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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Embodiment and becoming in secondary drama classrooms: The effects of neoliberal education cultures on performances of self and of drama texts

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Abstract

This article explores the effects of neoliberalism and performative educational cultures on secondary school drama classrooms. We consider the ways Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalysis and Butler's concept of gender performance enable us to chart the embodied, relational, spatial and affective energies that inhabit the often neoliberal and heterosexually striated space of the drama classroom. These post-humanist analyses are useful methodological tools for mapping the complexities of student becomings in the space context of the secondary school. We also show how Foucault's governmentality and Ball's theory of competitive performativity are particularly salient in the context of immanent capitalism that shapes the desires of its subjects. These frameworks, when combined, can be useful in critiquing neoliberal educational assemblages and in indicating emerging de-territorialisations and lines of flight in teachers and students.

Keywords

Becoming; Butler; Deleuze and Guattari; embodiment; Foucault; neoliberalism; performativity; secondary drama

A. Introduction

Studies exploring the connection between drama praxis and adolescent development have noted that the drama classroom can be a potent space for

students to negotiate issues of identity (Armenta, 2005; Burton, 2002; Cahill, 2002; Gallagher, 1998, 2000; Hatton, 2003). Previous studies, however, have not foregrounded the influence of neoliberalism on identity formation, where desires can be moulded by capital in ways beyond awareness (Roberts, 2012). This research examines issues of identity and becoming in this context, taking as its focus students' embodiment of characters from proscribed texts in the drama classroom.

Neoliberal times are characterised by a master narrative of economic rationalism. For example, the Australian Federal Education Minister states that "economic reform" will benefit students through "spreading opportunity and staying competitive" (Pyne, 2014). This study reveals how the so-called "opportunities" of neoliberalism impact the daily lives of teachers and students in schools in the 21st century. This article is one account of the ways in which the theories of Deleuze and Guattari (1994 [2012]; 1977, 1987), Butler (1990, 2004), Foucault (1977) and Ball (2003) are useful for researching becoming and performativity in contemporary times in senior secondary drama classrooms.

More specifically, informed by these contemporary theorists and employing a critical paradigm, we foreground the impact our "neoliberal culture of competitive performativity" (Ball, 2003, p. 219) has on moulding student becomings in the drama classroom. We explore student "becomings" rather than "identity" because "becoming" in a Deleuzoguattarian sense (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987 [2012], pp. 264-278) accounts for multiplicity and is a process, whereas "identity" can be seen as a fixed point.

To borrow from critical theory and yet remain within a post-humanist paradigm can be both problematic and illuminating. Specifically, we map how teachers and students responded to hegemonic constructions of masculinity and femininity in drama texts and the influences on them. In a similar way, Jessica Ringrose (2011) in exploring young women's engagements with social networking sites uses Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical concepts to "offer new theoretical tools for thinking about discursive subjectification but also for mapping complex desire-flows and micro movements through and against discursive/symbolic norms" (2011, p. 598).

The research is thus enriched through the utilisation of a critical, post-humanist methodology that examines wider issues of power in neoliberal times as well as notions of becoming. To do this, we interviewed 15 drama teachers and 13 of their 18 year-old-drama students in Western Australian government, independent/private and Catholic secondary schools (post high school graduation) about how teaching or participating in senior secondary drama embedded in our current neoliberal educational milieu shapes their becomings.

The first section of the article, by going beyond analysing discourse, explores how the concepts of Deleuze and Guattari can contribute to previous studies of embodiment and student becomings in the drama classroom. Second, we use the work of Foucault and Ball to shed light on neoliberal culture and how it influences student and teacher becomings. The third section utilises Butler's concept of gender to examine how a culture of performative neoliberalism impacts students' gendered subjectivities. The final section provides examples where these theories are used to map student becomings through their embodiment of characters from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as one illustration of praxis.

B. Embodiment and identity in drama education

Linking drama with identity work is not new. For example, van Wyk's (2014) study into grade 10 life skills shows that drama-in-education (DIE) activities can be a powerful tool to understand the ways in which gender and identity is constructed. Using theories from Friere, Foucault and Butler in the context of a Life Orientation curriculum, van Wyk sought to stimulate critical modes of thought; however, her research was not set in a drama class with a "theatre-based" curriculum. Other studies focusing on adolescent girls, in the context of the single-sex drama classroom, noted that drama activities help girls negotiate issues of identity, gender and culture (Armenta, 2005; Gallagher, 1998, 2000; Hatton, 2003, 2013, 2015). Research has also examined identity formation, gender norms and boys in drama and dance classrooms (Holdsworth, 2013; McDonald, 2007; Sallis, 2011, 2014).

Studies focusing on the drama classroom, in particular, have foregrounded the phenomenological subject and how drama education can assist social, emotional and intellectual development, yet political forces key to understanding context have remained in the background (Armenta, 2005; Hatton, 2003, 2013; McDonald, 2007). Understanding this context is important because of the potential influence of neoliberalism on identity formation of both teachers and students in drama classrooms. Consistent with the research, this study also highlighted that the drama classroom can have a potent impact on student becomings; however, this impact is moderated by neoliberal culture. For example, Elizabeth¹, an independent school student, noted that "Drama gave me the confidence to say, I'm going to change all my life plans." However, as a teacher at a Catholic school highlighted, that "impact" was also mediated by, "the pressure that I have to produce stuff. I have to be seen to be showing the school off" (Bianca, Catholic school teacher).

What Bianca's remarks highlight is that in 21st century capitalism, the "pressure" to "produce stuff" is not an outside power or force, but a desire that comes from within, where values and desires are shaped by neoliberal market-driven discourses and competitive ideologies.

This means that when analysing drama education, it is imperative that paradigms and methodologies are used that take into account the *embodied* nature of drama as a subject as it functions in schools today recognising how the body is used in sense-making.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987 [2012]) offer one set of helpful conceptual tools in this process of sense-making where they highlight the way that becoming, as a richer way of understanding identity work, is a process whereby bodies affect other bodies and are transformed within assemblages. Bresler (2004) also highlights the way that the body is central to the process of inquiry and constitutes a mode of knowing. For example, in drama education particularly, students do not merely study texts and characters; they embody or physicalize them in the space of the drama classroom when they take on roles to enact scenes. This meant that the effects of physicalizing dramatic characters can be significant to participants, with Marie noting the way that this can make "you feel more powerful" [independent school student]. In a similar way Cassie elaborated how this embodiment enables students to explore their own identity and possible becomings:

I guess in theatre you can be whomever you want. It's the same with identity, I can be the most opposite of me that I can to explore and see where it goes.

¹ Pseudonyms are used throughout for names of participants and schools.

And you use yourself as a basis to build characters upon and that helps you explore your own identity (Independent school student).

Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalysis² is also relevant to this research because it places emphasis on bodily experience, taking into account the embodied interrelationship and energies within and without assemblages (such as students, teachers and educational systems), rather than studying discourse as an end in itself. Considering this concept within the research also helps reveal that students and teachers are situated within systems, and these systems are both reflective of and embedded in a culture of competitive performativity and each of these are embodied experiences.

Theories influenced by the "posties" (Lather, 2012, p. 1021), such as schizoanalysis, are vital in moving us from the unified, conscious, rational subject of humanism to the post-humanist, split, desiring subject. This "post" move entails a shift from positivist epistemology to a focus on the limits of our knowing, with an emphasis on the "affective turn" (Clough & Halley, 2007). This affective turn is important when exploring student becomings in the secondary drama classroom because it takes into account the transcorporeal agency of (student and teacher) bodies understood not as "human", but as "non-human" or "more-than-human" — where discourse and matter are co-constitutive (Alaimo, 2010; Asberg, Koobak, & Johnson, 2011; Hird & Roberts, 2011; Lenz Taguchi, 2013). Educational research based on post-human materialist frameworks such as Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalysis is growing rapidly (Hickey-Moody, 2013; Lenz Taguchi, 2013; Renold & Ringrose, 2016; Ringrose, 2015) because they provide tools for mapping heterogeneity.

This research found that the transcorporeal embodiment of characters in drama has a profound impact on student becomings. Miranda, an independent school student, described her experience in this way:

Embodying characters in drama forces you to become them. There's a lot more understanding about how emotions work, how people work, their strengths and weaknesses and you kind of learn about yourself, like what makes you upset or angry and how you deal with that.

This intense study and physical embodiment of characters in drama can be a transformative *becoming* experience for students, an issue considered later through characters from *Macbeth*. On *becoming* Deleuze and Guattari state that "Becoming and multiplicity are the same thing" (1978 [2012], p. 275). In the context of drama linking these two developmental forces highlights the way that drama offers students this multiplicity of dimensions. For example, Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming, allows us to view teachers and students as multiplicities continually in the process of becoming — not as unified subjects. Thus we were able to see the intersection of the students, the embodied characters from plays, and the space of the drama classroom itself, as energies and affects that transform one another. As Cassie notes: "In drama you get very good at connecting to people. Being an actor you have to be able to know the layers" (independent school student).

It is also important to understand that this multiplicity occurs in particular spaces. Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between two kinds of spaces: smooth

² Deleuze and Guattari's (1987 [2012]) rhizomatic "schizoanalysis" is a concept created as an alternative to reductionist psychoanalysis, particularly Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex.

space and striated space. Smooth space is essentially heterogeneous, associated with free action (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987 [2012]), whereas striated space is homogenous and is associated with work and capitalism (1987 [2012], pp. 523-551). Linking space and embodiment is important and this research highlights that the intersection between smooth space and embodied characters can be life changing for some students, moulding their personalities and desires. For example, Cassie, a government school student notes: "I used to be the quiet kid in the corner but since doing drama I have become more confident. I don't care as much what everybody thinks".

Identity, however, is also influenced by choices students and teachers make about the roles and characters they embody in a dominant neoliberal educational climate of competitive performativity where exam marks and school rankings dominate (Ball, 2003, 2012; Thompson & Cook, 2014; Webb, 2014b). Performativity, for Ball (2003), relates to performance of "success" for the purposes of accountability. This is to be distinguished from Butler (1990, 2004) who uses the term to refer to the performance of one's gender to adhere to societal expectations of masculine/feminine. In the drama classroom, teachers reported the pressure they felt to produce good [exam] data in order to perform the role of "successful teacher" (Thompson and Cook 2014). As one government school teacher noted:

The year 12 exams are always my priority so the other aspects of drama might fall off a bit. That's my biggest pressure. I mean last year our results weren't good and I think it definitely changed the way I taught this year. (Ariel)

This pressure can be further understood through a consideration of neoliberal subjectivity.

C. Neoliberal subjectivities

Neoliberalism reconfigures "constituent subjectivities and their relationships" (Doherty 2015, p. 395) in the drama classroom by way of accountability practices, such as the publication of exam results. Defined as "an ideology and policy model that emphasizes the value of free market competition" (N. Smith, 2016, p. 1) neoliberalism is often used in academia as a "catch-all explanation for anything negative" (Rowlands & Rawolle, 2013, p. 261). Nonetheless, this "metapolicy" (Doherty, 2015) of individualism and personal responsibility is criticised for its transformation of citizens to "homo economicus" and the "domination of politics by capital" (Stern, 2012, p. 387). This lies in contrast to the humanist ideals drama teachers describe (Lambert, Wright, Currie, & Pascoe, 2015a).

Deleuze and Guattari also offer methodological tools for mapping "tactics of domination" because the post-human subject is beyond the human via assemblages and relational networks. As they elaborate:

Capitalism arises as a worldwide enterprise of subjectification by constituting an axiomatic of decoded flows. Social subjection, as the correlate of subjectification ... an entire system of machinic enslavement [where] human beings are constituent parts. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 505)

Under the metapolicy of neoliberalism, the fluid, post-subject is key to understanding how affective capacities and desires are modulated and manipulated.

If research is to question the common sense notions of neoliberalism and the taken-for-grantedness of global capitalism, then we must take into account the neoliberal post-human subject/consumer. In critical theory the post-human subject re-conceives the universal, autonomous, rational thinking human being. The post-human, for critical theorists, is not a singular, defined individual, but rather one who can “become” or embody different contradictory identities and understand the world from multiple, heterogeneous perspectives (Haraway, 1991). What drama offers in this regard is both a process for both exploration and expression (Lambert, Wright, Currie, & Pascoe, 2016). Moreover, in considering the pressures teachers feel, this post-subject is one who conforms to the shifting requirements of capitalism and blames herself for not matching up to its standards. As one teacher shared:

I feel the pressure that I have to produce stuff. I have to be seen to be showing the school off, but there’s nothing in my contract that says, ‘you have to do a musical, you have to do a play’. So they never say that to you but I think as you go on you get into this mindset that you kind of have to. That’s part of your job whether it’s written or not but it turns into pressure that’s not so much put on by them but pressure that you put onto yourself to do that. (Bianca, Catholic school teacher)

The data further revealed the ways in which teachers and students’ becomings are affected by dominant neoliberal performative ideologies where energies and attention is “directed”. Neoliberalism, for example, has been characterised as a form of “governmentality”, that is, the art of government and “the way in which the conduct of individuals or groups might be directed” (Foucault, 1977, p. 341).

The emergence of neoliberal states has been characterized by the transformation of the administrative state, one previously responsible for human well-being as well as for the economy, into state that now gives power to global corporations and installs apparatuses and knowledges through which people are *reconfigured as productive economic entrepreneurs of their own lives*’ (Davies & Bansel, 2007, pp. 248-249, emphasis added)

To govern, in this sense, “is to structure the possible field of action of others” (Foucault, 1977, p. 341). In terms of education, Ball (2003), drawing upon Foucault, has argued that our current education system operates on the “performativity” principle where the corporatisation and marketization of schools has changed the very nature of education itself. Thus schools, students and teachers embody and perform certain identities such as the “good school,” the “successful/good student” and the “hard working” teacher (Thompson, 2010a). As Tannock (2009) notes, the neoliberal rise of “meritocracy ... substitutes concern for full equality of social and economic outcomes” (p. 210). This performative culture was echoed in our research findings. Gemma, an independent school teacher, describes it this way:

And I must admit that I do get disheartened when I hear of other schools that drill towards the test. I think legislation is putting more and more pressure on the schools, like our school, to actually perform well. And I think in actual fact we could lose the essence and the joy of what we do.

Theorists who apply Foucault’s theory of governance to education stress that teachers are inevitably enmeshed in a matrix of power relations and face continued

pressure to submit to prevailing hegemonies (Ball, 1994, 2012; Besley & Peters, 2008; Peters, 2015). This requires what Foucault (1977) would describe as docile and governable, normalised individuals (or bodies) who are controlled by constant surveillance (panopticism), testing and ranking in schools:

The power relations, not above but inside the very texture of the multiplicity, as discreetly as possible, as well articulated on the other functions of these multiplicities and also in the least expensive way possible: to this correspond anonymous instruments of power, coextensive with the multiplicity that they regiment, such as hierarchical surveillance, continuous registration, perpetual assessment and classification. (1977, p. 220)

This constant surveillance even extends to the architecture of school buildings. As Denise, a government school teacher noted: “Our school has glass walls. You can see into every classroom. The college is quite open. There are no little dark dingy spots. The kids can’t hide ... no one can hide at Northside College”. This is one manifestation of hypersurveillance.

Corporate discourses of performance, competition and accountability contribute to the hyper-surveillance of teachers. Teachers are sensitive to this, as Liz, a drama teacher in one interview cautioned herself: “I’ve got to be careful what I say here.” This surveillance focuses on quantifiable outcomes: “Our school has even employed people to analyse our [exam] results for us and tell us how we can make them better” (Tom, government school teacher). Moreover, a teacher’s value is reduced to the narrow lens of their students’ success in standardised tests (Fitzgerald & Rainnie, 2011). As one teacher in the study stated, “I essentially teach to the exams... my course is judged *entirely* on exam scores” (Tom). Capitalism’s power lies in its capacity to break each workplace down into quantifiable measurable assets such as exam data.

Lather notes, “Neoliberalism LOVES quantitative reductionism” (2012, p. 1023). From a critical paradigm, the majority of schools in this research displayed what appears to be an obsession with data, or what Paulos (2010) labels “metric mania” (p. 3). Thus the only reliable “measure of quality” is statistical data such as test results. For example, one principal (Mick, government school principal) rejected any data that was not easily quantifiable as “fluffy stuff”. He then went on to say, “Don’t give me the fluffy stuff about what’s happening in the classroom. The only thing that counts is data, numbers. I want the facts”. In this regard, “evidence” of good teaching is narrowly defined.

According to Lawn (2011), over the last decade new powerful data-gathering technologies have “enabled a new way of governing education through performance data” (p. 277). He notes data are central to modern governance because: “Without data there can be no comparisons of performance or close management of production ... Data are a way of categorising and governing groups and individuals to make them known and governable” (Lawn 2011, p. 278). It is this performative pressure these teachers respond to.

The focus on data analysis as a way of measuring teacher “success” was also experienced in the “faith based” Catholic sector, even though they purport to approach education “with a focus on the development of the whole person” (Catholic Education Western Australia, 2015, p. 1):

We do get hauled over the coals if our stats don't ... I mean I spent a lot of time at the start of this year really pulling apart those stats. I would like to teach the kids how to act but we don't have time. It's so assessment and exam-centred.
(Claire, Catholic school teacher)

The pressures of performance and surveillance means that many Australian teachers make *choices* about pedagogy and praxis in a zeitgeist of capitalist neoliberalism making education a commodity where data reigns supreme (Ball, 2012; Beder et al., 2009; Fitzgerald & Rainnie, 2011; Keddie et al., 2011; Webb, 2011). In this research more particularly, teachers report enormous pressure to perform and therefore choices about pedagogy, such as which plays to study, are made on the basis of getting better marks in exams (Bacon, 2015; Connell, 2013a; Thompson & Cook, 2014). For example, Ariel felt that her students did poorly in exams when they studied and performed a contemporary pro-feminist text. Her solution to the problem was to revert to "the classics": "So I think we will change the play next year to *Macbeth*. I know that the classics don't have very many female roles but I want to just get them all on stage".

However, it is worth noting that this "choice" is made in a context where 60% of Ariel's class is female and most characters in *Macbeth* are male. Considering context, and pressures to perform, how do these choices affect students' gendered performances?

D. Gendered subjectivities

Butler's theory of discursive re-signification emphasizes "the contingent and discursive nature of all identities" (Randall, 2010, p. 7) and the social construction of gendered subjectivities. This is important because her concept of gender performance is useful for understanding the multiple and contradictory discourses that shape teachers and students in contemporary times, challenging the pre-existing and seemingly "common sense" order of things and opening up a multitude of possibilities. Building on Foucault's post-structural discourse analysis, Butler argues that subjectivity is discursively constituted through a "heterosexual matrix" of norms that constrains "what we can be" (2004, p. 57). The psychosocial dimensions of Butler's theories have been usefully elaborated by educationalists such as Davies (2006), Renold (2013), Youdell (2010) and Ringrose (2013). They utilize Butler's concepts in their exploration of the discursive organization of gendered identity and power relations in ambiguous and contradictory discourses of girlhood. Butler's theories offer possibilities of identity transformation through discursive agency and performative acts:

If gender is a kind of doing, an incessant activity performed, in part, without one's knowing and without one's willing, it is not for that reason automatic or mechanical. On the contrary, it is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint. (Butler, 2004, p. 4)

In this research, participants embodied a number of gendered identities. For example, Zac (independent school student) identified himself as openly "gay" in the drama classroom; however, "the moment drama finished I had to quickly switch on my masculinity again. Not that apparently I was very good at it. But I felt like I could

be myself and not be judged for it". Cassie (independent school student) identified herself as:

the black sheep in my household. I identified with Rose [a character from *Cloudstreet*, (Monjo & Enright, 1999) quite a bit as the strong girl who was being resilient and was trying to break out of where she was. I do performing and everyone else does engineering or chemistry.

Each of these identities was performed successfully, or unsuccessfully in relation to other identities and forces. For example, Zac felt he was unsuccessful in performing in his words "masculinity", and Cassie defined herself as a "strong girl" — in relation to others.

The self is understood and performed differently depending upon the discursive environment (Butler, 2004; Francis, 2002) as we can see with Zac performing masculinity in the playground, but his gay identity in the drama classroom. In this research we worked with theorisations that "the subject" is constructed through discourse and is essentially non-unitary, embodied, and is both more and less than "essentially rational" (Davies, 2006, 2012; Hey, 2006; Vick & Martinez, 2011). Thus, in this research gender is viewed as a social construct and not an essentialist one such as: women are essentially emotional and men are essentially rational.

Combining Deleuze and Guattari's concepts with Butler's analysis opens up new ways of conceiving subjectivity (Bacon, 2015). This composite, for example, leads to new approaches to resisting hegemonic constructions of identity in the current neoliberal educational assemblage. In relation to this research, using Butler's discursive and performative understanding of gender with Deleuze and Guattari's post-humanist theories of embodiment, materiality and affect foregrounds the non-human and often non-intentional nature of power relations between bodies and objects or texts in the drama classroom.

Utilising pluralistic approaches to theory gives rise to inevitable tensions. Critical pedagogy continues earlier traditions emancipatory pedagogies, whose roots lie in modernist thinking (Bowers, 1993). Post-humanism challenges modernist notions of progress, rationality and subjectivity (Braidotti, 2013). Yet post-humanism and critical theory are both movements that are useful "in our efforts to come to terms with dominant assumptions about education" (Bell & Russell, 2000a, pp. 188-189). Thompson and Harbaugh (2012) argue that there is a need to mix paradigms because this creates a "bricolage". Given their different foci, both critical theory and post-humanism stand to enrich research projects by offering different insights into the central phenomenon. When mapping student and teacher becomings in the drama classroom in contemporary times, it is critical that "Qualitative forms of inquiry demand that theory (i.e., theoretical frameworks) be used with imagination and flexibility" (Anfara & Mertz, 2006a, p. 195).

Schizoanalysis, when combined with critical theory, offers significant resources for thinking that is "post-signification" and that is useful for mapping tactics of neoliberal performative domination and for understanding how energetic forces affect break off from normative regimes in the drama classroom. Rather than being locked in a "paranoid" reading of the negative affects of neoliberalism (Sedgwick, 2003), the positive task of schizoanalysis consists of discovering in a subject the nature, the formation, or the functioning of [their] desiring-machines, that is, the unconscious and the partial objects that constitute it (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p.

322). As Savat and Thompson (2015) note, “Schizoanalysis, both as a method and process, is about the ongoing and continual process of questioning and destroying beliefs and values, that is reterritoralisations, as well as about the ongoing and continual process of understanding how we produced those particular beliefs and values in the first place” (p. 283).

The theories of Butler, Deleuze and Guattari offer alternative but reconcilable frameworks and vocabularies for understanding subjectivity, power and the possibility to disrupt norms in the drama classroom. Three students, Grace, Marie and Elizabeth, converse about how embodying characters in drama enabled them to deterritorialise from gender norms:

Grace: Drama gives you that sense of you can get away with a little bit more than what you usually can.

Marie: My monologue — I was like Portia from *Julius Caesar*. You feel powerful because you’re like, “I’m not like this, but I can be like this.”

Grace: That was the same with my monologue. I played Roxy from *Chicago* and I am definitely not the type of promiscuous girl and I got to play around with that.

Elizabeth: I was Tamora from *Titus Andronicus* and performing that and having someone go, “Oh my God you are scary.” I was never told that before.

The embodiment of characters in drama enabled these students to explore multiple possible selves. Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of deterritorialisation and lines of flight were helpful tools to illuminate the data. “Deterritorialisation” refers to the process of breaking free momentarily from the normative strata and a “line of flight” refers to a more “absolute” break (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987 [2012], p. 559) What these concepts allowed us to do is view drama as a class where students felt safe to deterritorialise from cultural norms and perform multiple and often dangerous identities. Safe space is critical if drama is to provide multiple possibilities.

I think the drama space is a lot safer. I think it’s safer in terms of students expressing themselves; it’s much freer. I often have kids coming in and saying... [whispers] I’ve got to be careful what I say, but ... “Oh, I just had maths [sigh]. At least I can think in this class... there’s room to be creative, there’s room to breathe; there’s room to work in a different way.” (Liz, Christian school teacher)

Similarly, Zac, discussed earlier, added his perspective.

I’m gay so obviously having to act I always acted differently in drama because I felt like out in the schoolyard I’d get bashed. And it was an actual genuine fear. When I stepped into the theatre, like I could finally be who I truly was. (Zac, independent school student)

All of the drama teachers interviewed agreed that drama was a safe place for deterritorialisation of gender norms, particularly for boys to be less macho and girls to be less girly. Claire and Kate, two Catholic school drama teachers, add:

It does. A lot of the girly stuff is habit, and social survival, you know when they fiddle with their hair or roll up their skirt ... that’s a social conditioning thing. [In drama] they can break down that wall and stop worrying about what people

think about them, start to play characters and find a truer version of themselves. (Claire)

Kate amplifies this theme.

Drama attracts the kids who may be questioning their sexuality or are more in touch with their emotions, which as a boy, is not so acceptable in our society. They get an opportunity to step into those roles. 'Oh I'm role-playing, I'm playing somebody else' so it's safe to try being the person that they feel like they have inside. They get to express themselves in a way that they're not comfortable doing in the playground. (Kate)

Unfortunately, in the neoconservative environment of the independent Christian school, this freedom appeared to be limited to the drama space: "That's what I didn't like about St Albans because the moment drama finished, I had to quickly switch on my masculinity again" (Zac). Massumi (2005) suggests that an imagined threat in the future causes embodied fear in the present (from the virtual to the actual). Therefore, when analysing affect (such as Zac's fear), one's methodology must take into account affect and its immanent dynamism. Massumi states there is, "a kind of simultaneity between the quasi-cause and its effect, even though they belong to different times" (2005, p. 36). Affects are embodied intensities resulting from encounters between bodies in various cultural contexts or material conditions/assemblages. For example, Zac's fear of being bashed affected the performance of his gender in the schoolyard of the Christian school, whereas the smooth space of the drama classroom enabled him to embody his "true" self.

E. Performativity in context

To better understand the role that text, character and space can play on young people's becomings it is important to examine the cultural contexts or material assemblages. The teachers and students interviewed came from government, independent and Catholic education systems from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds in the metropolitan area of Perth, Western Australia. The performative pressures of neoliberalism are visible in different ways depending on context. For example, Alecia's government school is one of the poorest in Perth's outer suburbs with 73% of her school's students coming from the bottom 50% of the state's Index for Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA³). As a drama teacher, Alecia says that one of the biggest struggles she faces is a student's home life: "Because of the demographic of the school my kids are coming from a place where even the best

³ The *Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage* (ICSEA) is a scale of socio-educational advantage for each Australian school. Each school's ICSEA value appears on the *School profile* page on the *My School* website. A table presents the distribution of students across four socio-educational advantage quarters representing a scale of relative disadvantage ('bottom quarter') through to relative advantage ('top quarter') (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2014, pp. 1-2)

of our kids is struggling. The parents value education in one breath but their home lives are far more important.”

Roberts (2012) notes that capitalist processes of “increased work intensification” are associated with neoliberal ideology and practices (p. 42). Alecia adjusts her pedagogy and offers full tutoring four days a week in her own time to attempt to make up for students’ underprivileged backgrounds and compete in the externally published exams:

Because a lot of kids flopped badly last year ... quite frankly I’m looking at the exams, what do they have to do to be able to do them? Never mind what other useful things are good for drama. So unfortunately, I am ditching parts of the course that are good. (Alecia, government school drama teacher)

Conversely, Gemma’s wealthy independent school on the riverfront has only 1% from the bottom ICSEA quartile, and 84% of students from the top quartile. Her students easily soar above state averages in published exams; however, the performative pressure on teachers in elite schools is just as strong as in struggling schools, as Gemma notes:

There’s quite a focus on exam results. Yeah, there’s a *lot* of pressure because they are published in such an open way, particularly in the high profile independent sector. You know, parents will pick their school based on results.

Somewhere in the middle, Bianca’s Catholic school — where she felt compelled to “produce stuff” and “show off the school” — in an ocean side suburb has 8% of students from the lowest ICSEA quartile and 30% from the highest, with the majority of students residing in the centre. Bianca reported that the pressure to perform via externally assessed exams and impressive school productions was felt across sectors and socio-economic divides. Teachers reported that this manifested in various ways such as: “looking at the data analysis at the beginning of every year, how we went, where we fall” (Helen, independent school teacher); “working really hard” (Alecia, government school teacher); getting the “right marks” (Andre, government school teacher); and to generally “be successful” (Tom, government school teacher).

The private sector influence (private companies and consultants with data-based and improvement contracts) on the public sector has enabled the growth of an “audit society” with an emphasis on formal measurable standards and the measurement of performance (Lapsley, 2009). Governing has become a process of data production and analysis and “the greater the accumulation of numerical data, the more powerful the process of governing” (Lawn, 2011, p. 279). In this study teachers in the poorer schools, in particular, felt under the surveillance of line managers and the Department of Education (DET) who would go over their statistics with “a fine tooth comb” (Andre, government school teacher). For example, Denise a government school drama teacher from a lower-middle ICSEA government school stated:

There’s a lot of competition. My school is based on a business model rather than a traditional school in almost every way. So we have a lot of reliance on results and we have a huge *huge* reliance on teacher responsibility for those results. We are asked to explain poor exam results as a part of our grades

analysis at the beginning of the year. All teachers go into the auditorium and all the results for all subjects are flashed up on the screen and they are ranked. (Denise, government school teacher)

These descriptors Denise uses: “competition”, “business model”, “results”, “success” and “ranking” are all terms one would expect to find in the corporate sector; however, their use sheds light on the pervasive influence of immanent capitalism on educational assemblages. Managerial discourses have saturated educational assemblages from all socio-economic strata. For example, Gemma, the elite private school teacher noted:

Look, they're [parents] paying \$20,000 plus here and some of them want to get their money's worth. So yeah, we are VERY accountable to the parents... they've paid their money and they want you to sort of parent them as well.

The competitive culture of neoliberal performativity forces schools to compete for students — “homo economicus” — by marketising their product (Stern, 2012). Wealthy schools, such as Gemma's, built state of the art theatres, hired professional actors, directors and technical crews to put on impressive performances as a “great selling tool for the school” (Jo, independent school teacher). Jo's music department spent “over \$20,000 on musicians” for their school musical but would not let the students play because, “that would sound terrible” (Jo, independent school teacher). Deleuze and Guattari highlight that under the schizoid logics of capitalism the branding of a product (such as a school) is more important than the product itself.

Capitalism institutes or restores all sorts of residual and artificial, imaginary, or symbolic territorialities, thereby attempting, as best it can, to recode, to rechannel persons who have been defined in terms of abstract quantities ... That is what makes the ideology of capitalism ‘a motley painting of everything that has ever been believed’. The real is not impossible; it is simply more and more artificial. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972, p. 34)

Elite schools appear to be “producing” students who are capable of performing in professional productions, while in actuality they have contracted industry professionals. Teachers in poorer government or Catholic schools talked about working hard to improve the “school image” (Kate, government school teacher), the importance of having a “good reputation” (Helen, government school teacher), and being a “good school” (Claire, Catholic school teacher). Students likewise talked about the pressure to “work hard” (Elizabeth, independent school student), equating hard “work” with lengthy assignments: “People don't understand how much *work*... my assignments ended up being 20 pages” (Grace, independent school student). What each of these key ideas does is raise the spectre of a culture of performativity.

F. Macbeth, embodiment and becoming

The assemblage of bodies, schools and immanent capitalism are enabling and constraining forces on student becomings in the drama classroom, and these will be made explicit through *Macbeth* as an example. The students and teachers in this study embodied the “successful student”; the “hard working teacher” and the

“good school” as well as they embodied the characters proscribed for them in set texts such as *Macbeth*. In this sense, students and teachers each performed a multitude of characters that were shaped consciously and unconsciously by the desire to conform to (and occasionally rebel against) neoliberal ideologies and systems.

Even though many drama teachers in Western Australia stick to the “classics”, they still find creative ways to produce difference rather than sameness. Both teachers and students pushed the boundaries in schools. Kofoed and Ringrose (2012) state that a “Butlerian-Deleuzian-Guattarian” framework “helps us to understand affect as bound in, but not limited to, discursive signification” that enables researchers to, “understand both fixity and becoming” in young people’s confrontations with power (p. 5). Combining Foucault with Butler, Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts allowed us to follow the arborescent and rhizomatic (multitudinous and interconnecting) becomings of students when interpreting texts and performing characters in drama classrooms. These concepts combined enable us to think about how affect flows in the current neoliberal education climate in a way that moves us beyond analysis of discourse (Lambert, Wright, Pascoe, & Currie, 2015). Canonical texts such as *Macbeth* are sometimes transgressed and potentially disrupted by teachers and students, how they embody the roles and how they manoeuvre in the neoliberal assemblage of the secondary school. As one student described her awareness that came through an exploration of the character of Lady Macbeth:

I was Lady Macbeth ... playing such a strong character was much more fun. That’s why I was always drawn to her. How could someone have that much power in an age when like women had nothing? That annoys me, when they make the men so much more powerful and the women seem so pathetic. But that’s what it’s like in real life. (Elizabeth, independent school student)

It is easy to presume from a critical positionality that the characters the research participants embodied such as Lady Macbeth (one of the characters most frequently written on in the year 12 drama exams in Western Australia) would be disempowering for young female students because they reify hierarchical and heteronormative power relations. However, female participants who studied and embodied the character of Lady Macbeth felt empowered. These students drew strength from such characters in a way that could be mapped as affective flows that mediated lines of flight — breaks from homogeneity — in their becoming women. Some students reflected on their own experiences in these ways:

I was drawn to Lady Macbeth and the witches... Yeah, I think it was the power. It was a different character to what we usually get to play. (Grace, independent school student)

Marie compared the experience of working with a more contemporary Australian play (that was as heteronormative):

I did *Away* (Gow, 1986) in year 11 and it was like, ‘I love you. I love you too.’ And when we were like the witches [from *Macbeth*] it was like, ‘You’re going to be king.’ You feel powerful because you’re like, ‘I’m not like this but I can be like this.’ (Marie, independent school student)

Utilising Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of difference as a positive force of transformation to follow the rhizomatic becomings of young women's affective relationships with their texts/characters enabled us to map how affects were manoeuvred and possibly disrupted by young people in their interpretations of the plays they were required to study in drama: "We made the witches the more powerful ones over the men. It was interesting making women more powerful in a Shakespearean play" (Elizabeth, independent school student). In a similar vein Marie noted, "It was the witches who had control over the Shakespearean world" (independent school student).

Yet one cannot forget that these young women are surrounded by the same hegemonic normative constructions of identity in both dramatic texts and in school assemblages as the following conversation between two students shows:

Marie: I found that in most plays ... the women can be powerful but like in Macbeth, Lady Macbeth dies. You're like, 'Okay.' It's always the men in the end who are the most powerful.

Elizabeth: Yeah, I'm not a huge feminist. I've come to accept the fact that most of these plays are male dominated and I just love them the way they are.

Marie and Elizabeth's deterritorialisations, "We made the witches more powerful over the men"/"witches had control" were accompanied by reterritorialisations — "men in the end who are the most powerful"/"I've come to accept ... male dominated". As Deleuze and Guattari note, "We can see clearly here how smooth space subsists, but only to give rise to the striated" (1987, p. 546). Drama is simultaneously an enabling and constraining space for adolescent becomings where lines of flight/ deterritorialisations are quickly recaptured/ reterritorialised by wider heteronormative powers: "Never believe that a smooth space will suffice to save us" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 500).

G. Conclusion

The drama classroom can be a smooth space for facilitating multiple becomings, including becomings that deterritorialise from heteronormative culture. Students in their final year of high school find the embodiment of a variety of characters and roles a powerfully transformative experience at a critical time in their adolescence. However, this space can be striated and reterritorialised through the pervasive influence of performative neoliberalism that requires assemblages to perform "good school" in order to remain competitive in the education "market". Finding themselves under constant surveillance, drama teachers often revert to teaching "the classics" in the hope that this will improve students' grades. This safe path is a limiting force on both pedagogy and praxis. Yet, as the interview data shows, teachers and students find lines of flight from capitalist governmentality.

Insights gleaned from post-humanist and critical theorists such as Butler, Deleuze, Guattari, Foucault and Ball can be useful to map the complex terrain teachers and students find themselves traversing in the 21st century drama classroom. It is these frameworks, for example, that help us to think through the classroom dynamics and practices to see how neoliberalism impacts schooling practices and, in particular, the becomings of students and teachers in these settings. We considered how research can be enriched by critical analysis and

Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalysis because these theories are able to chart the embodied, relational, spatial and affective energies that inhabit the drama classroom in the context of immanent capitalism. Combing these theories and frameworks in a pluralistic way allows a critique of neoliberal educational assemblages to emerge as well as revealing the emerging de-territorialisations and lines of flight in teachers and students. As one student, sharing her experiences, insightfully sums up:

High school just teaches you how to do tests. Drama teaches you life. (Marie, independent school student)

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