LEARNING TO LISTEN:
THE COLLABORATION AND ART OF THE SITI COMPANY

DISSERTATION

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By

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This dissertation focuses on the SITI Company, and its place within American theatre history, using the company's mission—creating new work, training young theatre artists, and international collaboration—as a basis for exploring multiple historical contexts within which SITI can be situated. This dissertation looks at Artaud, Brecht, and Copeau as early 20th Century examples of theatre artists significantly influenced by Asian performance techniques. Artaud, Brecht, and Copeau helped establish the use of movement as a communicative device, de-emphasizing the written/spoken. The Wooster Group, Théâtre du Soleil, and Complicité are presented as late 20th Century examples of collaborative theatre companies which create new works. These three companies draw on the theories and practices of Artaud, Brecht, and/or Copeau, creating performances where the actors' movement assumes as important a place in performance as text. When addressing SITI's unique actor-training (the Viewpoints Training and the Suzuki Method)
this dissertation not only offers an overview of the actor-training and their underlying philosophies, emphasizing those techniques that support their collaborative process, but also provides a context for physical actor-training by looking at Meyerhold, Decroux, and Grotowski. All three developed their own system for training actors that stresses physical training. This dissertation provides biographical background on the Company's founders, Bogart and Suzuki, looking at the key events that influenced their careers and development as artists. This dissertation also reviews the principle published writings by Bogart and Suzuki, identifying key ideas that shape SITI. Finally, this dissertation examines the SITI Company's creative process that eschews the hierarchies found in traditional theatre, by looking at four performances and how they were created (Bob, Room, Score, and Death and the Ploughman) and providing examples of how SITI's training lends itself towards developing choreographic movement. While there are other examples of theatre companies that take a collective approach to their work, SITI's process makes a unique contribution to the theatre world because SITI's work is grounded in its unique actor-training.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this labor of blood, sweat, and tears to my Mimi, my maternal grandmother, Laurence Leger Hanks, a fierce Cajun woman whom I admire, respect, and love more than mere words can ever express.
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If I tried to thank everyone who deserves recognition for contributing to my success, the acknowledgments would be as long as the rest of my dissertation. That I can say this in all sincerity means that I have friends, family, and colleagues in abundance.

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My research would have never been possible if the Wexner Center for the Arts did not bring SITI to Columbus on a regular basis. My thanks to Chuck Helm, not only for
commissioning SITI’s work, but also for sharing his thoughts on contemporary American theatre and for giving me access to materials archived at the Wexner Center.

Finally, I must single out Lesley Ferris who took a risk when she admitted an international studies major to an M.F.A. directing program. Through the classes, the productions, the tutorials, and the luncheon meetings at La Chatelaine, she’s been a role model without equal. Ever since first meeting Lesley I have looked up to her as an exemplary artist, scholar, administrator, and world citizen. I can never thank her enough for all that she’s done for me.

All of these individuals have played important roles in the comedy of my life in graduate school. I thank each and every one of you for being a part of my life and helping me complete my doctorate.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION:

A COMPANY WITH A MISSION

Any study of the SITI Company should begin with a look at its mission, or as the company refers to it, its “ongoing components”—“the creation of new work, the training of young theatre artists, and a commitment to international collaboration.”¹ Using the mission statement as a framework, I will examine each of these components while drawing attention to how SITI functions as a collaborative theatre company. In doing so, I will address SITI’s place in history, making comparisons with the ideas and methods of other companies and artists and explaining why SITI is one of the leading avant-garde theatre companies in the late 20th Century whose impact continues into the 21st.

Rationale for study

As of yet there is no comprehensive study of the SITI Company and its unique style of collaboration. The few previously published works focus on Anne Bogart rather than on the company she co-founded with Japanese director Tadashi Suzuki. This may be partially a result of the fact that two of the works, Eelka Lampe’s dissertation, Disruptions in Representation: The Directing Practices of Anne Bogart, and Dagne Olsberg’s dissertation, Freedom, Structure, Freedom: Anne Bogart’s Directing Philosophy, were both completed in 1994, a mere two years after the formation of the SITI Company.

Eelka Franziska Lampe’s dissertation, completed at The New York University, examines Anne Bogart’s directing practices in the context of feminist cultural theory. She positions Bogart as a female director engaged in feminist directing practice, which she defines as “a way of working which disrupts the patriarchal conventions of

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2 I have chosen to follow the Japanese tradition of placing the surname before an individual’s given name.
representation.”³ According to Lampe this disruption is visible in both Bogart’s creative process and the final theatrical product.

Lampe’s text focuses on Bogart and primarily examines her productions of *History, an American Dream* (1983), *1951—Les Traces* (1985-86), and *Danton’s Death* (1986), none of which are SITI productions. While Lampe highlights Bogart’s collaborative methods, the emphasis remains on Bogart and her role as director.

Lampe’s critical analysis of Bogart’s directing practices uses elements of Taoist philosophy and feminist theories on representation, looking at the influence of the fundamental principles of Tai Chi, a martial art which Bogart has practiced since 1974, to find a significant root from which Bogart’s directing style has grown. For Lampe, this root is based in “let[ting] go of the restrictive investments of the self so that one can be responsive to each moment.” She identifies in Bogart, “a mature artistic incorporation of a centered but egoless subjectivity [emphasis in the original] that allows for creative

leadership without authoritarianism.” Bogart’s practice of Tai Chi gives her an inner focus that allows her to guide the creative process without being the center of that process.

Finally, Lampe’s dissertation also covers Bogart’s professional career through 1993 as well as her educational background. She also looks at Bogart’s leadership qualities in the various stages of her career, including her brief tenure at the Trinity Repertory Company in Providence, Rhode Island, her collaboration with Tadashi Suzuki in co-founding the Saratoga International Theatre Institute in 1992, and lastly her appointment to co-head the Graduate Directing Program at Columbia University with Andre Serban.

Similarly, Dagne Olsberg’s dissertation, completed at Texas Tech University does not include much on the SITI Company, but it does expressly look at Bogart as a collaborative director by looking at her relationships with the actors in her company and makes little mention of the roles that designers, dramaturgs, and assistants play when creating a theatre production.

Olsberg examines the relationship that Anne Bogart has with her actors, primarily through her use of improvisation

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4 Lampe 15-16, 201.
as structured by the Viewpoints Training. She asserts that “the actors are given the freedom to create and contribute in a significant way to the development and shaping of the production...[while Bogart ensures] a mise en scène with a strong expression, seen with the audience’s and the director’s eye.” The emphasis of this dissertation is on the Viewpoints Training which she encountered firsthand during SITI’s 1993 summer workshop, and which she observed during the rehearsal process of *The Women* (1993-94).

As her title indicates, Olsberg asserts that Bogart’s directing style emphasizes freedom within structure, identifying a cycle within the rehearsal process. Olsberg finds that “the actors in the viewpoint improvisation experience the ultimate freedom by responding simultaneously in the moment. A similar kind of freedom is brought to the ‘setting’ of the scenes or choreography...Finally as the choreography has been learned and the actors have brought the choreography to life again, the actor, again, has freedom—freedom to interpret.”

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6 Olsberg 162.
Olsberg the freedom for which Bogart is known is grounded in the freedom that the Viewpoints Training develops in an ensemble.

Unlike these early dissertations, Kevin Saari’s dissertation, *The Work of Anne Bogart and the Saratoga International Theatre Institute: A New Model for Actor Training*, completed at The University of Kansas in 1999 focuses on Bogart’s relationship with her actors, especially through the dual emphasis training program which SITI has developed.

Saari’s focus is on the “Asian-Western theatre collaboration” and the application of the training system to production. Providing a comprehensive analysis of the Viewpoints Training and the Suzuki Method for Actor Training, Saari also explores how the two blend together and can be applied to “the works and production styles theorized by major anti-realistic playwrights and theorists,” namely Bertolt Brecht’s Epic Theatre and Antonin Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty.\(^7\)

Saari provides a summary of the background and theory of both Brecht and Artaud before relating them to the SITI training program. Relating the training program to the two

masters of modern theatre theory, Saari finds where they mesh and where they fail to fit together smoothly. He observes that, “while both techniques deal with Alienation and Gestus, in the broadest sense, Suzuki Training\textsuperscript{8} works most in the area of Alienation while Viewpoints most directly works in the area of Gestus.” The former trains the actor to create distance between the theatrical event and the audience while the latter provides the actors with the tools needed to harvest original physical material that can communicate iconically with the viewers.

A notable divergence between Brechtian theory and the SITI training lies in Brecht’s demand for didacticism in theatre. When looking at Artaud, Saari looks at how SITI’s work can create “the intense and transformative world of the Theatre of Cruelty” through emphasis on ensemble, rigorous physical training, and “a more spectacular, non-Realistic approach to production.” SITI’s work fails to line up, however, with Artaud’s search for “an authentic magical system [and] religious experience.” According to Saari, SITI’s training system is neutral with regard to

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\textsuperscript{8} Saari refers to it as the Suzuki Training. I use the term Suzuki Method since that is how SITI currently refers to that element of their training.
these Brechtian and Artaudian values, whereby their work can take on a political or magical emphasis, but does not inherently seek to create one.⁹

In addition to this, Saari provides chapters detailing Anne Bogart’s and Suzuki Tadashi’s backgrounds, their aesthetic and theoretical principles, and their co-founding of SITI. He also devotes a chapter each to the Viewpoints Training and the Suzuki Method before writing a chapter about how the two complement each other.

There are only two other major publications relating to the SITI Company. The first is Bogart’s book on directing, A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre, published in 2001. In this book, Bogart talks about the events that led her to directing and her quest for an American theatrical aesthetic, as well as seven ideas that shape her personal approach to directing. I will speak more about this book in Chapter Three when I address Bogart and her career specifically.

The second major publication with a connection to SITI is Anne Bogart: Viewpoints, a collection of papers from the Actors Theatre of Louisville’s 1995 Modern Masters symposium devoted to Bogart and her work. Contributors to

⁹ Saari 226, 275-276.
this text include Bogart herself, as well as, scholars, critics, and artists (primarily playwrights) who have collaborated with Bogart over the years. Once again, the emphasis is on Bogart as the director and not on the collaborative creative process that helps set the SITI Company apart from other theatre companies creating new works today. Again, this is perhaps a factor of the date of publication (1995), but also because the symposium from which these papers were drawn, focused on Bogart as a director of contemporary classics.

In addition to these larger works, there have been numerous publications—essays, articles, interviews, and production reviews—in most of the major theatre journals, magazines, and newspapers, including *The Drama Review*, *Performing Arts Journal*, and *American Theatre*. Among these, two stand out. One is on directing with the Viewpoints;\(^{10}\) the other is a debate on the current trends in actor-training between Bogart and her Columbia University colleague, Kristin Linklater.\(^{11}\)


Joan Herrington’s article “Directing with the Viewpoints” positions the Viewpoints as a directorial device used by several contemporary directors including Bogart; SITI member Leon Ingulsrud; ETW\textsuperscript{12} director Kevin Kuhlke; and director of actor-training at the American Repertory Theatre, Scott Zigler.

Of particular interest is the idea that Bogart and Ingulsrud both use a “rapid training approach” when working with non-SITI trained actors. At the onset of rehearsal Bogart and Ingulsrud will include a three-hour workshop on the Viewpoints, introducing everyone to the ideas and setting the stage for including the Viewpoints approach in subsequent rehearsals. In both cases, the workshop activities relate directly to the particular text being rehearsed, maximizing the creative potential for that production.\textsuperscript{13}

Herrington also discusses how the Viewpoints are being adapted and moved away from the Viewpoints as used by Bogart and the SITI Company. This is an inevitable outgrowth of the current popularity that the Viewpoints enjoy in academic theatre. One example is Kuhlke’s use of an open Viewpoints session as an improvisation that helps

\textsuperscript{12} The Experimental Theatre Wing of New York University.
\textsuperscript{13} Herrington, “Directing with the Viewpoints” 157-158.
establish individual character development, relationships between characters, and basic staging. For Kuhlke, this type of session helps his undergraduate students make connections between the interior life of the character and the physical performance thereof in both time and space.\textsuperscript{14}

The Bogart-Linklater debate arose from an article that Linklater wrote for \textit{American Theatre} bemoaning the fact that many acting students piecemeal their training, combining bits from multiple cultures and traditions, thereby diluting their craft and failing to recognize the value of their American heritage. In a subsequent issue of \textit{American Theatre}, Bogart responded with a letter to the editor. \textit{American Theatre} later took the discussion to a formal interview with both of them.

Linklater argues that American actor-training has deep roots in language dating back to the Greeks, significantly enhanced by Shakespeare, and finally reaching its current heights in the exploration of the human psyche, both emotion and intellect. While Linklater applauds the rise of the American Method (See Chapter Four for a discussion of the American Method and its origins), Bogart criticizes the

\textsuperscript{14} Herrington, “Directing with the Viewpoints” 155, 163-165.
“if I feel it, the audience feels it” approach as being narcissistic, nothing that it is appropriate for film and television, but terminal for live theatre.\textsuperscript{15}

The key difference between Bogart and Linklater is astutely observed by a question from the audience asking about how each relates to the audience. Bogart’s interest has always been in the creative role that the audience plays in any production. Indeed, one of SITI’s productions, \textit{Cabin Pressure}, was created in order to explore the relationship between the audience and the actor. Bogart’s approach is to create moments onstage that trigger different associations in each spectator, rather than to give the audience all the answers, ensuring that each viewer has the exact emotional experience.\textsuperscript{16}

Linklater, by contrast, unabashedly calls herself “really old-fashioned” in that she believes in \textit{catharsis},\textsuperscript{17} and actively seeks to create the emotional moments on stage that can trigger emotions in the viewers. She acknowledges

\textsuperscript{15}Bogart and Linklater 32-33.  
\textsuperscript{16}Bogart and Linklater 104.  
\textsuperscript{17}\textit{Catharsis} is the idea from Classical Greek theatre that audience members could be cleansed of negative emotions by watching actors portray emotionally charged scenes on stage.
that she primarily works with language-based plays that lend themselves to the emotional power that the voice can exert during performance.\textsuperscript{18}

These interviews, articles, and books are all about Bogart. Those that do mention SITI do so only as an outgrowth of Bogart, the director. While Bogart acknowledges that most companies in contemporary history only last about ten years, she quotes Copeau who said that companies begin at age ten, an idea that resonates with her.\textsuperscript{19} SITI is only now entering its second decade and it seems that a comprehensive work on the SITI Company and collaborative style is in order.

Collaboration is something of a problematic concept because it is difficult to define. While theatre is frequently called a collaborative art,\textsuperscript{20} the delineation of creative control and individual input varies greatly from company to company and often from production to production within any given group. Part of this difficulty in defining collaboration lies in the fact that a theatrical production is created from the combined efforts of a variety of artists which may include directors, designers, performers,

\textsuperscript{18} Bogart and Linklater 105.
\textsuperscript{19} Anne Bogart, talk at the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio, 16 March 2002.
\textsuperscript{20} Indeed, a textbook by Farley P. Richmond is titled \textit{Theatre—The Collaborative Art} (2000).
choreographers, and dramaturgs. Our culture tends to focus on the single artist as creator, de-emphasizing the collaborative process more or less implicit in all theatrical productions. Furthermore, human egos can intrude on the process, adding an additional variable to the creative process. Aside from the fact that defining the term is difficult, there is also the tendency of historians to follow the model that places emphasis on “great men”, rather than on the many individuals who surround and support the figures about whom history is traditionally written. Theatre is no different in this respect and with the historical rise of the single director and later the auteur, theatre historians have tended to focus on the director regardless of how collaboratively his/her company in fact may operate. Thus, even though a company may intend to function as a collective, writers often identify its work by the individual to whom directorial credit is given. These previous studies of Anne Bogart by Lampe, Olsberg, and Saari have each focused on this.

21 The auteur director is the director whose personal interpretation of a play or film is so strongly his/her own that it dominates the entire production, often overshadowing the playwright or screenwriter’s original. A contemporary example of such a production is Baz Luhrman’s (1962–) Romeo + Juliet (1996).
Methodology

My research focuses on the practical methods and pedagogical practices employed by the SITI Company in their actor-training programs and their own performance work. I discuss how they train others through workshops at their own base in Saratoga Springs, NY and in New York City, and through residencies at universities and theatres around the world.

My methodology falls into two main categories: published material and live performance/workshops. I have already reviewed the main published material as it focuses on Bogart and observed that it fails to examine SITI as a company, focusing instead on Bogart, the individual. This work attempts to address the lack of information on SITI the company, by examining the way their training systems build an ensemble and the way individual members of the company work together to create a production. Indeed the title of my dissertation does not have Bogart’s name in it, unlike the previously mentioned works.

An additional difficulty relating to the lack of published material also relates to the second category, namely live performance. Documenting performance, rehearsal processes, and workshops is acknowledged by theatre
scholars to be a difficult task. Alison Oddey, when addressing the nature of devised theatre (see Chapter Five for a discussion on this topic), observes that its “transient and ephemeral” quality is the root of the problem. This holds true for all live performance, not just devised theatre, including traditional theatre as well as dance. Unlike a traditional play that has a script offering a limited record of a production, a devised production usually lacks such a tangible, however feeble, documentation of the performance. While there is a growing trend to publish the text of devised productions after they open, these texts focus on the written word and fail to capture the performance experience which includes the movement, gestures, and sound all of which play key roles in devised work.22

Because of this lack, I look to the second category, live performance and workshops. I have been present as a spectator for several productions by the SITI Company. In addition to these performances, I have observed rehearsals for Score and observed archived video of Bob rehearsals. Furthermore, I have observed and participated in SITI workshops, where company members shared their unique actor-

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training with students and faculty at The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. I have also watched archived video of SITI workshops at Ohio State, and while video recordings are not the same as live observation or participation, they have nevertheless added to my understanding of both SITI’s actor-training and their rehearsal processes.

While I am using the terms *observation* and *participation*, my work should not be confused with anthropological participant observation research methods. In the classic example, based on Margaret Mead (1901-78) and her work in Polynesia, the anthropologist immerses him/herself in the culture under study as an outsider looking in, with an emphasis on observation. Recent trends have moved away from this model, emphasizing more subjective participation.23 I am not an anthropologist in either of these models. Instead, I am a practicing artist and scholar, who has over a ten year period, been trained in directing; stage movement techniques; and theatre

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history, literature, and criticism. I bring my practice as a theatre artist to this research, and allow it to inform my understanding of SITI's work.

Finally, in order to fully understand the significance of the SITI Company’s work it is important to understand the history of theatre actor-training and production emphasizing movement and to have a contemporary context for their work. SITI is not an isolated example; there are other companies who consider and practice ways of physicalizing the production. I have selected three examples of contemporary theatre companies (Wooster Group, Théâtre du Soleil, and Complicité) that share with SITI a physical approach to creating work. I have also selected three examples of actor-training methods (those used by Meyerhold, Decroux, and Grotowski) that emphasize the body. I stress the interconnectivity within theatre, finding similarity among these examples whether or not there is a direct link among the artists.

Work of this nature is important because little documentation exists on performance, actor-training, or the creative process. All too frequently these techniques are only transmitted to future generations via the studio from master teacher to student apprentice. This method is
subject to disruption and cannot provide an accurate record, since the teaching evolves as it passes through the generations. While written documentation is difficult to create and can never fully capture something that has to be experienced in the body, it does leave a record, an artifact, to which future generations can refer.

Overview

In Chapter Two, addressing the historical context, I situate SITI Company within the 20th Century tradition of avant-garde performance starting with how Asian performance traditions have affected influential European theatre practitioners in the early half of the century and concluding with a look at examples of theatre companies in the latter half of the century against whose work the SITI Company’s work can be compared. I chose Asian influences because of SITI’s own emphasis on international collaboration, a collaboration that started with Bogart and Suzuki. For the first part, I have chosen to look at Antonin Artaud (1895 – 1948), Bertolt Brecht (1898 – 1956), and Jacques Copeau (1879 – 1949), three individuals whose ideas have deeply affected nearly all subsequent theatre artists, including SITI and its founders. The second half of this chapter looks at Théâtre du Soleil (1963/64–), the
Wooster Group (1980- ), and Complicité (1983 - ), each noted for their collaborative creative process. Though no two examples within this group share a common approach to crafting a production, I will make comparisons showing the similarities among companies working in a less hierarchical manner than found in the traditional directorial approach.

Chapter Three addresses the origin and history of the company, including biographic information on the SITI Company’s founders, Anne Bogart (1951- ) and Suzuki Tadashi (1939- ). This chapter diverges slightly from the framing device of the company’s mission statement, though the very founding of the company included elements of international collaboration between artists in the United States and Japan, a connection that is exemplified by the dual training for which SITI is well know. While some might find it contradictory to single out Bogart and Suzuki in a dissertation that focuses on a company-based process, it is their vision and their ideas on acting, actor-training, and the creative process that has given rise to SITI and its artistic success.

In Chapter Four, I address the regimen with which the company members train and that they teach both in their summer institute and through workshops in New York City and
in masterclasses at universities around the country. I will first provide a context for body-focused actor-training, looking at the methods and techniques of Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874 – 1940), Etienne Decroux (1898 – 1991), and Jerzy Grotowski (1933–99). Each of these is regarded as a master whose work has influenced actor-training around the world. Following this discussion of other noted teachers who emphasized developing the actor’s body, I will then detail the basics of both Bogart’s Viewpoints and Suzuki’s Method, making connections between SITI’s work and the training methods and ideas of Decroux, Grotowski, and Meyerhold. I will also address a key idea in both the Viewpoints Training and Suzuki Method, listening, using it as a way of understanding not only the training, but also the way that the SITI works in the rehearsal room.

Finally, in Chapter Five I discuss SITI’s collaborative creative process using three original works and one previously published play as primary examples. In the first case, I will look at Bob (1988), Room (2000), and Score (2002), three original one-actor plays commissioned by the Wexner Center for the Arts at The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. Each of these plays treats the life and ideas of a single 20th Century artist, Robert
Wilson (1941 - ), Virginia Woolf (1882 - 1941), and Leonard Bernstein (1918-90) respectively, and not only demonstrates the effectiveness of the company’s training, but also represents international collaboration. In addition to this trio of plays, I am including Death and the Ploughman (2004), while not an original work, a production that also exemplifies the collaborative nature of SITI’s creative process.

In my conclusion I summarize my main points, showing that while the SITI Company is a unique example of contemporary avant-garde theatre, its work and methods has much in common with other noted artists, both historical and current. While SITI is only in its second decade, I contend that it is one of the leading avant-garde theatre companies not only in the United States, but also in the world. Between the success of their artistic work and their highly sought Viewpoints Training and Suzuki Method, I argue that the SITI Company will have a lasting impact on theatre in the 21st Century.
CHAPTER 2

A PLACE IN HISTORY

As part of the 20th Century avant-garde performance tradition, the SITI Company can be situated within two broader historical contexts. While there are undoubtedly multiple ways of historicizing the SITI Company I have chosen to look for examples from both the start and the end of the 20th Century. In doing so, I hope to place SITI at the center of a web of interconnections across national and generational boundaries. I have made this choice in keeping with SITI’s mission statement as a framework for examining their place in theatre history, in this case, the international connection.

Before developing this argument, I must address the notion of the avant-garde, and particularly my juxtaposition of the word tradition therewith. The term avant-garde comes from the French, referring to the
military’s “advance guard” in an expedition,¹ and was first used in connection with the arts in 1825 by Henri de Saint-Simon (1760 – 1825), one of the founders of the field of sociology. As such, the term, avant-garde, refers to those arts that are at the forefront of their field, breaking new artistic ground. Furthermore, the avant-garde not only challenges previous artistic ideas and trends, but also questions cultural and social norms. Avant-garde performance also redefines the relationship between the audience and the performance, thus altering the way the spectators view the world around them.

For some, linking the avant-garde with tradition is a misnomer; the cutting edge cannot simultaneously be traditional. At the start of the 21st Century, however, there is a rich history within both Europe and the United States of theatre described by critics and historians as avant-garde. Indeed, Arnold Aronson decrees the avant-garde dead in his book American Avant-garde Theatre: A History, asserting that the Wooster Group is the last avant-garde theatre company.² Aronson, however, sets up a narrow definition of the avant-garde with which some critics and

¹ Critics and historians have also used the equivalent English military term, vanguard, though I will use the more prevalent avant-garde.
historians disagree. For many *avant-garde* is synonymous with *experimental*, emphasizing the idea of innovation and exploration. I fall into the latter category and point to the SITI Company as a contemporary example of a theatre company whose work has been influenced by decades of artists who were/are a part of the avant-garde and whose own work discovers new ways of making theatre.

Looking to the third component of SITI’s work—international collaboration, I find the first historical context for their work addressing the early 20th Century precedent of Asian theatrical styles influencing Western theatre practitioners following the introduction of Asian theatre and dance into Europe. In this dissertation, I will focus on Bali/Artaud, China/Brecht, and Japan/Copeau. While limiting my historical background to Artaud, Brecht, and Copeau does not account for the many other instances of Asian performance traditions inspiring European theatre practitioners, these individuals have had the most significant impact on modern theatre and especially movement theatre.

The second historical context (perhaps an outgrowth of this early interaction) is the development of a highly collaborative theatre that challenges not only the primacy
of the text, but also of the primacy of the director in traditional theatre. In this section, I will focus on three contemporary companies which share these two central characteristics: Théâtre du Soleil, the Wooster Group, and Complicité. These companies are representative of three different countries (France, the United States, and the United Kingdom respectively), and of roughly three different decades (60s, 70s, and 80s respectively), which I hope provides not only a sense of the international nature of the avant-garde, but also how this type of work has endured and expanded over the latter half of the 20th Century.

Before defining collaborative theatre, I should first explain the role of the text and director in traditional theatre. In traditional theatre, the director and his/her directorial concept (or vision) guides the entire production. It is a system with a strict hierarchy with the director at the top; the designers use their expertise to create a physical world for the play that communicates the director’s ideas. The director’s interpretation of the text is the only one that is permitted. The entire rehearsal period is spent teaching the actors the blocking that the director has created, the play’s meaning as
determined by the director, and the basic motivations and character objectives that will tell the story the way the director wants it told.

I use the term collaborative theatre to refer to theatre companies whose creative process(es) rejects the notion of the director as the principle creator in a production and instead taps the talents and strengths of all members of the company. The artistic vision of the production may originate with a single member of the company, but the development and creation thereof is the result of the input from, and even direction by, all members of the company, including actor(s), designers, stage manager(s), playwright(s), as well as someone who, in assuming the title of director may be responsible for the final shape of the production, but who during the creation process is usually merely the first among equals. While all theatre is collaborative by definition, my use of this term refers to a theatre where the traditional hierarchies are diminished if present at all. Within collaborative theatre there is collective agreement that the individual designated “director” will be an arbiter, exerting his/her
“authority” when there is disagreement that does not become resolved in the course of the creative process (See Chapter Five for a further discussion of collaborative theatre).

**Asian influence on European artists**

Before discussing the specific Asian influences on the works of Artaud, Brecht, and Copeau, I want to first address the issue of the East-West dichotomy. The primary source that I am using for this section is Leonard Cabell Pronko’s *Theater East and West: Perspectives Toward a Total Theater*. Published in 1967, this work predates scholarship examining how European and American institutions have manufactured images of the East as an exotic other based on the paternalistic outlook of 19th and 20th Century colonialism. Edward W. Said’s seminal work, *Orientalism*, provides a framework for such discourse by coining the term Orientalism and providing a history of the subject. While Said sets forth multiple definitions of Orientalism, the central characteristic is the study of an Orient created by Europe and America representing and replicating their power over the Orient. Subsequent to Said’s work, there has been greater attention paid to terminology that does not

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reinforce dynamics rooted in colonialism which was not a concern when Pronko wrote his book. I have tried wherever possible to use contemporary academic terms such as Asia, Asian rather than East, Eastern, and Oriental.

**Balinese dance-theatre and Antonin Artaud**

One of the most important figures in the development of modern theatre, French theorist, Antonin Artaud (1895 – 1948) was inspired and influenced by the dance drama of Bali. Pronko, observes that while Artaud had developed an interest in Asian theatre, having been declared an Orientomane some years prior to his encounter with Balinese dancers at the Colonial Exposition of 1931, it was this moment in 1931 that provided the impetus for the essays he wrote between 1931 and 1937 which were later collected into the book that we now know as *The Theater and its Double*. These essays envisioned a theatre different from the one common in his day, especially emphasizing the experiential and the spiritual aspects of performance.

While Artaud’s essays “Metaphysics and the *Mise en Scène*”, “On the Balinese Theatre”, and “Oriental and

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5 While Artaud is most often thought of as a theorist, he was also a poet, playwright, actor, and director.

6 Bali, part of Indonesia, is an island approximately 5,632 square kilometers (2,175 square miles) between Java and Lombok, around eight degrees south of the equator. The overwhelming majority of the population living on this tropical paradise is Hindu.

7 Pronko 7-9.
Occidental Theatre” specifically draw upon Balinese dance-theatre, all of his essays in The Theater and its Double include references to and ideas inspired by his encounters with Balinese performance.

One of the key ideas on which Artaud focused was the blurring of the religious and the secular. Pronko writes that:

in Bali it is utterly impossible to separate religious life from profane; everything one does, whether it is work or play, whether it gives pain or pleasure, is related to the gods and indeed performed for the gods. To dance in Bali is to dance for the gods: to delight them, to show them one’s joy at being a Balinese, at having been given the lovely island as a home—or, in times of disease or disaster, to seek the beneficence of the gods.”

Simple every-day actions have religious meaning, making it difficult to separate ritual from everyday action, because even everyday actions are acts of worship. While performance has become a part of the tourist industry and thus lost some of its original ceremonial significance, the

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8 Pronko 11.
performers are still engaged in acts of worship because that is a part of who the Balinese people are and how they interweave the spiritual and temporal worlds.

This commingling of the everyday with the spiritual is most profoundly visible in the trance states that Balinese dancers achieve. In a trance state, the Balinese performer is possessed by the part; the god or demon represented is in fact dancing through the performer. While in a state of trance, small children are capable of performing complicated dance steps without ever having received dance training.\(^9\)

One of the most frequently cited examples of trance on display in Balinese dance-theatre is the Barong play. This play, using all the forms of Balinese dance-theatre (refined, rough, and masked dances, clownish interludes, spoken and sung dialogue, and gamelan\(^{10}\) accompaniment), tells the story of 11\(^{th}\) Century Javanese king Erlangga and his struggle with the evil witch Rangda. The climax of the play occurs when Barong, a good monster, attempts to kill Rangda. As Rangda gets the upper hand in the battle, human

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\(^9\) Pronko 13.

\(^{10}\) Gamelan is a type of Indonesian orchestra which includes sets of tuned bronze gongs, gong-chimes, metallophones, drums, one or more flute, bowed and plucked string instruments, and occasionally singers. In some villages bronze is replaced by iron, wood, or bamboo.
assistants rush forth with kris knives\textsuperscript{11} and attack Rangda as well. Her power is so great that the knives are unable to penetrate her magic cloth. Furthermore, through her magic, she causes the men to turn the kris knives on themselves. The Barong uses its powers to prevent the men from being hurt as the dancers, in a trance state, attempt to stab and slice themselves with real knives that have no effect. A priest and attendants stand by ready to take the knives from the dancers and to bring them out of the trance should something go wrong.\textsuperscript{12}

The trance state was of particular interest to Artaud. Pronko writes:

Such a submerged state of being is immensely important in understanding Artaud’s reaction to Balinese dance…. Through the dancer, who has become a kind of medium at the same time he (sic) is an artist, we the audience are put into contact, however dimly, with some experience beyond that of our everyday physical world. We are somehow brought into touch with what Artaud would call an absolute. And this, precisely, is the function of the theatre….”\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{11} A kris knife is an Indonesian dagger with a wavy blade, possessing ceremonial importance.
\textsuperscript{12} Pronko 23.
\textsuperscript{13} Pronko 13-14.
Observing Balinese dancers physically expressing that which transcends the mundane and the temporal led Artaud to call for a theatre that could do the same, that could communicate something spiritual, universal. For Artaud, “...these cosmic themes have found their way into the very bodies of the dancers, and become through them what Artaud calls thoughts in a pure state.”¹⁴ This pure state, this absolute was Artaud’s Holy Grail as he sought a transcendent experience not based in intellectual thought or reasoning that could affect any spectator.

Artaud’s ideas were revolutionary because European culture reaching back to its Hellenic roots has been logos-centric, stressing the word and specifically the written word. This heritage has given primacy to the thoughts over the emotions and mind over body. From his experience with the Balinese dance-theatre, Artaud envisioned a theatre that utilized a theatrical vocabulary that appealed to the entire range of human senses rather than a vocabulary of words appealing primarily to the intellect. This theatrical vocabulary placed an emphasis on movements/gestures and sounds that evoke spiritual and emotional meaning, the use of props and scenery that operated organically and

¹⁴ Pronko 14.
symbolically within the production, and an overall concept for the production crafted not by the playwright, but rather by the director, or, as will occur in later companies, by the ensemble.

**Peking opera and Bertolt Brecht**

Brief encounters with Peking opera had an influence on another of the most significant figures in modern theatre, German theorist and playwright, Bertolt Brecht (1898 – 1956). While Pronko suggests that Brecht’s interaction with, and understanding of Peking opera may not be as substantial and nuanced as Artaud’s was with Balinese dance-theatre, nevertheless, Brecht pointed to the Peking opera and the acting therein as exemplars of the acting theory he was developing. Regardless of how well Brecht understood what he saw, seeing Peking opera affected his subsequent theorizing.

Brecht’s earliest contacts with Peking opera, suggested by references in his poetry, may have been through books and articles on the subject. The first verifiable contact was with *The Chalk Circle*, directed by Max Reinhardt (1873 – 1943) in 1924. The 14th Century text was freely adapted by Viennese poet Klabund (1890 – 1928), who was greatly interested in Chinese history, language,
and culture. This production marks a turning point in how European artists and audiences looked at Chinese theatre. While Europe had had a fascination with China and its theatre since the 1700s, this fascination was simplistic and often misconceived, focusing on China as an exotic “other”. From 1924 onward, thanks to better scholarship and to increased interaction with Chinese performers–most notably Mei Lan-fang\(^{15}\) (1894 – 1961), a highly celebrated performer of female characters in Peking opera–European artists, including Brecht began to better understand Asian theatre.\(^{16}\)

While in Moscow in the spring of 1935, Brecht had the opportunity not only to see Lan-fang’s troupe, but also to see Lan-fang perform informally at a party. This led to Brecht’s first use of the word *Verfremdungseffekt*, often translated “alienation effect” or “strange-making effect,” in an essay “Verfremdungseffekte\(^{17}\) in Chinese Acting,” written in 1936. In a penciled margin-note Brecht directly attributes Lan-fang’s performance as the inspiration for

\(^{15}\) There are numerous ways that his name is written in English. I have chosen the one used by Willett in *Brecht on Theatre* (1964), placing the hyphen between the second and third parts of his name. 

\(^{16}\) Pronko 36-43.

\(^{17}\) Since the translation varies by author, I will stick with the equally familiar German.

The purpose of the Verfremdungseffekt is to make the familiar appear strange, thus calling into question one’s underlying associations about the action. 

Brecht admires the Chinese actor for his ability to keep distance between himself, his character, and the spectator, creating a performance that is conscious of its performative and artistic nature. Pronko suggests that Brecht’s understanding of Peking opera comes from his unfamiliarity with Chinese stage conventions, causing him to focus on the external qualities of the performance rather than connecting on the emotional level in the way that a native spectator would. The Chinese music which many early European critics described as “cacophony and din” matched with “the shrill whining voices of the singers” fails to appreciate the lyricism and deep emotion that a Chinese audience hears in the same performance. Instead for Brecht, the music breaks the illusion onstage, creating the distance that he sought between the audience and the performance. Brecht envisioned using music in performance not as a seductive device to enhance the emotional response in the way a score is used in Hollywood movies, but rather

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19 Pronko 44.
20 Pronko 57.
as a technique to prevent identification with the
characters on an emotional level. Indeed, Brecht sought to
create a dialectic between the music and the text.

Brecht himself relates an incident at one of Lan-
fang’s performances, where, while watching Lan-fang portray
the death of a girl, a spectator sitting beside Brecht
exclaimed aloud at the moment. Reacting as though a real
death occurred on stage might be appropriate at a European
production, but Brecht called it “unspeakably ridiculous”
for Peking opera and a “misfire” by the Verfremdungseffekt
because, in Brecht’s mind, the actor’s intent was not to
create a realistic portrayal. Pronko notes that this
misfiring must occur often for Chinese audiences who react
quite emotionally to, what is for them, the sad scenes in
Peking opera.\footnote{Pronko 57.} In fact, Peking opera can be compared to
melodrama, one of the very forms against which Brecht
reacted.

While Brecht may not have been the most educated of
audience members watching Peking opera, imposing and
justifying his own theories after observing Chinese acting
styles, his notion of the \textit{Gestus} has a better connection to
the use of the stylized movements found in Peking Opera.
Gestus for Brecht was a gesture that clearly and stylistically expresses a particular human social interaction; it stands out so clearly during the performance that it can be “quoted” by audience members the next day in the same way that a melody can be hummed after seeing a musical performance. This type of stylized expressive movement is similar to “the highly stylized, carefully controlled…movement of any part of the body [that] reveals character, situation, and some specific action, usually in symbolic terms,” founding Peking Opera.  

While this type of action in the Peking Opera acts as a shorthand for a larger movement that cannot easily be enacted on stage, for Brecht, Gestus is a shorthand for all the complex thoughts, feelings, and socio-political circumstances leading up to the action.

For Brecht music, movement, and gesture can all be used to remind the viewer that s/he is watching a performance with a message that needs to be considered on multiple levels, including intellectually. These devices played an important role in the development of a movement—

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22 A well-known example is the actor carrying a whip to indicate riding on horseback, the dismount symbolized by handing the whip to a servant (Pronko 44).
23 Pronko 44, 59; Brecht 198-200.
based theatre where text and gesture, word and dance work together (or as a dialectic) in the course of a performance.

**Japanese Noh theatre and Jacques Copeau**

Jacques Copeau (1879 – 1949), French actor, director, and producer, one of the most important figures in the history and development of movement theatre, was inspired by Japanese Noh theatre, despite never having seen a Noh performance; Copeau’s inspiration came instead from the study of Noh texts and theoretical works.24 Through his students and their students, Copeau’s work has directly led to the development of movement theatre. The short list of Copeau’s metaphorical descendants includes Etienne Decroux (1898 – 1991), Jean-Louis Barrault (1910-94), Copeau’s son-in-law Jean Dasté (1904-94), Marcel Marceau (1923- ), Jacques Lecoq (1921-99).25

Before going further, I should explain what I mean by movement theatre. The term movement theatre is a relatively new concept referring to current trends in the work of some theatre companies. When I refer to movement theatre, I am

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24 Pronko 89.
referring to theatre which draws from non-theatre sources such as modern and post-modern dance, mime, acrobatics/gymnastics, and martial arts in order to create a theatrical experience where the primary emphasis is no longer on the spoken text, but is shifted to or shared with the physical expression of the actor. The artists engaged in movement theatre think of themselves as theatre artists although they acknowledge the fact that they draw from other traditions. Movement theatre differs from dance theatre, where the artists view their work as dance that draws on theatre and other non-dance sources.

Copeau’s influence extends more broadly, as his ideas on production unity shaped the development of the role of the director. At a time when plays were still being guided by senior actors, Copeau saw the need for direction from outside of the performance in order to create powerful works that could affect an audience. The more prevalent arrangement saw a manager or an actor-manager providing minimal direction in the rehearsal process. Instead the star took center stage and expected the other actors to appropriately fill the stage around him/her.

In a 1924 interview in The Christian Science Monitor, Copeau asserted that “…the director must catch the spirit
of the drama’s basic unity and incorporate its rhythm into his (sic) work. There must be no failure of coordination anywhere.” His ideas of directing would have an impact on direction not only in France, but also the United States thanks to New York City’s interest in his work and his extensive lecturing throughout the States.²⁶

Seeing pictures of Noh stages in Arthur Waley’s book *The Noh Plays of Japan* (1922) confirmed Copeau’s belief in using a bare stage which had driven him to open his own theatre—the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier in Paris in 1913. The first thing Copeau did to the space was remove the footlights and the proscenium and add a forestage over the orchestra pit, creating a large bare stage and necessitating a different kind of acting that was capable of filling the space. Copeau found inspiration in the writings by Zeami Motokiyo (1363 – 1444), playwright, actor, theorist, and teacher of Noh.²⁷ Because he codified Noh performance through his writing, Zeami is often regarded as the founding father of Noh.

While two opposing concepts—monomane, translated as “imitation,” “truth,” or “realism,” and yūgen, translated as “what lies beneath the surface”—governed Zeami’s

²⁷ Leabhart 21-22.
teachings on acting, the subtlety of the latter was a greater influence on Copeau and his students. Pronko quotes Zeami as advising actors to “move your spirit 10/10, move your body 7/10” so that the spirit contributes more to the performance than the body, allowing the viewer to fill in the gaps him/herself between the fullness of the spirit and the brevity of the physical expression. For Zeami, an actor can reach a level of sublimity that needs no words where the performance is as much a spiritual event as it is an enacted one. The actor’s presence alone can affect the audience because his/her spirit is full. Pronko attributes this metaphysical goal and Noh’s search for beauty in form, rhythm, and music as the significant reasons that Western artists are drawn to Noh.28

Shortly after opening his theater, Copeau opened a school, believing that the only way to create the kind of drama that he envisioned, he would need to train his own actors. Seeking to save theatre from stagnation, Copeau sought a more total theatre, believing that “…a student-actor had to learn how to use, practically and objectively, the one medium of his (sic) art—himself (sic).”

28 Pronko 84-86, 87, 92.
Accordingly, Copeau began training physically, without speaking, layering in sound and meaning and text, only after first focusing on physical training.\textsuperscript{29}

Copeau’s School at the Vieux-Colombier, using Waley’s books, produced a Noh play, \textit{Kantan},\textsuperscript{30} in 1924 that had to be cancelled at the last minute due to an accident. In the rehearsal process, Copeau and his students\textsuperscript{31} found that the Noh appeared to be the application of the musical, dramatic, and plastic studies upon which, for three years, [they] had nourished [their] students, so much so that their various improvisations, the goal of these studies, was related in style to the Noh much more than any contemporary work.\textsuperscript{32}

In working on this play, Copeau discovered a kindred approach to performance. The strict demands of form, ensemble acting, use of masks, and corporeal acting of Noh drama resonated with Copeau’s own ideas on theatre.\textsuperscript{33} In her

\textsuperscript{29} Kurtz 38.
\textsuperscript{30} A well-known play attributed to Zeami (more likely written later), \textit{Kantan} tells the story of Rosei who leaves his village to seek his fortune. Falling asleep on a magic pillow while awaiting dinner in \textit{Kantan}, he dreams of his future. Having lived his entire life in a dream, upon awaking he concludes that “life is but a dream” and returns home (Pronko 90-1).
\textsuperscript{31} Copeau himself did not direct this play; instead Suzanne Bing (1939-52), one of his principal students led both the study of Noh and the production of this play (Pronko, 90).
\textsuperscript{32} Pronko 90, quoting from Copeau’s unpublished papers at the Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, Paris, France.
\textsuperscript{33} Leabhart 30.
notes on the acting style the company found while rehearsing Kantan, Bing notes that gestures [were] slow and solemn. A fine discretion, a fine control order[s] the expression, so that the simple gesture of a father posing his hand on the shoulder of his lost son gives enough intensity of emotion to bring tears to the eyes.  

Working on Kantan led Copeau’s students to find the tremendous communicative potential of a simple gesture.

While the production never received a public viewing, the rehearsal process was influential on the Vieux-Colombier and the actors and directors who studied under Copeau and led French theatre in subsequent decades, taking with them “lessons of restraint, control, meaningful movement, inner strength, concentration, and sacrifice which such a production can impart.” These ideas would shape nearly all movement-based theatre to follow.

Summary

While Artaud, Brecht, and Copeau each were exposed to Asian theatre from different countries, each was profoundly

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34 Pronko 92.
35 One of Copeau’s students, Etienne Decroux declared this production one of the most beautiful things he had seen and later when teaching at the Piccolo Teatro in Milan told his predecessor that he sought to make his students move like Japanese actors (Leabhart 30-1).
36 Pronko 92.
influenced by the experience and sought to reinvigorate European theatre by applying what they saw to their own work. While Copeau and Artaud may have more in common than they do with Brecht, all three sought to change the conventions in order to affect the audience more powerfully. The main idea formulated by this trio that has had an impact on theatre artists since can be summarized in the expression that Artaud coined: total theatre.

In total theatre, significant attention is paid to all the theatrical elements: text, scenery, lighting, sound, costuming, and especially the physical work of the actor. This reduces the emphasis on text and prompted subsequent generations of theatre practitioners to explore alternate means of creating performance. Their work and ideas have provided a foundation for avant-garde theatre artists in the 20th Century who sought to communicate in new ways with their audiences. Companies like Théâtre du Soleil, the Wooster Group, and Complicité would look to Artaud, Brecht, and Copeau for inspiration as they explored new relationships with their audiences.

These ideas were revolutionary in the early 20th Century in that they challenged the logo-centricity that underpins European civilization. Language, text, the
written word have held primacy since Aristotle, securing its supremacy within European culture with the advent of the printing press. Artaud, Brecht, and Copeau, while not eliminating the written word, brought their understanding of an Asian performance sensibility to European stages, changing the way artists would approach performance ever since. As other artists attempt to incorporate these ideas they will develop their own training methods, which, like their Asian counterparts, are traditionally passed on from master to apprentice in the studio, not in the textbook. Application of these theories and practices will continue in contemporary performance, including the work of the SITI Company.

Building on early foundations

The ideas of Artaud, Brecht, and Copeau all influenced contemporary examples of Western theatre companies seeking to create a more total theatre experience by elevating movement, sound, and spectacle to a level of importance equal (and in some cases superior) to that of the text. The three contemporary examples that I have chosen to include in this dissertation—Théâtre du Soleil, the Wooster Group, and Complicité were chosen because they represent three different countries and roughly three different decades.
Likewise they represent a major shift in the theatre-making of this century. Each is noted for their collaborative creative process, for their creation of new works, and for their use of movement as a co-equal communicative device as text.

In this section, I will provide a short history of each company, focusing on their origin. I will also use one production of each to demonstrate their respective styles and processes.

**Théâtre du Soleil**

In the 1950s there was a renewed interest in theatre among young French artists, a group of which founded ATEP (L’Association Théâtrale des Etudiants de Paris) in 1959 under the patronage of Roger Planchon (1931- ). Included in this group was Ariane Mnouchkine (1939- ) who, along with other members of ATEP, would later found Théâtre du Soleil. In *Genghis Khan*, ATEP’s second production, mounted in 1961, we can see the beginnings of a style that would later become synonymous with Théâtre du Soleil. Elements in *Genghis Khan*, directed by Mnouchkine, that later are seen

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37 Planchon was one of the most celebrated French directors who emerged in the 60s. Influenced by Brecht, and borrowing from filmic techniques, Planchon’s controversial, but innovative productions won him a significant following in France. In the early 1970s, as part of a national reorganization of the French theatre system, the French government elevated the status of Planchon’s company by giving it the title Théâtre National Populaire.
as signatures of Théâtre du Soleil include “a study of a political figure who is presented ambivalently,” “extensive use of oriental spectacle and color in the staging,” a large space, and a large cast.\(^\text{38}\)

In late 1963/early 1964\(^\text{39}\) Mnouchkine and nine other “idealistic young students”\(^\text{40}\) without much theatrical experience or formal training at any of the French theatre schools, founded Le Théâtre du Soleil, Société Coopérative Ouvrière de Production (The Theatre of the Sun, workers’ production cooperative).\(^\text{41}\) The company was named after the sun in honor of filmmakers like Max Ophüls, Jean Renoir, and George Cukor whose work the company associated with “light, generosity, and pleasure.”\(^\text{42}\)

While Théâtre du Soleil’s first production, Les Petits Bourgeois (1964), could be described as a more naturalistic production than their subsequent works,\(^\text{43}\) upon which their

\(\text{38}\) Adrian Kiernander, Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil. (Cambridge University Press, 1993) 45-6.

\(\text{39}\) Dates for the company’s inception vary by source.


\(\text{41}\) Founding members include: physical trainer Georges Donzenac, actor Myrrha Donzenac, photographer Martine Franck (1938- ), actor Gérard Hardy, actor Philippe Léonard (1940-2001), director Ariane Mnouchkine, designer Roberto Moscoco (1943- ), actor/administrator Jean-Claude Penchenat, actor Jean-Pierre Tailhade, and costume designer Françoise Tournafond (Appendix in Williams 224).

\(\text{42}\) Kiernander 47, 49; Williams xvi.

\(\text{43}\) The company looked to Konstantin Stanislavski’s (1863-1938) writings as a source for their acting style (Kiernander 47).
reputation has been made, the production did mark the start of the company’s exploration of the creative process, particularly that of the director’s role in production. “...For Mnouchkine it marked a move away from the autocratic model of the director towards a way of working which was much more communal,” where the rehearsal period is extended, allowing the actors time to develop their roles without having to rely on directorial choices because of time constraints. Length of rehearsal became key for the company, enabling it to develop a non-hierarchical creative process.44

In the company’s second production, Le Capitaine Fracasse (1965), we begin to see stylistic choices that have become associated with Théâtre du Soleil. The production was an adaptation by founding company member Philippe Léotard of a popular French novel by Théophile Gautier (1811-72). The novel features a 16th Century troupe of itinerant French actors, a topic which allowed Théâtre du Soleil to explore improvisation and commedia dell’arte.45 As Adrian Kiernander says,

at a time when most mainstream theatre was still performed in a style not far removed from naturalism,

44 Kiernander 48.
45 Kiernander 48-9.
the world of the itinerant troupe gave an opportunity to explore and present a historical theatre style which freed the company from the constraints of probability and verisimilitude. This integration of more exuberant and explicitly theatrical performance styles is perhaps the greatest breakthrough that Fracasse offered Mnouchkine.  

Working on a production that explored an explicitly physical performance genre enabled Théâtre du Soleil to move beyond the limitations imposed by a text and to find a physical voice that has become a signature of the company’s work.

Before continuing with the development of Théâtre du Soleil’s creative style, let me provide a brief explanation of commedia dell’arte. The earliest references to commedia dell’arte date back to the mid 1500s; by the start of the next century, itinerate commedia troupes were popular primarily in Italy and France, but were also successful everywhere they played in Europe. The two principle characteristics of commedia dell’arte are the use of stock characters, or basic character types usually dominated by a single motivation, and improvisation around a basic plot

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46 Kiernander 50.
rather than a written script. An example of one of the *commedia dell’arte* stock characters is Capitano, a loud boisterous braggart who extols his prowess not only in love, but also in battle and who over the course of the performance is proven to be a lonely insecure coward. *Commedia dell’arte* is most generally known for comedies that focused on love and intrigue, featured disguises and characters working at cross-purposes, and relied heavily on physicality, particularly physical humor.

With their third production—*La Cuisine* (1967)—Philippe Léotard’s adaptation of Arnold Wesker’s (1932–) *The Kitchen*, not only does Théâtre du Soleil begin to experience success but they also begin to develop their unique rehearsal style. Attributed to the limited finances of the company, requiring some company members to have day-jobs, they rehearsed *La Cuisine* over 18 months. This lengthy rehearsal period allowed the actors to undertake a detailed study of the characters and their lifestyles.47 Around this investigation of character and context, the company would start without the text, improvising exercises around the lives of the characters, their backgrounds, and their daily

47 Kiernander 51-2.
routines, and only gradually allowing the play and the casting to coalesce around these improvisations.\textsuperscript{48} This process of research and improvisation as part of rehearsal prior to casting and collaboration within a “collective company of equals”\textsuperscript{49} would become a signature method of the Théâtre du Soleil’s work.

Wesker’s play demonstrates both the organization and structure of a dehumanizing workplace. Set in a kitchen, Act I builds up to the lunch rush and Act II builds up to the dinner rush. Théâtre du Soleil’s production of \textit{La Cuisine} used no food, instead using mime and choreography to create the world of the play, where the kitchen staff works long and hard hours without the thanks or appreciation of the owners.

It was also during the rehearsal process for \textit{La Cuisine} that Mnouchkine studied under Jacques Lecoq. With financial support from her father, well-known film producer Alexandre Mnouchkine\textsuperscript{50} (1908–93), she spent her days at the École Jacques Lecoq and her evenings trying out her lessons on her company. Lecoq’s influence,\textsuperscript{51} with his emphasis on bodily awareness and physically expressing emotion, is

\textsuperscript{48} Kiernander 52.  
\textsuperscript{49} Kiernander 4.  
\textsuperscript{50} Sometimes credited as Alexander Mnouchkine or Aleksandr Mnushkin (Internet Movie Database: \url{http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0594891/}).  
\textsuperscript{51} See the section on Complicité for more on Lecoq and his training.
clearly seen in Mnouchkine’s own emphasis of the physical as the primary mode of communication onstage as well as the company’s recurring references to non-literary forms such as commedia dell’arte, the circus, and masks (all material studied at the Ècole Jacques Lecoq).\footnote{Kiernander 52.}

With more than twenty productions, including some films, residing in a performance space nearly as well-known as the company itself,\footnote{When working on 1789 in 1970, the company was given a former cartridge factory in the Bois de Vincennes as a temporary rehearsal space. After difficulty securing a performance space, the company decided to perform where they had rehearsed. While the hangars at the Cartoucherie suited the production’s spatial needs, the decision was risky given the isolation of the area. Despite the public’s initial skepticism, the opening of 1789 “transform[ed] the Cartoucherie instantly into a well-known Paris theatre venue and...brought Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil to the attention of the international theatre community” (Kiernander 75-6).} and an international touring schedule, the Théâtre du Soleil is acclaimed by both scholars and critics and the general theatre-going public. Known for their celebrated productions of Shakespeare and classic Greek tragedy\footnote{Including Le Songe d’un Nuit d’Été (A Midsummer Night’s Dream), 1968; La Nuit des rois (Twelfth Night), 1982; Richard II, 1981; Henry IV, 1984; and Les Atrides (a quartet made up of Euripides’ Iphigénie à Aulis, 1990; Aeschylus’ Agamemnon, 1990; Les Choéphores, 1991; and Les Eumenides, 1992.} as well as original creations by the company, Théâtre du Soleil has positioned itself through its work and its process as one of the leading avant-garde theatre companies in the 20th Century.
The Wooster Group

I chose the Wooster Group for the United States example in this section because it is one of the most prominent companies started in the experimental heyday of the 60s and 70s that is still creating new work and touring internationally. Artists such as Julian Beck (1925-85) and Judith Malina (1926- ), Joseph Chaikin (1935 – 2003), and Richard Schechner (1934- ) sought alternatives to commercial theatre, founding their own companies, the Living Theatre, the Open Theatre, and the Performance Group, respectively. Of these experiments, only the Wooster Group is still alive under its original organization and collaborative working process.55

The origins of the Wooster Group lie in Richard Schechner’s Performance Group founded in 1967 as an experimental company exploring environmental theatre, non-traditional performance, and the creative process.56 The Performance Group’s production of Dionysus in 69 (1968)57

57 Loosely based on the Bacchae by Euripides, most of the lines were improvised by the actors who sought to create openness with their emotions and each other; nudity was used as a device to increase vulnerability. The production reached a peak with a group physicalization of Dionysus’ birth onstage. Performers interacted with
first attracted Elizabeth LeCompte (1944–) and Spalding Gray (1941–2004) to the company, LeCompte as an assistant director and Gray as an actor. LeCompte thought she would only be with Schechner’s company for the production of Commune (1970), but ended up staying on and found herself in charge of the company when Schechner went to India in 1971.\(^{58}\)

In working with Schechner, LeCompte and Gray began to develop their own ideas on performance and by the late 1970s the Performance Group was already splintering, resulting in the production of Sakonnet Point (1975) by the individuals who would continue as the Wooster Group after the dissolution of the Performance Group.\(^{59}\) Over the course of the 70s LeCompte and Gray slowly acquired new members and by Schechner’s final departure in 1980 a new company was created from the ashes of the old, using the name under which the Performing Group was officially incorporated—the Wooster Group, taken from the street in SoHo where their rehearsal/performing space—the Performing Garage—is located. Both Gray and LeCompte credit their time with spectators, seated on scaffolding rising over the open performance space, who were encouraged to join the performance (Greene 118).\(^{56}\) Savran, 1988 2; Greene 118.

\(^{59}\) Founding members of the Wooster Group include: designer and technical director Jim Clayburgh, actor Willem Dafoe (1955–), actor Spalding Gray, director Elizabeth LeCompte, actor Peyton Smith, designer and actor Kate Valk, and actor Ron Vawter (1948–94).
Schechner as a formative period in their artistic development, LeCompte attributing “his use of disparate texts and acting styles and his development of work through improvisation” as influential on her own creative process. 

In choosing an example of their work to demonstrate their creative process, I decided to look at Sakonnet Point because it was the company’s first production as the Wooster Group. Sakonnet Point provides a classic example of the company’s highly collaborative approach to creating new works. The Wooster Group avoids attributing any narrative or thematic meaning to this production, urging audiences to make their own associations. Nevertheless, the production is semi-autobiographical, based on Spalding Gray’s boyhood experiences at the ocean-side town in southern Rhode Island where he spent his summers, leading audiences to interpret the production as about lost childhood.

The origin of the Sakonnet Point demonstrates the company’s collaborative approach to creation. Gray states in an interview with Savran that “…the spark was simply being in the room, as a group, the ones that wanted to work

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60 Savran, 1988 3-5.
together.” Togetherness in one space, with the objects found in that space would become the point of origin for nearly all of their subsequent works.

In creating Sakonnet Point, the company, through warm-ups and improvisations, generated material on which LeCompte at first simply took notes. Gray began by bringing in objects that he found, many of which he found in a dumpster. Gray would “perform silent associative actions” with the props. Likewise records were brought in by various company members. As other company members joined in LeCompte observed and later structured the material generated by the company, acting as an editor and organizer.

This approach leads LeCompte to refer to herself as a scavenger, picking up whatever is lying around, using whatever the actors give her. Her preference is for taking the first thing an actor does and using that, trusting that first impulses are usually the better choices. The resulting work “underscores the autonomy of individual production elements” asking the spectator to make his/her own connections, to find the narrative based not on a pre-existing text, but on his/her ability to create a context.

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61 Savran, 1988 57.
63 Savran, 1988 57-59.
for the work based on personal history and insights. Thus, while there are autobiographical undertones to the work, based on Gray’s life, they are not readily apparent, nor necessary to understand the production.  

From this production on, The Wooster Group would refine this process and continue to use it as the basic creative principle upon which all subsequent work is founded. Classic texts have become a standard part of their work, but only in bits and pieces, where the emphasis still remains on “interweav[ing] and often violently juxtapos[ing] dissimilar visual, verbal, gestural, and musical texts.”  

Twenty years after its inception, with nearly as many productions, the Wooster Group has garnered acclaim as a strong example of avant-garde theatre both by critics and audiences.  

Complicité

Simon McBurney (1958–), Annabel Arden, and Marcello Magni, all fellow classmates at the Lecoq School in Paris, joined up to form a collective devising company in 1983, naming it Theatre de Complicité; it would later be renamed

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64 Savran, 1988 62, 64, 66.
Complicité in 2002. The company describes itself as “a constantly evolving ensemble of performers and collaborators” with McBurney, who became the artistic director in 1992, at its center. While company membership has been fluid since its creation, most of them have studied at the Lecoq School, giving them all a common vocabulary.  

Since their success at the 1985 Edinburgh Festival with More Bigger Snacks Now, Complicité has gone on tour with nearly 30 productions to more than 41 countries, garnering more than 25 major international awards. As a company they are known not only for devised works (Mnemonic, 1999), but also for literary adaptations (The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol, 1994, based on the novel Pig Earth by John Berger), and reinterpretations of classic texts (Brecht’s The Caucasian Chalk Circle, 1997 and Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure, 2004). In addition to the traditional theatrical media, Complicité has also ventured into radio productions (Mnemonic and To The

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68 A devised work is a theatre performance that is created by the company. For more information on what devising is, see Chapter Five.
Wedding, 1997 an adaptation of Berger’s The Wedding) as well as a multimedia installation in a tube station (The Vertical Line, 1999).  

Drawing on the commedia dell’arte tradition, Complicité’s work has a strong emphasis on improvisation accenting the physical and the comic. The approach to all of their projects involves collaboration in a lengthy rehearsal process with production concepts that focus on creating a total theatre where image, movement, music, text are integrated and supported, “seeking what is most alive” to “create surprising, disruptive theatre.” McBurney refers to their process as a “series of extraordinary and intricate collisions” with actors, who bring their own personal lives into the process; with music from around the world; with writers and playwrights; and with “fragments of stories and memories, some [dating] as far back as 5,000 years to the ice man.” Their ensemble-driven process takes

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the raw stuff that makes up their daily existence, mixes it together with various theatrical elements, and creates a performance.\textsuperscript{70}

In addition to their creative work, Complicité company members teach workshops that include physical training, neutral mask,\textsuperscript{71} ensemble creation, clowning, improvisation, and text-based work. Complicité holds a bi-annual Open Workshop geared at professional actors and theatre students. In addition to the Open Workshops, Complicité also offers lecture demonstrations, post-show talks, workshops and residencies at theatres and universities around the world in conjunction with their touring productions. Complicité maintains that their training is inherently linked to their creative process, enabling them to grow as an ensemble.\textsuperscript{72}

Before discussing their creative process, a few words need to be said about Jacques Lecoq (1921-99), founder of the school at which most of the Complicité members, as well

\textsuperscript{70} Andrew Solway, “Theatre de Complicité,” The Continuum Companion to Twentieth Century Theatre (London: Continuum, 2002) 757; Lacey 304; Complicité website \url{http://www.complicite.org/about/}; Murray 97.

\textsuperscript{71} The neutral mask is the first mask that Lecoq uses when teaching his students. It is neutral in that the mask is a full mask (covering the entire face) with no animate expression and no mouth. It is used to train the actor to communicate with his/her body and diminish the reliance on facial expression onstage.

as many members of Théâtre du Soleil, trained.\textsuperscript{73} Lecoq himself studied with Jean Dasté (1904-94), Copeau’s son-in-law, at the Comédiens de Grenoble. After two years of study there and one year teaching in Paris, Lecoq taught for eight years in Italy. There he discovered Greek tragedy and commedia dell’arte, both of which significantly influenced his teaching. After his stay in Italy, Lecoq moved back to France and established his school in 1956, which he ran until his death in 1999.\textsuperscript{74}

Lecoq’s pedagogy was indebted to both Copeau and Artaud. From Copeau, Lecoq was inspired by the use of masks, commedia dell’arte, Greek tragedy, a focus on movement and play; he took from Artaud “…a commitment to a dynamic visual theatre where movement and physicality are the primary motivators of dramatic expression.”\textsuperscript{75} Another signature of Lecoq’s training was the use of masks, neutral, expressive, or commedia, and even the clown’s red nose. While the other two are intended for performance, the neutral mask is a training mask only, used to encourage “…students to find a pure economy of movement…uncluttered

\textsuperscript{73} I choose to discuss Lecoq here, rather than in the section on Théâtre du Soleil because Complicité’s work is more overtly beholden to the Lecoq training, and almost a pre-requisite for working with the company.

\textsuperscript{74} Leabhart 88-90.

\textsuperscript{75} Murray 32.
by extraneous social patterns or habits....” The neutral mask also promotes a sensual, rather than intellectual, exploration of the world.\textsuperscript{76}

The shared background in Lecoq training allows Complicité to accomplish a great deal in shorter periods of time than would be necessary if the company did not share a common vocabulary. The company devised \textit{Light} (2000) in a little less than two months from the beginning of the process to opening night, however Complicité rarely considers a work to be finished. Refining and editing continues after a production opens. For McBurney, this represents a creative philosophy that emphasizes working vertically rather than horizontally. Companies that choose to work vertically create fewer pieces, focusing on nurturing each work from beginning to end, giving each production the time to grow and mature. McBurney contrasts this with companies that are always looking to their next project, leaving the current one incomplete after reviews appear in the papers. Complicité’s style includes continued work even after their productions open.\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{76} Murray 31-32, 73; Leabhart 91.
Rehearsal for *Light* began with discussion of Torgny Lindgren’s novel by the same name; a starting point, a disembodied voice speaking in the darkness; an adaptation of the novel by Matthew Broughton that divides the novel into four working parts; and a few drawings by McBurney. With this opening, the company played an improvisatory exercise that explored status and helped them select and work with ten significant moments from the first chapter.\(^{78}\)

Improvisations, games, and exercises are a key component of Complicité’s devising process. Ball games are a recurring type of game that serves to energize the company members and to build the ensemble. These types of games also serve to condition the actors, preparing them for the intensity of their physical work, both in the process and later in performance. Other exercises aim to find a rhythm, a movement quality, and a production style.\(^{79}\)

As visual images accumulated, both generated in rehearsal and found outside of rehearsal, the company created an increasingly more stimulating work environment. Collaborators brought in puppets and sounds as the actors

\(^{78}\) Canny 85-86.  
\(^{79}\) Canny 87-88, 90.
worked on characters and their relationships. The company also worked with a composer who taught the actors some songs aimed at finding a unified voice for the show.\textsuperscript{80}

At the start of the second month of rehearsal, the company sat down again to discuss the novel and discovered that there was little agreement on the text as it was being translated from the page into spoken words. They realized that much work still needed to be done and intensified their efforts. A day spent with the author reinvigorated the process. Two weeks before the production opened, everyone began to tightly focus on the text in an effort to cut the production down from its 3 hour, 25 minute run time. At this point, the company also watched the video of an early rehearsal so that they could reconnect with their early thoughts and ideas.\textsuperscript{81}

After an intense week of 13 hour long technical rehearsals, the production opened but felt like “a first rehearsal of the piece as a whole, the starting point for [their] understanding of the dynamic that...needed sharpening.” After the first few performances, McBurney

\textsuperscript{80} Canny 90–91, 96.
\textsuperscript{81} Canny 96–98.
pushed the production’s style towards the expressionistic, using these early performances to determine what needs clarification.\textsuperscript{82}

**Summary**

While each of these companies operates differently, there are some key commonalities among them in their approach to work. They are all noted for de-emphasizing text in favor of a stronger sensorial experience based on movement and other theatrical elements, often incorporating technology such as light, sound, projections and televisions in their work.

While each has an individual who serves as the director, the creation of their work relies on the entire company providing input, creating text and movement, and working on the design elements. As a result, the directors of these companies often serve as an editor, rather than the sole artist responsible for the production. The rehearsal techniques and processes that they use to arrive at a collaboratively created project vary, though they all usually require more than the minimal three-week rehearsal period found in traditional theatre. They also typically continue the revision and editing process after the

\textsuperscript{82} Canny 100-101.
production has opened, occasionally tweaking the play throughout its entire run. These are elements that will also appear in the process employed by the SITI Company.

Two of these companies have a direct lineage back to Copeau though the Lecoq School. The Wooster Group is the outlier here which is not surprising since Lecoq’s training has only recently crossed the Atlantic and was not a part of the American theatre world in the 70s when the Wooster Group got its start. As a consequence, it is Théâtre du Soleil and Complicité who both emphasize training as a part of their creative process.

Finally, these companies value education as an integral part of their company. This is especially true for Complicité which emphasizes training new artists not only for its own sake, but also for the connection between ongoing training and the creation of new work.
Before discussing the training system and the company’s creative process, it is important to look at SITI’s origin, and more importantly at its founders. Accordingly, I am deviating slightly from the organizational structure offered by the SITI mission statement—creating new work, training young theatre artists, and international collaboration—in order to look at Anne Bogart and Suzuki Tadashi, their respective backgrounds and their ideas, though Bogart and Suzuki’s joint effort is a prime example of international collaboration. This chapter will offer brief biographies, focusing as much as possible on the seminal events in their creative lives, will present a few of the highlights of artistic philosophies as expressed in the books they have
published, and will address how they came together to create SITI, concluding with a survey of SITI’s creative work and early history.

Anne Bogart

Biographical information

Anne Bogart was born into a Navy family in 1951, and looked to theatre as a means of adjusting to the constant relocation. As a young teenager Bogart got her first taste of directing when she was asked to fill in for the faculty director who became ill. Her experiences on this production of Eugène Ionesco’s (1912-94) Bald Soprano would solidify her desire to pursue a directing career in theatre.¹

Bogart was introduced to postmodern dance while studying at Bard College, the fourth and last undergraduate institution in her educational history. At Bard Bogart studied with postmodern choreographer, Aileen Passloff under whose tutelege she gained a sensitivity to movement. Passloff’s composition classes so inspired Bogart that she would later refer to her directing as composition. This

¹ Saari 32.
initiation into the dance world would be developed further while teaching in New York and ultimately result in her version of Viewpoints.²

After graduating from Bard College in 1974, Bogart continued to work with Via Theatre, a student-created theatre company dedicated to the practical study of Jerzy Grotowski’s work and method. Upon its dissolution after a troubled international tour, Bogart moved to New York City, advice her teachers had given her before graduation.³

In New York, Bogart directed wherever she could, churches, streets, rooftops, store windows, her own three-story brownstone. After applying to and being rejected from graduate programs in directing, Bogart was admitted by Richard Schechner (1934- )⁴ to the masters program at New York University. The program in Theatre History and Criticism at the time focused on an anthropological and sociological approach to theatre, leading to its current

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² Lampe 26; Saari 32.
³ Anne Bogart, Wexner Center for the Arts, 23 April 2004.
⁴ Richard Schechner is a contemporary director, critic, and academic. Editor and founder of TDR, he is also widely known for founding and leading the Performance Group for over ten years, which became the Wooster Group after his departure.
incarnation as Performance Studies. While in school Bogart, like many other young theatre artists, supported herself through a variety of odd jobs.\(^5\)

In 1979, because her experimental work had been attracting increased attention, Susan Flakes, the founder of Experimental Theatre Wing (ETW), an innovative undergraduate theatre program at New York University, asked her to teach directing. Bogart met and worked with Mary Overlie, choreographer and founder of the Six Viewpoints (space, time, shape, movement, story/image, emotion), while teaching at NYU. Bogart claims that “the Viewpoints blew [her] mind.” They collaborated on shows together, working in each others’ studios and rehearsals. Influenced by Overlie’s choreographic technique, Bogart adapted Overlie’s Six Viewpoints for her own directing work, developing a unique approach to training and working with actors. Bogart expanded Overlie’s six into nine (tempo, duration, kinesthetic response, repetition, shape, gesture, architecture, spatial relationship, and topography).\(^6\)

Since their time together tensions have developed between Overlie and Bogart. Overlie has become frustrated with Bogart’s success, as she has had to respond to queries

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\(^5\) Bogart, Wexner Center, 2004; Saari 34.
\(^6\) Bogart, Wexner Center, 2004; Saari 35-36.
as to when she studied with Bogart. These tensions have left their relationship strained, though they are still in contact. Bogart admits to being a scavenger, but also concedes that Overlie considers Bogart’s work a bastardization of her own. Bogart has made overtures in the past including offering to change the name. Bogart is currently seeking a creative solution to the situation, hoping to heal what she refers to as “an open wound.”

Bogart left the ETW in 1986 and accepted a tenured teaching position at the University of California, San Diego in 1987. While teaching in San Diego, Bogart met Karen June Sanchez and Tom Nelis, both of whom had studied with Suzuki and who would later become founding members of SITI.

Leading a company of her own was a long-held dream, ever since a conversation with Ariane Mnouchkine where Bogart asked Mnouchkine why she only worked with her own company. Mnouchkine replied,

Well you cannot do anything without a company. Don’t get me wrong, companies are difficult. People leave

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8 Saari 36.
and break your heart and the hardships are constant, but what are you going to accomplish without a company?

Mnouchkine’s reply made Bogart stop and realize that every performance she had ever seen and admired was created by a company.  

Bogart’s dream would be temporarily realized in 1989 when she left the University of California to serve as Artistic Director of Trinity Repertory Company in Providence, Rhode Island. Her tenure there was short when she resigned over a budget dispute. Bogart claims that this experience taught her that you cannot take over someone else’s company, but rather have to start your own. In 1991 she became president of Theatre Communications Group, an advocacy group for not-for-profit American theatres, and served there for two successful years.  

In 1993, Bogart joined the faculty at Columbia University as an associate professor and directing program advisor, co-heading the Graduate Directing Program with Andrei Serban. Bogart currently continues in this position.

Since beginning her career as a director, Bogart has worked with several noteworthy contemporary playwrights

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10 Bogart, A Director Prepares 16; Saari 36-37.

A highly respected and recognized artist, Bogart is the recipient of numerous awards including:

- Bellagio/Rockefeller Grant (2004),
- Eliot Norton Award for outstanding direction (2003),
- Distinguished Chancellorship Award from Louisiana State University (2002),
- Regent’s Fellowship at the University of California, Davis (2002),
- Guggenheim Fellowship (2000-01),
- Obie Award (1988 and 1990),
- New York Dance and Performance Award (1984),
- Villager Award (1980),
- National Endowment for the Arts Artistic Associate Grant (1986-87), and
- Bard College Kellog Award (2001).

In 1995, Actors Theatre of Louisville named her a “Modern Master” at its 10th annual Classics in Context Festival. As a result of her acclaim and reputation, Bogart is the

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11 Columbia University website: http://63.151.45.66/index.cfm?fuseaction=theatre_div.viewMemberDetails
subject of books, articles, and courses in college and university curricula around the country. Her own thoughts on directing are published in *A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre* (2001).

**Bogart on the page**

While Bogart has written essays and given numerous interviews, she only has one book to her credit. *A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre*, addresses the seven issues or “consistent problems” that she repeatedly faces as a director. These seven—memory, violence, eroticism, terror, stereotype, embarrassment, and resistance—form the structure of her book, with a chapter devoted to each. Through careful and considered study of these “problems,” Bogart’s own theatre practice has changed; “these problems became [her] allies.”\(^{12}\) At the insistence of her friend Jon Jory (1938–),\(^ {13}\) Bogart shares her insights on these allies in a published text. In the next few pages, I will highlight a few points from two of

\(^{12}\) Bogart, *A Director Prepares* 2.

\(^{13}\) Jon Jory, professor of acting and directing at the University of Washington School of Drama, was the producing director of the Actor’s Theatre of Louisville from 1969 – 2000, where he founded the Humana Festival of New American Plays in 1979, the site of several SITI Company premieres.
those chapters—memory and resistance—that I feel particularly resonate with the explorations undertaken by the SITI Company.

In the chapter on memory, Bogart states that “if the theatre were a verb, it would be ‘to remember.’” From there, she relates a story about a friend, actor Wendy Vanden Heuvel, who participated in Grotowski’s research at the University of California at Irvine. Vanden Heuvel found the lengthy days of intense work physically exhausting. With much frustration, she finally found a reservoir of energy that came from “familiar codes of sound and movement deeply rooted in her Jewish culture.” Not being Jewish herself, Bogart began asking questions of herself:

Confronted with the same sleepless nights and physical exhaustion, how would I have moved? What are my codes? What would my body remember?...What is culture? Where does theatre in the United States come from? Upon whose shoulders are we standing? What informs my artistic sensibilities? What is the role of memory?

14 Bogart, A Director Prepares 22.
15 Bogart, A Director Prepares 23.
16 Bogart, A Director Prepares 23.
These questions led Bogart to research her place in history, to gain an understanding of where her theatre—American theatre—has its origin and development.17

Bogart easily found recent artists and companies whose work influenced hers, including the Living Theater, the Open Theater, the Manhattan Theater Project, the Performance Group, the Bread and Puppet Theater, the dancers of the Judson Church, and individuals such as Robert Wilson (1941- ), Richard Foreman (1937- ), and Meredith Monk (1942- ), but was stymied when she attempted to find connections to earlier artists such as Eva La Gallienne (1899 – 1992), Hallie Flannagan (1889 – 1969), Orson Welles (1915-85), and Clifford Odets (1906-63). She attributes this break to “a cataclysmic event” from 1949-52, the McCarthy Era.18 “Through a brutally effective mechanism, artists were directed to disengage from issues facing the real world.”19 Bogart challenges the idea that

17 Bogart, A Director Prepares 22-23.
18 Referring to the period in United States history when Joseph McCarthy (1908-57), Republican Senator from Wisconsin, led government witch-hunts, attempting to ferret out and remove communists and homosexuals from Washington, D.C. and other locales of power and influence. The scope of his efforts was immense, shaking up all branches of the government, Wall Street, Broadway, and Hollywood. Many artists and intellectuals chose to leave the country for Europe; those left-leaning artists who remained saw their careers ended.
19 Bogart, A Director Prepares 25.
“art and politics don’t mix” citing contemporary examples of successful and highly acclaimed artists whose plays take on social and political issues.  

The rest of the chapter follows Bogart’s attempt to find American ideals and to find a reason why our theatre eschews the political. Starting with the first play produced in the colonies in 1665—Ye Bare and Ye Cubb—which when brought up on charges of blasphemy was ruled not blasphemous because it was entertaining, Bogart follows the development of performance in the United States. In her search for an American theatre identity, she looks to vaudeville as a particularly American tradition.

Bogart goes on to point out that at the point in time when film became the dominant form of popular entertainment, young theatre artists encountered the ideas of Konstantin Stanislavski (1863 – 1938). Their adaptation, or “miniaturization” as Bogart calls it, of Stanislavski’s system was ideally suited to acting on film, “but in the theatre created an unfortunate stranglehold of emotional indulgence” (see Chapter Four for additional information on Stanislavski). In finding her own artistry, Bogart is exploring “approaches to acting for the stage that combine

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20 Bogart, A Director Prepares 24-26.
21 Bogart, A Director Prepares 36.
vaudeville, operetta, Martha Graham, and postmodern
dance,” looking to these authentic American performance
developments for inspiration.

In the chapter on resistance, Bogart talks about her early days in New York City when no theatre was willing to take on a “young untested woman director.” This resistance led her to produce as well as direct her own plays, creating dozens of plays with actors who shared a passion for creating and were willing to do so without much if any pay. Bogart cites these experiences staging plays in atypical spaces such as rooftops, store-front windows, basements, and clubs as when she learned to use architecture as set design and how to work with a wide variety of people each with his/her own idiosyncrasies.

When starting a new project in these formative years as a director, Bogart would bring together everyone working on the production for a brainstorming session, which she called “lateral thinking.” In these sessions they would dream up “elaborate plans and wonderful imagery” that would be impossible to realize given “the constraints of a nonexistent budget and severely condensed rehearsal times.”

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22 Bogart, A Director Prepares 39.
23 Bogart, A Director Prepares 30–39.
24 Bogart, A Director Prepares 138.
These limitations forced creative solutions which resulted in productions filled with “presence and energy.”\(^{26}\) Bogart found that once she had production budgets and design and technical support, she needed to beware of things coming too easily. “If there are not enough obstacles in a given process, the result can lack rigor and depth.”\(^{27}\)

Bogart further elaborates, observing that when one is challenged, the natural inclination is to stop. Instead, she encourages theatre practitioners to continue and rather than releasing the emotions that arise from the confrontation, to contain and concentrate them for controlled release later. While this example seems particularly directed at performers, Bogart notes that working on a production requires individuals to work together which will invariably result in conflicts. By concentrating the personal emotions that arise, the individual is able to express an opinion “backed by this concentration of thought and feeling,” creating a supportive artistic environment.\(^{28}\)

Towards the end of this chapter, Bogart relates a story that I have heard her share in one of her talks at

\(^{26}\) Bogart, A Director Prepares 141-142.
\(^{27}\) Bogart, A Director Prepares 142.
\(^{28}\) Bogart, A Director Prepares 143-145.
Ohio State. She tells of how she once heard a young director repeatedly ask an actor if he was comfortable. After awhile, Bogart turned to the director and asked if the point of rehearsal was comfort. Bogart asserts that a director’s task is to put obstacles in an actor’s path. A good director “set[s] up purposeful resistances...because differing perspectives serve to clarify the work....”\(^{29}\) This notion of resistance is evident in SITI’s most recent production, *Death and the Ploughman*, and will be discussed in Chapter Five.

**Suzuki Tadashi**

**Biographical information**

In order to better understand the other side of the SITI training, it is useful to look at the creator of the Suzuki Method and SITI co-founder, Suzuki Tadashi. The third child of a timber merchant, Suzuki was born in 1939 in the small port town of Shimizu, just under Mount Fuji in Shizuoka Prefecture\(^{30}\) on the Pacific side of Japan’s main island Honshu. Suzuki grew up in an old-style Japanese house where sliding paper-screens were all that separated him from siblings, parents, and grandparents. He left his

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\(^{29}\) Bogart, *A Director Prepares* 151.

\(^{30}\) Japan is divided into 47 prefectures, geographically defined political subdivisions.
rural childhood early, moving into a boarding house in Tokyo so that he could attend junior high school there in order to improve his chances at getting into a good university.\textsuperscript{31}

In 1958, Suzuki was admitted to Waseda University to study political science and economics. In his first year there, Suzuki joined the Waseda Free Stage Drama Society, the most prominent student theatre group in Japan. In the late 50s, the Waseda Free Stage Drama Society had as many as 150 members and presented its work to 5,000 spectators a year. While the company pursued a socialist agenda, both onstage and by protesting on the streets, Suzuki shied away from this artistically and politically. His frustrations with social realism\textsuperscript{32} and with the company’s lack of a training system led him to abandon acting and pursue directing instead. After directing three productions (The Anniversary, a Chekhov farce; a double bill by fellow student Betsuyaku Minoru (1937–), A Vacancy and Hokuro Sausages; and Miller’s Death of a Salesman) with the Waseda Free Stage Drama Society, the ideological disagreements


\textsuperscript{32} Social realism is a term used to describe the artistic movement that glorified the working class. Especially appreciated in communist countries, social realism portrayed the worker’s actions in a heroic, larger than life manner.
proved to be a deal-breaker and led Suzuki and Betsuyaku to present their own work in rented venues as the Waseda Free Stage Company. From 1961-64, they produced Chekhov’s *Three Sisters*, *A and B and a Certain Woman* by Betsuyaku, Sartre’s *The Flies*, Betsuyaku’s *The Elephant*, and Williams’ *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Their success particularly with *A and B and a Certain Woman* provided the opportunity for them to create the Waseda Little Theatre in their own space.\(^{33}\)

The struggling artists frequently hung out at the local university coffee shop, the Mon Cheri, the owner of which offered to build them a studio theatre over his shop if they paid for the construction. The company members took up part-time jobs and raised the money quickly due to Japan’s rapid economic growth in the 60s. In 1966, in what Gotoh Yukihiro described as “a typical ‘poor theatre’ in the Grotowskian sense,” the Waseda Little Theatre premiered Betsuyaku’s *The Little Match Girl*.\(^{34}\)

The move to the Waseda Little Theatre proved a significant starting point for Suzuki. Suzuki not only began exploring ensemble physical acting which would eventually lead to the Suzuki Method, but he also began working with a process that combines multiple texts in a

\(^{33}\) Carruthers and Yasunari 8-13.  
\(^{34}\) Carruthers and Yasunari 13-15.
single production, a style for which he later achieved international acclaim. Betsuyaka’s success with The Little Match Girl brought him numerous commissions, leading him to break with Suzuki. The loss of his playwright and a move towards the exploration of an actor-devised process led Suzuki to Kabuki texts which give actors significant room for individual choice in performance. These explorations would lead to the development of a process of collage where various source texts and improvisations by the actors are given a context and logic by Suzuki.⁴⁵

Suzuki credits the physical parameters of the theatre above the coffee shop, parameters which put the actor in very close proximity with the audience, with shaping his theatrical vision from that point onward. It is also within this period of his work that the physical training which would later become the Suzuki Method had its beginning. Suzuki increasingly saw the need for a proscribed training system that enables the actor to objectify his/her body, allowing him/her to perform the complex open-ended stories that Suzuki sought and adapted.⁴⁶

The production that marks the pinnacle of this period of Suzuki’s work is On the Dramatic Passions II (1970), a

⁴⁵ Carruthers and Yasunari 14-16.
⁴⁶ Carruthers and Yasunari 15-16, 23.
production that brought Suzuki to the attention of theatre practitioners around the world. Like its predecessor, On the Dramatic Passions I (1969), this production allowed the actors to individually select scenes and text that suited the acting issues on which they were personally working. These separate fragments, primarily drawn from Kabuki literature, were linked by the central character performed by Shiraishi Kayoko, a madwoman venting her frustration by performing bits of classic text. Carruthers writes that this context “enable[d] audiences to discover in [the original classic Japanese plays] echoes of Artaudian cruelty, the intense physicality of Grotowskian ‘poor theatre,’ and Beckettian values of indeterminacy.”

Critically lauded, the original four-week run was extended an additional three weeks before touring to Osaka and Kyoto and brought Suzuki an invitation by Jean-Louis Barrault to attend the Théâtre des Nations Festival in Paris in 1972. In Paris, Suzuki was called a “Japanese

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37 Carruthers and Yasunari 100.
38 The Theatre des Nations was an international festival created under the auspices of UNESCO in 1955, bringing several foreign companies to Paris. From 1955-65, A.M. Julien, manager of the Theatre Sarah-Bernhardt, organized the annual two-month festival with financial support from the State as well as from the local governments. Jean-Louis Barrault headed the festival from 1966-68 when it no longer received State funding. Since 1968 the festival has taken place sporadically in various cities around the world. During its heyday in Paris, the festival brought approximately 150 companies including groups such as the Berliner Ensemble, the Royal Shakespeare Company, and the Living Theatre.
Grotowski” and praised for creating a new Theatre of Cruelty, Kabuki-style, linking Suzuki’s work to that of Artaud who first espoused the Theatre of Cruelty. This success was based on two scenes performed by Shiraishi from On the Dramatic Passions II, the strength of which led to invitations to tour the production in 1973 at the Nancy International Theatre Festival, Barrault’s Récamier, the Mickery Theatre in Amsterdam, and in 1975 at Grotowski’s invitation to Wroclaw, Poland. Not only would this trip to Paris bring Suzuki international attention, it would also inspire him to seek a new home for his company, the motivation of which is discussed in the following section.39

1976 marked Suzuki’s first year in Toga, a small village in Toyama Prefecture on the Japan Sea side of Honshu.40 In addition to the company’s production of Night and Feast I, the inaugural performance also included a Toga village lion dance (shishimai) and a Noh performance with a full complement of musicians. Night and Feast I was so named in order to evoke the traditional sense of opening up one’s house by removing all the interior sliding screens and doors (shôji and fusuma) for a banquet or public meeting, stressing the communal nature of theatre

39 Carruthers and Yasunari 98-100.
40 The village of Toga has approximately 1,000 residents.
performance. *Night and Feast* I was a collage of scenes from *The Three Sisters, Waiting for Godot, The Trojan Women, The Bacchae*, and Oka Kiyoshi’s *The Soul of the Japanese*, the excerpts from the latter focusing on an Old Woman, a Transvestite Clown, and a Military Officer, their memories and fantasies.\(^{41}\)

By 1982 Suzuki opened two new theatres in Toga, including an outdoor amphitheatre and was ready to hold the First International Toga Theatre Festival. Up until this year, Suzuki’s work opened in Toga for a limited run before moving to Tokyo and international tours. Bringing an international A-list of avant-garde theatre to Toga, Suzuki’s festival not only included performance, but also lectures, and demonstrations. Participants included Robert Wilson (1941- ), Tadeusz Kantor (1915- ), Meredith Monk (1942- ), and JoAnne Akalaitis (1937- ) representing the foreign avant-garde, Terayama Shûgi (1935-83) and Ôta Shôgo representing the Japanese avant-garde, John Fox’s Welfare State International and the Toga village Lion dancers representing community theatre; Dasho Sithey and the Royal

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\(^{41}\) Carruthers and Yasunari 37-38, 40.
Mask Dancers of Bhutan, Suresh Awasthi, and K.N. Panikkar representing traditional Asian theatre; and Noh and Kyogen artists from the Kanze and Nomura families.42

Suzuki has been prolific not only as a director and teacher, but also as an arts advocate. In addition to directing, remounting, and touring multiple productions each year, Suzuki began offering a month-long actor training session in Toga in 1988, bringing students from around the world, many of whom were introduced to his work when he conducted workshops in the United States (University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee; Julliard School of New York; University of California, San Diego). These international training sessions were held under the auspices of the Japan Performing Arts Center, also founded by Suzuki in 1982.43

As a celebrated artist not only in Japan, but also internationally, Suzuki was appointed artistic director of the Mitsui Festival in Tokyo (1988), director of the Acting Company Mito in Mito City (1989-95), director of the Shizuoka Performing Arts Center in Shizuoka Prefecture (1995). He also founded the Shizioka Performing Arts Center International Spring Arts Festival (1999) and the Japan

42 Carruthers and Yasunari 47-48.
43 Carruthers and Yasunari 46-47.
Performing Arts Foundation along with the Toga Young Director’s Competition (2000) and co-founded the Saratoga International Theatre Institute (1992), the International Theatre Olympics (1993), the BeSeTO Theatre Festival (1994), and TheatreInterAction (1996), an organization devoted to providing support for regional theatre and education in Japan and Asia.44

**Suzuki on the page**

Unlike Bogart, Suzuki has written several books on theatre, only one of which has been translated into English—*The Way of Acting: The Theatre Writings of Tadashi Suzuki* (sic).45 This collection of essays (written from 1980-83) provides insight on the theatrical values held by Suzuki. The style and tone of the book matches that of the sixth chapter—“Undated Entries from my Diary”—giving the book a more personal feel than other similar texts. In addition to the previously mentioned chapter, *The Way of Acting* includes meditations on “The Grammar of the Feet,” “House and Family,” “Human Experience and the Group,” “The Toga Festival,” and “The Empty Village,” and also includes

44 Carruthers and Yasunari 54, 67; xxvi-xxvii, xxx-xxxiii.
Suzuki’s adaptation\textsuperscript{46} of the Orestes legend, Clytemnestra. As with my discussion of Bogart’s book, A Director Prepares, I will focus on a few specific themes that Suzuki raises in this text that I find particularly relevant when studying SITI and its work.

Before discussing the highlights from his book, I first want to mention an article Suzuki wrote for Zarrilli’s text, Acting (Re)Considered,\textsuperscript{47} entitled “Culture is the Body.” This article is significant because it is a much clearer articulation of Suzuki’s basic philosophy and approach towards training than I have found in any other source. As such, it is ideal for assignment in studio classes devoted to teaching the Suzuki Method.

In this article, Suzuki addresses his search for a method that will give actors a physically perceptive sensibility. He work began as a study of cultural differences in physicality and a desire to find the common properties that all humans share.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{46} Suzuki notes that the word “adaptation” is not the best description of his work. Instead, he uses the word “re-quoted” to explain how he used pieces from the various Greek plays that pertain to the House of Atreus, attempting “…to put together a new story of Orestes that follows none of them exactly” (Suzuki, The Way of Acting 121).


\textsuperscript{48} Suzuki, Tadashi, “Culture is the Body,” compiled and trans. Kazako Matsuoka, in Acting (Re)Considered, 163.
In doing so, Suzuki distinguishes between animal energy and non-animal energy. The former is the physical energy supplied by human beings or animals such as horses and cattle; the latter refers to electric or nuclear power. Noh theatre is a theatre completely devoted to animal energy, an energy which Suzuki claims is the key to finding a vital theatre. Suzuki’s goal is not to recreate Noh, but rather to use the basic underlying principles that are unique to Noh in order to create something that goes beyond contemporary theatre experience with its reliance on non-animal energy. This drive to reclaim animal energy for the actor leads to Suzuki’s particular training method.49

In this article, Suzuki goes on to address why the feet are so important to the work, particularly focusing on why stomping is the key component of his training. Since I will address this not only in the next paragraph, but also in the next chapter, I will not repeat the material, but stress the accessibility of the explanation in this essay. I do wish, however, to mention Suzuki’s inclusion of how stomping originates with ancient Japanese ritual.

Suzuki quotes Origuchi Shinobu’s “Six Lectures on the History of Traditional Japanese Performing Arts” which

49 Suzuki, “Culture is the Body” 164.
ments the Opening Ritual of the Heavenly Stone Wall in the Japanese creation myth as the origin of Kagura (the Sacred Dance). In the myth, the goddess (kami) of dance and music, Ameno-Uzumeno-Mikoto stomped on a wooden tub turned upside down, not to suppress evil spirits, but rather to arouse the spirit energy in order to use it to benefit humanity. More specifically, the Ameno-Uzumeno-Mikoto danced to coax the sun goddess Amaterasu-Omikami out of the cave in which she was hiding. This image of a primordial goddess stomping to draw power from the earth, indeed to awaken the very sun, is a powerfully evocative one that provides a positive way of looking at the extremely physically exhausting stomping in the Suzuki Method.

The first chapter in The Way of Acting, “The Grammar of the Feet,” is the most cogently written chapter and focuses on Suzuki’s acting philosophy. Suzuki begins his work from the ground up, as it were, starting at the feet. The way in which the feet are used is the basis of a stage performance. Even the movement of the arms and hands can only augment the feeling inherent in the body positions established by the feet. There are many cases in which the position of the feet determines

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50 Suzuki, “Culture Is the Body” 166-167.
even the strength and nuance of the actor’s voice. An actor can still perform without arms and hands, but to perform without feet would be inconceivable.51 For Suzuki, the feet are literally the base upon which the body rests and the foundation not only for movement but also for speaking. This attitude towards the feet drives all of the training in the Suzuki Method for Actor Training. Through a study of different ways in which a person can walk and stand, Suzuki developed training exercises that explore each of these, paying particular attention to how an actor can “…maintain the necessary physical equilibrium so that, without disrupting his [sic] control, he can vocally articulate the theatrical image he is striving for…”52 Since this chapter is mostly concerned with the “why” behind Suzuki’s training, I will not spend more time on it here, instead will incorporate these ideas in my discussion of the training in chapter four.

Chapters four and five relate why Suzuki chose to establish himself and his company in Toga and discuss some of the special considerations that life in Toga bring. Suzuki’s dream for his own space began when he visited Paris in order to participate in the international theatre

festival held at the Théâtre des Nations under Jean-Louis Barrault’s (1910-94) guidance. Suzuki and his colleagues in the Japanese delegation were assigned to work in Barrault’s own theatre, the Théâtre Récamier, an old converted townhouse. The simplicity of the performance space, small and cramped, still haunted by the former occupant’s sensibility, had a profound impact on Suzuki who left determined to find his own theatrical space in Japan. Without the high-tech trappings of a contemporary commercial theatre, Suzuki felt that the Récamier permitted no “predetermined response” from the audience and asked that all involved in attending a production—from director to actor, designer to stagehand, and especially including the spectators—to partake in a collective experience, “a shared time call[ing] for inspiration from all who participated....” The success of such a production is strictly based on everyone’s ability to engage in the performance without preconceptions as to what performance should be or look like, something aided by the unconventional nature of the performance space itself.\footnote{Suzuki, \textit{The Way of Acting} 69-71; Carruthers, “Rethinking Japanese Theatre” 28.}

Upon his return to Japan, Suzuki dreamed of finding a space with “a history of actual human use.” Given the
tendency towards low ceilings and narrow space between load-bearing pillars and walls, only three traditional Japanese architectural styles would lend themselves towards conversion to theatrical purpose: a castle, a Buddhist temple, or a mountain farmhouse. With the first two unattainable, Suzuki sought and eventually found a suitable farmhouse in Toga.\(^{54}\)

In contrast with Tokyo’s modernity, Suzuki’s use of a mountain farmhouse roots his work physically in the depths of Japanese history. The remote location adds another element that Suzuki could not find in a city such as the Tokyo-community. Because of space limitations in the densely populated cities of Japan, the theatre experience in Japan consists of arriving minutes before the performance, and in order to return home via public transportation with its strict schedules, leaving immediately after the performance. Suzuki laments the lack of opportunity for audience members to discuss the performance and its relationship to contemporary events as theatre audiences in the past could. By locating a theatre in Toga, such opportunity abounds since attending performances there from Tokyo requires a five-hour train

ride and an additional one-hour bus ride, requiring at least one overnight stay, with guests frequently staying in the local dormitories where they can interact with each other, the performers, and the natural environment in which the theatre is located. The experience at Toga is a communal one, where the audience brings something to the event.  

Chapter two, “House and Family”, discusses how the individual artist is connected to his/her artistic heritage and focuses on examples primarily from Kabuki and Noh. Chapter three, “Human Experience and the Group”, on the other hand relates more to the creation of a company and how a company can and should evolve over time if it wishes to survive its original founders. I find Suzuki’s thoughts on the subject particularly compelling as SITI and other similar companies mature. The question is no longer whether these companies have what it takes to survive, but rather, can these companies outlast the person or persons who had the will and determination to start the artistic endeavor. Directing these questions at SITI may be a bit premature since the company has just recently embarked on its second decade. Nevertheless such questions will arise inevitably.

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Theatre companies that work as an ensemble and have a means of bringing in new blood, are the companies that have the ability to survive the loss of their originators. In order to do so, they must have group experiences that “impress[es] such newcomers with the fact that the troupe operates as it does because of the vision that all its members possess in common....”\textsuperscript{56} Furthermore, new members must experientially understand that attempts to deviate from communally held values are a threat to the company and are thus unwelcome. This is not intended to limit the growth and development of the company, but rather to stress the company over the individual. For Suzuki, this will occur when a company works towards learning new means of expressing ideas, rather than the ideas themselves. These are techniques that can be learned by a group, and thus taught by a group.\textsuperscript{57}

In Suzuki’s case, we see this in the development of his training methods. The Suzuki Method does not center on the ideas of social revolution or the identity politics that some companies use as a unifying idea. Rather it is a physical training, focusing on a way of communicating, developing new ways to express any idea or ideology. It is

\textsuperscript{56} Suzuki, \textit{The Way of Acting} 59.

\textsuperscript{57} Suzuki, \textit{The Way of Acting} 62.
a means of working as a company that can be passed on to new members. In addition to SCOT (Suzuki Company of Toga, as his company had been renamed in 1984), SITI, with its dual training in Viewpoints and the Suzuki Method, is an example of a company that focuses more on a way of working than on the subject matter being worked upon. I find Suzuki’s ideas compelling, undoubtedly because as a director and educator, I value the ensemble and would hope that an acclaimed ensemble would have the means of sustaining and regenerating itself despite the loss of members. Unfortunately attempting to prove this theory is outside the scope of this dissertation and indeed the examples of companies chosen are all too young, with the founders and several of the original members still actively engaged in the company work.

**SITI Company**

**Origin**

In 1988 Suzuki Tadashi invited Anne Bogart to participate in and observe his summer Toga Festival. Four years later, in 1992, he approached her about co-founding a theatre company, telling her to choose the place because he would have other things to do in five years. They founded the Saratoga International Theatre Institute (now known
simply as the SITI Company) in Saratoga Springs, New York in order to “revitalize contemporary theatre in the United States through an emphasis on international cultural exchange and collaboration.” Bogart chose Saratoga because of its beauty, its location at the foot of the Adirondack Mountains, and the fact that while it is a quiet little town, it is only three hours away from New York City.\textsuperscript{58}

Various sources offer conflicting information about how their arrangement worked, but all are agreed that Suzuki would only stay with SITI the first few years before moving on to other projects. As part of the agreement, Bogart would direct annually at the Toga Festival and Suzuki would tour his productions to Saratoga immediately following the Festival. That first year, Suzuki directed a cast made up of both SITI and SCOT in his production of \textit{Dionysus} while Bogart directed Charles Mee’s adaptation of \textit{The Oresteia} called \textit{Orestes}. Both productions played at Suzuki’s Toga Festival and Saratoga Springs.\textsuperscript{59}

SITI’s origin is extraordinary in that Bogart cannot even explain why Suzuki picked her for this venture. She denies understanding Suzuki’s motives for creating the

\textsuperscript{58} Bogart, \textit{A Director Prepares} 16; Saari 37; SITI website: \url{http://www.siti.org/pages/history.htm}.

\textsuperscript{59} Carruthers and Yasunari 59; Saari 37; SITI website: \url{http://www.siti.org/pages/history.htm}. 
company with her, noting that “different people attribute
different motives [to Suzuki] based on their own
perceptions and feelings towards him.” She also
acknowledges that without Suzuki, SITI would never have
come into being. Through his courage, strength, and ability
to bring together financial resources, Suzuki enabled her
to put together her own company at a judicious time in her
career. A generation older than she is, she calls him her
“fairy godfather” because he made it happen.60

Bogart pulled together a group of twelve American
actors, of which only Ellen Lauren, Will Bond, Kelly
Maurer, and Tom Nelis remain. The original company members
trained with Suzuki in order to perform in his productions
as well as with Bogart. The current company includes Akiko
Aizawa, J. Ed Araiza, Will Bond, Susan Hightower, Leon
Ingulsrud, Ellen Lauren (associate artistic director),
Kelly Maurer, Jefferson Mays, Tom Nelis, Barney O’Hanlon,
and Stephen Webber. Originally designers were brought in,
but were not a part of the company. Today the designers,
Neil Patel, set; James Scheutte, costume; Mimi Jordan
Sherin, light; Darron West, sound, have their own
professional careers, but “…come back to SITI to make work

with the company as a way of flexing their muscles.”

The company also currently includes playwright Charles L. Mee, company stage manager Elizabeth Moreau, and managing director Megan Wanless Szalla.

In addition to the exchange of performances, workshops in both the Suzuki Method and in Viewpoints were given at both locations further increasing the international exchange between SITI and SCOT. After three years, earlier than originally planned, Suzuki withdrew altogether as co-director, leaving SITI in Bogart’s hands.

**Production history**

Since its inception in 1992, SITI has been involved in more than 25 productions which have appeared at theatres and festivals both within and outside of the United States. These productions include the following:

1992 *Dionysus* (with SCOT)  
Bernhard Theatre, Saratoga Springs, NY

*Orestes*  
Spa Little Theatre, Saratoga Springs, NY

1993 *The Medium*  
Toga Festival, Toga, Japan

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61 Bogart, *A Director Prepares* 17-18.
63 Carruthers and Yasunari 59.
64 There is some discrepancy among the sources as to where both *Dionysus* and *Orestes* opened and/or played. I am taking my listing from the SITI Company website.
65 Note that I am only listing where the production premiered, and not all subsequent performances.
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Year</th>
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<th>Location</th>
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<td>Waiting for Romeo (with SCOT)</td>
<td>Bernhard Theater, Saratoga Springs, NY</td>
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<td>1994</td>
<td>Small Lives/Big Dreams</td>
<td>Toga Festival, Toga, Japan</td>
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<td>The Adding Machine</td>
<td>Modern Masters Festival, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Louisville, KY</td>
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<td>1997</td>
<td>Going, Going, Gone</td>
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<td>Miss Julie</td>
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<td>1998</td>
<td>Culture of Desire</td>
<td>City Theatre, Pittsburgh, PA</td>
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<td>1998</td>
<td>Private Lives</td>
<td>Actors Theatre of Louisville, Louisville, KY</td>
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<td>Bob</td>
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In addition to touring both the East and West Coasts and some parts of middle America, many of these productions have toured cities around the world including Berlin, Bogota, Dublin, Edinburgh, Jerusalem, Paris, Prague, and Warsaw. SITI has an additional three productions in development including:

`systems/layers`
Reunion

Hotel Cassiopeia

With few exceptions, most of SITI’s work is original to the company, either written for the company or by the company. Only about one fifth of their productions are previously published texts. Around five productions are kept in repertory, available for booking. 66

In addition to their production work, SITI company members remain active teachers, not only at the summer institute at Skidmore College in Saratoga, but also in masterclasses and workshops at universities such as New York University, The Julliard School, Columbia University, The Ohio State University, Miami University, Utah State University, University of Minnesota, University of Louisville, Carnegie Mellon, University of Pittsburgh, Emory University, and University of California, Berkeley. Many members of the company are also on the faculty at institutions such as Julliard, Columbia, and New York University. 67

Since its inception, SITI has affected a shift in the way of thinking about the relationship between artists and

67 Score program.
institutions. In addition to the ongoing relationships with the previously mentioned universities, SITI also works with Wexner Center for the Arts, Walker Art Center, Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, Miami Light Project, Performing Arts Chicago, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Perseverance Theater, City Theatre in Pittsburgh, the Toga International Arts Festival, and Theatre Archa in the Czech Republic. A few of these relationships; most notably with Actor’s Theatre, City Theatre, and the Wexner Center; developed as Suzuki’s involvement with the company diminished and proved to be instrumental in SITI’s development and success. I will briefly discuss the Wexner Center’s role in SITI’s growth.⁶⁸

**Relationship with the Wexner Center**

In 1995 Chuck Helm, Director of Performing Arts at the Wexner Center, saw a videotape of *The Medium* and based on that video and Bogart’s reputation invited SITI to bring *The Medium* to Columbus in November 1996. Bogart and Helm immediately struck up a friendship and began discussing SITI’s next project. As Bogart discussed getting her company on a firm footing, Helm offered to bring SITI’s next project to the Wexner. From this start, SITI would

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⁶⁸ *Score program; Chuck Helm, personal interview, 12 August 2005.*
bring seven productions to date to the Wexner Center, including five premieres (Bob, Alice’s Adventures, Room, Score, and Death and the Ploughman). ⁶⁹

The five premieres, one fifth of SITI’s body of work, were made possible through creative residencies commissioned by the Wexner Center. The Wexner Center creative residencies provide “significant resources for significant projects” and gave the company exclusive access to a theatre and full technical support from the beginning, both rarities in the performing arts. Indeed, one of the most valuable commodities in the creation of live performance is space, not only for performance, but more importantly for rehearsal. It was only in 2004 that SITI secured a permanent space in New York City where Bogart teaches.⁷⁰

Full technical support, the ability to use production quality lighting and sound equipment, from the get-go is crucial to the development of work by companies such as the SITI Company, where the text is not the primary element. In

⁶⁹ Helm, interview, 12 August 2005; Chuck Helm, Wexner Center, 23 April 2004.
⁷⁰ Helm, interview, 12 August 2005; Bogart, Wexner Center, 23 April 2004.
the case of the SITI Company, this is particularly important given the role that the soundscore\textsuperscript{71} plays in its productions.

In addition to the physical resources that the Wexner Center provides its creative residencies, Helm is very insistent on giving artists their freedom. This contrasts sharply with the regional theatre system where the producers not only demand a degree of creative control, but also demand a percent of all future engagements. Instead the Wexner Center actively works with companies, such as SITI, to develop works of varying scales that can be toured, giving them support without interference. In this way, the Wexner Center, as a part of The Ohio State University, acts as a creative laboratory that provides contemporary artists with the time, space, and resources to engage in creative research, resulting in new performance works.\textsuperscript{72}

In the early years of the relationship between the Wexner Center and SITI, Chuck Helm also served as an advocate for Bogart and SITI outside of the Wexner Center’s

\textsuperscript{71} Darron West refers to the music and other sounds that provide a background to performance a soundscore. This soundscore is not analogous to the soundtrack from a Hollywood movie in that the sound choices are often asynchronous with the emotional context, though sound is more noticeably present in the productions that West designs than in other contemporary theatre works.

\textsuperscript{72} Helm, interview, 12 August 2005.
commissions. At that time, SITI lacked the basic infrastructure—producers, managers, agents—that supports a company. Helm provided advice on funding and marketing; he introduced Bogart to other performing arts presenters, helping SITI find funding partners and touring opportunities both within the United States and abroad.\textsuperscript{73}

The opportunities at the Wexner Center not only align with SITI’s goal to create new work, but also with SITI’s mission to train young artists. Artists’ availability for teaching residencies is a primary consideration when developing the Wexner’s season.\textsuperscript{74} These teaching residencies range in length from an afternoon conversation with the artists, to the students’ ability to observe rehearsals throughout the week, to week-long teaching residencies.

The Wexner Center’s influence on the SITI Company is not insignificant. The Wexner Center opened in 1989 as the only contemporary arts center that is part of a university, the only one that is dedicated to the avant-garde, and one of the few that emphasizes equally film/video, the

\textsuperscript{73} Helm, interview, 12 August 2005.
performing arts, and the visual arts. The Wexner Center’s appearance in the performing arts scene in the United States occurred at a time when many leading avant-garde theatre companies had all but given up working in the United States due to the lack of support; companies such as the Wooster Group were taking their work to Europe where state and arts agency support for new work is much more significant. The Wexner Center’s commitment to commissioning new work provides the needed support to enable contemporary artists to create and present their work within the United States. In the specific case of the SITI Company, the Wexner Center’s financial support along with Helm’s advice enabled SITI to grow from a fledgling to a mature company with a solid place in contemporary American theatre history.

Summary

The basic values that form the SITI Company’s mission statement—creating new work, training young artists, and international collaboration—can directly be traced to the company’s founders, Anne Bogart and Suzuki Tadashi. Both created new work themselves, both were teachers either in a

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75 Other contemporary arts centers are structured more as a museum where the performing arts and film are more of an add-on, rather than an equally funded and integrated part of the institution’s mission.
university (Bogart) or in a studio (Suzuki), and international influences inspired both to collaborate with artists from other countries, culminating in their own joint venture—SITI.

Both Bogart and Suzuki demonstrate a commitment to furthering the art of theatre not only through practice, but also through theory. Each demonstrates a keen analytical mind, in addition to the creative, in their various writings and lectures on theatre. This combination of the artistic with the cerebral also shows up in SITI’s work which is not only satisfying aesthetically, but also intellectually.

Starting with this common set of artistic values, Bogart and Suzuki were able to attract actors and designers and forged them into the SITI Company. In turn, SITI has found venues, both academic and presenting, that share their vision for contemporary theatre, providing them exposure to audiences around the world.
Late 20th Century context

Both Viewpoints Training and the Suzuki Method developed outside of the realism-based American acting techniques and emphasize a more physical approach to developing character and dramatic action. The American approach to acting focuses on the psychology, or internal motivations, of the character. These internal motivations can be found in the subtext rather than the explicit text composed by the playwright. This training, commonly referred to as the Method, is a distinctly American interpretation of Stanislavski’s early writings developed by acting teachers such as Lee Strasberg (1901-80), Stella Adler (1901-92), and Sanford Meisner (1905-97). The American Method, further popularized by film, has dominated actor-training in the United States since its inception in the 1930s.
Neither the Viewpoints nor the Suzuki Method relies entirely upon the text or its subtext for the creation of the performance. Instead each system taps into the individual actor’s body, that of his/her fellow performers, and the very environment in which they are working as sources for creativity. The fusion of these two training systems creates the SITI Company’s trademark theatrical style that co-emphasizes the text and the physical world of the production. Before addressing SITI’s approach to actor-training, I will first look at other examples of actor-training that are not grounded in the psychological realm of the American Method.

*Acting (Re)Considered: A Theoretical and Practical Guide* by Philip Zarrilli highlights several examples of performance exploration that diverged from the traditional acting styles of their day, and more importantly to my dissertation, also present alternatives to the American Method. To provide a context for SITI’s work, I will look at three of Zarrilli’s examples—Vsevolod Emilevich Meyerhold (1874 – 1940), Etienne Decroux (1898 – 1991), and Jerzy Grotowski (1933-99). As physical trainings, each of these, like the SITI Company’s, charts a different course from the Stanislavski base of contemporary American actor
training. Each one of these examples focused on the body and its potential as a means to find new ways to communicate on stage. Accordingly, Meyerhold, Decroux, and Grotowski developed exercises and training methods to enable an actor to take advantage of his/her body and its expressive capabilities. Their work would influence, directly or indirectly, many avant-garde artists, including those contemporary American artists seeking alternatives to Stanislavski-based performance. I will examine a few examples of their training techniques, highlighting similarities they share with SITI in how they approach training the body in order to train the actor.

Vsevolod Meyerhold

Before discussing Meyerhold and his physical work with actors, Konstantin Stanislavski (1863 – 1938) warrants a brief mention. Stanislavski’s work not only inspired Meyerhold to find alternate acting methods, but thanks to his impact on American actor-training, inspired every avant-garde artist in the United States who also sought non-realistic alternatives to performance.

Stanislavski’s influence on acting methods coincided with the development of realism, a theatrical movement that focused on portraying the everyday conditions of life in
the late 19th and early 20th Century, rather than the formal theatrical conventions of the preceding century. Much of Stanislavski’s ideas were developed while his company—the Moscow Art Theatre—produced the plays of realist playwright Anton Chekhov (1860 – 1904), eventually being published in four texts: My Life in Art (1924), An Actor Prepares (1936), Building a Character (1949), and Creating a Role (1961). Stanislavski’s approach to performance centers on the psychological basis of the role. While this is a gross oversimplification of Stanislavski’s work, this is generally what is meant when referring to his work.

Vsevolod Emilevich Meyerhold was a student of Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko (1858 – 1943), co-director with Stanislavski of the Moscow Art Theatre, and acted in their company, originating the role of Treplev in their production of Chekhov’s The Seagull (1898). Meyerhold’s interests diverged from those of the Moscow Art Theatre’s directors, prompting him to strike out on his own. Rejecting Stanislavski’s approach to acting, Meyerhold sought a more physical style of performance.

In 1902 Meyerhold saw a Japanese theatre company led by Kawakami Otodziro which was touring Europe at the time and was struck by the rhythmical movement of the
performers. Citing Noh theatre, where performers are expected to be dancers as well as actors, Meyerhold observes that “at the point where the spoken word fails in its power of expression, the language of the dance begins.”¹ Meyerhold was further inspired by George Fuchs’ *The Stage of the Future* (1904/05), one of the premises of which is the importance of rhythmical movement as a means of dramatic expression, reminding his readers that theatre had its origins in dance and focusing not only on ancient Greece, but also his understanding of Japanese theatre. In 1906, Meyerhold experimented with these ideas in his production of Arthur Schnitzler’s (1862 – 1931) *Cry of Life*, intentionally borrowing Japanese ideas on stage movement. Meyerhold claimed that the actors’ movements either preceded or followed their speeches. “Every movement was treated like a dance (a Japanese device), even when there was no emotional motivation for it.”²

Shortly thereafter, Meyerhold, along with Vladimir N. Soloviev,³ developed sixteen études (“studies”) based on theatre vocabularies from multiple cultures. Meyerhold

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³ Soloviev was an expert in *commedia dell’arte* and 17th Century Spanish theatre.
intended these exercises to teach basic principles of movement on stage including

how to move in a circle, square, or triangle; how the alteration of the numbers of even and odd characters on stage affect the style of acting; the relationship between movement and the shape of acting platforms or proscenium boundaries; the traditional “antics appropriate to the theatre,” involving the contrast between the space-and-time realities of the stage and life; the relationship between the metric basis of muscle and movement (including the idea of pauses in movement); working with stage properties; and generally the effects of acting on the spectator (the differences between large and small gestures).  

These exercises offer actors the opportunity to explore basic movement principles and patterns and are not that different from exercises in the Viewpoints Training. The nature and style of these études are similar to the exercises later developed into Meyerhold’s Biomechanics, a system of actor-training based on the principles of efficiency and precision and the study of the body and its basic mechanics. The most significant difference between

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the earlier études and the Biomechanics is that the earlier work is based on and references specific traditional theatre conventions, whereas the Biomechanics sought a universal, non-culturally specific system that could be applied to many different kinds of theatre.\textsuperscript{5}

Meyerhold wanted a theatre that would support the advances of “the socialist and scientific reconstruction of Russia” and sought a means to take theatre out of what he considered its historic agrarian roots. The Russian Revolution had just taken place and Meyerhold was a member of the Communist Party in 1918. The Biomechanics were developed to create a baseline of training “to instruct the new actor in all the essentials of scenic movement,”\textsuperscript{6} serving as “the lowest standard of actor-training in the proletarian and Constructivist\textsuperscript{7} theatres.”\textsuperscript{8} Meyerhold saw movement as one of the most significant parts of performance claiming that “every movement is a hieroglyph with its own peculiar meaning. The theatre should employ only those movements which are immediately decipherable;

\textsuperscript{5} Gordon 107; Meyerhold 198.  
\textsuperscript{6} Gordon 111.  
\textsuperscript{7} Constructivism, a Russian theatre movement from 1922–26, approached all aspects of the \textit{mise en scène} from a scientific basis. “The Constructivist director/engineer was free to calibrate the theatrical components at his (sic) disposal (dramatic text, staging areas, scenery, properties, costuming, lighting, styles of acting, speech, music, tempo, etc) towards a single goal,” seeking to create specific responses in the spectator (Gordon 110).  
\textsuperscript{8} Gordon 112.
everything else is superfluous.”⁹ Since each and every movement was its own individual bit of communication, Meyerhold developed his Biomechanics in order to train actors how to act so that audiences could read the physical performance before them.

In creating the Biomechanics, Meyerhold looked to contemporary science, finding inspiration in Taylorism in industry and reflexology in Soviet psychology. Taylorism is based on the work of Frederick Winslow Taylor (1856 – 1915) who sought to find a motion economy that would create greater efficiency and increased safety on the assembly line. Reflexology held that physical action could create emotion; it arose out of “objective psychology” which developed separately in both the United States and Russia. American psychologist William James (1842 – 1910) maintained the dictum “I saw the bear, I ran, I became frightened” believing that in order to recreate this fear, all one had to do was run with eyebrows raised and pupils dilated. By automatic reflex, fear would be felt. Pavlov’s animal studies on conditioned response are in the same field of objective psychology. According to Meyerhold, “the spectacle of a man [sic] working efficiently affords

⁹ Meyerhold 200.
positive pleasure.”\textsuperscript{10} Using both of these scientific fields of inquiry as well as his previous work in actor training, Meyerhold began to develop his Biomechanics, separating his work from Stanislavski not only by using the buzzwords of the day, but also by striking out in an entirely different direction.\textsuperscript{11}

Biomechanics in Meyerhold’s studio was one of several physical trainings that included fencing, boxing, Dalcroze eurhythmics,\textsuperscript{12} classical ballet, floor gymnastics, modern dance, cabaret dance, and juggling, as well as vocal work such as diction, speech, and music. In the studio, students were expected to wear lightweight uniforms that would allow the actors to see their bodies and where their joints articulated. Most of the biomechanics were accompanied by the piano, guiding “the actor in setting an emotional tempo that sometimes conflicted with the natural rhythmic organization of the étude.”\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{10} Meyerhold 198.
\textsuperscript{11} Gordon 108-10; Braun 130-135.
\textsuperscript{12} Eurhythmics (“good rhythm”) was developed by Emile Jacques-Dalcroze (1965 – 1950) as a means of music education that incorporated the entire body. Using movement to teach about time, space, energy, weight, and balance, applying the physical lessons to the same musical elements (Dalcroze Council of Australia website: \url{http://www.dalcroze.org.au/what.htm}).
\textsuperscript{13} Gordon 112.
In Meyerhold’s Biomechanics there are approximately 13 études\textsuperscript{14} that “utilize every essential principle in expressive movement that an actor might encounter.”\textsuperscript{15} Most of the études either begin or end with a dactyl, a term Meyerhold used for a short exercise that served as both a focusing device and as a means to coordinate timing between two actors.\textsuperscript{16} The complete form (as opposed to a shorter, simple form) has seven steps.

The actor, beginning with a complete relaxation of all muscles, suddenly claps his (sic) hands twice in a short upward motion which his body follows until he stands on the balls of his feet. Then, bending his knees, he immediately claps his hands twice in a violent and downward motion, throwing his arms back as they separate after the last clap. This abrupt movement is transferred to the actor’s entire body in a forward and downward motion as the momentum of energy is conveyed to his calves and feet.\textsuperscript{17}

The dactyl was the first thing an actor learned and is indicative of the specificity and formulaic nature of the

\textsuperscript{14} Gordon notes that the number of études varied from seven to more than 20, though the number generally stayed around 12/13 (111).
\textsuperscript{15} Gordon 111.
\textsuperscript{16} In literature, a dactyl is a metrical foot composed of one accented syllable followed by two unaccented syllables. In anatomy, a dactyl is a finger or a toe.
\textsuperscript{17} Gordon 112-3.
Biomechanics. The 13 Biomechanical études that Gordon presents in his article include: shooting the bow; throwing the stone; the slap in the face; the stab with the dagger; building the pyramid; strike with the feet; the leap to the chest; dropping the weight; the horse and rider; tripping up; carrying the sack; the leap from the back; and the circle.\(^{18}\) These études formed the basis of Meyerhold’s actor-training, which sought to develop a level of stylization where the movement possessed a “plasticity rather than [an] impersonation of reality.”\(^{19}\) Meyerhold’s actors needed to develop an expressive flexibility that could allow them a broader range of communication than the limited physical vocabulary of his mentor, Stanislavski.

Meyerhold’s explorations in physical theatre would inspire and influence theatre artists after him. His combination of both European and Asian performance traditions—namely commedia dell’arte and Japanese theatre—would serve as a model for other artists also seeking a physical approach to theatre performance.

**Etienne Decroux**

Etienne Decroux, student of Jacques Copeau and teacher of Marcel Marceau, formulated the principles of Coporeal

\(^{18}\) Gordon 113-27.

\(^{19}\) Meyerhold 45.
Mime with the help of student and colleague Jean-Louis Barrault, in the 1920s. A teacher from the beginning, Decroux’s work expressly focused on training the actor in ways to more expressively use his/her body on stage; indeed, towards the end of his career, Decroux ceased performing himself except on occasion for a small group of intimates.  

Decroux uses the myth of Prometheus as a metaphor for his art. Prometheus was the Titan who either gave humanity fire, thus sending humans on their way to civilization, or who created people out of clay after the gods wiped them out. In either case, Prometheus was punished by the Olympian gods for aiding humanity; he was shackled to a rock where an eagle daily came and ate his liver which regenerated every night. Sklar explores the metaphor suggesting that “the ideal of the Promethean actor...is more beautiful than the one God made,” and that “the key themes of self-creation, rebellious and heroic action, struggling and suffering, manual labor, and choice based on reason form the core of Decroux’s world view, aesthetic and physical technique.” Since I am using Decroux as an

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20 Deidre Sklar, “Etienne Decroux’s Promethean Mime,” Acting (Re)Considered, 129.
21 Sklar 129.
22 Sklar 130.
example of physical training, I am not going to explore
Decroux’s world view or aesthetic. Instead, I am going to
focus on his physical technique, exemplified as the
struggle between an idealized form and the physical
limitations of the body. The corporeal mime’s goal is to
create the former while working with the latter.

Decroux differentiated his work from that of dance in
noting that his actor is “struggling and earthbound”
whereas the dancer is “free and soaring,” indeed the
“kinesphere of Corporeal Mime action tends to be limited.”
The actor does not move extensively through the space.
Sklar quotes Decroux who likens the work to a “Greek statue
changing form under a glass bell.” The actor’s feet remain
rooted to the ground while the upper body physically
expresses the emotions and attitudes of the piece. This
stance creates a visible struggle between the actor’s upper
and lower body as each works to achieve different goals.

In addition to the struggle between the actor’s upper
and lower halves of the body, Decroux’s work also calls for
tension between adjacent parts of the body. Using a couple
of still images from one of his pieces, “Sport” (1948), she
notes how the chest and waist struggle against each other.

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23 Sklar 131.
The muscles of each work in opposition, one pulling forwards while the other pulls backwards. This opposition of adjacent parts of the body can also be seen in Decroux’s notion of triple design.

One of the basic principles of Decroux’s work is the triple design. Decroux divided the body into five segments (head, neck, chest, waist, pelvis), each of which can be articulated independently of and in opposition to each other. The range of motion for each includes sagittal (side to side) and frontal (back and forth) inclinations (a tilting movement in one direction) as well as rotations. A single design is motion within one plane (ie rotating the head to the left), double in two (ie rotating the head to the left and inclining to the right), and triple in three (ie rotating the head to the left, inclining to the right, and inclining backwards). “The resulting combinations, or attitudes, can be arrived at by moving each part separately or all at once.”

The central line of the body, especially focusing on the trunk, is where Decroux felt the universal could be expressed. Placing little value on the hands and face, which Decroux felt were where the actor’s “personal nature

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24 Sklar 131.
25 Sklar 134.
manifests itself spontaneously and easily,"  

instead trained the trunk, a difficult part of the body to articulate, to be expressive and communicative, often working with masks to prevent the actor from relying on his/her face. Seeking to remove the “actor’s personal idiosyncrasies,” Decroux focused not on the expressive face and hands, but instead on the trunk, a part of the body underutilized in daily life.  

These isolations, which form a mime scale similar to the scales used by a musician to warm up, are the basis of Decroux’s technique, a term not usually associated with acting. Decroux intentionally sought to change this negative attitude towards technique, believing instead that technique could excite inspiration in theatre. In the same way that technique not only forms the basis of music and dance, but also gives musicians and dancers freedom of expression, Decroux believed that technique freed the actor. By using his/her body as a physical instrument for expression and mastering its full potential, an actor could work as an equal in theatre to the other artists working on a production. For Decroux, mastery of physical technique

26 Sklar 133.
27 Sklar 133.
gave the actor not only freedom to create, but also lessened his/her dependence on text, costume, scenery, and lighting.\textsuperscript{28}

Decroux like Artaud, who was a colleague for and with whom he performed, was influenced by the Balinese and Cambodian dancers who repeatedly visited Paris. These performances not only influenced Decroux’s choice of subject matter, the mythic and superhuman, but also in the movement qualities that he explored. In addition to the articulation, already mentioned, Decroux was undoubtedly influenced by the Cambodian dancers in the inclusion of transtations in his technique. Transtation, is one of the three types of movement, along with inclination and rotation, that Decroux codified. A transtation is the shifting of a body part along one plane, either saggital or frontal.\textsuperscript{29}

Decroux’s lasting legacy lies in the grammar for corporeal movement that he developed. This grammar, designed to increase a performer’s expressive potential,


\textsuperscript{29} Leabhart 40-41; Lust 76; Gyongi Biro 1-14 April 2001.
served as a starting point, not only for silent performers like Marceau, but also artists such as Barrault and Lecoq who wed the text with the body.

**Jerzy Grotowski**

In 1959, Jerzy Grotowski, along with writer Ludwik Flaszen, founded the Theatre of the Thirteen Rows in Opole, a small Polish town. In its first few years, the company was prolific. By 1965, the company was focusing more time on theatre research and less on production, which was officially recognized by renaming itself the Laboratory Theatre when it moved to Wroclaw. There, Grotowski developed his idea of a “poor theatre” that relied on the relationship between the actor and the spectator as essential to the theatrical experience and eliminated the extras: scenery, props, lighting, and sound.\(^{30}\)

Grotowski eschewed codifying his training, believing that for training to benefit the actor it had to be developed organically from the actor’s own research and study. His emphasis was not on any single set of exercises, but rather on combining previous training with new methods. Nevertheless, the Laboratory Theatre’s work from 1959-66 was recorded in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, influencing theatre

\(^{30}\) Jennifer Kumiega, “Grotowski’s Laboratory Theatre,” in *The Director and the Stage: From Naturalism to Grotowski*, 191-193.
artists around the world. One of Grotowski’s basic ideas relating to actor-training stresses the actor’s ability to use his/her body in extraordinary ways, leading to his study of European and Asian masters.\textsuperscript{31}

From November 1983 to June 1986, Jerzy Grotowski directed the Objective Drama Project at the University of California–Irvine (UCI). The project’s goal was to identify “performative expressions” from various cultures and teach them to non-natives outside of the original cultural context. The cultural forms that were included in the project included Haitian voudoun ritual, whirling dervish, Korean shamanistic dance and songs, Balinese incantation and mantra, hatha yoga, and Japanese karate. Each of these physical styles was taught by experts within the native culture. New songs were created from literary texts from multiple sacred traditions.\textsuperscript{32}

In addition to the physical exercises from these disparate cultures, participants in the project worked on individual or group pieces that were part of Mystery Play. Mystery Play was an extremely long (two days and two nights) exploration of personal artistic possibilities.

\textsuperscript{31} Kumiega 194.
intended for public view, Mystery Play gave the participants an opportunity to apply what they learned through the exercises in a performative context.\textsuperscript{33}

Grotowski conducted these experiments in an isolated part of the UCI campus with hills, horses, cattle, rabbits, and two historic buildings which the group referred to as “the barn” and “the yurt.” Despite access to electricity, Grotowski insisted on using kerosene lanterns when working at night, which was a consistent part of the experiment. Indeed, many of the exercises would begin at sunset and last well into the night, intended to force the body and mind to a new level of alertness.\textsuperscript{34}

Grotowski’s exacting nature required not only the physical and mental focus and strength, but also a strict adherence to discipline. The rules of his exercises asked the participants to do exceptionally difficult things over very long periods of time. Single exercises often lasted two or more hours, with work sessions lasting eight hours or more, for six days a week. One of the participants and instructors, I. Wayan Lendra,\textsuperscript{35} observes that working in

\textsuperscript{33} Lendra 149.
\textsuperscript{34} Lendra 150, 157.
\textsuperscript{35} I. Wayan Lendra, holds the Ph.D. from the Department of Theatre and Dance at the University of Hawaii. Through Lendra’s many years of experience in keybar and topeng dance, he was invited as a technical specialist at Grotowski’s Objective Drama Project.
this manner altered his awareness, changing the way he perceived his environment and consequently the way in which he responded to that environment.\textsuperscript{36}

Lendra draws parallels between Grotowski’s work and his native Balinese performing traditions, particularly with regard to the attainment of a higher awareness, which both seek to develop through training and subsequent performance. In Balinese dance-theatre, this training takes the form of very exacting physical forms (agem) that are difficult to master, requiring strict dedication to the training. The execution of the physical forms not only affects the physical but also the psychological aspects of the performer, creating a condition where the performer can attain a heightening of awareness. Lendra observes that the inherent spiritual nature of everyday life in Bali, where the distinction between the sacred and the profane is blurred, plays a significant part in this development. Indeed, there are two parts to the performance: the expression of the inner spirit or true nature serves as an offering to the gods while the forms and the energy that the forms produces serves to affect the spectators.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{36} Lendra 150.
\textsuperscript{37} Lendra 151-2.
In Grotowski’s project there was no overtly religious ritual, but rather the creation of rules and exercises that created a similar “mental cleansing [that] prepares the body and mind to concentrate fully...”\(^{38}\) Grotowski’s most important rule was the rule of silence. Speaking was only permitted under limited circumstances related to the work at hand. Silence was observed during breaks in what Grotowski referred to as “silence of saturation”, a time when participants could reflect and internalize the experience. Conventional socializing, while permissible outside of the project area, rarely occurred because of the general rigor of the work. Participants found that the silence developed a finer sensitivity to the environment around them, leading to a heightened awareness of themselves individually and collectively through being, doing, and observing.\(^{39}\)

The highly disciplined nature of the work was challenging for those involved in part because it was extremely different from conventional every day life. The lack of socializing and the lack of opportunity to disengage proved to be a taxing experience. Those who felt

\(^{38}\) Lendra 155.
\(^{39}\) Lendra 155.
doubts about the rules either quit the project or increased their involvement and participated fully; there was no opportunity to only partially engage in the work.\textsuperscript{40}

The physical training, especially the complete understanding of the rules and the exactness of the exercises, was of utmost importance. When challenging the participants, Grotowski and his assistants gave constant correction and criticism, which was often harsher than many were accustomed. While verbal correction was given, Grotowski believed that kinesthetic learning was more important. The body itself has an ability to record and reproduce physical forms as well as the corresponding emotional quality that was associated with the exercise when first learned. Learning through verbal description does not print the emotional layer on the body. This method of learning physical work is nearly universal, found in cultures around the world whether they are dance, gymnastics, combat, or other body trainings. Lendra includes the example of a Balinese master physically moving the body of a young student, which progresses into

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{40} Lendra 156.}
correction by touch and body signals. As time progresses, the student is increasingly able to learn through observation and repetition of the master’s work.\textsuperscript{41}

One of the basic exercises of Grotowski’s project, called the Motions, incorporates multiple aspects of the training, not only stretching the body, but also developing mental endurance. Its primary purpose is to train the body’s sensitivity and the mind’s ability to be alert. Conducted in a diamond pattern, with a leader at each of the points of the diamond, the Motions originally lasted an hour and a half, but were later cut to 45 minutes. The exercise connected seven directions: north, south, east, and west, as well as up and down, and center. The Motions is made up of three major movements repeated in each of the cardinal directions and connected by several transitional movements. An exercise of turning slowly in place was used to move from cardinal point to cardinal point, and could take up to two minutes to execute. The up and down connection was made by moving the body along the vertical axis while the center was associated with the heart and the primary position, which serves as a root position or starting point.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{41} Lendra 158-9.
\textsuperscript{42} Lendra 159.
The primary position is executed standing. The feet are placed parallel, about one fist apart. The knees are slightly bent and the body weight rests on the balls of the feet, as if the performer is ready to move. The torso and the head and chin are gently pulled in, so that energy travels from the bottom of the spine up to the head. The torso and the head are tilted forward, which allows a slight contraction and pull at the bottom of the torso. The pelvic region is tucked in, the abdomen is lifted, and the chest and the shoulders are relaxed. The arms are straight, placed at either side of the body, and the base of each thumb touches slightly the section below the hip. The palms face backward, and the fingers, touching each other, are slightly curved in and relaxed.43

Another vital piece necessary to perform the Motions relates to the focus. Lendra describes it as maintaining “a wide angle, panoramic view,” taking in the entire visage. It is coupled with an attention to hearing, where the “ears should hear all sounds at once.” Grotowski instructed the students to “see what you are seeing and hear what you are hearing” while striving for perfection of form in an

43 Lendra 159–60.
extremely complex and intricate exercise. Participants were urged to continually self-correct in order to maintain the precision of the form. 44

The difficulty of continually monitoring the physical technique allows what Lendra calls the “inner mind, the subtler consciousness” to emerge, expanding to a total sensorial awareness. While doing so, the Motions also create a great internal source of strength. Exploring this physical resource, which Grotowski believed every human possessed, was one of the principle goals of the Objective Drama Project. Many of the other exercises that Grotowski developed from other traditions were designed to awaken and tap into this wellspring of energy for performance. 45

Summary

While each of these artist-teachers differed significantly in the nuts and bolts of their training they have a few things in common. First, to greater or lesser extent, each took inspiration from Asian theatre. As each sought to create a more vital theatre, they looked to the physical strength and dexterity of Asian performers as traits to develop in their actors.

44 Lendra 161.
45 Lendra 161-2.
Since the actors they worked with did not have these skills, each sought to find ways to train their actors for the kinds of performance that they envisioned. As a result they each experimented with different approaches to the body and training. Meyerhold and Grotowski explicitly borrowed material from multiple sources; Decroux on the other hand primarily relied on developing his material though everyday observation and study of the body.

Another commonality among these physical actor trainers is the notion that this type of work is best taught experientially. While this is partially a result of the inherent difficulty in writing about movement, it is also a belief in the value of the relationship between teacher and student, a relationship found not only in Asia, but also in European physical traditions such as dance. Despite the experiential nature of the teaching, all three of these master teachers codified their technique, creating a system that could be taught in an on-going manner even after their own deaths.

Finally, each firmly believed that discipline could free the performer, rather than limit his/her creativity. This notion not only challenged the opinions of their contemporaries, but also continues to challenge some
schools of acting. Meyerhold, Decroux, and Grotowski felt that a highly trained body gave the actor significantly more options when performing and that the only way to develop such a body was through vigorous discipline in the study of physical technique(s).

**SITI Company training system**

A significant part of what makes the SITI Company unique is their training program, which is the synthesis of the Viewpoints Training and the Suzuki Method. Training new actors forms a third of the tripod which supports the company’s mission. My understanding of these two systems comes from participating in and observing (both live and recorded) several masterclasses with Anne Bogart, Barney O’Hanlon, J. Ed Araiza, and Kelly Mauer; these workshops took place at Ohio State in February 1998, October 2000, March 2002, and April 2004. In addition to these intense workshops, I have also studied both Viewpoints Training and the Suzuki Method with Jeanine Thompson, head of Acting/Directing at Ohio State. As with an increasingly large number of universities around the country, components of the M.F.A. program in acting at Ohio State include both Viewpoints and Suzuki. Because I have internalized much of
this work over the course of these workshops and classes, I will only footnote specific ideas on which I have actual written notes.

**Viewpoints Training**

The Viewpoints Training originates in the world of postmodern dance; in the 1970s Mary Overlie articulated the six viewpoints\(^46\) (space, time, shape, movement, story/image, emotion) as a way to provide structure in dance improvisation. Bogart, after having studied with Overlie, adapted the viewpoints for actors and expanded them to nine.

The simplest way to describe the viewpoints is that they are a vocabulary through which performers can communicate about the various elements of theatre, dance, and music. Indeed, the company refers to the training as “art training" rather than training for the actor, dancer, or musician.\(^47\) This vocabulary serves as a shorthand that aids the creative process and during rehearsal, allowing company members conversant with the vocabulary to communicate with greater detail and precision as they critique and develop their work.

\(^{46}\) I use the capital “V” when referring to the Viewpoints Training and the lower case “v” when referring to the individual viewpoints within the system.

The current nine viewpoints can be divided into two categories—time and space. The viewpoints of time include

1) kinesthetic response,
2) tempo,
3) duration, and
4) repetition.

They describe how time and timing affects the execution of movement. The remaining five viewpoints are viewpoints of space and include

5) gesture,
6) shape,
7) architecture,
8) spatial relationship, and
9) topography.

These five refer to the multiple opportunities the body has for inhabiting a given space. Any given physical action, from the mundane to the exotic, can be described in these terms. Through the use of these terms, artists can offer detailed feedback on the work of their colleagues. They allow for a method of criticism that not only removes the personalities from the discussion, but also gives
meaningful specificity in the development of movement.

Bogart and the SITI Company are currently exploring an additional category of viewpoints—sound.

When training in the viewpoints, a group works towards an open viewpoints session, an improvisatory session where the performers utilize an internalized awareness of all of the viewpoints. These sessions typically focus more on the experience of the performers than on creating a satisfying experience for an audience. Nevertheless, when a group is paying careful attention to all of the viewpoints, the work they will create—still just a training exercise—will be visually and aurally stimulating, often worthy of an audience. Like a jazz group jamming together without regard for the audience, the performers in an open viewpoints session will create something aesthetically pleasing because of the care with which they listen and respond to each other. Without script, choreography, or direction, the group will fill the space with movement, sound, and perhaps even text as each member listens and responds to the group. As a training exercise, open viewpoint sessions enhance the group listening skills of the participants. As a rehearsal tool, an open session can generate a gestural vocabulary and physical motif for use in production. Such gestures,
developed through group improvising, can create an organic physical reality for the production, building a meaning out of thin air.

The viewpoints of time all acknowledge that performance, unlike most of the plastic arts, occurs in and through time. Each refers to a separate element of measuring or utilizing time on stage. Kinesthetic response refers to one’s ability to respond to the dynamic environment on stage, rather than independent initiation of action. As such, kinesthetic response can be considered the cornerstone upon which the Viewpoints Training is built. This aspect of viewpoints helps create a fluid and collaborative environment where the ensemble physically listens to each other and responds, not from preconceived plans, but rather from impulses felt in the moment, in each and every moment of the performance. Being responsive kinesthetically requires that the actor not enter the viewpoints session with preconceived ideas of what to do and how to do it. S/He instead reacts to the physical environment and the ever-changing performance environment as his/her fellow performers do likewise.

Kinesthetic response creates the basis of Viewpoints because it acts as the underlying framework upon which the
other viewpoints are layered in order to generate original material. Because it is a technique based on responding in each individual moment in time, it discourages premeditation and habitual physical choices. As a result, a company can make associations and connections that are frequently intuitive rather than linear.

The final three viewpoints of time are relatively straightforward and somewhat self-explanatory. Tempo, for instance, refers to the rate at which a given action or gesture is accomplished. Descriptive words of tempo include fast and slow. Duration, on the other hand, describes the length of time it takes to complete an action. Words such as quickly and slowly can be used to describe duration. Repetition relates to whether or not an action is repeated and can refer to an individual repeating his/her own action or repeating the action of another member of the group or the entire group repeating the action.

In the viewpoints of space, gesture is divided into two different types of gesture, behavioral and expressive. Behavioral gesture is the type of everyday movement that everyone does and could be seen on the street, in a supermarket, at a park, waiting in line for movie tickets, et cetera. A behavioral gesture can be executed with any
part of the body, and will often relate to another object or part of the body. Examples include pointing one’s finger, waving a hand, scratching one’s head, rubbing one’s eyes; the options are limitless. While The SITI Company does not use the dance term *pedestrian* to describe behavioral gesture, it could just as easily be used to describe these gestures. Behavioral gesture can be further subdivided into public and private, acknowledging the distinction between behaviors that one might be less inclined to do in front of others. The previous examples would all be examples of public gestures. Private gestures might include scratching one’s crotch or adjusting one’s bra. This final differentiation may vary greatly across cultural norms and personal comfort zones.

While behavioral gestures interact with the physical world, an expressive gesture on the other hand, interacts with the psychological world. Expressive gestures tend to be slightly more abstract, conveying an emotion or an interior state of being. With their heightened quality, expressive gestures would not typically be seen in everyday life and circumstances; physically they are larger, bolder, and more colorful than behavioral gesture. A gesture that looks like shaking water from one’s fingers can become an
expressive gesture when the size of the gesture grows as though one is trying to shake off a snake that has just bitten one’s hand. Often with expressive gesture the coloration will also include the face.

Shape differs from gesture in that shape removes the human characteristics and the emotional underpinning. Instead shape emphasizes the line, design, and form of the body. The options for shape are limited only by the limits on one’s own imagination. In a viewpoints session, shapes can be either stationary or motile. They may also stand alone, or relate to objects or other bodies in the space.

In viewpoints training architecture refers to how the performers relate to the physical space in which they are performing. This can be done through imitation, by reflecting certain features of the architecture in their own bodies. An example of imitation might be to walk deliberately along the lines and angles of the tiling on either the ceiling or floor. Architecture can also be brought into the performance by referring to it, drawing the audience’s attention to specific details of the architectural environment. Pointing with hand, food, arm, leg, head at an architectural feature such as a curtain would be a way of referring to the architecture. Miming the
gestures that utilize features in the room are also ways of referring to the architecture. An example would be turning a light switch on and off. Calling attention to architecture is done to enliven the space itself during the performance, emphasizing the performer(s) in a concrete locale. Architecture allows each viewpoints session to be unique precisely because of the relationship between the performance and its current site.

How the performers physically relate to each other is expressed in terms of spatial relationship. Spatial relationship looks at how close or apart the performers are to or from each other. It also includes the idea of groupings, describing solos, duets, trios, quartets and so on and so forth. Spatial relationships will often evoke narrative as the viewer reads a meaning into the moments of interaction.

Finally, the last viewpoint is topography, a concept that describes how the performers inscribe the physical space with meaning in a given performance. It refers to how the group maps certain details into the space that were not there prior to the performance. Physical references may be repeated in certain areas of the performance space as the group collectively delineates that area as separate from
the rest of the space. The use of repetition creates meaning in a particular part of the room that the audience will come to anticipate as that area is entered time and again through the performance. If a performer crossing upstage center ducked at the center line and other performers in the group repeated that movement when they crossed the center line at upstage center, topography would be inscribed at that point as if there were a low doorway or a low-hanging bar there in the performance space.

Ultimately training in the viewpoints of time and space is concerned with developing sensitivity both individual and collective. The performer learns “to objectively observe [his/her] work while [s/he is] simultaneously in it.”  

This awareness is attained through various semi-structured exercises that gradually layer the viewpoints into an improvisation session while focusing specific attention on each one in turn until all of the viewpoints are incorporated into the sessions. During these sessions, the participants maintain a soft focus by maintaining no direct focus and by visually, aurally, and proprioceptually\footnote{O’Hanlon workshop, 19-24 April 2004.} listening on the broadest band possible.

\footnote{Proprioception is an individual’s ability to perceive where his/her body and its component parts are in space, not by seeing them, but by feeling internally.}
A soft focus is a focus that is directly forward, but not specifically focused. Rather than singling out any particular item for viewing, the performer expands his/her awareness in order to take in 180° along both the horizontal and vertical axis. This concentration can be described as listening with the entire body. Soft focus may be broken in the moment as an action is performed, but will be returned to immediately after its completion, allowing the performer a neutral body from which to respond to the next external impulse. This will be most clearly seen by the audience when a performer executes an expressive gesture that incorporates the face and focus, then released into neutral waiting for another stimulus.

As the participants grow more comfortable and experienced with the concepts, the group develops sensitivity to each other and their environment. When this occurs a wonderful thing arises in these open viewpoints sessions—its improvisational work begins to take on the appearance of careful choreography. The work that a group creates on the spot quickly develops a vocabulary and a style that is unique to each individual session. To even the skilled observer, the work generated by a group that has worked together for some time will look as though a
director or a choreographer crafted and shaped the experience for the audience. In fact, it would be appropriate to say that the work is choreographed by the group in the moment. As each participant responds creatively in the moment, s/he helps to construct a visually dynamic performance.

This level of interconnectedness within a workshop, while not occurring overnight, begins to become apparent a little after the mid-point in the sessions. This is the result of the organic way that the material is presented. Kinesthetic response, as the cornerstone of the Viewpoints Training is usually introduced first. Starting in stillness the class is asked to focus awareness in ever expanding circles until the entire space is “woken up” to their senses.

The Viewpoints’ origin in dance is apparent in the nature of the exercises, many of which could be seen in a dance studio. Space and time are often intermingled so that exercises might include floor pattern and tempo, as students walk in either right angles or curvilinear lines, at a quick, moderate, or slow pace. Shape and gesture are taught together as students are asked to explore each in turn while crossing the room. Once these basic ideas are
explored, the sessions become freer, less structured. Instead of set exercises, the students are divided in halves or thirds, depending on the number of participants and the size of the studio. From this point onward, the instructor offers guidance, notes, direction, telling the students to focus on architecture or repetition or duration.

These notes are spoken in an even tone, lacking inflection in the same way that a director side-coaches actors in a scene, or in the way that a guided meditation is conducted. This method of delivery limits the potential from distraction, conveying the information without affecting the students’ focus. This contrasts markedly from the firm, often aggressive manner that notes and instructions are delivered while learning the Suzuki Method.

As a participant, moving through a Viewpoints workshop has a steady flow as each idea is layered onto the previous one in a seamless development. The progress from concept to concept is only interrupted by time spent watching one’s fellow students when the class is divided to better accommodate the number of bodies within the limited space. Students make discoveries with only the gentlest of nudges
from the instructor. Because of the nature of this training, the observer often interprets these sessions as a series of small dance pieces, perhaps not fully developed or realized, but choreography nonetheless.

On a more practical note, the viewpoints training gives a company a means of generating physical material either in conjunction with a text or independently thereof. This physical material can assist directors when blocking a script and actors when developing a character’s business and other physical details. An open viewpoints session focused on an idea or theme can generate hours of choreography that can be mined for use in performance. Because of the nature of the improvisation, generated material will have a strong organic connection to the text which will lend itself to a unified production no matter how stylized the physical vocabulary of the production.

The language of the viewpoints further assists when suggesting corrections during rehearsal. The specificity of the vocabulary allows a director to recommend new ways to physically explore the work without proscribing a specific choice. Furthermore, the lack of judgment in the terms, allows the actors to take critique quickly, easily, and with less objection. Drawing attention to the spatial
relationship in a given moment is much more neutral than
telling an actor that s/he missed his/her mark or that s/he
crossed too late on the line. This freedom contributes
greatly to the success of the collaborative process upon
which the SITI Company relies.

**Suzuki Method**

Whereas the Viewpoints Training provides a sense of
freedom and improvisation, the Suzuki Method brings a
degree of order and discipline to SITI’s training regimen.
Both train the body and the mind, emphasizing a heightened
physical perception and careful listening. The Suzuki
Method brings the student’s focus a bit more inward and
stresses one’s connection with the earth, giving more
attention to muscular control and the perfect execution of
training exercises. The technique builds physical strength
and control, the ability to separate the upper from the
lower body, extreme precision, and discipline, the
combination of which creates “a body with presence,
articulation, and control.”\(^5^0\) This is accomplished through
the attempted mastery of difficult physical exercises.

Before continuing with the Suzuki Method, I must
digress briefly to discuss the significance of a movement

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\(^5^0\) O’Hanlon workshop, 19-24 April 2004.
training system with an earth-based emphasis. Historically, European dance—in its dominant form, ballet—has been interested in escaping the earth rather than connecting with it. The ballet dancer en pointe, leaping, or being lifted resists gravity, denying connection with the ground. It is only since the start of the 20th Century that the gravitational ideas of classical ballet have been challenged.

In 1913, Vaslav Nijinski51 (1890-1950) premiered Le Sacre du printemps (The Right of Spring) and “…paved the way for virtually all the modern dance developments of the 20th Century.”52 In this dance, Nijinski sought to create the spirit of the prehistoric Slavs, depicting a cultic ritual where a young virgin is sacrificed so that her blood may bring life to the earth, calling forth a bountiful harvest to feed her people. Few critics actually described the movement; those who did called the dance harsh, bitter, brutal, raw, and coarse.

51 Transliteration from Cyrillic to Latin alphabets has yet to be standardized. I have chosen to spell Nijinski’s name with the final “i” instead of “y” because this is the standard transliteration that I learned when I took Russian and it is the choice that I have made in spelling Stanislavski’s name. I am thus choosing internal consistency within my dissertation, rather than what appears to be the more common spelling, but by no means universal, in the dance world.
The illusory lightness and effortlessness of the classical ballet was replaced by a sense of heaviness; symmetry was eliminated; and the primeval quality of the score was expressed through repetitive passages of walking, stamping, and heavy jumps.\(^5^3\)

Nijinski ignored the traditional movement qualities found in ballet and turned to something that he thought was more primitive, changing the way his dancers dealt with gravity and weight. This emphasis on downward movement was not well-received in its day, neither by his fellow artists nor by the public at large. In fact, performances of this piece resulted in audience riots. It was only after his death that Nijinski’s *Rite of Spring* was recognized as a watershed moment in the history of dance.

The forms used in the Suzuki Method were developed as Suzuki’s actors trained apprentices for their roles. Each exacting gesture and movement is part of a character’s blocking from one of Suzuki’s directions when he was incorporating material from Kabuki and Noh in his new works. Suzuki stresses that he was not seeking to recreate the forms (*kata*), but rather the intense physicality present in Kabuki and Noh. While many refer to Suzuki’s

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training as the “martial arts for the actor,” Suzuki himself avoids referring to the exercises as kata, the term used for the forms in the martial arts, instead referring to his training exercises as kunren (disciplines). SITI emphasizes this aspect, discipline, when teaching in workshops.54

In his text, The Way of Acting, Suzuki attempts to evoke the essence of his philosophy on training actors.55 He does this with very little attention to his training method. The only chapter that directly addresses specifics on training is entitled “The Grammar of the Feet;” accordingly there is a strong emphasis on walking in the Suzuki Method. Suzuki formalized 10 different highly stylized walks that his students learn, each of which deals with a different relationship between the foot and the ground. These 10 walks, each of which can also be executed backwards, include

1) Stomping56 (Ashibumi),
2) Inward walking (Uchimata),
3) Pedaling (Waniashi),

54 Carruthers and Yasunari 71; O’Hanlon workshop, 19-24 April 2004.
55 Suzuki and members of SITI who teach his method observe that the only way to truly understand this method is experientially. No amount of observation or textbook study can comprehend the lessons imparted by partaking in the method’s discipline.
56 While most writers spell this stamping, I have also seen some write it stomping. I am choosing the latter because it better represents the pronunciation used by members of SITI.
4) Outward walk (*Sotomata*),
5) Tiptoe (*Tsumasaki*),
6) Side slide (*Yokoaruki 1*),
7) Side cross step (*Yokoaruki 2*),
8) Side stomping (*Ashi o hour–ichi ni*),
9) Sliding walk (*Suriashi*), and
10) Squat walk (*Shikko*).\(^{57}\)

The Suzuki Method’s focus on the earth and the actor’s connection through his/her feet intends to utilize the natural power that such a link can provide a performer. Much of the training in the Suzuki Method works to rediscover the earth and find new ways making of contact with the ground. By doing so, an actor draws both strength and energy that can be redirected into his/her performance. While this connection to the earth represents Suzuki reaching back into classical Japanese performance history, looking to Kabuki and Noh, it differs significantly from classical Western physical training—ballet—which rather than emphasizing connection with seeks escape from the ground. In this respect, Suzuki’s work philosophically

\(^{57}\) Carruthers and Yasunari 79.
aligns more closely with modern dance, the founders of which sought, in part, to break with ballet’s negative relationship to the ground.

A trademark of the Suzuki Method is stomping, a forceful means of walking where the emphasis is not on locomoting through space, but rather in finding an arrested moment in each step. Indeed, finding an arrested moment is characteristic of each of the Suzuki walks; the actor is encouraged to move quickly through the step so that the moment of stillness can persist longer. All the while this occurs on the beat, serving to visually break the accompanying music.

When stomping the student raises his/her foot and brings it down only after shifting his/her weight forward enough to move past the balance point. In doing so, not only must the actor concentrate on executing the move, but also on being precisely in the moment so that the balance point is observed and not overstepped. This is a simplified

\footnote{I have chosen to provide a detailed explanation of stomping, while only paying cursory attention to the other aspects of the Suzuki Method. I made this choice because I am focusing on the basic principles of the Suzuki Method rather than the details of the training disciplines. Of the authors who have written about the Suzuki Method, Carruthers provides not only one of the clearest accounts, but he also provides a historical summary of what others have written showing how the exercises have grown and changed over time. While any written record of a physical activity is limited, his chapter in The Theatre of Suzuki Tadashi offers one of the clearest written explanations of Suzuki’s training exercises.}
and pared down version of what one must do to execute one step while stomping. When training, students stomp to music usually lasting approximately three minutes; even the fittest actors find a round of stomping physically exhausting. In fact, stomping can be so physically strenuous that it can have a psychological affect on students, shaking loose deep-rooted emotions. Unlike the Viewpoints Training, where the focus remains soft and diffused, when training in the Suzuki Method the student’s focus must remain direct and concentrated. O’Hanlon refers to this focus as a “classical focus”, inspired by Greek theatre where the actor’s focus is outward and in relationship to the gods. This contrasts with an internal focus, or a focus that is narrowly held within the limits of the room, both of which are more reflective of the American Method. The performer is completely engaged in each moment both physically and mentally while executing each training exercise. After starting the stomping exercise by moving in a circle, the group breaks apart and the individuals stomp throughout the studio as they wish.

When the music begins to wind down, they regroup towards the back of the studio in a line and cease simultaneously with the end of the accompanying song.

The traditional exercise is Stomp and Shakuhachi which includes three minutes of stomping before moving into a different energy that begins with the students dropping to the floor in as quick and efficient a manner as possible, disappearing from view. By this point in time the performer is physically drained and usually breathing heavily. Upon dropping to the floor, s/he quiets his/her breath, reigning in the energy and creating a moment of calm. This separation of the inner agony from what the performer visibly shows is a key concept in the Suzuki Method. The student must listen carefully to his/her body in order to achieve the stillness needed to move on to the next part of the exercise. Intentionally controlling one’s breathing as it tries to get away from one’s self builds energy that can then be harnessed by the actor and directed out to the audience.

After collapsing to the floor, the students reengage their bodies, suspending most of the body just above the
ground in a sudden full-body tak.\textsuperscript{60} To music by the Japanese flute (shakuhachi), the students slowly move their feet and legs under their body’s center before slowly rising to a standing position where they create a statue, any fixed pose maintained by the upper body. After reaching a standing level and finding a statue, the actor turns to face the front of the studio. Once all of the students have reached a standing position and created a statue, the group simultaneously begins to move towards the front of the studio using a technique called tenteketen (slow-motion walk).\textsuperscript{61} The exercise from stomping through the completion of the slow ten is sometimes referred to as the Shakuhachi Circle of Death which simultaneously conjures images of the tranquility of the Japanese flute with the physical challenges associated with the stomping. This exercise exquisitely demonstrates the opposition used throughout the Suzuki Method.

Slow ten is a method of moving forward where the performer never halts the forward momentum, creating the effect that the performer is gliding through space as though s/he were on wheels. Indeed if the performer were

\textsuperscript{60} Mime term used to describe the crisp conclusion of a movement that emphasizes the gesture. It is accomplished by generating opposing tension in the part of the body that is being emphasized.

\textsuperscript{61} SITI members refer to this as “Slow Ten.” I will do so as well.
wearing a hakama\textsuperscript{62} or even a hoop-skirt, thus obscuring his/her legs and feet, it would appear that s/he was gliding rather than walking. It is a very slow motion requiring a great deal of concentration. The body’s weight must never be allowed to settle because to do so would create a stop, a hesitation that would violate the principle of slow ten. The center of the body moves forward regardless of where the feet are in their stride. During slow ten, the students’ focus remains forward, but now takes on an interior fiction that should be projected outward. Once the students have all reached the other side of the studio, they collectively agree to stop and then to release their concentration and end the exercise. All of this is done without speaking or looking to see what the other students are doing. The emphasis is on collective listening and agreement.

In addition to the previously mentioned exercises within the Suzuki Method, there are also four standing disciplines (Basic 1-4) which focus on one’s center of gravity,\textsuperscript{63} a standing kata in three levels (with or without gestures or “statues”), and a sitting kata in three positions (with or without statues). Both the standing and

\textsuperscript{62} The skirt-like pants traditionally worn by samurai.
\textsuperscript{63} Carruthers and Yasunari 78.
the sitting statues can be executed standard or free-style, where the teacher chooses level in the former and the actor chooses level and gesture in the latter. Vocal work can be included with Basic 1-4, standing, and sitting statues.

A SITI workshop begins with these disciplines, jumping right in with Basic 1, no preparation, no discussion. This underscores the emphasis on doing the work and listening to one’s body in order to learn from both successes and mistakes. The instructors may demonstrate a kata or they may offer corrections, both verbal and physical, but the stress is on working through the exercise. Frequently the very first exercise involves the entire class and is an exercise in patience, focus, and stillness as the students are asked to stand in one form for as long as a minute without fidgeting or adjusting. While this may not appear to be a very long time, in actuality 60 seconds is nearly an eternity when silence or stillness is invoked. For the student, this is an active stillness, body held ready to execute the next move in the discipline. As an exercise, this beginning asks the student to listen to his/her body,

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64 A physical correction might be moving a student’s foot into proper position or a light touch to remind him/her to connect with the earth and engage his/her strength.
65 Challenge yourself by setting a timer for 30 seconds, remaining absolutely still until the timer goes off. In my experience, anything longer than 15 seconds of the same thing begins to feel long.
processing all the information that the muscles and nerves are sending the brain while waiting in readiness for the signal to move.

From this starting exercise, the class is divided in half, with half of the class on the floor doing the discipline while the other half watches. While teaching style varies from instructor to instructor, the Suzuki Method encourages teachers to use a firm, commanding tone when putting the class through the paces, punctuated with the sharp whack of the shinai on the ground. In this work, the teacher serves as a stimulus for the student to challenge him/herself, varying the timing of each exercise. Suddenly the teacher will call “switch” and the group watching replaces the group doing, getting on the floor as quickly as possible and being ready to go immediately.

Usually the Suzuki portion of the workshop will end with the walks. Music with a fairly rapid beat is used for timing. The instructor demonstrates a walk and in twos, the students cross the floor using that particular walk. Sometimes forwards, sometimes backwards, occasionally

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66 The shinai is a bamboo sword used for fencing and Suburi (cutting/swinging practice) in Kendo. Kendo, “the Way of the Sword” is the art of Japanese samurai swordsmanship and is rooted in the Budo (martial way) tradition of Japan.
incorporating upper-body gestures, the class goes through all of the walks, ending this portion of the masterclass very upbeat.

For both the participant and the observer, moving through the Suzuki workshop has the feel of a vigorous martial arts class. The exercises are strict and precise. The students work against their own bodies and minds as the instructor spurs each of them to test their individual limits. Unlike the Viewpoints, where the training can both look and feel like performance, the Suzuki work feels like being drilled over and over again; only on occasion does the observer see glimpses of a performative quality to the training.

Throughout all of the exercises in the Suzuki Method a key component of the work is a focus on the body’s center and all of the deep muscles of the pelvis, particularly the psoas major.\(^{67}\) Successful study of the Suzuki Method requires strengthening these muscles and learning how to use them to greater effect. Suzuki-trained actors are able to accomplish great feats of physical strength and

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\(^{67}\) The psoas major is a muscle of the anterior hip. This muscle originates at the transverse processes of L1-5, the bodies of T12-L5, and the intervertebral discs below the bodies of T12-L4. Its insertion is the middle surface of the lesser trochanter of the femur. It is innervated by the anterior primary rami of L1, 2 and serves to flex and medially rotate the hip.
endurance because of the method’s emphasis on the center. The Suzuki Method’s emphasis on a strong center and a rooted lower half of the body allows actors trained in this system to be able to separate the stress and strain between the lower and upper halves of the body, freeing the voice while accomplishing difficult physical activities.

During the course of the Suzuki training, students have voice work added to the physical work. While holding the standing and sitting statues and performing the basic positions, the students endeavor to fully deliver, in a strong and clear voice, with the fewest breaths possible, a short monologue from a classical work. In SITI’s training workshops, they usually take monologues from their current or past productions, or from Suzuki’s productions. The breathing points are set in advance, the class must stay together, including the length of the breath, and the energy should remain the same. The Suzuki vocal work is as exacting as a choral rehearsal and utilizes similar concepts to obtain similar results. The students must keep the text driving forward with energy and strength. As the training continues, the instructor may start and stop the text at will as well as alter the statues that the students are creating; s/he indicates the time to start/stop by
striking a shinai to the floor creating a strong resounding crack. The Suzuki Method stresses breath control, focus, and vocal power when working on the voice.

Throughout most of the exercises, the Suzuki Method stresses the discipline of attempting to achieve perfect form in a form that is nearly impossible to perfect. The individual struggle between these expectations is central to the method. In this sense, the actor’s mind and mindset are just as important to train as his/her physical body. During the training students are discouraged from physically and mentally reacting to their mistakes by frowning, scowling, or cursing which indicates that they are internally judging themselves for their fault. Rather, they are encouraged to remain in the physical moment and continue the exercise without dissipating their energy and focus. This practice is almost meditative and in fact is comparable to samatha, a Buddhist meditative technique, where stray thoughts are accepted and let go, rather than allowed to distract from the meditative focus.

**Summary**

Viewpoints Training and the Suzuki Method can be viewed as opposites, the former seeking to liberate the actor, the latter reining in the actor with a strict
physical discipline. Some question how such a combination can work; others, including Grotowski, see immense value in arrangements such as these. In *Towards a Poor Theatre*, he writes,

> It is the true lesson of the sacred theatre; whether we speak of the medieval European drama, the Balinese or the Indian Kathakali: this knowledge that spontaneity and discipline, far from weakening each other, mutually reinforce themselves; that what is elementary feeds what is constructed and vice versa, to become the real source of a kind of acting that glows.\(^68\)

Grotowski clearly articulates a theatrical ideal that both Artaud and Copeau sought, one which has come to fruition in the work of the SITI Company. SITI’s work is a contemporary example that demonstrates how discipline and spontaneity can be fused into a dynamic training that enables actors to create physically expressive performances.

As with the previous examples the SITI Company’s training addresses key concepts such as freedom, discipline, focus, physical and spatial awareness, all within a codified and teachable system. SITI’s training,

like that of Meyerhold, Decroux, and Grotowski, requires practice and commitment not only to the form, but also to the ideas that support the form.

Both Viewpoints and Suzuki train the actor for a state of readiness not typically found in other training systems. When training, actors are expected to be ready from the moment they step onto the training floor without any of the common preparatory tricks actors frequently employ. In this way, the SITI training teaches actors to build and conserve their energies, releasing energy in a controlled manner.

The combination of these two training programs endeavors to create actors who are able to respond creatively in each moment in performance from a limitless bounty of physical possibility. Bogart calls the combination of the Suzuki Method with the Viewpoints “a magical, chemical combination” noting that Suzuki provides “incredible concentration, focus, strength, and the ability to change quickly...[whereas the Viewpoints adds] spontaneity and flexibility and being in the moment.”⁶⁹ This combined training gives actors the stamina necessary to execute challenging movements and to hold difficult poses all the while maintaining the necessary emotional connection to the

⁶⁹ Bogart and Linklater 105.
text that may be in contrast to such physical exertion. Furthermore, the Suzuki Method trains the actor’s body to support his/her voice in the midst of extremely difficult and challenging physical work.

Lastly, both the Viewpoints Training and Suzuki Method work to build an ensemble. Each develops skills that enable performers to listen to each other and their stage environment. The approach to listening is different in each. The Viewpoints teaches the actor how to listen in 360°, with all of his/her senses, allowing him/her to respond to anything in the performance space. The Suzuki Method first teaches the actor how to listen to his/her own body. After learning to accept the information that the body is giving the actor s/he then realizes that s/he is also listening to his/her fellow actors. This allows SITI to make decisions as a group in the creative moment, aiding their collaborative process. In order to maintain a high level of proficiency, company members get together each summer to train together, acknowledging that training is a vital part of their company’s work.
CHAPTER 5

WORKING TOGETHER TO CREATE A PRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will take up the third component of the SITI Company’s mission statement: the creation of new work. In doing so, I will discuss SITI’s approach to producing four different productions, the first three entirely created by SITI, the fourth starting with another playwright’s previously written work. For the former, I have chosen to write about Bob, Room, and Score, three 90-minute, one-actor plays because I have had the opportunity to see two (Room and Score) of them in performance, as well as observe rehearsals for Score. I was also able to attend discussions with the company, which the Wexner Center hosts on Friday afternoons after the production has opened. In addition, I have been able to view archived copies of Bob and rehearsals for Bob.
I have chosen to discuss all three because the three form what SITI refers to as a triptych, suggesting that while each is a stand-alone piece, they are meant to be viewed and considered side by side. Furthermore the approach to each was the same even though different actors and subjects were used for each. Each of these productions takes a look at three great 20th Century artists from theatre, literature, and music—Robert Wilson (1941- ), Virginia Woolf (1882 - 1941), and Leonard Bernstein (1918-90) respectively. These three original productions also clearly represent the collaborative nature of SITI’s creative process.

Unlike these three, Death and the Ploughman is not an original script by SITI Company, having been written by Johannes von Saaz in 1401 Bohemia. I have chosen to include this production because in addition to being one of the company’s most current works, it also demonstrates a markedly unique creative process, one that particularly highlights the company’s ability to use Viewpoints and the Suzuki Method to great effect not just in the training studio, but also in the rehearsal room and ultimately onstage. I was also able to see Death and the Ploughman when it premiered in Columbus. Finally, another factor in
my decision to write about these productions is that they were all commissioned by the Wexner Center in order to give the SITI Company tourable productions.

**Devising context**

Before discussing the creative processes used for these productions, it is first necessary to discuss devising theatre as a concept on its own. *Devised theatre* is a difficult thing to define. Alison Oddey in *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook* writes

> What identifies and defines devised theatre as a separate form worthy of consideration is the uniqueness of process and product for every group concerned. The significance of this form of theatre is in the emphasis it places on an eclectic process requiring innovation, invention, imagination, risk, and above all, an overall group commitment to the developing work. However, it is the very nature and eclecticism of the devising experience that makes it impossible to articulate any single theory of how theatre is devised, when every professional company or
group works in a unique way with different intentions, interests, and concerns. ¹

What makes devised theatre unique also makes it a difficult subject to document. Not only is it difficult to define, but there is also difference in how some label this type of work. Instead of referring to their works as devised theatre, some artists use the term new works or physical theatre. I prefer the term collaborative theatre because it emphasizes the process rather than the product. Bogart herself speaks of SITI’s work as a collaborative, rather than a devised creation, though scholars, myself included, place SITI’s original work within a devising context.

Devised theatre is the name more prevalent in the United Kingdom where significantly more creative artists are engaged in creating works of this kind; in fact, the subject is even taught for the A-Levels, with the recent publication of Gill Lamden’s text Devising: A Handbook for Drama and Theatre Students. ² Nevertheless, whatever the name, however it is defined, there are some common questions that this type of theatre must answer,

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even if the answers to those questions diverge widely. I will look at the questions and themes that Oddey identifies as common among artists currently devising theatre.

First and foremost, devised theatre challenges the playwright-director relationship and text-based theatre. Devised theatre demonstrates a shift away from the single vision of the author as towards a collective approach to creation emerging out of a desire by many companies in the late 60s and early 70s to find different ways to create a theatrical experience. John Schmor, assistant professor at the University of Oregon, notes that saying a production was devised “distinguishes only the means of production, denot[ing] the absence of the author/text as productive foundation.” Such an approach to creating allowed any artist, regardless of his/her traditional role in theatre, if indeed s/he is even a conventional theatre artist, to provide the initial idea for a production. As a result, this led to the development of performance languages beyond the verbal, indeed, many devised works share emphasis on movement and on other visual elements.

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4 Oddey 3-5.
After deciding on a subject that can sustain a group’s interest, a company must decide upon the length of time devoted to the process, a decision that often hinges on the availability of resources. While the conventional theatre world can usually allocate three weeks to rehearsal, a devised project often has greater needs for research and development, time to try and to fail and to try again until the performance comes together. In the end, a company must agree upon the length of time for a project and set deadlines that will work in the process. The length of time any given company uses varies not only by company, but also often by project. While there is no definite length of time that can be attributed to all devised theatre, each must grapple with time as a significant resource constraint, usually needing more time than conventional theatre.

Perhaps the most important question that a group must answer relates to how it will work. “This involves choices about how working structures relate to recognized roles or responsibilities of individuals within a company, as well as selecting the most appropriate approach to the work....”\(^5\) The first choice on how the company will work together will then define how the process unfolds and how the production

\(^5\) Oddey 42.
develops. Oddey identifies common arrangements and typical challenges identified with the traditional roles of director, writer, designer, and performer in a devised work.

Some companies collectively share the responsibility for communication and criticism, traditionally held by the director, while others bring in an outsider or assign the responsibility to one or two members of the company for any given project. Examples exist for each of these, with some companies using different arrangements for different projects.

Identifying the writer in a devised process is often difficult and frequently contentious since ownership is typically attributed to the individual who writes and publishes a text. In some cases, the writer is little more than a scribe, recording the words generated by the various company members during improvisations. In other cases, a specific individual, either from within the company, or someone brought in as a guest, researches an idea with the group, is inspired by improvisations, but ultimately is the sole author of the text. Complicité’s work is a good
example of the former while Caryl Churchill’s (1938–) work with the Joint Stock Company (1973-89)\(^6\) is the classic example of the latter.

The issue of particular strain for the designer in a devised process centers around time. By the time the production opens, the designer(s) must see to the creation of a safe and functional set, costuming, and properties. Even the lighting and sound design areas require a certain amount of time in order to create these elements for performance. The unique challenge lies in being flexible enough to explore the visual elements during the creative process while solidifying choices so that design elements can be stage worthy by opening night.

The relationship of the performer to the process is probably the one that most people identify when imagining a devised theatre production. This function in a devised theatre production often shares responsibility for research, improvisation, and discussion, sometimes including responsibility for direction, writing, and design. The degree to which the company is hierarchical or

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\(^6\) The Joint Stock Company, an English theatre company, broke new ground in terms of theatrical collaboration, working closely with writers to workshop new plays.
democratic will shape the creative process and varies from group to group and occasionally from project to project within a company.

Regardless of the process chosen for a devised piece, agreement on the process is essential prior to beginning the creative process. The nature of devised theatre stresses relationship-building, communication, and trust in a slightly more intensified manner than traditional theatre because the boundaries between traditional roles overlap and are blurred.

While Oddey focuses on the practical, defining and characterizing devised theatre based on process, John Schmor in his poetics of devising, looks at five qualities that are not specifically linked to the process. These five qualities are

1) the quality of shared experience or complicité,
2) the quality of not knowing,
3) the quality of incompletion,
4) the quality of hybrid mutability, and
5) the quality of material failure.

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7 Oddey 65-69.
I include his thoughts on this subject because they are applicable to all of the companies that I have included in this dissertation and provide another means of discussing work like the SITI Company’s.\textsuperscript{8}

The quality of shared experience, or complicité, is one whereby a company exercises its right to narrate, or to tell a story. Schmor asserts that this right comes with a responsibility to generate interest in the work on the part of the artist, but that the audience also shares in the responsibility. Referring to the works of Shared Experience and Complicité, both British companies, Schmor observes that their “theatrical events...demand of [their] audiences an active imagination to make their own metaphoric links” where the spectator brings his/her own experiences to the production as s/he makes meaning together with the actors as the performance unfolds.\textsuperscript{9}

The “right to not know,” as Schmor puts it starts with the idea that there is no “cultural, ethnic, political, or religious homogeneity in our audiences,” which has led avant-garde theatre to resist traditional definitions, since the very definition of “tradition” is constantly

\textsuperscript{8} Schmor.  
\textsuperscript{9} Schmor.
questioned in today’s cultural, ethnic, political, and religious communities. As an element of the creative process, this quality of not knowing often carries over into the meaning of the production, further enhancing the shared experience as each spectator figures things out for him/herself. 

The quality of incompleteness stems from the lack of an author, someone that Schmor calls a completing authority. The completing authority in traditional theatre would be the stage manager, whose prompt book traditionally forms the basis of the published script, providing blocking and design notes in addition to the playwright’s text. I find that Schmor’s inclusion of this quality in his listing is based more significantly on his work in the educational system. This quality is not as clearly seen in the works by SITI or other companies, whose works are often written down and published, bringing some closure to them, regardless of the fact that they may still be works in progress, continuing to evolve with the

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10 Schmor.
11 The stage manager’s prompt book is the master guide to the live performance and includes the director’s blocking and both light and sound cues. The stage manager uses the prompt book to call, or run the production. The prompt book of the premier of a new play traditionally provides blocking for the printed version of the script made available to the public.
company. Nevertheless, this is a trait that is demonstrable in SITI’s work in that the productions often continue to develop and grow even after their premier.\textsuperscript{12}

Mutability as the fourth quality I consider linked to Schmor’s third—incompleteness. He specifically is referring to the improvisational nature of most devised theatre and the fact that devised theatre often bridges artistic disciplines, where visual artists and musicians work along side actors and dancers. Increasingly technology is being added as groups work with cameras and projections, microphones and sound distortion, and computers and other high-tech gadgets.\textsuperscript{13}

Finally, Schmor looks to the quality of material failure as the final characteristic of devised theatre. While he acknowledges that this might be more a quality of his own work with his students, he also points to the work of Split Britches\textsuperscript{14} and the Wooster Group as examples of

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\item\textsuperscript{12} Schmor.
\item\textsuperscript{13} Schmor.
\item\textsuperscript{14} Split Britches is a lesbian feminist theatre company founded in 1981 by Peggy Shaw, Lois Weaver, and Deb Margolin. Their work is known for its gender-bending and vaudevillian style.
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companies who are not afraid to fail, who understand that failure can be an invigorating part of the collaborative process.  

The SITI Company makes a unique contribution to the world of devised or collaborative theatre that is rooted in the way that the Viewpoints Training and the Suzuki Method interact. The shared training and vocabulary that focuses on listening to the ensemble as well as the choreographic approach to blocking, sets SITI apart from other companies who take other approaches to creating movement and the physical world of a play.

Creating new works: Bob, Room, and Score

The triptych of Bob (1998), Room (2000), and Score (2002) is an ideal set of plays to use when discussing the collaborative style of the SITI Company because each is an original new work commissioned by the Wexner Center for the Arts. These three also share a similar creative process and are all collaborations with Irish playwright Jocelyn Clarke. As previously mentioned, SITI refers to these three as a triptych, conjuring up the image of a panel of orthodox icons. This image suggests that these three plays,
when reflected upon as a grouping, make a stronger statement about the arts in the 20th Century than they do standing alone. As of yet, the company has been unable to tour them together, affording audiences the opportunity to see them back to back over a short period of time. Before talking about process, I am going to address each production in turn, addressing the themes, talking about the scenography, and describing the choreography.

**Performance**

It is difficult to pin down a narrative on the triptych. Because each of these productions is written from the very words of the subjects, there is a quasi-biographical feel to *Bob*, *Room*, and *Score*, yet none of them provide a biographical narrative. Instead, the dramatic arc of each production conveys theatrically the experiential quality of Wilson’s, Woolf’s, and Bernstein’s art. All three address similar themes: the general nature of art and the creative process, as well as the artist’s individual idiosyncrasies, how their art interacts with the public. Each play also touches on these artists’ childhoods, particularly their childhood relationships with their

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16 Anne Bogart, Jocelyn Clarke, Ellen Lauren, and Darron West, Wexner Center for the Arts, 3 November 2000.
fathers. While these themes run through each play, each also raises its own issues that are independent of the other three. Bob, for instance, addresses the nature of time and space. Room explores the unique struggles that Woolf experienced as a woman writer. Score touches on Bernstein’s Jewish heritage.

The Bob stage is bare except for a single chair with arms and a small table (approximately 3’ x 3’), on which sits a pitcher and a single glass. A square is taped on the bare black floor, subdivided into a rigid 3 by 3 grid, each of which can be lit independently. The chair sits in the downstage left square and the table in the upstage right square.17 The lighting instruments are visible on trees on both the right and left sides of the stage as well as a row of colored footlights along the length of the back of the stage. Two large scoops18 sit in the upstage left and right corners of the stage which can flood the stage with a diffuse light.

17 Downstage refers to the part of the stage closest to the audience and comes from the time when the stage was angled so that if an actor were upstage, s/he was physically higher than someone downstage. Stage left and stage right are references from the actor’s perspective, not the viewer’s.

18 A scoop is a lighting instrument (also known as an ellipsoidal reflector floodlight) that is lensless and is typically used for lighting cycs and drops.
The most color that appears onstage is the result of light. Aside from the predominant white light, blue is the second most common color in the lighting palette with red and yellow, with the latter two used primarily to heighten the intensity of particular moments in the performance. At these accent moments the entire stage is ablaze in these highly saturated, pure colors, standing out cleanly on the cyclorama\textsuperscript{19} at the back of the stage. These are not the only colors used in this or other of SITI’s productions, but after having seen several of SITI’s productions, this is the lighting style I have come to expect. The emphasis on a stark, crisp white lighting and the purity of the red, blue, and yellow, stands out in a theatre environment that utilizes non-primary colors like amber and surprise pink (names of gel colors used in lighting).

Over the course of the performance, Will Bond occasionally sits in the chair, but more frequently sits on the table, the lines of his body (spine, thighs, and shins) as rigid as a mannequin. Bond walks backwards as often as he walks forwards, in slow, measured steps, usually gesturing with arms and hands. Among the several pointing

\textsuperscript{19} A cyclorama, or cyc, is a solid off-white backdrop upon which colored lighting instruments can be focused, transforming the overall color of the scene.
gestures, the most common recurring one is pointing to the sides of his head either with one hand or both. On a couple of occasions, Bond pours milk from the pitcher to the glass and then drinks the milk.

One of the most dramatic images in Bob has the four corner quadrants lit with the rest of the stage in pitch blackness. Bond performs variations of this choreography at two other points in the production. I include it in my description because it shows interaction with the set dressing, the unconventional nature of which is also indicative of SITI’s style. Bond pushes the table backwards across stage from the downstage right to the downstage left quadrant. Upon reaching the downstage left quadrant, Bond squats and crawls backwards under the table to the other side. While remaining in the squat he crosses upstage to the chair which he pushes from stage left to stage right while remaining. In completing these two crosses, Bond travels in and out of the light.

A little more than halfway into the performance, there is a section that is pure choreography, without text. A loud thunderclap marks the beginning of this section that is set to music reminiscent of Philip Glass (1937- ), with its repeated arpeggios, and a choreography that references
Lucinda Childs (1940-), both of whom collaborated with Wilson on his five-hour opera *Einstein on the Beach* (1976). In a diffuse sickly green light, Bond travels back and forth along the diagonal from upstage right to downstage left as rolling thunder accents the music. I have chosen to describe this section because it contains gestures and movement phrases that are both distinctive of Bob, and also contain phrases that are picked up in *Room* and *Score*. These choices also demonstrate the creative generative possibilities of the Viewpoints Training, as well as the strength and absolute precision imparted by the Suzuki Method.

The section begins with Bond running quickly from the upstage right to downstage left. Once there, sort of hopping a couple of steps at a time on his right leg, bent over and gesturing as though writing on a blackboard, slowly writing higher and higher on the imaginary board he crosses upstage along the diagonal. There is a frenetic, chaotic quality to the movement; the traveling is quick, the gestures are jerky and rapid.

Upon reaching the upstage right quadrant, Bond turns in place then straightens up and slowly walks downstage. While doing so, he gesticulates with his hands. With elbows
bent in to the body he rapidly gestures with his hands and fingers as though working an invisible abacus, or plucking the strings of an invisible harp while raising and lowering his hands from sternum to face, varying which hand is above the other one. The quick flicking hand/arm gestures are juxtaposed with the sustained quality of the steady pressing walk. The phrase is concluded by running backwards and turning in a flailing circle before beginning the next phrase.

The third phrase maintains this flailing quality in both the arms and legs. Bond crosses downstage diagonally by swinging his weight from leg to leg in the sagittal plane turning in both 180° and 360°, all the while swooping his arms in wide circles. The gestures are broad, taking up a lot of physical space and contrasts greatly with the preceding and succeeding phrases where the arms and hands are much more tightly focused. The second half of the phrase repeats the second half of the first phrase and is concluded by spinning in place in the upstage right corner before beginning the final traveling phrase in this section.

Walking slowly downstage along the diagonal, Bond points to his head with his left hand, points up into the
air with his right, points behind his head with his left, gestures to halt with his right, describes a box with both hands, he reaches the end of his path and after bending at the waist, quickly runs backwards as though pulled by a string attached at his midsection. In the first half of this phrase Bond’s gestures possess a sustained, almost dignified rate. This formality is immediately juxtaposed within the same phrase by the quick, indirect quality of the second half.

After reaching the upstage right corner, Bond raises his right hand level with his ear and begins gesturing with his fingers as he slowly crosses to the center of the stage where he slowly turns in place, pointing at his head. As he slowly turns in place the light changes from the sickly green wash to a frontal spot that gradually opens wider, casting his shadow against the unlit cyclorama. The quadrants along the diagonal that Bond has just moved along are lit from above by downlights as blue-green footlights create an accent from the back of the stage. As the lighting completes the transition from the diffuse green to the more focused composition, Bond begins spinning faster and faster in place for several seconds. As he slows down, the spotlight and the three downlights fade, leaving only
the blue-green footlights illuminating the stage. Bond slowly backs up and sits in the chair downstage right. This movement section comes to a conclusion as the sound of an airplane travels through the space from stage right to stage left.

Upon entering the performance space for Room, the audience sees four walls of a cube (left, right, back, and bottom); lighting instruments are visible on both sides of the cut-away box. The only piece of set dressing a plain chair with covered arms, seat, and back that sits downstage right. Ellen Lauren is seated in the upper right corner of the house.

As the performance begins, the lights go out; Lauren is picked up by a spotlight off stage left as she walks to the center of the stage, standing properly straight with hands behind her back, and begins speaking to the audience. In doing so, she speaks as Woolf offering a lecture on women and fiction to a hall full of women. She begins with a room, and a woman’s need for a room of her own in order to write fiction, text taken from her famous feminist work A Room of One’s Own (1929). Ellen stands still throughout most of this opening, only occasionally gesturing with a hand, which returns behind her back.
Photograph 2: Ellen Lauren in Room
Photo by Dixie Sheridan
Eventually the lighting alters, revealing the walls that define the room. Throughout the play, the lighting opens and closes, expanding to show the walls and contracting back to the spotlight focusing only on Lauren. As the lighting design develops through the play, the audience realizes that the walls are made of projection. Rear-projected lighting creates various shapes on the walls: windows, what appears to be a lamp, the shadow of a piano.

One of the more striking lighting moments has the stage lit by a single instrument focused from the floor behind the chair up onto the rear wall at a diagonal. A gobo\textsuperscript{20} in the instrument creates a window pattern along the back wall upstage left. The only other light is projected from behind the rear wall, creating what appears to be a small lamp hanging in the room. The light from behind the chair casts the shadow of the chair, and of Lauren, against the back wall upstage left as well. The moment progresses and a light in front of the chair projects another shadow on the upstage left as the upstage right shadows slowly

\textsuperscript{20} Gobos are carved metal disks, placed on the lighting instrument, that create a pattern when the light shines through. These patterns can suggest many things including windows, tree branches, or more abstract designs on the surface that the light strikes.
fade. Such expressionistic\(^\text{21}\) use of lighting gives visible shape to Woolf’s mental landscape as the walls of the room both nurture and confine her.

SITI uses Woolf’s words to explore the issues of sex, artistic inspiration, the politics of gender, and Woolf’s childhood, including her relationship with her father. The room becomes a prison that simultaneously exists as a confining space and also as a place of stimulation for the creative act.

As with Bob, I am choosing to describe a part of the performance that is particularly heavy on movement. Most of the choreography in Room up to this point has been minimal, a gesture here or there, walking across the stage, sitting in the chair. In this section, unlike the one I described from Bob, Lauren speaks, rapidly, matching the cadence of the language to the rhythm of her pace.

The section begins in the middle of the stage which is brightly lit. Lauren walks from the center downstage right and around to the back of the chair. Leaning forward she places her hands on the chair’s back. She gestures stage

\(^{21}\) Expressionism is an artistic movement, primarily between the two World Wars where external environment visually reflected the emotional and mental state of the individual. The Scream (1893) by Edvard Munch’s (1863-1944) is a classic example of expressionist painting.
right with both hands at ear level. She crosses upstage center to stand against the back wall; with her right hand she points to the ground, stage right.

Walking forward a few steps, Lauren turns stage right, crossing to the upstage corner, pointing up with her right hand and arm as she does so. As she reaches the upstage corner, she takes her right hand behind her head, turns around to face the audience and points with her right hand at her left hand that is face up level with her sternum. She shifts her weight, taking half a step stage right and repeats the gesture with both hands at ear level. She brings her weight back to center and points back at her left with her right hand. She points up quickly with her right hand; she slowly lowers her right hand lingering behind her head.

Lauren crosses to center stage where she pauses briefly, taking her hands pressed together from the right, at shoulder level quickly across her body to behind her left hip, momentarily looking as though she is constrained by a straightjacket. She walks forward and then left around the chair where she pauses with hands on the chair’s back. Keeping her hands on the chair, Lauren turns and looks upstage right. She bends at the waist, placing her head on
the stage right edge of the chair’s back. Lauren stands and spins around to perch on the stage left arm of the chair. She stands and turns back to stand with both hands on the chair’s back. Her hands and arms fly up; right arm at ear level, palm facing the audience, the left slightly higher, palm up. The left arm crosses to join the right, palms together at ear level. She points at the left palm with the right hand held at the sternum. She repeats the two gesture sequence.

Crossing upstage to stand against the center of the wall, Lauren gestures with both arms, making a peace symbol of her body. She clasps her hands above her sternum and walks downstage. She points left with her left hand, then down with her right. She raises her right hand as if to stop someone; she points downward with her left. She closes her right hand into a fist as she raises her left slightly above her head also in a fist.

The hand and arm gestures continue as she crosses in an arc to the upstage left corner, then to the center again where she lies down on the ground. Effortlessly getting up from the ground she backs up to upstage center before
walking forward again and in an arc back to the upstage left corner. New gestures that appear include pointing upwards and pointing at her head.

From the upstage left corner, Lauren walks upstage right and around the chair as she crosses to upstage center. She walks to center stage en route to the left upstage corner. Walking from upstage left to downstage right, Lauren sits in the chair briefly.

The text ceases after Lauren sits in the chair. The choreography, however, continues. This movement section echoes the previous choreography but much, much slower. Some of the traveling is reversed so that Lauren walks backwards and when she lies down on the ground this time does not lie on her back, but rather starts face down and rolls onto her back.

During this entire sequence Lauren is speaking the text rapidly. The physical and vocal tempo creates a sense of urgency, an anxiety, while Lauren talks about the violence of the creative spark, describing it as a blow that shatters something. She is then compelled to ignore the pain, gathering the pieces on the page. The repetitive nature of the gestures and floor pattern belie her statements of rapture and pleasure. Physically bouncing
around the room within the narrow confines of the walls, the audience sees an artist whose creative energies are concentrated so much that they have to find a way out.

This extremely visceral moment is then contained as Lauren returns to the lecture, standing mostly motionless at center stage. Breaking from the framing devise and slowly building to the crescendo that I just described is the dramatic construction of the ideas that are in the spoken text. In doing so, SITI drags the audience along Woolf’s creative experience, giving each viewer an emotional understanding of the writer, her struggles, and her process.

What was most striking throughout this performance was its physicality. In heels, Lauren runs around the stage, at times leaping over or onto chairs and blocks. The variations in tempo were breathtaking and the duration with which she held some physically demanding positions was awe-inspiring. The creativity of the choreography is a direct product of the Viewpoints Training while the stamina to execute it without letting the physical difficulty affect the vocal quality is the Suzuki Method at work on stage. Through dynamic choreography, Lauren and Bogart were able
to create their interpretation of Woolf’s psyche both
visually and rhythmically in a way that hooked the audience
from the get-go.

The movement in Room is highly suggestive of
Meyerhold’s use of the reflexology of Soviet psychology,
where the performing of an action leads to the feeling of
an emotion, rather than the emotion instigating an action.
In this production, the intensity of Lauren’s choreography
builds an equally strong emotional intensity, the
combination of which both physically and emotionally
affects the audience. Watching her perform these
concentrated and powerful actions causes the viewer’s heart
rate to increase, further enhancing his/her response to the
performance.

Score opens with a set that is markedly different from
that of both Bob and Room; rather than being primarily
empty, the stage is filled with music stands, some upright
with practical lamps, others lying on their sides. A
mirror, angled downward, towards the stage spans the length
of the back wall. This mirror makes it possible for the

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22 A practical is an everyday lighting instrument that is a part of the
scene design and can be turned on and off by the actor. In this
particular case, the practicals are the clip-on lights that light the
sheet music for an orchestra that sits in a darkened pit.
Photograph 3: Tom Nelis in Score
Photo by Michael Brosilow
audience to watch Tom Nelis’s footwork as he navigates incredibly intricate patterns on the stage cluttered with music stands. A bright red conductor’s podium sits downstage center and a portable standing silver ashtray complete the design. The ashtray is fully functional as Nelis lights up and smokes cigarettes periodically throughout the play.

Unlike the previous two productions whose gestural languages were almost exclusively expressive and abstract, Score also includes significant amounts of pedestrian gestures including putting hands in jacket or pants pockets, rubbing nose, and snapping. The repeated reaching into his jacket pocket to remove a pack of cigarettes, tapping them, removing one, and lighting it while asking if we mind if he smokes is a recurring bit that reinforces the feeling that Bernstein is having a conversation with the audience. Other gestures include movements from Bernstein’s conducting vocabulary and pointing at the head from Bob and pointing at the chest-level hand from Room.

Picking a single scene to describe is more difficult in Score than in either Bob or Room. Unlike the other two, there is no single scene that stands out for its choreography. The movement is both more pervasive and more
subtle, perhaps because of the emphasis on pedestrian
gesture and conducting. One of the more visually
interesting sections of this production is one where
Bernstein talks about his father. Here the lighting breaks
dramatically from the stark white as the signature yellow
makes an appearance. West (sound designer) and Nelis
reference both vaudeville and Bernstein’s Jewish heritage
in sound and movement choices. Throughout, yellow light,
especially picked up by the white jacket that Nelis throws
onto a pile of music stands, and the red podium stand out,
emphasizing the whimsical that underscores this scene. This
movement is highly presentational with jazz hands,
swiveling hips, and an overall comic sensibility. This
movement is punctuated with Yiddish as Bernstein talks
about his father’s emphasis on learning while growing up.
This scene is immediately followed by a scene where
Bernstein talks about one of his influential teachers. The
high energy movement and music that preceded this section
is slowed down as he talks about learning how to conduct
legato. The movement still has a presentational quality
and a stronger sense of folk dance, but in slow motion.

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Legato is a musical term referring to a smooth, even style without
any noticeable break between the notes.
Since costume seems to play the smallest role in SITI productions, I will mention the costume design for Bob, Room, and Score all at one time. Bond, as Wilson, wears a loosely fitting black jacket over a black shirt with black pants. In Room, Lauren wears an early 20th Century costume of a simple brown skirt that hangs below the knee, with a long-sleeve brown blouse. The blouse is slightly fitted emphasizing Lauren’s figure and has narrow sleeves that show the clean line along the arms. Lauren also wears heels, a fact that is striking because the audience knows that this is a one-woman show, 90 minutes without intermission and those viewers familiar with SITI’s work also know the potential physicality that they can expect during the evening. Finally, for Bernstein, Nelis wears black pants and a black turtleneck. A white jacket that he puts on and removes completes the costume.

**Creative process**

The first play, Bob, was inspired by an off-hand remark when Anne Bogart turned to actor Will Bond and said, “Bondo, can you do Bob?” at which point Bond did an impression of avant-garde theatre director and designer Robert Wilson. Following Bond’s off-the-cuff impersonation, Clarke, Bogart, and Bond decided to create a show “about
Wilson just talking.” Out of a few casual remarks while joking around developed an idea for a project that would later become a three-part exploration of 20th Century theatrical, literary, and musical culture.\(^{24}\)

Once everyone committed to the project, Bogart assembled approximately 70 pages of text taken from Robert Wilson’s own words, looking to sources such as interviews, letters, essays, and scripts. In the case of Leonard Bernstein video and audio recordings of his conducting, radio shows, and interviews were also included. Bogart started with a slightly larger body of work when compiling material on Virginia Woolf, since Woolf as an author had more text that could be accessed for the project. Bogart and actor Ellen Lauren, who portrayed Woolf in Room, spent time in a cabin in the woods one summer reading Woolf’s work, discussing her writing and her life, and making choices about what to keep and what to lay aside.\(^{25}\) It is at this stage in the process that the company does a form of table work\(^{26}\) for an extensive period of time, sometimes several weeks. Unlike some traditional directors, Bogart

\(^{24}\) Anne Bogart, Jocelyn Clarke, Barney O’Hanlon, and Darron West, Wexner Center for the Arts, 16 March 2002.
\(^{25}\) Bogart, Wexner Center, 2000.
\(^{26}\) Table work is the time in rehearsal spent sitting around a table reading the script for its meaning as opposed to time spent blocking.
uses table work to open up the questions about the material, rather than to answer them. Bogart believes that nailing down answers at this point in rehearsal stymies the creative process. This process of gathering together materials from which to create a new piece is not atypical of collaborative theatre. It provides everyone involved with the same set of information from which to work and serves as a limiting device, keeping the project a manageable size.\textsuperscript{27} The entire production team becomes immersed in the same body of material.

Bogart then handed this material over to Irish playwright Jocelyn Clarke, who went off by himself and fashioned it into a script for a specific actor—Will Bond, Ellen Lauren, or Tom Nelis, respectively—“playing to the actor’s characteristics and qualities.” When working on the text, Clarke intentionally created a work that the others who will be working on the project “can get inside,” can artistically contribute to the creative process. Clarke considers it essential to write a text that is strong enough, enabling it to sustain the interest and the passions of a group of 5-6 people for the extended period of time it will take to create and mount the production.

\textsuperscript{27} Bogart, Wexner Center, 2002.
This is a particular need for a company that cannot always work on a project over a period of consecutive days, but rather that must work a week here and a couple weeks there, usually with a final week or two of rehearsal time immediately prior to opening, over as long a period as five years from start to finish. Clarke takes it as part of his responsibility to craft a text capable of sustaining energy over such a timeframe. The benefit to working from scratch in a company is that all members of the company, including the writer, can take into account the individuals who will be working on the production, working consciously with their inherent strengths, weaknesses, interests, and personal history.

As Clarke puts the script together, he deliberately over-writes, knowing that once the project goes into rehearsal things will get cut. This allows the piece to be further shaped and refined by the actor, designers, and director. As a group the production team takes the 30 pages that Clarke has generated and creates the piece. Clarke’s

There are numerous historical and contemporary precedents for this. Historians strongly believe that William Shakespeare (1546 - 1616) and Jean-Baptiste Poquelin Molière (1622-73) wrote specific parts for individual actors in their companies. Scholars know that Anton Chekhov, in his later plays, developed characters around particular performers. Today, we see this process in the works of Terrence McNally, who has written several parts with Nathan Lane in mind.

Clarke, Wexner Center, 2002; Bogart, Wexner Center, 2004.
script comes to the company without stage directions. Everyone involved in the production—actor, director, writer, designers, stage managers—give notes about any and all elements of the production, rather than limiting themselves to their defined roles.\textsuperscript{30}

Because of this style of working, these performances are billed a little differently than a traditional play. Bob is billed as being conceived and directed by Bogart, created and performed by Bond, with text by Clarke. Room is billed as being directed by Bogart, adapted by Clarke, created by the Company, featuring Lauren. Score is billed as being conceived and directed by Bogart, adapted by Clarke, created by the company, featuring Nelis.\textsuperscript{31}

After Clarke has compiled a script, the company begins the process of creating a visual and gestural vocabulary for the production. At this point in the process the work is no longer about ideas, but rather about figuring out how the performance will look in both time and space. Bogart is careful never to demonstrate anything for an actor, but rather continually asks the actor to “show her.” Analysis

\textsuperscript{30} Bogart, Clarke, and West, Wexner Center, 2002.
\textsuperscript{31} SITI website: \url{http://www.siti.org/pages/pastbob.htm}; programs for Room and Score.
has no place in SITI’s rehearsal room; from this point on out, the work is about doing, any intellectual discussion occurs before or after rehearsal, but not during.\textsuperscript{32}

To assist the actor in the process, Bogart will impose restrictions, placing obstacles before the actor which must be overcome or circumvented. Through this struggle SITI is able to create powerful and evocative work. In this part of the process, the complementary training in Viewpoints and the Suzuki Method are demonstrated. The conditioning of the Suzuki Method permits the actor to accomplish extraordinary feats of physical and vocal skill while the open-ended nature of Viewpoints encourages creativity and exploration, allowing company members to talk about the material being generated.\textsuperscript{33}

One of the more unique aspects of SITI’s process is the fact that Darron West, the sound designer, is a part of the rehearsal process from day one. Bogart calls West “the best dramaturg\textsuperscript{34} [she’s] ever encountered.”\textsuperscript{35} In addition to

\textsuperscript{32} Bogart, Lauren, and West, Wexner Center, 2000; Bogart and West, Wexner Center 2002; Open rehearsals for \textit{Score}; Videorecording of \textit{Bob} rehearsal.

\textsuperscript{33} Bogart, Lauren, and West, Wexner Center, 2000; Bogart and West, Wexner Center, 2002; Open rehearsals for \textit{Score}; Videorecording of \textit{Bob} rehearsal.

\textsuperscript{34} A dramaturg is a member of a production team whose job lies primarily in research. More frequently seen in German and Eastern European companies than in the States, the dramaturg researches the play, its
performing the function of sound designer, West also provides direction, in part because the specificity and subtlety of his sound scores requires clear choices in the timing and effort of an action, as well as the rhythm and pace of speech. During rehearsals West freely gives his feedback to the actors, at times giving more direction than Bogart herself. Indeed, an outsider unfamiliar with the individuals in the company would probably not be able to identify the director just from observing rehearsal, since both West and Clarke work with the actor, as well as other company members who might have dropped in on rehearsal that day.\textsuperscript{36} Barney O’Hanlon, speaking of West’s role in production says,

Darron’s not just the ‘sound guy.’ He’s a dramaturg, a fellow actor, a director, and choreographer, all of which he does behind his sampler and DAT player, with one earphone attached to one ear listening to

\textsuperscript{35} Bogart, \textit{A Director Prepares} 18.
\textsuperscript{36} Bogart, O’Hanlon and West, Wexner Center, 2002; Bogart and West, Wexner Center, 2000; Open rehearsals for \textit{Score}; Videorecording of \textit{Bob} rehearsal; Notes from open rehearsal for \textit{Death and the Ploughman}, taken by Jennifer Schlueter, 2004.
different pieces of music and the other earphone off so he can hear what’s going on in the rehearsal room.\textsuperscript{37}

In the same way that a finite number of literary sources are selected from which the text is adapted, West puts together a CD folder of music and sounds from which he creates the production’s soundscore. As with the text, this imposes a limit and encourages creative problem-solving during the development process. Sometimes specific sounds and effects are not included in the folder for a given production. Rather than adding the necessary sound or effect, West will scour through the material he did include and find alternate solutions that might require mixing and morphing but still remain within the original self-imposed constraint.\textsuperscript{38}

West’s process is just as collaborative as the rest of the company’s; throughout the rehearsal process, he tries things out, seeing what will work best where. While this often makes the rehearsals sound chaotic, it gives the actors an opportunity to hear how the sound develops,


\textsuperscript{38} Bogart and West, Wexner Center, 2000; Bogart and West, Wexner Center, 2002.
enabling them to incorporate it into their performance from the beginning, rather than waiting for tech and dress rehearsals.\footnote{Bogart, O’Hanlon, and West, Wexner Center, 2002; Bogart and West, Wexner Center, 2000; Open rehearsals for \textit{Score}; Videorecording of \textit{Bob} rehearsal; Notes from open rehearsal for \textit{Death and the Ploughman}, taken by Jennifer Schlueter, 2004.}

**Creating “old” works: Death and the Ploughman**

\textit{Death and the Ploughman} is not a traditional play where characters interact with each other. Instead, the play is written as a series of 34 monologues alternating between Death and a ploughman, whose wife just died. During the course of the play, the Ploughman asks about the meaning of life and death and human suffering while Death defends him/herself as an essential part of the world and nature. The SITI Company added the character of Woman, most often depicting the Ploughman’s deceased wife. Throughout the play, she voiced some of Death’s lines and at the end, spoke the lines of the angel, or God, depending on how one reads the play, both of which creates a beautiful tension as the Ploughman tries to come to terms with his wife’s death for Death’s rebuttal is not the
argument of a cold and impersonal supernatural being, but is intimately linked to the very warm and human individual who was his wife.

Performance

_Death and the Ploughman_ opens with a black stage floor bordered in white. A backdrop with the image of gothic architecture, featuring archways fills the back wall. Benches sit, partially on the white border, in the upstage right and downstage left corners of the stage. Stephen Webber stands with his back to the audience beside the bench in the upstage right corner. He wears a black suit and a bowler hat, and carries a black walking umbrella. Ellen Lauren, in a simple, white, peasant-inspired dress, sits downstage left facing the audience. Will Bond, wearing dark pants, a white long-sleeve collar-less shirt and suspenders stands a few feet right of Lauren, facing her.

A pulsing, industrial score fills the space with an uneasy, disturbing sound. For nearly 15 minutes, the actors perform a silent choreography primarily of stillness, punctuated with a movement, a gesture, or a slight shift in position, all the while remaining in their opening positions. The most dramatic thing happening during this long opening scene is a bell that rings throughout the room.
Photograph 4: Stephen Webber, Ellen Lauren, and Will Bond in *Death & the Ploughman*
Photo by Al Zanyk
and eventually an eerie siren that prompts the Woman to begin moving away from the Ploughman and closer to Death. When she reaches just right of center stage, the lighting changes showing that the stage is dividable into sections, like in Bob, but with greater flexibility. The stage segments in Death and the Ploughman are malleable enough to look like blocks in a Tetris game. At this moment, Bond begins speaking the play’s first monologue.

Lighting in Death and the Ploughman, particularly takes on a physical presence, creating delineating the space on the stage. In this production, the color palette, while emphasizing white, is larger. What is most interesting is the way the light can be selectively focused, coloring the inner square separately from the white border and creating geometric patterns within the center square. These patterns help to reinforce the fact that these three characters exist in different planes of existence.

The isolation of the characters is further enhanced by the stage composition. While the actors may face each other and move close to each other, there is very little actual physical interaction. The choreography in Death and the Ploughman is made up of a series of solos rather than any
duets or trios. The interaction that does take place between characters occurs between the Ploughman and the Woman, or the Woman and Death, suggesting that the Woman is not only the point of discussion between Death and the Ploughman, but also the bridge that allows the communication to take place.

Darron West merges several distinct musical genres in this production which offer varying colors and nuances to the experience. In addition to the very industrial opening, Russian sacred music, bluegrass, and Black spiritual make aural appearances in the production, each presenting a different lens through which one can view philosophical and metaphysical conversation that the Ploughman has with Death.

Physically the most stunning part of the production takes place about three-quarters of a way into the performance. After what feels like an ending to the production, the actors begin running, almost literally, through movement phrases that the audience quickly realizes it has already seen. As the actors count, the audience recognizes that this two-minute scene is a form of a dumb show, that physically reprises the entire performance. Because the tempo is increased, this is the most frenetic
part of the entire play. The counting occurs not in numerical order, but rather a seemingly random order, offering audience members a glimpse into SITI’s creative process as the viewers connect the individual numbers with specific movements that they have already seen in the production. The spectator realizes in this moment that all of the movement in the preceding 90 minutes was organized in a complex numerical system.

The audience is quickly taken out of this highly cerebral moment and brought back to the emotional as Lauren, speaking more metaphorically as an Angel, or the Voice of God delivers Death’s final monologue on the seasons and the natural order of life ordained by God. Though lit as an Angel and speaking with the finality of the Voice of God, Lauren is also the Woman, the Ploughman’s wife saying goodbye to her husband. The emotional impact is intensified as Lauren and Webber leave the stage and Bond moves to center stage for the Ploughman’s final monologue which is a prayer to God. The stillness of the moment and the gravity of the speech create a tear-filled moment as the Ploughman quietly asks God to watch over his wife in
heaven. With the final “amen” of his prayer, the Ploughman comes to an acceptance of his wife’s death and slowly exits the stage.

Creative process

The traditional design areas—scenery, costume, lighting—are not aspects of production for which SITI is particularly well-known. Nevertheless, I would be remiss to talk about SITI’s creative process without mentioning how they fit into the production. The sound designer, on the other hand, plays a unique role not only in the final production, but also within the creative process. I see two possible reasons for this arrangement. The first is that SITI’s work is heavily body focused. Their actor-training is designed to develop bodies, capable of virtuosic movement, thus scenery and costume must be capable of supporting the inherent physical qualities of their work. Thus, as spectacular as the scenic and costume design are, they emphatically must support the physicality of the production. Secondly, sound has the ability to exist as another character onstage, interacting with the actors and enhancing the choreographic nature of the blocking. This does not diminish the artistic expression within the scenery, costume, or lighting, nor does it mean that these
design elements do not play important roles in the final production. Instead it underscores how important the physical training is to SITI’s creative process and the preeminence of choreographic movement in their productions.

There are two possible reasons why scenery is generally sparse\textsuperscript{40} in SITI’s work. The first is related to the tourability of their productions. As a theatre without a permanent stage, their work has to travel to other stages in order to be seen. With neither the commercial backing nor audience necessary to play in Broadway touring houses, SITI’s work must be able to run in a wide variety of smaller spaces. Financial and spatial limitations affecting scenery choices are particularly significant for the productions commissioned by the Wexner Center, usually one- or two-man shows.

The second possible reason that scenic designs emphasize open space is the inherent physical nature of their work. The actor’s body is a primary locus of meaning in SITI productions and a bare stage focuses the viewer’s eye on this body. In this way, the stage of a SITI production often looks more like a dance stage, especially

\textsuperscript{40}In the productions discussed in this dissertation, Score stands out as an anomaly with its numerous music stands and cluttered stage.
given the use of side light at all levels, including extensive use of floor lights. The lighting instruments, both floor and side, are frequently visible, a production technique only dating back to Brecht, emphasizing the theatricality of the performance.

Bogart spends time with her set designer, Neil Patel, at the very beginning, long before the first rehearsal. Referring to this time as her “treasured Zen time,” Bogart is very protective of her discussions with her set designer and intentionally limits the number of voices at this stage. They discuss the themes and the goals of the project going over options and possibilities to create a space in which the play can live. While Bogart ultimately spends the least amount of time with the set designer, their time together plays a crucial role in the development of the play.41

While decisions regarding the scenery are made early, both costume and light are brought in late, after much of the production has been developed. This is partially due to the nature of professional careers in design and the length of time SITI takes to craft a new production. As a result, neither plays a significant role in the shaping of the

production, something about which the costumer designer, James Scheutte, complains. While this has been acceptable in the past for the lighting designer Mimi Jordan Sherin, Brian Scott, the company’s new lighting designer, wants to become more involved in the process. SITI’s creative process currently seems to focus significantly on the actor as creator most likely because their training regimen—Viewpoints and Suzuki—is actor-training. Involving the additional designers earlier in the process could bring new methods to their creative process.

Because my focus is on acting and SITI’s actor-training, I will devote less time to the various design elements when discussing SITI’s process. It will be interesting to see how the company’s process evolves since both the costume and lighting designer are expressing interest in getting involved earlier. This will be worth exploring in a few years, to see whether involving these design areas sooner alters the process and/or the nature and style of SITI’s performances.

While bringing the discussion back to the actor, I want to start with the issue of casting for Death and the Ploughman. Since Bob, Room, and Score were all one-actor

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shows, casting is not as relevant a topic; *Death and the Ploughman* presents a different case. Originally the script called for two male characters, but Bogart decided to use three actors, two men and one woman. At the time the company settled on this idea no one knew what text the woman would have, that decision was left for the rehearsal process. Bogart made the decision to add the additional character after discussions with actors in the company and then following her intuition cast the show; Will Bond was cast as the Ploughman, Stephen Webber as Death, and Ellen Lauren as Woman.\(^4^3\)

Company members enter the rehearsal studio with the text memorized and for this production, Lauren came into rehearsal with all of Death’s text memorized so that she could be ready for anything. This would enable Woman to become many different representations at different times in the productions, at times the Ploughman’s Wife, at times an Angel, at other times the Voice of Death, and at the end, the Voice of God. All of these decisions were made in the

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\(^4^3\) Bogart, Wexner Center, 2004.
moment, during the rehearsal process, a process spanning three weeks in November, and two each in January and April.  

As a multi-actor show, *Death and the Ploughman* demonstrates the use of Viewpoints in the rehearsal process to more advantage than *Bob, Room*, or *Score*. Bogart’s traditional method of using the Viewpoints in rehearsal is to devote a short amount of time at the beginning of each day to help set up the framework for the rest of the rehearsal. Bogart introduces each of these sessions with a premise, an image, or an action and then leaves it to the actors to explore. As the actors viewpoint off each other, Bogart pays attention to patterns, shapes, gestures, relationships, noting which ones she thinks will be used again, either as a start for another Viewpoints session or as part of the choreography.  

The playwright wrote the script as a series of 34 chapters, or monologues, alternating between *Death and the Ploughman*, whose wife dies before the play begins. The number 34 has a cosmological, numerological significance.  

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45 Herrington 160-161.
46 In numerology all numbers can be reduced to a single digit by adding the individual numbers together. Accordingly, 34 has 7 (the sum of 3 + 4 = 7).
in this production, which SITI would use as a creative challenge—Johan von Saaz wrote the play all in one day, the day after his wife died at the age of 34. SITI worked with the production as a series of diptychs, both spatially and texturally, and consequently referred to each chapter or monologue as a panel. Each monologue was set in relationship to the following one and the space was shaped into clearly defined areas as well. Thus the ideas are presented in such a manner as to compare them, stressing the conversation between Death and the Ploughman rather than the isolation of each character. In this way, the resistance provided a way for the actor to avoid thinking about the difficulty of the series of extended monologues that the playwright wrote for the two characters.  

With *Death and the Ploughman* Will Bond specifically wanted resistance, a topic that Bogart frequently mentions in her talks and which forms the basis for a chapter in her book, so that he would not have to think about the text he was delivering. Bond sought something to struggle against in order to take his mind off of the text. Resistance is and 4) as its base number. As a curious aside, [www.astrology-numerology.com](http://www.astrology-numerology.com) lists the key words for the number seven as analysis, understanding, knowledge, awareness, studious, and meditating.

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**Footnote:** Bogart, Wexner Center, 2004.
more than an acting gimmick to deal with complex text. Bogart specifically views challenge as fertile ground for creative exploration. When there are too few obstacles, the process stops; the SITI Company seeks to avoid these interruptions in the production process by defining limits which may seem artificial at the outset, but which enhances SITI’s imaginative potential.

In order to provide the resistance, Bogart gave each of the actors the task of creating 34 moves for each of the 34 panels. While delivering the text, Bogart would call out a number and the actors would transition from one movement to the next. At first these cues were given by Bogart, but gradually during the course of rehearsal they became set, ultimately resulting in a performance where the actors took their cues from each other, the text, the lights, and the sound. During the rehearsal process, Bogart would work a few counts worth of material (1-5), then stop and repeat before adding a few more counts (6-8), with subsequent repeats going back to the beginning (1). This method of developing small bits of material coupled with lots of repetition enabled the actors to learn their difficult material; it also demonstrates the dance/movement
background of Bogart and others within the company, since repetition of a few counts at a time is a common way of teaching choreography.\(^a\)

In addition to the 34 panels, Bogart added an additional silent panel composed of 34 movements drawn from each actor’s 17 favorite gestures put together in reverse order. This silent panel was added to the end of the piece and provided a sort of visual flashback of the play’s physical action. In addition to this, the actors voiced their counts, sometimes at full voice, sometimes in a whisper, creating a “moment of transparency where the numbers aren’t hidden.” This counting reveals two things, first, an insight into the construction of the production, and second, a revelation of the difficulty of the performance. Bogart observes that counting is “a basic human thing to do when under stress,” which has double layers of meaning in the context of this production—stress for both the actor and the character. The actor experiences the strain of a nearly impossible task, since each actor had to learn 1,190 gestures in addition to his/her lines, and had to perform these movements according to a precise numerical pattern, while maintaining the inner workings of

\(^a\) Bogart, Wexner Center, 2004.
his/her character. The characters on the other hand grapple with life, death, and the meaning of human existence. The complexity of this production meant that the actors never made it through the entire play until opening night. ⁴⁹

Since Bogart is reluctant to tell actors what to do, she stops the rehearsal to offer suggestions, such as “try it to the right.” This however, is a rare occurrence. Unlike more traditional theatre, the actors are more likely to stop and clarify a moment, sometimes requesting input from Bogart or West. The actors themselves problem solve by making new choices, ensuring that the stage manager will record and re-record blocking sometimes up until the last rehearsal. ⁵⁰

Disagreement is an expected and encouraged part of SITI’s creative process, serving to keep the ideas fresh. The company’s unique ability to listen to each other allows disagreement to be a healthy part of their process rather than a fractious one. Bogart says

Collaborators…are not people who say: Is this what you want? Collaborators are people who disagree, who can

allow me to see from an angle I’ve never looked at before. It’s scary at times, to be in a room with people who agree not to agree, but absolutely necessary. I have no interest in being in a room where people are simply doing what I want.\(^{51}\)

Part of why SITI works so well collaboratively is because no one in the company, including Bogart is afraid to disagree; indeed a significant part of their work is based on navigating situations where individuals do not see things the same way. For disagreement to work in a creative environment, trust must exist among all involved, a trust that is developed and cultivated through not only working closely together, but also training together. Their ability to actively listen to each other, allows disagreements to be resolved in a manner that improves the production. Since even the director is open to listening to other points of view, the company is able to try out different options during the rehearsal process without being locked into one individual’s vision of any given scene. Thus the active listening, initiated through training and developed over

the course of multiple productions, allows the SITI Company to truly create works as a company, rather than works of a single playwright and/or director.

While I was not able to observe a complete process from beginning to end, coming in to watch SITI while rehearsing in their last couple of weeks before opening, I was surprised by a couple of things. First, I am struck by the degree of informality in the rehearsal room. The boundary between the stage, where the actor is, and the house, where the director and other members of the production team are, is not rigid. Communication flows back and forth across this artificial barrier with ease.

Secondly, without knowing the company’s organizational structure, an outsider might never realize that Bogart was the director. The only clue is the degree of attention that she pays to the performer(s). Bogart does not yell “hold” in order to stop rehearsal so that she can correct the actor. She does not spend time looking back and forth between her script and the stage. She does not confer with assistants and collaborators. Instead she primarily sits quietly, eyes glued to the stage. Rehearsal stops when the actor wants clarification, or when the sound designer wants to work a cue a second time.
Both the informality and the apparent lack of a conventional director suggest not only the comfort level members of SITI have with each other, but also the degree of collaboration that is a part of their process. Unlike a more traditional approach where the director, aided by the stage manager, maintains a tight control over the rehearsal, where all participants channel questions and answers through the director, members of a SITI production all share in generating the solution to a problem.

Summary

The SITI Company’s particular style of working clearly puts them in ranks of collaborative theatre companies. Whether working on a new work or working from a pre-existing script, the creation of the production, its style and structure, is a group effort; while Bogart holds the title, director, the directorial function is better described as a shared function within SITI.

In the case of the new works, Bob, Room, and Score, the company worked with a single playwright, though not in the traditional sense of the word. Jocelyn Clarke, rather than creating the text from the beginning, takes the various letters and interviews and writings that Bogart
gathered and crafts a script from Wilson’s, Woolfe’s, and Bernstein’s original words. From these words, Clarke puts together a script slightly longer than the target performance and hands it over to Bogart and the actor.

At this point the physical and aural world of the performance begins to take shape as actor, director, writer, and sound designer explore movement, gesture, sound, tempo, rhythm, and mood. Here the generative potential of the Viewpoints Training comes into play. While it is not unusual for the playwright to remain a part of the creative process, not only fine-tuning the script, but also providing feedback on how the text should be performed, it is somewhat unique that the sound designer provides the same level of directorial input. This creative process is the basis not only of SITI’s original works, but also previously written plays.

This collaborative style of inclusion, that not only includes individuals working on a specific production but also other members of the company who drop by during rehearsal is one part of what makes SITI unique.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

As an artist, scholar, and educator, I have been drawn to the work and workings of the SITI Company. I find their productions refreshing and their training systems not only physically invigorating, but also artistically inspiring. This dissertation began as a personal interest in how they operate in rehearsal. With my interest in both scholarship and practice I set out to address both, seeking to place their work within a historical context. A significant part of my attraction to SITI lies in the fact that both the founders and most members of the company are active educators, taking their practical experiences into the classroom. SITI’s commitment to training is so significant that it is imbedded within the company’s mission statement. As I sought a multi-layered historical context for SITI and
its work, I not only found connections between SITI and other companies but also discovered a map of ideas that have shaped my training and influenced my art.

One of the most striking observations that can be made is the incredible impact that Asian performance traditions have had on European and American artists. I am not the first scholar to see the significance of Asian-European interaction in the arts and it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to provide a comprehensive study of how Asian performance styles and techniques have affected European theatre practice, but there are key concepts that come into European and ultimately American performance that are worth highlighting when providing a historical context for the SITI Company’s work.

From first contact in the early 19th Century when the great European artists/theorists encountered Balinese dance-drama, Peking Opera, and Noh, Asian performance styles opened up European theatre artists’ minds to a more expansive idea of expression on the stage. Artaud, Brecht, and Copeau came away from these early encounters seeking what Artaud called total theatre, one in which costume, scenery, properties, lighting, music, and most importantly for this study, movement and gesture, contributed
significantly to the performance, at times exceeding the theatrical and communicative value of the written/spoken word.

These three provided a foundation upon which the theatrical avant-garde, and particularly movement theatre, as one of its subsets, would construct its artistic sensibilities. Whether looking to the mystical experience sought by Artaud, or the aesthetic distance that Brecht desired, or the physical experience to which Copeau was committed, subsequent movement theatre artists found inspiration in the teachings and trainings of Artaud, Brecht, and Copeau and/or their disciples.

All three of these early 20th Century artists demanded the creation of a theatre that utilized all of the artistic and expressive tools available to it. The preeminence of the written and spoken word was broken as the communicative potential of the design elements and movement were developed. Symbols, visual metaphor, and choreography now found a place in the theatre, ultimately paving the way for technology and dance to be integrated into performance. Both technology and dance present challenges in categorizing, describing, and critiquing work by
contemporary theatre companies as boundaries between the arts are stretched and sometimes shattered in order to create powerful evocative performances.

In the early 20th Century, reliance on star power, the ability of one brilliant and well-known actor to carry the production, was discarded in favor of an ensemble of highly trained actors, where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Artaud, Brecht, and Copeau each saw the need for a community base. Artaud’s centered around communal ritual, Brecht’s around workers’ collective, Copeau’s around students in a school. This idea of strength in a group would continue and influence how future companies structure themselves.

Artaud, Brecht, and Copeau not only influenced the performance and thus creative process of movement artists, but also their approach to actor-training. From Copeau on, directors and actors have realized that in order to create the total theatre experience they first would have to create actors who could perform this type of work. Indeed, one of Artaud’s failings as a director was that his actors, schooled in classical French acting, could not address his innovative approach to performance.
In the former case, as artists formed companies around common ideals that de-emphasized the written word, they had to develop new ways of working in order to create theatrical performance. For many of these companies, these creative processes involved collaborative work, frequently based around group improvisation. Théâtre du Soleil, the Wooster Group, and Complicité, like the SITI Company, each use improvisation, and collective research to create new, original works. The individual techniques that each company uses vary greatly, but all stress spontaneity and group dynamics.

With an emphasis on ensemble creation, these companies downplay the director, and by extension, the playwright, as the sole authority of creative control even though each company has a director. It would be unfair to characterize Mnouchkine, LeCompte, McBurney, and Bogart as insignificant members of their respective companies but it is equally unfair to attribute all credit to these individuals over the groups to which they belong. Traditional scholarship tends to stress the importance of the director, frequently overlooking the very structures and processes that set these ensembles apart from their peers. Each of these companies structures the directorial role slightly
differently, yet not one of them follows the traditional hierarchical structure where total control of the production rests with the director.

Actor-training has also changed as artists have sought new modes of expression and communication. As a baseline, all such training emphasizes strength and flexibility, approaching the actor’s body as an instrument in need of tuning across the ensemble so that the company is ready for a variety of challenges. This training not only sought to develop the individual actor and his/her body, but also the group’s ability to work together, improving artistic communication skills within the ensemble. For many this has led to developing and codifying movement patterns and forms. Examples include Meyerhold, Decroux, Grotowski, and Suzuki. While each of their approaches is different, they all sought to train the actor to meet any physical demand in performance.

These forms, or kata, become the basis of their approach to actor-training. In each case, the forms are difficult, requiring concentration and strength of both body and will. Long-term repetition of these exercises,
both simple and complex, hones not only the physical capabilities of the actors, but also their mental functions and group skills.

Similarly, there are multiple physical approaches encouraging the physical spontaneity that permits actors to generate original creative movement and gesture. The Lecoq-based approach to improvisation, arising from commedia dell’arte, used by Complicité and Théâtre du Soleil represent one major approach that differs from the modern dance-based Viewpoints used by SITI. While different, each allows these companies to develop physical material and communicate artistically and critically about their work. More importantly, training systems such as these allow theatre artists to generate tremendous amounts of material in relatively short periods of time. Such an explosion of creation affords companies like Théâtre du Soleil, the Wooster Group, Complicité, and SITI a great deal of freedom in their process. These creative techniques put the play on its feet more rapidly and with more creative options than one finds in the traditional theatre, supporting and enhancing the physical element rather than the textual.

Increasingly artists and companies such as Grotowski, Complicité, and SITI insist upon ongoing training as
essential to their artistic output. The emphasis moves away from learning a specific technique to continued growth within the technique(s). This changes the dynamic within the company since the members see themselves as eternal students, always moving towards a goal that is not a fixed, but rather a shifting, evolving target. Within these companies, members teach and train each other reinforcing the non-hierarchical approach to their work which ultimately strengthens their collaborative approach to rehearsal.

With SITI in particular, this is further enhanced by their ongoing training of young artists. Through a summer workshop at Skidmore College, ongoing classes in New York City, and master classes and residencies at colleges and universities around the country, members of the SITI Company increase their mastery of the training by sharing it with others. They continually explore the material, bringing observations and fresh ideas back to the company when they get together annually each summer.

Through international festivals and globetrotting tours, the world of theatre has become increasingly connected over the last century. As artists they have not only seen performances of their international colleagues,
but also attended their lectures, demonstrations, and workshops, they have borrowed and learned from each other. The lines of influence are intricate and complex, not only moving from generation to generation, but also across the same generation. The SITI Company maintains a special connectivity with SCOT as Suzuki continues to use SITI actors, especially Ellen Lauren, in his productions and as SITI actors travel to Toga to train with SCOT.

Within this dissertation, I have shown how the work and ideas of Artaud, Brecht, and Copeau have crossed national and generational boundaries. These early 20th Century artists have influenced approaches to training found in the studios of Meyerhold, Decroux, and Grotowski, as well as the collaborative processes in companies such as Théâtre du Soleil, the Wooster Group, and Complicité. All of these artists have influenced both Bogart and Suzuki, thus affecting the style and approach used by the SITI Company.

With the SITI Company, we see a confluence of several of these ideas. The exchange of ideas across national borders led to the development of their unique training. This training brings together Viewpoints Training, descended from the American modern and postmodern dance,
and the Suzuki Method with its roots in the traditional Japanese theatrical forms of Noh and Kabuki. These training systems not only develop the body, they also teach the mind to focus, the ear to listen, and the voice to speak. This fusion of American and Asian performance, of dance and theatre, trains the entire performer, something rarely seen in other schools.

Furthermore, both the Viewpoints Training and Suzuki Method cultivate ensemble awareness. This awareness strengthens SITI’s ability to collaborate as a company. In the case of the Viewpoints Training, the ensemble is developed through group improvisation which stresses close listening and responding to each other. The Viewpoints eschew individuality instead focusing on a fluid, reactive, group decision-making process not based on verbal communication, but rather on physical actions, both subtle and large. By developing an actor’s proprioception, the Viewpoints trains an actor to use his/her entire body as a sensory device, receiving and responding to input from all of the senses within 360° of awareness.

The Suzuki Method, on the other hand, develops ensemble awareness in two ways. The first is through the unison execution of the disciplines, through the rhythmic
stomping, through maintaining a physical line while going through Slow Ten. In the physical work togetherness is demanded in a strong, martial way. The shinai, or bamboo sword, used in Suzuki instruction can be both an intimidating and a liberating instructional tool as it commands a sense of discipline in the Suzuki studio; students quickly learn to respond to the striking of the floor as a group, rather than on their own individual timing. Students can hear when their stomp is not simultaneous with the rest of the class and adjust their own work to match their peers. By listening to the percussive stomping, students learn to train as an ensemble.

Voice work provides the second way of enhancing the ensemble. In this case, the Suzuki Method pushes the actors to create vocal concurrence in volume and tempo. In order to match both volume and tempo, students have to agree on when to breathe as well as for how long. In this case, students listen to each others’ breathing and strive for ensemble agreement. Again, as with the stomping, students quickly realize when they are not synchronized with their classmates and must work harder to be a part of the ensemble.
The combination of the Viewpoints Training and the Suzuki Method builds a strong ensemble dynamic that carries over out of the training and into their rehearsal process. Unlike traditional theatre companies where the director provides all of the leadership for their productions, SITI operates with a much looser notion of the director. While Bogart holds the title, director, and gives a significant amount of the organizational leadership, the company works as a group when creating productions. Bogart comes up with the initial idea for a project after much contemplation of the topic. The structure and scale of the project is developed collectively by the members working on the production. Directorial input during rehearsal comes from any and all members of the company, with Bogart acting as the final arbiter. Bogart’s vision starts the project and ends the project, but everything else in between is the shared work of everyone working on that production.

The triptych, Bob, Room, and Score, as well as von Saaz’s play Death and the Ploughman provide clear examples of SITI’s collaborative process. In the case of the triptych, the process extends to the writing as Bogart gathers source material that the playwright fashions into a script which is then edited in rehearsal by those involved.
in the production. In both cases the text is merely a pretext for a performance where the blocking is better described as choreography, filled with all the beauty and nuance that the dance term suggests.

SITI’s collaborative creative process, paired with its dual training system gives the company a distinctive production style that focuses on the actor and his/her body as well as his/her voice. The Suzuki Method allows the actors to perform astonishing physical movements and feats of endurance. The Viewpoints Training adds original movement and gesture that arise from an organic creative process. Such choreography breaks away from the world of realism, providing interesting and complex images that comment on, enhance, and even poke fun at the spoken text. It challenges the viewer to make new associations both within and outside of the spoken word. While other contemporary theatre does the same, SITI’s work is distinctive in that their productions could stand alone as viable performances even if the text was stripped from the production; the movement has that strong a choreographic presence.

With their extensive touring schedule and prolific creativity (the company has averaged two productions a year
since it was founded in 1992) SITI has made a significant mark on the American avant-garde theatre scene. SITI is recognized internationally as one of the leading American theatre companies, receiving invitations to bring their productions to theatres in Asia, Europe, and South America. Their relatively rapid rise to success can be greatly credited with their association with presenters at contemporary arts centers within the United States, most notably Jon Jory during his tenure as artistic director of the Actors Theatre of Louisville, in Kentucky and Chuck Helm at the Wexner Center for the Arts at The Ohio State University, in Columbus. Together the Actors Theatre and the Wexner Center have premiered 12 of SITI’s 26 current productions.

In addition to contemporary arts centers, the academic community has embraced the SITI Company and its training, regularly bringing company members to its campuses to teach masterclasses and workshops in Viewpoints Training and the Suzuki Method. In addition, many theatre departments either actively seek new hires who can teach Viewpoints or Suzuki, or at least include one or both in the list of desired movement skills sought in their acting faculty.
The SITI Company represents a culmination of the ideas that have shaped 20th Century theatre. From international influences and partnerships to ensemble actor-training to collaborative creative processes, the major ideas that have affected contemporary avant-garde theatre all find expression in SITI’s work. Because of their world-wide touring and their strong commitment to training young artists, both in their own studios and in colleges and universities around the country, their work is having a significant impact on 21st Century American theatre.
APPENDIX

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP TO SITI COMPANY

Acknowledging that my interests in the SITI Company go beyond the parameters of this dissertation, I am including a brief account of my interaction with the company, its training, and its work.

1998

My first encounters with The SITI Company was when they premiered Alice’s Adventures at The Wexner Center for the Arts at The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio in November 1998 and then brought Cabin Pressure to the Wexner in 1999. Alice’s Adventures explores Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, better known as Lewis Carroll, his interests in young girls, and his gift for story-telling. In Cabin Pressure the company examines the audience/actor relationship and was based on research the company conducted at Actor’s Theatre of Louisville. While both
performances were intriguing, strongly conceived and well-performed, my real interest in the SITI Company did not come until I began studying their actor-training.

1999/2000

Having studied movement as a secondary area while working on my M.F.A. in directing, I was eager to resume this study at Ohio State. I began taking movement courses with the M.F.A. actors under Jeanine Thompson in 1999. In spring of 2000, based on my previous experience in modern dance, I assisted Thompson in the classroom with her undergraduate Viewpoints course and occasionally sat in on and participated in the graduate level course that quarter. My intent had been to take the graduate level course, but my schedule would not permit it and so I entered the SITI training immediately learning it both as a performer and as an instructor. I was hooked.

I immediately began to see the rehearsal implications of this type of training and spent much time before and after class discussing with Jeanine pedagogical aspects of the training as well as ways to incorporate the work in rehearsal, both as a way to build a constructive company dynamic and as a tool for generating an original gestural vocabulary and movement phrases which can be incorporated
into the blocking. As a performer learning the work I particularly enjoyed the way my senses become heightened during and after an open Viewpoints session.

During spring break 2000 (March), I was able to attend the premier of War of the Worlds at the Humana Festival of New American Plays, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky. Of all the SITI productions that I have seen, this is the only one that did not fully engage my attention and interest. I am not sure if it is the material, the way the material is handled, but I was not as entranced watching this production as I have been watching others. One element of the production that did stand out in my mind, however, was the use of shadows as a performative element. Adjusting a performer’s proximity to the light source allowed the scale to be manipulated very eerily and there were several moments when this technique was used that I found myself focusing more on how the shadows interacted than on how the actors casting them interacted, quite likely the intent of their use.

In November 2000, SITI premiered Room at the Wexner Center. This was the first production of SITI’s that left me speechless. One actor, who never left the stage, kept me riveted the hour plus length of the performance. Ellen
Lauren created such a powerful characterization of Virginia Woolf that I will never be able to think of Woolf without thinking of what Lauren did that night on stage.

That same autumn, the Department of Theatre brought in Barney O’Hanlon and Kelly Mauer for a week-long residency. Still taking my own Ph.D. coursework, I was unable to participate. I was able to observe a few of the sessions much to my delight. As a future teacher, I am always eager to observe other teachers do what they do and often focus as much on learning how they teach as I do in learning what they are teaching.

2001

That following autumn, I took Thompson’s introductory course on the Suzuki Method. While I enjoyed the freedom and openness of the Viewpoints Training, I equally responded to the discipline and structure of the Suzuki Method. I found a commonality with the mime training that I had already had at Ohio State with Jeanine—both mime and Suzuki require precision, control, discipline, and have codified structures. I find myself engaged in this type of work in a completely different but thoroughly excited manner than the Viewpoints work. I particularly appreciate the mindset you develop as you study the Suzuki Method.
This is one of the things I most appreciate about Suzuki, in some ways it is more about training your mind than training your body and as you find how the two can work together, you discover you can accomplish truly remarkable things during performance.

The spring of 2001, I once again served as teaching assistant in Thompson’s undergraduate Viewpoints course, filling in for her a few weeks when she was away from the campus as a guest artist at the Utah Shakespeare Festival. This provided me my first opportunity to lead a movement class on my own. This was both exciting and slightly intimidating. While I will always maintain a healthy anxiety about the first day of class, my confidence level has increased substantially since that spring.

2002

In March 2002, The SITI Company completed their triptych on American icons when they premiered Score at the Wexner Center. While the Wexner afforded The SITI Company with a creative residency, the Department of Theatre once again offered a week-long teaching residency, bringing O’Hanlon back. This time, while I had the flexibility of my schedule to participate in the workshop, I also had the opportunity to observe significant amounts of rehearsal.
Not being able to attend all of the workshop sessions, I observed those that I could and spent the rest of my time observing the company in rehearsal at the Wexner.

What was perhaps the most amazing part of observing SITI in rehearsal was being able to see how a company that has worked together for awhile operates, seeing the human interaction. I find that all too often individuals that have a degree of celebrity or notoriety lose a bit of their humanity in the eyes of others. Noticing the banter among them does wonderful things in reminding us that they are people too, albeit very talented people.

Score was the production that most impressed me up to then. A ninety-minute one-man show about Leonard Bernstein, the production not only addressed the topic of music, but also had a musical feel to its very construction as themes developed and were repeated, as the emotional intensity ebbed and flowed much like a symphony. Despite having seen the production in rehearsal for nearly a week I still found myself moved to tears while watching the opening night. I also found myself wanting to learn a bit about symphonic structure and to add Mahler’s 9th Symphony to my CD collection.
The precision with which Neff moved in and out of the cluttered set was astonishing. Having seen several of SITI’s productions, I came to realize that their performance is often difficult to describe. In part this is because the physical work is much closer to choreography than traditional theatre blocking, and despite coursework in the Department of Dance, I lack the experience writing about dance. I also think that their work presents you with so much complex information, text, sound/music, choreography, and the actor that one’s ability to process it all is challenging. As an individual in the audience, you are awash in the experience and have a visceral response to the production that can be hard to articulate.

During the week that the SITI Company was in creative residency at the Wexner Center, O’Hanlon was in residency in the Department of Theatre, teaching the Suzuki Method, Viewpoints, and Composition Monday – Friday, 12:30 – 5:30 PM. Bogart joined the group on Saturday 10 – 1 PM for Composition work. I was able to observe about half of this residency because the rest of the week, I was observing the company in rehearsal on Score.
In April 2004, The SITI Company premiered Michael West’s translation of *Death and the Ploughman* by Johannes von Saatz at the Wexner Center, which I found completely fascinating. O’Hanlon had revealed to us before hand that the play was constructed physically in a very precise manner. Each actor developed 34 moves for each chapter of the play. This resulted in a total of $3,570^1$ moves meticulously scripted to textual, sound, and light cues in the 90 minute play. Even without the forewarning, the precision was overwhelming to observe and the control and definition that is characteristic of the Suzuki Method came shining through brighter than the crisp lighting design illuminating the stage. To say the least, I was completely enraptured by the performances of Will Bond (Ploughman), Ellen Lauren (Woman), and Stephen Webber (Death) as well as by the detailed choreography created by Bogart and the actors. While the performance could not be done by just any company, watching this piece demonstrates the capacity that we as humans have for concentration, control, and memory.

While I found the subject matter dark and personally difficult to process at this time in my life, the method of

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1. $34 \text{ (panels)} \times 34 \text{ (moves)} + 34 \text{ (extra panel)} \times 3 \text{ (actors)} = 3,570.$
exploration was so beautiful that it reduced the pain of grieving my own mother’s death the previous April. The execution of the choreography paired with the extremely passionate text, not only enhanced one’s ability to process its meaning, but in my case, also helped distance me somewhat from the feeling. For me, it may have been a case of processing the material on multiple levels simultaneously as I not only experienced the production but also thought about the technique that allowed the company to create this particular production.

There was an added movement-only scene at the end in which each actor hit his/her 17 favorite moves, counting them sotto voce while doing so. This scene subtly underscored the process of creation as each actor voiced a number as s/he hit a position, a gesture. It further had the effect of creating a quick rewinding of the play, allowing the themes to resurface, connections to be re-established.

During the week that The SITI Company was in creative residency at the Wexner Center, O’Hanlon was in residency in the Department of Theatre, teaching the Suzuki Method, Viewpoints, and Composition Monday – Friday, 12:30 – 5:30 PM and Saturday 10 – 1 PM. Despite the previous times the
SITI Company has been in residency in the Department of Theatre, this was the first time that I was able to actively participate.

Starting off with Suzuki was extremely energizing. O’Hanlon worked us hard, but with kindness, generously explaining and demonstrating the technique, a particularly difficult thing to do with nearly 30 participants in the residency ranging in experience with the material from none to the quarter-long class taught by Thompson. Most had at least gone through a three hour preparatory session that Jeanine led two weeks prior to the residency. O’Hanlon stressed the aspect of discipline and encouraged the participants not to strive to master the form, but rather to engage in the struggle that the form invariably creates.

Following the Suzuki work, we had a ten-minute break before engaging the Viewpoints. O’Hanlon spent more time exploring some of his personal interests in Bogart’s Viewpoints, rather than a full introduction to the material as a whole. As a result, we worked on space, time, and shape in a way that felt more akin to work in a modern dance class. As someone who has been made familiar with the
material, it was very interesting to watch who has worked with the material much longer and is in a different place of exploration and development with the work.

The Composition section of the masterclass consisted of creating a short movement piece in one quarter of the studio upon which was layered the various elements of the week’s work, finally adding text, and expanding it to the entire studio by the Saturday session. It was fascinating to observe how a short sketch or exercise could take so much shape in a short week and how adding a short bit of text from Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* could create a whole new level, despite the fact that it was never intended to work as a whole.

Watching O’Hanlon give notes and corrections was a great opportunity for me to learn not only from the personal corrections, but also from those he gave others. It was also such a learning experience as someone who aspires to teaching these training systems in the future. What I found most interesting was that most of O’Hanlon’s notes focused on where one’s weight was placed, not surprising since the earth-body connection is such the focus of the Suzuki Method. One of the things that he did from the middle of the week on was to test individuals’
engagement and connection to the ground by pushing on them while they were holding a position, sometimes a position on one foot. It quickly becomes apparent where one’s concentration is as some topple and some do not. Those who engage at the moment in order to not topple quickly strengthen not only the form but also the entire physical presence which when translated to the stage would create an extremely powerful presence, very alive, and very hard to ignore. It reinforced his emphasis on not perfecting the form, but rather on engaging the moments of crisis and struggle.

I made a spectacular realization when we started adding text to the Suzuki work. For the first time in any movement work, I connected to my center in a different way; I visualized my center no longer as a single point in by body, but rather as a sphere, slightly larger than a softball. Adding dimension to my center not only helped with my voice work, but also created a stronger connection to the physicality of the work as well.

In all, being able to participate in the residency was valuable and rewarding. Re-engaging with the material reminded me of why I am drawn to the training systems, which also reminded me of why I wanted to study this
specific company. As such, it provided a much needed boost in motivation to complete my dissertation. In addition, I learned more about teaching the material, something I hope to do when I take up a faculty position at a university in the near future.

2005

Finally, my experiences with SITI and its actor-training at Ohio State ends in spring quarter 2005 when I served as teaching assistant for Thompson’s Suzuki class a second time. This time around working with Thompson proved a much different experience, with a deeper understanding of the material, not only due to increased time with the training, but also due to training under O’Hanlon. Furthermore, as my research on Suzuki, his directing and his training uncovered more material, my comprehension of the work became stronger as I made connections between his writing, his training, his creative process, and his production history. This was also fueled by working alongside Thompson’s other teaching assistant, Kimberly Lester.

Almost daily, Lester or I would bring in something new to discuss with Thompson before or after class, some of which would be passed along to the class. The best example
of this would be the Suzuki’s article “Culture is the Body,” in Acting (Re)Considered. Having read, gotten stuck, attempted to re-read, and only after numerous tries completed The Way of Acting, I found that this article was better suited as an assigned reading in a studio course. Concise and more clearly articulated than anything in Suzuki’s only full text, The Way of Acting, I shared this discovery with Thompson who immediately distributed it to the class for discussion a week later.

The other significant development this quarter was the ongoing discussions of theatre pedagogy in studio classes. While this was always a component of assisting under Thompson the level had stepped up a notch. In part this was my desire to be prepared for teaching the material on my own and in part this was Thompson’s effort to improve the directed teaching experience for her students.

As a result of my experiences this quarter, I now have a 15 week syllabus for a studio course introducing the Suzuki Method, a few of CDs worth of music that I want to experiment with in a Suzuki class, a selection of course readings, and I’ve identified the images that I intend to put into a PowerPoint presentation on the body’s musculature that Suzuki’s work particularly highlights.
Better still, having been given the opportunity to lead a class session my confidence with the material has increased such that while I am not a master teacher of the material, I am ready to teach an introduction in a university setting. This was particularly gratifying since I underwent a similar transformation with Decroux and Marceau technique when I assisted Thompson in her mime course winter quarter. Despite not having a degree in acting, my movement background is extensive and grounded, not only in the practical but also the historical context and I am excitedly ready to begin my career in an acting/directing curriculum.
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