On Stealing Viewpoints

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On Stealing Viewpoints
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Mary Overlie is an observer/participant, a deconstructing postmodern theatre practitioner, an original anarchist. She is a woman who is not afraid of obscurity, or worried that being unknown might obscure her ideas ... The Six Viewpoints is her child.

Mary Overlie, Standing in Space: The Six Viewpoints Theory & Practice (2016c: 198)

As she admits freely and often, Anne Bogart stole the Viewpoints from Mary Overlie, a postmodern dancer and choreographer from Montana who came to New York in 1971.


You do not take work from someone else and use the name and claim to have developed the work calling it the same name and, in addition, adding insult, never really having studied the work.

Mary Overlie, Correcting a Profound and Tragic Mistake (2016a: 6)

Contemporary theatre is having a 'Viewpoints' moment.1 Commonly known as the 'postmodern response to Method Acting', Viewpoints has become 'ubiquitous' as it has found 'adherents throughout the industry' (Loewith 2012). Originated and developed in the 1970s by the choreographer, dancer and teacher Mary Overlie in the vibrant arts scene of New York City's SoHo district, The Viewpoints articulates a shift from traditionally 'hierarchical' approaches to theatre that privilege plot and character to one that makes 'horizontal' the theatrical materials of Space, Shape, Time, Emotion, Movement and Story.

The 'Viewpoints' name was long unfamiliar to most American actors, even as Tectonic Theater Project's Moises Kaufman and other of Overlie's students at New York University's (NYU's) Experimental Theatre Wing (ETW) studio incorporated them into their theatre practice. However, the increasing currency of the 'Viewpoints' name in recent years is largely due to its popularization by the acclaimed theatre director Anne Bogart, through her well-known work with SITI Company and their regular training 'intensives', as well as the 2005 publication of Anne Bogart and Tina Landau's The Viewpoints Book: A practical guide to viewpoints and composition. Bogart has long boasted of having 'stolen' the Viewpoints from Overlie during her brief time teaching at ETW, the studio that Overlie had helped to found. While Bogart has claimed to have 'expanded' Overlie's 'dance' system and 'applied' it to theatre, her approach is so fundamentally different from Overlie's longstanding formulation that it is curious that Bogart would adopt the term 'Viewpoints' for her system at all. As Overlie puts it, Bogart's approach operates through an entirely different logic, constituting a 'system [that] cannot possibly stand as "The Viewpoints"' (2016a: 5). I contend that it would be more accurate to say that Bogart stole the Viewpoints in name only, a theft that has allowed that name to come to describe an easily consumable commodity and not Overlie's radical intervention.

In this essay, I describe Overlie's conceptualization of The Viewpoints as a performance practice of what Deleuze and Guattari call a minor form. That is, The Viewpoints operates as a practice of deterritorializing the fixed terms of what Overlie calls 'solid state theatre' to produce a 'collective assemblage of enunciation' in theatre and dance (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 18).

1 For the sake of clarity, I will refer to Overlie's system as 'The Viewpoints' and Bogart's (and Landau's) as the 'VPs'. To my knowledge, neither Bogart nor other members of SITI Company use this term. However, I use it here to distinguish the two approaches. In this essay, 'The Viewpoints' refers to Overlie's SSTEMS system, 'Viewpoints' (without an article) refers to the materials themselves in either approach, while the 'VPs' refers to the approach constructed by Bogart and Landau and disseminated in trainings led by SITI Company and Steppenwolf Theater. Overlie has used all variations of 'The Viewpoints' interchangeably over the years: The View Points, The Six Viewpoints, Viewpoint Theory and so on.
In so doing, The Viewpoints works to free theatre’s and dance’s materials, performers and audiences from what she calls the ‘domination [of] hierarchical control’ (Overlie 2004). It is what Overlie terms the ‘infectious impact’ of The Viewpoints that provides the conditions of possibility for Bogart’s ‘funny little machine’, which Overlie describes as a wholly different ‘system that wasn’t mine’ (2016c: 197). As a result of Bogart’s name-theft, ‘Viewpoints’ has become a taxonomy of the major, standardizing a new form of actor training, which obscures the potential of a different kind of machine altogether – Overlie’s abstract machine, which produces and is produced by ‘the fragility and persistence of the minor gesture … [that leads] the event elsewhere than toward government fixity of the major’ (Manning 2016: 7).

Bogart’s appropriation of the ‘Viewpoints’ name has established it as the ‘major’ form of ‘her System with a capital “S”’ (Loewith 2012). The term is now so common in actor training that it is even abbreviated as the ‘VPs’ in audition and scene study courses for Hollywood actors, such as those taught in Los Angeles at Steppenwolf Classes West by Alexandra Billings, a star of the Amazon TV series Transparent. As a major performance practice, Bogart intends for the VPs not to challenge norms, but to produce a new normativity for theatre to contest the hegemony of Method Acting in American actor training, which she describes as the ‘misguided … Americanization of Stanislavski’ that has inhibited theatrical innovation by ‘overemphasizing personlized emotional circumstances’ (Bogart 2001: 56; Bogart and Landau 2005: 16). Theatre artists and acting teachers alike now generally understand the ‘Viewpoints’ in the major terms of the VPs’ ‘clear-cut procedure and attitude’, with Bogart and Landau’s The Viewpoints Book providing a ‘step-by-step recipe’ for producing this new normativity (2005: back cover). Bogart’s ‘efficient’ system has largely effaced what Overlie terms the ‘deconstruction’ and ‘particle-ization’ laboratories for the production of ‘Original Anarchists’ (Overlie 2016c). In this way, the VPs speaks not in The Viewpoints’ minor key of ‘particle-ization’, but in the major key of instrumentalization. It does so by capturing and deploying ‘Time’ and ‘Space’ as ‘order words’ for what Bogart describes as a director’s ‘shorthand’ for telling actors what to ‘fix’ in their performance (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 106; Bogart 2005: 212).

As valuable a machine-system as the VPs may be, the Viewpoints themselves cannot have been stolen from Overlie, as The Viewpoints represents an attempt to name what is impossible to steal: the resistance to capture, to being stolen. In contrast to the VPs’ instrumentality, The Viewpoints enact a form of what James Scott terms ‘anarchist calisthenics’ for the production and development of The Viewpoints actor, that is, Overlie’s ‘Original Anarchist’ (2012: 1). While this name-theft occludes the visibility of The Viewpoints’ minor gesture, disenfranchising Overlie in multiple ways, this form of domination is characteristic of the minor-major relationship, where the ‘minor gets cast aside, overlooked, or forgotten in the major chords’ (Manning 2017:1).

However, it is in the ways that The Viewpoints are not major, operate at the fringes and in the interstices of the major, as well as even in the subversion and unmaking of the major, that lies its infectious potentiality.3

3 The ‘brief history’ on the Steppenwolf West website states that Overlie originated the Viewpoints as a means of communicating with her ‘dance troupe…. In the early 1970s Ann [sic] Bogart adopted them’ (‘Viewpoints’ 2016). After Bogart and Landau chose to ‘add 3 more’, Landau taught them to Billings who has now ‘tailored the VPs in a way that opens up the emotional truth of the actor’ in such courses as ‘Viewpoints for the Camera’ (ibid.).

5 My own understanding of the Viewpoints is shaped by extensive training and relationships with both Overlie and SITI Company. I was first introduced to them during a two-week course held in June 2004 held at California State University, Fresno. The workshop was organized by professors Tanya Kayne-Perry and Karen Schaffman where I was part of a small group of university students, faculty and independent artists who studied for one week with Mary Overlie (and her long-time collaborator Nina Martin), followed by one week with Anne Bogart and two members of SITI Company (Will ‘Bondo’ Bond and Barney O’Hanlon). Since that summer, I have participated in numerous SITI Company trainings, including (in 2006) their annual residential four-week intensive at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York. I most recently trained with Overlie during a 2017 residency at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Minor key (a small dance)
Mary Overlie’s entry into The Viewpoints is a reckoning with Space, in no small part because of the ways in which the places where she lived during its development gave rise to the theory itself. Having grown up in Montana, Overlie ‘ran away from home’ in 1964, jumping a freight train with $50 in her pocket to eventually arrive in Berkeley, California. As a small-town girl and a lover of classical music and ballet, Overlie felt alienated from the counterculture scene that defined the city in the 1960s. Even though she began taking ballet classes at the University of California, Berkeley, Overlie found herself ‘terribly lonely as an artist and bored’
until a 1968 performance and workshop given by Yvonne Rainer, Barbara Dilley and other members of the group of former Judson dancers known as Grand Union (Overlie 2016c: 6). The experience was so transformative for Overlie, that when Dilley invited her to perform in a piece commissioned by the Whitney Museum of American Art in Manhattan, she relocated to New York, driving across the country with Rainer. The SoHo district of New York City, where she lived and worked for many years, proved highly influential for the development of what would become The Viewpoints. SoHo in the 1970s constituted a milieu for a community of artists of the minor who disturbed the boundaries of theatre, dance, visual arts and music. Overlie’s work exemplified this dynamic, performing in and choreographing for gallery spaces and museums, in addition to collaborating with the seminal theatre company Mabou Mines on projects in theatres and even in a football stadium for Lee Breuer’s *The Saint and the Football Player* (1973).

Grouping her with such path-breaking artists as Robert Wilson, Philip Glass, Richard Foreman, Jack Smith and Laurie Anderson, cultural theorist Sylvère Lotringer identifies Overlie as one of the scene’s key artists describing them as being ‘affected by a deterritorialization of their senses that offered perceptions until then inconceivable’ (2013: xiii–xiv). These artists worked within the same *episteme*, Lotringer states, as ‘they were all part of a sudden change in paradigm, like switching one mindset for another and looking at it while it was happening’ (2013: xiv). At the time, these artists were largely unfamiliar with the postmodern theories of Foucault, Deleuze, Guattari and Lyotard (and they with them). However, the SoHo artists produced what Lotringer describes as a ‘breakthrough’ as yet only theorized by those writers, as these artists ‘opened a new area where theater could do without language, concepts without referent’ (2013: xiii).

Overlie’s particular ‘breakthrough’ was her research into and the identification of dance’s ‘materials’, extending the work of moving beyond dance as a performance of virtuosity, which Yvonne Rainer called ‘the dancing bear’ (1980: 34). Inspired by the Judson Dance Theater (and particularly by her ‘hero’ Rainer), Overlie set about a ‘deep investigation of what exists in dance’, an approach that she likens to an auto mechanic taking apart (and reassembling) an engine, a carpenter dismantling (and rebuilding) a structure, or tearing up and reinstalling plumbing (as she and the composer Philip Glass did for her SoHo loft) (ibid.). During 1973–4, Overlie began calling these materials ‘The Six Viewpoints’, sometimes using the two-word ‘View Points’, before settling on ‘The Viewpoints’ in 1976.

The term ‘Viewpoints’ designated her interest in isolating each individual element of dance and the performer’s perception of it, ‘interrogating’ each Viewpoint by pointing her view both at and through it, even as each and all of them would remain at play at any given moment. Overlie describes the construction of The Viewpoints as one of ‘inventing the wheel backwards’, discovering a wheel by taking it apart rather than assembling it – a process she would later come to term ‘deconstruction’ (Overlie 2016c: 29). While some of the terms shifted during her early investigations, there were always six Viewpoints: Space, Shape (sometimes called Line), Time, Emotion (sometimes called Emotional Ambience), Movement (sometimes called Kinaesthetics) and what she reluctantly termed Story (sometimes called Narrative or Logic). The Viewpoints are studied through ‘The Bridge’, a series of nine performance ‘laboratories’, which she initially termed the ‘friends of the Viewpoints’ (Overlie 2016b). As can be seen in fig. 1, the Viewpoints constitute more than a listing of an actor’s tools, but rather form SSTEMS, the acronym that denotes the assemblage of these six materials, a rhizomatic structure intended to radically alter the actor’s relationship both to the materials and to the audience. That is, the actor becomes embedded within the structure, responding to the Viewpoints, rather than using them as materials to ‘control or own’ (2016c: 3). Working with the Viewpoint of Space, Overlie explains, ‘is not a “skill”, but rather a “language” to be...
learned from Space, a physical and mathematical encounter, which is as concrete a matter as measuring the Space by walking through, or even simply standing in it (11).

In 1978, Overlie was invited to teach at Tisch School of the Arts, New York University by Ron Argelander, where she became the founding faculty member of the innovative Experimental Theatre Wing (ETW) studio joined the following year by Mary Overlie Dance Company member, Wendell Beavers. The Viewpoints provided a core curriculum of the programme, complimented by additional methods as new faculty members were hired, including Mary Overlie Dance Company members Paul Langland and Nina Martin with additional faculty members, Kevin Kuhlke and Stephen Wangh.4 In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Overlie began more widely describing her discoveries in interviews in The New York Times and TDR: The drama review, further developing them until she ‘completed’ the theorization of The Viewpoints in 2004. While Overlie’s teaching has been tremendously influential, she has published precious little writing about the work. It was only after decades of writing some seven discarded drafts of ‘writing my way back into existence’ that she finally published her 2016 book, Standing in Space: The Six Viewpoints Theory & Practice (2016a: 14).

However, as is symptomatic of minor practices, Overlie’s name and her conceptualization of her system is frequently absent from university and other actor training programmes’ descriptions of their offerings in ’Viewpoints’. While Bogart frequently claims Overlie’s response to her appropriation as one of ‘delight and chagrin’, Overlie describes her experience quite differently. In a 2006 interview with Bogart, Overlie stated that Bogart’s theft of ’Viewpoints’ was nothing less than traumatic.

\[I \text{ feel like someone is taking my life away. I feel like I’m dying…. I had no concept that the Viewpoints were like my flesh. I spent my whole life working on them. To lose them was to look at having devastated life…. I needed to reestablish my name in the work. (Bogart 2012:418)}\]

### THE (SIX) VIEWPOINTS

MARY OVERLIE’S RHIZOMATIC SYSTEM OF PERFORMANCE LANGUAGES

**STEMS – as in stems, or a strange way to spell systems** (Mary Overlie)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Space</th>
<th>Shape</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>Story</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>see and feel</td>
<td>feel and see</td>
<td>experience duration</td>
<td>experience</td>
<td>experience and</td>
<td>see and understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>physical</td>
<td>physical form</td>
<td>systems created to regulate duration</td>
<td>states of being</td>
<td>identify with kinetic sensation</td>
<td>logic systems as an arrangement of collected information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FRIENDS OF THE VIEWPOINTS: THE NINE LABORATORIES OF ’THE BRIDGE’**

*Source: Standing in Space: The Six Viewpoints Theory and Practice by Mary Overlie*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News of a Difference</th>
<th>Noticing difference in increasing levels of subtlety</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deconstruction</td>
<td>Investigating theater by separating the components of its structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Horizontal</td>
<td>Nonhierarchical composition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postmodernism</td>
<td>The philosophical foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reification</td>
<td>A reflection on creativity, communication and language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Piano</td>
<td>The interface between artist and audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Matrix</td>
<td>The ingredients are in the cauldron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing the Unnecessary</td>
<td>The STEMES dissolve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Original Anarchist</td>
<td>A very old idea</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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* Beavers became the second Director of ETW, following founder Ron Argelander, and continued to teach the core viewpoints curriculum at ETW until 2005, leaving NYU that year to create the MFA Theater: Contemporary Performance programme at Naropa University, which includes training in The Six Viewpoints.
This reestablishment of her own name in relationship to the Viewpoints name is particularly fraught because The Viewpoints (and Overlie, herself) operate through the minor form of quietude. This ethos simultaneously leaves The Viewpoints vulnerable to the volume of the major, but also is what enables its pervasive influence. As Overlie states, The Viewpoints ‘has come with a quiet and infectious ability to represent itself without her’, speaking only in a ‘quiet voice in a sea of raging commercial, artistic, corporate, capitalistic ego’ (2016c: 198, 2013: 156).

**MAJOR KEY (REMAKING ‘AMERICAN THEATRE’)**

The story of Anne Bogart is much better known, given that she recounts the tale of her ‘discovery’ in her books, teaching and through SITI Company’s frequent training intensives. Her story of the ‘Viewpoints’ has become its master narrative, wherein Bogart is cast as an artist-hero who expanded and applied Overlie’s ‘dance’ method to ‘theatre’. Bogart, a self-described ‘scavenger’, attended Bard College in New York’s Hudson Valley, where she studied with the Judson dancer and choreographer Aileen Passloff. Having moved to New York City in 1974, Bogart became known for her ‘postmodern’ and site-specific theatrical work throughout the city.5 She was later hired by ETW, where she also directed a number of productions, including the Overlie collaborations, Artourist (1984) and their radical reimagining of the musical *South Pacific* (1986).

During the mid-1980s, Overlie had relocated to Paris, where she was establishing a satellite ETW programme. Bogart states that when she found herself ‘unsure of what to teach’, she worked as a ‘scavenger’, not only teaching ‘the Viewpoints’ but also doing so in a way that she now admits ‘bastardized [Overlie’s] work, adding things and changing things’ – all unbeknownst to Overlie (Bogart 2012: 471). Significantly, Bogart writes that the ‘principles’ she had learned from Overlie ‘underwent changes’ as the specific formulation of “Space, Shape, Time, Emotion, Movement and Story” drifted away from me’, so much so that ‘I forgot what her six Viewpoints were’ (Bogart 2015, 2012). Overlie reports having received telephone calls from concerned New York theatre artists about the ‘confusion’ caused by Bogart’s use of ‘Viewpoints’ for her different approach (2012: 481). Such confusion is not surprising, given that Bogart had never actually trained with Overlie, but had only gleaned The Viewpoints from observation and discussions.

As seen in fig. 2, Bogart’s VPs dispenses with Overlie’s horizontal, rhizomatic structure in favour of a two-tiered system organized by the Viewpoints of Time and Space, with Overlie’s four remaining Viewpoints either scuttled or demoted to sub-categories. Due to their seeming association with the psychological realism that the VPs was meant to oppose, Bogart eliminated the Viewpoints of Emotion and Story. Having first increased the enumerated ‘Viewpoints’ from six to seven, the new system was constituted by nine Viewpoints, underneath the ur-Viewpoints of Time and Space. Unlike the recursive process designed by Overlie, the VPs is utilitarian, what Bogart describes as merely a ‘cardboard thing that you use to look at the thing you’re really interested in’ (2012: 486).

In 1992, Bogart and Japanese theatre director Tadashi Suzuki co-founded the Saratoga International Theater Institute (SITI), which shortly thereafter evolved into the Bogart-directed SITI Company, known for its parallel training in Suzuki’s physically rigorous method and Bogart’s VPs – with the former referred to as Suzuki (an abbreviation of ‘Suzuki Method of Actor Training’) and the latter as ‘Viewpoints’ (with no equivalent nominal attribution for Overlie). As SITI toured their first devised work, The Medium in 1995, ‘Viewpoints’ became identified with Bogart as ‘her “philosophy of movement”’, while she blithely stated, ‘I steal from everybody’ (Winn 1995).

The theft of the Viewpoints name was cemented in 1995 with the publication of the book *Anne Bogart: Viewpoints*, an anthology of texts by collaborators and drama critics celebrating Bogart’s work. While Bogart’s
A lone contribution to the collection makes no mention of The Viewpoints, her collaborator Tina Landau’s essay states that she ‘remembered Anne saying that the work she did was “stolen” from a myriad of sources, most prominently, the Viewpoints from a dance teacher at New York University (NYU) named Mary Overlie’ (1995: 16). As a dance practice only, Landau contends, the ‘Viewpoints’ was merely source material, which required Bogart to first ‘refine’ and ‘expand’ it in order to ‘apply’ it to theatre (ibid.).

These claims seem to be ignorant of the fact that Overlie had developed the work in the context of theatre (not just dance) projects, taught it at the Experimental Theatre Wing, and had designed it as a ‘bridge technique for dance, theater and, to some extent, the visual arts’ (Overlie 2016a: 8). Bogart’s own first book, A Director Prepares, mentions The Viewpoints only in passing as raw material that ‘led me in the development of a new approach to training for actors’ (2001: 12). Bogart and Landau’s The Viewpoints Book: A practical guide to viewpoints and composition has become a staple of contemporary acting libraries. In a brief introduction to this how-to book for prospective Viewpoints teachers, they pay greater obeisance to Overlie, but still relegate her to the status of a dance ‘pioneer’ whose work Bogart and Landau had ‘extrapolated and expanded’ in order to make them ‘applicable to creating viscerally dynamic theater’ (5). Moreover, they mistake the assemblage of The Viewpoints for a mere naming of ‘natural principles’.

It is impossible to say where these ideas originated, for they are timeless and belong to the natural principles of movement, time and space. Over the years, we have simply articulated a set of names to put on things that already exist. (7)

This prehistory dispossesses Overlie of The Viewpoints by describing it as a mere grouping of natural elements, rather than Overlie’s complexly structured system. Thus, even in the act of honouring Overlie as a ‘pioneer’, she is described as having a dance-based ‘approach to the Six Viewpoints’, which required Bogart to ‘recognize’ their ‘immediate relevance to the theater’, in order to ‘apply’ them to ‘theatre with actors’ (5). Thus, ‘theatre’ must first be erased from Overlie’s formulation in order to create the space for their ‘application’ and ‘expansion’ to theatre.

The publication of The Viewpoints Book helped to erase Overlie’s minor formulation, as Bogart’s ownership of the Viewpoints name was cemented by proliferating and increasingly standardized teaching of the VPs. Now armed

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### The VPs

**Anne Bogart’s Two-Tiered Organization of the Viewpoints**

‘A set of names given to nine principles of movement through time and space.’ (Bogart and Landau)

*Source: The Viewpoints Book, Anne Bogart and Tina Landau*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Viewpoints of Time</th>
<th>Viewpoints of Space</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tempo</strong></td>
<td><strong>Shape</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate of speed at which a movement occurs</td>
<td>Contour or outline the body/bodies make in space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Duration</strong></td>
<td><strong>Gesture</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long a movement or sequence of movement continues</td>
<td>Movement of a shape with a beginning, middle and end.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kinesthetic Response</strong></td>
<td><strong>Architecture</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A spontaneous reaction to/timing of response to/impulsive movement caused by an external stimulus</td>
<td>Physical environment of working and how awareness of it affect movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Repetition</strong></td>
<td><strong>Spatial Relationship</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeating of something onstage</td>
<td>Distance between things onstage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Repetition (of movement within own body)</td>
<td>Landscape, floor pattern, design created in movement through space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Repetition (of something outside own body)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Perceived as a mere grouping of natural elements, rather than Overlie’s complexly structured system. Thus, even in the act of honouring Overlie as a ‘pioneer’, she is described as having a dance-based ‘approach to the Six Viewpoints’, which required Bogart to ‘recognize’ their ‘immediate relevance to the theater’, in order to ‘apply’ them to ‘theatre with actors’ (5). Thus, ‘theatre’ must first be erased from Overlie’s formulation in order to create the space for their ‘application’ and ‘expansion’ to theatre.
with a paint-by-numbers handbook for teaching the VPs, the ever-growing number of SITI Company-trained teachers have adopted them. Moreover, the VPs have entered the curriculum of professional actor training programmes throughout the world, even finding their way into high-school drama curricula. This development is not surprising, given the ways in which The Viewpoints Book presents the VPs through an easily replicable pedagogy, making it amenable to the contemporary neoliberal university’s increasing demands for standardization and expedience.

As SITI Company members have reached middle age, they have used the VPs as their brand in order to institutionalize the company. Writing in American Theatre magazine, Porter Anderson supportively describes this process as the company’s need to ‘plant a flag, stake out some turf, find a court to hold’ (2008). In short, he says, the future of American theatre depends on their establishing a ‘SITIstate’ (Ibid.).

**Understanding The Viewpoints**

Understanding The Viewpoints as a ‘complete work’ rather than merely as an enumeration of terms is perhaps most evident in relation to Overlie’s concept of The Horizontal. For Overlie, The Viewpoints approach is constituted by a horizontal structure, rather than an itemized list of raw materials for the actor to manipulate and control. Rather the process of separating the material aspects of theatre is governed by the ‘working condition’ of de-hierarchicization to be explored in ‘The Horizontal Laboratory’ (Overlie 2016c: 91). In this laboratory each Viewpoint is provisionally isolated so that it can be related to with ‘impartiality’ – as no Viewpoint is thought to have greater importance than any other, nor is the Viewpoint to have more importance than the performer.

The radical breakthrough of The Viewpoints is not only in deconstructing the materials to the level of their particles, but that like Donald Judd, Richard Serra and other of her contemporaries working in minimalist sculpture, the materials perform as much as the actor or dancer does.

For Overlie, this rhizomatic structure constitutes a radical break from what she terms the ‘vertical’ orientation of ‘classical’ and ‘modern theatre’, wherein elements of the mise en scène operate in service of character and plot. Rather, each Viewpoint is considered to have its own ‘language’, which the actor may learn to ‘speak’. By identifying these materials as fundamentally equivalent in value, they can then be assembled into structures of ‘temporary hierarchies’, a condition that is essentially provisional (Overlie 2016c: 95). Overlie refers to this process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization as ‘reification’, the practice of concretizing the unknown into the ‘circle’ of the known, but that is always disrupted by the de-reification of its own deconstruction (Overlie 2013).

As seen in fig. 3, horizontality characterizes not only the relationship between the individual Viewpoints, but also the entire performance situation, including the actor’s relationship to both the Viewpoints and the audience, as well as the audience’s own relationship to the individual Viewpoints. This ‘embrace of
The nonhierarchical structure de-centres the actor in a given performance event (Overlie 2016c: 79). No longer an ‘artist/creator’, the actor performs the role of an ‘observer/participant’ with the materials, propelled by a ‘loss of ego’ that allows a release of the impulse to ‘control information too early’ (83).

Similarly, the Viewpoint of Emotion – eliminated in Bogart’s approach – refers to a horizontal relationship of actor to audience. Rather than designating the drive to ‘capture and express unique emotional context’, Emotion denotes the charged energy and engagement between the observer/participant performer and the ‘spectator/participant’ audience member (30). As a practice of ‘presence’, the Viewpoint of Emotion is characterized by the actor’s heightened self-awareness of the ‘minute details’ of their body, attention and avoidance/acceptance of the audience’s gaze. Overlie calls this the ‘Dog-Sniff-Dog world’, wherein the actor offers the ‘gift of being seen’ so that both they and the audience can mutually partake in each other’s ‘scents’ (32). This relation is explored through ‘The Piano Laboratory’, wherein the members of the audience are cast as ‘the finest pianos in the world’, whose subtlety, perceptual abilities and sensitivity to nuance enables the performer to see them as adoring collaborators, rather than as an oppositional force to be manipulated or controlled. This perceptual shift allows for the actor to ‘believe in an audience that believes in them’, who can then be trusted to create meaning with the most abstract of works (108).

While ‘The Horizontal’ does not appear in The Viewpoints Book, it is a mainstay of SITI Company’s Viewpoints training. In their approach, horizontality’s significance lies in its de-prioritizing of manufactured emotion, psychologically motivated character and linear narrative. By raising the value of the material elements of theatre, it undermines the dominance of these aspects in order to establish a broader palette of compositional choices. No longer subservient to the masters of emotion, character and plot, the VPs ‘places the actor at the center of the creative process’ (Bogart 2014: 110).

As seen in fig. 3, the VPs’ claim to de-hierarchicization belies the fact that it actually creates a new hierarchy in which the ‘expanded’ nine Viewpoints are now equally subordinate to the ur-Viewpoints of Time and Space. In this taxonomy of theatrical elements, Time and Space serve as ‘order words’ that contain those elements by rationalizing them for the re-centred actor. Such fixity does, indeed, make...
the VPs ‘practical’, as it instrumentalizes the material elements of theatre as tools for the actor to manipulate. While the actor may feel initially de-centred in the VPs by the removal of the familiar elements of character and plot, the actor is ultimately restored as the master manipulator of Time and Space, an artist-creator and ego-centre of the theatrical event. While The Viewpoints challenges the centrality of the actor’s ego, the VPs seeks to do the opposite – what Bogart describes as a vehicle to ‘create the kind of ego that can create’ (2014: 15).

THE STORY OF THE END OF (THE BEGINNING OF) POSTMODERNISM

The Horizontal is not only a structure, but also a processual act of structuring. This distinction notably characterizes Overlie’s description of the Viewpoint of Story, which Bogart eliminates in her VPs. For Overlie, the centrality of Story and its unique formulation is rooted in the name ‘Postmodernism’, which she describes as the ‘heart of the Six Viewpoints’ (2016c: 87). While Bogart formerly described the Viewpoints as a ‘post-modern way to train actors’, she has more recently declared ‘the end of postmodernism’ (Shteir 1998, Bogart 2014: 5).

On the other hand, Overlie has long described such sentiments as based on a ‘mistaken idea of Postmodernism’ (Overlie 2016c: 87). Not only is postmodernism alive and well, it ‘is in its infancy’ (ibid.). This infant postmodernism is the necessary companion to the Viewpoints, which Overlie describes as her ‘child’ (2016c: 198).

Informed by the post-modernism of post-modern dance, Overlie’s conceptualization of the term centres on the ‘microscopic activity of differentiation’, which is enabled by and productive of a ‘process of finding points of relatedness in divergent details ... rather than grand fixed plans’ (Overlie 2016c: 87, 96). In a 1979 interview with Sylvère Lotringer for the ‘Schizo-Culture’ issue of his journal, semiotext(e), Overlie describes her project as what Deleuze and Guattari would later term the ‘molecular dance’ of the minor (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 11):

The point for me is how the molecular structure of the body is functioning.... I look upon movement not as pattern in space and not a sculptural pose and not progress across a surface. The level I think of dance on is atoms moving in accord with each other out – either they rise or expand.... I give to those people who are watching the experience that things can change minutely and completely and yet nothing has happened. (Lotringer 1979: n.p.)

Lotringer describes Overlie’s conceptualization of perception as a philosophical ‘breakthrough’ since it provides a molecular challenge to the ‘molar structure’ of the major form. As Lotringer explains, Overlie’s work produces a ‘new body’ that is made up of a multiplicity of atoms, molecules, [and] particles that don’t need to be reincorporated into any distinct movement or ‘molar’ structure. This is quite a breakthrough, and it has far-reaching effects. The deeper, it seems, you get into the body, into its minute components, the more ‘abstract’ it becomes. There is a point at which the highest degree of abstraction in dance brings about the most direct flow of energy. (Lotringer 1979 n.p.)

Overlie’s postmodernism is predicated not on an opposition to Story, but rather on the understanding that the temporal unfolding of any performance event makes Story unavoidable. The mortality of the minor gesture produces what she calls ‘abstract narratives’, which may occur so microscopically that they ‘happen in an atmosphere of chargedstillness’.

The experience is witnessed, understood, followed, remembered and yet there is no nameable event that transpired.... There is however some very engrossing small, odd gestures next to some very large gestures which dissolve into huge sweeps across the space and then occur again in an atmosphere of charged stillness. (Overlie 1980: 32)

While there has been much dispute about the relative ‘postmodernism’ of ‘postmodern dance’, Overlie’s understanding of the term is quite specific. As Nick Kaye points out, the work of the Judson dancers – particularly through the influence of John Cage’s chance operations – embodied a radical postmodernism in their collapsing of the boundaries of ‘dance’ and...
'not dance' (1994: 98). Rather than supplanting previous dance forms with a new 'style', postmodern dance threw the distinctions of classical and modern dance ‘into confusion’. Indeed, Yvonne Rainer’s emphasis on the materiality of ‘being seen’ and the aleatory aspects of Steve Paxton’s development of contact improvisation proved foundational for Overlie’s formulation of the relationality of ‘Emotion’ and the dynamic kinaesthetics of ‘Movement’. As with the work of Judson dancers, the postmodernism of Overlie’s Viewpoints ‘looks towards its own condition’ as dynamic minute components, such that it occasions what Kaye calls the ‘latent instability … of a “postmodern event” … which can be set directly against a “postmodern style”’ (Kaye 1994: 117). The Viewpoints draws on the radical potential of this molecular, deterritorializing gesture to ‘challenge the very nature of authority’ what Jill Johnson describes as moving ‘beyond democracy into anarchy. No member outstanding. No body necessarily more beautiful than any other body. No movement necessarily more important or more beautiful than any other movement’ (cited in Burt 2006: 11).

This understanding of postmodernism is radically different from the postmodern style of pastiche that became fashionable in 1980s American theatre and visual art. Writing in 1983, Hal Foster argues that as appropriation became an artistic style, it approached the condition of ‘mere kitsch’, even an ‘instrumental’ practice of ‘neoconservative … reactionary postmodernism’ rather than the ‘postmodernism of resistance’ that challenges the normalization of the culture of late capitalism (1983: xi–xii; Jameson 1991). Bogart describes her appropriative ‘scavenging’ of the Viewpoints within a discourse of such kitsch postmodernism. The role of the artist, she says, is to ‘gather raw material, absorb it, digest it’ with The Viewpoints but ‘raw material’ for the ‘real creative innovation’ of their appropriation (2015). Not only does this ethos guide Bogart’s relationship to the Viewpoints, it is also what she casts, in The Viewpoints Book, as a guiding principle for the Viewpoints-trained artist: 'In the spirit of postmodernism, we consider ourselves free to pick and choose whatever relationship we deem useful from the full history of the theater’ (Bogart and Landau 2005: 95).

As postmodern style has fallen out of fashion, it is unsurprising that Bogart now claims, as many have done since the 1980s, that we have reached the ‘end of postmodernism’. In her most recent book, What’s the Story, Bogart contends that despite being, herself, a ‘product of postmodernism, of deconstruction’, who had ‘resisted the comfort and tyranny of stories’, ‘postmodernism’ has lost its relevance in our contemporary moment of ‘upheaval and change’ (2014: 4–5). In order for us to ‘make the world understandable’, she calls for a return to ‘story’, with no reference to the fact that she had eliminated the Viewpoint of Story in her construction of the VPs (Ibid.).

Bogart describes story as a necessary response to ‘the inferiority complex’ that has come to plague ‘American theatre’, leaving it ‘weakened’ and populated by artists who act like ‘beggars, like lesser citizens’ (2014: 4, 13). Theatre artists, she announces, should reclaim their position of power, using story to ‘give order and meaning’. Through the ordering-power of the theatre artist’s use of story, American theatre is figured as a major practice that ‘frames’ experience, so that theatre artists may then redefine the world for audiences. Restored to their proper place of power to secure and determine the meaning of experience for audience, theatre artists ‘can control’ stories and thus ‘we can choose’ to make American theatre great again (13). In the name of restoring American theatre, the ‘comfort and tyranny of stories’ is no longer to be resisted, and can even be realized by the mobilization of the Viewpoints, which now serve as a means of control – over meaning, over the audience, as well as over the materials themselves.

Such an understanding of story works in stark contrast to Overlie’s Viewpoint of Story, where it is understood as an ‘arrangement of particles’, a ‘Logic’ to be discovered through a process of
‘exposing ... an organization of sequences of information’ (2016c: 45, 55). In The Viewpoints, Story had not been opposed, but rather reconceptualized as a Story/Logic. This formulation exceeds ‘traditional narrative’ form to uncover not only ‘Story in abstraction’ but also Story in the ‘chance operation and new logics’ that occur when multiple pieces of ‘information’ are ‘placed next to each other’. Moreover, the audience are not subjects to be controlled, but collaborators who construct an ‘abstract narrative’ to account for the electrical ‘arching’ between disparate materials (48–9).

As Story/Logic continually enacts itself as a becoming-Story/Logic, it creates the conditions for the narrative ‘end of The Six Viewpoints’, which is reached in the final laboratory of The Bridge: ‘The Original Anarchist’ (123). The ‘originality’ of the Original Anarchist is, paradoxically, an effect of Viewpoints study, allowing the actor to no longer need ‘outside rules as guides in order to function as a part of the whole’ (124). The Viewpoints produces becoming-Anarchists, ‘bad neoliberal subjects’ whose ‘awesome sense of self-affirmation’ allows them ‘to be cooperative without being locked into an arbitrary unity’ (Perucci 2015: 106; Overlie 2016c: 125). The auratic ‘patina of the Original Anarchist’ – constituted in ‘vulnerability and invulnerability’ – produces ‘secrets onstage’ to be shared on the Horizontal with the audience (126, 125). The becoming-Original Anarchist actor is thus empowered to ask The Viewpoints’ own originating question, both to themselves and the audience, ‘What is theatre made of?’ (127).

WAS MEINE ATOME MACHEN: TOWARDS AN ANARCHIST VIEWPOINTS

In the age of the SITIState, what is to become of the Original Anarchist? Overlie offers herself as a partial answer: the Original Anarchist need not be ‘afraid of obscurity, or worried that being unknown might obscure her ideas’, despite the fact that the ‘financial and professional advantage ... of the Viewpoints has all gone to Anne’ (Overlie 2016a: 14; Overlie 2016c). While the ‘Viewpoints’ name has been stolen, The Viewpoints, itself, cannot have been since it cannot be owned. The Viewpoints was not only not ‘stolen’, but it has also ‘come with a quiet and infectious ability to represent itself without [Overlie]’ (Overlie 2016c: 198). The VP’s ‘Viewpoints’ is, then, an aspect of the SITI Company trainings that Julia Whitworth describes as a ‘product for marketing’, which is produced from their ‘corporate culture’ (2005: 27).

If the corporatism of ‘Viewpoints’ as a marketed-product disciplines theatre artists into what James Scott may call ‘seeing like a SITI-State’, then it is the Original Anarchist who must necessarily operate within the margins of that State, propelled by the infectious deterritorializing of ‘Viewpoints’ minor practice (1998). In the constitution of a horizontal relationship with the materials and audience, The Viewpoints articulates not a list of natural elements, but a rhizomatic structure that evades instrumentalization, capture and containment. As a theatre practice, The Viewpoints produces observer/participants, the recursive enactment of reification and de-reification, the atomic and microscopic movements of particles, and a giving over to narratives of chance and abstraction. Rather than enabling mastery and control, The Viewpoints is an invitation to perform ungovernably, to confound any and all acts of dispossession. The anarchist calisthenics of The Viewpoints evades capture by the SITI-State as it produces ensembles of Original Anarchists who are not dependent upon a restoration of the greatness of ‘American theatre’ as a site for the reproduction of control. The Viewpoints cannot be stolen because, while the ‘Viewpoints’ may have been expropriated, the resistance to control is one of their constitutive elements. Ever threatened by the art of the corporate steal, the Original Anarchist steals away through the radical act of (re)asking, ‘What is theatre made of?’ And in that act, Overlie says, we ‘go off into another planet in a spaceship. We get into the Viewpoints world’ (Bogart 2012: 483).
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