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ARTICLE

The Constructive Deconstruction of Mary Overlie's Six Viewpoints

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Since its publication in 2005, Anne Bogart and Tina Landau's *The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition* has provided the received narrative not only for the ways that Viewpoints training is practiced, but also for its history. In their opening chapter, the authors crucially acknowledge that they did not invent this method of training:

> In 1979, Anne met choreographer Mary Overlie, the inventor of the "Six Viewpoints," at New York University, where they were both on the faculty of the Experimental Theater Wing. Although a latecomer to the Judson scene, Mary, who had trained as a dancer and choreographer, attributes her own innovations to those Judson Church experiments. . . . Mary immersed herself in these innovations and came up with her own way to structure dance improvisation in time and space—the Six Viewpoints: Space, Shape, Time, Emotion, Movement, and Story. She began to apply these principles, not only to her own work as a choreographer, but also to her teaching.[1]

Although Bogart and Landau claim the necessary authority to bring this "practical guide" into the marketplace, they make no secret of the fact that their work derives from Mary Overlie's innovations. To obfuscate on this point would have been a grave misstep causing outcry from the hundreds of performers who studied with Overlie over the preceding three decades. Many of those students have contested Bogart and Landau's implication that Overlie's purpose on the Experimental Theater Wing faculty was specifically to teach dance. Even giving Bogart and Landau the benefit of the doubt on that point, this acknowledgment alone would raise questions about why these authors feel they have the right to publish the definitive work on Viewpoints training—and why they now list *nine* viewpoints, which exclude some of the original six. To these questions, Bogart and Landau say:

> To Anne (and later Tina), it was instantly clear that Mary's approach to generating movement for the stage was applicable to creating viscerally dynamic moments of theater with actors and other collaborators.[2]

The claim that Bogart and Landau seem to be making is that Overlie's Six Viewpoints—Space, Shape, Time, Emotion, Movement, and Story—might best be thought of as a dance-oriented revision of Aristotle's essential, or "natural," qualities of drama: Plot, Character, Thought, Diction, Music, and Spectacle. After all,

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the premise that "The Viewpoints approach both dance and theater as physical entities akin to natural landscapes that can be entered and traversed . . . is dedicated to reading the stage as a force of nature"[3] suggests that Overlie is articulating the components that naturally constitute artistic performance broadly—in a way similar to Aristotle's codification of the elements of dramatic tragedy in particular. As such, the reader is meant to understand that the primary intervention of *The Viewpoints Book* is to take those disciplinary elements of dance and translate them into something useful for theatre practitioners for whom Aristotelian drama is no longer satisfying.

After scrutinizing Overlie's claims, what I hope becomes clear is that her Six Viewpoints are not so much a prescription for how a so-called pure dance is to be made, but a description of how performance can be conceived and experienced regardless of the disciplinary orientation of the performer. I place the Six Viewpoints within the context of Overlie's artistic influences and consider how they manifest themselves in Overlie's own work, both as a creative artist and as a teacher.

Along the way, I provide a clearer sense of how Overlie's Six Viewpoints bring themselves to bear on a performance, what they enable performers to do, and the features of a performance that employs them. To that end, I turn to Overlie's 1977 work *Window Pieces*. This set of dance explorations was performed by Overlie, Wendell Beavers, and David Warrilow in two street-level windows of the Holly Solomon Gallery in the Soho neighborhood of Manhattan.[4] It is worth noting that while Overlie and Beavers come from backgrounds steeped in dance training, Warrilow is primarily known for his work as an actor, particularly in the plays of Samuel Beckett.[5] The piece is more than ninety minutes long, so my analysis addresses the piece in general terms of its holistic aesthetic, its philosophical disposition, and affective qualities. With Overlie's explanations of her artistic and pedagogical practices as a guide, I examine how the performers in *Window Pieces* apply each of the Six Viewpoints, with an eye toward revealing the skills that these performers exhibit in the making of the work. The skills I identify are not those that one might conceive as the focus of traditional dance training. They reflect a postmodern desire to view generic and disciplinary boundaries as artificial constructions, break them down, and see what other constructions might be possible. These interjections appear throughout the essay—marked by bold italic headings and smaller, indented type—and highlight the individual Viewpoints as they come up in my broader argument.

Placing these findings in dialogue with the postmodern epistemology that was gathering momentum in the 1970s and 1980s, I identify significant overlaps, if not alliances. In the end, it is evident that Overlie has indeed created a structure, but one that exists to deconstruct—to dismantle other structures. It is a structure that the postmodern field of performance studies can deploy to untangle performance from theatre, and theatre from drama (even as it delights in the entangling of theatre and dance). It is a structure that does not banish Aristotelian logic to the attic but makes space on the table alongside it. My purpose here is not to disparage Bogart and Landau's revisions to Viewpoints training as invalid, or even improper. Nevertheless, their choice to brand their training as a theatrical revision of Overlie's Six Viewpoints has been called into question, and the rationale behind the branding

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warrants investigation. A thorough analysis of Overlie's work is the first phase of such an investigation.

The Six Viewpoints: Substance and Structure

Overlie refers to The Six Viewpoints—Space, Shape, Time, Emotion, Movement, and Story—in a variety of ways: as Viewpoints, of course, but also as "materials" (viii), "languages,"[6] "voices,"[7] and using the acronym SSTEMS. Significantly, she does not refer to them as "tools" for artists to "us[e],"[8] as Anne Bogart and Tina Landau sometimes do in their revised conception of the Viewpoints. At first, the significance of these descriptors, particularly the choice between calling the Viewpoints materials as opposed to tools, may not seem especially meaningful. Materials and tools are both things people use in the making of new things. Yet materials, such as a piece of cloth, become part of the final product. Tools do not. The cloth that I use to make a shirt might move in ways I don't anticipate as I stitch it, so I use a tool—a pin—to hold the fabric in place as I sew. The tool is a temporary means by which I make the material do my bidding. Bogart and Landau tend to treat the Viewpoints as a toolkit for artists to manipulate in making their work. For Overlie, these materials, the SSTEMS, move independently of the artist throughout any given performance. They are coproducing agents with which the performer learns to be in dialogue, rather than to manipulate.

In her first publication outlining the Six Viewpoints—an essay in Arthur Bartow's 2006 edited anthology, *Training of the American Actor*—Overlie claims that all performance is made from these six "existing materials."[9] The modern realistic theatre, which she terms "solid-state theater," sought to integrate Space, Shape, Time, Emotion, and Movement into a logical hierarchy at the service of Story—what Aristotle would call Plot. Such a hierarchy would leave no doubt in the minds of the audience as to the "definitive statement"[10] of the performance and obscure the existence of the individual materials coming together to create that message (Figs. 1–2). In these first two Figures, Overlie illustrates the rigid hierarchy in which the "solid-state" theatre organizes the materials of performance, the Six Viewpoints. This hierarchy conditions the audience to believe that, as long as they understand the Story, they have perceived all that the performance has to offer. Overlie argues that the postmodern theatre of the 1960s and 1970s was no longer interested in clear or definitive narratives. Instead, it sought "inclusiveness and equality of information,"[11] and pursued that objective by separating the materials of art from one another and removing the hierarchy imposed upon them by realism and naturalism (Figs. 3–4). In Figure 3, the traditional hierarchy is flattened out; no single viewpoint supersedes any of the others. Ultimately, in Figure 4, the Six Viewpoints are set free, moving independently, yet always in relationship to one another.

Associating each of these materials with a single "primary practice"[12] for the artist, Overlie presents a clearer process for deconstructing the traditional theatrical hierarchy and isolating each Viewpoint from the others than she does in her later monograph on the subject. With that work already done, the book, *Standing in Space* (2016), is able to offer a more circumspect view of how Overlie teaches each of these "languages" to her students, what other artists have

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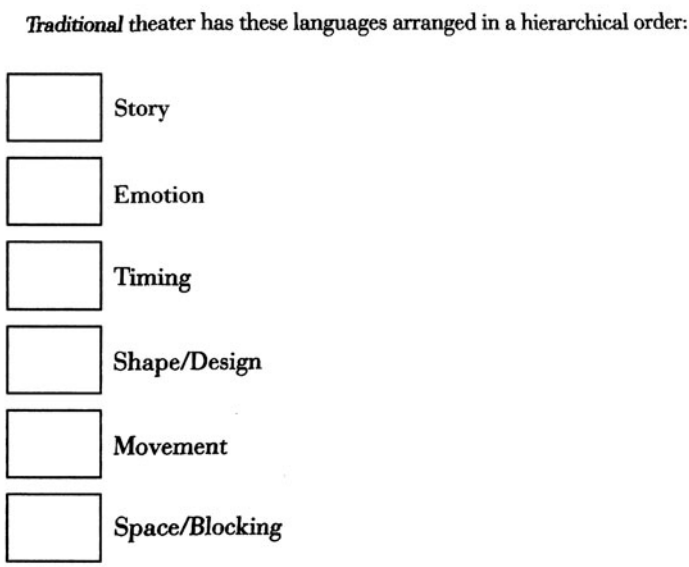


Figure 1. Illustration of the "traditional" hierarchy of theatrical elements. *Source:* Mary Overlie, "The Six Viewpoints," 193.

accomplished in their unique dialogues with them, and the variety of ways in which the artist might consider the SSTEMS beyond the obvious. Yet *Standing in Space* is not merely an expansion of Overlie's attempt to distinguish the Six Viewpoints from one another. It substantively expands the curriculum of Six Viewpoints training, giving the student/artist a series of perspectives from which to engage the SSTEMS.

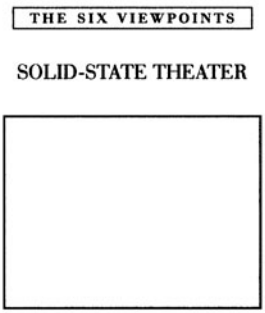


Figure 2. The illusion created by "solid-state theater" in which the individual materials of performance are rendered invisible beneath the Story. *Source:* Mary Overlie, "The Six Viewpoints," 193.

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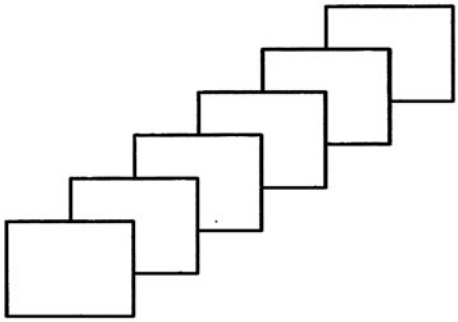


Figure 3. Training in the Six Viewpoints allows the actor to examine the materials independently of one another and of the traditional hierarchy. *Source:* Adapted from Mary Overlie, "The Six Viewpoints," 193.

Overlie calls these perspectives "laboratories" and claims they "focus attention on philosophical concepts that are used to disintegrate and then reintegrate performance" (67). Collectively, these nine laboratories—News of a Difference, Deconstruction, The Horizontal, Postmodernism, Reification, The Piano, The Matrix, Doing the Unnecessary, and The Original Anarchist—form "the Bridge." Overlie argues that "The Bridge forms a sort of double helix with the six materials by initiating discussions that reach beyond simply identifying the material structure of performance" (67). The terminology is mixed, the imagery is muddled, and the content is esoteric, but it is helpful to imagine that working across this bridge transports the student/artist from mere awareness of the Viewpoints to artistic facility with them. Devised-theatre artist-scholar Tony Perucci, a former student of Overlie's, claims that the laboratories "for a long time were called 'the frames,' as in the bridge support."[13] This term is also useful because it gives the image of a

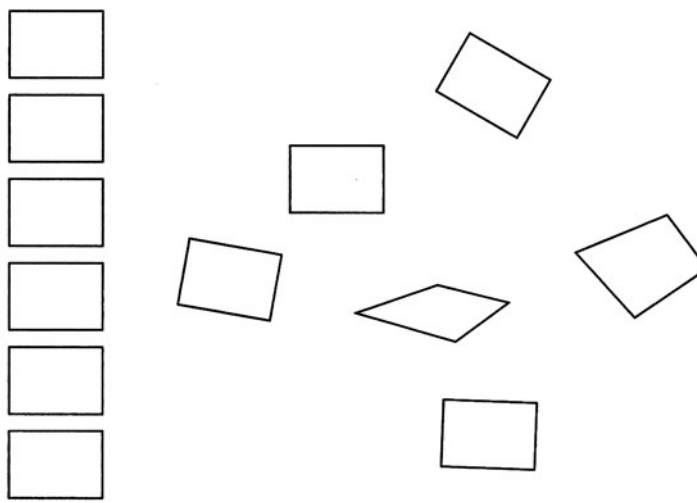


Figure 4. The Six Viewpoints freed from not only the traditional hierarchy, but from any hierarchy at all. *Source:* Adapted from Mary Overlie, "The Six Viewpoints," 194.

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frame that puts a border on a painting, photograph, or window—a context for viewing. Each laboratory along the bridge, then, offers a new frame through which the student/artist may observe experiments with the SSTEMS. By the time they reach the final frame on the bridge, which Overlie calls The Original Anarchist (123), the artist no longer needs to have structure imposed upon them. They can "rely on their own judgment; confident enough to wait until the positive ideas or action are clear [*sic*], able to be generous; able to interact on a vast variety of planes of communication . . . able to be cooperative without being locked into an arbitrary unity" (124–5). The so-called rules of genre and discipline—ballet, modern, drama, acting, dance, theatre—no longer apply to an anarchist performer. They are free to make work in collaboration with the materials at their disposal as they see fit. Such could be said to be the objective of postmodern art and of deconstructive theory in the postmodern era more broadly.

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

When Beavers moves into the center of the window, the spectator may notice that although he retains the same narrow, upright posture he adopted at the beginning, his form appears to fill much more of the frame. The elbows can come away from the torso when he reaches up. The arms form diagonal lines toward the corners of the window to provide contrast to the vertical lines to which they were restricted before. On the other hand, when Beavers moves into a low crouch in the center of the window, the negative space almost threatens to consume him. He appears smaller than ever.

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

Not only do the three bodies create shapes individually, they also create shapes together. When the three performers inhabit one window together, for example, the order in which they stand changes the shape of the negative space visible behind them. If Beavers stands between Warrilow, the tallest of the three, and Overlie, the shortest, the tops of their heads trace a straight, downward-slanting horizon across the storefront. If Overlie stands between the two men, the horizon takes on a V-shape. Overlie connects the practice of reading Shape in performance to what people

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do when observing natural land formations: "We notice the patterns of the waves, the peaks, the snowflakes as a way of taking readings to know what is happening or what has happened long ago" (17). In this sense, my application of the horizon analogy seems apt. The straight downward slant recalls a gently sloping hillside, whereas the more severe V-shape conjures the image of a deep ravine. The compact storefront window confronts the spectator with these shapes, narrowly focusing the gaze like the lens of a camera, in a way that a cavernous proscenium theatre does not. Furthermore, the conventions of ballet and modern dance demand that the Story proceed toward its resolution, and would likely prohibit the performers from holding a given spatial arrangement long enough, or repeating it often enough, for a spectator to perceive them. In Overlie's practice, however, "Shape observation begins with a minimalistic 'particalized' level of awareness" (15), which requires "a sense of calm and contemplation" and "a focus that has a meditative type of attention" to achieve (17). Even if the performer achieves such an awareness, it must be honed still finer so that the audience may apprehend it.

Even though I have turned the focus toward Shape in the *Window Pieces,* I have not been able to avoid being drawn back into how Shape works with Space. That is evidence of Overlie's decision to place Shape at the gravitational center of this dance. Her acknowledgment of the need for such a center implies an awareness of that structure, even hierarchy, which she claims to reject. Rather, she resists the assumption that those structures are natural and permanent.

Historical Context

Postmodernity and postmodernist art, as Overlie and her contemporaries came to know them, emerged from a variety of socioeconomic, political, and aesthetic narratives. Foundational among these was the existence of an allegedly natural World Order of nations: Western capitalism constituted a First World, ideologically superior to both the communist Second World and the as-yet-preindustrial Third World. This superiority was unquestionable in the West, and yet needed to be enforced through a policy of containment.[14] The dramatic conflict between the First and Second Worlds was narrativized as a Cold War, one whose battle lines were drawn with metaphorical curtains of iron and bamboo; but, in his study of postmodern theatre, Johannes Birringer reminds readers that real space was reconfigured as well:

> The Berlin Wall with its borderline, a fortified no-man's land that encloses and doubles the condition of the city, can be seen as a complex image of our postmodernity. The Wall constructs boundaries of difference but also contorts space in a way that postpones a clear territorial or categorical "break" as long as the city remains the east of the west and the west of the east.[15]

The construction of these boundaries, material and ideological, allowed the heat of this conflict to be transferred to theatres of war in the Third World: Vietnam, Afghanistan, Cuba, Nicaragua. It allowed for imperial powers on both sides to recast themselves in the role of liberators: "Postmodernism in this sense could be called a retrospective process in which a myth or imaginary construction as a mode of cultural (re)production is tied to the physiognomy of modern industrial society and to the historical trajectory of its political and aesthetic transformations."[16] In this

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context, though, I might change Birringer's "postmodernism" to "postmodernity." Industrial society constructs these myths to make postmodern structures of power appear natural, whereas postmodernism seeks to deconstruct those myths to reveal their artifice.

More specifically, postmodernist art of this time is reacting to modernist artistic conventions that propped up the totalizing mythologies of both democracy and communism. J. F. Lyotard identifies a set of intellectual and artistic movements taking place in the 1970s that urge an end to experimentation and diversity in favor of "a politics of totalitarian surveillance in the face of nuclear warfare threats." He argues that this embrace of totalitarianism is echoed in Jurgen Habermas's fear that the "totality of life" is being "splintered" and that the remedy for this splintering is an artistic culture that provides unity in which "'aesthetic experience . . . is no longer . . . expressed in judgments of taste,'" but is "'put in relation with problems of existence.'"[17] Habermas's problematic assumption, toward which Lyotard gestures, is that the "problems of existence" are the same for all humankind. If they were, it might be possible for them to be represented in their totality through "so-called realistic" mimetic representation.[18] Lyotard suspects that institutional calls from each side of the Cold War for artists to suspend experimentation and adhere to its particular version of realism arise out of a desire "for order, a desire for unity, for identity, for security"—not, as they may pretend, due to the attainment of perfect artistic expression.[19] Fredric Jameson likens the endeavor to homogenize the postmodern aesthetic and intellectual landscape to "the massive and repressive Order of Aristotle and his successors," against which nonhegemonic Greek philosophies such as Stoicism, Cynicism, and Sophistry mounted a "guerrilla war of the marginals, the foreigners, the non-successors."[20] Now, as in the ancient world, the Aristotelian logic of unity is endorsed as natural, while alternative artistic modes are relegated to the margin.

It is fitting, then, that Birringer argues: "the very notion of a dominant or unified culture, a traditional notion traceable back to historical idealizations of the theatre of the Athenian *polis*, will become obsolete,"[21] that the still-hegemonic Aristotelian theatrical structure would come under a guerrilla assault from feminist and racially minoritized artistic communities. Yet, though Hans-Thies Lehman observes that these marginalized performance traditions all have "the power to question and destabilize the spectator's construction of identity and the 'other'—more so than realist mimetic drama, which remains caught in representation and thus often reproduces prevailing ideologies,"[22] postmodernist artistic practice was not limited to those communities alone. In East Berlin, Heiner Müller's fragmented dramaturgy critiqued the false teleology of Aristotelian drama, while in the United States, Robert Wilson's theatre of images replaced Plot and Character with Spectacle and Music at the top of the theatrical hierarchy. Both of these artists operated from white male positionalities; still, both opposed the imposition of false unity of aesthetics through deconstructive practices.

For the most part, however, poststructuralist criticism—which takes aim at the same hegemonic structures—is launched from positions of alterity. Jacques Derrida, the Jewish-Algerian philosopher, articulates the necessity for deconstructing the structures of written language generally. For Derrida, hegemonic powers falsely posit orthographic writing as natural signifiers for diacritical sounds. In

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doing so, these powers hope to arrest divergent evolutionary processes of spoken language.[23] The implication is that, by preserving language as it is in their moment of dominance, institutions can maintain control over domestic operations and export their language abroad as an instrument of imperialism. This also has the effect of placing those geographically further from the seat of institutional control at the disadvantage of not having the proper relationship between spelling and pronunciation, and therefore creates a justification for keeping power consolidated. This is a process with which Derrida would likely have personal experience.

Time: Similarly, embedded in my discussion of the Shape of *Window Pieces* is the seed of how Time is experienced. I noted that slowness and repetition allow the audience to observe that these subtle Shapes are being made, and that they are important. In service of that objective, the piece begins with two and a half minutes where the three performers stand shoulder to shoulder in what might be described as an actor's neutral posture facing out into the street. At length, each of the performers takes up a simple, isolated gesture. Overlie almost imperceptibly slides her right palm across her thigh; Warrilow draws his thumb and forefinger across his brow, as though tracing the brim of an invisible baseball cap; and Beavers, bending at the elbow, extends his forearm out to his left, palm opening wide to the audience and covering Overlie's waist. Over the next minute, all three repeat these gestures at irregular intervals. These gestures return throughout the piece, and when they do (as during 13:20–13:35, for example), they serve as a reset. The stillness and slowness with which they are executed establishes a baseline rhythm for the entire piece, which never allows the pace to run away from the performers. In Overlie's conception this rhythm is "an all-out attack on the overbearing rhythms that dominate music, traditional dance and drama, and socialized conversation." Here, for Overlie, "Time becomes a living, breathing, ephemeral material that unfolds itself so that you can physically inhabit it" (23). This practice of time rejects the notion that the frenetic pace of life taking place outside the gallery window is natural: time does not have to be experienced as something that slips away before a person can experience it. Rather, it can be fully and consciously experienced as a "long string of anatomical operations" (22).

In other moments, the three dancers perform synchronized gestures in more regular rhythms. Approximately twenty minutes into the piece, they once again take places facing the street in a line across one of the windows. At this point, rather than the random repetition of individual gestures, they execute the same gesture—moving their hands to their hips, then dropping them at their sides—repeatedly. It seems that this could go on forever until suddenly, and all at once, they change the gesture. Now they raise only their right hands to touch their right shoulder blades. The rhythm is so regular as to become hypnotic, and then they change the gesture again without missing a beat. Now their right hands come to their hearts as they turn their heads to gaze over their right shoulders. At the beginning of the dance, the unsynchronized, randomly occurring gestures showed the performers exploring their own individual ways of experiencing Time, and how achieving that experience requires intentionality and focus. Conversely, this series of gestures in unison seems automatic, and obscures the spectator's sense of how much time is passing. The section lasts about a minute and a half by the clock, but for some audience members it may feel interminable. Others may be entranced and feel as though no time has passed at all. In my repeated viewings of the recording, I had both experiences.

These experiences of Time are exaggerated by the absence of musical accompaniment, at least in the conventional sense. Although there is no orchestra playing, or

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> speakers broadcasting a recorded track out onto the street, the performance is underscored with sound. Wind blows. Car horns blare. People passing by call to one another. In a sense often associated with John Cage, the rhythms of life outside the performance provide it with underscoring. Those rhythms contrast with Overlie's deliberate, highly focused choreography with its constant, chaotic motion. The ensemble's ability to toggle between individual experiences of limitless time and perfect unison, especially with a real-time, diegetic, ambient sound score that somehow works against both these aims, articulates a postmodern understanding of time as much more pliable than calendars, watches, and metronomes. It is a testament to the Six Viewpoints primary exercise for practicing Time, the Walk and Stop, which "concentrates awareness on the length of time the practitioner stands, the length of time others stand and the length of time used to move from one place to another" (22–3). It cannot be emphasized enough that these are practices that develop skills for working with these materials. It is not something one is simply able to do.

As a teenager from the spacious prairies of Montana arriving in San Francisco in the late 1960s, Overlie was not aware of Lyotard, Jameson, Derrida, or poststructuralism in any sense. How could she be? Most of that work had yet to be written, let alone translated into English. Instead, she encountered Yvonne Rainer and Barbara Dilley, who had journeyed west after being members of the Judson Dance Theater in New York. These dancers, perhaps Rainer most of all, were the pioneers of the "post-modern" dance movement: Sally Banes, in the introduction to a revised edition of her foundational work, *Terpsichore in Sneakers,* argues that Rainer and the rest applied the term "post-modern" to their work in order to signal a temporal and aesthetic break with the modern dance of the early to mid-twentieth century, rather than an alliance with the philosophical postmodernism of which they were likely unaware. Banes argues that modern dance was never truly modern*ist* because it does not task itself with identifying the essence of the art form in the way that modernist painting, specifically abstract expressionism, does. Rather, Banes perceives a move toward abstract expressionism in the "post-modern" dance of practitioners, and concludes that the work of the Judson Dance Theater is more closely aligned with the modernist aesthetic than with philosophical postmodernism.[24] However, examined from the perspective of movements in the performing arts, the simultaneous primitivism and avant-gardism she recognizes in modern dance seem much more comfortably aligned with the theatrical modernism of Yeats, Artaud, and Grotowski, thus allowing "post-modern" dance to feel truly postmodern.[25] This ambiguity reminds us that terms like "post-modern," "postmodern," and "postmodernity" are still contested and highly elastic. However, given the importance Overlie and her cohort place on practices of deconstruction, it may be most productive to think of her work as an embodied parallel to a Derridean, poststructuralist postmodernism and its objective to break down institutional hierarchies through linguistic deconstruction.

The significance of the Judson Dance Theater has been well-chronicled, but the clearest distillation of how its work parallels Derridean deconstruction is its emergence at a time when there was supposedly a "lack of theaters in New York that are both suitable and available for dancing and dance-watching," and when "Most dance people, be they of balletic or modern persuasions, acknowledge this deficiency and feel themselves limited by it."[26] This claim comes from a 1964 column

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in the *New York Times* that simultaneously praises and patronizes the group for their ability to "tailor their dances to fit the limitations of the performing area." The author, Allen Hughes, assumes that the Judson Church dancers could not secure a legitimate venue in which to perform, so they made do with whatever space they could find. What Hughes refuses to recognize is that, for the Judson dancers, it is the traditional theatre space that is hampered by limitations. New York City had no shortage of "suitable" (traditional) dance spaces, spaces that took their supposed legitimacy from wealthy patrons and exclusionary practices. Such spaces were constructed to suit the aesthetic needs of dance forms in which a choreographer-auteur controls every move the dancers make so as to manipulate the attention of the spectator and provide those patrons with safe, unsurprising performances. The Judson dancers' work, on the other hand, is collaborative, chaotic, improvisational, and indeterminate. It requires a space that is not beholden to the ways in which performers and spectators are trained to recognize hierarchical positions under the proscenium arch.

These artists understood, without articulating it, Wittgenstein's concept of "language-games"[27] and applied them in time and space. Lyotard, drawing upon Wittgenstein, explains that speech acts fall into a variety of categories, and that in order to make a given type of statement, certain conditions must be met; rules must be followed. These rules create a metanarrative about language—what it is, how it is used, and what it is capable of. Yet Lyotard observes that these rules, and the moves they allow, are not fixed: "A move can be made for the sheer pleasure of its invention: what else is involved in that labor of language harassment undertaken by popular speech and by literature? Great joy is had in the endless invention of turns of phrase, of words and meanings, the process behind the evolution of language on the level of *parole*."[28] In other words, although the rules of a language are defined prior to the birth of a given individual, those rules cannot anticipate all of the possible arrangements of phonemes in that language. Nor do the rules preclude one from inventing new uses for words, incorporating words from other languages, or outright inventing new words. The rules handed down by the metanarratives governing the use of space and time in art are similarly pliable. In classical and modern dance forms, the metanarrative was that to perform dance, a proscenium theatre space was required, or at least preferred. By bringing dance to other kinds of space—gymnasiums, art galleries, out in the woods on somebody's farm in New Jersey—these postmodern dancers incorporated new moves into the art form for both the dancers and the audience. I mean this both in the Lyotardian sense that "new moves" were possible in the language game of dance, and the literal sense that movements that would not have qualified as dance before, now could. Judson Dance Theater reconceived the dance space and generated new possibilities for dance moves. Rainer and Dilley, by introducing these ideas to Overlie—with her experience of living in the open space of Montana—"deconstructed dance in some strange way, and in the process the Viewpoints fell on the floor."[29]

Movement: Overlie, in the telling of her origin story as a dancer, describes the first dance class she attended. It was led by Harvey Jung, a former company member of the Metropolitan Opera Ballet company. Jung's classes were "strictly conducted and did not include any learned movement beyond the ballet barre." The barre was useful

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for training the body to find useful forms, but dictating combinations of steps was excised from the curriculum because Jung believed that it "was all that learned movement that had caused him to be inhibited as a creative spirit" (40). That value for a precise movement vocabulary uninhibited by authority of the teacher/choreographer is clearly reflected in *Window Pieces*—which is not to say that the piece does not include learned movement.

Learned movement in this dance gives evidence of Yvonne Rainer's influence on Overlie. Rainer, who "deplored the idea of dance defined by how high dancers could lift their leg, spin or jump," because it "reduced the art form to something close to a carnival show" (36), integrated pedestrian movement into her artistry. I mean "pedestrian" both in the sense that she made dances seeking to elevate everyday movements into works of art, and in the sense that those everyday movements included actual walking. While *Window Pieces* does not take on the gestural lexicon of everyday life in a mimetic way, as realist/naturalist acting seeks to do, neither does it require the dancers to exhibit the athletic virtuosity of the dance forms Rainer condemned. Instead, it makes use of movements that are easily legible as abstracted versions of quotidian gestures executed with uncommon discipline, gracefulness, and intentionality. It is as though the performers have devoted the hours on the ballet barre necessary to dance with the Balanchine or Graham companies, only to deploy those skills toward hailing a taxi, adjusting an item of clothing, or relaxing in a chair.

Steven Paxton's contact improvisation also exercises influence on Overlie's work in ways that are apparent both in her explanation of Movement as a Viewpoint and in *Window Pieces*. Overlie notes that contact improvisation "achieves a familiarity with kinetic motion that interfaces directly with the physical sensation" and "breaks the formal social barriers between bodies" (37). The first part of this quotation is foundational to the way Overlie sees Movement as a Viewpoint, but I must take up the second part of the quote first.

Given the name "contact improvisation," it seems a safe assumption that Overlie means the practice helps the performer develop facility and comfort with touching and being touched by other performers, which it does. For example, contact improvisation and other postmodern dance techniques have been applied for this purpose by practitioners in fight and intimacy direction.[30] In *Window Pieces,* however, Overlie interrogates the formal social barriers that govern proximity without touch.

Bodies in close proximity are frequently deployed in performance to suggest intimate relationships: physical closeness is a sign of emotional closeness. *Window Pieces* places the performers in situations where they must be close together yet resist other signs of physical intimacy—touch, comfort, eye contact. Beginning around the fourteen-minute mark, there is a segment in which all three performers inhabit one of the windows together and attempt to move freely. The smallness of the window is emphasized by the presence of three bodies in it, and it soon becomes evident that moving freely without touching each other is a challenge. Their movements are frequently halting and constricted in an effort to avoid contact. The performers exacerbate the awkwardness of the tight space by turning their backs, as if to disavow the presence of the spectators, and their heads are intently directed toward the back wall, to imply that this disavowal extends to one another. In a larger space, this avoidance would likely escape notice, but in such close quarters, the urgency with which the performers do not touch or engage with either each is a strong source of tension for the audience.

This transmission of tension returns my consideration to Overlie's argument that contact improvisation "achieves a familiarity with kinetic motion that interfaces directly with the physical sensation" (37). Movement is not merely a means by which bodies or objects are conveyed from one location to another—or, as is the case with much classical dance,

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> from one shape to another. It is the medium through which a person interfaces with the physical world; even when the body is still, it senses the movement of the world around it. The performer trained in the Six Viewpoints does not develop muscular facility so as to execute extraordinary feats of athleticism or parlor tricks like juggling (though they might also possess those skills). They train their bodies as an instrument for "interrogation of the earth's forces" (40), absorbing the information from that interrogation, and transmitting it "directly through kinetic sensation . . . right into the audience" (38). There are certain performers who seem to have an innate gift for this type of communication, so much so that it may appear to be supernatural, and something one either has or lacks. Viewpoints practices seek out a way to teach these telepathic abilities.

When Rainer and Dilley returned to SoHo in 1970, Overlie came along to join Dilley's new improvisational dance company, The Natural History of the American Dancer. Both in her writings and in interviews, Overlie describes an incident in which each of the dancers in the company made a solo to introduce themselves to the group. Overlie says she decided it would be "smart and 'avant-garde'" to do a solo outdoors (9). She does not describe the dance she made, but the piece did not have the effect she had hoped for. After an uncomfortable silence, Rachel Lew, another member of the company asked, "Do you know where you are?" After Overlie's confused and panicked response, the other dancer explained: "You are about two feet from the building behind you, three-quarters up the block, and 12 feet from the building across the street" (10). Evidently, Overlie's solo had not considered the buildings and streets as delimiting markers for her performance space. It was a revelation for Overlie, and a foundational moment in the development of the Six Viewpoints.

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

> *Space:* If, as Overlie suggests, the idea of horizontal, or nonhierarchical, composition is less about the complete banishment of structural scaffolds from the performing arts and more about the idea that "Any juxtaposition of the SSTEMS, outside scripts, objects, timings, sources, etc. can be rearranged to form temporary hierarchies" (79), Space would have to be near the top of the temporary hierarchy that Overlie constructs in the making of *Window Pieces.* The use of space in this piece is the most remarkable thing about it. Overlie's dancers occupy a pair of storefront windows, a space that seems completely wrong for dance. If one imagines a typical venue for dance, it would likely include a great deal of open area in which the dancers might move about. Instead, Overlie examines how bodies move in tight, compacted spaces.

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Perhaps for a choreographer whose upbringing took place in Montana, an environment with abundant space, coming to New York City makes a lack of space compelling. Overlie also uses two adjacent windows in ways that frequently separate the performers from one another, and in the times when all three are in the same window, they carefully avoid both physical and eye contact. This sets up a paradox in which the performers can be both isolated and crowded at the same time, which further evokes the sense of life in New York.

Additionally, the storefront windows separate the performers from the audience in a way that typical dance spaces do not. The setting for this performance is not shared with the audience. Rather, the audience views the dancers through glass, perhaps as though they were exhibits in a museum or items for sale in a department store. Yet, because the performance takes place during the day, there is light on both sides of the glass, and the performers are able to see out. The audience might be justified in feeling as though they are being watched as much as they are doing the watching. Therefore, while the performers are putting themselves on display for the audience in the street, people passing by are also on display through glass—performing for the dancers without consenting to do so.

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

The use of an unconventional space demands that the performers do more than merely execute their choreography. They must, as Overlie phrases it, "speak space."[31] Perhaps though, it is more precise to think of "speak[ing] space" as a shorthand for speaking *with* Space. A performer who is in conversation with Space understands the amount of space available for performance, how their body fits into it alongside or in between any other solid objects there, and how their presence in the space affects what the audience can perceive. How many walking steps take them from one side of the space to the other? How many running, bounding, or shuffling steps? Can all three performers face the audience directly without touching, or must someone turn in profile or move slightly downstage? If they move downstage, what part of the other performers is hidden? Does the amount of Space between the performers suggest comfort or tension? Does that change if they rotate toward or away from each other? How does the space change when someone leaves? When someone enters? This is not to say that conventional theatre spaces do not require performers to answer these questions. Rather, the limits of the unconventional space in *Window Pieces* draw attention to themselves and prohibit the space from being used merely as an area in which to perform; instead, it becomes a fourth scene partner for the dancers. Attending to the demands of the space as a coperformer demands a heightened sense of cooperation from the dancers as an ensemble.

Postmodern Theory and Viewpoints Practice

There is a degree to which Overlie's articulation of the Six Viewpoints does not escape the essentialist language of modernism. She describes performance as "a

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dialogue with the natural elements themselves" (xi), and that these natural elements are "universal languages" (50). It might be tempting to argue that Overlie errs or is insufficiently precise in her description of the Viewpoints as a postmodern structure. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that there is a gap between how the artists and the philosophers define the term, or that there are multiple ways of understanding distinctions between postmodernity and postmodernism. Perucci, who, in addition to being a former student of Overlie's, is a member of the Mary Overlie Legacy Project Team, points out that the relationship between the postmodern artists of Overlie's generation and the scholars of postmodernism with whom they were contemporary was one of mutual indifference at best: "for the most part [post-modern dancers including Overlie] were actively disinterested in high theory . . . and then the French [philosophers], I mean, they had no idea what was going on in American performing arts, and you can see this in the writing for the most part."[32] With that in mind, I argue that it is neither the case that Overlie errs, nor that there is a significant gap in understanding of terms. Instead, it is a case of postmodern conditions operating in different areas of study inspiring similar conclusions reached by traversing different pathways.

The lack of proliferation of French poststructuralist discourse among postmodern dance artists in the 1970s United States is no reason to suspect antipathy between the two. As I mentioned above, what there was of poststructuralist discourse had yet to make its way across the Atlantic by this time. Perucci asserts that once it did, people who worked with Overlie, or read early drafts of her manuscript, pointed out how her use of the word "deconstruction" was similar to Derrida's, so she eventually became familiar with that work.[33] Moreover, the distrust between theory and practice is not unique to this time and situation; yet since both are created by and respond to the increasingly globalized culture of postwar capitalism, they frequently reach similar conclusions.

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

The first word of the introduction to *Standing in Space* is "Materials" (3). The word has a strong denotation of the physical world: materials are of matter, which can neither be created nor destroyed, only rearranged. A plot, a character, or a turn of phrase is invented by the poet, but the SSTEMS exist in the physical world of their own accord, whether the poet chooses to acknowledge them or not. A performance that moves to exclude any of these may strengthen the awareness of the excluded material by drawing attention to its absence. It may be challenging to think of Emotion as a physical material, but Richard Hornby unpacks it

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well in *The End of Acting: A Radical View*: "I can hide the workings of my mind, as I would if I told a lie, just as I can hide my emotions by suppressing them. But . . . [m]ost of the time, the mind is *not* hidden."[34] The actor may suppress or disguise their emotions, but those can never be eradicated. Emotions and the physical sensations that human beings experience as a result of their emotions are always already present in the body. As such, they are physical materials that cannot be separated from any performance. "You do not first have to feel something 'inside,' and then merely 'express' the emotion outside."[35]

Emotion: Emotion is the Viewpoint that perhaps feels most contrary to the postmodern sensibility, and—not coincidentally—the greatest infringement upon the territory of the American method and Lee Strasberg's obsession with bringing the actor's experience of emotion from the inside to the outside. Postmodernism, as an artistic movement, is frequently characterized by an aesthetic of ironic detachment. This aesthetic suggests a rejection of, or at least indifference to, emotion and emotive practices. Indeed, the three performers in Overlie's *Window Pieces* do not appear to be attempting any overt displays of whatever emotions they may be experiencing. They shun the facial and bodily iconographies that are central to method acting's efforts at "unblocking emotion" in pursuit of an "authentic" performance.[36] In Overlie's formulation, the ability to affect these iconographies is merely part, and perhaps the latter part, of the performance of Emotion.

At a more basic level, Overlie argues that Emotion is "the active self-awareness of the performer," which she calls "presence" (29). In order to be fully present, the actor must be able to recognize and be at ease with the internal and external processes of their body and how those are impacted by the watchful presence of the audience. Skipping over this awareness to the production of external emotive signifiers is frequently an effort "To avoid the task of being present" by resorting "to faux realistic activities" (32). She advocates meditative practices that draw the awareness inward to interrogate the state of the mind and body in the moment of performance and engage the audience from that state without trying to construct anything on top of it: "This act assures that they are not avoiding any aspect of acknowledgement that they are there before a witness. If all is going well, the performer will accumulate the ability to be present and gain a thrilling experience: the gift of being seen" (32).

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

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The evidence to support my reading is strongest in Overlie's chapter on Story—which she is adamant is not equivalent to Plot. For Aristotle, the absence of Plot from a work is absolutely disqualifying for aspiring tragedians. Overlie, on the other hand, does not insist upon a sequential narrative or even a "structure of events" in order to have a Story.[37] On the contrary, she "insisted that there was Story in abstraction" (46). When an artist intends their work to be completely devoid of "narrative logic," Overlie argues that an audience member may impose one anyway. Even if the artist is successful in performing an absence of narrative, the "enormous effort to have no Story is itself the Logic" (46). Story, in this case, is represented in the performance by its absence, and because Overlie argues that each performance creates its own temporary hierarchy for its component parts to inhabit, the absence of one in a given performance may indicate its outsized importance to that work.

Overlie does not provide much description of the ways in which the other five Viewpoints might impact a performance when the artist endeavors to exclude them, though she does give a brief nod to the "kinetic sensation" of stillness amid her discussion of Movement (36). In the case of Emotion, it seems particularly postmodern to imagine its absence as detachment or distance, and Overlie's strong association of Emotion with presence lends credibility to that impulse. The actor may not be imitating the overt signs of Emotion, as a Strasbergian actor would, but, as noted above, there will still be emotions present in their body and in the bodies of the audience. Time may be negated in performance either by extreme brevity or indeterminacy, both of which have been explored in postmodern performance. Space and Shape present interesting questions about the possibility of their elimination, which may provide more insight regarding Overlie's claim to the abolition of hierarchy from her practice.

The first question I would pose is this: "Are Space and Shape two discrete materials?" It appears the Shape of a body or an object is inexorably tied to the space it occupies. Anne Bogart and Tina Landau imply this in their version of the Viewpoints, in which the Shape Viewpoint falls under the "Viewpoints of Space" category.[38] Why then does Overlie articulate these two as separate from one another? It is certainly possible to think of Shape as the way in which an artist has chosen to arrange bodies or objects in Space. At the same time, however, it is also possible to think of Space as defined by how bodies or objects are circumscribed around it. Rachel Lew was asking Overlie to consider Space in this way in her comment on Overlie's outdoor solo mentioned earlier. Both ways of conceiving the relationship are possible, and both are useful to the artist. It is true of the organization of writing on a page. The shape of the paper (or digital page)—say, an eight-and-a-half by eleven-inch rectangle—defines the area where the writing takes place. The organization of shapes *on* the paper is where meaning is conveyed, and that meaning can be literal or abstract. If I type a colon, hyphen, and close parenthesis, one after another, I have presumably arranged shapes in a nonsensical way. :-). Shape and Space work together to define each other. Neither can be said to be fully independent from, nor superior to, the other. This ends up being true for the relationships among all of the Six Viewpoints.

Overlie asks her reader to test this theory in her News of a Difference laboratory, the concept of which "expands awareness through a physical interrogation that

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collects minuscule, seemingly useless, details" (69). She derives this concept from Transcendental Meditation practices in which the practitioner notices greater detail through prolonged investigation of a given structure. In the example above, examining a shape brings awareness of both the Space it contains as well as the space beyond its borders. Conversely, examining a space brings awareness of the Shapes created by bodies and objects within. The Emotional practice of meditation brings awareness of how the interior Space of bodies shifts over Time; on the microscopic level, Emotions take up Space in our brains and bodies. The process also works in reverse: zoom out far enough, and one becomes aware that the movement of Earth over Time means that my house is not in the stable location I imagine it to be. If that example is overly concerned with the cosmic, then consider how the edifice will crumble and decay over Time. Thus, none of the individual Viewpoints can be completely detached from the others even if the artist's focus may be trained upon them singly. The boundaries are porous and resistant to the rigid differentiation that modernity wants to impose on the world.

My second question would be, "Is performance possible without Space and/or Shape—can they be absent in the way that the other Viewpoints can?" An early draft of this essay, written in the autumn of 2021, came at a time when this question had become complicated in a profound way. A massive global pandemic brought about the closure of traditional theatres as well as a wide variety of other venues in which people share Space. Not only performing artists but workers of all stripes had to become accustomed to functioning in spaces that elide the physical distance between the bodies in them and reduce our experience of one another to two-dimensional onscreen shapes. Much of the conversation surrounding this newly commonplace mode of mediated yet live performance has revolved around fatigue and dissatisfaction. From what I have seen, this is due to persistent attempts to recreate familiar types of performance in these new virtual spaces. An examination of these "rooms" at the microscopic level of News of a Difference may reveal a way in which this absence of distance as a factor in Space can be used to generate a performance logic that resonates among my contemporaries the way that nontheatrical spaces did for Overlie's in the 1970s.

Overlie's second claim, that the Six Viewpoints are "universal languages" (50), also carries the baggage of modernist essentialism. Yet, when examined in context, the phrase carries a meaning different from its colloquial usage. Overlie frequently uses linguistic metaphors to describe her work: "I can speak space. A lot of people who can do Viewpoints can speak space."[39] This is an example of the kind of claim she makes about the linguistic qualities of the SSTEMS. It has a Saussurean sensibility in it, suggesting that the physical material of space can be theorized as a linguistic sign. This, in and of itself, does not pose a challenge to Overlie's claims about the Viewpoints as a postmodern form of training. The idea that these languages are somehow "universal," however, does carry with it some of the more troubling connotations of modernism—to what degree is universality imposed upon colonized communities? To what degree does the experience of the "universal" translate from individual to individual? If the speech or writing of linguistic signs is "universal," does it necessarily follow that the reading of those signs is also?

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

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

Viewed in this way, perhaps Perucci clarifies the relationship by insisting that the Six Viewpoints are not like written languages, which Derrida has observed are a way for people to have power over language and preserve it so as to sustain their power over others. Rather, says Perucci, the SSTEMS are not "more things that you can manipulate": they are "first and foremost about how you relate to those materials. That the performance space, event, studio is an active ecology," akin to how Derrida imagines spoken language to be, when untethered by writing.[42] Perucci identifies the chilling influence of power here as well: "If you think about industrial capitalism's interference with ecologies, [then] we know what the danger is," of trying to impose structure on forces of nature. Ideology has imposed structure upon Space, Shape, Time, Emotion, Movement, and Story, but Overlie wants the Viewpoints-trained performer to deconstruct that structure, notice that those materials predate (and will outlive) human existence, and try to engage with them as materials rather than tools. Perucci believes that "it makes it much more radical . . . than even other kinds of post–method acting approaches, because it's fundamentally not about mastery. It's antimastery and anticontrol."[43] It places the materials on a plane of equal importance with the performer, rather than in the position of being subjugated. In doing so, it resists the ideological problems that come with modern concepts of the natural and universal.

Story: It is tempting to synthesize the convergence of the SSTEMS in *Window Pieces* to divine some kind of message or hidden plot. Indeed, viewers may be unable to prevent themselves from it. It is likely that in my analysis here, despite my efforts at neutrality, I have alluded to what *Window Pieces* means to me. I see the use of the storefront window as a device for putting the dancers on display like mannequins in the shop windows on Fifth Avenue. Their everyday dress, as opposed to leotards or even sweat suits, suggests to me that the dancers are everyday people doing everyday actions—constantly

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on display, but never really seen. Their routines are tedious, but any attempt to break out of those routines reminds them that they are constantly crowded out by other people going about their own daily routines. Perhaps worst of all, they are so consumed by their mundane tasks and staying out of each other's way, that they do not commune together. They are packed into this window, practically on top of each other, yet they do not meet. This, to me, is life in the city, specifically and especially New York City. Yet all those observations say more about me than they do about *Window Pieces*. They represent inferences I make about the performance, not something that is essential to it.

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

Points of View (and Contention)

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

The prevailing perception—from Bogart and Landau—is that Overlie created the Six Viewpoints as a tool for dancers and choreographers. I am sure that some of this perception is reinforced by her relatively well-known work in that field—not so well known as the giants of postmodern dance like Merce Cunningham,

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Yvonne Rainer, or Deborah Hay, but enough to merit mention in *Terpsichore in Sneakers*. For readers who are less familiar with Overlie's work as a teacher—and for that matter as a creative artist, which goes well beyond the limitations of "choreographer"—it would be easy to assume that Overlie designed, applied, and taught the Six Viewpoints as a pure dance practice.

There are certainly points of difference, both theoretical and practical, between Overlie's Six Viewpoints and the version put forth by Bogart and Landau. The idea that Viewpoints training is a useful experience for theatre actors is not one of those points of difference. Perucci observes that when Overlie and Bogart taught together at NYU in the 1980s, Overlie "was charged with developing the Experimental Theatre Wing. Like, she wasn't teaching in a dance program . . . it is an approach derived from her experience as a dancer and a choreographer including choreographing for theatre works with Mabou Mines."[44] In her own words, Overlie announces her intention for the Six Viewpoints as a theatrical practice in her first published writing on the subject: an essay in which she outlines her ambition to "find the materials and principles involved in making theater," and that is "written from the perspective of actor training."[45] *Standing in Space* takes examples from both dance and theatrical perspectives. Ultimately, although Overlie's intention for and practice of Viewpoints training has been stated, it has not, as yet, been able to overtake the preexisting narrative of *The Viewpoints Book,* which has been received with much greater fanfare.

Moreover, I contend that Overlie's Six Viewpoints have applications in the field that are even broader than practical performer training. They provide a framework for scholars in the field of performance studies who want to analyze nonartistic events through the lens of performance. Thinking about the ways in which the sport of golf makes use of Space, Shape, Time, Emotion, and Movement versus the ways in which basketball uses those same elements may prove useful for understanding the Story that each event tells: Who is it for? What are its values? What purpose does it serve in our society? The same could be said for all sorts of performance: protest, religious observations, ceremonies, social gatherings, and so forth. Since the discipline is still in its infancy and is generally thought to be conducive to the postmodernist view of the world,[46] the potential for Overlie's work to have an impact on performance studies merits serious consideration in the years to come.

All of this is to say that while Overlie makes use of some language with strong modernist connotations, her work remains both philosophically and practically postmodernist. Rather than an Aristotelian checklist of things performance must have, the Six Viewpoints offer a set of independent and dependent variables for the exploration of performance—how is it altered by their abundance or lack. It emerged at a time when received narratives about world order and social hierarchies were beginning to show deep cracks, and it extends the skepticism regarding those narratives to the ways in which theatrical performance is made and the assumptions that theatre reflects about the reality of experience in an increasingly postmodern world. Chief among those assumptions was that an easily surveyable narrative is necessary or sufficient to describe the human experience. Overlie's theatrical works—including her dances—provide a powerful example of how Viewpoints training helps performers deconstruct received narratives about the art-

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making process, the value—or even possibility—of separating performance disciplines such as dance and theatre, and human existence in general.

Notes

1 Anne Bogart and Tina Landau, *The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2005), 5.
2 Ibid.
3 Mary Overlie, *Standing in Space: The Six Viewpoints Theory and Practice* (Billings, MT: Fallon Press, 2016), vii. Subsequent citations of this work are given parenthetically in the text.
4 Mary Overlie, "The Mary Overlie Archive Presents: *Window Pieces,*" performed with Wendell Beavers and David Warrilow at Holly Solomon Gallery (1977). *The Mary Overlie Archive,* 2024, video, 1:38:53; https://sixviewpoints.com/window-pieces, accessed 7 June 2024.
5 Mel Gussow, "David Warrilow, 60, an Actor Who Interpreted Beckett, Dies," *New York Times,* 29 August 1995, B6; https://www.nytimes.com/1995/08/29/obituaries/david-warrilow-60-an-actor-who-interpreted-beckett-dies.html, accessed 24 June 2024.
6 Mary Overlie, "The Six Viewpoints," in *Training of the American Actor,* ed. Arthur Bartow (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2006), 187–221, at 190.
7 Mary Overlie, interview by Anne Bogart, *Conversations with Anne* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2012), 469–88, at 477.
8 Bogart and Landau, *Viewpoints Book*, 17.
9 Overlie, "Six Viewpoints," 188.
10 Ibid., 189.
11 Ibid., 192.
12 Ibid., 201.
13 Tony Perucci, interview by author, Zoom, 21 July 2021.
14 Though I use the term "containment" in reference to the Truman Doctrine and its commitment to opposing the spread of communism in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, Bruce McConachie has also used it to describe a cultural mindset in the Cold War United States, which studies in cognitive science have suggested is characterized by binary, essentialist thinking; that activities were American or Un-American, for example. Bruce McConachie, *American Theater in the Culture of the Cold War: Producing and Contesting Containment, 1947–1962* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003).
15 Johannes Birringer, *Theatre, Theory, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 2.
16 Ibid.
17 Jean-François Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?" trans. Régis Durand, in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 71–82, at 72.
18 Ibid., 74.
19 Ibid., 73.
20 Fredric Jameson, "Foreword," in Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, vii–xxi, at xix.
21 Birringer, *Theatre, Theory, Postmodernism,* xi.
22 Hans-Thies Lehman, *Postdramatic Theatre,* trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (London: Routledge, 2006), 5.
23 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 35–42.
24 Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), xiii–xv.
25 Ramsay Burt has made this argument in greater detail in his book *Judson Dance Theater: Performative Traces* (London: Routledge, 2006).
26 Allen Hughes, "At Home Anywhere: Avant-Garde Dancers Adjust to Anything," *New York Times,* 9 February 1964, X18; www.nytimes.com/1964/02/09/archives/at-home-anywhere-avantgarde-dancers-adjust-to-anything.html?searchResultPosition=1, accessed 24 June 2024.
27 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* rev. 4th ed., ed. P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Chichester, UK: Wiley–Blackwell, 2009), 8.
28 Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, 10.

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29 Overlie interview, Bogart, *Conversations with Anne,* 476.
30 Tonia Sina Campanella, "Intimate Encounters: Staging Intimacy and Sensuality" (M.F.A. thesis, Dept. of Theatre Pedagogy, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2006); https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd/1071.
31 Overlie interview, Bogart, *Conversations with Anne,* 476.
32 Perucci interview.
33 Ibid.
34 Richard Hornby, *The End of Acting: A Radical View* (New York: Applause Books, 1992), 113.
35 Ibid.
36 Colin Counsell, *Signs of Performance: An Introduction to the Twentieth-Century Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1996), 55–9.
37 Aristotle, in *Poetics* (trans. Malcolm Heath [London: Penguin Classics, 1996]), uses the phrase "structure of events" (12) to describe Plot, which seems to absolve the poet from adhering to a sequential order; yet asserting that "well-being or its opposite ill-being" (11) is the ultimate outcome of the structure of events implies that sequence is necessary after all.
38 Bogart and Landau, *Viewpoints Book,* 9.
39 Overlie interview, Bogart, *Conversations with Anne,* 476.
40 Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* 303; original emphasis.
41 Overlie interview, Bogart, *Conversations with Anne,* 476.
42 Perucci interview.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
45 Overlie, "Six Viewpoints," 187–8.
46 Henry Bial articulates this compatibility between postmodernism and performance studies in his Introduction to *The Performance Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003), 1: "The positive promise of performance studies—its potential to illuminate, instruct, and inspire—is enhanced, not diminished" by its resistance to definition and lack of identifiable essence.

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