Production Participation – Fall 2015

University of Waterloo, Theatre and Performance Program's Production of Kevin Kerr's
UNITY (1918)

TINA LANDAU IS A DIRECTOR AND PLAYWRIGHT. HER PLAYS include *1969* at the Humana Festival of New American Plays, the musical pieces *Floyd Collins* and *States of Independence* at the American Music Theatre Festival, *American Vaudeville* with Anne Bogart at the Alley Theatre, and *In Twilite* and *Modern Fears* at American Repertory Theatre. For En Garde Arts she directed her play *Stonewall* and Charles Mee's *Orestes*. She also staged José Rivera's *Marisol* at La Jolla Playhouse.

When Anne's work is discussed, described, or created, certain words make their appearance over and over again: the Viewpoints. Source-work. Composition. What do these terms mean? Where did they originate? How are they used in creating work for the theatre?

BACKGROUND

I met Anne at the beginning of 1988 at the American Repertory Theater (ART) in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She had come to do a project with the acting students at the ART Institute. I had never seen Anne before, had only heard her described third-hand as "the Mama of Downtown Theatre," and had seen only half of one of her productions, having walked out during intermission, several years earlier. Out of mild curiosity, I sat in on her first rehearsal with the actors on Heinrich von Kleists's *Kätchen von Heilbronn*. Two hours later, I marched up to the head of the Institute and announced that I *had* to work with this woman. And so I became her assistant director on this project. In those two short hours, I felt the reality of what I could do, think about, and dream of in the theatre radically shift. Like many people when they first encounter Anne, I was deeply inspired by her generosity and respect for us as artists, and by the overwhelming flood of passionate, insightful theories she let loose at us that day.

Over the next three months, I worked with Anne closely on

From *Anne Bogart – Viewpoints*, eds. Michael Bigelow Dixon and Joel A. Smith (Lyme, NH: Smith and Kraus, 1995).

what would be the first of our many collaborations. In our first weeks of what she called "source-work," I studied what was then called "The Six Viewpoints." I did "composition work." I ate up her methodology as someone who was starving to finally *name* the things I had always done but had no words for.

Then something scary happened. In the following year or so, as I made my own work as a writer and director, I discovered that Anne's influence had so permeated my thinking that I had somewhat lost myself. I went through a horrible period of having no idea who I was or what I wanted as an artist. It was during this time that I realized the final and most critical step I had to take in relation to Anne's methods: to make them my own. To question them. Refine them. Expand them. Find the necessity and meaning of them for myself. As is the case with all systems or sets of rules, the danger lies in a blind imitation of their form without fighting for the understanding of their essence. I remembered Anne saying that the work she did was "stolen" from a myriad of sources, most prominently the Viewpoints from a dance teacher at New York University (NYU) named Mary Overlie, and the notions of composing for the theatre from a woman named Aileen Passloff, who taught a class called "Composition" at Bard College (one of the four schools Anne attended). Over the last five years, I've struggled to develop and teach my own versions of Source-work, the Viewpoints, and Composition. Anne and I now talk about these ideas incessantly, teach classes on them together, and continue to modify them in a trading back and forth of experience and example. The following description of these methods is my understanding and use of them, inspired by Anne's understanding and use of them, in turn inspired by people like Mary Overlie's and Aileen Passloff's understanding and use of them. It is impossible to say where these ideas actually originated, for they are timeless and belong to the natural principles of movement, time and space. Over these years, we have simply articulated a set of names to put on things that already exist, that we do naturally and have always done, with greater or lesser degrees of consciousness and emphasis.

So on the one hand, I'm loathe to do what I'm about to do: Describe the nuts and bolts of an amorphous, mysterious, and to me, somewhat sacred process. My own experience taught me the dangerous seduction of trappings, of taking on a method of

working or a "style" of staging. (By the way, the Viewpoints are not a style, nor do they imply a style. The Viewpoints are meant as much for naturalism as they are for postmodern abstraction.) Yet on the other hand, I know deeply the importance of structure, of guides and maps. That is what we use each time we pick up the text of a play. The text is simply the outline, the form. The form which does not become something truly alive until it is filled in with the necessity of emotion, thought, or meaning. Source-work, the Viewpoints, and Composition are also only maps. Tools and ladders. They provide a structure for the artist so she can forget about structure. They are there to free her up for the much more difficult, consuming task of expression, of getting in touch with and communicating the stuff of the soul. They exist *in the service of Art.*

Source-Work

> *Source-work* is a series of activities done at the beginning of the rehearsal process to get in touch—both intellectually and emotionally, both individually and collectively—with "the source" from which you are working.
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> *Source-work* is the time taken (before you begin rehearsing anything the audience is actually going to see on stage) to enter with your entire being into the world, the issues, the heart of your material.
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> *Source-work* can include, but is not limited to, work using the Viewpoints and Composition.

Anne believes that great theatre, whether it is a new piece you are creating or an old play you are producing, carries inside of it *a question*. It is this question, however the collaborators feel it, which is the source of their work. It is this question which needs to be discovered, awakened and brought to life for the audience. But in order for this to happen for an audience, the question must first be alive for the collaborators (not only the director or writer, but also the actors and designers). Source-work is a way of lighting the fire for everyone to share. It's not

about staging. It's not about setting the final product. It is about *making time* at the beginning of the process–sometimes only a day or two, sometimes a month or more (depending always on time limitations)–to wake up the question inside the piece in a true, personal way for everyone involved.

A director often does Source-work on her own before rehearsals begin. Anne reads a ton of books and buys dozens of new CDs to listen to. I cut out photographs and stick them all over the walls and rent movies of a particular era or genre or subject. Other directors might go to the library, make field trips, talk to people–any kind of research or preparation which informs the work. So when a director walks into rehearsal on the first day, she is often weeks or months ahead of the rest of the company in her obsession with the material. Source-work is used to provide a similar time and space for the collaborators to fill up with their own knowledge, interest, dreams and reactions to the material. The director has caught a disease, and somehow in those critical early moments in the process she has to make the disease contagious. Source-work spreads the disease. Source-work is an invitation to obsession.

Although Anne describes the source as a question, I think of it as anything which is the origin for the work at hand. Source-work is about getting in touch with this original impulse behind the work, as well as the work itself, i.e. the text, its relevance, its period or author, or the physical and aural world of the production. The source of a theatre piece can be as intangible as a feeling or as concrete as a newspaper clipping or found object. Theatre can be made with anything as its source. Source-work is the time we put aside to "riff" off the source, to respond to it as a group, and to cause and identify an explosive chemistry between it and us.

An example of Source-work in rehearsal:

At the first rehearsal for *Kätchen von Heilbronn*, Anne asked everyone to come in on the second day with a list or presentation which answered the question "What is German?". She was interested not in academic research, which would bring us to the material from our heads, but in subjective responses which would bring us to the material from our hearts and imaginations: our preconceptions, our prejudices, our fantasies, our

own memories and histories and culture. She wanted to bring our hidden selves to the surface through Source-work. So when we came in on the second day of rehearsal, one person read a list of things German, another brought in "German" food for us to eat, and I played the most clichéd "German" music I could think of on the piano, ranging from Beethoven's Fifth to the Nazi anthem "Tomorrow Belongs to Me" from *Cabaret*. In this way, we were able to identify where we were starting as a group in relationship to the play, to become aware of its context for us, and then to decide how and why to operate out of that–or not.

A second example:

When I visited Anne in rehearsal for *Strindberg Sonata* (a piece she made about Strindberg's world at the University of California at San Diego), she was in the middle of Source-work with the company. She had asked the actors to fill in the blanks: "When I think of Strindberg, I see _____, I hear _____, I smell _____," etc. On the day I visited they were reading their lists out loud. They were full of images of men in top hats and women in long gowns, crimson and black velvet, Edvard Munch paintings; the sounds of a piano playing, a clock ticking, a gun shot; the smells of paper burning, liquor on someone's breath, a bouquet of flowers...The first things that came up were often the most obvious, but Anne encouraged the actors to lean into the clichés and stereotypes rather than try to ignore them. By going through them, she explained, they would come out on the other side with something that used, but transformed them. Most importantly for me, the lists had served to waken the imaginations of the actors and to start creating the vocabulary for their "play-world."

When I direct a piece, I start with the assumption that we can create an entirely new universe on stage, a *play-world*. Rather than taking for granted that the reality of the play will be the same as our everyday reality, we instead assume that anything in this play-world can be invented from scratch. The play-world is the set of laws belonging to this piece and no other: The way time operates, the way people dress, the color palate, what constitutes good or evil, good manners or bad, what a certain gesture denotes, etc. I use Source-work to create the play-

world of any given piece. Out of tasks like the one above, we develop a list which defines our new world. Sometimes these are concrete and historical (as in the way people hold cigarettes in turn-of-the century Russia so as to make them last longer), and sometimes they are invented (as in Anne's production of *Small Lives/Big Dreams* where everyone in the universe has to enter from stage right and exit stage left so that to exit stage right takes on a specific meaning of breaking the rules, leaving the game, going backwards, going towards death).

In addition to the talking and writing that we might do as a group in Source-work, it is during this time at the beginning of rehearsals that we do the Viewpoint training which subsequently leads to Composition work.

The Viewpoints

> *The Viewpoints* are a philosophy of movement translated into a technique for 1) training performers and 2) creating movement on stage.
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> *The Viewpoints* are the set of names given to certain basic principles of movement; these names constitute a language for talking about what happens or works on stage.
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> *The Viewpoints* are points of awareness that a performer or creator has while working.

Anne came into contact with the Viewpoints at NYU. When I met her, there were six Viewpoints. Today we work with nine Viewpoints, in addition to several subcategories and viewpoints which are specifically related to sound as opposed to movement. The Viewpoints overlap with each other and constantly change in relative value, depending on the artist or teacher and/or the style of the production.

Viewpoints of Time

- *Tempo*–the rate of speed at which a movement occurs; how fast or slow something happens on stage.

- *Duration*–how long a movement or sequence of movements continues; duration in terms of the Viewpoint work specifically relates to how long a group of people working together stay inside a certain section of movement before it changes.

- *Kinesthetic Response*–a spontaneous reaction to motion which occurs outside you; the timing in which you respond to the external events of movement or sound; the impulsive movement which occurs from a stimulation of the senses. An example: Someone claps in front of your eyes and you blink in response, or someone slams a door and you impulsively stand up from the chair in which you were sitting.

- *Repetition*–the repeating of something on stage. Repetition includes:
  a) Internal Repetition (repeating a movement within your own body) and
  b) External Repetition (repeating the shape, tempo, gesture, etc. of something outside your own body).

Viewpoints of Space

- *Shape*–the contour or outline the body (or bodies) make in space. All shape can be broken down into either:
  a) lines
  b) curves
  c) a combination of lines and curves

Therefore, in the Viewpoint training we work on creating shapes that are round, shapes that are angular and shapes that are a mixture of these two. In addition, shape can either be:
  a) stationary
  b) moving through space.

Lastly, shape can be made in one of three forms:
  a) the body in space
  b) the body in relationship to architecture making a shape
  c) the body in relationship to other bodies making a shape

- *Gesture*–a movement involving a part or parts of the body. Gestures can be made with the hands, the arms, the legs, the head, the mouth, the eyes, the feet, the stomach or any other

part or combination of parts which can be isolated. Gesture is broken down into:

a) Behavioral Gesture–Behavioral Gesture belongs to the concrete, physical world of human behavior as we observe it in our everyday reality. It is the kind of gesture you see in the supermarket or on the subway. Scratching, pointing, waving, sniffing, bowing, saluting are all Behavioral Gestures. Behavioral Gesture often has a thought or intention behind it. Behavioral Gesture gives information about character, period, physical health, circumstance, weather, clothes, etc. Behavioral Gesture is usually defined by a person's character or the time and place in which they live. Behavioral Gesture can be further broken down and worked on in terms of Private Gesture and Public Gesture.

b) Expressive Gesture–Expressive Gesture expresses an inner state or emotion. It is abstract and symbolic rather than representational. It is universal and timeless and is not something you would normally see someone do in the supermarket or subway.

▪ *Architecture*–the physical environment in which you are working and how awareness of it affects movement. How many times have we seen productions where there is a lavish, intricate set covering the stage and yet the actors remain down center, hardly exploring or using the surrounding architecture? In working architecture as a Viewpoint, we learn to dance with the space, to be in dialogue with a room, to let movement (especially shape and gesture) evolve out of our surroundings. Architecture is broken down into:

a) solid mass (walls, floors, ceilings, furniture, windows, doors, etc.)

b) texture (whether the solid mass is wood or metal or fabric will change the kind of movement we create in relationship to it)

c) light (the sources of light in the room, the shadows we make in relationship to these sources, etc.)

d) color (creating movement off of the colors in the space, e.g. how one red chair among many black ones would affect our choreography in relation to that chair)

In working with architecture, we create *spatial metaphors*, giving form to such feelings as I'm "up against the wall," "caught between the cracks," "trapped," "lost in space," "on the threshold," "high as a kite," etc.

▪ *Spatial Relationship*–the distance between things on stage, especially one body to another, one body to a group of bodies, or the body to the playing space. What is the full range of possible distances between things on stage? What kinds of groupings allow us to see a stage picture more clearly? Which groupings suggest an event or emotion, express a dynamic? In both real life and on the stage, we tend to position ourselves at a polite two or three foot distance from someone we are talking to. When we become aware of the expressive possibilities of Spatial Relationship on stage, we begin working with less polite but more dynamic distances of extreme proximity or extreme separation.

▪ *Topography*–the *landscape*, the *floor pattern*, or the *design* we create through movement in the space. In defining a landscape, for instance, we might decide that the downstage area has great density, is difficult to move through, while the upstage area has less density and therefore involves more fluidity and faster tempos. In working on floor pattern, we can use the image that the bottom of our feet have red paint on them and that, as we move through the space, the picture that evolves on the floor is the floor pattern which emerges to the onlooker's eye over time. The design involves choices about the size and shape of the space that is available for us to work in; for example, we might choose to work in a narrow three-foot strip all the way downstage or in a giant triangular shape which covers the whole floor, etc.

Use of the Viewpoints in Rehearsal

There are as many different ways to work on the Viewpoints in rehearsal as there are rehearsal approaches. Usually, Anne will do anywhere from a day to a week of *Viewpoint Training*. As training, the Viewpoints function much as scales do for a pianist or working at the barre does for the ballet dancer. It is a structure for practice, for keeping specific "muscles" in shape, alert, flexible. The actor, in the case of the Viewpoints, exercises

awareness (awareness of the different Viewpoints), the ability to listen with the entire body, and a sense of spontaneity and extremity. The actor trains to take in and use everything that occurs around her, and to not exclude anything because she thinks she knows what is good or bad, useful or not. The Viewpoints enable performers to find possibility larger than what they first imagine–whether it is in creating a shape they didn't know their body was capable of or in discovering a range of unexpected gestures for a character. By using the Viewpoints fully, we eliminate the actor's ability to state "my character would never do that." By using the Viewpoints fully, we give up our own heady decisions and judgments. By using the Viewpoints fully, we give ourselves surprise, contradiction and unpredictability.

The Viewpoints are practiced each day in rehearsal, at first separately and, after some time, together. Each rehearsal might begin with a twenty-minute Viewpoint session in which the actors will work together in an "improvisatory" fashion. The only set structure is the notion of the Viewpoints. When the SITI company rehearses, their beginning twenty-minute set each day includes working off of music and light as well. For instance, they apply the notion of Kinesthetic Response to changes in sound, so that when the sound designer Darron West suddenly changes the music, the actors immediately incorporate a response in movement. When working with music in the Viewpoints, we ask, "How can one be open to and affected by the music, without being dictated or limited by it?"

In preparing for specific work on the play, the Viewpoints can also be used to create more specific "improvisations" based on *themes*. For instance, in beginning work on *The Medium*, Anne might give the company the theme of "The Future." Using their awareness of the Viewpoints, the company will create spontaneous movement which is somehow of "The Future." Just as when we work with music, the use of a theme is intended to inspire rather than determine movement, to open up rather than limit choices. The company makes movement which is somehow expressive of "The Future" without being literal. The company then observes what patterns emerged in their Viewpoints, discusses them, and determines whether or not to include them in the vocabulary for the production. For instance, working with

the theme of "The Future," the company might discover that their shapes were predominantly angular and geometric. Or that there were extreme switches of tempo from slow motion to hyperspeed. Or that the gesture of covering the eyes kept coming up. Or that they were moving on the floor pattern of a grid. These patterns can then be used as guides in staging. Or not. The director, like the actors, has worked with an *awareness* of the Viewpoints so as to create a conscious and extreme range of choice.

Anne often uses the Viewpoints as the basis for staging a piece. By using them, the actors become the individual and collective choreographers of the physical action. First, the Viewpoints are a common language that the company shares. They become a shorthand for communication. Anne can look at the stage, notice that the spacing is cluttered, say to the actors "Spatial Relationship," and they will adjust accordingly to create a more "readable" stage picture. Second, the Viewpoints are a tool for the actors to make their own staging rather than have the director tell them where to go and what to do. The information which causes movement doesn't come from a direction as much as a response to what is already happening around them in the playing space. In this way, the movement is organic and belongs to the actor. Lastly, the Viewpoints are often used to generate and then "set" the staging. Anne might ask two actors to make a movement sequence using the Viewpoints which expresses the relationship between these two characters. The text will then be "put on" the movement. In this way, Anne chooses to set the form but allow the emotional life of the characters to remain open. The staging becomes the vessel for what goes on in the interior life. Additionally, the piece begins operating on multiple "tracks" (as in film there is a visual-track and a sound-track or in music there is four- or eight- or twelve-track recording). The movement has been freed from the text so that each is informed by and related to the other without it being the same as the other. There is a tension between what is seen and what is heard, and now the spoken text allows us to see the physical text more clearly and the physical text allows us to hear the spoken text more clearly. The various "tracks" of a theatre piece can be separated, played in counterpoint, or sync-ed up to cre-

ate different expressions of harmony and discord, balance and disorientation.

These are only some of the ways the Viewpoints are used in moving from training to production. The Viewpoint of Gesture can be used to work on developing character. The Viewpoint of Architecture can be used to stage an entire scene around and in and on a doorway or, as Anne would say, "to make door art." The possibilities are infinite.

Finally, Anne and I have recently started doing in-depth experimentation with the Viewpoints as they relate to sound. In our classes in New York, we are currently working on applying the notions of Shape, Tempo, Gesture, Architecture, Repetition, Duration, and Kinesthetic Response to sound (abstract) and speech (sound with denotation and connotation). While the Viewpoints of Topography and Spatial Relationship have become less useful in this area, two new Viewpoints have inserted themselves into our training here: Dynamic (or volume) and Pitch (or tone). In exploring this new territory, we hope to eventually put the *Physical and Aural Viewpoints* together so that the Viewpoint sessions will include both movement and text.

Composition

Composition is the practice of selecting and arranging the separate components of theatrical language into a cohesive work of art for the stage. It is the same technique that any choreographer, painter, writer, composer, or filmmaker uses in their corresponding disciplines.

Composition is to the creator (whether director, writer, performer, designer, etc.) what the Viewpoints are to the actor: a method for practicing her art.

Composition is a method for revealing to ourselves our hidden thoughts and feelings about the material. Because we usually make Compositions in rehearsal in an unbelievably short amount of time (anywhere from three minutes to half an hour), we have no time to think. Composition provides a structure for working from our impulses and intuition.

Composition is a method for generating, defining and developing the theatre vocabulary that will be used for any given piece. In Composition, we make pieces so that we can point to them and say, "That worked," and ask, "Why?"—so that we can then articulate which ideas, moments, images, etc., we will include in our production.

Composition is a method for creating new work. It is an alternative method of writing. Rather than being alone in a room with a computer, Composition is writing with a group of people on their feet. In creating the drug trips for my piece *1969* at last year's Humana Festival of New American Plays or in Anne's creating her Brecht piece *No Plays No Poetry*, we both employed the magic of Composition to have the company generate tons of material which we then sifted through as a film editor would, selecting which material to use and in what order.

Compositions are assignments we give to the company to have them create short, specific theatre pieces addressing a particular aspect of the work. Anne and I use Composition during the Source-work period of a rehearsal to engage the collaborators in the process of generating their own work around the source. The assignment will usually include an overall intention or structure as well as a substantial list of ingredients which must be included in the piece. This list is the raw material of the theatre language we'll speak in the piece—whether principles that are useful for staging (symmetry versus asymmetry, use of scale and perspective, juxtaposition, etc.) or the ingredients that belong specifically to the

play-world we are working on (these can be objects, textures, colors, sounds, actions, etc.). These ingredients are to a Composition what single words are to a paragraph or essay. The creator makes meaning by their arrangement. In addition, in Composition work we study and use principles from other disciplines as translated to the stage. For example, stealing from music, we might ask what the rhythm of a moment is, or how to interact based on a fugue structure, or how a coda functions and whether or not we should add one...Or we'll think about film and ask, "How do we stage a close-up (i.e. what is its equivalent in the theatre?). An establishing shot? A montage?" In applying compositional principles from other disciplines to the theatre, we push the envelope of theatrical possibility and challenge ourselves to create new forms.

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The following is an imaginary, but typical Composition assignment that Anne or I might give to actors in the first week of rehearsal for a Chekhov play or a piece about Chekhov:

Divide into groups of five. Each group will create a 6 minute piece which is an expression of a "Chekhovian" world.

The piece should be in three parts, each with a clear beginning and end, and each separated by a device (a blackout, a voice-over, a bell, etc.). The three parts are titled:

1) The way things look in this world
2) The way things sound in this world
3) The way people are in this world

You must *include in your Composition piece:*

- All the Viewpoints.

- A setting (somewhere in this building) which is the perfect architectural environment for your piece.

- A clear role for the audience (Are we voyeurs? Judges? Historical archeologists? Etc.).

- A Revelation of Space (for example, the curtain rises and we see the stage, or a door opens and we see endless corridors behind it).

- A Revelation of Object (for example, someone opens a box and there is a gun inside it).

- A Surprise Entrance.

- Music from an Unexpected Source (for example, the doctor opens his medical bag and the aria of an operatic soprano emanates from inside it).

- 15 Seconds of Simultaneous Unison Action.

- Broken Expectation.

- A Staged Accident.

- Two Uses of Extreme Contrast (loud/quiet, fast/slow, dark/bright, violent/gentle, still/chaotic, etc.).

- The Objects:
  A gun
  A cigarette
  Playing cards
  A tea cup
  Fire in any form

- The Sounds:
  A clock chiming
  Birds chirping
  Someone singing offstage
  Silverware clinking

- The Actions:
  Tripping over something
  An embrace
  A slap
  Whispering
  "Laughing through tears"

- The only text you can use is:
  I was so happy.
  Do you remember?
  Whatever do you think has come over her (him) today?
  Two hundred years from now, I wonder if human kind will still be suffering?
  My boot.
  Do you hear the wind?
  We must go on living.
  We must work.

You have twenty minutes to make your piece. Go.

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And *that* is the joy of Composition work. And that is also the beautiful, large, courageous spirit with which Anne works.

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