

Application of Anne Bogart's *Viewpoints*

The acting technique I chose to research and apply to my character in *The Foreigner* was the Viewpoints Technique constructed Anne Bogart. This is something that I had never researched before and have yet to learn at Western Michigan. This work was originally meant for dancers but Ms. Bogart translated it into the theatre. Having said that, one can tell that choreography definitely influenced the technique on the stage. Gesturing, tempo, rhythm, and other elements are vital to this process. Usually, viewpoints are done with the ensemble. But since the assignment was only for me, I faced the challenge of applying the acting technique on my own.

Viewpoints have a great deal of components. Thus, I applied a few parts to my work as the character of Catherine. One of the steps I used was "Source Work". In Source Work, you immerse yourself in the culture of the time period the play is in. It is almost like research, but it is different at the same time. In this work, you look at television shows, popular music, fashion, and things of that nature. This was one of my favorite things to do to prepare for rehearsal. The play takes place in the year of 1984. Thus, I searched the top forty hits on the Billboard Charts in that year. Then I would listen to those songs before rehearsal would start. Since the eighties are one of my favorite decades, this was an easy routine for me to get used to. It really made me feel like I was transported back to that time. Despite that fact we had no real set or real costumes, listening to the music helped me reach that place and made it feel real.

Another important element of Viewpoints is the step of "Behavioral Gesturing". This is a gesture one can associate with their specific character. Since my character was

an ex-debutante, I began to search for a gesture to associate with a debutante. I watched a great deal of videos of debutantes at their debutante balls and I noticed their perfect posture. Thus, I used their posture and smiling faces as my gesture that I associated with them. Once I had my specific gesture, I took it a step further. In my apartment, I would turn on classical music and behave as a debutante for at least thirty minutes to an hour. I would do my common, household chores as a debutante as a ball. I kept my face alive, posture upright, and walk gracefully at all times. When I was going around my apartment, I always kept in the mindset of achieving the tasks the way a debutante would. I remember one point I was about to put on Chap Stick. Staying in the mental state of a debutante, I only wrapped two finger around the lip balm, pressed it lightly against my lips, and applied it very gracefully and calmly. Doing this exercise really helped me get out of my thoughts and into my body. Often, I find myself getting trapped in my thoughts on stage rather than living in the moment. Thanks to behavioral gestures, I could be inspired by my surroundings rather than being fixed on my mental decisions.

Another element of Viewpoints is “Architecture”. This step deals with the environment in which the actor is working in and how it motivates their movement. Before rehearsals would begin, I would always walk around the space we were about to work in. Also, I added the posture of a debutante to the mix. I would walk around the space and furniture that we used for our set as a debutante. Moreover, we did the show in a black box setting with no scenery. Thus, it was also my job to imagine the lodge. I drew from my inspirational photos that I picked as I walked around the set. This made me reflect on my character and her relationship to the lodge. As I was walking, I would touch

the chairs, blocks, steps, and so on. My movement was inspired the space rather than my thoughts.

Furthermore, one of the aspects of Viewpoints that I focused on was “Spatial Relationship”. I would watch the actors and the space between them and the furniture. Additionally, I looked at the distance between the actors on stage from each other. Specifically, I looked at my spatial relationship based on my character. She really wanted David, her fiancé, to protect and comfort her at the beginning. Thus, her space with him was quite close a majority of the first act.

Combining all of these elements, I was really able to connect to the space and really live in the present. Walking around like my character inspired me to make choices that I would not have made otherwise. In retrospect, I remember the first night that I applied the Viewpoints method and it was a complete breakthrough for me as an actress. Instead of focusing on my mental choices, I focused on my character’s body. When I let my body lead, I made so many choices that I never would have made on my own. It was so strange and amazing at the same time. My professors had often told me that leading with the body will inspire decisions mentally, but I never believed them. Meanwhile, I found out that rehearsal that what my teachers were saying was completely true. Not only that, it freed me and allowed me to have more fun on stage. It was an amazing epiphany that I will never forget.

I am so grateful that I applied a different acting technique to this production. Honestly, the show would not have been as great as it was if I had not used the Viewpoints method. I discovered so many things about my character through my body.

Until this point, I could not say that I had ever done that in my acting career. Thus, this was an experience that really was a turning point for me as an actress.

Where Technique Can Be Found

Bogart, Anne and Tina Landau. *The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to*

*Viewpoints and Composition*. London: Nick Hern, 2014. Print.