Metaphors to Train By

Circles, SITI, the Suzuki Method, and the Viewpoints

Christopher J. Staley

Why are artists practicing the Suzuki Method and/or the Viewpoints compelled to continue training? Often they express reasons like "building community" and "becoming a better person" as well as a better actor. The training creates, holds, or brings together a group of people, and then sends these people back out into the world with a renewed sense of optimistic purpose. One hopes. No matter the degree of engagement, the way artists conceptualize the Suzuki Method is revealed in the way they speak about it, in the metaphors they stomp by.[1] Likewise, the Viewpoints are always "languaged," sometimes metaphorically and sometimes literally.[2] For some, the Suzuki Method or the Viewpoints creates a "home" for their lives as artists, and either this home travels with them wherever they go or they travel to find it. For others, the reasons that they train, or stop training, are more domain- and site-specific. By tracing these cultural values relative to the infrastructural support or logistical hurdles that might aid or hinder their actualization, I join others in calling for new training circles to maintain SITI's legacy. The future of SITI's impact will be directly connected to the reach of new teachers and students in the years to come.

Eighteen years ago, I began a journey in which I started stumbling upon paths forged by SITI members and their predecessors. While returning to training always requires a sustained and intentional commitment, my first encounters with these systems were incidental. In 2005, I entered Skidmore College and was cast in the chorus of Seamus Heaney's *The Burial at Thebes*, directed by Professor Carolyn Anderson. I vividly remember in early rehearsals how the more experienced members of the cast would warm everyone up doing this weird thing called "statues." We squatted, then rose up on tiptoe or sometimes one leg, then spoke some lines beginning with "O splendor of sunburst..." Throughout the first week, we read the script, and then got up from the table and improvised the play's themes using some very basic words like "space" and "shape" and "architecture" and "repetition" along with more obscure terms like "KR" (kinesthetic response). Many in the

1. A reference to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory (1980) and the essential stomp of Suzuki training. For a description of the Suzuki Method see Suzuki (2015).
2. At the Six Viewpoints Institute Symposium in early 2022, Wendell Beavers remarked on the importance of studying how teachers can "language" their own methodologies (Beavers 2022). For details on the elements of the Viewpoints process see Overlie (2016) and Bogart and Landau (2005).

Christopher J. Staley (Texas Tech University) is Assistant Professor of Movement in the School of Theatre and Dance. His research centers on actor training pedagogy, deixis, and cognitive science. Contributions to edited collections include* Re-Mapping Shakespeare: Hybridity, Diversity, and Adaptation *(2024),* Teaching Performance Practices in Remote and Hybrid Spaces *(2022),* Theatre and the Macabre *(2022), and others. Training includes multiple experiences with the Suzuki Company of Toga, SITI Company, and Pacific Performance Project. He holds a PhD in Theatre and Performance Studies from the University of Pittsburgh. christopher.staley@ttu.edu

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cast knew what to do with these prompts, somehow generating new material out of thin air. It felt like everyone else was working with a code that I did not know, let alone feel the need to crack. I had no language for what I was feeling except that it was completely unlike anything I had ever done before as a young actor. I knew I had to have more of it before actually knowing what "it" was.



Figure 1. Studio A of the Janet Kinghorn Bernhard Theatre, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY. (Photo by Christopher J. Staley)

Prior to *The Burial at Thebes*, I knew nothing about the Suzuki Method, Viewpoints, or Skidmore's rich history with the Suzuki Company of Toga (SCOT) and the Saratoga International Theater Institute (SITI). Quickly though, given that SITI's Brian Scott was the lighting designer on this show and the techniques used in the rehearsal room were SITI-based, I started to appreciate how lucky I was to be a part of a program so steeped in SITI's unique collective training and composition methods. The process of mounting the play was exciting and fluid with an experience of risk—and trust. Over the next four years and mostly guided by Artist-in-Residence and SITI member Will Bond, both the Suzuki Method and the Viewpoints became central to how I work as an actor and director.

In 2006 I traveled to Cambridge, MA, to see *bobrauschenbergamerica*—my first SITI show—at the American Repertory Theater. I was floored by the exactitude and abandon the company modeled. Then in 2007, while studying abroad in Moscow, I saw *Electra*—my first SCOT show—at the Taganka Theatre and felt a similar watershed moment. As many others have said about their own experiences encountering the trainings, I needed to follow these feelings to their source.

The year following was the first time I applied for SITI's Summer Intensive. I was waitlisted and then rejected. Crushed is still an understatement for how I felt in late Spring 2008. Because I had already committed to staying in Saratoga, I took a gig working in the scene shop of the Janet Kinghorn Bernhard Theatre, the same building where SITI trained and performed. In early June, as I listened to 60 people from around the world stomping in Studio A, I was envious (see fig. 1). I would walk out of the JKB and see a diverse array of artists exuberantly practicing the Viewpoints, either in Studio B or outside in the sunshine. After the first week, site-specific pieces popped up around campus. One day I watched an actress crawl out of a washing machine—or maybe a dryer—with a group of colleagues gathered round her in rapt attention, trying to figure out whether to keep that moment for their new composition. I had never in my artistic life wanted so badly to be a part of something.

I applied again in 2009 and was accepted.[3] What I encountered that first summer was nothing short of life-altering. It was an encounter with other people as much as with myself: my buckling knees in Suzuki; a feeling of quicksand underfoot when first learning to just "be" in the Viewpoints; and the excitement and pressure of existing so vulnerably in front of new collaborators. The effects

3. SITI asked the following questions on their application, to be answered in short essays: "Have you previously applied to the SITI Summer Workshop?"; "Why are you applying to the SITI program as opposed to any other theater training program?"; "Describe your experience and training up until now"; and "Describe your future."

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of the training on my own acting were significant, but most salient were the effects associated with training within this emergent community. Over those four weeks, I found an ever-widening tribe who understood the radical potential available when a group of artists come together in service of bettering themselves, each other, and the world around them—through *training* and not necessarily in a performance (though all of SITI's intensives did culminate in public performances).

After that first summer, I realized how fortunate I was to have SITI's training at my fingertips at Skidmore. Upon graduating, I would drastically have to increase my efforts to access them again. Though there were many weeks, months, or even years during which I was not actively training, the community itself remained ready and available. Developing an ethos of self-motivation was an important challenge, a strong lesson for a young actor. I struggled as most young artists in NYC do, carving time away from a survival job to take as many master classes and workshops as I could afford with SITI.

Exactly eight years after my first SITI intensive, I returned in 2017 to Skidmore to participate in its 25th anniversary session. I had just been accepted into the doctoral program at the University of Pittsburgh and knew I needed an artistic jolt before entering to remind myself what it was about theatre I loved in the first place. My research would shift significantly over the next few years. Building on my SITI experience and my training with the Pacific Performance Project,[4] I attended SCOT's 2018 Summer Camp in Toga, studying in the same spaces where my teachers first learned the Suzuki Method. Hungry for more, and with financial support from the University of Pittsburgh, I spent the summer of 2019 participating in another Skidmore intensive, and then studying again in Toga, after which I attended the Theatre Olympics.[5] Then I knew that for my doctoral project I wanted to study how cognitive science might elucidate certain sociolinguistic mechanisms enabling the Suzuki Method to work as a "language." I planned for another session of fieldwork in Toga. Then the pandemic hit.

During the lockdown SITI's training intervened most in my life in terms of feeling connected to other artists. Of course it was jarring to acclimate to virtual platforms. Aspects of working online were unsatisfying due to a necessary down-gearing of intensity in speed, strength, or volume. Yet for me and many colleagues, the virtual weekly drop-ins (open trainings) and two online Skidmore intensives were critical lifelines over those years of quarantine and isolation. Suddenly entire communities were forced to adapt to the home studios we set up by moving furniture and clearing a small space on the floor. There were absolutely some positive results and mindful adaptations. Specifically, the focus of the training shifted to discussing the *principles* underlying the forms rather than the forms themselves. The migration online by the SITI network, as with other learning communities, was a time of experimentation, innovation, and self-reflection.

Comparing several in-person summers with the online Skidmore intensive in 2021[6] let me see what was lost versus what was gained in these different environments.[7] Ultimately the lesson was to

4. I trained with Robyn Hunt and Steve Pearson during their 2012 and 2014 intensives held at Marymount Manhattan College.
5. The Theatre Olympics is a multicultural and multidisciplinary festival; the ninth iteration was held in 2019, cohosted in Toga, Japan, and St. Petersburg, Russia.
6. There was no Skidmore intensive in 2020. SITI had a "Day One" meeting in June 2020 that gathered around 100 artists from around the world on Zoom to train and connect for one day. This Day One meeting served as a pilot for the rest of the online training sessions.
7. I have expanded on this optimism in my chapter, "Imaginative Deixis and Distributed Fictions in the Suzuki Method of Actor Training," in *Teaching Performance Practices in Remote and Hybrid Spaces*, edited by Jeanmarie Higgins and Elisha Clark Halpin (2022).

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not become inured to the miracle that was achieved: creating legitimate and *live* connections with others around the world online. Though online programming has more than sufficiently proved its merits, these virtual sessions work best for those who already have body-to-body encounters with teachers and colleagues in the studio. Once travel became safer, I returned to Toga-mura in 2022 and 2023—my first in-person trainings since before March 2020.

A natural part of training in any system over time is the impulse, or the request by others, to begin sharing the work. The ethics involved in feeling—let alone being—qualified to instruct others are quixotic and can be arbitrary. An advanced practitioner will acknowledge how difficult it is to get it right, with success often being "failing better," to tweak Beckett. SITI members temper their own struggles and masteries in lifelong training by always teaching in front of each other when they teach students—company members take part in student classes. From SITI's pedagogical example of constant toggling between instructor and instructed, new teachers are reminded to prevent their role as mentor from morphing into a semblance of an over-inflated guru.

In my current role as an assistant professor of movement at Texas Tech University, I teach the Suzuki Method and the Viewpoints to undergraduates and graduates. Looking back at my first Standing Statues as a chorus member in 2005, I continue to be amazed that it is my job now to mentor others by modeling an evergreen student. It is necessary that I always remain a teacher-in-training, practicing what I preach. When the company invited a few dozen artists to serve as SITI Alumni Ambassadors, we also took on the joy and the responsibility of programming new training for students and colleagues as well as curating new teaching opportunities for SITI Company members themselves.

Why Train in Metaphor?

In *Metaphors We Live By*, cognitive linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson established the theory of "conceptual metaphors," which holds that metaphors actively create cultural values rather than simply reflect them as passive linguistic phenomena. They hypothesized "that our values are not independent but must form a coherent system with the metaphorical concepts we live by" (1980:22). Such coherences are not universal or even always logical. It follows that "the only kind of similarities relevant to metaphors are *experiential*, not *objective*, similarities" (154). Any structural particulars that are relevant to different groups of people (or researchers studying them) would derive from or lead to experiential shifts in behavior, thought, and affect within the group members. The most dynamic aspect of metaphorical meaning-making is therefore the motivational impact of its enactment: the way language makes people feel and how it mobilizes them.

Metaphors are always sensorial, and this reveals how their use is a form of embodiment performed in an ever-receding present (now). In their later *Philosophy in the Flesh*, Lakoff and Johnson examined an ontological motif that governs the way both the Suzuki Method and the Viewpoints train an actor's spatiotemporal presence onstage: the "primary metaphor" of "Existence Is Being Located Here." This mode of thinking comes from the general belief that:

> Existence is thus conceptualized as presence in a bounded region around some deictic center, that is, around where we are. Combining this with Change Is Motion, yields: Becoming Is Coming Here [and] Ceasing To Exist Is Going Away. (1999:205)

These primary metaphors reveal the ways people might imagine something as metaphorically alive (a newborn's *delivery* or *arrival*) or dead (the dearly *departed*) using spatial terms, which exemplifies another primary metaphorical motif, "An Action Is Being In A Location" (205). Through their bodiliness, metaphors of being or nonbeing are rooted in these basic phenomenologies of presence, absence, dispersal, loss, renewal, etc.

The existentiality of these primary metaphors—ones individuals and groups live, die, and "re-member" themselves by—is fundamental to Suzuki, and not just his method but his theatre's

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Figure 2. New Toga Sanbo in summer 2018. (Photo by Christopher J. Staley)

worldview as well.[8] This stance is informed by Suzuki's acceptance of Sartre's idea that, in Suzuki's words, "life is a useless but passionate play."[9] The individual actor engages in this Sisyphean struggle as a metaphor for their real life performing as "a poor player who struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more."[10] However alone or idiotic the actor-in-training feels, such ideas of mortality and futility also signify how the Suzuki Method encourages actors to understand the ensemble, or *house*, as an uphill battle against its own collective disappearance.

Suzuki's most-trafficked metaphor describing his method is the blended image of a farmhouse and a noh stage (see fig. 2). In Toga, these are one and the same: the farmhouse is the stage. Like a theatre company comprised of different individuals, these *gassho-zukuri* houses are traditionally built using pine trees that are bent from the wind and snow; as with a theatre company, the house is formed by intentionally mixing heterogeneous materials/members (Suzuki 2021:3).[11] Another primary metaphor is *house is family*. For Suzuki, doing of the theatrical action creates the house/family and keeps it together. As Suzuki writes, "Zeami stresses that the family line is one of skill rather than blood ties. [...] To put things more simply, artistic skill represents the crucial link within the House" (2015:122).[12] Suzuki pulls at this thread throughout historical *nohgakuron* (writings of noh) where the thing passed on to one's artistic house, or school, is a set of techniques for how to relate to time and space through song, dance, speech, and gesture.

However it is explicated textually in a manuscript or grounded materially in a place or physical space, the house is shared and passed on orally and through practice-based skills. The Japanese word "noh" means "skill." In performing the skill, the house/family/school lives on. There is thus no group without the group's enaction—or performation; through practice it brings itself into being and maintains itself. In these ways, while the house/family might locate itself around a site or a physical house, when thought of *metaphorically* the house/family is not reducible to any physical locus or roster of people. If *existence is being located here*, then "here" for Suzuki is wherever the

8. Anne Bogart often said at workshops and intensives: "If theatre were a verb it would be to re-member." Her hyphenation distinguishes between the function of commemoration versus convening.
9. In *The Way of Acting*, Suzuki writes, "Since coming to Toga-mura, I am most thankful for one thing. Here I have been able to encounter a certain number of others who take pleasure in what we do because they have become conscious of the limitations of their own humanity [...] To parody Sartre's words, I have finally been able to see at close range a few people who truly understand that life is a useless but passionate play [...]" (1986:110).
10. The training text most often used in Suzuki studios now is the "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" speech from *Macbeth* in act 5, scene 5.
11. Participants of the intensives in Toga would receive a copy of "For the Future of Theatre," Suzuki's 2021 speech given in acceptance of the Thalia award—among other reading materials.
12. While "House and Family" are first translated in English in *The Way of Acting* (1986) and then separately in the chapter "Human Experience and the Group," these chapters are synthesized into one chapter, "House and Family," in *Culture Is the Body* (2015).

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Suzuki Method is practiced. In those spaces, the house/family exists in refuge together. Though SITI Company is no longer "here," their house/family/school can thrive through this collective passed-on practice.

This said, it is important to not conflate SCOT and SITI; there are many, many differences. Chief among them is location. SCOT's hub is Toga-mura where company members train, perform, and live year-round. SITI was often spread out, subject to the cycles of academia and touring. Having a training center or home is vital for any working artist, and yet, constantly feeling at risk of being without one—living a decentered lifestyle—is also common to many theatre-makers. Though anchored out of the Zeisler Studio in New York City for decades, SITI artists were always on the move—and still are. The same for SITI's students who journeyed to find a *feeling* rather than a *location* as their artistic home. As Suzuki stated in an interview with Tadashi Uchino:

> I believe that artists are people who by nature don't believe there is a place where they can live with [the] sense of security a hometown implies. A hometown is a place you can go back to [...] but for an artist, I think that place is probably in the heart. Perhaps I would say that home is a place where hearts connect by being moved by something, even if that is a somewhat lonely concept. (in Uchino 2019)

Rather than being sentimental, the precarious feeling of not having a stable artistic home can galvanize collective action in groups and mobilize people to build or cross bridges in order to form deeper affective connections, however impossible to maintain long term. This inability to achieve or maintain connection, despite the intense desire to do so, is at the heart of the human illness that Suzuki describes. This communication gap, ironically but also *ethically*, holds groupings together, especially new intercultural groupings, as SanSan Kwan wrote about in her *Love Dances* (2021). The "Lonely Village" is more than specific to Toga-mura. It describes the necessarily solitary yet public life of any artist who understands how difficult it is to truly express their worldview to others, and yet continues to try. These moments of seeming inarticulateness—about what the training does and feels like to the individual or collective body—are exactly what metaphors are for.

As Lakoff and Johnson state, it is not the objective connotations of a metaphor that live but rather its associative and performative potential (1980). A metaphor's relevance to a group of people is affected by its ability to linger in the archive, to continue to make impressions. The house/family/village metaphor points to the following qualities of Suzuki and Viewpoints: the training is sustained through its constant renewability; the training forms relational fields based on inheritable actions rather than inherent qualities; the training always activates a social field even and especially if one is practicing alone; and while training is always deeply integrated with the spaces in which it perpetuates, it also helps practitioners *create* new affective spaces rather than being tied to any specific place. Such distributed intentionality of "becoming together" affords communities working with the Suzuki Method and the Viewpoints more profound sociological weight than simply educating lonely individuals to become better actors. Although these group dynamics often develop even when participants are not conscious of them, they are also often recognized and known.

Rather than just demonstrating that Suzuki and Viewpoints cultures exist or that SITI's training network exists, it might be more useful to follow Bruno Latour's methodology of studying groups to describe the way this actor-network regulates its own behavior and trace how it shapes its own behavioral repertoire. To show the *function* of an actor-network is to show how it leads to further performations or how it effectively motivates people to reform themselves into new iterations. As Latour describes actor-network theory: "Its main tenet is that actors themselves make everything, including their own frames, their own theories, their own contexts, their own metaphysics, even their own ontologies" (2005:147). Even though Latour does not mean specifically theatre nor even human "actors," I take seriously his suggestion in order to find out how SITI-trained actors create their own figures of speech and gestures. Latour advises researchers working with actor-network theory to zoom out and take their own positionality into the overall picture. So, given

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my own engagement as an ambassador, it is important for me to distinguish when interlocutors—my research subjects or myself—are using figures of speech mindfully from when we are using them unconsciously, or when not using figurative speech at all.

Because sometimes metaphors are really not metaphors. As Bogart wrote in a December 2022 blog "Metaphor,"[13] she would debate her friend and colleague Elizabeth Streb about whether the extreme actions performed in their joint piece *Falling and Loving*—like slamming bodies against the floor—were metaphorical or literal. Of course, the action is both, but does it mean more than what it does? Relative to the Suzuki Method, is the traditional farmhouse/noh house a metaphor or not?

One must learn how to discern when and how a metaphor is more literal or more abstract. The Suzuki Method is taught and learned concretely; it is not abstract at all. However, paradoxically, it is utterly so. If the training vocabularies are not treated as metaphors, they become gymnastic exercises occurring onstage. The process of metaphorizing them is a necessary step to elevate the training into something more than calisthenics, making them what Suzuki calls a "divine fiction." However, the actor's focus should still be on executing the actions as literally, nonsentimentally, and as nonmetaphorically as possible. The Suzuki Method trains the "performative consciousness" of this paradox: one should never just metaphorically stomp. The actor needs to put their whole self into it. In this way the stomps are both physical and metaphorical.

Take, for instance, the exercise referred to as Stomping/Shakuhachi (sometimes called Basic One). The actor is required to locomote in circles through space while keeping their center of gravity in a straight horizontal line. As they transition into the next section they drop immediately down to the ground. Then they lift their center of gravity directly up from the ground and again walk across the space in a clear straight line. Here, the straight line that they are idealizing and trying to manifest is *not* a metaphor; it is measurable based on failed attempts to perform this objective over and over again. However, when teaching Stomping/Shakuhachi, pedagogical metaphors seem to abound, not only helping to make the movements more legible, but also guiding the actors on what their inner experience might be during the process. This happens when teachers repeat Suzuki's famous injunction to "turn the world on its axis" in their circling, or when SITI's Leon Ingulsrud suggested year after year that Stomping/Shakuhachi, done over and over, can become an intergalactic "dance with Andromeda."[14] These vivid directives seem abstract, esoteric, and obviously impossible; but by simply stating them—by putting them out there—the actor can actually attempt to literalize them *somehow*. The actor either does, or does not, succeed in creating a straight line, just as they either do, or do not, succeed in dancing with Andromeda. Of course, no one actually achieves these feats. And yet, once imagined, gradations of success miraculously can and do appear! Therein lies the reality and the radical promise of the training as an effort towards an impossible objective. By embracing this, the training then reifies itself as a metaphorical and metatheatrical *play* about the practical absurdity of the artist's life. About why they continue training.

Training Circles as Gestural and Verbal Performations

When I returned to Skidmore in 2017 for SITI's 25th anniversary intensive, I had not trained there since 2009. Over the intervening years, however, I was able to attend five of SITI's workshops and master classes in NYC. Marking this anniversary session as unique, the month-long program was preceded by a symposium, "Transformation through Training: Symposium on the Suzuki Method of Actor Training."[15] While it may seem obvious, this scaled-up anniversary offered a chance for members of the wider community to return to a familiar space for a familiar activity they had all

13. Bogart also writes about metaphor at length in *A Director Prepares* (2001).

14. Skidmore Intensive training notes, 2009, 2017, 2018. Ingulsrud poetically instructed that the artist's creative engagement with gravity is not just a relationship with the center of Earth but rather exists on a much larger scale.

15. The symposium was 31 May–3 June. A video archive is available at https://howlround.com/transformation-through-training.

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done at different times with different cohorts. It was an extended opportunity to research what had changed and what had remained the same, whether in oneself, the environment, the training, or more accurately, in some combination of all three.

While livestreamed as a HowlRound event, the symposium was largely interior-facing and intimate, aimed at looking fondly yet critically at the past while also projecting hopes and plans for the years ahead.[16] This gathering brought together generations of artists from around the world, including Tadashi Suzuki and other members of SCOT. In the 1960s Suzuki and colleagues began formulating the training vocabulary at the original Waseda Shōgekijō theatre in Tokyo, then in 1983 launched the Toga International Actor Training Program. After SITI's founding in 1992, countless communities have tapped into this training, which had become available as a global commons. Because of this proliferation, both critical histories and the pedagogical standards of the Suzuki Method have become increasingly unwieldy.[17] Now that SITI is past its sunset, it is worth looking back on the groundwork laid out at the silver jubilee. How have those legacy plans evolved in the years since, especially concerning training?

There are several reasons for focusing on the symposium: First, since the symposium's activities were livestreamed via HowlRound and remain free on YouTube, they were and continue to be more widely disseminated than closed-door training sessions. Second, the symposium is the last time Suzuki came to Saratoga Springs with the company he cofounded. Third, it was the last larger-scale gathering of the alumni network before SITI shut down. Fourth, the symposium marked a key turning point in both of SITI's main pedagogies. After the symposium, some teachers of the Suzuki Method followed a newer taxonomy with exercises like Stomping/Shakuhachi or Slow Ten becoming Basics One and Two respectively, or the exercise called Statues becoming Basic Four. Meanwhile the Viewpoints became much more geared to Overlie's Six Viewpoints than the nine Bogart had been using.

The Symposium consisted of four "Conversations." The first on "History" was led by SITI dramaturg Norman Frisch, a self-described "outsider" to the Suzuki community. The second panel focused on "Training" and the third on "Legacy." The culminating event was a chat between Suzuki and Bogart. The panels made clear how the impact and legacy of the Suzuki Method are the stories of a complex ecosystem, of which no one person could claim any ownership, not even Suzuki himself. There were many beginnings: in Tokyo, Toga, Mito, and Shizuoka; in Milwaukee (UWM), San Diego (UCSD), Springfield (StageWest), Saratoga Springs (Skidmore), and beyond.

Frisch, along with SITI company members J.Ed Araiza, Stephen Webber, and Barney O'Hanlon, framed their conversations around these "first contacts" (people, but also the events of meeting), which initiated the repeated refrain of "encounter," "exposure," and "making contact." This phrasing stuck throughout all of the discussions. Metaphors of "circling the globe" were passed on verbally and gesturally during and beyond the symposium. As Frisch said midway through the first panel:

> As people got bit by this bug, what you had to do was get over there for the summer. [...] And then a moment arrived for the next generation of people when they did not have to

16. Notably, Bogart said in her conversation with Suzuki that "We're trying to learn what it's like to be in the room and not in the room at the same time" (www.youtube.com/watch?v=DGtCo9MQMUU 2:10). Of course, six years later this sentiment appears innocent of the impending migration to Zoom three years later.

17. As Suzuki said in his interview with Tadashi Uchino, "That is why professional actors from 16 countries come to Toga for training in my method, and they say it is very helpful for them. None of these people think they are doing Japanese theatre; it has spread to these countries because they find it useful as basic theater training. There are even some people I don't know who are teaching the Suzuki Method somewhere (*laughs*)" (2019). If Suzuki's sense of this unwieldiness is that people he has not met are teaching it, then it has far surpassed his initial expectations.

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> go over there. What was that tipping point? And then how did the spread of the training in the US occur?[18]

Though obvious, the metaphor of being "bit by this bug" describes a type of pedagogical transmission that requires body-to-body contact that is infectious, and that can spread globally like an epidemic. All this long before any remote/hybrid learning or video conferencing. As these practitioners waxed nostalgic about the past, they used various images to describe this bodily circulation as viral ("infectious"), biological ("cellular transformation"), botanical ("Johnny Appleseed"), cartographic ("compass points"), or elemental ("on fire"), among others.[19]

At another point in the first Conversation, Frisch passingly likened this dynamic of transmission to an "orbit." He asked the panelists, "Do you want to talk about [...] people like that who sort of came into this *orbit* of Americans who were performing in the [SCOT] productions at various stages [...]?"[20] At the time I thought this a colloquial phrase describing the transmission of the Suzuki Method from artists who drew into their training sessions groups of outsiders. However, a year or so later, after making the summer journey to Toga for the first time, I thought about "orbit" as the way I felt about being a part of this network. Over the years since the symposium, I have come to *feel* how orbital metaphors might illuminate what happens to my own body as it relates to the bodies of others, imaginatively or physically circling the globe in and for training as we engage in a "spiritual globalization."[21]

As SITI's symposium made clear, there are very specific though heterogeneous metaphors for the Suzuki Method and the Viewpoints, innumerable shorthands, codes, and inside jokes. For example, Ellen Lauren eloquently spoke about "the ride," meaning her career in and around the method:

> I've spent the last almost 40 years trying to really speak articulately and well about it. You can see that I I [sic] can't still, it's such a feeling, it's just something that [*here she made a gesture of a hit/impact on her body*], that transformed and changed me.[22]

Among insiders, Lauren's metaphorical hit packed enough of a punch to get the point across, while her gesture was also legible to outsiders.

Where the written archive is accompanied by video, the gestures are just as telling as the transcripts. Speaking with Bogart during the final Q&A, Suzuki suggested various ways his method works to unify a group of actors. At one point he told translator Kameron Steele to move his chair and sit body to body. With slapstick physicality, Suzuki described various SCOT actors as different sized grains of sticky rice in a sushi-roll. In this metaphor, the method works as a sheet of *nori* seaweed containing and shaping the grains, making them into an aesthetically pleasing digestible package. He affirmed that "nori is the grammar of the Suzuki Method." At one point in the back and forth, a bemused Bogart groaned to Suzuki, "I was wondering where you were going with that."[23] While the exchange is memorably humorous, it is what Suzuki said next, or rather what he did not say, that spoke volumes. Describing the need to maintain a company

18. See "Conversation #1: History" for ideas about "first contact" (www.youtube.com/watch?v=l91eYpTq33g 04:00).
19. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=UC6TLfWSW-Q: being "on fire," being "infectious" (28:00), "bit by a bug" (31:00), "Johnny Appleseed" (42:00) or "seeds" (1:02:00), or as a "compass" (1:00:00). During "Conversation #2: Training," Will "Bondo" Bond described it as a "cellular transformation" (21:30).
20. See "Conversation #1: History" (www.youtube.com/watch?v=l91eYpTq33g 49:30); emphasis added.
21. On Suzuki's idea of "spiritual globalization" see Motohashi (2021).
22. "Conversation #1: History," www.youtube.com/watch?v=l91eYpTq33g 26:00–30:00. Lauren is being very modest here. She has impacted the training just as it has impacted her. For more, see Lauren, "In Search of Stillness" (2011).
23. "Tadashi Suzuki and Anne Bogart," www.youtube.com/watch?v=DGtCo9MQMUU ~ 1:00:00–1:06:00.

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through training, Suzuki gestured deliberately, drawing circles in the air four times, and then made a final point (like threading a needle) in the middle of the circles, while saying (per Steele's translation), "The creation of a method is needed to contain the actors [...] if it's not there [...] it doesn't keep the shape, the form." Suzuki's implicit, gestural logic underpinning this idea is *to think in circles by tracing circles* and in doing so, to understand the ways the method has created new groups concentrically.

This is not just implicit, for as Suzuki said in a 1995 interview, "I want to show time as circular, rather than extended. Nobody has mentioned this aspect of my work, but it is my basic point of view" (in Ryuta, Carruthers, and Gillies 2001:48). And as Suzuki said in a separate interview with Tadashi Uchino, "You can't create such a network unless you speak about your ideas and what you are fighting for. I want that to be one of the fundamental things we teach in our school" (in Motohashi 2021). SCOT and SITI have fought to show the circularity of time and how it affects training networks' ability to sustain themselves.

In some of the later exchanges, these ideas came into alignment—the network and the gestural life of circles. These metaphors proved useful for moderators and panelists describing what their own affective experiences of passing through this network *feel* like. During the Conversation on Legacy, Barney O'Hanlon depicted his own epicentric experience of the transmission pattern. More so than prior examples, seeing what O'Hanlon did is necessary to understand the meaning of his utterance. O'Hanlon said:

> There are so many more companies around the world [...] we are just a small part of a much larger picture. There's a sense of, how do I put this, there's a sense of, [*Here he gestured and made sounds to suggest an impact point in space with ripples extending outward*], over and over again, like Toga [*same gestures and sounds again*], Saratoga [*same gestures and sounds again*] [...] which is so moving...[24]

Over the course of the conversation, this gesture was picked up several times in conversations, circulating across groups in real time. For example, one attendee referred to it at a Q&A as the "drop in, and ever widening concentric circles" pattern.[25] The gesture was later invoked in the symposium's closing ceremony. This pattern, what I elsewhere call a "many-footed circle," what others call "drop in, and ever widening concentric circles," conceptualizes the transmission of the method as a material force that spreads outward from a point of impact while simultaneously drawing people inward.[26] Taking the metaphor further, the more such ripples spread from the source, the more deviations from the signal.

The discussion of this network sprawl inevitably led to talking about fidelity to the "original"; belonging to old or new schools of thought; staying in touch or falling out of communication; etc. Given that SCOT continues to consolidate the Suzuki Method, checking-in/staying-current with updates to the pedagogy is important. Suzuki still makes new works, teaches, and refines the method. The method's almost 60-year lifespan has at times been fraught, internally and externally, because of a desire to both preserve (solidify) and evolve (adapt). As the training sections of the symposium made clear, the recodification of the method several years prior into the standardized six core exercises was met with gratitude from those craving a systematic guideline from above (i.e., Suzuki). But such system unification has a perilous flipside evidenced in the wielding of these guidelines in such a way as to question whether individuals not engaging in all the "basic" practices

24. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=-HfrE0BN6lw 24:30–25:30.

25. On the follow-up question of this "drop, and ever widening concentric circles" see www.youtube.com/watch?v=-HfrE0BN6lw 1:13:30.

26. Some of this portion of my essay derives from "Metaphors to Stomp By: Multipodal Orbits as Decentered Houses," chapter 4 of my dissertation, "What's the Point? Multipodal Orbits in the Suzuki Method of Actor Training" (2023).

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are in fact still doing the Suzuki Method. Such in-group/out-group dynamics were not initiated by Suzuki, but it is clear from the variety of arguments over many decades about what and how to teach—including those based in nostalgia for the early years—that the progressive systematization of the method brings its own problems.[27] The question constantly arises: how, if at all, are the *principles* behind the pedagogy distinguishable from the practice itself, and what is required to call a training the Suzuki Method? What makes something more or less in alignment with the changes coming out of Toga?

There are more and less effective teachers of the training, as with any educational apparatus. The former are constant, reliable, and stable—in alignment with Suzuki's codification or principles. The latter fail to follow the principles of the training, or worse, exoticize it as an Orientalized movement training. The stakes are significant, not just philosophically, but also due to very real concerns of injury and accessibility. This situation helps reframe the question whether the Suzuki Method is, or is not, reducible to six basic exercises, or if it is instead "just" a set of principles.

In describing Suzuki/SITI actor-networks, I must account for my own position within these circles. I have taken the opportunity, and accept the responsibility, for filtering much of what I write through my own embodied, participatory engagement with the training. I understand through experience how students and teachers can "change orbits" either in momentum, angle (of entry/departure), or trajectory. Over the past 19 years I have gone from learning the method from Suzuki's primary students, to learning from his secondary and tertiary students, to learning from Suzuki directly. Such degrees of separation do not imply any de facto merit, authenticity, or veracity aside from the fact that my thinking comes from my work with a spectrum of sources. But I am not neutral when it comes to this thing, this *house*.

Returning to the metaphor of a house, training is not just the transmission of vocabulary from body to body and generation to generation, but also a kind of space-time actors can enter into as well as take with them. It is conceived architecturally, like a home one enters or builds. The training is an empty center around which company members circulate democratically. The studio atmosphere and body-to-body interactions are often understood as spatio-temporal relationships with divergent hierarchical/political dimensions. This has implications for sustainability, inclusion, and inheritance from prior generations. Suzuki's advanced age (born 1939) is salient for many. The 2017 symposium was no exception to this mix of celebration and trepidation. Morbid jokes about age and mortality were not infrequent. As Scott Cummings wrote at the time, Suzuki "also offered the opinion, only half in jest, that when he is dead and gone his work will be forgotten in Japan but live on in the US thanks to the perpetuation of his training by SITI Company and other devoted teachers" (2017:34–36).[28] A most pressing question already was how the "houses" or "schools" could be maintained and led, and how those artists in and surrounding SCOT would fill the void left behind when Suzuki passes. What was less clear was what this community of artists would do without the SITI Company and its small-but-mighty infrastructure.[29] Now, with SITI closed, the most urgent question for this community of artists is: How should the next generation self-lead?

This was the subject of "Conversation #3: Legacy." One panelist, Megan Hanley, former Education Manager of SITI Company and founding coartistic director of the queer feminist theatre group The Syndicate, described their company as "decentered" and "supergeographical." The

27. See *Culture Is the Body* on this feeling of "nostalgia" and not wanting to give up the "legacy" forms because some had been doing them for so long (Suzuki 2015:179).

28. The question of where Suzuki would prefer his burial to take place also came up at the 2019 Theatre Olympics (Suzuki 2019).

29. SITI Company at the time was thinking about not shutting down entirely but using five years as a transition period. This was mentioned by Michelle Preston in the Theatre Communications Group plenary titled "The Medium Is the Message" (Preston 2022).

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company was the first successful outgrowth of the inaugural SITI Conservatory in 2014. Picking up on this, her colleague Janouke Goosen said "training provides [the chance] to center ourselves again [...] because we're decentralized."[30] The Syndicate became a model for reconceptualizing the very transmission of an international network of female, queer, and trans+ artists using their deconstruction of the Suzuki Method and the Viewpoints. "Conversation #3" featured two additional groups formed by former students of SITI Company and SCOT: Vueltas Bravas Productions of Bogata and Nine Years Theatre Company of Singapore.

"Conversation #3" traces how these companies survived even when apparently isolated. According to Vueltas Bravas company member Lorenzo Montanini:

> Basically what happened with us [...] one year passed [...] then we had, again, all of us had to go away, and another year passed [...] and again, the story repeats, we got invited to a festival but we had to wait another year in between. So we stay in touch a lot. Thank god we have Skype and WhatsApp [...] So a lot of the work gets done from a distance.[31]

Picking up on this, Tina Mitchell—former SITI Associate Artist, teacher, and coartistic director of Australian-based Chopt Logic Productions—said "We lead from within." Because of their decentralized geographies, groups used training as a metaphorical extender, or antenna, across space-time.

Notably, both Vueltas Bravas and Nine Years used virtual technology to stay connected long before the pandemic altered the landscape. Even in 2017, many in the SITI-SCOT community knew of the great potential of videoconferencing to extend the Suzuki Method and the Viewpoints across distances, time zones, and with limited resources. Though there are now plenty of new training circles offering regular "jams" or "drop-ins" and more regular master classes online, The Syndicate and Vueltas Bravas televisual trainings were ahead of the curve.

During the Symposium, Melissa Flower Gladney asked about how to handle the "training deserts" she experienced, being unable to travel to hubs like SITI's workshops in NYC or their regional classes.[32] In 2017, there were not enough people training online for drop-ins like there are today. Even now, after the pandemic, many people do not accept that teaching the Suzuki Method online is worthwhile. However, adaptable and flexible offerings like virtual drop-ins provide hope for people who want to train with one another regularly while coping with the ebbs and flows of their professional, educational, and personal lives. Online lessons have continued to morph, becoming polyvocal and accessible to those in small towns. After all, some regular training, even online, is better than none (see Staley 2022).

At the end of the symposium, Lauren wrapped up the final conversation between Suzuki and Bogart, and offered the following thoughts:

> Thank you for making this pilgrimage [...] I think we have our marching orders here. To go back to our communities, as Barney said, to drop that line (*gathers fingers together and points down vertically*) and let those waves span out (*spreads fingers and extends them in a horizontal curve outward*) as far as they can. Go home with hope and encouragement. The SITI Company was always told that when we got tired and needed to refresh, Toga was there for us. It's our charge now in turn to say to you, when you get tired and you need refreshment,

30. "Conversation #3: Legacy" www.youtube.com/watch?v=-HfrE0BN6lw 21:30. Years prior, at a panel conversation at CUNY's Martin E. Segal Theatre much like the 2017 Symposium at Skidmore, Leon Ingulsrud said as moderator that SITI's definition of "success" would be to have fostered the creation of independent companies standing on their own. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=JvBiOs02faI 53:40 of "SITI Conservatory: What's the Story," from 21 May 2014.

31. "Conversation #3: Legacy," www.youtube.com/watch?v=-HfrE0BN6lw 28:00.

32. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=-HfrE0BN6lw 1:10:10.

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when you need a spiritual boost [...] that the SITI Company will do everything we can to provide you with sanctuary and refuge for that.[33]

Decentered Training Circles

The premise of the Suzuki Method and the Viewpoints training was to enact decentralizing or dehierarchizing power. With that in mind, I write from a decentered position. While this is not feminist outright, it does challenge male-centric actor training paradigms, as suggested by J. Ellen Gainor in her "Rethinking Feminism, Stanislavsky, and Performance" (2002). This is particularly relevant in reference to Suzuki's male-dominant narrative. That said, much of Suzuki's vocabulary was generated by the performance-as-research of SCOT female company members. In this, no one is more central than the renowned actress Kayoko Shiraishi. As Will Bond said during the symposium, "a lot of the training came out of her body. She's the source of it all."[34] Other women loom large despite often appearing in the wings, backstage, or in administrative offices, like current managing director, Yoshie Shigemasa. Ikuko Saito, who died in 2012, co-led the 2011 "International Symposium on the Suzuki Method of Actor Training." Saito also spearheaded establishing the International Suzuki Company of Toga, I-SCOT. Within SCOT, women frequently teach and perform lead roles: Chieko Naito/Clytemnestra, Maki Saito/Hecuba, and Aki Sato-Johnson/Elektra. Suzuki also shares power with males such as founding company member Kosuke Tsutamori (d. 2019); current senior company actor Yoichi Takemori; and the I-SCOT company led by associate director Mattia Sebastian.

At the final event of the 2017 symposium, Suzuki addressed chauvinism in his response to Bogart's asking about his notorious "yelling at the actors."[35] Suzuki responded (in Steele's translation):[36]

> He's not really yelling at actors. [*Audience laughs*] He's passionately [*Pause*] raising the bar [*More laughter*]. He has certain rules that are created by the grammar, but then he also tries to let there be freedom within that structure. So what he really wants to do, he wants to make sure you understand that the image out there in the world, that he's a tyrant, abusive [...] He really wants to set the record straight [...] So when an actress in Jean-Louis Barrault's company saw him working with the actors in the '60s when he was bringing the *Trojan Women* to the Théâtre des Nations [...] she asked him "Suzuki, when did you become a feminist?" He's not a feminist, not any of these things that have a label. Nor is he a male chauvinist pig.[37]

It is important to take Suzuki at his word when he says he is not a feminist, but it is also important not to call him a "chauvinist pig." If there is ambivalence concerning gendered identity politics, then a decentered historiography can help to capture alternative accounts.

Furthermore, by telling this history "from the margins," I can include the accounts of bodies operating within gendered, raced, classed, and ableist spaces. Though SITI recognized this before the 2017 symposium, they reckoned more seriously with it after 2020/Covid. Whether hiring consultants to increase their efforts towards diversity and inclusion, creating more scholarships for BIPOC artists, working in specific historically underserved communities, or emphasizing the importance of shared affinity groups in its intensives, SITI recognized that what they needed to do in their final years was to model how to continue to learn, grow, and evolve right up until the

33. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=-HfrE0BN6lw 1:30:00.
34. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=UC6TLfWSW-Q 44:08. Shiraishi acted in the leading roles of Suzuki's groundbreaking *On the Dramatic Passions* (1969) and *Trojan Women* (1974). She left SCOT in 1989.
35. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=DGtCo9MQMUU 0:56:00–1:08:30.
36. Suzuki spoke about himself using the third person.
37. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=DGtCo9MQMUU 58:30.

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Figure 3: Anne Bogart speaking to audience members at the 2019 SITI Theatre Workshop at Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY. (Photo by Miranda Park)

curtain closed. And after that final curtain, SITI asked how best they could continue to serve a much larger community as a service organization.[38]

The House for SCOT and the Table for SITI are basic metaphors. The table, a flat object, lends itself to discussions on a nonhierarchical horizontal plane, which is critical for Viewpoints; it is also literally a place to sit around socializing, eating, or working—a copresence.

Along with working nonhierarchically on the horizontal plane and increasing the number of seats at the table, SITI in its final years embraced constant change and renewal. In a 2021 online conversation series with Urban Bush Women, "Talking into the Future," Bogart and Lauren joined UBW founder Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and coartistic director Chanon Judson to discuss "the lifecycle of these companies" (The Hop 2021). When asked about the rigors of the Skidmore intensive, Lauren responded:

> It's a giant circle I'm talking about. [...] And then you hand it on and have it knocked over by the next group. But you've gotta help that group by handing on what you believe is a value and a tangible way of practicing that. And that's what our summer program and all our programs point at.[39]

This sense of flux and contingency, of circularity, led Judson to suggest that it is "very much the feminine design that says there's cycles, there are seasons, that change; not only is it inevitable, but it's part of the operating system." This mode of thinking, Bogart responded, is "the feminine approach"; and Lauren added that "SITI Company [...] when we're really our most creative together, probably is following a really feminine model." And just as there were many beginnings, there were also many endings to SITI. It is, as company members said at the first Alumni Ambassador Meeting, a "never ending ending."

38. Personal notes from SITI Alumni Ambassador meeting, online, 24 January 2023.
39. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vk7_6WFSZpk 30:00 and following.

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Instrumental Metaphors of the Suzuki Method

What happens when people think of the training in personal contexts, or even in selfish terms? Metaphors of the body are the most common way people understand the Suzuki Method on a personal level. It is something that helps generate focus, attention, stamina, endurance, strength, speed, precision, exactitude, ferocity, determination...the list goes on. An additive accrual of skills prepares the "actor-as-instrument." Conversely, conceiving the method as a Grotowskian *via negativa* is a way to isolate and winnow away excesses and get back to a "preexpressive state," an instrument ready to play any piece at any time (see Barba 2002). Theoretically, the actor's ability to be *attuned* with themself allows them to be more confidently *in tune* with other instruments and be in the same key (or style) when playing the score (or script) as an orchestra (or ensemble).

This musical trope is a metaphor that Suzuki has used repeatedly (2015:173). It is circulated by his students-turned-teachers in SITI and elsewhere. Lauren explained at the 2022 TCG Plenary how this metaphor reflects SITI's values and will contribute to its legacy: "Each instrument is different. But the orchestra plays the piece of music together through the structure of that thing on the page. And the training has acted as a metaphor that way for us and ever will, and ever will—it won't stop with us" (2022). In the Viewpoints, this musical metaphor is encapsulated in Overlie's idea of "playing the piano" the performer can assume certain perceptual systems exist in the audience and that these can be "played." The actor and the audience both "speak space," for example, so the actor can tap the space "keys" for the audience to perceive. The process assumes that the audience is engaging in pattern recognition, and playing the piano therefore is a way to entrain the audience within the performer's own practice-as-research (Overlie 2016).

Of course, these tropes are common in performance pedagogies. Teachers go to great lengths to make students aware that their instruments are their primary commodity. This awareness spurs growth and fosters agency. It also has drawbacks: reenforcing hegemonic body standards and the need to correct or adjust oneself relative to such constructs. If an instrument is out of tune, the Suzuki Method can be used as a diagnostic tool to reveal deviations from the basic forms. Rather than offering prescriptive advice, the method effectively shows the actor that "what 'talent' really means is the ability to discover your own obstacles, to be able to ascertain what kind of barriers are in your way" (Suzuki 2015:174).

Extending Suzuki's metaphor, the actor's obstacles—being out of tune with oneself—may also be described as physical maladies. Diagnosing the actor's *illness* can become too literal, leading the actor to think that the method is about revealing deficiencies relative to some ideal. Instead, if thought of as developing mindfulness, the method can effectively be a means to reveal performance habits or traits of which one is unaware. It is up to the actor themself to determine if they are *ill* or not; if they have any habits they want to change but cannot without more self-awareness. With greater consciousness, the actor can start to feel microscopic changes in their performances over time. This might lead to the training over the years causing what Bond calls an intentional "cellular transformation."[40]

Other analogies tend toward the mechanical, which are ironic, if not contradictory, insofar as the method is driven by the philosophy of getting back to animal energy. For example, the body as a car appears frequently in relation to *braking* or stopping: arresting motion is a primary goal of the training. The sportscar metaphor encourages the actor go for greater speed in order to better *test the brakes*. The words *high octane* have been used in studios for decades. After Grotowski applauded the "violence of the brakes" during his encounter with noh master Kanze Hisao under Suzuki's direction, this metaphor became a useful synonym for the system itself, showing that the method is not a movement training but a training for braking (or breaking up) movement

40. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=UC6TLfWSW-Q 21:32.

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(see Sato 2008). Referring to the lower body, teachers tell students to imagine the stomping as the pistons of an engine highlighting the up-and-down movements. The cars in this metaphor are not automatics but manual shifts, requiring foot and leg action to operate the clutch. The car metaphor helps to position the body in space through its forward motion, especially because the upper body is supposed to remain still. For example, imagining headlights on the hip bones effectively helps the actor move forward evenly in space by mitigating any anterior/posterior tilt as well as lateral asymmetry, while maintaining steadiness on the transverse plane or the *classical axis*. Taken further, the car metaphor pluralizes a form like Stomping/Shakuhachi. When I trained in Toga one summer a teacher likened the stomping to NASCAR's Indianapolis 500. In all of the forms that feature stopping, actors rev their internal engines while simultaneously holding the brakes. This action, which requires equal and opposite tensions, manifests the aesthetic concept of *hippari-ai*, or being pulled in two directions, through the isometrics of the body. When I trained in Toga during spring of 2023 and 2024, Aki Sato-Johnson of SCOT instructed the international cohort to think of these biomechanics as constantly hitting the accelerator and then the brakes, like in the Presley exercise.[41]

These metaphors of the body-as-vehicle or body-as-machine are perpetuated when the Suzuki Method is compared to an airplane or a runway. Frequently, the training is taught as a way to *take off* into performance. The actor-plane-pilot is taxiing, the pilot goes through a series of checklists, and then once on the runway, the pilot revs the engines while holding the brakes; when ground control gives the go, the brakes are released and the take-off happens. The sequence begins long before the wheels lift. If performance is conceived of as going airborne and gaining altitude, then the emphasis is on the step-by-step process. The metaphor also implies knowing how to not get overwhelmed by the changes in pressure and oxygen availability, and most importantly, how to circle back to the runway and land the plane gracefully.

Considering how vital these vehicular metaphors were in early writings about the method, it is not surprising that they are still used. For example, Arthur Holmberg, in his 1992 review of StageWest's *Hamlet*, describes the group's use of the method during rehearsal and training, quoting Lauren's take on Suzuki:

> You don't build a runway so the plane can taxi up and down all day long. [...] You build a runway for the plane to taxi down it once, and then soar. *The point of the method is not the method.* The point of the method is flight. (in Holmberg 1992:12)

In Holmberg's early article on the Suzuki Method in the US, the spotlight is directly on its metaphoric potential, not just through vehicular metaphors, but also explicitly through the concept of the body as a musical instrument. Holmberg and others recognized that the metaphors of the training serve dual purposes. One is the functional comparison: car = high octane = more horsepower onstage; or, instrument = object = controllable tool. The other is to use metaphor itself to re-teach and re-learn. Metaphors help actors figure out the point of doing the Suzuki Method and how to sustain themselves as they practice it.

In general, the training is often called a type of "language." The ability to speak in the language of the Suzuki Method gives one the ability to communicate and collaborate with artists of different cultures and geographic backgrounds, bypassing verbal languages to create a more domain-specific gestural code. With this in mind, I recently asked colleagues about how they conceptualize and communicate the training to others. Using a Google form, I asked four questions, the last of which was: "If you were to describe the Suzuki Method to someone who knows nothing about it, how

41. The exercise "Presley" is a legacy form from SCOT's oeuvre. It involves performing a side-stepping motion on horizontal then transverse axes. The form is set to Elvis Presley's "Don't Be Cruel."

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would you do so? What metaphors, if any, would you use?"[42] Despite the blatant leading question, the majority of responses did not cite metaphor. One respondent wrote: "If I were to describe the Suzuki Method to someone who doesn't know anything about it, I would describe it as a physically based theatre practice that emphasizes form and psychological focus. Honestly, I can't really think of a suitable metaphor." Others wrote that they "don't really use metaphor" or simply did not answer this question. Others paint the method with florid characterizations, readily taking my invitation to think in metaphors. Another respondent used the musical instrument metaphor:

> One metaphor I used was something like: If acting is playing a saxophone, then the Suzuki Method teaches you what keys correspond to what notes, gives you scales to work with, teaches you how to read music, etc. And that maybe most actor training now is like [a] student going to a teacher and saying "I want to learn how to play 'A Love Supreme'" and the teacher responding "Just feel it hard enough." [...] This metaphor is maybe a little shallow, but it seemed to be the thing that made a click happen for my friend.

Indeed, the instrument metaphor can make the "click happen," but it is often too superficial to capture the complexities of the artist's subjective relationship to their body.

In other instrumental versions of the body, Cartesian motifs abound. Some respondents called themselves a "vessel," or a "portal," or a "container," while another likened themself to a bottle of wine: the training was the bottle, the person the wine, only improving with more time in the bottle. In many of the metaphors, the premise was that the actor learns more about their instrument in such a way that they can be better attuned to themselves and to their own individual needs. As such, the metaphors used to describe the training point to it as a system of self-teaching if one is distanced from a wider community. Like the antimethodology of Latour's Actor-Network Theory, the point is not the method but something beyond itself—something social that paradoxically can only be learned on one's own.

Metaphorical Viewpoints

At their most basic, the Viewpoints are empty linguistic prompts—Space, Shape, Time, Emotion, Movement, Story—that only work when they stop meaning something, or perhaps more accurately, when they stop meaning nothing.[43] In a conversation with Mary Overlie, Anne Bogart likened training in the Viewpoints to attempting to stare at a solar eclipse. You can't look at the sun directly, because you will go blind doing so. She wrote that the Viewpoints are a "cardboard thing that you use to look at the thing you're really interested in" (Bogart 2012:486). The "cardboard thing" of the Viewpoints acts as a filter or frame that protects artists from solipsism and focusing directly on that which the prompts represent. Even if an actor has a eureka moment, they need to reify (or rely on) technique rather than try to replicate a peak experience on their own. As Gábor Viktor Kozma—associate artist for SCOT and SITI alum—told me:

> This thing I fight with is me, is myself, my, my, my mind, my distractions. [...] And it's great. I mean that all these difficulties are just great because [...] that's what we usually seek as actors to put us in intense embedded experiences. [...] You [...] experience fear, you experience

42. The other questions were "What is your name? (optional)"; "How did you first start to train in the Suzuki Method?"; and "Are you still training in the Suzuki Method? Why or why not? If yes, how?" The end of SITI has left a vacuum, based on the responses I received. Many are no longer training because they feel they cannot do so without a regular group. Even those training in New York, where there is ongoing training, expressed the end of SITI as a hurdle to their continuing training. But the converse is also true. Those who continue to train prove that while SITI provided infrastructure, the impulse and responsibility to train had always relied on individual artists.

43. Here I use Overlie's original conception of the Six Viewpoints: space, shape, time, emotion, movement, and story. Bogart adapted these Six into the Nine Viewpoints (architecture, spatial relationship, shape, tempo, duration, kinesthetic response, floor pattern, gesture, and repetition).

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> danger, but why? You can enjoy it. It's because you know, it's safe. So training gives me the space and time to enjoy this safe danger. (Kozma 2023)

Kozma likened the practice of working with the Viewpoints to trying to play with sand slipping through his fingers. Training in both Suzuki and the Viewpoints engages this kind of playing with evanescence.

Though radically different from each other, the Suzuki Method and the Viewpoints also share much. Both feature gesture and metaphor that are not supplements to the written word, but instead are highly formal techniques. Both bring performers to a heightened consciousness of their spatiotemporal circumstances, what Suzuki calls "performative consciousness." Both invite being seen from the vantage of the spectators, or even from the vantage of a transcendent witness. For those who share the SITI culture, these systems are held in a paradoxical conjunction. They come from completely separate lineages and ought to be recognized as such. And yet, each serves the same purpose: to unify a group around a training rather than around any charismatic person.

Coming Full Circle

It is easy to wax nostalgic about past training experiences with SITI; to linger on them goes against the core value of the company: to live, abide, and exalt in the fleeting legacies of the present moment. Here I have tried to show how the metaphors of the training have a futurity baked into them, a never-ending ending. Neither the Suzuki Method nor the Viewpoints are ever achievable as a finality. They are ever in-process. Both require the understanding that to be an artist onstage is to live a life of existing alone yet bound together with your "house."

Part of what made SITI's work so dynamic was how both the Suzuki Method and the Viewpoints together activated a sense of radical transindividualism. Understanding the individual can only happen through mapping social relations. Even when training on one's own, the performer is always embarking on a journey laid out by others. Both the Suzuki Method and the Viewpoints activate social fields that strengthen the actor's ability to attune to others—whether as Suzuki's "performative consciousness" or Overlie's "playing the piano." However different—and their differences are major—SITI's mix of these two training methods contrived a social affordance for students, forged through the relationships and dialogues shared in the crossing between methods and houses. New research ought to maintain a firm distinction between both methods or houses while at the same time not foreclosing the third space created by combining them. Likewise, future studies might question if these two methods are uniquely synergistic when coupled, or if they only seem to be because of how SITI used them in tandem.

From my perspective as an alumnus SITI ambassador, the most valuable techniques I have gained are not in the Suzuki Method or the Viewpoints outright but in the ability to toggle in and out of each. The two training systems are more effectively taught "together but alone," as the company would describe them. SITI treated them as necessarily coaligned, not two, not one. Conjoining them as Suzuki-Viewpoints does both a disservice. It is better to teach and practice them as an intersecting dialogue between unique systems.

My hope is that people will continue training not just to improve actors' instruments, but to bolster the social function of both systems: building communities who hold one another up and hold one another accountable. Those with the resources should go beyond one-off workshops and master classes. They should create ongoing programs to fill the vacuum left behind when the Skidmore intensives stopped.

I speak directly to fellow practitioners: though it might feel we are in a training desert without SITI, this is not so. SITI taught us self-reliance. Let me remind myself as much as my readers what Anne Bogart advised all students of the Skidmore intensives. As each group circle was formed during orientation, Bogart advised that inevitably each individual would have days of struggle, self-doubt, and the desire to give up. She suggested that in those moments, members of the circle

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ought not only reach out to someone else for help, but more importantly, offer help to others. As SITI modeled, the training circle is a shape-metaphor forming accessible environments that foster renewal and an opening even within, especially within, their enclosures.

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