

A man in a white shirt and dark vest is kneeling in a shower of white confetti against a black background. He has his arms raised and is looking upwards. The confetti is falling all around him, creating a dense, celebratory atmosphere.

SITI Company

The Legacy of Radical Presence

Joan Herrington

Legacy Is Ginormous¹

The spiritual sort of task of theatre artists is to actually be able to joyfully live a life in which your work disappears—there's no trace of it. And people will encounter things that are like it, that were influenced on it, that built upon it and have no consciousness of you. Legacy is related to the ephemerality of theatre itself. Ultimately the legacy is to have an effect and then disappear.

—SITI member Leon Ingulsrud (2023)

Assemblage as a way to make art carries the expectation that existing elements will be combined with other existing elements to make something new, to expand impact, to enable new perceptions. One might argue that the SITI Company (Saratoga International Theater Institute, 1992–2022) were masters of assemblage. They were not the first acting ensemble, nor the first to devise new work or deconstruct classics. The training they taught came directly from Tadashi Suzuki and indirectly from Mary Overlie; and company members brought to SITI years of preparation from their professional careers. But together as an extraordinary ensemble, they took techniques and tools and literature and realigned, reimagined, and re-envisioned them. They created productions stunning to witness and offered life-changing training to the artists who worked with them. They redefined and edified the idea of a company and evidenced the extraordinary courage and rigor required to maintain the integrity and aesthetic of an ensemble.

The SITI Company consistently ventured into new territory, ensuring that their palette offered an array of challenges. With no brick-and-mortar home, they traveled the US and the globe. Self-described by company member Ellen Lauren as “a classical company wrapped in a post-modern bow” (in Rodriguez 2014), they devised new work and collaborated with dance companies; they created *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2006) and played with Noël Coward (*Private Lives*, 1998); they collaborated with visual artist Ann Hamilton (*the event of a thread*, 2012; and *the theatre is a blank page*, 2015) and choreographer Bill T. Jones (*A Rite*, 2013). They made *Macbeth* as a radio play (2004), envisioned and realized an opera (*Seven Deadly Sins*, 1998), and bounced the walls with Streb Extreme Action (*Falling and Loving*, 2019). They shifted from *The Bacchae* (2018) to *A Christmas Carol* (2022). Their flexibility as artists resulted from the clear structures in which they worked. With disciplined and vigorous mental and physical focus, they found what Artistic Director Anne Bogart termed “freedom within the form” (2019), bringing to their worktable and their rehearsal rooms the profound desire to question their artistry. Although the SITI Company no longer exists, their international impact has been exceptional.

Founded in 1992 and collectively disbanded in 2022, SITI leaves behind a changed landscape. Their lasting legacy includes a challenge to theatre-makers as to how theatre is conceived and

1. “Ginormous” is the word Barney O’Hanlon consistently used in the conversation about SITI’s legacy hosted by Howlround on 2 June 2017 (HowlRound 2017).

Figure 1. (facing page) Gian-Murray Gianino in Hanjo. Japan Society, NY, 2017. (Photo by Julie Lemberger; courtesy of SITI Company)

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executed, a remarkable contribution to the way in which theatre artists are trained, and an influential example of how an ensemble can thrive.

The process of creation for SITI was always a conversation—a process of discovery. They believed that theatre is about creating an environment where you can explore that which you don't know, not trying to understand what is in front of you. The expansive research and preparation undertaken by the company combined with their training, particularly the Viewpoints, provided a way of searching, of asking questions, affording a space for the collision of philosophy, politics, and art that defined SITI. Their methodologies afforded ownership of the creative process to everyone in the room and demanded that they actively and instinctively responded to the challenge of each project. The canvas on which they worked was intentionally expansive and when they began, no one knew what it would ultimately contain. As Darron West, company member, designer, and dramaturg, notes:

When you go into a SITI Company rehearsal, there's a giant question you're trying to find the answer for, and you're just answering this question and then you're answering another question and you're finding the play rather than creating something that a director or a conceiver or a playwright has already put together in their mind. They know what it's going to look like. We don't know. There is always so much change. There's tons and tons and tons of stories of the company working and completely 180 degrees changing their idea about how we're doing something. It is really about following the Ouija board in the room with this particular group of people. (2023)

The faith required to stand on shifting sand was built on a shared intimacy, trust, and a complex/effective system of communication—what SITI Company members consistently refer to as the common vocabulary provided by the training. The common vocabulary made it possible to embrace a diversity of visions and fulfill the company's mandate for artistic exploration. The company pursued what Bogart described as “the violence of articulation” (Bogart 2001).

In their 30-year history, the SITI Company engaged in an array of work. Even their first productions expressed their desire to wrestle with the most difficult of challenges. They dramatized the writing of Marshall McLuhan (*The Medium*, 1993), deconstructed and reassembled Chekhov's five major plays (*Small Lives/Big Dreams*, 1996), and combined Edward Albee with quantum physics (*Going, Going, Gone*, 1997). These early theatrical puzzles made them creative, nimble, powerful, and energized; it made them solidify their common aesthetic. The radical work demanded a radical, rigorous approach in preparation and execution, which they soon began to share broadly, training and empowering several generations of theatre-makers. They generously shared their methodology centered in “composition work,” defined by Bogart and Tina Landau in *The Viewpoints Book* as “the practice of selecting and arranging the separate components of theatrical language into a cohesive work of art for the stage” (2004:12). The approach enabled them to work quickly, instinctually, and with a vocabulary that allowed them to “articulate which ideas, moments, images etc. we will include in our productions” (12).²

Long-time SITI collaborator, playwright Charles L. Mee, talks about how this approach changed his work:

It's a new way of making theatre. They put together some text and something visual and some activity and that's called a composition, and then they proceed to make 47 compositions and then put those in the order they want—that's a whole new kind of theatre. There are a lot of people hugely influenced by that—people who are not so much working with a plot line—you know, A causes B causes C—but really putting together a piece that feels like spring, summer, autumn, winter, oh, spring rebirth. That's really what SITI Company did. (2023)

2. For additional insight into SITI's composition work see Erin Mee (2022).



Figure 2. Ellen Lauren and Stephen Duff Webber in War of the Worlds. Actors Theatre of Louisville, 2000. (Photo by Richard Trigg; courtesy of SITI Company)

Mee professes it changed his approach to playwriting. He was inspired when he worked with Bogart in 1997 and she set an artistic expectation for him: “Take me someplace I have never been before” (2023). It is the lofty challenge that underpins all of SITI’s productions.

SITI Company member J. Ed Araiza recognizes the impact of SITI’s work in this arena:

I don’t want to say that the SITI Company should take credit for devising being such a part of the American theatre now, but I think we pushed it to another level. We weren’t the first people to devise, but you can certainly look at the number of people we trained in those methodologies or those perspectives and know that we catapulted that work into a place of much greater abundance. (2023)

Indeed, SITI’s influence is easily seen in the work of theatre-makers from as far apart as Brussels and Singapore.

Director Rachel Chavkin recognizes why SITI has been, and will continue to be, so influential:

SITI was outward facing as a company. I think that is a big part of SITI’s legacy. I think public access to the Wooster Group, for example, who were not very publicly focused, feels to me very different than the SITI Company. That’s a big philosophical difference—how much access you give to how you’re thinking about stuff, and why you’re thinking about stuff. That’s a very academic inclination—the idea to constantly report back versus be focused more internally—study yourself versus necessarily bringing it out for others to see. (2023)

A fundamental belief in the value of their work, not just for themselves but also for others, combined with an extraordinary generosity of spirit, motivated SITI to provide the kind of access Chavkin describes. This may have been a reflection of the foundational influence of the Suzuki Company of Toga, Japan (SCOT), whose mission has always been to ensure that there was purposeful broad engagement with their work through training in the Suzuki Method, their extensive touring, and by inviting artists to visit Toga, a remote mountain village facing the Japan Sea. Thousands of students studied at SITI’s summer theatre intensive at Skidmore College in Saratoga, NY, at



Figure 3. bobrauschenbergamerica. From left: Danyon Davis, Akiko Aizawa, Ellen Lauren, Will Bond, J.Ed Araiza, Leon Ingulsrud, BAM Next Wave Festival, 2003. (Photo by Richard Termine; courtesy BAM Hamm Archives)

SITI's New York City Conservatory, or in the training SITI offered wherever they toured—which was constantly. The presence of other artistic ensembles from an array of disciplines who were in residencies at Skidmore at the same time as SITI bred a sharing of work and cross-pollination of techniques. Through their contact with the global student body who came to study with them, SITI's methods spread throughout the world.

Director Rebecca Taichman believes, “They have offered an alternative vision for what theatre can be—provided the invitation—the invitation to think in these other ways about how a story might feel or look or sound onstage” (2023). SITI's invitation did not only extend to artists. Their work also demanded a partnership with audiences. As SITI member Kelly Maurer notes,

Before I met SITI, I thought that the job of theatre was to make something *for* the audience. And through working with SITI, I think the job is to make something *with* the audience [...] a rigorous attention on what are we making in conversation with the audience. (2023)

Marc Masterson, who worked extensively with SITI while artistic director at Pittsburgh City Theatre (1981–2000 and 2018–present) and the Actors Theatre of Louisville (2001–2011), sees clearly why their work stood apart:

The idea of an ensemble making work together was not unique to the SITI Company. They didn't invent that. But what they did do was explore a kind of approach to theatre that was not, initially at least, grounded in traditional narrative. They pursued a separation of the elements of design, of text, of movement, of sound, of lighting, so that instead of all being focused on one kind of track and the service of a story with a beginning, middle, and an end, they were interested in these parallel tracks. Each of the elements was moving down that track and then would collide with, or coincidentally influence, the other track so that the sound design would trigger a response from the lighting design, or a gesture or a movement would alter the vocal expression of a moment. (2023)

What is singular to SITI is that the process of exploration used in devising—entering a state of unknowing—remained the same with texts by living writers such as Charles Mee and Jocelyn Clark as it did with the classics. It was how SITI lived in their space—in an unending act of discovery—and it is a key reason company members remained loyal for decades. West easily prefers the chaos to what he finds in a non-SITI rehearsal, which he describes as “being in a room of strangers where hopefully the director has really got a good pitch to get everybody on board.” He is frustrated by what he sees as quick and easy decisions:

One of the things that’s so different to me about the company versus working outside of the company is when I’m working outside of the company and I get to the first rehearsal of whatever that theatre piece is, most of the time, there have been so many decisions already made that everyone knows what the thing is gonna be. We [SITI] don’t know. (2023)

SITI’s approach seems on the surface unruly, not likely to result in impactful work. But Joseph Haj, artistic director of Minneapolis’s Guthrie Theatre, who was involved in the work while SITI was forming in the early 1990s, believes that in fact SITI’s approach has much greater potential:

In the commercial sector you’re bringing folks all together from all different areas. You’re throwing them into a room and you’re praying that you can all get on the same page and can make something that is finally beautiful. This person works at this pace, this person works at that pace, this person needs all of this, this person needs none of that. You can spend half of your rehearsal process just trying to get to some common ground about what it is that one is trying to pursue. So much of the beauty of SITI Company, working so closely for so long, is they’re starting on day one at a place where most rehearsal processes get to halfway through. They understand one another’s strengths, weaknesses, they have trust, they have belief, they have collegiality, they have a way of working and caring for one another. (2023)

The other foundational difference in the work of the SITI Company is the primacy of the body in training, rehearsal, and performance. The Viewpoints originated in the choreographic world of Mary Overlie, and her influence on Bogart was retained as she embraced and expanded Overlie’s Viewpoints as a theatrical tool. Overlie shared her work on the six Viewpoints she used with dancers when she and Bogart worked together at New York University in the late 1970s. Bogart immediately recognized the Viewpoints’ potential noting, “if actors could work this way, they wouldn’t constantly ask me what to do. They would get up and make a choice based on spatial and temporal issues” (2023). Bogart renamed some and expanded Overlie’s Viewpoints from six to nine. They are defined in *The Viewpoints Book* as “a philosophy translated into a technique for 1) training performers; 2) building ensemble; 3) creating movement on stage” (Bogart and Landau 2004:7). Working with the Viewpoints enables actors to create powerful stage movement by being sentient, physically open to the environment, and motivated by instinct unimpeded by intellect.

The Viewpoints are based in the body, the actor’s physical responses to the text with which the actor is working. West confirms that “the company has always been about the actors’ bodies in space. We started that way and we ended that way” (2023). Many who have studied with SITI believe in a “radical presence”—the ability of the performer to transform those in the performance space—to form a collective relationship between actor and audience who together experience “a sense of awakening from everyday life” (Lingafelter 2023).

The focused, driven, specific, and highly impactful physical work of the company was one of its greatest achievements. Joseph Melillo, emeritus executive director of the Brooklyn Academy of Music (1991–2018) and one of the first producers to hire the company sees that

what separated them from other ensembles was that they were very solidly entrenched in methodology and process such that you could actually see the difference in a very specific

way, physically. It is about the consistency of the art. In other words, Anne was on the path of giving her company consistent performances, which enabled them as individual interpreters to master her physicality, which enlightened their characterizations and developed their storytelling technique. (2023)

Full commitment to an ensemble as the defining feature of all of SITI's work has made for transformative, effective performances driven by complex ideals of what the art can be, and who can best create it. Rebecca Lingafelter, coartistic director of the Portland Experimental Theatre Ensemble and long-time SITI student, remembers Bogart paraphrasing an inspiring quote from Leonard Bernstein that Lingafelter feels defined the company: "What is the purpose of art in challenging times is the large question. The answer is that you make the music more intense" (2023). SITI's consistent choice to wrestle the difficult questions in art and life—to make them more "intense"—is reflected in many of the ensembles who follow in SITI's footsteps, not aiming to recreate SITI's work but to emulate and encompass its values.

It is perhaps surprising that among the many theatre-makers worldwide whose artistry and theatrical pathways have been clearly defined or influenced by SITI are some who have never seen a SITI production. Ironically, it is not the productions that define SITI's legacy but the training that was part and parcel of their process of creation. Artists sought out SITI training for an array of reasons, often stemming from a discontent with the contemporary theatre and its approach to preparing its artists. SITI's training offered an alternative by combining the more formal Suzuki Method, in its original form, with Bogart's deeply felt exploration/expansion of Overlie's Viewpoints. Together, the methods were extremely powerful, but it was embedding them in SITI's extraordinarily collaborative pedagogical and artistic environment that made them so impactful.

Carrying through the nonhierarchical workspace SITI had created in rehearsal studios, their classrooms were likewise a level and equitable landscape. All company members taught Suzuki and the Viewpoints in collaboration with each other, and when they were not teaching, they studied alongside students. As company member Will Bond says: "I think students were inspired by how we inspired each other in the group, you know, how we spoke to each other, how we took each other's classes, how we were really bonded in that way" (2023). Lauren continues, "I think our contradictions and discourse together in the studio, teaching other people, allowed a horizontality. If I was teaching in front of Stephen [Webber], I would be talking to Stephen through 30 people" (2023a).

Former students speak of the profound desire of the company to share the work. Richard Hess, former chair of theatre at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music (CCM), remembers when he first engaged as a student, in 1997:

what I loved was that this was a living, breathing training and, at the time, nobody knew what it was. It wasn't trying to be the new famous American actor training; it was the SITI Company opening the door, and freely saying, use this [training], share this. We love this. If you love it, it can be yours. And no one was doing that. (2023)

Gábor Kozma, coartistic director of the Chance of the Hunter Theatre in Budapest, who studied both with Suzuki and with SITI, had never "seen a company who would be so generous and also so wise to form their own story, to form their own narrative, to share their narrative, not through asking people to write about them. They have formed their narrative by handing it out to others" (2023).

Over and over SITI provided its students with what Lingafelter describes as

a call to creation [...]. It wasn't ever "look at us, do it like us." It was "take what we're teaching you and go do it and change it." So, there was this call to action. People from all

over the world received this generosity from all of those people and then with the call to action to keep going. They have touched so many of us. (2023)

SITI ignited a generation of creators, of theatre-makers, and of forward thinkers who have been asked to challenge what's possible. According to Lingafelter, to “bust open narrative and turn up your art-making. They made so many art-makers and empowered us with the audacity to believe that we could do it too” (2023).

The training and its expectations were, at times, often unachievable. But SITI made no pretense of mastery, pursuing the same grueling schedule of work, fully integrated among the other students, feeling the pain and continuing to strive for the impossible. Over and over, former students talk about falling in love with them, inspired by their artistry, humbled by their humanity. At a May 2023 conversation at La MaMa, looking back on SITI, an audience member shared a widespread sentiment, “You were like gods to us.”

But SITI saw it otherwise. Canadian director and SITI student Ravi Jain clearly remembers Lauren telling him something that “stayed with me forever”: that he was an equal artist, “the only difference is 20 years of experience” (2023).

SITI has invested in the legacy of their training by identifying over 40 “SITI Ambassadors” who span the globe. Invited by SITI and under the watchful eye of Ellen Lauren and SITI Legacy managing director Brad Carlin, ambassadors include artists worldwide who have studied and/or worked extensively with SITI over the years. They are the next generation of actors, directors, ensemble members, and teachers who are invested in ensuring that people who have experienced the training continue to share it.

Although Anne Bogart is better known than the SITI Company, and many assign the company's success to her vision and influence, SITI was, at its core, a fully collaborative ensemble. No artistic director nor administrative board defined them. When a decision needed to be made, the whole company, crammed in a small office in downtown Manhattan, decided what to do. There was always disagreement—in the office and in the rehearsal rooms. Collaboration did not mean agreement; there was a significant amount of rough and tumble. Bogart often quips, “SITI Company believes in suffering—unless we are in pain or on the edge we don't feel like we are doing anything” (2023).

They had arguments that nearly tore them apart, about how to share the training, who should be “allowed” to teach, how to manage a gig, whether to spend more time in NYC or away, whether to invest in studio space. Being consensus based, SITI could potentially argue about anything—and they did. But their commitment to each other and to the way that they made theatre was—for the vast majority of SITI Company members who spent many years working within the company—unfailing. As Lauren notes:

I would do anything [...] for Anne, for my colleagues, for the whole country called SITI—the planet we made together. I don't remember ever having one moment—never once—when I

SITI Company Members

Akiko Aizawa	1996–2022
J.Ed Araiza	1994–2022
Anne Bogart	1992–2022
Will Bond	1992–2022
Gian-Murray Gianino	2010–2022
Susan Hightower	1998–2022
Leon Ingulsrud	1996–2022
Ellen Lauren	1992–2022
Ellen M. Lavaia	2017–2022
Kelly Maurer	1992–2022
Jefferson Mays	1994–1999
Charles L. Mee	1994–2022
Elizabeth Moreau	2001–2008
Tom Nelis	1992–2016
Barney O'Hanlon	1994–2022
Neil Patel	1995–2022
KJ Sanchez	1994–2018
James Schuette	1995–2022
Brian H. Scott	1997–2022
Samuel Stricklen	2020–2022
Megan Wanlass	1995–2014
Stephen Duff Webber	1994–2022
Darron L. West	1993–2022

was unsure of why I was doing this with this group of people for so long. Never questioned that. (La MaMa 2023)

Company members describe the powerful feeling of connectedness, honesty, and respect. The company was always home.

In the unique environment they created, all artists in the room had equal voice. Those voices ebbed and flowed, some louder at moments than others. Bogart was most often the launcher, knowing how to start a room and make a good room for collaboration. She was often a conductor, listening and selecting an emphasis or a pursuit. But the longer the company was together, the less Bogart attended to the details of the production. Former executive director Megan Wanlass (2000–2014) remembers Bogart saying she was really good at beginnings but then:

She would come in [later in the process] when we were still grappling with how this project, how this particular piece, would end. We'd be like: "We just don't have the ending. It's not quite right." But she would always come in with the next text for whatever the next project was. And we were like: "Anne, we are trying to solve this problem right now. We have an audience tomorrow night and we need to know how this show ends." (2023)³

But they always figured it out, returning to the creative collaborative space the Viewpoints afforded them, always willing to leave behind that which was not working and create something new, even at the eleventh hour.

Lauren describes Bogart as a "horizontal sort of nonleader leader who we couldn't function without—because she has a secret magic quality. And yet you wouldn't know she was a director in a room ever" (2023a). Indeed, if you walked into a SITI rehearsal, you would be hard pressed to identify who was in charge. This is perhaps true because Bogart's vision was so consistently challenged by the company. Lauren remembers, "We were always like, 'Anne, thanks for the idea. That's not gonna work.' We really buffeted her about a lot" (2023a). In a fundamental shift in the way American theatre rehearsal rooms traditionally function, everyone spoke and was equally attended. Kelly Maurer describes SITI's way of working as empowering everyone in the room, including the designers.

I'll never forget being in Japan in 2019, and I said, "Anne, this Lady Macduff scene is not what I want it to be. Should I change it?" And our lighting designer Brian Scott brilliantly said, "No, just keep thinking about going down this avenue." The lighting designer gave the actor a note. In our rehearsal room, the lighting designer can talk, the sound designer can talk, the actors can talk to the director. The director can talk to the actors. The actors can come in with more ideas. Even the stage manager can say, "wait a minute. I saw this yesterday and this seemed to work better than that." It's a conversation. (2023)

While they originally modeled themselves on the Suzuki Company's strong sense of community that values everyone's contributions, according to Ingulsrud, SITI actors had much more agency than members of SCOT. As Barney O'Hanlon notes:

I think our approach to company and one of the things that made us unique in the field was that it was purely collaborative. It was very nonhierarchical and everyone's input mattered. And I think that's something that we did that definitely influenced the field, if not changed it. (2023b)

Bogart knows the strength of the ensemble-infused performances.

I had always known that what we are producing is not only a play, it is also a demonstration of how to be together. So, when an audience goes to see us at a theatre, they're seeing two

3. Wanlass joined SITI as stage manager in 1995, before becoming managing director and then executive director in 2000.

plays: they're seeing the play, and they're seeing how this company is acting and working together. (in Bogart and Shevtsova 2021)

SITI can be credited with generating, across the world, new theatre companies for whom the artistic values SITI embraced and shared were foundational. Some devise, most train together in some form, many share the Viewpoints and the Suzuki Method with other artists. Additionally, The SITI Company also modeled for many ensembles how a company can work with other producing organizations and how it can function fiscally. Ensuring the financial health of company members was central to their mission as Bogart notes: "This is a company of actors, and they don't leave—partly because they're very dedicated, and partly because we paid them decently. I started the company saying it—'Actors have to be paid decently'" (2023). SITI maintained a "favored nations" approach to salaries with everyone receiving equal pay; Actors Equity rates were paid for show contracts and compensation for workshops was at or close to that same rate. This ensured that the company did not follow the common practice of paying actors only for rehearsals and performances and not for the time the work was being developed.

With no building of their own, SITI, for its entire existence, had no consistent rehearsal space. Money was tight and the company often lacked resources to begin production. To compensate, SITI was strategic about their producing partnerships. Within a world where all of the big questions had no immediate answers, Wanlass pushed Bogart for defining information:

Anne and I would start having those conversations: I'd say, okay, we have this deadline for an NEA grant or for some other grant. And I would just start very broadly asking her questions like how many actors are you envisioning? And what are you thinking design-wise? Talk to me a little bit about the world that you are creating. From those super early conversations, we would also start to think about what are the resources we need beyond financial to bring this project into fruition. And so we started thinking: well...Actors Theatre of Louisville, they have a scene shop, they have a costume shop, they have a new play festival. We can pitch this to John Jory or Marc Masterson.

And okay, well, we also need another partner. Well, the Wexner Center is near Actors Theatre of Louisville, and they don't have the scene shop or the costume shop, but Chuck Helm [former director of performing arts] is passionate about the company's work and will help provide some commissioning support. In a way like a sort of patchwork quilt, we started to put the puzzle pieces together of projects and how we were going to make them turn them into reality. (2023)

SITI was on the forefront of forging relationships where an independent ensemble could, for example, partner with an arts presenter, or a university, or a regional theatre, and then encourage them to partner with each other. Wanlass sees SITI as having "broken open a pathway where those entities could engage with really forward-thinking work that they would not have been able to put together on their own" (2023). In so doing, SITI opened that pathway for others, developing a new perspective for the institutions with whom they worked.

In the last decade of its life, SITI chose to collaborate with other artistic ensembles including the Martha Graham Dance Company, Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company, Streb Extreme Action, as well as individual artists such as Ann Hamilton. For SITI, the partnerships were a purposeful effort to challenge themselves to chart new territory.

One of the most exceptional qualities of the SITI Company is their longevity as an ensemble and the commitment its artists made. SITI has stayed with the same core group throughout; 15 out of 19 early members of SITI were still with the company in its final year of performance. This bred a maturity that deepened their work. Joe Haj recognizes this exceptional feat:

You know, 30 years ago, 35 years ago, when I was starting as a professional actor, there were acting companies all over the country: Guthrie had a standing company; ACT had a



Figure 4. Death & the Ploughman. Will Bond (foreground), Ellen Lauren, and Stephen Duff Webber. Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH, 2004. (Photo by Al Zanyk; courtesy of SITI Company)

standing company; Alabama Shakes had a standing company. It wasn't ubiquitous, but there were tons; there were a lot of theatres that had standing acting companies and all that's gone away. That has almost completely gone away today. So, you know, part of the resonance of SITI Company is a reflection of what happens when a group of artists agrees that they're going to share an approach and that they're going to work together as a matter of primacy. All of them work in some ways on different things all the time. But as a matter of primacy, SITI was going to be central, and it was going to be the hub and core of their artistic work and their artistic expression. (2023)

SITI's members welcomed this, especially when other ensembles were quickly disappearing. This responsibility to others demands more of an artist and the company embraced this commitment. Company member Stephen Webber describes SITI as a "chosen family with a shared aesthetic. The aesthetic was informed by the training, but it wasn't just the training, it was something beyond that. So, I think as long as we were interested in that aesthetic, there was a reason to stay in the company" (2023).

The training centered the company, tethering members to one another. As they honed and developed their approach to creating work, they found fulfillment and joy. Lauren: "it's really hard to find people to laugh with in the world. To share that. We did share a sense of humor and even when we wanted to kill each other, we still could bring each other really good zingers" (2023a). Discord, argument, and collision were common yet valued as a necessary part of creating work. The familial, respectful, intimate relationships they shared enabled them to stay together despite clashes. As SITI associate artist Violeta Picayo says:

Without SITI, I would have a different definition of collaboration. SITI has given me the tools and experience and curiosity to go into any room and look for dynamic, ferocious conversation between artists and not be afraid. The best way to honor collaboration is not by finding the middle ground, but by making something strong enough to hold that distinction. (2023)

The ensemble made them better artists but that was not all. Company member Gian-Murray Gianino elaborated:

Who am I now and who do I want to be? I look around the room frequently and wonder, happily I wonder, who these people I have worked with for so long are now. I simply want to be a better person. Working on this play now is an opportunity to attempt just to be a better person, citizen, and worthy friend to these evolving humans. That's what I want. Why else would we go to the trouble and difficulty? (La MaMa 2023)

While commitment to the company was primary, ensemble members worked outside of SITI. There they spread their approach to making theatre to their other projects. But they did not missionize; they influenced by example. Other artists wanted what the SITI people brought into the room: an exceptional use of body and voice, the ability to collaborate, and personal empowerment. As SITI continues to influence new generations of theatre artists, many believe that today there is a greater need than ever for the inspiration and challenge that SITI's legacy offers. Lingafelter sees the legacy at work:

The American theatre, regional theatre, and Broadway are in crisis—in deep crisis. There's this kind of undertow of change that's pulling at all of these institutions and in some ways also dismantling them. And what I see arising from the cracks are these young artists who want to work in community, who want to work from their bodies, want to work sustainably, want to work in genres that aren't realism, you know? So, all of these are legacies. I think of SITI Company, and I see them really activated in young people [...] The most exciting work that I see is being made by people who are thinking in those ways. (2023)

30 Years from Beginning to Ending

Tadashi Suzuki established the Suzuki Company of Toga (SCOT) in 1976 when he moved his theatre troupe, Waseda Shogekijo, out of Tokyo. Already internationally known, Suzuki's hope was that SCOT would be where people would train and make work together, and then share his methods with others across the globe. Suzuki became known in the US during the 1980s for his *The Bacchae*, performed at La MaMa in 1982, and *The Trojan Women*, presented at the Olympic Arts Festival in Los Angeles in 1984. In 1988, four regional theatres teamed up to produce Suzuki's *The Tale of Lear*, with an American all-male cast.⁴ During those years, Suzuki visited and taught at several American universities including the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee; University of California, San Diego; and Juilliard in New York. Also, in 1988, Peter Zeisler, cofounder in 1963 of Minneapolis's Guthrie Theatre and from 1972 to 1995 the executive director of Theatre Communications Group, brought Bogart and Mark Lamos, artistic director of Hartford Stage, to Toga. The visit was, in part, a response to Suzuki's wish and Zeisler's encouragement, to find American companies to present work at the Toga International Arts Festival. On this trip, Bogart met Ellen Lauren, then a member of Suzuki's Company, and Leon Ingulsrud, Suzuki's assistant director. Lauren became a founding member of SITI and Ingulsrud, who worked with SITI from the start but remained a member of SCOT, joined a few years later.

In 1991, while touring his production of *The Chekhov* to Purchase, NY, and StageWest in Springfield, MA, Suzuki renewed his interest in an American partnership. Also in 1991, while SCOT was performing *Dionysus* at the New York International Festival of the Arts, Suzuki and Bogart reconnected at a meeting at the Mayflower Hotel: the seeds of SITI were planted. Not long after, in 1992, the two created a manifesto, "Towards A New International Theatre Center," stating their commitment to "the growth of individual artists and the development of a new approach to

4. The Berkeley Repertory Theatre, the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, StageWest in Springfield, Massachusetts, and the Arena Stage in Washington, DC.

From “Towards a New International Theater Center”

Anne Bogart and Tadashi Suzuki

This text is excerpted from the program for SITI’s Saratoga International Theatre Institute inaugural season, 5–13 September 1992.

This is an exciting time in the theater because of a crisis now facing its artists. The point has been reached where new and better ideas concerning the future of the art form are desperately needed. A watershed has been reached, and now we must move forward in a new direction. [...] We need a place which will develop the artist for the theater of today and ensure that development into the next century. We propose the formation of a cultural center that is both locally and internationally connected, where the art of acting for the theater is celebrated, investigated, and encouraged. The purpose of this international theater institute is to foster and develop new work for the theater and to be a cultural center where new approaches to theater for the next century are developed and put into practice. [...] This institute should be connected with other similarly minded organizations around the globe. International interconnectedness is vital to the creation of new approaches to acting. It is fundamental to the larger way in which we in the theater need to think. It is essential to financing and to the development of new audiences. [...] This institution would be designed to transcend cultural barriers. [...] This institute should reflect world culture by integrating traditions and innovations from other cultures. [...] The steering committee of this cultural institution should be made up of internationally affiliated artists from all disciplines. The financing should be made possible by international and national interests. This company would create two new pieces a year which would open at the local home of the institute and then tour nationally and internationally. Each summer, while the two productions of the home company are performing in repertory, international visitors would come to create work and meet other artists and participate in an exchange. A training program would be in place. Other international companies would be in residence. These companies would form part of a worldwide network. The exchanges would be artistic, economic, and spiritual. This cultural center should be dedicated not only to creating a body of work but to a constant articulation of values. A continuous active dialogue about the role and function of theater in our lives and times is vital. This will be accomplished through symposiums, discussions, and audience participatory events. At the heart, is a company of gifted, committed artists. [...]

world theatre.” Their plans were shared in the program for SITI’s inaugural season.⁵ Suzuki’s intent was to sever himself from the collaboration after five years.

Suzuki invited Bogart to Toga to work with him in 1992 on a new production of *Orestes* by Charles L. Mee. He requested that Bogart bring American actors trained in the Suzuki Method. Bogart already had a deep interest in actors who had Suzuki training. According to Webber:

The story she tells us, that she was at UC San Diego and they were doing the Suzuki training there in the ’80s, and she just saw that the actors had a different quality and she asked, “what is it?” And she had the idea that when she formed a company, she wanted actors who had had this training because she saw in it something that she liked, which was probably a formalism—you know, Anne’s a formalist, right? (2023)

In fact, Bogart appreciated the actors’ focus, presence, and particularly their stillness. She asked how it came to be: “You don’t shuffle your feet. You’re very clear. Your voices are good. Why are you all so good?” (2023).

Then, in the late summer of 1992, Suzuki and Bogart together led the first summer institute at Skidmore College in Saratoga, NY, out of which the SITI Company would grow. Students came to train with Suzuki’s company, who brought the productions they had developed in Toga earlier

5. See “Towards A New International Theatre Center” originally excerpted by Eelke Lampe in “Collaboration and Cultural Clashing” (1993).

that year: SCOT's *Dionysus* and Bogart and SCOT's coproduction of Mee's *Orestes*. At this point, according to Darron West, Bogart was clear that "I want to make a certain kind of work and I have to have a company to do it, so I'm going to make a company" (2023).

At the Saratoga Institute the following year, the Suzuki Method was taught alongside the Viewpoints, which Bogart used as a way of "bringing actors together quickly and establishing a company ethos" (2023). Suzuki brought SCOT's *King Lear* and Bogart showed an early incarnation of *The Medium*, SITI's first production. At this point, Bogart clearly planned to develop an ensemble that would train in both Suzuki's method and her extension of Overlie's Viewpoints. The intention was to devise original works with international collaboration. By the 1994 third iteration of the Saratoga Institute, SITI had been established with a clear mission:

- To create bold new productions;
- To perform and tour these productions nationally and internationally;
- To train together consistently;
- To train theatre professionals and students in an approach to acting that forges unique and highly disciplined artists for the theatre;
- To create opportunities for artistic dialogue and cultural exchange. (Bogart 2007:44)

Early work focused on the performance of what Bogart termed "theatrical essays" (2023). Within four years, SITI had dramatized nondramatic material from Marshall McLuhan in *The Medium*; reimagined bits and pieces of five Chekhov plays in *Small Lives/Big Dreams*; and extracted text from Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* to make an argument between Newtonian and quantum physics in *Going, Going, Gone*. Methods of devising were ambitious and diverse. Bogart writes about *Going, Going, Gone*:

We began by rehearsing an edited version of Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and created an entire physical score, with all of the play's psychological subtleties. It was only after the play was fully staged in such a way that the story was visually clear from moment to moment, that we discarded Albee's words completely and replaced them with text gathered from the writings of many scientists and philosophers. (Bogart 2022)

The Medium, as well as *Small Lives/Big Dreams*, and *Going, Going, Gone* were subsequently performed in Toga, Japan; in New York at New York Theatre Workshop and PS 122; and at the Actors Theatre of Louisville.

Training noncompany members was central right from the start. SITI was inspired by Suzuki's focus on training and they also recognized that training could provide the company with sustainable income. Combining the Suzuki Method with the Viewpoints became what O'Hanlon describes as "this sort of holistic entity. And that really, that's really what finally exploded. So, it [training]



Figure 5. Akiko Aizawa, Ellen Lauren, Stephen Duff Webber, and Makela Spielman training prior to *Under Construction*, Actors Theatre of Louisville, 2009. (Photo courtesy of SITI Company)



Figure 6. *The Medium*. From left: Will Bond, Kelly Maurer, Tom Nelis, J. Ed Araiza, and Ellen Lauren. New York Theatre Workshop, 1994. (Photo by Joan Marcus; courtesy of SITI Company)

went from an extra income stream to actually being part of our identity” (2023b).

Conversations in Toga among the American actors who would later form SITI were forward thinking. Leon Ingulsrud remembers these discussions:

Wouldn't it be great if there was something like a SCOT Company in the United States, and then what follows from that was a discussion of why isn't there, why are we all being atomized into individual actors in the field in the United

States? And why is it so hard to have ensemble companies? And so then, in putting together the company, part of it was that all of the walls that went up against it were taken as not just challenges to our survival, but as things we needed to knock down for everybody behind us. We were well positioned to do it; we had this example of the SCOT Company, and we had this support, and we had a famous artistic director, we thought “if anybody can do this, it's us.” (2023)

What these artists valued in SCOT's work was clear, as Webber recalls:

We didn't want to be like them in every way, but we wanted to work as hard as they worked and we wanted to train to become better the way they trained to become better. We wanted to embrace the idea of sacrifice that we saw them embody. We thought that they were masters of shimmering with beauty onstage in shocking individual performances, but then also easily sacrificing their agendas in order to do what was best for the group. (in Carter 2023:15)

But even with these points of focus, SCOT did not mean the same thing for all early members of SITI. Again, Ingulsrud remembers varying perspectives:

We would all point at the SCOT Company and say “like that,” but we all meant different things. We had all touched the elephant in different ways. And so, some of us were talking about a tail, and other people were talking about a leg. Inevitably there's that part of why the SITI Company worked was because Anne is just temperamentally someone who didn't have to nail that all down. She didn't have to clarify all of that. (2023)

From the beginning, SITI was built in an environment where different, often juxtaposed, ideas coexisted in a dynamic and energized creative space. Power floated among everyone in the room in a world in which, according to West, “the best idea wins—which is an easy thing to say, but a harder thing to really do practically—to get everybody on board with an idea, to really fully try it, and then try something else” (2023).

The SITI Company coalesced over the next three to four years as Bogart and early company members recognized in fellow artists a kindred spirit and aesthetic. Many of the actors who joined had traditional Stanislavsky-based American actor training; most had successful careers. But they sought a more rigorous physical training that was not imposed from the outside. Maurer recalls:

I really gravitated toward both the Suzuki training and the Viewpoints training because it gave me these tools to work in any way I wanted to work. And one of the things that I've appreciated

so much in watching other artists pick up these tools is them saying, “Thank you. This is my aesthetic. This is my aesthetic. It’s not SITI’s, it’s not yours, it’s not Anne’s. It’s mine.” (2023)

The founding actors of SITI—Ellen Lauren, Will Bond, Kelly Maurer—all studied with Suzuki for years before SITI. Suzuki suggested them to Bogart for *Orestes*, their first collaboration in Toga. According to Lauren, “we already had a taste for company ensemble work and what it was to work in a company and have a glue, like a training, that was there to hold you together when you didn’t know what you were doing” (2023a). Tom Nelis was also in *Orestes* and part of the first summer in Saratoga. Over the next few years, Webber, KJ Sanchez, and Jefferson Mays, all of whom had been at UC San Diego when Bogart visited, joined the company.

Akiko Aizawa and Leon Ingulsrud were both members of the SCOT Company. Aizawa acted in *Dionysus* and Ingulsrud in *Orestes* during SITI’s first summer at Saratoga. Ingulsrud worked with SITI from its inception and within a few years transitioned fully from SCOT to SITI. Aizawa, a member of SCOT for seven years, followed later, after training with SITI in 1995 and 1996, which she felt was “like heaven” (2023). About the same time, Barney O’Hanlon joined. He had worked with Bogart off and on since 1986 and had studied the Viewpoints with both Overlie and Bogart at NYU. When Jefferson Mays had to leave the production of *Small Lives/Big Dreams* as it went on tour, Bogart invited O’Hanlon to replace him and he quickly agreed. He notes, “Each of us had been out in the regional theatre, and I think ultimately all of us wanted to be in a company because that idea of an actual company in the United States was pretty radical at the time” (2023b).

Bogart directed several shows at the Actors Theatre of Louisville (ATL) between 1990 and 1993 where she met actor J.Ed Araiza and sound designer Darron West. She invited both to join SITI. West recalls: “KJ and Ellen sort of grabbed me and said, ‘Hey, Anne’s doing this project with this company she’s starting in Japan this summer. You should go tell her if you want to do it’” (2023). According to West, one day in rehearsal at ATL in 1995, Bogart “pointed at [stage manager] Megan [Wanless] and said, ‘Don’t you think she’s one of us?’ Anne immediately was just like, ‘Hey, do you wanna come work with us?’ And then boom, you know, Megan came along around *Going, Going, Gone* time and ended up running the company for a while” as executive director (2023). In 1991, at En Garde Arts, Bogart directed Mee’s *Another Person in a Foreign Country*. Mee quickly found a home when SITI was formed, and notes that they “seek so much knowledge to begin with but also because they are such open people, ready to take in what the playwright has done and take that to where they think it might go” (2023). West describes that early group as “Anne Bogart’s Ragtag Theatre Players,” which they were, for a while. But, according to West:

eventually we learned the tools that Anne needed us to learn to create the kind of plays that she wanted to create. And then it morphed more into a collective. We had more things to say about the projects that we were doing, and we came in with ideas on our own and as a group. And so that’s when it started morphing into the way that the company actually worked. (2023)

When the opportunity to join SITI appeared, no one hesitated. According to Maurer, “When you get a chance to change your world—to do something that’s so hard—it’s unbelievably unique and makes everything else pale—you go” (2023). In 2022, the SITI website still listed all these artists (except Mays, Nelis, Sanchez, and Wanlass) as active members of the company, for many, 30 years after they had joined. The list also includes actor Samuel Stricklen (joined 2006), designers Neil Patel (joined 1998) and James Schuette (joined 1998), and stage manager Ellen Lavaia (joined 2013).

The early years were challenging. *The Medium*, *Small Lives/Big Dreams*, and *Going, Going, Gone* were labor intensive, requiring months to develop. Money was tight and SITI pursued opportunities as far as Ireland. Over its life, SITI performed and trained in over 27 countries. Araiza remembers, “We had a little tiny office on Grand Street down in Soho and the actors would meet at the Moonlight Diner” (2023). According to West,

We were doing whatever we could to survive. We’d get some offers to go to Ireland to do a show, in a festival. Nobody got paid, but we all got transportation to get there. So, we said,

“Let’s do it.” You know? We were all together. Nobody had families yet. We just did everything we possibly could just because we loved doing the pieces. The whole family-oriented feeling that I feel when I think about the company was something that developed within the first nine years or so. We started doing all these shows and being on tour with one another and then started spending holidays together. (2023)

As Lauren recalls:

We made the work first and figured out the administrative things after that. We made work, brought it to Toga then to Saratoga—then figured out how to manage it from there. We wouldn’t have lasted a hot minute now. (2023a)

Early on, SITI recognized that they needed partners with resources, an effective network of presenting and producing organizations. These collaborative partnerships provided SITI with physical space and financial support. An early supporter was Marc Masterson of the City Theatre in Pittsburgh:

In the 1990s when Anne was financing the SITI Company and had racked up tens of thousands of dollars of debt on her American Express card, I got involved with helping Ellen and Anne and whoever their manager was at the time so we could straighten things out and help them form a board. (2023)

Over time, SITI was recognized and supported with opportunities to perform at the Wexner Center, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and major regional theatres including ATL, City Theatre, Court Theatre, and the San Jose Rep.

SITI was tremendously productive in its first decade. They radically interpreted classics: Noël Coward’s *Private Lives* (1998) and *Hay Fever* (2002), August Strindberg’s *Miss Julie* (1997), Bertolt Brecht’s *Seven Deadly Sins* (1998), and Deborah Dratell’s opera *Lilith* (2001). SITI collaborated with Jocelyn Clark on *Alice’s Adventures* (1998) and *Room* (adapted from the work of Virginia Woolf, 2002) and with Mee on *bobrauschenbergamerica* (2001). They did their version of Orson Welles’s adaptation of H.G. Wells’s *War of the Worlds* using a text by Naomi Iizuka (2002). They devised *Cabin Pressure* combining Coward and Albee (1999), *Culture of Desire* reflecting Warhol (1997), and *Bob* inspired by Robert Wilson (1999). Will Bond notes that SITI’s “productions were built not just for the sake of building productions, but as an expression of a specific group of people working together in time. Productions that we made were an expression of our personal conversations and interests” (2023).

But money was tight and the future insecure. According to Brad Carlin:

SITI’s budgets would fluctuate significantly based on touring schedules. There were big years and lean years in the touring markets, but earned revenues for education programs (teaching/workshops/residencies etc.) and contributed revenues for the creation of work were relatively stable throughout the company’s history. (2023)

In 1999, SITI generated about \$425,000 in income; 50% of that was from engagement fees and about 30% from teaching. The remainder included grants and contributions, but this kind of funding did not flourish until the early 2000s. Ingulsrud describes “a kind of puritan embarrassment about self-promotion coupled with a kind of arrogance like, that’s below us” (2023). The need for money was ever-present. West recalls “we would stuff envelopes in Barney’s apartment back in the day to keep it going about midway through and each time it was like, ‘Oh, we weathered that storm’” (2023). Through it all, company members were consistently employed. Wanlass knew, “We needed Anne to be able to say, ‘I’m sorry, I’m only interested in directing this project if I can bring my company members on board. This is how we work’” (2023). Bogart recalls, “We lost a lot of work early on but then people didn’t call us unless they could pay for it” (2023). Employment was also for those not directly involved in a production as Wanlass explains:

What we tried to do is look at what the calendar would be, planning it out as far as we could in terms of the regional theatres and the arts presenting and the whole touring world. We operated so far out in terms of the calendar, so we could kind of plot where shows were hap-

SITI Company Chronology of Works

SITI created and performed 277 productions. This is a list of each work's premier performance. Many of these shows originated at Skidmore College where SITI held its summer residency. Skidmore productions are only listed here if there was no premier outside the residency.

1992	<i>Orestes</i>	Toga Festival, Toga, Japan
1992	<i>Dionysus</i>	Toga Festival, Toga, Japan
1993	<i>The Medium</i>	Toga Festival, Toga, Japan
1993	<i>Waiting for Romeo</i>	Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY
1994	<i>The Tale of Lear</i>	Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY
1994	<i>Small Lives/Big Dreams</i>	Toga Festival, Toga, Japan
1995	<i>The Adding Machine</i>	Actors Theatre of Louisville, KY
1996	<i>Going, Going, Gone</i>	Actors Theatre of Louisville, KY
1997	<i>Miss Julie</i>	Actors Theatre of Louisville, KY
1997	<i>Culture of Desire</i>	City Theatre, Pittsburgh, PA
1998	<i>Private Lives</i>	Actors Theatre of Louisville, KY
1998	<i>Seven Deadly Sins</i>	NY City Opera, New York, NY
1998	<i>Alice's Adventures</i>	The Raw Space, New York, NY
1998	<i>Bob</i>	New York Theatre Workshop, NY, NY
1999	<i>Cabin Pressure</i>	Actors Theatre of Louisville, KY
2000	<i>War of the Worlds</i>	Laurie Beechman Theater, West Bank Cafe, New York, NY
2000	<i>Room</i>	Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH
2001	<i>Lilith</i>	Lincoln Center, New York, NY
2001	<i>bobrauschenbergamerica</i>	Actors Theatre of Louisville, KY
2002	<i>Hay Fever</i>	Actors Theatre of Louisville, KY
2002	<i>Score</i>	Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH
2002	<i>Short Stories</i>	Kaleidoskop, Copenhagen, Denmark
2003	<i>La Dispute</i>	American Repertory Theatre, Cambridge, MA
2003	<i>Nicholas and Alexandra</i>	Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, Los Angeles, CA
2003	<i>Marina, a Captive Spirit</i>	DR2 Theatre, New York, NY
2004	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	Sobrato Auditorium, San Jose, CA
2004	<i>Death and the Ploughman</i>	Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH
2004	<i>systems/layers</i>	Utah State Theatre, Salt Lake City, Utah
2004	<i>Macbeth</i>	Swine Palace, Baton Rouge, LA
2005	<i>Intimations for Saxophone</i>	Arena Stage, Washington, DC
2006	<i>Hotel Cassiopeia</i>	Actors Theatre of Louisville, KY
2007	<i>Radio Macbeth</i>	Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH
2008	<i>Who Do You Think You Are</i>	Galvin Playhouse, Arizona State University
2009	<i>Freshwater</i>	Julia Miles Theatre, New York, NY
2009	<i>Under Construction</i>	Actors Theatre of Louisville, KY
2009	<i>Antigone</i>	J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, CA
2010	<i>American Document</i>	Joyce Theatre, New York, NY
2011	<i>Trojan Women</i>	J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, CA
2012	<i>Continuous Replay</i>	SPAC Saratoga Springs, NY
2012	<i>Café Variations</i>	Cutler-Majestic Theater, Boston, MA
2012	<i>the event of a thread</i>	Park Avenue Armory, New York, NY
2013	<i>A Rite</i>	University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC
2014	<i>Steel Hammer</i>	Actors Theatre of Louisville, KY
2014	<i>Persians</i>	J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, CA
2014	<i>This Is How I Don't Know How to Dance</i>	TBG Theater, New York, NY
2015	<i>the theatre is a blank page</i>	Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH
2017	<i>Lost in the Stars</i>	UCLA Performing Arts Center, Los Angeles, CA
2017	<i>Adam and Evie</i>	Dixon Place, New York, NY
2017	<i>Hanjo</i>	Performing Arts Center, Purchase, NY
2017	<i>Chess Match No. 5</i>	June Havoc Theatre, New York, NY
2018	<i>The Bacchae</i>	J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, CA
2019	<i>Falling and Loving</i>	Montclair State University, Montclair, NJ
2021	<i>Three Sisters</i>	The Drama Centre Theatre, Singapore
2022	<i>A Radio Christmas Carol</i>	Fisher Center at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY

pening. So that also provided us flexibility to then look at it and say, okay, so we know these actors are cast in this show and they're going to be on tour for this, but we have this group of actors who are not in that project. So how can we generate work opportunities for them? Then we would say, let's send some teachers here. (2023)

The system worked. West notes, "I can't believe we made it 30 years. It's still mind-blowing to me a little bit" (2023).

In the early 1990s, it was not exceptional to be part of a theatre ensemble.⁶ But, as Nelson Chia, longtime SITI student and now part of the SITI Ambassador program says, "By the 2000s, SITI was exceptional, not only for their longevity but because they were a functional ensemble" (2023). They had established their strong national network, they had codified and expanded their training, and they were committed as a full ensemble to their mission. But they remained itinerant. Then in 2008, the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation's Nonprofit Finance Fund awarded SITI a \$1,175,000 grant—part of Duke's plan to "tackle sector-wide challenges such as shifting audiences, decreased funding sources and new technologies" (Jones 2008). SITI's grant was specifically to enable them to "establish this ensemble-based theatre company as a resident New York City organization with relevant partnerships and support" (Jones 2008). SITI shifted their business model. According to Wanlass,

We were going to produce ourselves in New York and we were going to start this conservatory program. And for the first couple years we did produce ourselves in New York, which was just really expensive, and we started the conservatory program. Then, ultimately, we went back to the old way of doing work in New York, and being hosted at BAM or the Wexner Center or other places. We recognized that we could still have our own autonomy and be presented and actually be able to dictate what our season was, but not necessarily produce. (2023)

Returning to a familiar model, but with stronger executive leadership and an effective board, SITI was on much more solid financial footing. In addition to the Duke grant, SITI had, over 10 years, more than doubled their income (close to \$958,000 in 2008). According to Carlin, "a majority of that came from earned sources split between engagement revenue from touring (\$350k) and teaching (\$225k). The roughly \$300k in contributed revenue was heavily weighted toward foundations and government sources (federal, state, and local)" (2023). The financial security enabled SITI to expand their horizon. As O'Hanlon notes, "We were an acting ensemble that could fluidly and organically cross over into other disciplines. We did opera, dance, music, visual art, *and* theatre" (2023b). Overall, the work was, at this time, on a larger scale. Araiza describes the Company's evolution: "Our early work in the SITI Company was heavily devised. In the last 10 years, we've devised a bit, not as much, even though our work always has a certain devising element to it, even when we're doing *The Bacchae*, or when we're doing *Radio Macbeth*, or when we're doing *A Midsummer Night's Dream*" (2023). In 2014 Megan Wanlass, who had been executive director for 14 years, passed the reins to Michelle Preston. Administratively, the company was more solid than it had ever been. Still, it was never easy. As Ingulsrud rues: "It felt like we were bucking the wind for 30 years" (2023).

As the company matured, there were internal challenges as well, some emanating from the personal lives of the artists. Many of them had partners and some had children, forcing them to make hard choices—to turn down tours or distant training opportunities. The company expanded its artistic associates as actors and teachers were needed. It was new territory for the company and it was challenging. Some company members were freer to work more. Some chose to work long days; it was how they wanted to contribute—to live their life. But, according to Lauren:

6. In New York alone ensemble companies included Mabou Mines, The Wooster Group, Elevator Repair Service, and Atlantic Theatre Company.

[It] created a dynamic and a shifting power. The people that are around tend to be the ones that go to the meetings and are making decisions affecting everyone's lives because of the nature of the company. Major issues, of course, would try to be tabled, but there was always an attempt not to let that calcify and build up resentment, but it would—I mean it was a human thing. (2023b)



Figure 7. Will Bond in Bob. New York Live Arts, 2012. (Photo by Shebab Hossain; courtesy of SITI Company)

The formation of the conservatory in 2013, primarily driven by the desire for a longer-term relationship with their students, was, in part, also an effort to provide more work for company members in New York City.

Over 30 years together, artistic relationships within the company also shifted. SITI members became progressively empowered by their relationship with Bogart who expected them to participate equally and even, at times, to assert themselves more aggressively in the process. No one disputes that Bogart was extremely present in SITI rehearsals, but simultaneously, particularly in recent years, she kept a distance, putting more space between herself and the company, both in and out of the rehearsal room. This was perhaps not unexpected after many, many difficult rehearsals in which the company, according to Ellen Lauren, “just shut her down” (2018). In 2011, SITI decided to add a second artistic director to accommodate Bogart’s time away for both personal and professional reasons. Lauren and Ingulsrud both sought the position and ultimately, they proposed a triumvirate, which the company supported.

Nonetheless, Bogart remained a driving force in the theatrical conversation. Early conception, research, and the formulation of the big questions that drove the process continued to come from her. But this does not mean that she knew what the end product would be, and, over the years, Bogart’s need to guide the often far-reaching exploration process diminished. In the first decade of SITI, if Bogart felt the work was over expanding, or if there was disagreement, she would interrupt. In the final decade, Bogart did not interrupt, allowing creative conflicts to linger for as long as it took the company to resolve them. Will Bond saw that “she would let these disagreements go on for days, for a long time, before she felt like she had to intervene. It could be super frustrating. And that was a change” (2018). Still, remaining with their process of exploration, or what Bond sometimes refers to as “chaos,” ultimately enabled the company to facilitate greater discovery.

In 2018, SITI was a nearly \$1.2 million organization with the majority of income coming from engagement revenue, half of that from teaching and workshop revenue and the remainder from contributions, which increased in the final years as the company solicited funding for legacy activities (Carlin 2023). But the conversations were not about the finances. Over a decade ago, they began talking about ending despite a new level of financial security. As Bogart recalls:

Over a number of years, we had the question, “Do we go on?” Are we an institution that goes on, brings new people in, diversifies, changes leadership? Or are we a group of people who came together 30 years ago to make some plays that we thought would last ten years and we lasted 30. After many emotional discussions it was generally agreed that we are not an insti-



From left: Ellen Lauren, Stephen Duff Webber, Leon Ingulsrud, Akiko Aizawa, J. Ed Araiza, Will Bond, and Anne Bogart in their New York Studio, 2017. (Photo by Darron West; courtesy of SITI Company)

A Look into SITI's Creative Process

Rehearsals begin with intensive research. Even when working with an extant script, Anne Bogart arrives with notebooks and notebooks of quoted material, reference articles, stacks of books, and her journal entries from the year or two she has been ruminating on this subject. By the time the company comes together for the "first rehearsal," there is a tremendous amount of material on the table. Leon Ingulsrud says Bogart describes this initial part of the process as "downloading all of the stuff she had been working on into the room and into the collective" (2018). At this point she's flattening the hierarchy. Once she presents the material it belongs to everyone.

Bogart poses the questions, but immediately the company begins the conversation as an ensemble. These conversations last from hours to days. Ellen Lauren: "There's an excitement, a shimmer about her as she plows into a new subject, text, or question. She's effusive, finding the current subject to be the most essential, exciting, and extraordinary stuff she's ever read, learned, heard, or seen" (2018). The work is layered, gnarly, and continues with an array of seemingly unsolvable problems and puzzles.

Tables are pushed away. Bogart perches on her stool at her music stand. The actors begin with Viewpoints improvisations, often based on a theme or image from the research. Bogart watches intently, jots down images, sequences of choreography, moments that strike her as viable. Nothing in the process remotely resembles a traditional process of blocking a show. For Bogart and the company, after deep script analysis, illustrative staging is never a starting place. Lauren:

It's often a mistaken perception that Anne choreographs the scenes, stages them. What she does is provide a very clear language everyone shares, and makes choices from this foundation. She has no blocked out scheme she's working from. She is responding to what is actually occurring in front of her in the room. (2018)

The work might vary from project to project but there is always a commitment to a multi-dimensional start. The company might begin with composition work. Or, in another approach, the company might build “structures,” movement sequences that are then assembled to create a physical score. Again Lauren describes the work:

The actors begin at zero and Anne calls “1.” The actors then move in harmony with each other, making choices through the lens of the use of time and space—the Viewpoints. You arrive at a “structure.” Then you move back to zero, Anne once again calls “1,” and then “2,” and so forth. It might be that there are up to 12 structures. Emphasis is on the differentiation of the decisions made in space. There is no consideration of content. Nothing needs to be justified psychologically. Nothing needs to be explained logically. The actors are simply making a sequence of movements, and as they get that choreography clear in their bodies, time comes into play. Anne is watching the actors move from concentrating on the what and the where, to adding how or [the element of] time into the nonverbal conversation. (2018)

Then the actors play the scene using the structures they have created, full of uncanny coincidences and juxtapositions among the text, the staging, and the acting. Lauren:

The scenes are original, open and free. They crack open aspects of the overall play that might remain hidden. The movement is constantly refined, and the relation of the word to each physical action is scrutinized, trying to consider all its variations. (2018)

This work reinforces the scenario in which, as Erin Mee relates, “Bogart inspires, the actors create, the company builds” (2022:193).

Excerpted from “What Are We Waiting For? Bogart in Collaboration” (Herrington 2022).

tution—that we are these people with these aging bodies and these developed interests and I don’t want us to peter out—to dissolve. (2023)

Maurer says:

The conversation was wrestled for years. Nights were long and emotional, but we came to the conclusion that it was the right thing to do. There is some satisfaction that we went out the way we wanted to go out. We were in control including unpacking the file cabinets. We started it together, and by god we ended it together. (2023)

According to O’Hanlon, it was only the timing that remained in question:

We made the decision years and years ago that we would sunset, so to speak. Initially we were going to stop a while ago, but then Trump got elected and we were like, no, we need to stay together a little bit longer. It’s a political act if we’re together. Right? So, we decided that it would be, I forget, five or, or seven more years. We wanted it to be our 30th anniversary.

It just sort of became watching, watching that time coming. We were still fully engaged in the work we were doing. And so, our final season starting January 2022 became a series of endings. So, it was the last time that we were going to do this show. It was the last time we were going to rehearse in our studio. It was the last time we were going to train together. (2023b)

Executive director Michelle Preston says:

SITI Company was this specific group of individual artists who came together to create work in a particular way, and it couldn’t be SITI Company without that group of artists. Once we got to that point, the idea that we could operate in perpetuity was no longer on the table. So, in the fall of 2020, a legacy plan was formally announced, in which the operation would move forward through a final 30th anniversary season in 2022, then take a bow and make an exit. (in Cummings 2022)

Covid shut down some of the big plans SITI had for their final years, but even so, they had an expansive final season. They led 12 trainings, in the States and abroad, revisited some of their favorite works including *The Medium*, *Radio Macbeth*, and *War of the Worlds*, and performed at favorite places, including BAM and City Theatre. SITI took their final bow on 19 December 2022 at the Fisher Center on the campus of Bard College with *A Radio Christmas Carol*.

Ending has not been easy for members, as Lauren stated in the spring of 2023:

I still have a full year of mourning—the organizing principle is not there any longer. And we always needed that. We always needed that. It’s hard without the thing that we did, which was go into a rehearsal room. No matter what was going down between us personally, we made plays together really well. And now that I’m making a play without my peeps, it’s just highlighting how much I took for granted what we knew how to do. (2023a)

Training with SITI

The training engineered by SITI, their unique combination of the Suzuki Method and the Viewpoints, is SITI’s global legacy. The Suzuki training instills discipline while the Viewpoints expand flexibility in imagination and physical performance, nurturing freedom. According to Araiza:

We’ve absolutely used vocabulary of the Viewpoints to build our work and use the skills practiced in Suzuki training to maintain our level of work and to have an awareness of what the audience is really looking at onstage. (2023)

Thousands of artists trained directly with SITI in Saratoga, at their Skidmore summer program, at their conservatory in New York, or at the hundreds of training sessions they led worldwide. This global training expanded yearly. A two-week workshop at an arts festival often led to an invitation to teach at a university or theatre. Wherever SITI went to teach, they established a community of artists engaged in the work. Some of these people later reengaged with SITI for another week-long training or for a month at Saratoga; others worked for many months, five days a week, in SITI’s conservatory program. Many returned year after year to reconnect with and to advance their artistic preparation. Bogart expresses what she sees for her students: “SITI offers rigorous training that can help to cultivate focus, power, clarity, and courage combined with intuitive trust” (in Dudley 2015). For some, a greater value was that the language of training provides an organizing principle helping artists to work collectively.

The Suzuki training is a deeply rigorous physical, vocal, mental, and spiritual practice focused largely on the relationship of the lower body and feet with the diaphragm and voice. The training is geared toward stimulating a sense of presence in space with movements that provide criteria to measure yourself individually and as an ensemble. Bogart likens it to ballet barre work: “It’s like looking in the mirror every day and seeing how you’re not breathing right, or why your balance is off” (2023). Julia Whitworth in “Translating Theologies of the Body” writes that the work presents an extraordinary challenge and a unique opportunity for self-assessment: “The diagnostic nature of the technique comes to the fore—it’s the participant against her body, against her breath, against the training, against the floor” (2003:24). The Suzuki training, practiced daily and with a focused engagement prior to performance, places attention on the center of gravity and footwork, engendering extraordinary breath control and command over the body, including, most of all, the ability to be still.

Lauren and Araiza describe the training as foundational for any creative endeavor that does not dictate a style of acting. “The training seeks to heighten the actor’s emotional and physical power and commitment to each moment on the stage” (SITI n.d.a). Ultimately, it demands that the performer embraces the difficult, pushes forward, and comes back again and again to work harder and smarter. This energy carries into the Viewpoints training, which similarly demands its own commitment to the difficult, to pushing forward, to coming back again and again to work harder and smarter.

There are an extraordinary number of artists who have trained with SITI who now share the training with new ensembles in private workshops, at international conferences, and classrooms throughout the world. The Viewpoints training as practiced by SITI or the combination of the Viewpoints with Suzuki is an established practice in North America and beyond. It is part of the curriculum at universities and arts institutions from the Netherlands to Singapore, from Ireland to Chile to South Africa. Joseph Haj of the Guthrie Theatre relates how this developed over time:

I remember when I would talk to colleagues about this work we were doing, I mean, they looked at me like I was from Mars. It was so far out there. But then it went from that first year where people thought I was from Mars to Viewpoints is on people's resume now—the way jazz and tap used to be on actors' resumes back in the day. It's become a ubiquitous training mechanism. I can't think of another training mechanism in the American theatre since Stanislavsky's method that has had more widespread utility and acceptance as a training vehicle for actors than this SITI training. I think they've been incredibly impactful. Thirty years ago, maybe slightly more, you know, a lot of the acting in the American theatre was from the neck up. You know, speak it beautifully, say it beautifully—park and bark. (2023)

Richard Hess of CCM, another proponent of the work, studied extensively with SITI:

This was a living, breathing training and nobody knew what it was at the time. It wasn't trying to be the new famous American actor training. It was the SITI company opening the door, and no one was doing that, and freely saying, use this, share this. We love this. If you love it, it can be yours. (2023)

Probably more performers studied Suzuki with SITI than with Suzuki himself and more practiced the Viewpoints with SITI than with Mary Overlie. For many years, Overlie remained



Figure 8. Ellen Lauren, Stephen Duff Webber, and Will Bond training prior to Radio Macbeth, Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH, 2009. (Photo courtesy of SITI Company)



Figure 9. SITI Company training prior to Under Construction, Actors Theatre of Louisville, 2009. (Photo courtesy of SITI Company)

focused on SITI's use of the Viewpoints for both deconstruction and creation, and for staging, but the relationship between Overlie and Bogart was often fraught. At times Overlie stated that she was "sympathetic to the idea that [...] the Six Viewpoints began to change as [Bogart and Landau] worked with them" (1998:38). At other times, Overlie described Bogart's progressive ownership of the Viewpoints as "devastating" (in Bogart 2012:418). Despite the fact that Bogart often explicitly referenced Overlie as she taught, "The Viewpoints" became known as Bogart's creation. In the end, it was perhaps that Bogart referred to her work as "Viewpoints" that was the most difficult for Overlie; in later SITI years, Bogart herself, according to Ingulsrud, said she "should have called it something else" (2023).

In 2000, when, according to Lauren, Bogart's "fame for having invented the Viewpoints was catching fire," Overlie and her colleague Wendell Beavers invited SITI Company members to participate in a six-week, Six Viewpoints intensive they were leading at NYU. Bond and O'Hanlon took them up on the offer and in subsequent years, Beavers, who taught the Viewpoints as Overlie created them, worked with SITI at their invitation and, as O'Hanlon recalls, "educated us on Mary and the origins and history of the Six Viewpoints" (O'Hanlon 2024). What followed these purposeful encounters was a slow movement by SITI back toward the Viewpoints in their original incarnation—"the six"—both in practice and in an advocacy for restoring Overlie's legacy through more purposeful acknowledgement of her work. In the last decade of the company, several SITI members taught using the six Viewpoints Overlie identified. Others were hesitant having never studied directly with Overlie and chose to continue to teach with Bogart's nine. Ingulsrud notes "it moved the center of gravity pretty significantly but implementation was not symmetrical. We did not come to consensus" (2024). Still, according to Lauren, "as a company, we did what we always did and what we knew how to do. It wasn't prescribed or labeled as either/or. It was the best of both. It deepened us and I am eternally grateful we had exposure to Mary and Wendell before it was too late" (2024b). In the end, it was not so much a reconciliation of two different methodologies but a recognition that what Bogart originally brought to the company was one artist's way of talking about it, emphasizing it, applying it, but what she was talking about was what Overlie had created. Particularly in their later years, SITI company members taught with and their students were often inspired to study with Overlie or Beavers.

There is additional circularity in that SITI's work has also invigorated the Suzuki Company's training. According to Lauren, "Suzuki sometimes gave us a hard time because of how much we were teaching. But now a lot of the people they're getting over there have come through our program" (2023a). Fernando Montanares, who studied with SITI for many years and is now a SITI Ambassador, was in Toga in March 2023 and recalls, "We were talking with other people from the States that today we don't have SITI anymore, so everyone has to go to Toga to train in the Suzuki Method, with the source of the knowledge. Before we had these poles, in Japan and also the States, but now everyone has to go to Japan" (2023).

For years, SITI conducted the training programs to earn money. Income from teaching in residencies, at their summer intensives, and at their conservatory sustained the company. But teaching was also driven by a desire to elevate actor training. In a HowlRound interview, "Your Guide to Theatre Education," Bogart, Lauren, and Ingulsrud listed elements of actor training they felt were in short supply: genuine collaboration, rigor, innovation, expressivity, objectivity, humor, crisis, intelligence, imagination, openness, and fierce compassion (Dudley 2015).

Finally, their teaching was driven by a desire to bring to others the practice that was essential to their own work.

In many ways our training is a way of encoding our values into practice. We were not interested in training students to make theatre that looks like our work. But we do have a strong point of view about the art form. The training offers us a way to have a conversation about our deep values and hopefully pass them on, without the noise of a specific aesthetic or taste. (Ingulsrud in Dudley 2015)

Despite their seemingly oppositional qualities, the Suzuki Method and the Viewpoints trainings are synergistic, each fortifying the other. The formality and exactitude of the Suzuki training combined with the purposeful freedom offered by the Viewpoints comprise an unusually comprehensive experience. Bogart shares that:

The Viewpoints work on the horizontal, work on your relationship with others, how to move together, how to create together. Whereas Suzuki tends to be very vertical, emphasizing our struggle and your struggle against the world. So, bringing the vertical and the horizontal together just made a lot of sense. (2023)

Relating the two methods, SITI student and ambassador Lisa Lechner:

They get at something basic about the human condition and the layering of the two on top of each other has tremendous power—handing us back our own humanity. This specific training has an unrelenting way of saying you have both immense power and immense fallibility. (2023)

Their harmony results from their aligned ability to expand an actor's expressive capabilities. Suzuki "heightens the actor's emotional and physical power and commitment to each moment on the stage." The Viewpoints "allow the individual artist a way to practice observing the present moment with increasing sensitivity, and to respond with greater range" (SITI n.d.a). The Suzuki Method provides a grounding essential to the Viewpoints. The control, clarity, and focus of the Suzuki Method works in conjunction with the improvisational freedom of the Viewpoints to empower the actor.

While the term "training" is applied to this work, those who engage with it see it far more expansively. Bogart sees it as the "cement that's kept us going over time" (in Vincentelli 2022). Ingulsrud:

For us, training isn't education. Training is lifestyle. I think we're trying to pass along the tools that have sustained us as a company and hope that they will help artists, not just survive the world "out there" but change the landscape. We are all studying it. We want our students to find their own answers to the questions we helped them ask. (in Dudley 2015)

Lauren adds, “we want students to make work, make new things we couldn’t make, make a big noise, build an audience for themselves, find their people, find their homes” (2023a).

Those who have studied with SITI use powerful words to talk about their training—epiphany, life-changing; and to describe the space of study—sacred. They are grateful for the “gift.” Vocal and physical prowess expand. Actors flex physical, emotional, and spiritual muscles they had never flexed. They find independence in their rehearsal rooms, and the ability to embrace and solve complex problems. They describe the work as revolutionary, cleansing, and challenging; it clears away the baggage, enabling forward movement. It is often described as transformative—with long-lasting impact.

For many, the training offers something unique. SITI artistic associate Violeta Picayo found “a training that unites body and voice and treats those as the same instrument, something I hadn’t found anywhere else, a tool set through which I could grow as an artist outside of a particular project” (2023). Jonathan Taylor, who both studied with SITI and worked for them, recognizes SITI training, and its impact as a “primary experience” in the lives of those who have experienced it, “is going to have deep and long ripples” (2023).

The company themselves see the training as exceptional. Lauren says of the summer intensive:

I’ll just say I think it was the best program of its nature in the United States and potentially the world because of what we shared and how we put it into practice—because of the environment, which was secluded, because of Anne, but also because of how we just tirelessly taught those trainings in the morning and allowed application in the afternoon and evening. The exhaustion of it, the culmination of it. (2023a)

A quality that students describe as having a profound impact was the collaborative, horizontal nature of the training. There was no “guru”—no master—no traditional power dynamic. In many programs, specialists teach each given subject in a master-pupil relationship. “But when you study with SITI,” Ingulsrud notes, “the entire acting company teaches our core training. So, you will study the same material from multiple points of view. [...The] master is the training itself. We are all studying it” (in Dudley 2015).

Lingafelter finds a “reciprocity in the exchange that’s happening between the teacher and the student” (2023). Lanxing Fu, coartistic director of the theatre ensemble Superhero Clubhouse and also a long-time SITI student, observes that “the way they teach is through collaboration as an ensemble rather than there being one singular genius who has all these great ideas and imparts their wisdom onto you” (2023). The work is welcoming, enveloping, and invigorating. Picayo found it extraordinary that “there was space for me to engage with people who have been making work together for so much longer than me and treated me as an artist who is there to really be in the conversation. Not someone to watch from the outside” (2023).

There is always more than one artist at the front of the room, leading the work, and those artists rotated. Members of the SITI Company who were not teaching were working alongside other students, demonstrating that this work is ongoing and that no artist, despite years of experience, has fully mastered it. This was described by director Ravi Jain as “empowering because we were working alongside these Titan artists” (2023). SITI student and ambassador Thomas Jones clearly remembers the “look on the faces of SITI artists as they listen to each other teach and share. That level of depth and understanding is only possible when an ensemble has worked as they have” (2023). The care and respect they have for each other and their students were consistently evidenced.

Students came to study with SITI from an array of backgrounds and for various reasons. Some came because they had seen SITI perform and were inspired to elevate their artistry; some because the training offered a larger philosophical and aesthetic component, beyond most actor training opportunities; some because the training shaped not only actors but theatre-makers. They came because they sought training that recognized the primacy of the body and were hungry for a visceral, rigorous engagement. They came seeking a community. Lingafelter says, “I think for my whole career, I was always looking for ensemble training and trying to work with people consistently over time. I’ve never been totally satisfied in rooms where I haven’t had those kind of

deep relationships” (2023). Many were disillusioned with the theatre they knew and came to SITI as a last effort to reinvigorate their passion for the art. The thread tying all these motives together was the desire to work with like-minded people who were serious about the craft, and who had a practice on which they could build and use to converse with one another—a practice that could be the common denominator inside an ensemble.

Those who trained with SITI continued to train with SITI, or with ensembles or training collectives they formed following their SITI study. Training was a vehicle for accessing an international community of partners and potential collaborators. New communities were formed around the globe. People who had trained and now sought others with whom they could train sent collaborators to SITI, or invited SITI members to come to their communities.⁷ Artists who trained with SITI began to teach. This global network is SITI’s most evident legacy.

Nelson Chia, long-time SITI student and now SITI Ambassador, and artistic director of Nine Years Theatre in Singapore, sees the work as essential:

I ask people, “Why do you train?” For me, it is very simple. It is to reset. It is to always go back to zero. And then you rediscover, you rediscover again. That is one part. The other part is if I can train and become better and give the audience what is better, why am I not doing it? It’s not just a physical warmup, but it gets your entire body, psychologically and physically, into a state where you are heightened enough to be onstage. You’re not in the state of a daily life energy. (2023)

Ravi Jain speaks of the need younger actors have for this rigorous training. He values extreme challenge and the rewards it brings.

Prioritizing comfort and safety can bring work down. I pass on to anyone I’m teaching, any younger person, that you have to rise to meet the work. You can’t bring it down to meet you. I can set a standard, I can create a container that is safe, but discomfort is part of the process. (2023)

Even the Covid pandemic did not interrupt the training. SITI taught virtually, which its students considered a lifeline. Current and former students met on Zoom to practice together. Some travelled across the country to shelter with other former students specifically so they could practice in community. Those who had to practice alone did so knowing that in their practice they remained part of a larger community.

SITI training is intergenerational. SITI students are teaching new students and over the company’s 30-year life, students of students are now teaching new generations. When SITI members first recognized that there were those who had come to study with them who would return home and themselves teach, it gave them pause. Worried about distillation or misapplication by those who perhaps had only taken a weekend workshop, they were initially possessive. Araiza remembers:

Early on we were very careful about accepting people, particularly at our program at Skidmore, whose application showed that they were looking to enhance their teaching. And we were leery about that because we don’t feel you can learn it in a week’s workshop, in a weekend workshop, even in a two- or four-week workshop. (2023)

But it quickly became apparent that SITI’s ability to control who taught in their name, and what they taught, would be very limited. Over time, they found peace with this. Araiza advises, “Take it, use it, do it conscientiously and with rigor as you develop your own journey” (2023). As Maurer notes, training changes over time: “I can only imagine Stanislavsky or Michael Chekhov. I mean, they would look at what is being offered now in their names and go, what is that?” (2023).

Still, SITI members always preferred that anyone who planned to teach at least begin by studying directly with them. As this becomes less likely—SITI members will continue to teach

7. This list would include most of the SITI Ambassadors whose study with SITI inspired them to build a community of artists with whom they could train. This choice positioned them for the ambassador work they now undertake.

sporadically and as individuals but not as a company—this core component of SITI will pass. But they hope that they can continue to share the work by means of their ambassador program, in which their students who have evidenced the strongest commitment to teaching with integrity will continue to do so and will also provide SITI Company members with opportunities to continue to share the work.

Whether or not the SITI name will endure is unclear. The training may eventually exist without any SITI association. But the legacy remains, even untethered. Ingulsrud shares a conversation he had with Suzuki during his last summer in the Suzuki Company:

He asked me one afternoon, “How will I know that I’ve actually had an impact with this training?” We were teaching the training at the time—it was the second SITI summer. I thought for a second, and I said, “You will have had an impact when an actor comes upon this work, and they engage with it deeply. It transforms them as an actor. They become a much better actor as a result of it. And they never once hear your name. That’s when you will have had impact.” (2023)

But for now, with nearly 50 ambassadors spanning the globe committed to carrying on in SITI’s name, the training may become even more widely known than it was at the end of SITI’s life as an ensemble.

A New Generation of Theatre-makers

At one of our galas here in New York, there was a gentleman who I believe was on the Manhattan City Council who I was talking to, and he had no idea who we were. Somebody had brought him and he just didn’t know what we were or what we were about. So, he was trying to figure out if we’re so important, why had he never heard of us before, which is a thing I’ve encountered often with people. And so, I gave him an example, which I’ve often thought about: I said, “we are the Velvet Underground’s first album; only a thousand people bought it, but all of them created rock bands.

—Leon Ingulsrud (2023)

A primary impact of SITI having trained thousands of artists is the formation of dozens of new ensembles. When SITI chose to sunset, the company was hopeful that their choice would support a “necessary evolution [...] of companies that represent a broader range of aesthetics, identities, perspectives and values” (SITI n.d.b). This has come to pass.

The work SITI shared at Skidmore, at their conservatory, and in their workshops was equally focused on training and on creating theatre. Students left their encounter with SITI hungry to form their own companies. Many focused on devising, using the Viewpoints to create a common vocabulary and a methodology. Richard Hess remembers Tina Landau offering a demonstration:

She stood up and said, “Today was my first rehearsal with the cast of a new musical called *Floyd Collins*. We did [Viewpoints] training all day. [She said:] Here’s the cast. They’re going to do an open session.” I had never heard those words. These actors stood up in a line and suddenly something was being made on the stage in front of my eyes. And again, I knew that’s the thing I want. What is that? It’s magical. I was seeing a language come to life. (2023)

Companies who trace their roots to SITI are numerous and exist across the globe. Their productions may not resemble SITI shows, but the SITI way of working is manifest. Some companies work only with SITI-trained artists, and some have SITI-trained artists at their core. Some are ensembles (although fewer since Covid) and some are transitory. Some use SITI’s administrative structure and others work in an array of business models. Some devise work while others use extant texts. But as their websites, publicity, playbills, and conversations indicate, they proudly declare their SITI ancestry, and many continued to study with SITI. Ingulsrud notes:

I remember a lot of board meetings where we were looking at the funding situation and we would remark on the fact that there’s all this money out there but we’re not getting it. And

board members would say, “Yeah, that’s because you guys actually changed the field and now there’s a bunch of other people like you out there.” (2023)

Araiza noted in 2023:

For maybe 15 years, the pendulum has been swinging more and more from the American version of Stanislavsky’s early work, which is mostly America’s idea of the psychology of acting, to more and more a holistic, physically inclusive way of looking at training and at performances. I think that’s going to continue. I also think when you look at American theatre, whether they’ve trained with us or not, I think there are more companies who are doing a lot more physically based work. (2023)

The SITI model facilitated community. As Joe Haj said, “I can’t think of a university that isn’t annually churning out the five people who are going to join together and create their own company. I don’t think the impulse has gone away. I don’t think the impulse will go away” (2023). This idea is reinforced by Lanxing Fu of the Superhero Clubhouse:

The idea of ensemble creation that [SITI has] been experimenting with for so long is a really challenging thing and a really specific thing. They’ve offered so many models for how that can be successful and also what the challenges are, what the pitfalls are. There’s so much to learn from them. (2023)

Companies formed under the SITI influence continue to train together, which serves to bind their community. This was particularly visible in the resilience of some of these companies during the pandemic. The companies to be highlighted here—a small representative sample of perhaps 25 currently working—vary greatly in their practice and the shows they produce.⁸ But their methodologies and relationships with training clearly show their ties to SITI.

The Portland Experimental Theatre Ensemble’s mission is “to propose new ways of being through creative inquiry and performance.” PETE was formed in 2011. Their website resonates with their SITI roots, speaking to collaboration, training, and a “radical kind of presence shared with audiences” (PETE n.d.). Coartistic director and founding member Rebecca Lingafelter says, “it’s hard to capture the depth of SITI’s influence on our lives personally and as a company. And it is hard to express how deeply they have changed what the American theatre can look like” (2023). All the founding members of PETE studied with SITI. They had all been drawn to SITI by witnessing a production of *Room*, a solo play performed by Ellen Lauren. One had seen it in Seattle, one in Boston, one in New York. As Lingafelter points out, for all of them, it was a profound event: “To experience that kind of presence, to see a performer being truly transformative, was something that we just had never experienced” (2023). All of the current 14 ensemble members—performers, designers, and writers—train together in Viewpoints and Suzuki. Even guest artists work from the body, if not the Suzuki Method. PETE also runs a 10-month training program passing on the SITI legacy.

PETE produces one or two new productions each year. They do not have their own space for shows, but they do have a space for training. They’ve performed in various venues including the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art and Reed College. Most often they are supported by the venue—sometimes with production assistance, sometimes with space and marketing. Most recently, they performed at a bar/café, recognizing the need to bring their work to those who don’t attend traditional performance spaces. A partnership with a regional theatre is likely in their future.

In their 10 years of life, PETE has built a following with audiences and critics, “fans” who consider themselves “lucky” to see a PETE show. But PETE does not appeal to all.

8. This number is a SITI Company estimate.



Figure 10. *Ellen Lauren in Room*. Julia Miles Theatre, NY, 2011. (Photo by Chasi Annexy; courtesy of SITI Company)

In response to PETE's *Beckett's Women*, an evening of short plays by Samuel Beckett produced in 2020, Krista Garver wrote

This play is not for everyone—there were definitely some fidgeters in the audience the night I saw it. But, my impression was that most people were as rapt as I was, once I was able to quiet my thoughts and feel the experience instead. If you're willing to do that, then I highly recommend making your way down to Reed College to see it. (2020)

SuperGeographics is a global ensemble of artists who have worked with or trained with SITI. Members live in the US, Chile, Australia, and Mexico but they come physically to the same place to make work. SuperGeographics combines their interest in “disparate” and “marginalized” cultures with a commitment to “horizontal-ity in executive structure” (SuperGeographics n.d. and Taylor 2023). The group emerged from The Water Company, whose members trained at the SITI 2015 summer intensive. SuperGeographics uses the Viewpoints to stage devised and existing written texts, including *Castillo de Cartos* (by Charles L. Mee, 2018), *Panic Everything's Fine* (2017), and *Helen* (2022). As cofounder and artistic director Jonathan Taylor says, “There's a lot of recycling happening of the component parts that made up SITI and the experiences that we've had in SITI” (2023). Unlike SITI their ensemble is fluid, because as Taylor notes:

I think that we received from SITI this idea of having a really set company member list. But then I went on to realize that takes time. And so, we're not in a rush to nail down who's a company member and who's not. Now it's who's excited about our work, who's excited about the mission, who has an international view, and how do we make that happen? (2023)

Although SuperGeographics' internationality makes it difficult to convene a consistent ensemble, because they prioritize working with artists who have SITI training, even artists in the group who have not previously worked together can connect quickly through their SITI roots. As director

and former SITI associate artist Violeta Picayo realizes, “If there’s already shared language, we get to the unknown between us with a stronger foundation” (2023). Taylor notes that it is not only the training or sense of ensemble that comes from SITI:

Figuring out how to build an administrative infrastructure to support this kind of work is something I could not have done alone. SITI Company innovated this program called workspace where they sought funding for the company to rehearse together and to build whatever it was that they wanted to do. That is similar to a visual artist’s studio: you provide the materials for the artist to be in the room and then the artist builds whatever they build. We’ve taken it a little bit differently. We offer each of our company members a certain amount of paid weeks over the course of a year to make whatever it is they want to make. It allows individual ensemble members to follow their interest. So the work can come from many angles and not just a director or a playwright. We build from the brilliance of the ensemble. This is something I got from SITI. (2023)

SuperGeographics also follows SITI’s lead by pursuing support from an array of international partnerships. Some, says Taylor, “have brick and mortar theatres, and some have people who want to do the training, and some have ideas for plays” (2023). For example, SuperGeographics collaborates with Still Space Theatre in Bengaluru, Karnataka, India, whose artistic director and founder, Akhshay Gandhi, met Taylor at the SITI conservatory in 2016.

SuperGeographics also directly engages SITI Company alumni. Darron West is their sound designer and Megan Carter, past producing director for SITI, produces for SuperGeographics. For *Helen*, Bogart introduced them to people at the Getty Villa and to Anne Hamburger, founder of New York’s En Garde Arts. Hamburger produced some of Bogart’s early work. Taylor comments, “*Helen* is a product of SuperGeographics fully and purely, but it’s also very much a product of our relationships and experiences with SITI” (2023). This connection is sometimes less explicit but nonetheless evident. A *New York Times* reviewer found their deconstructed text reminiscent of Mee (Collins-Hughes 2023). But SITI’s influence is most clearly felt in the powerful, focused actors whose physical presence and vocal work clearly reflect their training.

Jem Pickard and Lanxing Fu, the codirectors of the Superhero Clubhouse in New York, were both long-time students of SITI. Inspired by a 2006 production of *bobrauschenbergamerica*, Pickard headed to Skidmore:

To be honest, it was like discovering my missing glove. It was exactly the kind of training I was looking for. It is a beautiful mix of accessible and relatable and also extraordinary and larger than life. I trained with them for eight years straight. (2023)

Pickard started Superhero Clubhouse in 2007. Their mission is to “create theatre to enact climate and environmental justice, cultivate hope and inspire a thriving future”—what they term “eco-theatre” (SC n.d.). The company maintains a strong relationship with the science community, often collaborating on specific projects about climate change. *Flying Ace and the Storm of the Century* (2013) was created with scientists from Columbia University’s Earth Institute. *Piece of Cake* (2019) was developed by Fu and Fabian Wagner, a climate scientist at Vienna’s International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis. They have had an array of residencies including those at Theatre Row’s Kitchen Sink and Pratt Institute’s STEAMplant, and have received funding from the New York State Council on the Arts as well as an array of private foundations.

Superhero Clubhouse’s work is designed to have broad appeal. As Melissa Moschitto wrote in the *Brooklyn Rail*:

Weighty, worldly questions might produce plodding dramas with some artists, but the work of Superhero Clubhouse is playful, inventive, and daring. There’s something, Jeremy [Pickard] says, “raucous and lighthearted in everything we do.” (2012)

Early on, Superhero Clubhouse tried to consistently incorporate SITI training, but they ultimately limited this effort because of their commitment to working with a broad array of artists, who may not have had SITI training. Pickard recognized that:

A downside of the training is that if you're not at the same level with other people—at the same stage of the training—it's hard to use it as part of a creative process. The training is idealistic. It's like enlightenment. It's like the impossible that you're chasing after. So, it's beautiful when you're practicing it with other people who are practicing it, but it's very hard to live in that space and to translate that practice unless you go through that process together. So, I think that is one flaw; I think that for all its nonhierarchical values, it does have a certain bias towards an institutional formality and some exclusivity—if you define theatre as this high, respectful, serious art form that you can only make if you're rigorously trained. The influence of Suzuki is huge on that. That is dissonant with, for example, working with communities and doing theatre that is about breaking walls and breaking institutions and saying, anybody can be a theatre artist, that theatre is an important vital tool for everyone to use. As soon as you say that, you have to let go of some of those expectations that you hold vital in the training room. (2023)

That said, Pickard acknowledges that “many of our early productions were built upon the questions and ideas that came directly from SITI training” (2023). Fu says that the rigor of the performances, the use of space and time, the presence of the body are all “part of our rehearsal processes, but it's not explicitly stated” (2023). Superhero Clubhouse sees their core values—commitment to interdisciplinarity, rigorous work, a nonhierarchical ensemble, the presence of a sound designer throughout the process, and continually questioning what comprises art—as coming directly from SITI. Like their mentors, they continuously construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct their work. While they do still offer classes akin to SITI's work, such as “Devising for Social Change,” much of Superhero's “training” is now focused on workshops open to the community, including an eco-performance lab and science storytelling.

SITI's impact can also be seen in companies whose members encountered SITI's work indirectly at a university. Richard Hess incorporated his SITI training into the curriculum of the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music. Five alumni then studied with SITI and formed Hit the Lights! Theatre Company (HTL), an ensemble of multidisciplinary artists who collectively and nonhierarchically create and perform stories. Cofounders Casey Leach and Kristopher Dean acknowledge their SITI training. Dean: “It was extraordinarily formative for me. You are truly thrown together with these people and told to make, to create” (2023).

Founded in 2017, HTL continues to practice the Viewpoints and compose work using SITI's methods. As they bring in new artists, Leach says “we are very careful with the way in which we teach people the process in order to maintain the collaborative spirit” (2023). Like SITI, HTL earns money by teaching—they work in high schools, universities, and at other theatre companies such as the Atlantic Theatre in New York. Leach enthuses: “Like SITI, we have something cool and then teach that cool thing. [...] I think that might be the most brilliant thing about what it was that SITI did. The teaching brought people to their work” (2023). Leach notes that HTL does not teach exactly what they learned but rather, as Dean explains, teach: “their version of Viewpoints and composition work, constantly in pursuit of this perhaps seemingly impossible task of working in a nonhierarchical way, inside of a very hierarchical structure that is the American theatre” (2023).

HTL, which averages two new productions a year, does not have a permanent home. They sometimes rent spaces but also have ongoing relationships with Ars Nova, the Peoples Improv Theater, and the New Victory Theater, all in New York. Their success is evidenced by the many commissions they get, including from the School of Drama at the New School, New York City Children's Theater, and the New York Botanical Garden. Critical response to their work shows an appreciation of their combining strength and whimsy. Alan Scherstuhl of the *Village Voice* described their production, *Whales*, as a “punk-rock shadow-puppet sea-chantey sing-along marvel” (2018). While HTL's work does not resemble SITI's, the physical relationship among the actors and powerful stage presence in performance recall their mentors.



Figure 11. Hanjo. From left: Akiko Aizawa, Stephen Duff Webber, and Christian Frederickson (on viola). Japan Society, NY, 2017. (Photo by Julie Lemberger; courtesy of SITI Company)

Director Rachel Chavkin, after finishing her BFA in the Drama Department at NYU Tisch School of the Arts, studied with SITI for several years and then trained with Bogart in the MFA directing program at Columbia University. Chavkin recognizes that SITI “changed how acting in theatre and performance is taught” (2023). Well-known for her work on Broadway, Chavkin is also the founding artistic director of The TEAM, which *The Guardian* described as “theatrical excavators of American culture, American dreams, and the American psyche” (Billington et al. 2019). The TEAM devises new work collaboratively where “it is nearly impossible to trace any one line of dialogue or image back to a single author’s hand. To date, we have created and toured 12 original works” (TEAM n.d.a). The TEAM’s work has received much critical praise. In 2019, *The Guardian* named their production of *Mission Drift* one of the 50 best shows of the 21st century (TEAM n.d.b.).

Chavkin initially invested herself in the SITI practice, noting, “I used Viewpoints very, very directly and aggressively to make my very first collaboratively created show, which was *Howell*, an adaptation of Allen Ginsberg’s poem [“Howl”] (2023).⁹ But soon things changed. Chavkin says, “The idea that there was any sort of shared physical practice went away quite quickly at the beginning of The TEAM, in part because the rest of the members pretty aggressively were not interested in my teaching them this methodology” (2023). Indeed, The TEAM shows an array of influences, including the Wooster Group and Elevator Repair Service. Still, in Chavkin’s descriptions of the TEAM’s work, the group’s kinship with SITI is evident. “Everything is collaboratively written line by line almost, and moment by moment. It’s very, very physical work. It’s very funny, often” (2023). The TEAM also leads workshops such as their 2024 “Devising within a Democracy” (TEAM n.d.c.).

Because SITI toured globally and attracted international artists to their training at Skidmore and in NYC, ensemble-based theatres who trace their origins to SITI exist across the globe. Gábor Kozma of Chance of the Hunter in Budapest states: “SITI really helped me to form my own ideas about how our companies should or can look [...]. Artistic process and community process. When I started to think about forming a company, I followed SITI’s lead” (2023).

9. Chavkin directed this show in 2006, her junior year at NYU.

The Syndicate, founded in 2014 by artists who studied together at SITI's inaugural conservatory earlier that year, includes members from Los Angeles, Brooklyn, Chicago, and the Hague. Their work, created collaboratively by the company, focuses on plays by “women, queer and trans+ artists” (Syndicate n.d.). Like the SuperGeographics, they come together physically in different cities to create work. This is a necessary by-product of artistic partnerships formed from the global community SITI inspired. After producing for six years, The Syndicate stopped during the pandemic. Presently, they are raising money to produce again. When SITI announced it was shutting down, Syndicate founder Janouke Goosen lamented:

I really hope that the legacy of how they worked, how they create, will continue and live within the new directors and theatre-makers. It's really important because now sometimes I go to the theatre and I don't know what we are saying. How important is theatre and art nowadays? So, when I start to question it, I get really depressed and then I need to see a SITI show—but they are not there anymore. (2023)

Singapore's Nine Years Theatre also began in 2014 and disbanded in 2021 as the Covid pandemic sent members in different directions. Under Nelson Chia's leadership, Nine Years produced “re-imaginings of classics and adaptations of literary works” (NYT n.d.), and as Chia shared:

We base our work on the common language that the training provides. So, the communication between me and the actors and the way we work, what we would like to see on the stage, the way we produce shows and think about them, are influenced and informed by our training in the Viewpoints. We pursue a primacy of the physical with regard to our bodies, how we want to carry them. (2023)

SITI began a collaboration with Nine Years on a bilingual version of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* based on an adaptation by Sarah Ruhl. But the Covid pandemic kept the companies from performing together onstage. Instead, in 2021, Nine Years actors performed alongside projections of SITI performers. The performance, conceived and codirected by Chia and Darron West, could be viewed live in Singapore or streamed throughout the world.

In 2014, Chilean theatre artist Fernando Montanares asked his aunt in Spain to bring him books about theatre directors. Included in what she brought was Bogart's 2001 *A Director Prepares*. As Montanares tells it, he “fell in love” and decided to study with SITI, which he did later that year at the summer institute (2023). The following year, Montanares returned to Chile and founded MB2 Theatre in Arica. But he also continued his studies with SITI at Skidmore and at their conservatory, and studied with SCOT in Japan as well. MB2 is a five-person ensemble, with Montanares and one other local artist trained by SITI. MB2 also works with another SITI alumna, Rocio Perez, who visits from Spain for three months each year. The company, guided by Montanares, trains in the Suzuki Method and the Viewpoints. MB2's devised pieces focus on local indigenous people; the work is very physical, what Montanares calls “dance-theatre” (2023). Montanares, a SITI Ambassador, says, “I think they are responsible for an invisible core of a new vanguard movement in theatre around the world that is connected through the training” (2023).

Christopher Manousos first encountered SITI in 2008 at the University of Windsor, Canada, where they came for a two-week intensive. Hearing from older classmates how “they were just the most incredible artists, and you just couldn't even fathom how their minds worked and how creatively infused they were with what they did” (2023), Manousos took the workshop. He continued to study with SITI for many years beginning in 2009. In 2016, he founded House + Body, an “interdisciplinary performance company focusing on experimentation and collaboration” (House + Body n.d.). House + Body's mission is akin to SITI's:

Our main activities are currently in deconstructions of works from the global classical canon, new play creation, and a focus on artist training and development. Our core practice is in the Suzuki Method of Actor Training + Viewpoints. (Manousos 2023)

House + Body is not an ensemble; they don't have the money to support a permanent company. But the mornings of the first week of rehearsals are devoted to training for the cast and open to the public. This approach both prepares the cast while also reaching out to potential future collaborators.

Vueltas Bravas, of Bogota, Colombia, is a group whose primary artists met at SITI's summer intensive in 2009. Over the next few years, Jhon Alex Toro Grajales and Gina Jaimes from Colombia, Tina Mitchell from Australia, and Lorenzo Montanini from Italy created a bilingual production of August Strindberg's *Miss Julie*, adapted by SITI's J. Ed Araiza. The show premiered in 2013 in Bogota and then toured to Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Naples, Italy, and Cadiz, Spain. As of 2023, Vueltas Bravas was still performing *Miss Julie* but recent opportunities in Los Angeles and Mexico City were delayed due to the pandemic and busy schedules. Grajales describes Vueltas Bravas as a "one-hit company" (2023). The group planned a production of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* but the project stalled when Albee's estate offered rights to a production in either English or Spanish but denied the rights to a bilingual production.¹⁰ In the summer of 2023, Vueltas Bravas offered their first summer intensive in Bogota with 11 participants from Colombia and the United States. Grajales shares:

We were replicating in some way what we did at Skidmore. We were feeding the people and giving accommodations. We were training from 7:00am to 7:00pm and having conversations around the training and having conversations about the importance of the SITI Company in our lives, their legacy, the way they brought the training to us. The SITI Company is a huge deal for me as an actor. (2023)

Vueltas Bravas is planning their second intensive for summer 2024. They are not sure they are a company, but their commitment to working together whenever they can, and training others, is central to their lives. As Grajales says:

I was 27 years old when I met this training in 1997. So much time. Now it's 2023, and this is my life. You know, like when I feel lost and nowhere to go, I find my center. I do these exercises and practice this training and find, again, the path I want to go through. (2023)

The landscape of these young ensembles is vast and energizing. Marc Masterson sees how SITI's legacy might develop:

Rather than seeing it as something that's ended or might be ending, I would look for how it is evolving—how some of the principles that they were championing and working with have taken hold and then moved to another level or another place. I would say that era is evolving and there are plenty of people who are interested in devised work still, in community-based work and other forms that are sort of moving in different directions, but carrying part of the past with them. (2023)

The work described here represents a small proportion of companies worldwide whose artists are SITI-trained. While none of these are SITI clones, they do evidence their generational link to the SITI legacy.

Collaborations

During the last third of its life, between 2009 and 2019, SITI collaborated with the Martha Graham Dance Company, the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company, Streb Extreme Action, and visual artist Ann Hamilton, among others. These partnerships reflected the company's, and particularly

10. Director Lorenzo Martinini notes, "I actually thought it would have been amazing to circumvent this and do a staging of the play at the border between US and Mexico, with English speaking actors on US territory and Spanish speaking on the other side of the fence, and ask for the rights in each country" (2023).



Figure 12. American Document, SITI and Martha Graham Dance Company members. Joyce Theater, New York, NY, 2010. (Photo by Costas; courtesy of SITI Company)

Bogart’s desire to have SITI “grow out,” to challenge itself, to join their “model society with other model societies” (2023). O’Hanlon describes these collaborations as “amazing” and “mind-blowing,” capturing a company consensus. Ingulsrud notes:

Even if there’s always the gravitational pull back to a status quo, it made us have to articulate our work to other people and have them articulate what they do to us. And, yeah, I think it had lasting effects. Every time I went to see a Bill T. Jones show for years after that he would say to me, “we would never have made this if we hadn’t done the work together.” (2023)

While SITI was in residence at Skidmore College every summer, other companies came and went. Work with the Graham Company began in 2009 when, according to Graham artistic director Janet Eilber:

We kind of all discovered each other. One of our dancers actually started sitting in on some of the SITI activities and discovered several common elements between the two companies—the idea of the embodiment of expression, which is core to Graham and core to SITI Company, and their set of physical exercises that launch off their rehearsal process [...]. It’s very similar to the way Graham developed her vocabulary to use body language and physicality to express emotions. So, it was kind of a love fest, and we just all were sort of agog at the deep core principles that were aligned in both of our work. So we stayed in touch. (2023)

Soon after their shared time in Saratoga, Eilber came to Bogart with a proposal: a partnership to reinvent Graham’s 1938 *American Document*, the dancer’s response to fascism. *American Document* featured Graham dancing while an actor read excerpts from the Bible, the Declaration of Independence, the Emancipation Proclamation, and a letter from Otetiani (later Sagoyewatha). Very little documentation of the original production remained, as Eilber shared with Bogart:

We have all this ephemera. Would you be interested in using it to create a completely new theatrical work? Not trying to reconstruct what Martha did by any means, but just borrowing

the idea and the structure and make an “American Document” for 2010 (when we did this). And she said yes without hesitation before we even had gotten very far into the conversation at all. (2023)

The performers cross-trained in each other’s classes. Bogart began with compositions, pairing actors and dancers together, providing some of Graham’s notes and asking the performers to come up with movement phrases. While elements of the Viewpoints such as time (tempo, duration of movement), shape (of the body), and movement of the body through space were familiar to the dancers, the expectation that they would use them as tools to create was new. Graham principal dancer Miki Orihara recalls:

Usually we have a director, and they tell us what to do, and we produce. So, no one would talk back to the director unless it was that something is very difficult or very dangerous. It’s not that we don’t have an opinion, but we don’t offer it—the nature of the work is that way. (2023)

Bogart encouraged the dancers to contribute and eventually, according to Orihara, “Some people started to say, ‘Oh, I think we should do this, or, you know, I have this idea’” (2023). Graham dancers were intrigued with Bogart. Orihara says:

She has that talent to pull people’s best without saying much. And as I’m actually observing it, I’m thinking: what makes that happen? Maybe because, in dance, we pinpoint this pinkie or that finger, but she sees the whole, she sees the whole entire painting. (2023)

Orihara remembers that the dancers were impressed with the actors’ “ability to speak with their bodies” (2023), which they had not expected from theatre artists. The dancers learned how to define a character and Orihara was excited to watch them do this, both while working with SITI and after. While the dancers’ skill sets expanded considerably, they were continuously challenged by the connection of the text to the movement. Charles Mee had been brought in to provide new written material for the piece. After watching the Graham company perform other works and getting a sense of the quality of their movement, he chose text ranging from Betty Smith’s 1943 *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* to letters written by US soldiers in Iraq. Still Eilber recalls: “The actors danced and the dancers acted, and the piece came together” (2023). It was performed at New York’s Joyce Theatre in the spring of 2010. Although it was a success, it was too expensive to tour.

SITI’s postmodern approach to classics made them the perfect partner according to Eilber:

We wanted to use our core collection of Graham works and our archives in reverent ways, but ways that people didn’t expect. I just always thank Anne for saying yes, because our company was at a pivotal place, and we needed the validation that the Graham vocabulary was going to move into the future. Partnering with SITI and with Anne demonstrated not only that the company and the dancers were going to be experimental and be able to do many different things, but the core legacy itself spoke to today’s audiences and was malleable and could be manipulated and used in ways that are profound. So, establishing that with this piece—and with SITI Company—has been hugely important to how we’ve moved forward.

An audience member came up to me afterwards and said, “This is definitely not your grandmother’s Martha Graham.” And presenters picked up that phrase. We had a T-shirt made, there were posters in a couple of cities where we were performing with “Not your grandmother’s Martha Graham.” It was a big shift in our reputation that we were going to find partners who were known for having influential voices in today’s world of performance. Because we felt that we had an influential voice that spoke to today’s world, and our reputation was holding us back. (2023)

The Graham Company followed their collaboration with SITI with other artistic partnerships and with commissions from choreographers, moving away from performing only Graham work. According to Eilber, SITI helped to pave the way. “It was kind of a new experience for our dancers. But it prepared them for working with new choreographers who value improvisation” (2023).

Dance companies turn over quickly. In Graham's current company, only Orihara worked with SITI. But selecting new dancers has been impacted by the SITI partnership according to Eilber:

I think the lasting impact on the sort of ethos of the company is the fact that we expect our dancers to be able to be multilingual, and that was not the case when Anne came in and SITI came in. So, it has turned over. The legacy, if you will, of that piece is that we audition dancers now not only in Graham, but in other dance languages. Our dancers are expected to be able to go into a rehearsal with SITI Company or others whose style is completely different from Graham and be able to communicate and be excellent in that new language. This piece with SITI really kicked that off and made it part of the company's profile. (2023)

Skidmore in the mid-'90s was also where SITI met the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company, founded in 1982 and known for innovative, collaborative work that blends modern and classical movement. In residence at the same time, the two companies took each other's classes, developed a mutual respect, and a desire for integration. Janet Wong, associate artistic director of the Jones Company, remembers the response of her company to SITI as, "Oh my God, this training is crazy" (2023). Twenty years later, in 2011, the Jones Company was hesitant about staging Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* until their producer, Bob Bursey, suggested collaborating with SITI. By then, half of the Jones dancers who knew SITI had moved on. As Wong notes, "They [SITI] were still there, all of them. But our company had completely changed" (2023). Still, they decided to pursue the collaboration.

Rite premiered at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC), in January 2013. The production then went to Bard and the Brooklyn Academy of Music. While in residence at UNC, the two companies trained in each others' methods. Wong notes how difficult it was to do SITI's training, which challenged the performers to:

Put their body in a compromised position or situation, and then produce text out of that position... So we all learned a couple of paragraphs of text, and we all had to do that together. So, my God, I remember after that first class, my legs were shaking and I've been dancing my whole life. (2023)

They started making the piece using SITI's process of devising. This was not totally new to the Jones ensemble, as Wong said, "We have been making work together. It's always collaborative. So, in a way, we also devise and work but without the terminology" (2023). Early on they defined small sections without a clear picture of the whole, using a hybrid system combining the Viewpoints with choreographic techniques brought by the dancers. The performers created shapes, gestures, and movement sequences to make a basic vocabulary—the common physical language—for the piece. Jones himself was not in these early rehearsals. That allowed the group to engage in the open-to-all process so valued by SITI. Wong: "They're more democratic in the way they work. Everyone shares responsibility. In our company, there is a driving force" (2023).

The two companies had another collaborative residency at Skidmore in 2012 to further develop the piece. There they ran into a challenge familiar to SITI but new to the Jones artists. Wong remembers:

We got stuck before the end. We went to our final tech residency before the premiere without the ending, which is something that I've never experienced before in all my years with the company—like show up for the tech final with no ending? But that was not new to SITI. We work in a much more urgent fashion. I remember thinking at Skidmore they are chillier than we are. (2023)

As they headed to the premier at Carolina Performing Arts, they created an ending. It was not one that fully satisfied anyone. The morning of opening night, they changed the ending they had just created by cutting a dialogue scene that led to the conclusion—which had been developed under Bogart's watchful eye—and then revising what followed. This was not new territory for

SITI. During their production of *Private Lives*, Bogart left earlier than the company for the Christmas holiday and the last thing she said was, “don’t you guys change anything.” But as West recalls:

We were in Louisville, Kentucky by ourselves for two weeks, and we’re the SITI Company..so we were talking about what the issues were that still needed to be solved and worrying about the intricacies of this and that. And somebody had an idea. And we went into the rehearsal hall to try it...and basically started from the top and kind of restaged everything. So then when Anne came back, she walked in the room and she knew something was up. Right from the top, she’s like, “What did you guys do?” And everybody gathered in a circle... “Well we had an idea. We just want to show you something.” She loved it, of course. She loves when that kind of stuff happens. It’s a crazy democracy. (2018)



Figure 13. A Rite. SITI Company in collaboration with Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company. University of North Carolina, 2013. (Photo by Paul B. Goode; courtesy of SITI Company)

Wong says, “We learned a lot working with them.” For her, it was empowering; SITI was reinvigorated by these collaborations. Lauren:

I think it gave us new life. It gave us wind in our sails; if we were stuck, it unstuck us. Even if you think you’re making good work, even if people are lauding you, you still can easily get stuck in your own thing. And we had these very practical languages, but renewing them through the lens of these companies we were working with, rearticulating our process to a dance company and in front of one another, allowed us to blow open old tropes. (2023b)

Jones came in halfway through the process. He was able to look in from the outside. Wong remembers that Jones added elements that “lifted up or calmed a moment which was very important” (2023). His approach sharply contrasted with Bogart’s collaborative process. According to Wong, “The buck stops with Bill,” whereas

Anne has this sort of undefinable ability to bring work where she wants it to be without that moment where she says, “No, could you not wear a black shirt, please? I think you need to be in a red shirt.” She’ll say, “Oh, great, great, good black shirt.” And then sometime about a week later, you’ll say, you know, I think I should be wearing a red shirt. And Anne will say, “Yes, I think that would be better.” And you’re not quite sure how that happened, because you knew right from the beginning that she wanted red. It’s just sort of this uncanny little ability to move people, and it’s a fundamental faith in people getting to a good place. (2023)

Wong values the opportunity to have worked with SITI in part because it gave the Jones company a chance to reconsider some of their company’s approaches to collaboration, to become more “horizontal.” Wong says, “I look at SITI Company’s body of work, the way they take apart theatre. It gave permission for other forms including dance to take things apart” (2023). The work on text also made its mark. In 2016, the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company removed “dance” from their original name. “When we auditioned people, of course they have to be fierce movers,” says Wong. “But then at the last part, the auditionee is redoing text or singing. I hear



Figure 14. *Falling & Loving*, SITI Company and Streb Extreme Action. PEAK Performances, Montclair State University, 2019. (Photo by Marina Levitskaya; courtesy of SITI Company)

Anne’s words often when we are working with texts—just the way she would direct” (2023). Also, the daily interaction with SITI had an impact. Again, Wong:

SITI Company has the utmost professionalism. They were never late. They are always warmed up and prepared. I don’t know the rest of the theatre world, but oh my God, that respect for the art. They are a very influential theatre company. I don’t know what it means to stay relevant for so many decades. And other people came and would rise above on their backs. Because new ideas arise. But the way they sit in the theatre culture, their influence, is undeniable even for a dance company. (2023)

A few years after the work with the Jones Company, Mee suggested a collaboration between Bogart and Elizabeth Streb, founder-director of Streb Extreme Action who describes their work as “a mixture of slam dancing, exquisite and amazing human flight and a wild action sport” (Streb Extreme Action n.d.). Mee had run into Streb at a party and over coffee, the two discussed working with text. Streb said she’d need a director and Mee suggested Bogart. He connected the two of them and, as Streb remembers, “We started chatting and then, lo and behold, there was some moment when we decided to collaborate” (2023). It was new territory for Streb:

I think Anne is so extraordinarily brilliant. I had no hesitation in collaborating with her. I don’t think I’ve ever collaborated with anyone before because I’m so obsessed with figuring out my questions in extreme action and the machines that I don’t really have time. It happened just because of Chuck Mee.

I don’t collaborate well with others. I’m so busy doing this weird thing I do. I don’t turn the wheel and go in a different direction, really. I suppose I’m a one-note woman, but with lots of complex problems, that go in with extreme action. (2023)

Extreme Action’s collaboration with SITI became *Falling & Loving*, which premiered at Montclair State University’s PEAK Performances in 2019. Streb defined an environment in which the performers had to avoid two moving, airborne, bowling balls and manage multiple buckets also suspended in the air dropping flour, molasses, water, and sand when the performers pulled hanging strings. She didn’t know exactly how it would turn out, but “just thought it was one of the most glorious romps on unreasonableness that I’ve ever really constructed” (2023). Mee provided the

text, excerpted from his plays. He knew the piece was about love so he decided there needed to be text that was “beautiful and fantastic and also scary and awful,” so he chose pieces from plays he had written and the SITI Company suggested other pieces included in Mee scripts they had performed (Mee 2023). As with the collaborations with Graham and Jones, the companies came together at Skidmore. The SITI and Streb company performers cross-trained, with everyone learning new skills. Streb remembers:

I had to go away for something and when I came back [Bogart] said, “You’re gonna be really mad at me, but I got your dancers to talk,” which is, to me, anathema. Please don’t let them talk. They’re not actors. Oh my God. But, you know, I trust Anne within an inch of my life. And it was in her hands. I was just watching how she did that. And I just thought it was really so fantastic. I was so proud of how we did this together. But I wasn’t a director in that situation. I just presented what my material was and then she was kind of organizing where the actors went while the dancers were doing what they were doing. (2023)

Bogart’s pursuit of freedom within the form meshed well with the methodology of the Streb performers who move, to a certain degree, as independent artists. According to Streb,

For all of the bodies that walk into Streb and become part of the company, the statute is that they can do whatever they want whenever they can, but you can’t change the space you’re in or the timing of the piece. But if they have a moment to do what their bodies and only their bodies can do, that gets added in it as well. (2023)

SITI actors were challenged by Streb, who is known for pushing the limits of the human body—defying gravity. Streb performers resemble acrobats who launch themselves into the air landing on their chest or sides. Streb believes that “risk and danger essences residing in an action room are necessary territories” (in THINKR 2013). The SITI Company came to the collaboration with some trepidation. As Bogart confirms, “We don’t leap from high places. We don’t know how to smash into things” (in Kourlas 2019). She remembers how it felt at the start: “The actors say it’s impossible. I take a deep breath and don’t tell them that I’m as nervous as they are, but I’m not going to let them know. ‘No,’ I say, ‘we’re doing it. We’re going in there. We’re going in. You can do it’” (in Bogart and Shevtsova 2021). Recognizing that these tasks were as daunting to SITI as speaking was to the Streb company, the performers coached each other through rehearsals with Streb’s dancers supporting fear of crashing and SITI supporting fear of speaking. Reviewers commented on being unable to distinguish Streb from SITI performers and O’Hanlon notes that they “were proud of having blurred those disciplinary lines” (2023a).

The work had lasting impact on SITI, as Lauren remembers:

I think we got a little riskier. I think we borrowed stuff from them and tried to put it into our own lingo and share it where it worked. I think we started working much more with weight-bearing...and embracing that low plane and floor. It changed us physically. I think when Streb came into our lives was perfect. (2023b)

While after *Falling & Loving* the Streb dancers did not use texts and SITI did not perform physically dangerous actions, the artists of both ensembles know the collaboration influenced future work. As Streb notes about Bogart, “she’s so brilliant that just hearing her direct them but also make comments is really just so magical on so many levels that I just keep learning from her” (2023).

Ann Hamilton first met SITI in 1998 during a SITI residency at the Wexner Center of The Ohio State University. Hamilton is a visual artist; she defines her large scale, “site-responsive process” as working with “common materials to invoke particular places, collective voices, and communities of labor” (Hamilton n.d.). Bogart and Hamilton grew fascinated with each other’s work. Hamilton recalls, “There was just this kind of mutual recognition, or this feeling, [that] it’d be really great to do something together” (2023). Years later, in 2012, Hamilton was preparing *the event of a thread* at New York’s Park Avenue Armory. She wanted to use live performers as part of



Figure 15. the event of a thread, a collaboration with Ann Hamilton. Park Avenue Armory, 2012. (Photo by James Ewing; courtesy of Park Avenue Armory)

the installation. As Hamilton recalls, “I didn’t really know how I was gonna bring this in, but I knew it needed to be live. And so, totally intuitively, I got in touch with Anne and I was like, ‘I have this project. It’s really soon. I’m in New York, can I come talk to you?’” (2023). When they met Bogart suggested that Hamilton use SITI actors, sound, and lighting designers.

The result was stunning. The room was hung with great silks and swings available to the audience in an environment the *New York Times* described as “complexly participatory” (Smith 2012).

At the threshold of the Drill Hall and facing a flock of caged pigeons, two readers, seated at a wood table, read out loud from scrolls. [...] The scroll they read from is a concordance, which is by definition an alphabetical arrangement of the principal words of a book with reference to the passage in which each word occurs. [...] Moving back and forth across the scroll, the pair read in intervals of listening and speaking, in unison or counterpoint, improvising a composition as each draws his or her own line from the paper’s column of text. [...] At the eastern end of the hall and facing away from the white cloth, a writer, also seated at a wood table, responds to the condition and weather of the room, the radio transmissions, the reading voices, and the space as seen in a mirror reflection.¹¹ (Hamilton 2012)

Hamilton credits the impact of *the event of a thread* on the collaboration:

I was gifted all the incredible resources and intelligences of SITI Company and it really was like an SOS art emergency rescue. I think one of the challenges for me was knowing how to work with establishing the structure for the performance with them. I don’t think of myself at all as a director. And so, I think, from talking to Anne and seeing how collaborative she is and how her form of directing is really to be so incredibly present and responsive and to be

11. To view video from this work visit: https://www.armoryonpark.org/photo_gallery/slideshow/ann_hamilton and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8-S0ziUseo>.



Figure 16. Akiko Aizawa in the theatre is a blank page, a collaboration with Ann Hamilton. UCLA's Center for the Art of Performance, 2018. (Photo by Calista Lyon; courtesy of SITI Company)

listening. I think that's collectively in some ways what we were all doing in this environment that we were making together. Like maybe, to me, it's the most important piece I've ever made. It had a life. It was alive. And that was, in large part, because of the collaboration with SITI. (2023)

In 2015, Hamilton and Bogart collaborated on a new installation, *the theatre is a blank page*, that used text from Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. The work premiered at the Wexner Center and then moved onto the UCLA Center for the Art of Performance in 2018.¹² This ambitious undertaking asked the collaborators to attempt to solve, through their different approaches, a complex puzzle. As Hamilton put it:

How do you invite people into that kind of spaciousness, of suspending into the things that happen when you read—the way that near and far get stitched together; the immediacy of the world you fall into [through the book] on your lap, but all the cognizance and awareness of everything going on around you? (2023)

Prior to working with the entire company, Hamilton and Bogart shared a residency of several weeks at the Rauschenberg Foundation in Captiva, Florida, where they worked with Woolf's text. Hamilton focused on the connection between text and textiles, Bogart on the connection between the text and the body. Together they asked how the words become tactile and how to make the act of reading visible. As Hamilton recounts their collaboration:

Anne was just patient. I think one of the things about being with Anne is you can just say anything. You can have the worst idea; like you might think, "this idea is really dumb," but this is where my head is going because everything is open and fair game. Anne offers a kind of social space that makes central to the processes the permission to evolve, and to work from what you know to what you don't know. (2023)

12. To view video from this work visit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gx3IWfeIYHo> and https://annhamiltonstudio.com/projects/theater_page.html.

As the collaboration progressed through performances at Wexner and UCLA, Hamilton noted that she became more “comfortable in the process.” She made “more choreographic suggestions” or suggestions about the audience (2023). According to Bogart, *the theatre is a blank page* “is an impossible project that challenges the audience with a ‘call to adventure’” (2023). As they devised, SITI wondered if the audience would “accept their call,” but Hamilton was confident:

We made a video for the end of the piece, and we had all these packing blankets, and part of the piece is handing those out, and the audience lays on them and looks up. And I convinced [SITI], “We’re gonna get everyone to lay down. This is gonna work.” And Anne was like, “No way. Audiences are not gonna do that.” (2023)

It turned out that Hamilton was correct:

Something that was unique to this collaboration was the relationship of the audience to the changing structure of the piece. There are folding chairs and it’s around a square. And those chairs need to be moved and the audience moves around. So, we needed to have a way to instruct people what to do. And it started out, and I think Leon was in his amazing way, making announcements, and I’m like, “Ooh, this doesn’t work for me, because people are being told what to do.” So, we just held up signs, like *stand up*, and we didn’t have to say anything, and people got it. Anne really trusted me and was willing to try. (Hamilton 2023)

Working with Hamilton was impactful for SITI and O’Hanlon notes that it gave the company the opportunity to

put into performance what they had been practicing for years in the Viewpoints: performance presence. Literally performing your presence, not acting, not pushing, not entertaining, but BEING! Being as performance. This certainly was not new in the art or postmodern dance worlds, but working with Ann gave SITI the chance to put it into play in the purest form. (2023a)

The work challenged them in terms of scale and also in exploring duration through its purposeful extension of action. It also allowed redefinition of their relationship of the physical body and the spoken text—so integral to their training. Lauren felt it “really allowed a different kind of somatic pleasure, sensory pleasure with speaking. We weren’t speaking the way we normally speak. We were miked, but we were there—there was an intimate quality to it that was new” (2023b).

The relationship with SITI also had a great influence on Hamilton:

I loved working with them. When I got nervous in the process, like when we had to set things—you know, there’s always that point where it’s all open and you can keep trying things, but then you have to know what you’re doing—and, I think Anne was better at that than I was. I really learned watching her because she’s not really doing anything. She’s not actually—not really directing. It was always out of listening. And listening is really in short order in the world. But that to me is one of the core things—how one is responding—which is so central to their productions, to how they work together, to my working with Anne. It was a special, special time. (2023)

Hamilton works in the visual arts where “things sort of stay in their made form.” But with SITI she developed her interest in “things relationally that are changing” and in duration—“in what way or how things are alive, what’s the atmosphere of wideness in a piece.” For Hamilton, “that’s partly a legacy of working with SITI” (2023).

Influencing beyond SITI Walls

Artists throughout the performing arts world have been influenced by SITI. Some, as discussed, have had direct contact; others have been touched generationally; still others may not even know how SITI’s work has influenced them. On one front, the legacy of SITI and its work is intertwined

with Anne Bogart's books and articles and her teaching in Columbia University's directing program, where she has been since 1993. According to Lauren, this work was continually interactive with that of SITI:

Anne's exposure to working with us in the rehearsal room was a two-way street. She benefited from that as much as we benefited from the environment and atmosphere she created for us. We all made it together, and she took that into her writing. She took it into her classrooms and those directors that came out were influenced by that. (2023a)

Joseph V. Melillo, executive director of the Brooklyn Academy of Music from 1999 to 2018, admired Bogart for asking more questions than she answered: "As with many of the ensembles SITI inspired, the legacy is not in repetition of the skills but maintenance of the values. They were encouraged to find their own way" (2023). Chavkin, who studied at Columbia with Bogart, affirms Melillo's opinion:

Anne, as a leader who has chosen to build her life in academia and being the head of the Columbia program for so long, has really helped forge how a whole bunch of directors think about making work and think about doing so outside many of the normal pathways. You got some classical foundations, certainly, at Columbia, but there were radical aspects to the freedom of how Anne taught. Anne just was interested in creating a crisis in your own trajectory. And in order to meet that crisis, you would have to grow all these muscles to think about what the crisis was.

The SITI Company really changed my capacity for thinking about time and space as a director and bringing a sense of order and meaning via time and space via the organizing of those principles. The way that SITI Company taught the Viewpoints was extraordinary. It's not like I think about the SITI Company when I'm directing, but certainly we could say that my capacities to shape a visual and rhythmic environment, while not solely due to the SITI Company, were impacted greatly by them. (2023)

After performing *In the Heights* off and on Broadway for three years, Luis Salgado felt he was not growing artistically. He left the show knowing he "wanted to create a lot more." He then "stepped into the SITI Company room for the very first time and was just blown away" (2023). When he began directing and choreographing, Salgado strove to incorporate his SITI training, which was, for him: "this thing that is like touching me, seducing me, provoking me artistically." Salgado credits SITI with broadening his perspective, focusing him on creating ensembles instead of casts, and applying Bogart's horizontality in rehearsals. Even with tight schedules, he finds ways to pull in the training:

There is this dichotomy that in Viewpoints you just can never be wrong, whereas in Suzuki you can never be right. So, in the first 10 days of rehearsals, I try to run five days where my cast can never be wrong, working with Viewpoints, guiding them and nurturing them to freedom so that they bring the best out of themselves, in a very playful manner, while at the same time creating a big skeleton for the show. And then ideally in the last five days of rehearsal, I turn to the Suzuki perspective where nothing can be right.

It's becoming my voice of making theatre—in musical theatre, in a commercial realm—utilizing this very avantgarde tool that I'm in love with. As I continue to make a name in the commercial world, I have to play in a balance between what selling a ticketed production is and the kind of avantgarde explorations I want to create until I have the money to just go very much like Suzuki to a mountain. Then I can create a company with a group of people and I can make every piece of theatre I want to make. (2023)

Salgado references a 2023 production of *Aida* at STAGES St. Louis: "it's very clear that we did a very avantgarde thing on a very commercial piece of Disney theatre" (2023). The *Broadway World* review noted his "modernistic choices," commending his "unconventional choreography and

blocking [that] marries slow-motion movement [from his Suzuki Method training] with African cultural dance” (Lindhorst 2023).

Not every director influenced by SITI worked with the company. Rebecca Taichman—former associate artistic director of Woolly Mammoth Theatre and winner of a Tony in 2017 for her direction of Paula Vogel’s *Indecent*—learned first through *The Viewpoints Book*. Taichman says of SITI:

It’s a huge impact that they’ve had on the way that I think. Directing or even staging is such a hard thing to do, so by creating conventions for how to explore visual impulses or how to explore synchronicity, Anne was giving it a structure. The SITI vocabulary was my first encounter with a systematic approach to theatricality. She was giving the idea of a kind of wild exploration in the theatre that wasn’t purely about narrative—that was about a visual impulse, a sonic impulse, a rhythmic impulse—this geographic impulse that she had.

There’s a story, a very short little story in *The Viewpoints Book* that Anne tells. She’s in rehearsal. She’s watching. She’s looking at the stage and it’s like a mess. It’s a disaster. It doesn’t work at all and she has no ideas—like, not one impulse. And she writes that she yelled, “I know!” and ran to the stage and leapt up on the stage, and in that run created a requirement that an idea would come to her. I’ve always treasured that. I went to graduate school at Yale. I wanted to immerse myself in theatre studies so that in that leap, from the seat in the house onto the stage, when I had no idea what to do, I would have a library of knowledge that would just automatically spark.

That idea has been a big part of how I work. There’s something she’s doing there about not censoring an impulse. There’s something about forcing it like that so you just don’t even have the bandwidth or the time to critique your own idea. So, it just comes. I often find that is where the most exciting impulses can be, not just for me, but for all my collaborators. You know, sort of encouraging all of us to keep leaping to the stage together.

The work of the SITI Company was always very inspiring to me because they were so meticulous visually. And so the stories were told on all these different levels—like a moving painting. In a country that’s very mired in realism, Anne was offering an alternative that was very, very exciting to me. (2023)

As a female director early in her career, Taichman shied away from working in nonhierarchical models, aware that her leadership was under scrutiny. It made the deep collaboration she sought less comfortable. Now, she sets up the space for the actors. “I just want to see what they’re going to do first—before I go asking anybody to do anything” (2023).

Suzuki has noted that he was perhaps more interested in training directors than actors because they create the expectations in the room. Bogart’s work with generations of young directors helped them create expectations. Bogart trained directors who valued a high level of collaboration and performer input. She challenged the hierarchy in the rehearsal room.

Megan Wanlass likes a joke about directing students who come out of Yale thinking “where’s my venue?”:

And then there are directing students that come out of Anne’s program or the Skidmore workshop being like, “I just need a clip light, some duct tape, and a basement.”

You could put SITI Company actors in a room with 10 parameters or five parameters or whatever, and they’re gonna make something. They’re gonna make something that’s amazing to watch. That’s a gift that they have given to others. You can kind of tell directors that have worked with Anne who know there’s only so many things that you need and then you can actually just make theatre happen. (2023)

Whether they studied with SITI at their summer institute or worked with Bogart at Columbia, as Joseph Haj notes:

SITI has made braver directors and better directors in terms of how one uses space, how one understands bodies in space, how one understands design as it relates to actors in space. (2023)



Figure 17. Café Variations. From left: Akiko Aizawa, Leon Ingulsrud, and Barney O'Hanlon. Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 2012. (Photo by Michael Brosilow; courtesy of SITI Company)

Ravi Jain, founding artistic director of Toronto's Why Not Theatre, believes that:

the opposition of Suzuki and Viewpoints as a training and a way of thinking provides absolute structure and total freedom. And finding freedom and structure is a fundamental principle that has allowed me to discover amazing imaginative worlds for audiences that really set me apart from other directors in Canada. (2023)

Sometimes SITI also influenced management. While in residence at the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts at the University of Illinois, SITI ran workshops focused on professional relationships just with the Krannert staff. Ingulsrud explains:

We started doing these workshops with them, and they reported after that it was transformative, the impact on them. We had the administrative staff doing the Viewpoints exercises with us, and then talking about how it opened up ways of communicating that hadn't been there before. (2023)

When Wanlass moved on from SITI to become an arts administrator she knew:

I needed to have a 360-degree perspective before really making complicated decisions. Sometimes I'll be faced with something and I still need to call another ensemble member or talk to the artistic director. It just feels like that is a healthier way to move forward in the world. So that is something that definitely informed me as an arts administrator. (2023)

As Kelly Maurer says:

Honestly some people who are not creative artists, or creative artists anymore, have held onto company and community and conversation and a nonhierarchical plane in whatever it is that they're doing. (2023)

SITI also impacted artists who were just physically in the same space but not otherwise involved in the work. When the company was at the Guthrie, Haj recalls:

The artists around the building and in town wanted to get in the room. They wanted to watch the work. They wanted to see how it happens, how it gets made. That company, that beautiful, beautiful company that started 30 years ago, who work together, trained together, have such a powerful shared aesthetic and approach. Everyone wanted to be around it. In fact, so much so that part of my work was to really sort of protect them from what would've taken all their time and attention. And, of course, they are very warm and very generous about people getting close to them and to their work. But I felt, in some ways, I had to allow them their process and the time to make that play as beautifully as possible for us. (2023)

Ingulsrud sees SITI's residencies as extremely influential:

When we would work at places like Actors Theatre of Louisville, rather than have our own theatre and our own infrastructure, we would become a "parasite" in existing theatres. And we would go into these institutions and exist in them as if we were running them, in that we would, in a sense, spiritually take over and not in a negative, not in an aggressive way of displacing anybody. But behaving within that institution in the way we would behave if it was our building, and intentionally so that we could get our work done in the way that we wanted to, but also so that we could impact those institutions on a level other than just the art. We could actually be impacting how it was run. That was something that we were very conscious of—wanting to plow a road, wanting to carve out a path. Especially in the last decade or so. (2023)

SITI's impact extended far out into the community, on and off the stage. *Cabin Pressure* at Actors Theatre of Louisville (1999) was created largely out of the experience the company had while working at ATL on *Private Lives* (1998) for which a Pew Charitable Trust grant provided resources to engage the audience in the rehearsal process. Marc Masterson, who led ATL at that time, notes this moment as a transition point for SITI in terms of "caring what the audience was experiencing" (2023). At a La MaMa Coffee House conversation in the spring of 2023, Bogart described herself as from the generation that brought a "fuck the audience" attitude to their work (La MaMa 2023). She found it "strange" reading about Moss Hart pacing the back of a theatre during an out-of-town tryout and then rewriting his work "based on the audience reaction." But it made her reconsider. Then a story that pianist Alfred Brendel told about his work changed her thinking:

When he is in concert, playing for an audience, he waits for the moment just before the final chord. He lifts his hands in public and silently asks the audience how long they will let him wait before he plays that final chord. (2023)

Bogart and SITI ultimately came to regard the audience as "sacred," as those who complete a necessarily circular relationship.

At the regional theatres and presenting arts centers where they worked, SITI truly fostered this relationship, building a following not by meeting audience expectations but by recognizing that an audience would join them in the creative exchange of live theatre. Masterson clearly sees SITI's impact outside of New York:

SITI's experiments in postmodernism did influence a number of different artists, both within the institutions and audiences too, who were exposed to a different way of thinking. And that happened outside of New York, in places like Pittsburgh and Louisville, and Urbana-Champaign. It is ironic at the very least, that those audiences got to know what "postmodern" was in a way that New York audiences probably did not. I'm not saying that there was not postmodernism in New York, but at these theatres, there was an ongoing relationship between these audiences and these artists. (2023)

As SITI members worked outside of the company, they brought SITI with them—as actors, designers, stage managers, and dramaturgs. SITI’s designers, West (sound), Neil Patel (scenery), James Schuette (scenery and costumes), and Brian Scott (lighting) often took on roles not traditionally expected. West shares his experience:

Bringing my sense of bedside manner and patience, and a way of watching a piece such that I know I’m looking at things the director might not necessarily be looking at. That all comes from SITI. Sometime in the 1990s, there was a point where the SITI Company designers, meaning myself, Neil Patel, James Schuette, and Mimi Sheron were sort of filtered by other directors to do other pieces because they wanted our aesthetic, and they wanted our brain and they just took us full stock. There was a production of *Quills* that New York Theatre Workshop did. Three of the designers were SITI Company designers. It was a really, really difficult grand old postmodern piece of theatre. And it was not the kind of theatre that I think the director was used to working on. And so, Neil and James and I basically staged the majority of the transitions and put together the structure of how the thing was gonna work based on the music that I had been working with in the rehearsal hall.¹³ (2023)

Often, it was an overall SITI aesthetic that was sought, but sometimes the request was more specific. Again, West:

I’ve had a few moments where I’m in a rehearsal and somebody will sort of offhandedly go, “This scene is like a SITI thing. So do, like, a SITI thing.” And I’m like, “I can’t do a SITI thing because this is not SITI and you’re not Anne Bogart.” (2023)

West sees this kind of ask as a “scary thing” (2023). As the SITI work moves farther from the source, it becomes something else. But other artists believe they are working in the style of SITI. If they advertise that, West says, “Yeah. Then we’re all in trouble” (2023). Ingulsrud recalls:

Suzuki used to talk about this too. He’d run into somebody who said, “I directed a play in your style.” And that would confuse him completely. Cause he was like, “Wait, was I there?” (2023)

As Bogart worked outside of SITI, particularly on operas, she brought to those productions a SITI aesthetic. She describes this as an “expectation that the artists are going to make choices constantly and that there will be a certain rigor of setting the material, an exactitude and also lightness at the same time” (2023).

Not every environment welcomed SITI’s level of collaborative input. Figuring things out requires patience, confidence, and the ability to work in partnership. During a limited rehearsal period these are often in short supply. When this happens, SITI veterans are disappointed. West shares:

You come into the room and you’re like, “we don’t know. We’re gonna figure it out.” And the producer and whoever else is in the room says, “No, no, no, no, no. I need to see a run through at this point. I expect to know what it is.” And then, when the designer run is four weeks before we open, they already know what the show is gonna be. They tell me, “Darron put the sound in.” (2023)

Lanxing Fu feels

lucky to often work with collaborators who are really collaborators, who are into the idea of ensemble and into the idea of people, *all* people, in the room having agency. But I’ve definitely not always worked on those types of projects. So, it is a challenge because as a result of

13. *Quills*, New York Theatre Workshop, 1995, directed by Howard Shalwitz.

SITI Company training and as a result of various processes that reflect that ethos, I feel very empowered. I should be able to voice my opinion, right? That is modeled in how the SITI Company works together as an ensemble in rehearsals and how they teach and how they impart to everyone who passes through as a student, a sense of agency. Sometimes that can be tricky in a room where that's not welcome. Still, there are tools that I can offer related to space and time and story that anyone can engage with and become a creative participant by using the tools. (2023)

Jem Pickard recognizes the complexities:

In rehearsal, I feel a great deal of agency, a great deal of empowerment; I am not just waiting for someone to tell me what to do. I'm sculpting this, I'm creating this; I'm a generative collaborative artist in this space, whether or not the director or the other actors are thinking in that way.

And I think that actually it's a glory *and* a problem, because if you don't have people around you who are thinking through that mindset, then I would come off as rather combative. So, there's the desire for me to stay in my lane a little bit more than I was trained to do.

Really what SITI prepares you for is ideal spaces, with other people who are really speaking that language. And as soon as you're in a space where you're not, there is dissidence. It doesn't mean that it's always a problem, but it means that you wish the people around you would rise to certain physical and vocal standards, to meet the thing that you've been trained to do. And especially I think in New York, and probably American theatre in general, there is not as much of that as you'd wish. (2023)

Even if the rehearsal room is not inherently hospitable, SITI-trained actors continue to work in ways that reflect their training, which they hope will guide those around them. Former SITI member Susanna Wilson feels:

Internally I'm working in a way that has deep ties to SITI Company. The Viewpoints are actually the piece of the training that feels like it has had the largest impact on how I work. And that has to do with a way of seeing the world, I think, and seeing the audience, and the self, inside of a performance. Because the materials of Viewpoints are always available to me, no matter the room I'm working in. (2023)

Webber uses the training to help him to fit into something new:

The training is about being flexible so that you can adapt to any situation superfast. Certainly, I can think of some productions where it was helpful that I was able to bring into the room a level of specificity in staging and in physicality that was appreciated by the other actors and the director and maybe helped things come together more quickly. (2023)

Ultimately, for these artists, it is about treating any room like a company where you expect and encourage the best in people.

Presenting Partners

As an itinerant company without a performance space of their own, SITI forged relationships with many partners including the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the City Theatre in Pittsburgh, Actors Theatre of Louisville, the Krannert Center at the University of Illinois, the Getty Villa in LA, and the Wexner Center of The Ohio State University. SITI modeled a shift, paving a way for other ensembles.

SITI arrived at the doorstep of regional theatres in the mid-1990s when those theatres were struggling to maintain their own resident companies. As Marc Masterson notes:

Resident companies proved less and less viable as the field began to diversify and, particularly in the case of Actors Theatre of Louisville, there was need there. They were doing so many



Figure 18. The Bacchae. From left: Stephen Duff Webber, Roshni Shukla, Barney O'Hanlon, J. Ed Araiza, Akiko Aizawa, Samuel Stricklen, and Leon Ingulsrud. J. Paul Getty Museum at the Getty Villa, 2018. (Photo by Craig Schwartz; courtesy of SITI Company)

world premieres and playwrights wanted and expected casting those plays with actors who were the right gender or the right race, or right for the way that they imagined that character to be. It's one of the reasons that institutional theatres began to disband their resident companies.

We all can agree that something was gained, something was lost. What was lost was the ability to work with a group of artists over a prolonged period of time so that the institution and the artists had a foundation that was already established that could be built upon with subsequent productions, no matter what they were. When the SITI Company formed, they began looking for institutional partners that could provide the things a small ensemble couldn't do—administrative things, some of the production things. The institutions had an interest in building a relationship with SITI because they were a group of artists who you could develop a relationship with over time. The work deepened and the producing organizations could see that there was a level of artistry and expertise that was possible beyond the capability of the producing organization if it followed the typical path. (2023)

SITI brought a different aesthetic to the regional theatres and engendered, in what many might assume to be a more theatrically conservative audience, a true appreciation for nontraditional performance. Joseph Haj:

What SITI brought was a different kind of storytelling. Not just different thematically, but a different kind of expression—a different aesthetics—a different formal frame for storytelling. It makes audiences bigger by having exposure to that work. It makes them braver in terms of what they can accept formally, aesthetically, thematically, from whatever we make onstage. [...] And I think from an audience development standpoint, it gives them a different kind of

play to look at and respond to, which I think results in our own expansion and our ability to see plays still more deeply and still more broadly than we could before. SITI company had a big influence on that landscape. (2023)

Chuck Helm, emeritus director of performing arts at the Wexner Center for the Arts, and an early fan of SITI, was “taken by their unique sensibility and precision of the work” (2023). Helm brought *The Medium* to Columbus in 1996. The Wexner’s mission as a “multidisciplinary, international laboratory for the exploration and advancement of contemporary art” made it a natural home for SITI (Wexner Center for the Arts n.d.). This partnership continued over SITI’s entire career. Wexner presented seven SITI shows including several premieres. For the Wexner community, the impact was significant. Helm observes:

Audiences could track the company over time—see their development—be able to say “I’ve seen them now in three shows, five shows.” I think that’s good to feel. They might have a chance to interact with them during the development process and then see the premiere of the show. They felt like, “These are our artists.” They really provided that spine for the program and people really felt invested because they thought, “This is our thing.” (2023)

In the first decade of the SITI Company, Helm, Masterson, and Melillo provided valuable administrative and financial help, laying the groundwork for SITI’s long career. They offered advice on leadership, management, and sustainability and provided the financial support necessary to mount SITI’s shows at their theatres. According to Masterson, the partnerships also impacted the work of those organizations:

We all kind of figured out together that we played different roles in the creation of the work, that there were things that the producing organization could do that the ensemble couldn’t do, and that the touring organizations couldn’t do. There were things that the touring organizations could do that the resident theatres couldn’t really do. And there were clearly things that the ensemble could do that none of us could do without them. So, we started communicating with people outside of our area of expertise. As a producing theatre, I got to know the presenting world really well, and I discovered that there were different funding sources. There were different practices. A commission meant something different in the presenting world than it did in the producing world. (2023)

Helm speaks of developing and producing new works that individual presenting organizations could not afford on their own:

I always felt that it was my job to be an advocate in the field for these artists that you care about and try to get other people on board. So, whether it was going to City Theatre or the Krannert Center or Arizona State, or whatever places, I would be actively talking these things up and trying to get other people on board to either be cocommissioners or just to present the work or to start a relationship. (2023)

Joseph Melillo joined BAM in 1983 as the producer of New York City’s first nontraditional performing arts festival—the Next Wave Festival. The Next Wave was “the place for innovative, progressive, nontraditional, large-scale work” (2023). Melillo, an avid theatregoer, saw it as his job to figure out what the artistic landscape was in the 1980s, and how BAM and the Next Wave festival “could be a destination for artistic work that would change people’s perception about storytelling.” Bogart and the SITI Company came quickly onto his radar, and he often brought their work to BAM, including *The Medium*, *Hotel Cassiopeia*, *Steel Hammer*, and *The Bacchae*. This was the result of an ongoing investment in the work of SITI. Melillo felt a responsibility to establish a relationship with the artists he worked with, enabling him to understand Bogart and what “she was seeking, what she was doing, and how the institution [he] was servicing could play a part in a project she was gestating or developing for her company” (2023).



Figure 19. Who Do You Think You Are. From left: Ellen Lauren, Barney O'Hanlon, Will Bond, Akiko Aizawa, and Leon Ingulsrud. Galvin Playhouse, Arizona State University, 2008. (Photo by Michael Brosilow; courtesy of SITI Company)

SITI often began developing a new work during their Skidmore summer residencies as a part of the composition work they did with their students. A month's worth of exploration might then be followed by a commission from the Wexner Center, who provided, over the course of another month, rehearsal space, technical support, and salaries. At the same time, SITI received support from regional theatres and other presenting partners. Thus, they would complete a residency at the Wexner and then perhaps move on to City Theatre or Actors Theatre of Louisville to continue to hone the work. Then onto the Getty Villa or BAM—or, often, touring nationally and internationally. Masterson watched an “ecosystem that grew” (2023) and became a model followed by other ensemble-based theatres. The “ecosystem” was crucial for SITI. Helm: “If you are going to inhabit an ensemble and keep it going, you don't want to ride the cycle of feast or famine where you get the big grant, get a couple of great presenters around on one project, but the next project—nobody” (2023). And as Melillo says:

The history of contemporary art and culture is the history of performing arts presenting in this country. It's the presenting organizations that have advanced the concept of commissioning and the concept of coproducing, enabling a company to hire management that could produce the work, which means collateralizing financial resources to pay for the director, in this case, Bogart, and her ensemble and collaborators. (2023)

The National Theater Project (NTP), piloted in 2010, offered another key component. NTP was designed to promote “the development of artist-led, ensemble and devised theatre work while extending the reach and life of these projects through touring” (see Progress Theatre n.d.). NTP's grants supported the artists themselves and the producing theatres in an effort to bring the “work to different regions and audiences” (NEFA n.d.). With the requisite pieces already in place, SITI



Figure 20. Stephen Duff-Webber and Leon Ingulsrud in Hotel Cassiopeia. Actors Theatre of Louisville, 2006. (Photo by Michael Brosilow; courtesy of SITI Company)

became what Helm calls the “case study” for NTP (2023). The result was a series of working mechanisms for ensembles. As Helm sees it:

That’s a real part of their legacy—that they could bridge these kinds of theatre worlds that have seemed so completely separate—in different orbits.

I don’t think that would’ve ever happened before that time. And so, to me, SITI were really the ones that legitimized this as a pathway for us to take. So, for that kind of advocacy, both in terms of outreach to other presenting organizations, making inroads to knowing some of the artistic directors at some of the regional theatres, being involved with the formation of National Theater Project, and developing this kind of networking, SITI played a pivotal role in getting that conversation going and keeping it going. (2023)

It can be argued that SITI did not establish as strong a reputation among New York audiences as ensembles who produced consistently in the city. But they may be one of the only ensembles to have a powerful following in regional hubs, such as Pittsburgh, Champaign-Urbana, and Columbus. Here, local audiences, artists, and often students at nearby or affiliated universities experienced the productions and intermingled with the artists.

The leaders of the organizations who have produced or presented SITI’s work have no doubt about their long-term impact. Mike Ross, director of the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, writes:

SITI Company will forever resonate through our hallways and rehearsal spaces, and on our stages. The lives the company has touched and the impact of their keen observations and critical thinking will continue to influence our approach to education and community building. (in Everyman Agency 2020)



Figure 21. Antigone. From left: Stephen Duff Webber, Akiko Aizawa, Tom Nelis, and Will Bond. Dance Theatre Workshop, NY, 2009. (Photo by Erik Pearson; courtesy of SITI Company)

Closing Thoughts

There is no doubt that the seeds SITI Company has sown will root and continue to grow. But SITI has also been purposeful about defining its own legacy. SITI's Digital Archive, launched in January 2023, focuses on the collaborative processes of the ensemble, "providing insights into SITI's historical artistic practices" as documented in photographs, press clippings, video, and production histories (SITI [2023a]). SITI's work is also documented at the Lawrence and Lee Theatre Research Institute (TRL) at The Ohio State University. "The SITI Living Archive joins an international community of performing arts archives and is the first of its kind for an ensemble-based theatre company" (SITI [2023b]).

According to Brad Carlin, managing director of SITI Inc., funding for this work was available through some unexpected grants that came in toward the end of 2022, as well as a strong legacy fundraising campaign in their final year. We ended up with a sizable amount, a kind of a nest egg, and we needed to figure out what was the most responsible way to work through that. (2024)

Some of the nearly \$400,000 was necessary to fund work on the archives and "keep the lights on." SITI Inc. "stewards the Legacy of SITI Company and its Emeritus Artists for the benefit of future ensembles" (2023). SITI Inc. has also been focused on other video projects. There is continued pursuit of partnerships for broadcasting productions through educational streaming platforms; restrictions put into place by Actors' Equity have meant that no full-length productions are currently included in the archives managed by Ohio State University. SITI Inc. has also reengaged with and invested in a documentary film that was started by Greg King in 2018.

This work is important to the company, but as a part of its legacy plan SITI also hopes to continue to build bridges to future generations of ensembles and spent much of 2023 in discussion



Figure 22. SITI Company gathered during their final performance of Radio Christmas Carol, Fisher Center at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, 2022. (Photo by Chris Kayden; courtesy of SITI Company)

with the board about what this would look like in practice. One project evolved as a coaching and mentorship program designed to create very “specific opportunities for emeritus artists to engage with ensembles and artists all over the globe” (Carlin 2024). SITI emeriti designed the program with the late Diane Ragsdale, who joined the SITI board in 2020. A call for applications was shared with the intent that all of the work would take place within calendar year 2024 if at all possible. Under the guidelines, SITI Inc. pays the SITI emeriti salaries and the other costs—travel, housing, rehearsal space, etc.—are left up to the host. According to Lauren:

the funds are to both help communities deepen their understanding of how to practice—and in some instances, teach (which many are doing anyway)—and to bring the alumni community together, to add new members, to expand the network. Win-win in that those in SITI who are interested/need the work are supported. The exchange might take place in a studio for training, or it might be mentoring someone in “making stages.” It could be present together or on Zoom... So, it’s a way to try to use the remaining funds to help new generations and allow SITI members to be supported for their work and gifts as well. (2024a)

With this same focus, but a longer trajectory, SITI also created the ambassador program to spread its legacy. Nearly 50 artists who have worked closely with SITI have been invited by Ellen Lauren to become “SITI Alumni Network Ambassadors.” Ellen Lauren with Brad Carlin will oversee this work. The ambassadors have committed themselves to actively sharing the training with their local communities, to broaden audiences, and to maintain engagement with SITI Company members. There are ambassadors throughout the United States and in Singapore, Canada, Spain, Belgium, Ireland, France, Chile, England, Italy, the Netherlands, Columbia, Portugal, Korea, Hungary, Norway, Ecuador, and Argentina. The SITI Living Archive website

posts a calendar of training and workshops led by ambassadors and open to the public. SITI Company member Samuel Stricklen describes the program:

The alumni base is really energized to be able to keep plugging away with either training or other workshops throughout the world. To have an emeritus artist go and be there in the room with them, to be able to give them feedback, or to be able to just be another person that they can bounce ideas off of. To be able to find more bridges between the company members and other artists around the world would be a huge thing that we're really looking forward to trying to do. (2023)

Gábor Kozma finds it to be “emotional to be an ambassador—a big responsibility” (2023). Violeta Picayo says “there is a big investment required to continue to share the training” (2023). Ernesto Martinez describes it as “deeply delicate” (2023) and Emma Shafer sees it as a “privilege” (2023).

Those SITI invited did not hesitate. Many were like Diego Coral López:

That feeling of family, of a space for constant learning, and the possibility of growing as an artist meant that when they asked me if I wanted to be part of the ambassador project, I immediately accepted [...]. It is staying in touch with that part of my history that marked me, and demanding of myself to be more disciplined. (2023)

Valerie McCann was eager to commit herself to a project that

offers/facilitates accessible training opportunities based in the Viewpoints philosophy and practice...[to be] someone who helps others connect to training opportunities and is interested in building and sustaining a community centered around horizontal, nonhierarchical, collaborative practice. (2023)

Juan Diego Bonilla Ibáñez just wants to “replicate—even a little—the way they taught and do theatre” (2023).

There is no formal plan for the ambassadors. The only expectation is that each ambassador attends quarterly meetings and facilitates Suzuki and/or Viewpoints workshops in their part of the world. It is unclear how it will work now that SITI Company has disbanded. Nelson Chia says, “We’re at the point of talking about this. So, I think there is a legacy, but I can’t articulate it yet. We’re in the middle of it, which is exciting” (2023). Ambassador Emma Shafer sees work ahead for the group:

I believe it will take much more time to define the shape of our roles. I also believe that these roles will ebb and flow, that each region may develop and define their responsibilities differently depending on what they may want as individuals or what their communities may desire. (2023)

Many ambassadors are wrestling with the charge. López notes that “above all, I take it as a question: How can I share not only the knowledge, but the enthusiasm, generosity, and rigor that SITI gave me?” (2023).

SITI recognizes that each ambassador will find their own way; that is part of the plan. For Shafer:

While we will never have the same knowledge and experiential history of the training that SITI Company members have. We (the ambassadors) each have our own histories, love, and passion for the training [...] We get to decide what that “onward” looks like.

Ambassador Lisa Lechner has already facilitated a week-long Suzuki/Viewpoints workshop in Boise, Idaho, bringing in SITI Company members:

This began as a purely selfish endeavor because I missed the work, moving away from NYC. Over time, it has become an essential annual touch point for an ad hoc collective of artists. Saying yes to being an ambassador is merely an extension of the above, creating space to train in community with other artists, rooted in a shared and meaningful pedagogy. (2023)

McCann offered “regular free or pay-what-you-can drop-in” Viewpoints sessions at London Performance Studios in the first years of her ambassadorship. She has recently relocated to Los Angeles and “will be launching something similar here” (2023). Thomas Jones will continue to offer the training annually, free of charge, in Winnipeg. Arjan Gebraad is in Amsterdam where there are fewer artists familiar with the training. He and three others call themselves the “Training Ensemble of the Netherlands” (2023). They have committed to offering several weekend workshops.

Continuing the training acknowledges the need to provide opportunities for artists who have trained with SITI to convene and pursue their practice in the presence of other trained artists. There is also a desire to expand their community in order to create work in a manner similar to SITI. Previously, people came to Saratoga or NYC or a SITI Company workshop. Now, the ambassadors are responsible for the training and there is a clear call for ambassadors to introduce new artists to the work, to train new generations.

Many ambassadors are eager for SITI Company members to remain involved. Chris Manousos, an ambassador in Toronto, says:

I feel called to generate feasible bridges for SITI Company members to participate and for me to have a stronger dialogue with them—to have them come here to continue their work of very diligently equipping us to pass on this training. (2023)

Ambassadors may become impromptu gatekeepers guarding the integrity of the training. Manousos got a “little knock on my door, and someone was like, ‘I just got hired to teach this voice and movement class. They used Viewpoints. I’m gonna read the book. Can we have a talk about it?’” (2023).

The moment made Manousos feel a bit closer to SITI, experiencing what he described as his “micro version” of the challenge they face to discourage the dilution of the training, an “angst about who’s teaching what” (2023).

Those carrying the work forward are thinking about its trajectory. Stricklen realizes:

There are so many alumni, there’s so much energy still underneath the foundations of what SITI Company was able to build over 30 years. And that’s going to continue to grow. And now with the ambassadors that are all over the world, even more so, people are taking more ownership, like, “Hey, I have this training, but I also have myself, and I can bring myself also now to the world of this training.” (2023)

Shafer welcomes this perspective:

While we continue to share the stories and histories intertwined with the training, with each other and those newer to the training, we also get the chance to sift through this culture and decide what we don’t wish to carry forward. This whole evolution is fluid. In the spirit of the training, I believe we will allow the space and the time to sit with these questions of what our roles and responsibilities are. We will allow the answers to come when they are ready. We will be curious. We will listen. We will navigate this as individuals and together. (2023)

SITI Company members and the ambassadors want to bring the training to an even broader community of artists and to theatre companies of color. Luis Salgado sees

a great opportunity for me to serve as a bridge between the SITI Company and my Latino community—just being able to host them [SITI artists] on the island [Puerto Rico], and bring some of the most hungry artists on the island to learn the technique.

There’s so much more I could say for sure. I mean, traveling to Peru, Colombia, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, and just talking about this, just even saying it in a room, there’s this thing called Suzuki and it comes from Japan and you should read this book or, you know, talking about the six Viewpoints versus the nine Viewpoints and the dichotomy between Mary Overlie and Anne Bogart. Just even having the conversation gives artists a different path of thinking. (2023)



Figure 23. A Radio Christmas Carol. Foreground, from left: Ellen Lauren, Will Bond, and Gian-Murray Gianino, and Violeta Picayo. Fisher Center at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, 2022. (Photo by Chris Kayden; courtesy of SITI Company)

Salgado is also committed to bringing SITI artists to work at the company he founded, R.Evolución Latina in NYC:

It's about exposing the next generation to this work and bringing them to the source. How can we then further how we use those tools by responsibly respecting and doing the traditional, but also by breaking and disrespecting them all and creating new forms based on these ideas and tools? (2023)

Even more traditional repertory companies are engaging with SITI ambassadors. Manousos and Jones were coincidentally working at the Stratford Festival in Canada at the same time and they generated a conversation focused on training there. In 2022, Manousos was working in Stratford's experimental wing, known as The Lab, which he describes as having "a focus on how Stratford can have a more international reach—a more creatively driven reach" (2023). The two ambassadors led classes for the Stratford Company, who had not done this training before. It was a positive experience for Manousos:

These actors work in a rep system for many, many months. And there were a lot of conversations around where does the physical rigor, the physical tenacity of these training practices live within a very delicate rep system and actors who are negotiating, performing every single day for months and months and months and months on end? But the training was very well received and Stratford is very keen on figuring out a way of building a longer relationship through Tom and me to offer this training. So, we're in the middle of those conversations. (2023)

Some ambassadors and SITI Company alumni are exploring how to apply the training outside of live theatre. Stricklen is very interested in the opportunity to

take this physical actor-based training that is so much about awareness, so much about focus, so much about ensemble, and to use it, not just for theatre, but also for television and film,

and other media. So, I'm really curious about taking everything that I have with SITI and then tying it together with where that could also go with the next steps, with the next generations. (2023)

These company alumni and the ambassadors all see a need in the contemporary theatre to continue their work after and beyond SITI. They see live theatre as under threat. Stricklen captures the ongoing need for ensemble:

There are big questions with where technology is heading and where the audiences are. We've been seeing theatres cutting back, cutting staff as of late. It's this really scary time. So, in terms of ensemble, you would hope that this maybe will bring people even closer together to want to create an ensemble of theatre artists, of live flesh bodies in space, wanting to create. So that's a huge hope. I think as we continue to think about where this all is heading we need for folks to try to find each other and be able to communicate or connect. (2023)

Manousos is also concerned about the current state of the theatre. Theatres are closing and audiences are dwindling:

The physical energy, the insurmountable energy that performers can put out into the space onstage is the thing that I want more theatres to think about, that I want more companies and artists to think about. And that comes from primarily the Suzuki Method and this way of thinking about full body performance and full body connectivity. I think there's something rooted in that, that allows this art form to be different from other art forms. (2023)

Bogart sees an ongoing need to include the audience:

There's something that SITI worked on a lot and that has borne a great deal of fruit and this is the sacredness of the relationship between the audience and the actor. And that's something that's obsessed me for a very long time. A change that I hope might continue forward during the next 10 years is the development of the relationship of the audience and the actor in the room. What does it mean and how far can you go exploring what that means? And I don't mean just immersive work or anything like that. I'm really talking about how a play functions in relationship to the community. You know, it's two communities that come together, and how do they interact? And I would hope that in 10 years that exploration, which SITI spent a lot of time exploring, will continue and bear fruit. (2023)

SITI affiliated artists are clear on the exceptional impact that SITI's work has had but also fear that this may decrease over time. Salgado:

I feel like there's an internal debate between commerce and arts—are they mutually exclusive or can they coexist? I see it day by day being in a battle where commerce and art are challenged by time limitations, capital limitations, space limitations. And we strive for the art, but we are operating in a very capitalistic American way of making theatre. And if you forget, if you don't have these [SITI] tools, you end up doing the same crap all the time. Sorry for my English. But if you have this material in your brain or in your soul, this gets balanced. And that is my hope for the future of theatre, that we never forget the value of art. (2023)

Manousos shares his hope that

similar to me, artists will take up this moment of evolution and really think about their practice and choose to work as artists with the same tenacity and ambition that SITI Company led with. And I hope everyone evolves over the next 10 years in their chapters, their corners of the world, to work with those principles. (2023)



Figure 24. SITI Company toasting their final performance of *A Radio Christmas Carol*, Fisher Center at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, 2022. (Photo by Chris Kayden; courtesy of SITI Company)

But the question remains: can SITI's effort to change the landscape succeed? Darron West realistically observes:

There are probably some things which SITI could have left as an inheritance, that the industry may not be any more ready for now than it was—maybe even less ready for it now than it even was 30 years ago. (2023)

In considering SITI's legacy, Stephen Duff Webber echoes Ingulsrud and many of his colleagues:

It has to do with the ephemerality of theatre. You have to let it go. When we ended, it was sort of like, did I just have a dream that was 30 years long and now I'm awake? It's ephemeral. It's just like dust in the air. It dissipates and it's gone. It's not like a sculpture or a painting or a book or a novel. I hope we were helpful. We tried to be helpful. We tried to help the theatre. (2023)

Bogart looks back and reflects:

I always wanted to make some impact, and certainly it didn't seem that I could make a big impact without working with the same people over a long period of time. There was a certain point when one does exercises like asking, "What do you want?" I said, "I want to change the DNA of American theatre." That's a big, what they call a BHAG—a big, hairy, audacious goal. (2023)

Did the SITI Company change the DNA of the American theatre? They certainly changed the DNA of thousands of artists and audiences. And while a stone dropped in the water does not change the water it disturbs, the ripples continue to fan out.

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