

## EMPATHY AND REDEMPTION IN THEATRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE: TOWARDS AN EPISTEMIC THEORY OF EMPATHETIC IMAGINATION

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### Abstract

This paper comprises two inter-related parts. In the first section I discuss the development of the empathetic imagination in young people through the medium of drama. Referring to a selection of plays I have written, directed and published as e-books for theatre in education projects, I will examine how the narrative situation of such theatre-work, both facilitates and invokes the meaning structures through which a young person's empathetic imagination can be epistemically and ethically schooled. Pre-given identity formations and socially endorsed 'ways of seeing' dictate the untutored imaginations of young people. This paper will argue for the value of generating an epistemically informed, empathetic imagination, as an ideal towards which theatre for young people should strive especially when its form is shaped into contemporary adaptations of the Shakespearean text or popular entertainment, which attract significant numbers of young viewers. The second section of the paper interrogates the design and representation decisions taken for an adaptation of Macbeth which imported Asian performance and visual arts traditions in an attempt to offer both student performers and audiences a thought-provoking perspective on traditional western interpretations of the play. Central to such an undertaking, I contend, is the ethical reconstruction through dramatic presentations of regimes of value reception. Cognitive respect for the young mind, together with a commitment to supporting the emerging autonomous judgement of the young viewer or performer requires the framing of the dramatic treatment in such a way as to present stage characters whose vulnerabilities resist marginalization through uninformed manoeuvres of exclusion. By questioning unreflexive, encultured identity formations, theatre for young people, I suggest, can enlarge the empathetic reach of the 'youthful imagination' and provide a justifiable 'way of knowing'. Ideologically undistorted dramatized encounters - joyous and sad by turns - invite young actors and audiences to embrace differences with enlightened generosity.

Keywords: Empathy, Theatre, Education, Shakespeare, Macbeth

### Abstrak

*Tulisan ini mengandung dua bagian yang berkaitan. Di bagian pertama, saya membicarakan tentang perkembangan imajinasi empati dalam kalangan golongan muda melalui medium*

drama. Merujuk kepada pilihan pementasan yang telah ditulis, diarah dan diterbitkan oleh saya di dalam e-buku untuk projek-projek teater dalam pendidikan, saya akan mengkaji bagaimana situasi naratif di dalam pembikinan sesuatu teater boleh membantu dan mencetuskan maksud struktur melalui imaginasi empati seorang anak muda yang dididik secara kognitif dan beretika. Ini kerana pembentukan identiti awal dan sokongan sosial tentang 'cara melihat' perancangan imaginasi tidak diketengahkan kepada golongan muda. Tulisan ini juga akan membahaskan nilai pembentukan pengetahuan kognitif dan imaginatif yang unggul sebagai satu situasi yang ideal dan arah tuju yang harus dicapai, oleh golongan muda, terutamanya apabila penulisan adaptasi kontemporari teks Shakespeare atau hiburan popular di mana ia menarik perhatian sebilangan besar penonton golongan muda.

Bahagian kedua pula, akan menumpukan kajian tentang reka bentuk dan persembahan naskhah Macbeth yang mengadaptasi bentuk-bentuk pementasan seni visual Asia dalam usaha untuk menawarkan kepada pelajar dan pelakon satu perspektif pemikiran terhadap interpretasi tradisional barat dalam pementasan. Kepentingan kajian ini sepertimana yang saya tegaskan, adalah pembentukan semula secara beretika persembahan dramatik tentang penerimaan nilai yang baru. Penghormatan kognitif kepada pemikiran golongan muda, bersama-sama komitmen untuk menyokong kebangkitan penilaian autonomi penonton dari golongan muda dan pengkarya, memerlukan satu rangka tindakan dramatik dalam cara mempersembahkan karakter di pentas, di mana kelemahan karakter akan menentang peminggiran melalui gerakan berkemahiran pengecualian yang spontan. Dengan mempersoalkan pembentukan identiti budaya yang tidak reflesif, saya mencadangkan teater untuk golongan muda, dapat diperluaskan jangkauan empati 'imaginasi golongan muda' dan menyediakan kaedah pengetahuan yang sewajarnya. Pertembungan ideologi dramatis – gembira dan duka silih berganti – mengajak ramai pelakon muda dan penonton untuk merasai perbezaan yang liberal.

*Kata kunci: Empati, Teater, Pendidikan, Shakespeare, Macbeth.*

## **EMPATHY AND REDEMPTION IN THEATRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE: TOWARDS AN EPISTEMIC THEORY OF EMPATHETIC IMAGINATION**

The spectacle begins, the tragic hero appears, the public establishes a kind of empathy with him.

The action starts. Surprisingly the hero shows the flaw in his behaviour, a hamartia; and even more surprising, one learns that it is by virtue of this same hamartia that the hero has come to his present state of happiness.

Through empathy the same hamartia that the spectator may possess is stimulated, developed, activated.

(Augusto Boal, 2000, p. 36)

## Part 1: Theorising the ‘dramatic situation’

In this paper I shall discuss the development of the empathetic imagination in young people through the medium of drama. Referring to a selection of plays I have written, adapted and directed, I will examine how the narrative situation of theatre of this kind, both facilitates and invokes the meaning structures through which a young person’s empathetic imagination can be epistemically and ethically schooled. The aim of theatre for young people, if it is to fulfill an emancipatory function, is to develop an epistemically and morally informed empathetic imagination. Pre-given identity formations and socially endorsed “ways of seeing” control the untutored imaginations of young people. The playwright of theatre for young people needs to commit to a deep cognitive respect for the young mind (as articulated by the great drama theorist, Stanislavski<sup>1</sup>) together with a commitment to support the emerging autonomous judgement of the young viewer which requires the framing of the dramatic treatment in such a way as to confront the young viewer with characters whose vulnerabilities resist marginalization through uninformed, and often culturally affirmed, manoeuvres of exclusion. By deconstructing unreflexive identity formations, theatre for young people, I suggest, can enlarge the empathetic reach of the youthful imagination beyond its initial (sometimes limited) exploratory function into an epistemic way of gaining sympathetic access to the interiority of others. This leads, if well executed, to the young performer and/or audience gaining entry into an ever-widening, potentially more inclusive, community.

Popular entertainment that attracts significant numbers of young viewers (I have over 2000 primary school children attending my children’s theatre productions at Murdoch University in Perth, Western Australia each year) should recognize the value of generating such an epistemically and ethically informed empathetic imagination as an ideal. Central to such an undertaking, I contend, is the ethical reconfiguration – through the dramatic realisation of the (re)presented world of the play – of regimes of value reception. By deconstructing unreflexive identity formations, theatre for young people, I suggest, can enlarge the empathetic reach of the youthful imagination beyond its initial enculturation into a deepening way of knowing through an unconditioned, dramatized encounter – joyous and sad by turns – that invites both young actors and young audiences to embrace differences sympathetically.

Arnold’s exploration of narratives and their function in our inner world is situated within the fields of thinking and feeling that characterize empathetic imagination. She

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<sup>1</sup> When asked, once, how to play for children, Stanislavski replied: “The same as for adults, only better”. Original source unknown. Cited on :[creatingtheatre.com/?page\\_id=65](http://creatingtheatre.com/?page_id=65)

traces our imagined worlds, invites engagement and encourages identification with the "... thoughts, feelings, values and views of narrators" (2005, pp. 63-67). These imaginative encounters constitute, she argues, "... a foundation for an empathetic approach to experience", especially as they are experienced by the young viewer within a "safe world" and have a socially guaranteed, conventionally governed "happy ending". She quotes Howard Gardner:

One might say that such a narrative, marshals 'existential intelligence' – the capacity to address issues of being and meaning about which individuals care most profoundly. Individuals are prompted to change when they identify with an inspirational figure and an inspirational message; for human beings, compelling narratives are more likely to stimulate such identification.

(Gardner, 1997, p. 108: in Arnold, p. 64)

Martha Nussbaum (1997, pp. 9-11, also quoted in Arnold) advances three "capacities" as crucial to the cultivation of humanity:

First is the capacity for critical examination of oneself and one's traditions – for living what, following Socrates, we may call the 'examined life' ... [second] Citizens who cultivate their humanity need ... an ability to see themselves not simply as citizens of some local region or group but also, and above all, as human beings bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern ... The third ability of the citizen, closely related to the other two, can be called the narrative imagination. This means the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have.

As adults we are all too aware that humanity incorporates creatures (ourselves) locked in metaphysical tension, torn in even more ways than that half angelic, half corporeal creature depicted in mediaeval cosmology. Habermas (1972; 1984; 1988) recognizes that only we, in all the known universe, are alone in occupying three distinct worlds simultaneously: the **bodies** we inhabit, like all the known objects of the material world are both explicable and predictable within the ever more comprehensive networks of probabilistic laws where the grand 'theory of everything' promises to unite the macro and the micro dimensions of physical reality. If we jump out of the window, science will compute our rate of acceleration just as it would compute the accelerating fall of a table thrown out the window. But we also participate in a **social world** where notions of moral obligation, decorum, rules of companionship provide us with both our language and our emerging rationality. The third world we occupy is that of our own **interiority**; the world of our conscious experiences. We differ from the natural

world in as yet inexplicable ways through our endowment with an inner consciousness located in a social field.

Two sets of considerations, one epistemological and one ontological, define the deep isolation of the human individual consciousness. We access our own conscious states and events with an intimate immediacy that Descartes has defined as a 'privileged access', privileged, that is, in contrast to our access of other minds, which we infer on the basis of their outward behaviours. We gain knowledge of our worlds, propositionally ('knowing that x': for example, that behavioural pattern of another evinces their sadness or that gravity could be explained as a distortion of space by mass) adverbially ('knowing how': for example, how to surf the web or speak French) and, finally, we know subjunctively: for example, we know what it would be like '*as if*' I were of another sex, at another time in another place. It is this third way of knowing that allows the individual consciousness to encounter the interiority of another and this empathetic capacity is tutored and schooled by drama. It is the capacity of emancipatory drama to so structure the audience's imagination that s/he is able to participate in the uniqueness of another consciousness. In the words of the American critic, Arnold Weinstein (2004, p. xxviii and p. xxiv), art facilitates

the *staggering reach* of feeling and pain ... . Art writes large and luminous the penitential experience of illness and in so doing, it opens the prison. [...] Ultimately, the scream that goes through the house communalizes us, puts us in touch with the sentience of others, quickens (through its tidings) our own sense of life and possibility. ... art and literature also, quite wonderfully, draw us out, hook us up (imaginatively, emotionally, neurally) into other circuits, other lives, other times.

...

Art connects.

We are brought to the centre of another's experience '*as if*' we were that person him/herself. The bridge out of our metaphysical loneliness, the epistemological resolution is constituted in and through imaginative works of art. Thus fine drama or literature, from the sensitivity of the lyric 'I' of Keats' *Ode to Psyche*, to the revealed anguish of Nina in Chekhov's *The Seagull*, to Molly Bloom's stream of consciousness in James Joyce's *Ulysses* enlarges without end our common humanity. Without literature the contiguity of consciousnesses collapses into the isolated Cartesian Ego and a neo-classical capitalist economics orchestrates us all into a phalanx of utility-maximizers, devoid of the spark of the sublime that is our (and our children's) cosmic heritage.

Thus our ways of knowing are embedded in our rationality assumptions which themselves are layered via contextual rationality, instrumental rationality, strategic rationality and the Habermasian communicative rationality. As I have discussed elsewhere

in a book chapter (Ghosh, [Ed], 2012, pp. 89 - 100), with John de Reuck. The deepening reach of our reasoning provides us with ever greater access to the community of souls that constitutes our human world. It is the one of the tasks of drama to integrate our ways of knowing with our ways of reasoning as, together, they profoundly govern the reach of our empathetic imagination. This integration, in my experience, is most successfully achieved through an actor's and an audience's imaginative participation in the dramatic structures of shared understanding. Yet, such a claim needs to meet the possible objection that not all forms of shared understanding are emancipatory. At an extreme end, a shared understanding of a hate-drenched, national socialist community is totally bereft of any liberating potential. Therefore, it is clear that our shared understanding needs to be deeply aligned with our moral intuitions. And here we strike the chords of anti-realism (relativism). The moral theories that aim to organize our moral intuitions conventionally align themselves with two opposing theories: *consequentialist* and *non-consequentialist*. The former, utilitarian theory – as presented and critiqued in *Hard Times* (Dickens 1854) in the character, Gradgrind – correctly links morality to human experience (albeit a reduced understanding of human experience as alternating between pleasure and pain strategically, through a calculative reasoning of the 'cost-benefit' kind). The latter, deontological reasoning is grasped propositionally as opposed to the utilitarian, largely procedural approach of consequentialist theories of morality and strives, essentially, for a universality unconnected to the particularity of individual human experience.

Immanuel Kant's words, slightly paraphrased here: "Everything that has a price has a value, but some things that have a value are beyond price and they are things that have a dignity", ground his notion of the Kingdom of Ends to which the contemporary discourse of human rights owes its lineage. These two theories straddle a central aporia: the treatment of justice. Utilitarianism famously will over-ride considerations of justice in the name of an increased human felicity, while deontology will never countenance any person being treated as a means only. The categorical imperative<sup>2</sup> precludes such procedural reasoning.

Both of the above moral theories are being challenged by a neo-Aristotelian 'aretaic' (or 'virtue') ethics that transcends rule-based ethics and for my purposes, here, have the clear advantage of addressing the question of human motivation and linking it to human well-being. It stresses aretaic virtues. These are human excellences such as benevolence, fairness, kindness and non-malevolence (Pojman, 2006). They are embodied in what we would term 'character' (in the sense of a moral quality or qualities rather than a facet of a dramatic representation) so that if one can imbue a child with

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<sup>2</sup> One version is that human beings can never be treated as a means only – given his Kingdom of Ends.

‘character’, we would be endowing that child with the motivation to strive for human excellence governed by a complex moral wisdom or ‘phronesis’.

Arateic ethics, then, with its situational sensitivity to the particularity of human experience as opposed to the former ethical theories’ understanding of humanity under its universal aspects, is best suited as a theoretical framework for emancipatory drama. Thus, in creating the virtuous dramatic structures of meaning, that centrally inform an emancipatory drama, in theatre for young people, the playwright is so orchestrating the interaction of character, ‘phronesis’ and arête as to school the interpretative activities of the youthful audience in the informing metaphysical architectonic which consists of a philosophical anthropology. This is broadly understood as a normative theory of human nature (or a realistic account of human nature) that determines essential characteristics of humanity that an adult discourse of human rights would both endorse and enact.

The well-constructed dramatic work of art needs to be a tightly organized, organic whole flowing from the intentionality of the playwright so as to invite, imaginatively, its young audience to appreciate the arête of the dramatic heroes. In this they should be invited to admire their moral wisdom and the courage their actions in the dramatic world evince. The goal of such theatrical representations would be to invite emulation and encourage their identification with and endorsement of human excellence. Such theatre should joyously inform them through their dramatic participation in the imagined world and which intentionally resonates with enlightened human generosity. It is only the careful scripting of the strategies of empathetic engagement that allows the playwright to realise and render significant the action plans of their central characters. Often clothed in the enabling virtues of intelligence, courage and kindness the virtuous characters reveal what Boal calls a *rehearsal* of action, as they can be said to practice a “...real act even though he does it via a fictional manner ... [W]ithin its fictitious limits, the experience is a concrete one” (2000, p. 141). It is these morally infused “concretizations” (Ingarden, 1973b) that school and position the young actor or viewer as empathetic warrantor of the world of the virtuous dramatic work of art. The villains’ moral failures align with their humbling, their spoiling forays into the moral order are shown to threaten initially our hero’s emancipatory action plans, to reduce the recovery of the good, to drain the potential for the complete triumph of the virtuous. Against this threat is set the emerging victory of the kind and benevolent with its inclusion (in children’s theatre, for example) of the penitent villains and the restoration of an emotionally enriched dramatic work. Here the cognition and endorsement of the final architectonic of the work by the young audience has been facilitated by the action sequences of the virtuous characters who not only triumph but who embrace the morally reconstituted villains and, when effectively wrought, secure their status as companions of the young viewers. Thus are the virtues sedimented in the field of youthful performance and reception.

In the next part of this paper I address more directly the processes involved in a research as praxis project that allowed me to shape and develop questions and answers to some of the theoretical insights drawn in Part 1, above.

## **Part 2: Concretizing the dramatic situation in a production of *Macbeth or The Scottish Play***

The Scottish Play was a device I developed (and scripted) in order to foreground the thematic elements that the production was emphasizing. It functioned as ‘the play outside the play’ and allowed us the opportunity for a dramatized commentary on the action. In it, The Revelers, a group of amateur performers are attempting to produce Macbeth but find themselves (comically) caught up in the many myths that surround performances of Shakespeare’s play, including the spectre of damage and/or death that lingers among superstitious theatre performers. A New Historicist approach informed the construction of the play: historical texts from the period – specifically those on King James 1 and his association with witchcraft and the persecution of women accused of sorcery in the early 17th century – provided pedagogic opportunities for this T.I.E. agenda without the necessity for the overt transmission of information. Teachers were provided with an Educational Handbook that engaged with the thematic and interpretative emphases of the production which they were able to use subsequently in related classroom activities.

In November 2010, then, I devised and directed a production of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* with third year, Honours and Doctoral students in Theatre and Drama Studies at Murdoch University. The project was envisaged as a theatre in education (T.I.E.) undertaking from its inception and the goal was to provide – through the performance itself – a degree of contextual detail for the intended youthful audiences of the play while, at the same time, offering the students involved in the production (as performers, designers, musicians and dramaturges) with an opportunity to ‘reinvent’ the play in a way that would challenge them to explore issues of representation. As the adaptor/director of the production I wanted the students to engage with theatrical conventions outside of the fields with which they were familiar and, to this end, I began working with them on an ‘Asian’ influenced palette of design ideas, performance modes and musical possibilities.

I referred to this combination of genres and styles as ‘Asian fusion’ and, though aware that the origins of the term lie in cuisine rather than performance, it nevertheless has metaphoric currency and is part of the contemporary vernacular, hence useful for my purposes in this paper.



I had recently written and directed a highly successful Children's Theatre piece (*The Phoenix and the Fighting Pandas of Yunnan Province*) which we had toured to Malaysia and the students from that production, with its Kung-Fu Panda intertexts and Chinese folkloric tropes, were keen to develop in more depth some of the possibilities we had begun to explore in that production.

Clearly any engagement of this kind, with its limited gestation period and foreshortened rehearsal time, can only be a kind of bricolage and we were aware that we might run the risk of accusations of superficiality. That said, however, we were keen, as an ensemble, to engage with integrity with the visual and performative traditions we were to deploy and so the research we undertook (on the design, the costumes, the make-up, the hairstyling and the movement, specifically) was intensive. We were assisted by a choreographer with a vast knowledge of Asian dance and movement traditions (from Classical Indian to Japanese Butoh) and, as the concept for the production evolved, I channeled the performers and the designers towards emerging strengths within the ensemble, particularly focusing on movement – and sound – in realizing Shakespeare's Jacobean play as an educational example of Asian fusion. The adaptation we developed included replacing the Scottish 'thanes' with samurai; the 'witches' with kimono-clad shamans; the 'assassins' with malevolent geisha; and the visions that appear to Macbeth with shadow puppets that paid homage to the Wayang Kulit traditions of Indonesia and Malaysia.

Banquo's murder, rather than a rapidly executed action by the assassins, became a *dans macabre* by the geisha (a troop of three women performers) followed by an extended Butoh movement piece in which the actor, only recently skilled in this mode of performing, drew on all his capacities and energies in order to realize the anguish of a character mercilessly killed for another's advancement. As an instance of the transfer



Figure 1 Samurai



Figure 2 Shamans



*Figure 3 Geisha*



*Figure 4 Wayang Kulit*

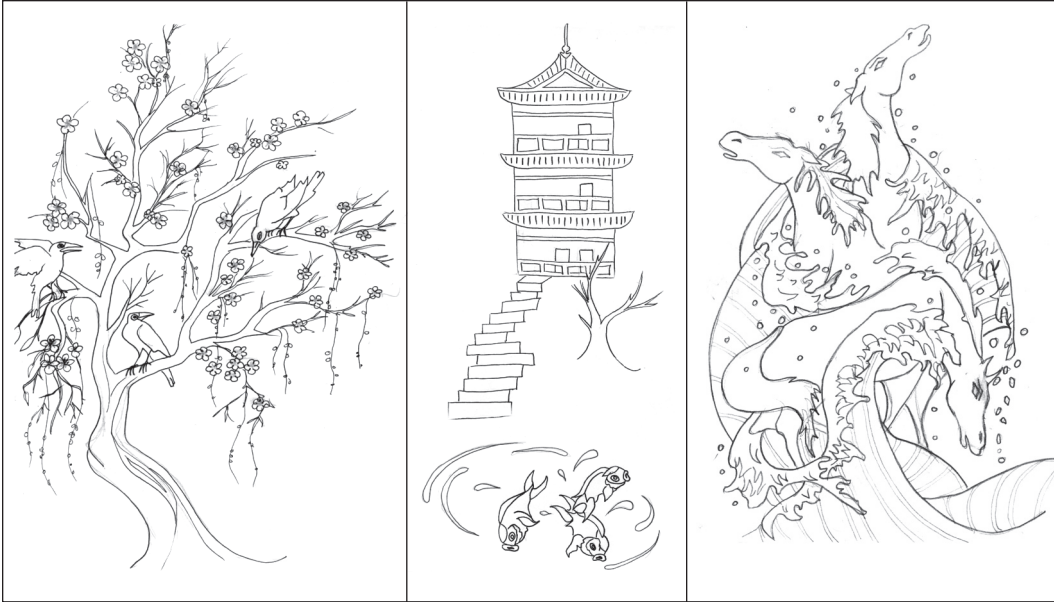
of knowledge and experience from one cultural tradition to another, this moment in the performances was among the most successful: audiences were swept away by the power of the death of Banquo as were all the members of the ensemble. The choreographer's achievement in bringing the student performer to this pitch of intensity (and credibility) in the short span of time allotted to them was one of the great achievements in this dangerous experiment. The movement workshops and choreography were developed and designed by a PhD student under my supervision, a devotee of the Temple of Fine Arts. His work on the movement for this production with all the actors, from the samurai/warlords to the aristocratic women of the courts (Lady Macbeth and Lady Macduff) as well as the geisha assassins, provided the performers with heightened skills in traditions with which they were entirely unfamiliar, but which they came to respect and cherish as the rehearsal phase evolved.

The set-designer worked with me to create three primary visual spaces for the action: they were signaled by the flying-in of panels which remained suspended over the multi-leveled set and sand-circle that served for the battlefields, the palace interior, the battlements and the witches' domain of sorcery and conjuring.

Rather than referencing a particular space, the designs created a mood: cherry blossoms for the entry of Duncan into the Macbeths' castle<sup>3</sup>, wild horses<sup>4</sup>, flecked

<sup>3</sup> This image, while translated into a Japanese motif, derives from Duncan's lines (1.6.1-3): "This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air /Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself/Unto our gentle senses."

<sup>4</sup> The image was derived from Ross's reference to the inversion of the natural order that follows upon the death of a king (2.4. 14-18): "And Duncan's horses, a thing most strange and certain,/ Beauteous and swift, the minions of their race,/Turned wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,/Contending 'gainst obedience as they would/Make war with mankind."

*Figure 5 Cherry Blossoms**Figure 6 Fish Pond**Figure 7 Wave*

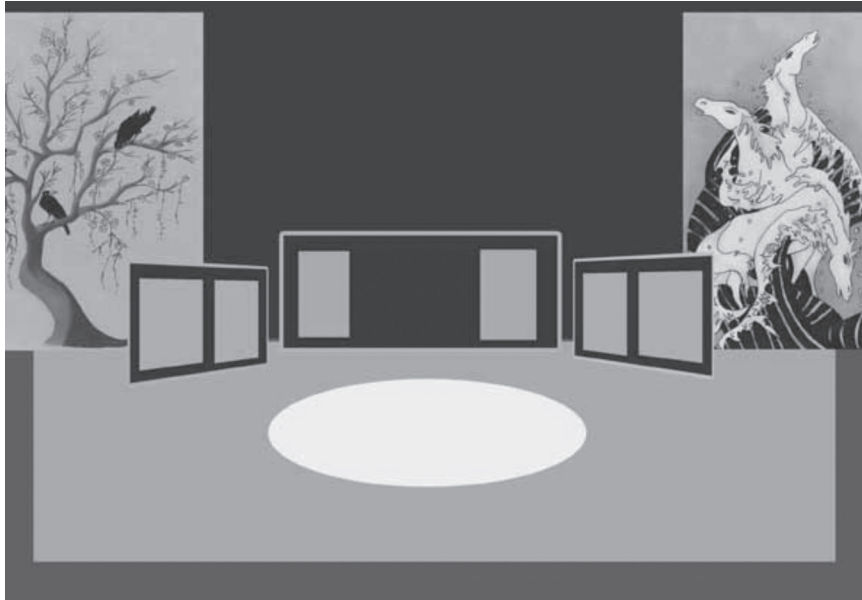
with foam in a respectful gesture to the Japanese illustrator, Katsushika Hokusai<sup>5</sup>, for the darker scenes of murder and destruction, and a pagoda and fish pond for the Lady Macduff scene<sup>6</sup>. A richly textured kimono, suspended on a bar, was flown in for the final resolution of the action in which, after Macbeth's beheading by his adversary, Macduff, primogeniture is restored and the crown of Scotland passes from the murderer/tragic hero to the murdered Duncan's eldest son, Malcolm.

Additional Asian fusion features of the set were the screens that were flown in for the shadow puppetry and the circle of sand on the stage floor, hinting at a Japanese garden that provided the central (delimiting) space for the action. The colour palette, too, was simplified into royal blue and limestone with the intention of achieving a stylized Japanese effect to complement the panels and screens on the fly-bars.

Providing a more fully concretized depiction of the characters from this fusion perspective were the costumes, make-up and hair designs. The designers here, working

<sup>5</sup> The drawing in question is "The Great Wave of Kanagawa", by Hokusai, 1829-32. [www.britishmuseum.org/explore/.../hokusai\\_the\\_great\\_wave.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/.../hokusai_the_great_wave.aspx)

<sup>6</sup> As with all the images in the design, this panel offered a translated – and trans-located – site for the lines spoken by Lady Macduff, deserted, in her view, by her husband and protector (4.2.6-10): "Wisdom? To leave his wife, to leave his babes,/His mansion, and his titles in a place/From



*Figure 8 Colour Palette*

to my brief, attempted ‘authenticity’ in the realization of the ‘look’ of the actors and the results were impressive.

The effect for the performers, and for the young audiences who viewed the production, was of a *verfremdung* or ‘alienation’ in Brecht’s sense, arguably liberating them from the constraints of a western traditional orientation in the design that might have used kilts, sporrans and cabers as opposed to the kimonos, wooden samurai swords and leather armour that adorned the characters in our version of the play.



*Figure 9 Make-up*



*Figure 10 Set and Costume*

It is possible that audiences from Asia – specifically Japan – would find fault with this representation but the adaptation and the deployment of bricolage effects in the design have a degree of respectability in the context of performance. The exciting performance work of Singaporean director, Ong Keng Sen explicitly seeks to recuperate ‘lost’ Asian identities in his search, through performance, for a new Asian identity. He valorizes traditional Asian dance, theatre and music practices even as he co-opts them, reinventing them, for a new, revitalized dramatic mode. His work with *The Flying Circus* and also on the adaptation of Shakespeare, which I have discussed elsewhere (de Reuck, 2000), has gained him a wide audience and international recognition: the strengths of his productions lie in the ways in which he problematizes essentialism in identity formation and in the ways in which he renegotiates the relationships between the ‘west’ and the ‘east’, destabilizing their very categories.

In this context, theatre work with students and young audiences that liberates them from the traditionally held assumptions about the conventions at play, allows all parties to explore the ‘subjunctive’ mode of being referred to in the first part of the paper. As audiences or as performers, the move into the imagined space of the ‘other’ begins the dissolution of boundaries that limit imagined possibilities. Our ‘Asian-fusion’ production of *Macbeth* – a quintessentially Jacobean English play from some 400 years ago – generated a great deal of unquantifiable discussion of cultures other than the one in which we find ourselves. The exposure, through research and training to other dramatic and performative forms, allowed us to develop skills as an ensemble (and as individuals) that will translate into other arenas of our lives. This was not an example of thoughtless appropriation: rather - and importantly for the pedagogic imperative – difference, in this project, was negotiated, acknowledged and fundamentally respected.

### **Part 3: Conclusion**

Over the years of writing and directing theatre for young people I have found that, by allowing both actors and audiences the imaginative space in which to interact with the often confronting events in the dramatic world of the production, the impact of the play extends beyond the specific moment of the transmission. I can affirm that the emancipatory impact of theatre for young people, conceived and produced in this way, is both a source of delight as well as a topic of discussion way beyond the theatrical moment. Emancipatory theatre as a vehicle of instruction (Theatre in Education or T.I.E.) through empathetic delight or emotional identification in the context of entertaining theatre, significantly contributes to an alignment holding between humanity’s highest standards and the developing character and aspirations of young people.



I want to conclude this paper by stressing that emancipatory theatre has an enormous capacity to impact on young people and as a result carries with it corresponding responsibilities for the adaptor, director and designers. With the creative energies of my students, those involved in acting, costume design, lighting, sound, set-building, we have impacted on the lives of thousands of young people in Western Australia. I cannot recommend to you a more satisfying educational activity than to participate in the making and performing of emancipatory theatre for young audiences. My experience is that the empathetic response we hope to gain from our audiences is replicated, when we are achieving best practice, in our ensemble approach: this valorizes, at a fundamental level, the deepest respect for the traditions and conventions that inform the productions. It carries through, also, to the creative participants as well as to the individual members of our youthful audiences who leave the theatre thoughtful and excited and, if our intention has been realized, imbued with an awareness of the value of the challenging and original performances they have been offered. In best practice, this would extend to the youthful members of the cast and crew whose imaginative reach – as well as their performance and production skills – will have been enhanced by the process.

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#### **Performances**

De Reuck, J. (2010). Writer/Director, *The Phoenix and the Fighting Pandas of Yunnan Province*. An original play for children. Performed in Nexus Theatre, Murdoch University, May and in The Temple of Fine Arts, Johor Baru and Kuala Lumpur, June.

De Reuck, J. (2010). Adaptor/Director, *The Scottish Play*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Performed in Nexus Theatre, Murdoch University.

