eurydice hails Orpheus into the subjectivity that he always had and calls attention to the problem of trying to pretend that he did not.

This creates problems for actors, who are frequently trained to use the text to boil their characters down to their essences. "Eurydice is a mind. Orpheus is a body." It creates situations

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[20] Ruhl, *Eurydice,* 38.
[21] Ruhl, *Eurydice,* 51.
[22] Ruhl, *Eurydice,* 10.
[23] Ruhl, *Eurydice,* 50.
[24] Ruhl, *Eurydice,* 52.

where the actor must struggle with key moments in the play where these two have to do things that seem "out of character." They might fall back on the all-too-common phrase that Bogart and Landau identify as the sign of the resistant actor, "My character would never do that."[25] How can actors, let alone the audience, fully invest in characters if they do not know what they are? Ruhl argues, however, that "Investing in the character because we have secret information about the character is the language of insider trading," and that "Emotional identification, neurologists might argue, comes from mirror neurons rather than from 'knowing' information. Some might argue the more you know the less you identify." She would prefer that rather than thinking of the character as walking a straight path that is easily tracked from point A to point B with "neatly spaced footprints," we should think of them as part of the "hidden emotional logic of the artist."[26] This is much more compatible with Bogart and Landau's desire that characters not be "motivated exclusively by psychological intention," but "generating action based on awareness of time and space in addition to or instead of psychology."[27]

In setting up the young lovers as a being of the mind and a being of the body, forcing each to engage with their opposites, Ruhl dramatizes what Richard Hornby calls the "mind-body problem." The modernist impulse, beginning with the Cartesian influence on Diderot's *The Paradox of the Actor*, has been to imagine the mind and the body as separate, interdependent entities.[28] Modern acting technique, then, is based on the conception of the actor as "the ghost in the machine." The mind operates the body but does not experience the thoughts or feelings that it directs the body to show. Stanislavski writes about the actor living a double life: "When I am acting…I laugh and weep and at the same time analyse my laughter and tears, so they can touch

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[25] Bogart and Landau. *The Viewpoints Book.* 17.
[26] Ruhl, *100 Essays I Don't Have Time to Write,* 27-8.
[27] Bogart and Landau, *The Viewpoints Book.* 16-7.
[28] Hornby, Richard. *The End of Acting: A Radical View.* (New York: Applause Books, 1992), 101-116.

the hearts of those I wish to move more deeply."[29] Brecht wanted the actor to not only live that double life, but to periodically interrupt the exterior life to show the interior one. Even the Strasbergian actor, who endeavors to experience "real" emotion, is directing their body to show the character's feelings by using interior language to recall physical sensations from the actor's distant life experience. The problem that Hornby identifies is that thought and emotion are physical processes that occur in the brain, a part of the body that is "much more than *mind*, and mind is much more than *consciousness*."[30] The brain controls all manner of physical activities that the conscious mind does not concern itself with. When the mind tries to assert control over some of these activities – breathing, walking, sleeping – we become *self-conscious* and the actions feel strange and forced. *Eurydice* implicitly exposes the flaws that the modernists ignore by insisting on the mind/body duality.

Ruhl goes on to explicitly expose those flaws as they relate to modes of actor training that ask the actor to find subtext or a second consciousness writing: "If you're acting in a play of mine…please, don't think one thing and then say another thing." She argues that "it is almost ontologically impossible to truly think one thing while saying another thing. It creates an acting muddle in the theater and a sociopath in life."[31] Ruhl would prefer for actors to be "in a pure state of emotion," citing Bogart and Ariane Mnouchkine's use of the term "*l'état,*"[32] a state that is ripe for transformation: "If one is saying one thing and feeling another thing, one is playing a sense of inner contradiction, or tension, or even of subterfuge, which makes a single pure state

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[29] Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work,* 456.
[30] Hornby, *The End of Acting,* 109 (original italics).
[31] Ruhl, *100 Essays I Don't Have Time to Write,* 66.
[32] Ruhl, Sarah. *Eurydice* (New York, Samuel French, 2008),

impossible."[33] Ruhl acknowledges that the mind and the body cannot be peeled apart, writes plays that depend on that fact, and pleads with actors not to try to achieve such a separation.

Although the roles of Eurydice and Orpheus most clearly illuminate the postmodernist project of *Eurydice*, they do not present the most compelling challenges for the postmodern actor. An actor playing Orpheus who balks when given the note to embrace the character's late-blooming intellect, can be countered by a competent modernist director with "plot forces characters to change; that is the essence of drama." Instead, I return to Ruhl's observation I cited at the beginning of this section – that it is a playwright's choice to populate her plays with people. In *Eurydice,* Ruhl elects to include characters who are not people.

At the beginning of the second movement, she introduces a chorus of stones. The choice to use stones as inhabitants of the underworld creates a whole new set of problems for the modern actor. The argument that "change is the essence of drama," for example, is out the window when the character is a stone, which is notably resistant to change. Something that is "set in stone" cannot be altered. A geologist could argue that stones undergo change, but not over the course of a ninety-minute play. The Rosetta Stone, for example, is still legible thousands of years after the etchings on it were made. Ruhl uses these characters to remind the audience that the dead are inert. They do not move or speak; they do not lack; they do not want.[34] This creates a major problem for an actor who motivates his or her character based on objectives and superobjectives. How does one portray a character that is not merely in an object-ified position, but is intended to present a literal object?

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[33] Ruhl, *100 Essays I Don't Have Time to Write,* 76.
[34] "Want" is a concept that both Ruhl and the authors of *The Viewpoints Book* problematize. Ruhl, *100 Essays I Don't Have Time to Write*, 69-72. Bogart and Landau, *The Viewpoints Book,* 17-18.

It might be easy to argue that Ruhl cannot possibly mean that these characters are supposed to represent literal stones. The actors, after all, are people. They cannot signify anything other than a person. With just about anything else, however, the theatre spectator takes for granted that things can represent that which they are not. A backdrop of a cornfield in the community theatre production of *Oklahoma!* is easily taken to stand for a cornfield; why can a person not just as well stand for a stone. To say that they do not, is to take both the chorus and the playwright for liars when the stones introduce themselves by intoning together, "We are a chorus of stones."[35] This is a performative utterance. Ruhl notes that "Five-year-olds understand perfectly this convention, as did Shakespeare. Here we are at the palace. Here we are in the dark, dark woods. By speaking it, we make it so." As above, Ruhl is critically suspicious of acting that "assumes that the real truth is buried or hidden underneath the language. Rather than having language bring to life the invisible world."[36] The fact that these particular stones have to speak, and potentially move around, notwithstanding, they must be stones.

"But stones don't move," says the skeptic. Of course they do. On this planet stones are constantly kicked, thrown, washed under, windblown, crushed, toppled, blasted, and rolled away. Forces act upon the stones in our world causing them to move all the time. The Earth itself moves constantly, propelled by gravity to simultaneously rotate and revolve without the least prompting, and what is the Earth but a rather large mass of stone? Ruhl's stones have the added advantage of living in a land where dead people live and serving a Lord of the Underworld with mysterious powers. The forces that govern this underworld, are simply not the same as the forces that govern the world where the audience lives. The forces acting upon these stones are different, but for the actor, thinking of how the stones in his or her world are moved, offers clues as to how

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[35] Ruhl, *Eurydice,* 26.
[36] Ruhl, *100 Essays I Don't Have Time to Write,* 78.

stones in the underworld might move. In the pages that follow, I explore some ways that viewpoints trainings can help actors in these roles find a performance that animates the inanimate.

In her discussion of the fifth of her Six Viewpoints, Movement, Mary Overlie recalls a performance she witnessed by Steve Paxton. Paxton, perhaps best known for the development of contact improvisation, "decided not to move a muscle for the duration of [the] performance. Standing in complete apparent stillness, in the absence of movement, the kinetics of this material oozed throughout the entire performance, asserting its power and place."[37] It is telling that Overlie describes Paxton's stillness as merely "apparent," just as the silence in John Cage's "4:33" is also merely apparent. For, though the audience may not easily perceive it, Paxton was likely breathing. He may have had an involuntary twitch or two. His heart was certainly pumping and any number of organic and cellular processes were taking place in and on his body. It is also telling that Overlie's description does not imply that the lack of what might be called "dance moves" did not make for a dull or lazy performance. On the contrary, it seems as though the performance was packed with intensity. Not only does stillness in performance provoke the spectator to anticipate what they imagine to be the inevitability of movement, but whatever Paxton did (or more accurately did not do) must have been suffused with energy to "ooze" and "assert." It may be that when Eurydice exclaims "I hate you! I've always hated you!"[38] at the stones, that their inability or unwillingness to excite themselves into movement is so oppositional to Eurydice's preferred habits of being, that the less fight they give her, the more fight they inspire within her. In the "physical theatre," stillness is every bit as physical as the leap.

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[37] Overlie, Mary. *Standing in Space: The Six Viewpoints Theory and Practice* (Billings, MT: Artcraft Printers, 2016), 36.
[38] Ruhl, *Eurydice,* 67.

The horizontal laboratory of Overlie's Six Viewpoints allows her fifth viewpoint to take the lead in this experiment. This does not mean that the other SSTEMS are diminished by the primary consideration of Movement, but rather that they are defined by it. If the movement vocabulary for these characters is to be grounded in stillness, the shapes the actors take, for example, are of great import. Overlie says: "For actors, the gestures – a much used aspect of Shape in acting – can take on a greater variation and attention, becoming a significant part of performance rather than filler for the emotional or textual aspect of a play."[39] While the colloquial understanding of the word 'significant' as meaning 'important' is valid here, I also consider the word's etymological meaning, having the power to signify. I also consider, as Bogart and Landau do, the word 'gesture' more broadly – not simply as the muddle of hand movements that is 'gesticulation' or 'talking with the hands,' or as the specific symbolic or indexical gestures like the 'thumbs up' or 'Uncle Sam wants YOU!' – as using the intentional shape of the whole body expressively rather than behaviorally.[40] By thinking of Gesture as more than the culturally agreed-upon "behavioral gestures" we give one another in daily communication, the shape of the body can "transform the body," as Overlie says.[41] In Bogart and Landau's language they become part of the "Architecture" of the space, which includes (but is not limited to) the floor, solid mass, objects, and other people.[42] As the sculptor uses Shape to transform stone into human form, the actor can use Shape to transform the human body into stone form.

This is not to say that the correct way, or even the best way, for actors to present a chorus of stones is to refrain from movement. There are moments in the script where Ruhl explicitly

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[39] Overlie, *Standing in Space*, 16.
[40] Bogart and Landau, *The Viewpoints Book,* 49-52.
[41] Overlie, *Standing in Space,* 16.
[42] Bogart and Landau, *The Viewpoints Book,*52-3.

directs the stones to execute specific movements. They shrug their shoulders. They look at one another. They weep. Ruhl has created an underworld in which a train "has wheels that are not wheels," where "There is the opposite of a wheel and the opposite of smoke and the opposite of a train."[43] It is easy to imagine that these stones are not stones as we know them. So how does the viewpoints-trained actor make a stone legible to the spectator who knows that they see a human body performing culturally conditioned human actions?

Here again, the playwright offers guidance. She has given the reader a "big stone," a "little stone" and a "loud stone." For the unimaginative actor, it might be enough to say that these so-called "names" for the members of the chorus refer to sensory attributes. The big stone must, therefore, be played by a tall or stocky actor, the small stone by a petite actor, and the loud stone should shout. Ruhl does not stipulate that these stones must be played by actors with those physical capabilities, but these names do give a sense of how each respective character can be imagined inhabiting Space. An actor of any size can hold themselves in such a way to suggest largeness or smallness. Moreover, if the production decides that the stones will have the power of mobility, the way a small stone moves when kicked up by horses in a cloud of dust or skipped across a pond, is much different from the way a big stone moves when pushed down a mountainside, with great effort at first, but gathering unstoppable momentum. Stones, big and small alike, may also be quite loud in ways which are not vocal. The sound of driving over gravel or cobblestone is very different from the sound of waves crashing on a slab of marble.

Actors trained in the viewpoints can take these mental images and use them to determine the character's preferred Tempo. These images also have an impact on Kinesthetic Response: a little stone will respond quickly and energetically when acted upon, while a big stone might

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[43] Ruhl, *Eurydice,* 29.

require a much larger stimulus to be moved at all. A loud stone might slap its feet along the ground as it moves while a little stone springs along on its toes. These varied Kinesthetic Responses will also have an effect on how the stones react to Topography and Architecture. A small stone could skip along in a zig-zag pattern, while a big stone, once it gets some momentum going, will tumble forward. A loud stone might crash into obstacles and bounce off them, while a big stone lands with a heavy "thud." Bogart and Landau offer a useful exercise for turning these visual images into character choices. They ask the actor to

> think of someone in [their] life who has a strong stamp, either a strong effect on you or an especially colorful personality. Express her/his *character* in a floor pattern. Is this someone who is very directed and moves in straight lines, or is this someone who is 'all over the place' and makes a Jackson Pollock on the floor, or is this someone who likes to take up space, or is this someone who hides on the outskirts?[44]

In a production of *Eurydice,* someone in the actor's life could easily be substituted for a big, little, or loud stone. The results of such an exercise would force the actor to dig into the physical characteristics that might be applied to a certain type of stone not only from an intellectual standpoint, but also in a way that puts what actors might call "character work" into practice and forces them to feel what their stone's body moves like.

To conclude this section, I return to the idea of subjectivity, which is where I began. To what degree do Ruhl's stones have it? I argue that they do, but it is not the Lacanian subjectivity that Ruhl grants to Eurydice. Amy Muse gestures to the problems of reading *Eurydice*, and indeed Ruhl's *ouvre* through a psychoanalytic lens. The playwright has "pointed out numerous times that she considers her plays 'pre-Freudian' in that, like the ancient Greek dramatists and

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[44] Bogart and Landau, *The Viewpoints Book,* 56

Shakespeare, her plays are 'low on exposition and psychology' and bathe audiences in the 'great, horrible opera inside' everyone…"[45] This makes the choice to designate the stones as a "chorus" rather than a bunch of individual stones all the more meaningful. Instead, I imagine the stones having a subjectivity closer to what Louis Althusser imagines. They are subjects of the "(Repressive) State apparatus" of the underworld. Not only that, but they come together to form what Althusser called "the ideological State apparatus."[46]

In "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus (Notes Towards an Investigation)" Althusser outlines the differences between the State Apparatus, which operates through forceful repression and the multiple ideological State apparatuses which exist apart from the State but also produce the conditions of the State and prepare subjects to be assimilated into it. Subjects, he argues, are conscious beings, "concrete, individual, distinguishable and (naturally) irreplaceable" and recognize themselves and each other as such.[47] The way in which Ruhl introduces the stones to the audience calls into question whether they fit these criteria. In the first moment of *Eurydice's* "Second Movement" the stones intone together: "We are a chorus of stones." After introducing themselves individually they conclude: "We are all three stones."[48] This choric speech and identification as a collective unit undermines the spectator's ability to see the stones as individual or distinguishable, even if they may be (quite literally) concrete. Even their individual introductions allude to the idea that these stones may not be irreplaceable. Ruhl does not give them proper names, which Althusser identifies as the sign of recognition of an individual's unique subjectivity within conventional ideological structures.[49] The stones

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[45] Muse, Amy, *The Drama and Theatre of Sarah Ruhl,* 35.
[46] Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus (Notes Towards an Investigation)." *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York, Monthly Review Press, 2001) 98-127.
[47] Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus," 117.
[48] Ruhl, *Eurydice,* 26
[49] Althusser, Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus," 117.

introduce themselves as *a* big stone, *a* little stone, and *a* loud stone. Not only are they not,

"Susan, the loud stone," they are not even *the* loud stone. Ultimately, Ruhl reveals that the stones

have some markings of individuality. When the big stone suggests that the language of dead

people sounds "like potatoes sleeping in the dirt," the other two "look at Big Stone as though that

were a dumb thing to say."[50] The (repressive) State apparatus of the underworld, under the

domination of a ruling class of one – the Lord of the Underworld – conditions its subjects to

forfeit as much as possible of their ability to acknowledge individual subjectivity, to "forget the

names [because] the names make you remember."[51]

The stones are momentarily "hailed" into individual subjectivity by the Lord of the

Underworld, in the guise of the Child, when he tells them to "see that

[Eurydice's]…comfortable," (ellipsis in original).[52] This is moments after the Child reveals

himself as the (repressive) State apparatus by declaring that he will "have to dip [Eurydice] in

the river again and make sure you're good and dunked," to re-erase her memory as punishment

for having a room and a father, both of which are signs of individual agency and relationships,

and both of which are "not allowed."[53] For the most part, however, the stones perform the

ideology of denying their individuality and hailing Eurydice and her father into that ideological

practice, ultimately convincing them to dismantle Eurydice's string room dip themselves in the

river to forget one another. They also attempt to hail the audience into the ideology of the

underworld by asking them to pretend to speak the language of the dead out of politeness to

Eurydice. When Eurydice's father tries to communicate with his daughter outside the language

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[50] Ruhl, *Eurydice,* 27.
[51] Ruhl, *Eurydice,* 31.
[52] "Hailing," or "interpellation" is a term Althusser uses to describe how ideology uses to call attention to an individual's subjectivity and direct it toward obedience to the State.
[53] Ruhl, *Eurydice,* 49.

of the dead, the stones label him "subversive."[54] A play whose State apparatus diminishes individuality to this degree creates further challenges for actors who depend on a strong sense of Lacanian subjectivity to create their characters, as many modern dramas do, but Ruhl's chorus hews more closely to the tradition of the ancient Greek chorus in, what I will call, its "collective subjectivity."

Members of the ancient Greek chorus might have been given lines of dialogue to speak individually and might express disparate points of view within the group. However, as representatives of the so-called ideal spectator, they belied the playwright's function as part of the ideological State apparatus in Greek society. These choruses, like Ruhl's, hailed both the named characters in the play and the audience into the kind of subjectivity Althusser describes by relating expository information and, in many instances, modeling the correct way to react to it. Additionally, members the Greek chorus, like Ruhl's, often had to synchronize their movements and speeches to demonstrate the "collective subjectivity" that the ideological State apparatus attempts to create in which an individual who strays from the accepted ideology can be hailed back into place. A workshop on Greek choral movement and speech led by Pig Iron Theatre's Emmanuelle Delpech, which I attended as part of the production team for a 2015 production of *Eurydice,* included exercises which overlap with Viewpoints training techniques to achieve these aims.

Among a wide variety of exercises that Delpech used to develop collective awareness of spatial relationships and to generate kinesthetic responses to that awareness was one that Bogart and Landau also endorse, which they refer to as "flocking:"

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[54] Ruhl, *Eurydice,* 30.

The group spreads out onstage, facing downstage…the group will be doing in unison what a leader initiates. This time, though, the leader is the person who, at any given moment, cannot see anyone else. Since the exercise starts with the participants facing downstage, the leader will be the person farthest downstage, unable to see anyone else. The leader initiates moves and the others repeat the leader's shapes and movements in unison. If the leader turns during a move and is able to see someone else, s/he drops her/his role as leader. The person who cannot see anyone else becomes the new leader.[55]

Delpech, whose training is in Lecoq-style clowning, used this exercise to get the group to work toward heightening the group's awareness of each other and creating the illusion that the unit was moving without a leader. With practice, the group was able to make the group's following of each leader so close as to render it nearly imperceptible. With more practice, the passing of the leadership role was also smoothed out beyond recognition. I could not say whether this is a Lecoq exercise that Bogart and Landau have appropriated or a Viewpoints exercise that Delpech has integrated into her practice, but it demonstrates their shared value for creating a sense of collective subjectivity, and its use in choric work both ancient and contemporary.

Subjectivity, both how it is defined and who may lay claim to it, is a prime target for deconstructive metaphysics. Destabilizing the subject disrupts the Cartesian logic of "I think, therefore I am" upon which the metanarratives of modernity, progress, liberation, and capitalism are dependent. *Eurydice* explores ways in which individualized subjectivity is not a guaranteed fact of existence for all bodies. When some have it and others do not, as in the play's afterlife, Ruhl suggests that fascism is the result. Actors who have only ever considered themselves as individual, autonomous subjects might struggle to portray a character like Orpheus in moments

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[55] Bogart and Landau, *The Viewpoints Book,* 79.

where he is "merely a body" as I have argued here. They may have difficulty surrendering that individuality to be part of a "chorus of stones."

Viewpoints training not only requires the actor to conceive the body as an object in space, as opposed to a casing for a psychological being, it sharpens the actor's awareness of the relationship between bodies in the room. While it may not cause actors to achieve genuine extrasensory perception, which collective subjectivity seems to require, the keen physical sensitivity that Overlie hoped to develop with the News of a Difference laboratory at least allows actors to model the possibility of a mind crossing the borders of the body. It approximates the dissolving distinction between Self and Other. Collective subjectivity is not the only model postmodernists have imagined for the death of the subject. The rest of this chapter will examine the possibilities for viewpoints trainings to depict fractured subjectivities.

The Art and Soul of James Ijames' *White*

James Ijames' *White* (2017), undoubtedly less familiar to many readers than *Eurydice,* is the newest play included in this study, and Ijames, born in 1981, is the youngest playwright. I underscore this recent timeline to acknowledge that as the icons of postmodern performance recede from view – Mary Overlie and Lee Breuer, for example, who both passed away while I worked on this project – the historical aspect of this work seems to take on outsized importance. Indeed, the number and scope of postmortem analyses of postmodernism has been on the rise since the early 1990s.[56] Anne Bogart has weighed in: "I think it's the end of postmodernism. It's the end of deconstruction. We've deconstructed to the point where nothing needs to be anymore."[57] Paradoxically, Linda Hutcheon, author of several influential books on postmodern

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[56] David Rudrum and Nicholas Stavris give a well-considered overview of this movement in the introduction to their anthology of essays *Supplanting the Postmodern* (New York, Bloomsbury, 2015) xi-xxviii.
[57] Bogart, Anne. *Conversations with Anne* (New York, Theatre Communications Group, 2012), 359.

literature and culture, has declared the movement "Gone forever, but here to stay,"[58] a phrase I find useful for an aesthetic philosophy that is perhaps no longer on the cutting edge, but carries on haunting us with its ghostly presence in pursuit of its unfinished business.

As Hutcheon suggests, it is important to recognize that the insidious constructions upheld by false master narratives that the postmodernists pointed out have not been completely deconstructed. If anything, some of the identity groups that advanced supposedly poststructuralist assaults on essentialism in the twentieth century have erected new constructions that assimilate themselves into structures of power, and yet continue to push other groups to the margins. A new generation of artists is taking up the metaphysical and aesthetic questions that the postmodernist pioneers posed and directing them back at the questioners. In *White,* Ijames illustrates the new power structures that his postmodernism takes aim at by making the first word uttered by his gay, white, male lead character "Hegemony."[59] Gus, the character referenced, says "Hegemony" as part of a conversation Ijames inserts the audience into the middle of, in which he and his white-feminist friend Jane mock a list of buzzwords which, in their opinion, the mainstream has worn out and rendered meaningless. The events of the play will demonstrate that the word may be a cliché, but the concept is still an apt description of how society operates.

Gus is an up-and-coming artist who hopes that Jane, a friend from graduate school and newly minted curator of a prestigious museum, will include his work in her first major exhibition. When Jane declines, noting that Gus is a "white dude,"[60] he hires Vanessa, a struggling Black actor, to pose as the maker of his painting and submit it to the exhibition using the persona Balkonaé Townsend, whom Gus and Vanessa create together. Ultimately, Jane

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[58] Hutcheon, Linda, "Gone forever, But Here to Stay: The Legacy of the Postmodern." In *Postmodernism: What Moment?*, ed. Pelagia Goulimari (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 16-18.
[59] Ijames, James. *White* (New York, Dramatists Play Service, 2018), 8.
[60] Ijames, *White,* 12.

discovers the ruse but insists that Balkonaé is the real work of art and wants to put *her* in the museum. The play critiques realist performance practices that claim the ability to present essential qualities of human experience through superficial observations. It expands that critique to include institutions that continue to rehearse modern colonial practices of expanding their wealth and power by appropriating cultural products from marginalized communities and displaying them in spaces that are inaccessible to the communities for which they were intended. Finally, *White* shows how this critique applies not only to works of art, but to human beings as well; it deploys the tropes of racial essentialism to show the myriad ways it is used to control marginalized subjects and keep them subjugated. While a realist or expressionist play might attempt to present this strategic diversity through several characters, each of whom is subjugated in a different way, Ijames shows all these oppressions working on Vanessa. I argue that in this endeavor, he creates a challenge that might elude the modern actor seeking a consistent, essential character for Vanessa. Although *White* may have emerged in a post-postmodern moment, its challenge of aesthetic and social hierarchy and its exploration of Black subjectivity demand that its actors possess skills that allow character to be conceived as complex, inconsistent constructions rather than cohesive, innate, or essential.

To demonstrate *White*'s antimodernist sensibility, Ijames positions as an artist with a modernist sensibility. The painting that he shows Jane as a sample of the direction his work has taken is described as "very white. Metallic raised white lines moving from the four corners of the canvas towards the center. They are laid out on a matte-finish white canvas. The work is minimalist and striking."[61] This description suggests the influence of abstract expressionist painters such as Mark Rothko's color fields. This kind of work moves away from figurative

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[61] Ijames, *White,* 10.

images in an attempt to present the essential qualities of both painting as an artform and the broader human experience. Gus explains: "'I'm trying to explore the intersection between my white body, hence the abundance of white, and my gay body, hence…' *He points out something phallic perhaps in the paint?"*[62] In other words, Gus is looking to use paint and canvas to describe the indescribable substance that makes up white queer masculinity. His modernist sensibility, well-trodden ground among painters by this time, reveals that Gus' time has passed, although his age suggests one just reaching maturity.

Gus' efforts to make his way into the institutional artistic establishment cannot be separated from this work. The character description says that Gus is in his 30's. It is clear to him that the time for youthful experimentation is over; his contemporary, Jane, has already moved into a position of authority and reflecting back on "that performance art thingy we did in grad school in the library," which was "crazy."[63] For Gus, having his work accepted into Jane's exhibition means that his identity can move from the margins to the center of power in his field. He presents this in his work in which queerness can become a part of white male power structures: "It's all building to converge at the center. Here."[64]

Of course, the existence of a center implies the existence of a margin, and for Gus to be part of the center, someone else has must be on the margin. Thus, he cannot explain his painting to Vanessa in the same way he explains it to Jane. To begin with, when Vanessa asks Gus what kind of art he makes, Gus further allies himself with the modernist aesthetic. He says that he has done "some work that is collage, but it always comes back to painting."[65] Which suggests that previous experiments with postmodernist media and the pluralism of pastiche have led him back

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[62] Ijames, *White*, 10-11.
[63] Ijames, *White,* 10.
[64] Ijames, *White,*11.
[65] Ijames, *White,* 21.

to the more traditional, respectable work of paint on canvas. Then, when Vanessa asks what Gus'

painting means, observing that "it's just a blank," Gus abandons the earlier idea of queerness

joining whiteness at the center. Instead, he says, "It's open. It's presenting itself to you as a

mirror almost. You apply to the canvas, to the white paint, what you are. Who you are." And he

encourages Vanessa to "extend [herself] into the world of the painting. Into the whiteness."[66]

Here, Gus is attempting to convince Vanessa that whiteness, specifically *his* whiteness, is neutral

– a universal, default mode of existence that everyone and everything can be incorporated into.

He thinks he is being welcoming and inclusive by doing this, that there is room for everyone in

his work, but by asking her to extend herself into the whiteness, he is asking her to assimilate

into his worldview and leave the parts of her that do not fit into the white, gay center out on the

margins. Vanessa's experience with being asked to assimilate into a white-centered world, is a

topic I will return to shortly.

Beyond the problems that Ijames points out with Gus' universalizing modernist

sensibilities, the playwright also underscores the ways in which white gay men have appropriated

stereotyped Black femininity for themselves. While Gus chooses a Black female actor to present

his work to the exhibition because Jane tells him, "if you were black and female and making the

work you are making, it would be perfect,"[67] he also feels the choice is appropriate because

"Every gay man has a black woman inside of him. Just dying to get out."[68] At several moments

in the play, Gus performs this Black femininity that he imagines to be at the core of every

(white) gay man. Gus believes that he is divinely authorized to articulate this Black femininity by

Saint Diana of Detroit, who is played by the same actor who plays Vanessa and appears to him

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[66] Ijames, *White,* 22.
[67] Ijames, *White,* 13.
[68] Ijames, *White,* 25.

as a vision telling him that she is "the perfect personification of the beautiful black woman you have nurtured inside you" and that he "must take what's on the inside and put it on the outside!"[69] Ijames, however, makes it clear that Gus' idea of Black femininity is a simulation that white structures of power have created to prop up white supremacy. Vanessa performs some of these stereotypes while she 'auditions' for Gus, doing excerpts from plays she has been cast in. Through these fictional plays, Ijames shows the types of roles that Black actors are often typed into – roles with names like "J-Tip" and "Shaundalisa."[70] These are the types of roles that give Gus the impression that he understands and identifies with Black femininity, but they are nothing like the way Vanessa performs herself, which she illustrates by asking, "Have you ever met a black woman…you know…in like, real life that talks like that?"[71] Vanessa claims that she became an actor because an actor "get[s] to be everybody." However, Ijames artfully demonstrates that this is not true by showing the types of roles that Vanessa is actually allowed to play. Gus is a product of the culture that has confined Vanessa to these stereotypical roles. His ideas about Black femininity are not informed by knowledge of real Black women, but constructed by these simulations. Ijames shows that these stereotypes are not simply produced by Gus, as an individual, being a racist. They are the product of the structures of power that decide how people are represented artistically and thereby imagined by the consumer.

Jane is the play's representative of these structures of power. She is the gatekeeper who decides what works of art the museum will display, and which communities it will represent. It is also clear that in this role she is beholden to a wealthy set of donors, who the audience never sees. Instead, Ijames places the audience in the role of these wealthy donors. In the play's first

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[69] Ijames, *White,* 17-18.
[70] Ijames, *White,* 19, 24.
[71] Ijames, *White,* 25.

scene, which functions as a prologue, Jane addresses the audience directly, introduces herself as the "senior curator here at the Parnell Museum" and thanks them for "coming tonight to the opening of this extraordinary exhibition of spectacular work by a group of very exciting new American artists."[72] Casting the audience in the role of museum donors is a clever move. It transforms the theatre into the art gallery, which Gus at one point remarks is "designed to repel the poor."[73] This comparison demands that the audience members examine their role in supporting art - both in the museum and the theatre - that assumes a wealthy white audience, which is typically the regional theatre's subscriber base.

In her prologue, Jane clicks through a slide show of five works of art, which she claims to be representative of the type of work the museum typically displays. The pieces suggest a wide variety of artistic tastes. It includes different media from painting, to photography, to sculpture. The pieces also seem to have little in common in terms of aesthetic. There are mimetic portraits, ironic pop-art pieces, and a take on a Duchampian readymade entitled *Mon Petit Dejeuner* featuring a half-eaten piece of toast. Despite this apparent diversity, Jane's point is that the museum has too often featured the perspective of white, male artists. She declares that her new exhibition features the "full range of America."[74] This seems like an admirable goal, but Ijames asks his audience to question Jane's motives and methods.

The first hint of Jane's attitude toward inclusion of disparate cultures in the museum comes when she tries to impress Gus with the artists she is recruiting to be in the New America exhibit. She mentions "this kid out of CalArts that is just dynamite." But rather than speak about what kind of art he makes, it seems to suffice for Jane that "He's Colombian and Chinese!"[75]

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[72] Ijames, *White,* 7.
[73] Ijames, *White,* 59.
[74] Ijames, *White,* 7-8.
[75] Ijames, *White,* 9.

Evidently this is a pattern with Jane. When Gus complains to his boyfriend Tanner, an Asian

man who teaches theatre, that Jane is excluding him from her show because of his race, Tanner

responds: "She does this. Remember the all-blind sculptor show? Jane and her crusades." Which

Gus immediately amends to "Crazy Jane and her fetishes."[76] Jane is not interested in creating a

place of cultural exchange; she wants to collect samples of as many minoritized groups as

possible and hold them at arms-length marveling at their difference. She is the perfect model for

the ethical pitfall Dwight Conquergood names, ironically, given Jane's job description, "The

Curator's Exhibitionism." This commitment to the differences between one's own culture and

that of others causes one to dehumanize, exoticize, and fetishize others, and the sin of seeing

different cultural performances and artifacts through this lens "clarifies how the snap-shot

perspectives of 'Noble Savage' and 'dirty dog' can come from the same view-finder."[77] Jane's

quest to collect works of art from different cultures becomes a quest to collect artists and put

them on display for her wealthy white donors to gaze at and claim to understand deeply.

Gus, the aspiring artist, in his attempt to remake the system into what he wants it to be,

plays a role in its colonialist project. By recruiting Vanessa to play yet another simulation of

what the system expects the Black artist to be, he becomes, in the words of Balkonaé: "A regular

Christopher Columbus. Bumping into shit by mistake and claiming it for the queen," the queen,

in this case, being Jane.[78] After Jane reveals that she knew all along that Gus was trying to trick

her into believing that Balkonaé had made his paintings, she makes her attempt to figuratively

put people on display in the museum literal. She declares that Balkonaé is Gus' "greatest work

yet" and that the museum is "adding her to our permanent collection" as "the most exciting piece

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[76] Ijames, *White,* 15.
[77] Conquergood, Dwight. "Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance." *Literature in Performance* 5, no. 2 (1985), 7.
[78] Ijames, *White,* 46.

we have acquired in years."[79] In this series of moves, Ijames takes the European colonial project to its ultimate conclusion. *White* gives its audience a concrete example of what postcolonial and critical race discourses have argued for decades.[80]

Jane, Gus, and even Tanner live within and uphold the systems of power that seek to assimilate and capitalize on everything outside of them and dehumanize that which they cannot assimilate. Vanessa also begins the play from an assimilated position, which she was trained into from childhood. Ijames makes this point through Vanessa's love of *The Cosby Show* (1984-1992). The play sidesteps the ways in which public perception of Bill Cosby has shifted in the twenty-first century and focuses Vanessa's attention on the way she felt about the show when it originally aired and "everybody wanted to be a Huxtable!"[81] In an analysis of the critical conversation surrounding *The Cosby Show,* Lauren R. Tucker observes that this aspirational thinking can be viewed as a product of an assimilationist ideology that denies the impact of racial difference on lived experience continuing television's "Twin traditions of investing Black characters with the values and mores of the White middle-class culture and ignoring the social and economic realities germane to most Black Americans."[82] The result being that Vanessa "thought my family was the Huxtables, then I realize…nope…we're kinda poor."[83] Vanessa buys into the series' promotion of "individualistic explanations for the persistence of Black inequality…believing that those who fail to achieve the American Dream have only themselves

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[79] Ijames, *White,* 64-5.
[80] Edward Said argues that Orientalism, a tool by which empires maintain dominance over colonies, does so by producing knowledge about the colonized based on exterior representation. He uses Aeschylus' *The Persians* as an example of how an artistic rendering by a "non-Oriental [is] made into a symbol for the whole Orient," just as Jane believes Gus has done with Vanessa/Balkonaé
Said, Edward. *Orientalism.* (New York, Pantheon Books, 1978), 15-21.
[81] Ijames, *White,* 34.
[82] Tucker, Lauren R. "Was the Revolution Televised?: Professional Criticism about *The Cosby Show* and the Essentialization of Black Cultural Expression." *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* vol. 41, no. 1 (Winter 1997), 91.
[83] Ijames, *White,* 34-5.

to blame."[84] Determined to succeed on those grounds, she follows the Cosby blueprint of assimilation to the point of changing her name from VanKnesia (with a silent K) to the name of one of the Huxtable children.[85] Vanessa constructs an identity for herself that gives her the opportunity to be acceptable to the same mainstream audience that made *The Cosby Show* a success, so the actor playing her can rely on the same acting techniques that work for the other three characters, each with clear, coherent identities based on the logic of the dominant ideology. Once Balkonaé emerges, however, the problems for this actor begin to reveal themselves.

Ijames describes the moment when Vanessa, discovers the right physicality and vocal placement for Balkonaé. The stage direction says that in this moment Vanessa "Nails it. Earthy. Soulful."[86] Soulfulness is a complicated attribute to play. In her essay entitled "SoulWork," Cristal Chanelle Truscott outlines four major characteristics of "soul" as it is denotatively understood:

> (a) the spiritual or unique/individual immaterial part of a human being; (b) a person's moral and emotional nature, the ability to feel empathy; (c) a quality of feeling deep emotion and arousing it in others, especially as revealed in an artistic performance, particularly soul music; and (d) all of the above as understood, created and practiced by African Americans as an essential element of Black cultural expression.[87]

It is confusing to read these definitions and then consider that it describes Vanessa's discovery of the character, Balkonaé, as contrasting with the actress/character, Vanessa. Is Vanessa not spiritual or unique? Dose she not have morality, empathy, or deeply felt emotions? Is she not an

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[84] Tucker, "Was the Revolution Televised?" 91.
[85] Ijames, *White,* 32, 35.
[86] Ijames, *White,* 39.
[87] Truscott, Cristal Chanelle, "Soul Work." In *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches* ed. Sharell D. Luckett and Tia M. Shaffer, (London, Routledge, 2017), 38.

African American expressing the elements of Black culture? The implication is that she is not. Perhaps this can be explained by reading her performance up to this moment as influenced by what W.E.B. Dubois identified as "double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity."[88] Vanessa, in her quest to be famous – accepted by the white mainstream – has created a version of herself that obscures her "soul," because it might be perceived as a threat. The soulful part of her, Balkonaé, does not reveal herself until Vanessa becomes frustrated with Gus' swift rejection of the various characterizations she proposes for the character they are creating.[89]

Vanessa/Balkonaé's "soul" being accessed by anger links back to her explanation of her favorite *Cosby Show* episode, "Off to See the Wretched." She describes the episode's climactic scene when Claire, ordinarily a clear-eyed, even-tempered attorney, "Goes. Off!"[90] on her daughter (also called Vanessa) for lying about the location of a rock concert she was going to. The audience gets to see Claire's professional demeanor, constructed for the white audiences of the fictional courtroom and the at-home primetime viewer, replaced with something else. Gareth Palmer, in his "ideologically based analysis" of the series identifies this as a recurring trope of the series: "her achievement is regularly undercut when she gets 'mad' and reverts to a speech rhythm and dialect entirely out of keeping with her cool professional demeanor. Such moments function dramatically to reveal the real Claire, the passionate woman lying beneath the thin veneer of a professional manner." Palmer goes on to suggest that "this 'real' persona is the stereotype more at home in the blaxploitation movie."[91] But I argue that this analysis discounts

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[88] Dubois, W.E.B., *The Souls of Black Folk* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2015), 5.
[89] Ijames, *White,* 39.
[90] Ijames, *White,* 37.
[91] Palmer, Gareth, "*The Cosby Show:* An Ideologically Based Analysis." *Critical Survey* vol 6, No. 2 (1994), 193.

the possibility that Claire's "mad" reactions are an authentic part of actor Phylicia Rashad's lived experience – that they are expressions of her soul which are not *for* the show's assumed white audience, which is the reason that they speak so strongly to Ijames' character, Vanessa.

Perhaps it appears to Palmer that Claire's "mad" reactions are stereotypical because *The Cosby Show* participated in a tradition, which Truscott identifies, of expecting Black performers to "erase cultural specificity and render actors of color 'neutral'" most of the time, but "bring soul in certain opportune moments that [suit] their productions."[92] *White* shares Truscott's critique. Gus imagines that Vanessa's performance as Balkonaé is only for the opportune moments that suit his designs – when Jane visits them in his studio and when they present his works in the exhibition. At first, Vanessa/Balkonaé complies. In Jane's visit to the studio, the character names indicating who is speaking say "BALKONAÉ" until, having expressed an interest in Balkonaé's work, "Jane exits. Gus and Vanessa celebrate."[93] At which point the speech indications say "VANESSA." When Jane doubles back unexpectedly to invite Balkonaé to show her work in the New America Exhibit, however, "VANESSA" does not return upon Jane's departure.

Soul is not controlled by an on/off switch. It emerged from Vanessa's real frustration with Gus, but it was always a part of Vanessa. Her double-consciousness was keeping it in check, but as Vanessa observes, "this woman has always been there. And we have unleashed her…She made me soooooo supremely aware of my butt and my belly. I always try to bind these parts of my body into submission but…when I'm with her…I'm in love with my fat ass and my round belly."[94] It suggests that there are moments before Balkonaé is unveiled in which it may

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[92] Truscott, "Soul Work," 40.
[93] Ijames, *White,* 46.
[94] Ijames, *White,* 47.

be productive (or even inevitable) for traces of her soul to be visible. It is not that Vanessa is inauthentic in opposition to Balkonaé's authenticity, but that, as Dubois asserts, both are present together all the time.

The actor in the role of Vanessa/Balkonaé will almost certainly understand this from personal experience, but ways of being do not necessarily translate easily from performance in daily life to performance onstage. Truscott insists that the transfer is not simply "natural," but rather that it is a craft: "The 'Work' in Soul Work recognizes that soul, as a practice and aesthetic, must be cultivated and developed." And since that is the case, Soul work is a technique which "is applicable across the hybrid and fluid concepts of culture, ethnicity, geography, religion, identity, genre, modality, etc. Every human with a soul is primed to engage in SoulWork."[95] The value of SoulWork for the actor in this role seems apparent, and the quotation in the preceding quotation makes it clear that Truscott sees SoulWork as having value for all kinds of performers. Her essay lays out a clear set of four Afrocentric principles for practicing SoulWork, but resists prescribing a definitive methodology for putting those values into practice: "What should the artist/ensemble do first?...Whatever they need to do first. Whatever the moment and the people present at the moment are calling for first."[96] She makes it clear, however, that as part of the first principle of SoulWork, which she names "The Call," each artist is expected to "come with contributions and to be open and flexible for discoveries."[97] In the remainder of this section, I show what Viewpoints exercises and/or the Viewpoints-trained actor have to bring to a rehearsal process aiming to achieve SoulWork in *White.*

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[95] Truscott, "Soul Work," (43).
[96] Truscott, "Soul Work," (42).
[97] Truscott, "Soul Work," (44).

After "The Call," the second principle of SoulWork is "living in call and response," which "requires an openness and instinct that is not hindered by the logistics of intellect, but rather renders one's intellect malleable" through "deep listening and engagement."[98] Living in the call and response is a performance practice that rejects the value of finding the definitive performance and aiming to repeat it. This resistance to totality plays well with the postmodernist sensibility. It requires actors to be constantly attuned to what is offered by their fellow performer and ready to adapt to something unexpected, not to save the performance from an error, but to create a new performance every time. *White* contains several moments where the rhythm of the dialogue recalls not only Truscott's definition of call and response, but the more familiar conception of the term used by rituals, especially religious services and educational settings. Take, for example, the following exchange in which Vanessa as Balkonaé tries to teach Jane to pronounce her name:

> BALKONAÉ: Oh…that's so sweet. Hey, tell…who composed *The Nutcracker.*
>
> JANE: Tchaikovsky
>
> BALKONAÉ: Oh that's right. And uuuuuuh who wrote *Crime and Punishment.*
>
> JANE: Dostoyevsky.
>
> BALKONAÉ: Uh huh. One more say "A Little Night Music" in German.
>
> Jane: (*Like butter.) Eine kleine Nachtmusik.*
>
> BALKONAÉ: Perfect! Say Balkonaé.
>
> JANE: Balcony.

Then a second attempt:

> BALKONAÉ: You'll get it. BAL.

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[98] Truscott, "Soul Work," (45).

JANE: BAL

BALKONAÉ: CON.

JANE: CON.

BALKONAÉ: NAY.

JANE: NAY.

BALKONAÉ: BALKONAÉ.

JANE: BAL…

BALKONAÉ: BAL. CON. NAY.

JANE: BAL. CON. NAY.

BALKONAÉ: Come on Gus! You too! BAL. CON. NAY.

JANE and GUS: BAL. CON. NAY.

BALKONAÉ: Balconaé!

JANE: Balcony!

BALKONAÉ: Close enough.[99]

This lengthy passage demonstrates that not only do the actors playing Balconaé and Jane need to be highly attuned to each other's rhythms and matching intensities, but the actor playing Gus, after a long stretch in which he has no lines or scripted actions, must be ready to seamlessly enter the call and response. As Truscut indicates: "In SoulWork space, either you are calling or responding. But, there is always something to do."[100] Gus must be active in the call and response, even when the script has trained its focus elsewhere. The sequence also gives an example of a sustained period in which the playwright asks the actors not to show the characters thinking about how to respond to one another but reacting based on well-rehearsed cultural

[99] Ijames, *White,* (48-9).
[100] Truscott, "Soul Work," (45).

scripts—not, as Meisner might suggest, natural instincts. It needs to be this way or the comedy of the sequence does not work. Jane has to have the pronunciations of those European names and phrases without pause for thought. As such, the actors do not need to try to replicate the same delivery of call-and-response in each performance. The learned behaviors of cultural scripts will reproduce and adapt themselves according to the specific moment of repetition.

Mary Overlie's "News of a Difference" laboratory expresses a similar goal for performers to attune themselves to slight alterations of repeated performances in language that closely resembles Truscott's: "individuals must be given the chance to rely upon their own interior senses with little or no outside command or externally generated enthusiasm."[101] Overlie advocates the use of Transcendental Meditation to develop their perception to the point where they have this chance. Bogart and Landau's iteration of this state of awareness is the "soft focus" in which rather than directing their attention *at* a specific object or person, the individual allows sensory information to *come to* them: "By taking the pressure off the eyes to be the dominant and primary information gatherer, the whole body starts to listen and gather information in new and more sensitized ways."[102] They develop this skill through a variety of exercises in which the participants perform a sequence of moves, yoga positions are a prime example, and not only direct their attention to the sensations the moves bring to the body, but also ask the members of the ensemble to "listen with the whole body" and synchronize their executions of the movements and the rhythm of their breathing with one another, even when not all members of the group are visible at once.[103] Any variation among the members of the group

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[101] Overlie, *Standing in Space,* (72).
[102] Bogart and Landau, *The Viewpoints Book*, (31).
[103] Bogart and Landau, *The Viewpoints Book,* (32).

is not cause to halt and start over, but rather to adjust and continue. As with Truscott and Overlie, Bogart and Landau stress the importance of perceiving and reacting to differences.

Bogart and Landau also offer an exercise that seems geared toward the type of call and response required by the sequence from *White* quoted above. The exercise appears in their chapter "Starting to Speak," and involves two people, a leader and a follower. The leader creates a series of sounds, not words, making clear, strong choices with pitch, dynamic, tempo, and duration (the Vocal Viewpoints) which the follower must attempt to reproduce exactly. Once the pair do this successfully, they continue the exercise, but the follower must select one of the vocal viewpoints to alter, while still reproducing the others exactly. The pair "continue playing with this until the person following is able to respond spontaneously and playfully."[104]

The goal of responding spontaneously and playfully mirrors Truscott's mission for performers. She uses examples from improvisational Jazz music call and response, and Bogart and Landau's emphasis on sounds which are not words calls back to improvisational Jazz scat-singing. In addition, singing is a key part of the third principle of SoulWork, "Emotional Avaliability and the Unending Climax." Truscott points to the galvanizing influence that learning a song and singing together can have on an ensemble of singers and non-singers alike creating a space in which artists feel a sense of intimacy, solidarity, and community that allows them to take risks and be vulnerable with one another.[105] As a choral musician, I have experienced the culturally generative power of singing together often, but it was never part of my formal training as an actor before working with Anne Bogart on vocal viewpoints.

This took place in the middle of a three-day workshop with a group of strangers who had travelled from all over the United States (and a few from outside the country), so there was little

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[104] Bogart and Landau, *The Viewpoints Book,*
[105] Truscott, "Soul Work," (46-7).

time that could be devoted to the creation of ensemble. The group had already been practicing

Viewpoints exercises together for a full day, so the activity was not conceived as an "ice-

breaker," but rather as an opportunity to level-up the group's bond. For the exercise, a group of

about six participants surrounded one person at the center of a tight clump. Each focused their

attention an energy into one part of the central person's body and vocalized together the vowel

sequence "Ee, Ay, Ah, Oh, Ooo." The members of the clump made every effort to synchronize

their start, stop, and shift from one vowel to the next, but the pitch, volume, and intensity of each

individual's vocal tone sent a different type of supportive energy into the person at the center.

Listening to each other, the members of the clump, regardless of their musical ability or

experience found themselves drawn to pitches that harmonized together forming traditional

musical sounds, octaves, open fifths, and major or minor tonalities. Because these musical

sounds are dictated by cultural experience, I suspect that a group of participants from nonwestern

cultures doing this exercise would create different musical sounds. As Truscott argues, this

exercise did not rely on sharing personal stories or memories. It also did not involve the clichéd,

forced, and potentially dangerous sorts of physical exercises that actor training often uses to

develop trust such as trust falls or leading a blindfolded partner. Instead, it used reciprocal vocal

energy and communal listening to invite emotional availability.

The next part of this principle, the unending climax, stipulates that once performers are

emotionally available to one another, they can break down the classical linear structure of drama

that demands that a rising action precede a climax which is followed by a resolution; they need

not be concerned about starting at an emotional level that is "too high." Instead, "every emotion

is appropriate for every situation and therefore diversity of emotional response is key."[106] In

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[106] Truscott, "Soul Work," (47).

White, the idea of the unending climax is particularly useful for the actor playing Vanessa/Balkonaé. While the script articulates precisely the point at which Vanessa finds the "right" persona for the character Balkonaé, it is clear that this persona emerges, not when she is attempting to put yet another mask over the mask she wears as Vanessa. Rather, it comes in a moment where she drops the Vanessa mask in frustration with Gus: "Look, I don't know what to tell you man!"[107] It is a moment when her Duboisian double-consciousness can be revealed just as Phylicia Rashad's Claire Huxtable does in the "mad" moments that Vanessa so clearly relates to. Since that persona is already a part of Vanessa, if she and the other actors are emotionally available to one another, it means that the Vanessa mask can slip in moments that precede the official reveal of Balkonaé, and that those moments need not be scripted or even rehearsed. They may come at any time in any performance so long as they are brought on by what is happening with the performers in relation to each other. Emotional availability and unending climax allow the ensemble to, in Bogart and Landau's terms, "surrender, fall back into empty creative space and trust that there is something there other than our own ego imagination to catch us," allowing them to let something "*occur* onstage, rather than *making it occur.*"[108] Thus, at the end of the play, when Balkonaé and Vanessa openly struggle for control of their shared body, it is less *the* climactic moment of the play, and more a new way of expressing a struggle that has been going on inside for the entire life of the character, which is expressed in the final speech act of the play:

> BALKONAÉ. *(AND VANESSA???)* Alright. Alright. As…As I…was saying. This work comes from my experience: trying to fit in. The times when I felt alone. In a sea of white. Miles and miles of white that I was expected to be a part of. To live inside of. That…is the impetus for all of my art.

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[107] Ijames, *White,* (39).
[108] Bogart and Landau, *The Viewpoints Book,* (19). Italics original.

When you press your fingers and faces against the cold glass to see me. When you snap

pictures of me and place them online. When you take my fat ass and thick lips and staple

them to your bodies. When you look at me and watch me…do you see me? Smiling at

first. Gentle even. Loving perhaps. Be careful. I could want to open up to you and allow

the raging sea inside me to pour out all over this planet. Then what the hell we gone

do?[109]

Ijames makes it clear that he does not know to what degree each of these personae are present in

this speech, but in the leadup to this speech they converse with and agree to make space for each

other. An actor who is emotionally available to the production will not need to be directed on the

specifics of how much Vanessa to include in this final speech or when she should emerge; the

actor, the production, and the audience can simply "*Get into how dope she is.*"[110] As the stage

directions dictate.

The fourth and final principle of SoulWork is called "The Dream." Truscott explains the

dream by referencing the Hip Hop/R&B tradition of the remix in which the artist places their

creative stamp on an already existing song to make it new: "It is not a 'cover' or 'remake.' The

remix reveals new discoveries and sharper perspectives that deepen the understanding, visceral

engagement and/or emotional impact on the listener."[111] The compatibility between The Dream

and Bogart's affinity for pastiche should by now be self-evident. Thus, my intention in this

section has not been to demonstrate that Viewpoints training, developed by white artists in white

spaces, is the key to doing SoulWork or a production of *White.* To suggest that would be

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[109] Ijames, *White,* (68-9).
[110] Ijames, *White,* (69). Italics original.
[111] Truscott, "Soul Work" (48).

contrary to the Afrocentric values of SoulWork and the Black Acting Methods with which it identifies. Rather, I am pointing to the ways in which Viewpoints training can prepare an actor to work within a framework like the one Truscott envisions in proposing The Dream to combine African diasporic aesthetics with contemporary performance practices and "explore the most compelling, honest, unflinching ways of approaching questions of humanity, and the social concerns and insights of our times inclusive of race, class, generation, gender and spiritual identity—in the service of unity through diversity, cross-community healing and understanding."[112] The postmodernist values that Ijames, Truscott, Overlie, Bogart and Landau all indicate in the writings cited in this section can come together to generate an audience experience that leads to productive questions rather than illusory answers.

Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis:* A (Pre?) (Post?) Dramatic Reading

Of the three performance texts considered in this chapter, Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis* (completed 1999 and produced posthumously in 2000) has the most radical conception of what a character might be. Where Ruhl's text for *Eurydice* presents a chorus of multiple bodies sharing a unified consciousness and Ijames investigates the ways in which white supremacy forces multiple consciousnesses to exist within single bodies, in *4.48 Psychosis,* Kane abdicates the playwright's traditional responsibility for deciding how many characters are in the play, let alone who they are and how they are represented by bodies; per the text: "Body and soul can never be married."[113] To that end, Kane does not provide any indication of the *dramatis personae* required by her text. She offers clues as to when one actor's "line" may end and another's begin, but these are by no means definitive, as I will argue in what follows. Neither does she describe any sort of *mise en scene* which she imagines her text taking place within. These refusals not only

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[112] Truscott, "Soul Work" (48-9).
[113] Kane, Sarah, "4:48 Psychosis." *Sarah Kane: Complete Plays*. (London, Bloomsbury, 2001), 212.

sympathize with Mary Overlie's quest for a horizontal - rather than hierarchical - arrangement of the elements of a performance, they demand it. Frequently, proponents of postmodernist performance and/or Viewpoints training assume that the use of a text in performance implies the superiority of the text and its author. Kane's texts insists on itself as an element of the performance equal to all others.

I am certainly not the first to identify the features mentioned above, except for the connection to Mary Overlie's horizontal laboratory, as evidence of postmodernist, poststructuralist, or postdramatic inclinations within Sarah Kane's work generally and *4.48 Psychosis* in particular. Catherine Rees, in her analysis of the scholarly conversation that has surrounded the play, offers an extensive review of literature which assesses *4.48 Psychosis* through these lenses.[114] Rees describes how critics have linked this work to Roland Barthes' "Death of the Author." They have pointed out its use of irony and textual collage suggesting that the play is "fragmented because that structure best resonates with postmodern times"[115] Kane's own assertion that the play "doesn't even have characters, all there is are language and images," calls to Jean Baudrillard's arguments about simulation's replacement of reality in the postmodern world.[116] Since the play's postmodernist bona fides have been well-established, in this section I refrain from a lengthy investigation of its suitability for inclusion in this study. Instead, I take up Rees' pushback against the case she makes that these critics are mistaken when they ally Kane's postmodernism with postdramatic theatre on the grounds that "Kane is still writing within the conventions of mimesis, however much she fragments and fractures the structure of her plays,

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[114] Rees, Catherine, "Sarah Kane." in *Modern British Playwriting: The 1990s,* ed. Aleks Sierz. (London, Methuen, 2012), 129-134.
[115] Rees, "Sarah Kane," 130.
[116] Saunders, Graham. *Love Me or Kill Me: Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes.* (New York, Manchester University Press, 2002), 111.

and her work is highly textual, almost poetic."[117] I interrogate Rees' reading of Lehman's definition of the postdramatic and seek to demonstrate that the resistance of Kane's text to a definitive reading offers practitioners the opportunity to emphasize the dramatic, lyric, and epic possibilities within the text as they choose. Along the way, I articulate the various challenges posed to the actor by each of these interpretations and suggest ways in which Viewpoints training can aid the actor in meeting those challenges.

Readers of Rees are left to assume that she bases her disqualification of Kane's work from the postdramatic because it does not constitute a complete "irruption of the real."[118] This is the term Hans-Thies Lehman uses to suggest that artistic performance need not depend upon the construction of a fictive cosmos, and as a result, its audience may not sit idly by, secure in the knowledge that they are have no responsibility for what they witness in the theatre. Rees takes this to mean that since Kane's work does not require actors to "either physically harm themselves or to exhibit their bodies without the dramatic framework of plot, character and setting," or for the audience to "believe that actors performing in *4.48 Psychosis* are really suffering from depression, or psychosis, and nor is such a belief necessary to appreciate the performance," that the work remains within the realm of dramatic theatre. This is a strange conclusion to draw.

Lehman does not suggest that postdramatic theatre requires performers to place themselves in harm's way. The example that Lehman uses to illustrate an "irruption of the real" is Richard Schechner's *US* which includes the apparent burning of a live butterfly. Even in this account, the burning is merely apparent, not actual. The truth of the burning is, in fact, immaterial. Lehman's point is that it forces the audience to examine their choice of whether or

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[117] Rees, "Sarah Kane," 131.
[118] Lehman, Hans-Thies. *Postdramatic Theatre,* translated by Karen Jurs-Munby. (London, Routledge, 2006), 103.

not to intervene. Likewise, Kane's work puts the audience in the position of having to consider whether or not they wish to continue their participation. Regarding her first play, *Blasted,* Kane said: "When people got up and walked out it was actually part of the whole experience of it. And I like that, it's a completely reciprocal relationship between the play and the audience."[119] It is this reciprocity between the performance and spectator that can be identified as the "irruption of the real" in this case. The audience member getting up to leave asserts the spectatorial subject into the performance, which for a moment, joins the cast as a character. Simultaneously, other spectators witness something taking place outside the diegesis of the performance. *4.48 Psychosis* may not induce the same frequency of walkouts as, *Blasted.* Nevertheless, it will soon become evident that the text offers plenty of opportunity for a production to force the audience into awareness of its own presence in the room with the performers.

Rees also points to the "centrality of text" within Kane's plays as a factor overlooked by "critics who argue Kane is postdramatic."[120] This, too, is puzzling because while the text of *4.48 Psychosis* is specific and peculiar in its structure, there are many ways – articulated above - in which Kane relieves the text of authority for what takes place onstage. Rees argues that "the play looks extremely textual, and frequently sections appear to be structured on the page visually rather than linguistically," but the text's apparent awareness of itself as such, does not seem to be an argument against its postdramatic qualities. Rather, the "various sections [being] laid out like poetic verse, suggesting a lyrical quality,"[121] undermines the argument that *4.48 Psychosis* is a dramatic text. Postdramatic theatre must not be construed as performance devoid of text. In her introduction to the English-language version of *Postdramatic Theatre,* Karen Jurs-Munby points

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[119] Saunders. *Love Me or Kill Me,* 13.
[120] Rees, "Sarah Kane," 131.
[121] Rees, "Sarah Kane," 132.

to several authors of strong texts who work in the postdramatic vein including Heiner Müller,

Suzan Lori-Parks, and Kane herself. Here again it is not the presence or absence of text that

counts but, "the sense that they require the spectators to become active co-writers of the

(performance) text."[122] That the text has a "lyrical quality" acknowledges that Kane has moved

away from the dramatic theatre's conventions of a dialectic between opposing agonists. Lehman

observes that the postdramatic theatre shakes off the "previously unquestioned constituents of

drama: the textual form of dialogue charged with suspense and pregnant with decisions; the

subject whose reality can essentially be expressed in interpersonal speech; the action that unfolds

primarily in absolute present."[123] These attributes line up so exactly with what Kane does in *4.48*

Psychosis, that in his preface, added for the English edition, Lehman cites the play specifically,

saying it "would almost have to be invented as one of the great texts in analogy to postdramatic

theatre if it did not already exist."[124] Even in its most conventionally dramatic iterations, *4.48*

Psychosis forces actors and audiences alike to consider its characters as something other than

tools of an authorial dialectic that mimics interpersonal speech in an absolute present.

   With that in mind, consider the play as the original Royal Court production did, in what I

will call its most dramatic expression. The production elected to present the play with a cast of

three actors, which might easily correspond to a set of three subject positions which several

critics have identified within the text: Victim, Perpetrator, and Bystander.[125] These subject

positions are especially useful for the sections of the text that read the most like conventional

dramatic theatre, placing dashes in the spot on the page ordinarily reserved for character names:

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[122] Jurs-Munby, Karen. Introduction to *Postdramatic Theatre,* by Hans-Theis Lehman. (London, Routledge, 2006), 6.

[123] Lehman, *Postdramatic Theatre.* 49.

[124] Lehman, *Postdramatic Theatre.* ix.

[125] Claycomb, Ryan M. *Lives in Play: Autobiography and Biography on the Feminist Stage*. (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2014), 98.

–   Have you made any plans?

–   Take an overdose, slash my wrists then hang myself.

–   All those things together?

–   It couldn't possibly be misconstrued as a cry for help.[126]

It becomes apparent that this bit of text can easily be made to represent a dialogue between the

Victim persona (who probably emerges as the protagonist) and either of the other two. Other

sections of the play consist of short, irregular stanzas of text which could be the disjointed

thoughts of the Victim placed in conversation with occasional interjections from the other two,

achieving the same basic effect:

Every compliment takes a piece of my soul

An expressionist nag
Stalling between two fools
They know nothing –
                  I have always walked free

Last in a long line of literary kleptomaniacs
                  (A time honoured tradition)

Theft is the holy act
On a twisted path to expression[127]

The general lack of punctuation provides the production with little guidance as to "who" is

speaking, so the possibilities are practically endless. A line break, stanza break, indentation,

parenthesis, or none of the above could provide the impetus for a shift in speaking voice, but any

shift could be justified once "characters" are established for the three subject positions in the

script.

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[126] Kane, Sarah. "4:48 Psychosis" 210
[127] Kane, Sarah. "4:48 Psychosis" 213

Still other sections read more like lengthy, stream-of-consciousness monologues, which, once again, could be assigned to any of the personae. The key is that each of the three actors has a consistent "character" with a more-or-less familiar dramatic function, even if they do not have names assigned to them. Daniel Evans, an actor from the Royal Court production, confirms some of the more conventional elements of the characterization process saying that they researched the characters by meeting with psychiatrists, nurses, and depression patients to gather insight into each of those perspectives on what takes place in a mental hospital.[128] Yet Evans undermines the notion that using the three consistent subject positions, when it comes time to perform, is as simple as I made it seem above: "Obviously in the doctor patient scenes, we tried seeing the doctor patient in a naturalistic way. It was terrible, needless to say."[129] Rather, the director, James McDonald came to realize that "basically there is only one voice in the piece – or one central voice,"[130] and assigned the actors to alternate in the role of doctor and patient, destabilizing the notion of subjectivity in the play, even when the text makes it seem more stable. Similarly, Evans notes, in the "multi-voice bits" such as in the second block quote above, "we just looked at them and read them around, and James said, 'okay that's how we're going to do it.'" Apparently, even that was too close to a realistic structure for this text, because "there was one section that we never allocated, so it was a free for all every night."[131] Despite the production's best attempt to adhere to the dramatic subject positions Kane seems to imply in her text, it ended up that "The three of us were playing the same person, on the same journey every night. That's bizarre, because you're normally working with people who have their own

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[128] Evans, Daniel, interview by Graham Saunders, *Love Me or Kill Me: Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes.* 172.
[129] Evans interview, *Love Me or Kill Me.* 174.
[130] McDonald, James, interview by Graham Saunders, *Love Me or Kill Me: Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes.* 123.
[131] Evans interview, *Love Me or Kill Me.* 174.

particular journey and you have your separate journey. And although we start and end up at the same place, you don't have any eye contact with each other and you don't touch anyone." Evidently, eye contact "wasn't allowed."[132] Judging by his choice of the adjective 'bizarre,' Evans' training had not prepared him for the collective journey through fractured psyche he describes. Some of the problems he indicates, however, may be addressed by viewpoints trainings.

An example of how Bogart's training prepares actors for the type of work I have just described is perhaps not unique to Viewpoints, but certainly one I have seen her use as a warm-up activity. Participants disperse themselves throughout the room randomly. Everyone should be able to see some of the other participants, but it is unlikely that anyone would be able to see all the other participants. The object is for the group to collectively count out loud from one to twenty. If at any point, two people speak the same number simultaneously, the group must start over. The random dispersal of participants throughout the room ensures that no physical signaling is possible. The group must find a way to feel together and sense when the moment is right for each individual to contribute a number. Logic does not explain it, but every group I have seen do this exercise gets better with practice. This could even be linked directly to Kane's text, which features two moments of counting backwards from one hundred. Of course, the script does not specify how this is done, but this exercise may be one way into it.

In a move which I have not seen elsewhere, Bogart then transfers this skill onto work with text. A group of seven to nine people prepare monologues. They stand in a line across the back wall of the space, evenly spaced, all facing downstage in a "sats" position, the state of

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[132] Evans interview, *Love Me or Kill Me.* 175.

readiness referred to earlier in this chapter as "*l'etat*."[133] Without audibly or visibly

communicating, one of the participants begins to speak their monologue. At the moment of their

first inhalation, another begins their own. "Only one person at a time should ever be speaking in

this exercise. At each inhalation, any other person may take over speaking"[134] until each of the

actors has completed their monologue. When I saw Bogart lead this exercise, at this point she

asked the group to transition into "open viewpoints" and repeat the process with bodies in

motion.

In the process described by Evans above, the actors might all use the same bit of text

rather than each using something different. Perhaps instead of starting at the beginning of the text

at each inhalation, the next actor might pick up where the previous one had left off. This would

this be a good way of determining in early rehearsals where it makes sense to shift voices in what

Evans called the "multi-voice bits." Moreover, it would also make the actors more keenly

attuned to one another and allow them to achieve the more complicated task of speaking through

a segment of text in which lines are not assigned, which the Royal Court production did for "the

apocalyptic section, where the voices quote from the book of Revelations" which "was kept free

each night for any one of the actors to speak those lines."[135] Treating the text in this way shifts

the dialogical elements of the text away from the style of modern drama, and closer to what

Lehman describes as the style of ancient tragedy in which the dialogue is not a discussion that

progresses from its beginning to its end. Rather, the characters talk around, past, and through one

another simultaneously occupying the same space, and their own individual world.[136]

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[133] In this previous reference, Ruhl attributes Mnouchkine's word "*l'etat*" to both Mnouchkine and Bogart.
However, in most cases of which I am aware, Bogart anglicizes "*l'etat*" to "sats."
[134] Bogart and Landau. *The Viewpoints Book.* 115-6.
[135] Saunders, *Love Me or Kill Me.* 124.
[136] Lehman, *Postdramatic Theatre.* 75.

4.48 Psychosis could be pushed further away from modernist conceptions of dialectical drama if a production chose to do so. If the dramatic conception of the text involves a small cast who occupy, albeit in turns, clearly-defined subject positions dialoguing at (if not with) one another, what might an epic conception of the text involve? Of course, by engaging with the term "epic" I invite controversy. Undoubtedly readers will assume I am looking at the text through a Brechtian lens and critique whether I have understood Brecht correctly. That is not my purpose here. Like Brecht, I am thinking of the epic in its relation to Homer's epic poetry and the ways in which it deploys character, namely, that there is a narrator whose voice mediates between the audience and a fictive set of characters. Otherwise, I am not interested in whether or not the techniques I lay out here are in line with those Brecht proposed.

As a point of reference for the epic mode of interpreting *4.48 Psychosis,* I gesture toward the 2009 Washington, DC Fringe Festival production by Factory 449 at the Warehouse Theatre. The narrative voice in this production was shared among a chorus of nine actors, a much larger cast than the Royal Court production. *Washington City Paper* reviewer Brian Abelman identified this chorus as "representatives of different aspects of 'the collective consciousness of the suicidal mind.'"[137] Production photos on the company's Facebook page depict the chorus permanently stationed on wooden chairs which were evenly dispersed throughout the playing space. This produced the ominous effect that they were hovering above the wheelchair-bound protagonist (played by Sara Barker) ominously anticipating the moment of her suicide by hanging. It also forced them to project their focus, as narrators do, out to the audience; in doing so, they recall the original production of Sarah Kane's penultimate play, *Crave* in 1998 by London's Plaines Plough theatre. In that production, the four actors were seated in chairs addressing the audience.

[137] Abelman, Brian. "Hip Shot: '4.48 Psychosis.'" *Washington City Paper*. 10 July, 2009. Online. https://washingtoncitypaper.com/article/338644/hip-shot-4-48-psychosis/.

Abelman observes that this technique "turns out to be the best method to represent our thought process whirling, colliding, backpedaling, teasing, agreeing, and disagreeing." The protagonist experiences a sequence of events: conversations with doctors, the taking of prescription drugs, the effects of those drugs, et cetera.

Yet rather than a dramatic enactment of those experiences in a constantly unfolding present, the chorus presents the protagonist's psyche, articulating her thoughts about those experiences for the audience, while simultaneously coaxing the protagonist toward her ultimate demise. Time, in this case, functions more like the oft-evoked moment before death when life flashes before one's eyes. Here, it begins to come clear that Overlie's observations about Time as a Viewpoint can help the actor understand that their experience of time in the performance will be different from their character's experience of Time as well as from the audience's experience of Time. While a performance with Aristotelean value for the unity of time will strive to unite these three perspectives on the "time of performance," a postmodern production will seek to heighten awareness of these differences. To that end, Overlie describes an exercise which she calls "The Viewpoints Haiku." Herein, four performers stand on the perimeter of a rectangle, demarked by four shoes at its corners. At an agreed upon moment they each perform a motion "that reflects a focus on the material of Time." On a second count, they perform a second application of Time, and on a third count they resolve the haiku with a final motion.[138] For the performers, they will experience this time as excruciating periods of anticipation for the exact moment of action, but the audience will perceive a stoppage of time in between the moments of action. Meanwhile, the characters may not be constructed to perceive any passage of time at all between the moments of action; for them, the actions have occurred in immediate succession and

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[138] Overlie, Mary. *Standing in Space.* 26-7

the in-between moments have been skipped over. So it may be for people experiencing the moment of death: a person watching a body die, simply sees life one moment, and its absence the next while the consciousness of the dying experiences an extended stream of images in between. Meanwhile, the images themselves are not directly aware of or related to one another. The point of view from which one witnesses the moment dictates the experience of time one receives.

Continuing to think about point of view, the choice to place the members of the chorus above the floor on chairs – platforms which do not even allow them to take a full step in any direction – is a deliberate engagement with Overlie's Viewpoint, Space. It does not create a space that is representative of homes, offices, or even hospital rooms which we might encounter in everyday life. Rather, it presents the mind of the protagonist spatially to the audience like thought bubbles in a comic strip. As such, the performers must be aware of their relationship to Space in this production. The conventional organization of the theatre space into a hierarchy of weak and strong positions used for blocking purposes fades away. In its place, the horizontal arrangement that a singing chorus or an orchestra frequently employs to balance sound equally among all parts emerges. If the chairs are arranged so that the distribution of space between them is uneven, the lack of ability to adjust from those positions will highlight the asymmetry in the eyes of the audience and it will take on meaning. The ways in which the performers interact with the space they are given will also take on meaning, and if the performers are aware of that, they may use it to their advantage: are they comfortable in that space? Are they trapped in that space? Can they hide in that space? Are they happy with the neighbors they are stationed beside? Overlie's chapter on Space frequently refers to the seeming infinity of her birthplace in Montana, but her work has also engaged Space as a confining element. Photos of her piece, *Glass*

Imagination I (1976) - part of a series with *Window Pieces,*[139] which I analyzed in Chapter 1 - depict her and two other dancers staged in a storefront window.[140] The lack of Space is as much an exploration of this Viewpoint as the surfeit, and the actor trained in Viewpoints will have an awareness of and facility with both.

Having considered the dramatic and epic possibilities in the text of *4.48 Psychosis,* I conclude with an exploration of the poetic mode so often evoked in criticism surrounding the text, but much less frequently engaged with in production: the lyric, which dispenses with the narrational quality of the epic and the dialectical quality of the dramatic presenting a singular point of view monologuing for (though not necessarily to) the audience.[141] Ryan Claycomb has argued that the play must be read as a poetic expression of a single authorial point of view, the autobiographical point of view of an "implied author" whom Kane has styled after herself.[142] Cristina Delgado-Garcia, on the other hand, argues that the text's refusal to offer any clear performative utterance of who or what characters are in the play make it impossible to determine a single discreet subject that can be called a character, let alone more than one.[143] Indeed, despite the fact that so many critics and practitioners whom I have cited throughout this section have voiced the opinion that all of the voices in the text come from one character, I have not been able to find any significant productions that have staged it as a solo performance. But if a production wanted to communicate most clearly that the "division of 'Victim. Perpetrator. Bystander' must

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[139] Or possibly the same piece. There are conflicting accounts.
[140] Overlie, Mary. *Standing in Space.* 132.
[141] See Lehman. *Postdramatic Theatre.* 128.
[142] Claycomb. *Lives in Play.* 10
[143] Delgado-Garcia. "Subversion, Refusal, and Contingency: The Transgression of Liberal-Humanist Subjectivity and Charcterization in Sarah Kane's *Cleansed, Crave,* and *4.48 Psychosis." Modern Drama.* Vol. 55, no. 2 (Summer 2012). 237-242.

be taken to signify the deeply divided self who inhabits all three roles,"[144] having one performer speak the text in its entirety could be highly effective.

Without other actors to play against, the solo performer must seek other sources for stimuli to move through the piece. Modes of actor training which insist that stimuli be taken from the "world of the play" foreclose many possibilities for these other sources. It may even seem as though the reliance of Bogart and Landau's Viewpoints training on ensemble play precludes it from benefitting the solo performer. But the Viewpoints can also be used to reveal that the solo performer is not alone onstage after all.

The viewpoints-trained actor has an awareness of Space as more than simply a neutral void which they pass through between the door and the sofa. Space has physical properties which the actor acts upon and which act upon the actor. Bogart and Landau describe the portion of their training that deals with these physical properties of space as "Architecture," declaring: "In working on Architecture as a Viewpoint, we learn to dance with space, to be in dialogue with a room, to let movement (especially Shape and Gesture) evolve out of our surroundings."[145] In the solo performance, the ability to "dance with the space" becomes much more necessary to the performer and apparent to the audience. In a space filled with solid mass, "walls, floors, ceilings, furniture, windows, doors, etc."[146] what kind of relationship can the performer develop with those objects? On the other hand, in the seemingly empty space, the performer has the opportunity to emphasize the Viewpoint "Topography," the landscape of the space that determines the pattern the performer cuts moving through it. Bogart and Landau offer the example that perhaps some areas of the stage can be imagined have greater or less density, which

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[144] Claycomb. *Lives in Play.* 22.
[145] Bogart and Landau. *The Viewpoints Book.* 10.
[146] Bogart and Landau. *The Viewpoints Book.* 10, 52-4.

change the effort required to move through these areas.[147] For *4.48 Psychosis,* perhaps different parts of the text may bring different densities into the space, having the same effect. They then ask the performer to imagine the bottoms of their feet painted red. "As you move through the space, the picture that evolves on the floor is the pattern that emerges over time."[148] In a sparsely populated stage, the traces of these patterns become more obvious. Maybe they can even be literalized to make the audience aware of the traces the performer leaves in her wake – which brings me to a second way in which the solo performer is not alone.

Rees argues that Kane's plays "still hang on to structures of representation and mimesis," that despite their "fragmented narrative, lack of distinct characters and rejection of social realist structures," they are ultimately still dramatic representations of conversations between people which proceed by the logic of cause and effect.[149] By removing the possibility of representational conversations between one performer body and another, the solo performance encourages the performer to act with, not for, the audience. Think of the opening passage from the play, first as mimesis of conversational dialogue between performers, then as a solo performer openly addressing the audience:

> *(A very long silence.)*

– But you have friends.

> *(A long silence.)*

> You have a lot of friends.

> What do you offer your friends to make them so supportive?

> *(A long silence.)*

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[147] Bogart and Landau. *The Viewpoints Book.* 11.
[148] Bogart and Landau. *The Viewpoints Book.* 11.
[149] Rees. "Sarah Kane." 135.

What do you offer your friends to make them so supportive?

(A long silence.)

What do you offer?

(Silence.)

In the version where one actor addresses another, it is obvious that the audience has no

responsibility other than to wait and see if the "character" being addressed is able to come up

with a response to the speaker's question. When the speaker addresses the audience directly, it

forces the auditor to wonder if an actual response is being solicited from them. It forces them to

wonder at the phenomenon that is friendship and what they do to earn it. It forces them to

empathize with the speaker, who does not seem to know how to create supportive friendships.

Recognizing that the traditional architectural divide between the stage and the house is a social

construction rather than a given reality is a little bit of in-the-moment Viewpoints training for the

audience. Assessing the uptick in the scale and frequency of violence on the British stage in the

1990s, Tom Morris of *The Guardian* writes: "Watching the cruellest [sic] of these plays in a

small studio theatre is like watching a simulated rape in your own living room. In very small

theatres, it is impossible to walk out, so the audience is trapped in close proximity to the action,

giving the playwright free reign to have his or her say in the bluntest possible terms."[150] But the

audience is not trapped. The Architecture of the studio theatre space perhaps highlights their

presence by placing them in view of the other spectators. Perhaps the production even elects to

cast light on them, or in the case of the original production of *4.48 Psychosis,* hold a literal

mirror up to make them see themselves (although this may not be possible for every seat in the

house; some accounts of the production say the mirror reflected only the stage), but they still

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[150] Morris, Tom. "Foul Deeds, Fair Play: *Blasted* Highlights a Growing Trend of Violent Plays in London's Small Theatres. Why the Shock Tactics?" *The Guardian,* 25 Jan, 1995.

maintain their own agency. The solo performance, by hailing the auditor directly, emphasizes that agency and confronts them with the responsibility of playing the antagonal role.

4.48 Psychosis is the culmination of a body of work that is fiercely postmodern in its radical anti-essentialism. The text is never complete until it is realized in performance, and even then, it does not offer the comfort of an easy or definitive interpretation. The play's refusal of telos, exemplified in these dramatic, lyric, and epic possibilities, supports Bogart's admonition to induce self-doubt by asking "what is it?" and then "What is it really?"[151]

Neither Ghost nor Machine

Fuchs proposes that "if once Plot was the 'soul' of the tragic play, and later Character moved into that place of preeminence, in twentieth-century non-realist theater, Thought began to assume a newly dominant dramaturgical position, shadowed by the slighted Aristotelian category of Spectacle as ideas became manifest through a quasi-allegorical use of space."[152] Perhaps *4.48 Psychosis,* completed in the waning days of the twentieth century, represents the apogee of Thought in the dramaturgical hierarchy, but I prefer to imagine that each of these texts has given up trying to understand why Aristotle thought that tragedy relies more on Plot than Character and the rest. Instead, these texts recognize that the hierarchy, like any other, was constructed and can be deconstructed to give the spectator something they have never seen before. Maybe that is why both *Eurydice* and *4.48 Psychosis* have been adapted into operas. Maybe that is why *White* premiered at a venue called Theatre Horizon.[153] These texts refuse to tell the reader what is most essential to their realization, to their character, and thus there are aspects of them that may

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[151] A version of this also appears on page 18 of *The Viewpoints Book* in which the authors challenge the reader to "resist proclaiming 'what it is' long enough to authentically ask: "What is it?"

[152] Fuchs. *The Death of Character*. 31.

[153] Ijames, *White.* 3.

flummox the modern actor, director, or spectator. For me, I understand myself and the world around me more clearly in the confusion than in the certainty of a well-made character.

The three texts that I have analyzed in this chapter do not treat character as a self-contained body/consciousness unit that travels a straight line from birth to death with each event causing the next choice that affects the next event. They imagine consciousness in ways that are much more fluid. A human being may contain multiple consciousnesses. It may be part of a collective consciousness. It may be both and neither. I do not suggest that an actor not trained in Viewpoints will only be able to work on material that conceives character in these ways. Some of the Viewpoints practices I have used as examples in this chapter bear resemblance to exercises employed by more traditional modes of actor training. What I do suggest is that Viewpoints training embraces these postmodern ways of conceiving character and orients itself toward facility with them. These other modes of actor training, on the other hand, are designed in the Cartesian, Freudian, Pavlovian tradition which depends upon a stable one-to-one body/consciousness relationship.

CONCLUSION

What I have done in these pages represents a first step in the critical examination of viewpoints trainings. I have explored the philosophical underpinnings of Mary Overlie's Six Viewpoints established training practices for performing artists who wished to work outside the psychophysical techniques that were, and still are, most commonly thought to be the essence of the actor's work. Overlie's explicit association of her work with postmodernism required a critical evaluation of that claim. To that end, I sought to draw connections between the techniques and aesthetic practices of the Six Viewpoints and those of postmodern artists as well as postmodernist and poststructuralist theories. I proceeded to investigate the ways in which Anne Bogart's appropriation and revision of Overlie's training, now known as Viewpoints, can be viewed as both a continuation of Overlie's work and a departure from it. Part and parcel to this analysis was an examination of the differences between the cultural moments in which Overlie and Bogart developed their versions of viewpoints training. Their disparate experiences of postmodernity, although the two are only five years apart in age, is significant to the type of training each would create.

The latter part of this project was to determine the ways in which the two iterations of viewpoints training, either jointly or severally, offer value for actors as preparation for work on postmodern performance texts. I argued that since at least the 1970s, writers and performance-makers have attempted to find ways of telling stories demonstrating the postmodernist idea that narrative is a human construction and, as such, epistemically unreliable. Not only that, but character, as a narrative construct, is similarly indeterminate. The question for me was whether these postmodern performance texts are more accessible to an actor trained in a postmodernist mode.

By now it should be clear that viewpoints trainings are not simply a new set of activities by which actors may learn how to pretend to be a person other than themselves onstage. They represent a complete reimagining of what skills the actor needs to make work in ways that comport with postmodern conceptions of narrative and character. Such an actor searches for possibilities rather than answers. They envision themselves, not as a vessel for someone else's art, but as a creative artist in their own right. Perhaps nothing in Viewpoints training demands artistry of the actor more than Bogart and Landau's "composition" work. Part of my project here has been to demonstrate how the actor's artistry through Viewpoints and composition is applicable beyond its obvious connections to what is commonly called "devised work." Overlie's Six Viewpoints, though she does not give much attention to their interaction with preexisting performance texts, give the actor a framework to consider where a text fits within the Space, Shape, Time, Emotion, Movement, and Story of their performance. Bogart and Landau give much more attention to speech as an element of performance. The work that they have made in their careers makes plain that they understand their Viewpoints as a way for actors to generate material, not only for ensemble-created work and found texts, but for preexisting single-authored scripts as well. What I have argued then, is that viewpoints trainings are not merely a way for the actor to assert their creativity by excising the text and its author from their work; these trainings teach the actor to collaborate with the text to generate meaning. They acknowledge that meaning and character are not essences located within the text. Rather, they are born out of the actor's performance of the text in a specific time and place and an audience's observation of that performance.

The need for actors to develop these kinds of generative skills has been recognized by actor-training theorists in recent decades. In *The Actor, Image, and Action: Acting and Cognitive*

Neuroscience, Rhonda Blair recalls the ways in which revolutionary ideas in behavioral

psychology and psychoanalysis around the turn of the twentieth century, such as those by Ribot,

Pavlov, and Freud, impacted the development of Stanislavski's System and the various trainings

which have descended from it. Presumably, it also impacted many of the authors who wrote

plays at that time and the process by which they constructed their representations of human

beings - characters. Yet Blair reminds the reader that "while text-centered actor training in the

US has tended to remain grounded in mid-twentieth century versions of Stanislavsky-derived

approaches, the science on which these approaches were premised has continued to move

ahead."[1] Much of Blair's remaining argument is demonstrative of the ways in which the

behavioral psychology of Stanislavski's time is no longer apt to describe the contemporary

understanding of consciousness and behavior – in the language of dramatic literature, what a

character is and why they do what they do.

Richard Hornby's *The End of Acting: A Radical View* notes that "the way in which actors

approach roles or playwrights create them will be to a large extent based on the prevalent ideas

about what a human being *is*."[2] I referenced this observation in chapter four, and I return to it

here because both Hornby and Blair seem to be aware that contemporary ideas about what

defines a human being differ from what they were a century ago. The postmodern performance

texts which I have analyzed suggest that playwriting has adjusted to reflect these differences,

both in what a human being is and how it experiences the world, yet neither Blair nor Hornby

provides a satisfying account of how acting and actor training have followed suit. Both conclude

that System and Method-based approaches can make a shift to compensate for these differences.

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[1] Blair, Rhonda. *The Actor, Image, and Action: Cognitive Neuroscience.* (London, Routledge, 2008), 9-10.
[2] Hornby, Richard. *The End of Acting: A Radical View.* (New York, Applause Books, 1992), 140.

My analysis is that these differences are massive, both metaphysically and epistemically, and as such cannot be dismissed so easily.

Moreover, the forces of late capitalism in the United States have created economic conditions which have made the structures that supported a realism-based commercial theatre and actor training untenable. Peter Zazzali has chronicled the disappearance of well-funded regional theatres in this country, which has translated to a dearth of venues in which graduates of more than a hundred fifty university programs which offer a Master of Fine Arts degree in Acting to find work. Zazzali notes that these programs insistence on adhering to a psychophysical mode of actor training based on "a balance of movement, voice, and acting courses taught in the Stanislavski tradition…seems out of sync with today's professional landscape."[3] As remedy, Zazzali proposes that actor training institutions empower their students to make work using what he calls an "entrepreneurial approach…thinking innovatively and using creative resources as an act of public service, as opposed to the more conventional understanding of entrepreneurship as a blithe pursuit of economic capital."[4] In this model, actors must be taught not only the skills required for performance, but also how to fundraise, secure performance space, and generate material for performance. He remarks that this approach means that actors must be able to work without the trappings of the realistic theatre such as elaborate sets and costumes. I will resist the temptation to wonder how Zazzali does this without reference to Grotowski's "poor theatre," and instead focus on the compatibility of this "entrepreneurial model" with viewpoints trainings.

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[3] Zazzali, Peter. *Acting in the Academy: The History of Professional Actor Training in US Higher Education.* (London, Routledge, 2016), 159.
[4] Zazzali. *Acting in the Academy.* 162.

There is a brief section of *The Viewpoints Book*, written from Tina Landau's point of view, that illustrates this compatibility. Landau recalls an anecdote in which she was leading a Viewpoints workshop in the lobby of a Steppenwolf Theatre Company rehearsal space. The space was small, irregularly shaped, and had black curtains with paintings displayed in front of them dispersed throughout. Landau's first instinct was to complain to an administrator: "You can't do Viewpoints in here. You should know better!" Ultimately, however, she was reminded that "above all else, Viewpoints is about learning to work with what you are given: obstacle as opportunity."[5] In an "entrepreneurial approach" to the work of an actor that moves away from reliance on institutional support – not only financial, but through the provision of a space designed for performance – viewpoints trainings equip the actor to turn "found spaces" from a bug into a feature. This work not only gives the actor a way of working that is compatible with postmodern philosophy, but also allows their work to thrive within the conditions of postmodernity. Though viewpoints trainings have largely been ignored by the literature in the field, they could be the beginning of a solution for many of the problems which have been identified by recent studies of actor training. "Recent," of course, is a relative term. The studies I cite here predate some major developments that will have a significant impact on actor training in the near future. New questions need to be posed.

For future scholarship on this topic then, a key question going forward will be "is it too late?" To paraphrase Tony Perucci, have the aesthetic practices that defined postmodernism become passe? Is postmodernity no longer an accurate description of the conditions in which humans exist?[6] If so, then the practical implications of this work are moot, and the value of this

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[5] Bogart, Anne and Tina Landau. *The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition.* (New York, Theatre Communications Group, 2005), 62-3.
[6] Perucci, Tony, interview by author, Zoom, July 21, 2021.

work is restricted to historical record-keeping. Given my emphasis on practical applications for viewpoints trainings in this study, it should be clear that I do not believe this to be the case. However, I would be remiss if I did not give the question of viewpoints trainings' continuing relevance some consideration as I conclude.

Arguably, many of the arguments made by postmodernists about the conditions of global capitalism and the oppressive narratives that they employ have only gone further since they began to be exposed by poststructuralist critics in the 1960s and 70s. Perhaps the most important site of contention on which their critiques have lost ground in the 2010s is their insistence on living with the discomfort of indeterminacy. Interrogating the assumption of naturalness of what bell hooks identified as "imperialist, capitalist, white supremacist patriarchy"[7] relies upon the adoption of a skeptical epistemology which denies the possibility that one can have knowledge of natural truths. It requires a willingness to acknowledge that what is presented as natural truth is instead a cultural construction. The response from imperialist capitalist white supremacy has been to appropriate that skepticism and misrepresent it. Where the postmodernists argue that since it is impossible to know natural truth, no proposition can be accepted as true, imperialist capitalist white supremacists have countered that if it is impossible to know natural truth, all claims have equal truth value. It allows those who do harm in the name of imperialist capitalist white supremacy to avoid accountability by asserting "alternative facts." Admittedly, this is a difficult challenge for a skeptical epistemology to combat, but it will be necessary to find a way as humans construct new realities which become increasingly further removed from embodied experience.

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[7] hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center.* (Boston, South End Press, 1984), 51.

Here I am thinking about the construction of digital spaces and virtual realities. Since the early days of the internet, it has been framed as a digital version of space – although users experience the web in two dimensions without the need to travel, they visit web*sites* and chat *rooms.* As technology advances, it seems inevitable that these digital spaces will emulate analog spaces more and more completely. While performance in early digital space was limited to the performative utterance – I identify myself as a sixty-five-year-old woman in the chat room and in doing so, the chat room takes me to be a sixty-five-year-old woman – the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the pace at which people who inhabit distant geographic locations have come to speak about themselves to be sharing space together. With it has come a new way to experience "live" theatre via videoconferencing software such as Zoom, a brand name which has rapidly become generic. Over the course of several months in 2020 and 2021 when little, if any, theatre was possible in shared "carbon space,"[8] theatre practitioners have begun to find ways to make "Zoom theatre" a unique medium of live performance. Just as postmodern performers in the 1960s and 70s made intentional use of nontraditional theatre spaces, Zoom theatremakers have thoughtfully turned virtual Space into a feature of their performances as opposed to a necessity to which suspension of disbelief must be applied. When, and if, the pandemic eventually recedes, this medium is likely to continue apace, especially given the recent rebranding of the Facebook holding company to "Meta." Though it is yet unclear what the implications of this change are, beyond the nominal, it is being marketed as a move toward digital Spaces which totally immerse the participant in environments they do not occupy in carbon space, and permit them to embody Shapes beyond the limits of their biological selves. Viewpoints trainings, with their innate acknowledgement of the constructed qualities of Space,

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[8] Performance scholar Ian Garrett credits this term to designer and dramaturg Beth Kates in the December, 2021 episode of *On TAP: A Theatre and Performance Studies Podcast.*

have the capacity to incorporate this simultaneously two-and-three dimensional concept of Space into their curricula.

To do so, Viewpoints teachers will need to reckon with a relationship to the camera. Asked about the applications of her work to mediated performance, Bogart responds: "I do not work in film or television and so I feel unqualified to answer…"[9] Although it is true that Bogart does not work in traditional camera-based media, I, nevertheless, suspect Bogart has thought more about how Viewpoints can play with the camera. The 2018 workshop with Bogart that I attended and have referred to throughout this project included at least one session in which the director of photography for a documentary film about SITI company participated in "open Viewpoints" with the camera rolling. I do not imagine that this was the first such occurrence, and it would be surprising if Bogart had not seen recordings of such sessions. It seems inevitable, especially since the advent of Zoom theatre and videoconference actor training sessions, that Viewpoints for the camera will become integral to the work.

Conversely, another frontier on which viewpoints trainings will need to engage presently is concerned with the integrity of corporeal bodies and a contemporary demand for absolute certainty regarding physical and emotional boundaries. I am referring to the rapidly emerging codification of practices for theatrical intimacy. Bogart argues that "The newly emergent approaches to intimacy onstage are compatible to the Viewpoints work. To become increasingly conscious of the impact of touch and proximity is what the Viewpoints are all about."[10] While there is certainly an effort in these trainings to develop an awareness of proximity between bodies, it is dangerous to assume that this effort necessarily equates to inherent compatibility, let alone compliance, with best practices in this area. Nothing I have

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[9] Anne Bogart, email message to author, June 25, 2021.
[10] Anne Bogart, email message to author, June 25, 2021.

experienced or read about these trainings has shown that significant attention has been given to consent-based practices, which are integral to work on theatrical intimacy. On the contrary, the Six Viewpoints' roots in the tradition of contact improvisation can be viewed as an obstacle to consent-based intimacy work.

Contact improvisation relies on an assumption of consent implied by the choice to participate. The word "contact" in the name of the form implies that participants will touch and be touched by one another. Perhaps it is also implicit that participants will be respectful of one another and not engage in touching that they know would be inappropriate or uncomfortable, but as Chelsea Pace and Laura Rikard point out, theatrical endeavors are filled with "overlapping, intersecting, idiosyncratic, and evolving boundaries"[11] Therefore it is impossible to assume that any two actors, regardless of the level of care they take, can know what kinds of touch might cross each other's boundaries and what harm such a crossing might do. In addition, contact improvisation, similar to comedic improvisation, is founded on a culture of acceptance. When the rules of the form dictate that participants respond to one another with "yes, and…" any attempt to enforce a boundary by saying "no" gets in the way. The boundary-enforcer is not playing along, and therefore detracting from the work being done. This culture of assumed consent persists in Viewpoints training. It is a powerful example of the limits that contemporary culture has found necessary to impose on postmodernist free-play and will require critical evaluation going forward.

Finally, I must gesture to the numerous ways in which the work I have done in this study has room to grow. I noted in the introduction the ways in which my research for this project took the form of a "pandemic methodology." The restrictions of this methodology meant that I was

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[11] Pace, Chelsea with contributions from Laura Rikard. *Staging Sex: Best Practices, Tools, and Techniques for Theatrical Intimacy.* (New York, Routledge, 2020), 1.

not able to participate in more Viewpoints and Six Viewpoints classes. Nor could I conduct interviews with nearly as many important practitioners of these techniques as I had hoped. Beyond the methodological restrictions I encountered, this research has been limited to published materials only. Websites for both Overlie and SITI company indicate the existence of much more written and video material which is, as yet, unavailable. Both websites assert that this material is in the process of being archived and made accessible for the near future: "The Mary Overlie Archive is being prepared to be sent to the Fales Collection at New York University's Bobst Library. During the pandemic all of these processes have slowed down;"[12] "Over the next 2 years, SITI will catalog and organize the papers, videos, photographs, and ephemera of three decades as an ensemble … we will create a living archive that will exist physically and digitally."[13] Once these archives exist, I expect there will be a great deal of material in them that documents the theory and practice of viewpoints trainings that may enhance or alter how they can be understood in relation to postmodernist aesthetics and metaphysics. As such, my work here may need to be expanded, revised, reconsidered, or abandoned. The next several years present an exciting opportunity to enhance the ways in which Overlie and Bogart's viewpoints trainings relate to one another and the larger aesthetic spheres of there time. I look forward to continuing to participate in that work.

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[12] "The Mary Overlie Legacy Project," sixviewpoints.com. December 20, 2021.
[13] "SITI Company Living Archive," siti.org. December 20, 2021.

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