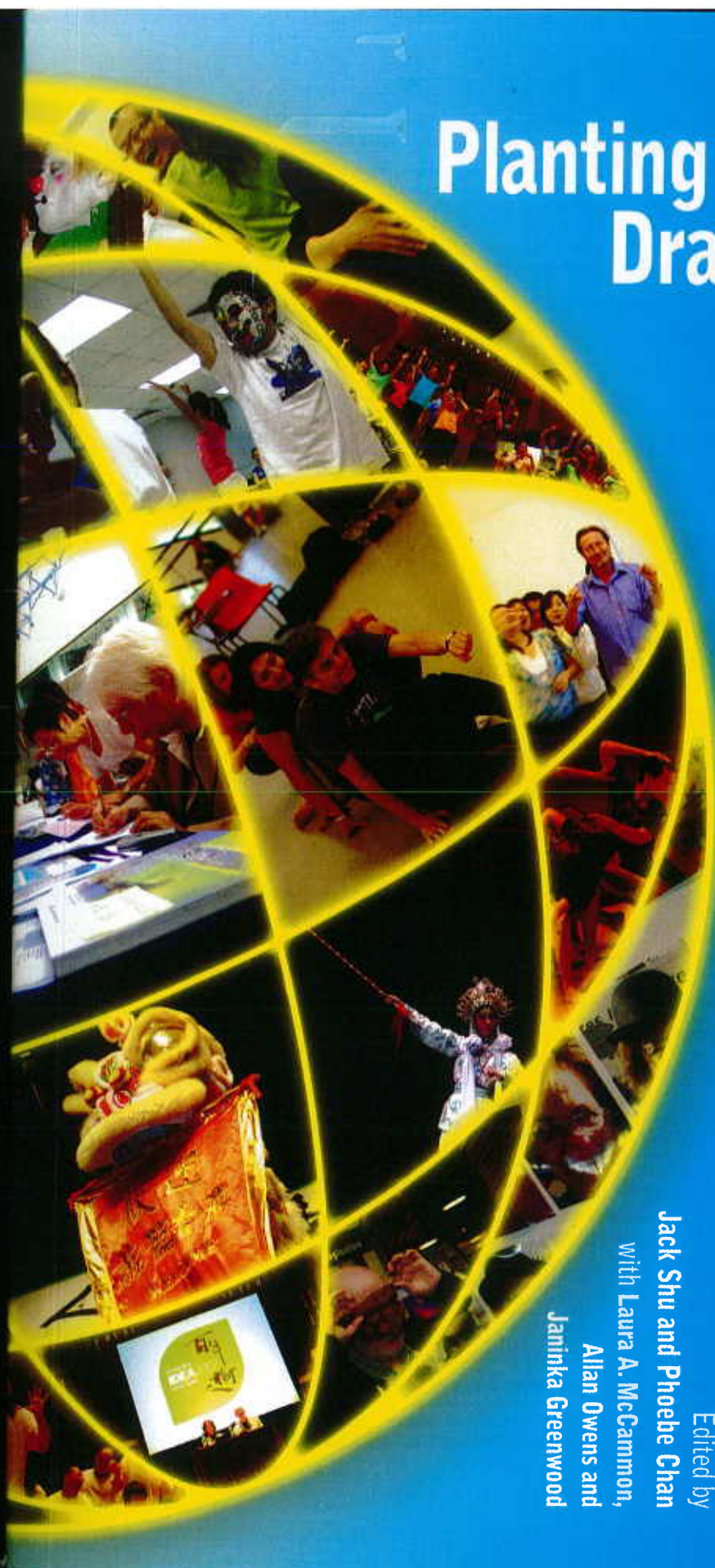


認識自己  
放眼世界

Janinka Greenwood



# Reminiscence Theatre Crosses Cultural Boundaries through Performance of Memory

Wan-jung Wang

## Introduction

My investigation in this paper aims to shed light on the question of how and why **Reminiscence Theatre** (shortened as R.T. afterwards) can cross cultural and linguistic boundaries and communicate with people from different cultures. I also want to examine whether R. T. offers possibilities to expand audiences' cultural horizons.

Furthermore, I also want to define and investigate the process and significance of R.T.'s specific kind of cross-cultural communication. In order to analyse critically and assess R.T.'s reception process, I will employ Merleau-Ponty's concept of body subjectivity in *Phenomenology of Perception*, Gadamer's hermeneutics and Pavis' and Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo's model of intercultural performance (Merleau-Ponty, 2002; Gadamer 1989; Pavis 1992; Lo and Gilbert 2002). I shall analyze and investigate how an audience forms their perceptions by identifying with the similarities and perceiving the differences between their own experiences and the elderly participants' through the performance of memory.

## The Central Role of Body-subject in the Reception Process

Firstly, I shall define what I mean by R. T. in this paper and give the context of the performances that I am going to employ as examples. R.T. is theatre performance composed by reminiscence materials, particularly oral history materials told and devised by elderly participants from community settings. The "elderly participants" that I refer to here are community elderly people who actively participated in the devising and performance process of Reminiscence Theatre. Since this strong participating quality in the devising process of R.T. represents its characteristic, I will use this term throughout this paper to indicate the elderly performers in R.T. in order to stress this point. However, sometimes I will refer them as participant-performer when they are participants as well as performers of their own stories. Reminiscence Theatre emerged in late 1970s is defined by Baz Kershaw



and other practitioners as theatre whose contents are constituted by the memories of the elderly participants as part of the social service for the elderly people (Kershaw, 1999). It is sometimes performed by the elderly participants themselves or by their collaboration with others. The practices that I am going to discuss here are a Taiwanese R.T. company called Uhan Shii Theatre Group and a U.K. R.T. group called Age Exchange Centre as well as some performances that I saw at the R.T. Festival held in London in 2004. Uhan Shii was founded in 1995 and is exclusively dedicated to oral history performance devised and performed mainly by elderly participants in community settings. The R.T. Festival in London is hosted every four years by Age Exchange Centre, based in Blackheath London, one of the earliest and most influential R.T. companies in U.K. and Europe. It holds R.T. Festival, which invites R.T. companies from Europe and the world to perform to one another and exchange ideas and techniques of R.T. practices through performances, workshops and discussion groups. From my observation, I noticed and was struck by the fact that the elderly participants can communicate across cultural and linguistic boundaries through their performances in spite of their differences in languages and cultures. I begin to wonder and set out this exploration to understand how and why R.T. can achieve this through researching into the devising process and the audience's reception process.

First of all, I propose that the way an audience receives Reminiscence Theatre is more a question of perception than a question of theatre semiotics. According to Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, human beings rely on "body-subject" to construct perception. Our bodies are not only the objective receiver of the world but also the subjective sensor of the world and ourselves. Our bodies are the fundamental basis with which we construct meanings of the world (Merleau-Ponty, 2002). The aesthetics of R. T. emphasize presenting the elderly participants' "body-subjects" with their own presence. The immediate and imminent presence of the elderly participants' body-subjects invites the audience's physical identification with and imaginative projection of their aging bodies on the basis of common "physical schema".

Perception is not only a visual or audio physical mechanism but also a holistic involvement of the whole body, body schema and mind according to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological understanding of human perception (Merleau-Ponty, 2002). So the mere interpretation of theatre semiotics in visual, audio and spatial terms could not encompass and explain completely the "perceptual" theatrical experience an audience receives.

The centrality of body-subject to the identification process also explains why audiences from different cultures who speak various languages and employ diverse theatre semiotics can still identify with the elderly participants' aging bodies. Merleau-Ponty (2002) argues the significant role of body-subject in the formation of perception. This concept is also the common physical basis with which Reminiscence Theatre can cross cultural boundaries.

However, when one encounters persons from a different culture and he or she does not understand the other's language, gesture or culture, he or she is "disrupted" from his or her habitual cultural horizon. In accordance with Merleau-Ponty's investigation into the perception process, a person has to rely on pre-reflective "body-schema" when he or she encounters unfamiliar "being-in-the-worldness" in the shared life-world. This lack of pre-ordained expectations suddenly heightens his or her awareness of the perceptive structure of body, transcending their habitual body and usual pattern of behaviour. In this sharp awareness of difference, they are more exposed to opportunities to expand their existing cultural horizons.

The audience's reception process in the International Reminiscence Theatre Festival resonates as a parallel to Merleau-Ponty's pathological analogy to demonstrate the mechanism of human perception. Merleau-Ponty (2002) exemplifies that when one is injured, he or she is more able to be fully aware of the injured part of the body within the field of perception since one's body usually remains ambiguous in the background of perception. When the audience encounters and watches performances from different cultures in the International Reminiscence Theatre Festival, their usual perceptive structure tends to be disrupted. They are therefore prone to perceive the differences and consistently see them in relation to their own cultures. This state of heightened perception has the potential to expand the existing cultural horizons of the audience.

## **Perceiving Similarities and Differences in Intercultural Performance Audience Reception**

Now I will further explain the theoretical model of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception to analyse the reception of intercultural performances. This process involves the audience in perceiving with both similar body schema and the different unfamiliar "being-in-the-worldness" of other cultures. In interpreting women's intercultural performance, Hølledge and Tompkins (2002) cited Merleau-Ponty and pointed out "postural schema" as the key perceptual system for understanding intercultural performance. Also highlighted in their analysis is the view that intercultural theatre reception is a question of perception rather than semiotics. This is because perception involves a more holistic approach than a merely semiotic approach. I will quote from them to clarify the concept of "postural schema" in the perception process:

Merleau-Ponty argued that we have an internalised sense of bodily alignment to our environment that orients us to surrounding material objects. This postural schema is a perceptual rather than a visual image that we hold of our physical reality: it is built up through our awareness of our own muscularity,

motor capacities, and energies, and it draws on our sensory responses to stimuli and our physical understanding of emotional states. We interpret the actions and intentions of other bodies through our knowledge of our own corporeal reality. In other words, we read the intensities, intentions, energies, and traces on the other body by replaying them imaginatively within our own, and through this imagined physical mimesis we interpret the other's actions (Holledge & Tompkins, 2002, p.143).

This quotation illuminates the important aspect of audience reception in terms of how an audience receives and interprets performances through physical schema and imaginative replay. This aspect is especially significant when the performance involves audiences of different cultures from the performers. They continue to analyse that,

Audience members watching an intercultural production tend to share an awareness of the unfamiliar: strange gestural and emotional expressions, alien performance energies, vocalisations, decorative codes, spatial relationships, or the slowing or speeding of perceptual time. When confronted with a foreign body, they are likely to indulge their scopophilic drives, but they will draw on more complex mechanism to decode this body if the narrative or emotional trajectory of the performance demands an empathetic relationship (Holledge & Tompkins, 2000, p.112).

This explains two essential phenomena in intercultural performance: one is the emergence of a state of high awareness in our bodies and perception when encountering unfamiliar cultures (which further confirms my previous point); the other is to bring out the issue of "empathy". The latter is central to the communication of cross-cultural R. T..

I will draw from the practices of Uhan Shii Theatre Group and the Age Exchange Centre to illustrate how Reminiscence Theatre performances employ their representations of daily-life movement as a kind of similar body schema to present different cultural sedimentations and to communicate with one another. For instance, the representations of childhood games show the different ways British and Taiwanese children play their games, such as the game of skipping rope in *Friendly Street* as well as the employment of Grandmother's Footsteps and the game of throwing cards in *Echoes of Taiwan III—The Story of Taiwanese Men*. The audience though from different cultural backgrounds can still understand and identify with these games—based upon the similar body schema and imaginative replay they have for similar children's games.

The other common source of identification in intercultural performance reception



process is empathy. Focusing on the life histories of elders and dealing with similar life crises within different cultural contexts, Reminiscence Theatre lays fertile ground for "empathy" to take place across cultures. Here empathy is employed to engender understanding phenomenological perspective, according to Edmund Husserl's concept of "inter-subjectivity" and Merleau-Ponty's concept of "body inter-subjectivity." According to Husserl, consciousness involves not only "the actual perceiving and appearance" but also the "possible perceiving and appearance" (Liu, 1995, p.7-8). He names the latter "horizons." This implies a vast capacity of imagination, to imagine the "possible perceiving and appearance" as potential practical experience. These horizons can also be projected "unto" the perceptions of others. Husserl calls this "empathy" in conjunction with "appresentation" and "paring," when we try to establish the relationship between self and others. This function of empathy is able to make "others" concretely perceived and felt by the self in the inter-subjective life-world of nature and culture.

The Reminiscence Theatre audience from different cultures must employ body schema and empathy to be able to understand the inter-subjective life-world through appresentation, paring and imaginative replay. Meanwhile, in this inter-subjective life-world, people are perceived as different groups with different cultures, languages, histories and customs. Through the projection of "horizons" or "empathy" involved in audience reception in R. T., people's usual "horizon of expectations" are disrupted and are thus offered an opportunity for expansion into new "cultural horizons". According to phenomenology, each person's body is always "perspectival"; one can never have an all-encompassing hold on the world (Compton, 2004, p.8-9). Therefore there is always "room for other incarnate subjectivities and their points of views complement my own" (Langer, 1989, p.103-104). This echoes Compton's argument "thus encountering and beingwith others (this is especially true with regard to people from other cultures) broadens and enriches my hold on the world. Others help make the world more complete by offering different perspectives" (Compton, 2004, p.9).

For instance, in the International R. T. Festival held in London in 2004, I witnessed the Chinese elderly participants who emigrated from Vietnam re-enact their hometown wedding customs and rituals of worshipping ancestors, as vivid recollections of their past. Even though the Vietnamese elderly participants did not speak English but Cantonese in the performance, the audience was invited to understand the different custom of a traditional Chinese wedding through the mechanism of a similar construct of postural schema and empathetic imagination. In the performance of ancestor worshipping ritual, the audience perceived the elderly participants burning incense and bowing to their ancestors' tablets. This reverent atmosphere created in the theatre invited the audience to empathize with the performers to prompt the following understanding. Thus the audience was offered a chance to expand their existing cultural horizons to be able to understand other different cultures and

customs such as worshipping ancestors.

Reminiscence Theatre gives a specific aesthetic frame for expansion of cultural horizons, especially in the International R. T. Festival. The festival displays and exchanges a variety of "being-in-the-worldness" through the elderly participants' narratives, movement and singing from different cultures. Conclusively speaking, the audience's reception process in this Festival was involved in multi-directional communication between cultures. This occurred through the mechanism of empathy and postural schema as well as through the heightened awareness of unfamiliar postural schema in the formation of perception. Merleau-Ponty's concept of the role of culture and history playing in the perception process will further support my argument in the later section.

### **The Similarities and Differences in the Cultural World in the Reception Process**

In the International R. T. Festival, if the audience is able to understand performance from different cultures, it is also because they might share similar historical experiences to those portrayed by the elderly participants' oral history performance. Alternatively, they might possess historical knowledge about identical subject matters in the Twentieth Century that are dealt with in the performance. Some of the historical experiences are largely shared by elders in the twentieth century across cultures such as rapid modernisation in terms of technological advancement; two World Wars or civil wars, the postcolonial and globalisation experience in terms of cultural hybridity; the experience of Diaspora; migration and immigration. R. T. audiences from different cultures share the experience of using similar "cultural objects" and going through similar "historical experiences" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p.405 & 422 ).

For instance, in the European Festival of R. T. held in 1996, Uhan Shii Theatre Group brought *Echoes of Taiwan I—Fifty Years Go By* to join in commemorating the fifty years anniversary of the end of the World War II. For a European audience, it was still possible to identify with the Taiwanese woman in the 1940s leading a group of children to hide in a shelter from an American raid on Taiwan (then a colony of Japan). Seeing them kneeling down to pray for safety using Buddhist gestures, the European audiences could possibly empathize with them because of their similar historical experience in World War II. This is a vivid example of how the audience can rely on similarities in historical experience as an identification reference point to form the basis of their perception and to understand performance from a different culture.

In order to further demonstrate how cross-cultural communication can be achieved through body schema and body inter-subjectivity, director Peng's interview about tour in



Germany with the author on 11 Nov 2002 will be useful to refer to. When Uhan Shii Theatre Group's reminiscence production *Echoes of Taiwan IIII—The Story of Taiwanese Man* toured to Wupertale, Germany, the production was almost exclusively performed in Holo (the Southern Fukien dialect widely spoken in Taiwan) to a German speaking audience. At the curtain call, the German audience were so moved by the performance that they stamped loudly on the floor and started shouting applauding for the elderly participants. There were no German subtitles for the production except a long introduction in their program explaining the historical and political background of the story. The elderly participants-performers (here I refer them as participant-performer since they not only participated in the creative process but also performed their stories by themselves) behind the curtain thought the audience was angry with their performance. When they stepped out and took their bow, they finally realized that it was a German way to express unreserved excitement and adoration for their performance. A member of the audience went to one of the elderly participants-performers, Wen-cheng Wu and told him, "My father was just like that!" (This female audience member repeated Wu's still gesture and posture as Wu sat erect and motionless on the bench with his hand raised for his wife to bathe him with a towel in one scene of the production. She went on explaining that her father is also a very uptight and stern patriarchal father figure just as Wu re-enacted his father's character on stage).

The reaction of the German audience showed that without the literal understanding of verbal language, by employing their body inter-subjectivity and empathy, they succeeded in understanding body postures, gestures, intentions and emotions from another culture. The intricate similarities and differences observed in perception formation in intercultural reminiscence theatre reception are crucial to the effective facilitating of cross-cultural communication. In the reception process, the similarities of experiences or body language between the elderly participant-performer and the audience formulated the identification basis for the audience while the differences in their experience or verbal language invited and engage further interest of understanding and potential expansion. However, this analysis is not to ignore the significant considerations and measures that Reminiscence Theatre has put into equally presenting the differences of languages and cultures in performance in terms of the cultural politics behind them in our both global and local society. I will discuss this point later in this article. Before moving into that, I also like to point out a danger that might happen in cross-cultural communication first.

Although the cross-cultural performance of R. T. Festival can cross cultural boundaries and language barriers based on the similarities in body schema and historical experiences and holds the potential to expand cultural horizon, it might hold another danger of falling into the trap of essentialising other cultures when they are removed out of their cultural contexts. With only limited information introducing their historical, social and cultural backgrounds in the



performance programs in the festival, the audience might project and identify their imaginary construction of other cultures into the performances they perceive without fully understanding the cultural context of it and therefore might mistake it as reality of other cultures. For example, in the previously discussed production of Vietnamese Chinese elderly participants-performers' performance, although the international audience could identify with the elder participants-performers by the similar body schema employed in similar rituals of worship, wedding ceremonies and new year celebration, the performers' simplified presentations of Chinese rituals they had undertaken in Vietnam might be interpreted as another Orientalist imagination of "authentic" Chinese culture by their international audience in London. Conversely, the Diaspora Vietnamese Chinese elderly participants-performers also took these rituals as the mark of their cultural heritage though these traditions might somehow keep them away from joining in their present daily life in London. Thus the cross-cultural reception might make the performers' living experience of Chinese culture perpetuated into a nostalgic imagination of Orientalism again. Thanks to the later presentation of these elderly participants' life experience in London as a contrast to their childhood memories of those traditional Chinese customs in this production, the audience can thereby be offered an alternative perspective of the difficulties that these Diaspora Vietnamese Chinese might encounter in London, such as communicating with their grandchildren and living away from their families in residential homes. The perception process of cross-cultural communication in theatre is unavoidably mediated with the existing imaginary construction of other cultures. The presentation of these elderly participants' oral histories has the possibility to essentialise their own cultures into the imaginary construction (meaning Orientalist construction here) imposed by existing knowledge/power structure (referring to the Western ideological construction of Orientalism here) if without careful consideration.

This is the criticism that the performances of Reminiscence Theatre might face which I am aware of and wary of here. This particular challenge needs to be taken with practical measures in designing and devising the performance in order to counter the essentialist imagination of cultural representation either externalized or internalized. The devising team needs to be consciously aware of the constant balance between presenting the imaginary constructions of cultures and their multiple and ever-changing realities.

### **"Fusion of Horizons" in the Production and Reception Process**

After discussing the aspect of similarities in the reception process of R.T. performance, I want to turn to explore how the differences in reception process can offer the opportunities to expand the audience's cultural horizons. Gadamer's hermeneutic theory in *Truth and Method*

will be employed here to support this argument. Gadamer (1989) presented his concept of "fusion of horizons" to understand the interpretative process between text and readers. He considered that the readers' understanding of a "text" is based on their new interpretation of the past. It is a result of the "fusion of horizons," between the readers' horizon of expectations of the present and the horizon of the past, reflected and represented in tradition or in texts (Gadamer, 1989). Gadamer argues,

Understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves. We are familiar with the power of this kind of fusion chiefly from earlier times and their naivety about themselves and their heritage. In a tradition this process of fusion is continually going on, for there old and new are always combining into something of living value, without either being explicitly foregrounded from the other (p.306).

He continued to contest that, "the historical moment of human life consists in the fact that it is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon" (1989, p.306). Gadamer's hermeneutics, therefore, could be interpreted as readers asking new questions about canonical texts and therefore finding new answers in these texts.

I find Gadamer's theoretical principles in hermeneutics can be effectively applied to the production and reception process in Reminiscence Theatre. The production process of Reminiscence Theatre has formed a multi-layered, hermeneutic circle, between the elderly participants and their pasts; between the different pasts of the elderly participants in the cast and between their past and the director's and finally between their performance and their audience. The elderly participants' narration and acting out of their oral history accounts are their own interpretations of their past. In the rehearsal process, the director intervenes with questions about the elderly participants' pasts and initiates improvisations around their stories to construct the final performance. The rehearsal is thus a dialogical process between actors and director to embark on finding answers. The director adds her or his interpretation of the elderly participants' stories in the *mise en scene* as a reflection of Gadamer's term of "the history of effect" (this refers to the efficacy created from reflecting on history). The director's intervention manifests how the elderly participants' histories have influenced the director's understanding of history. The director also stimulates and launches the cast's mutual inter-interpretations of each other's pasts and incorporates their "histories of effect" into the final performance. In this process, the elderly participants' horizon and the director's horizon constantly undergo mutual fusions in order to negotiate a unified internal horizon of expectation of the performance in order to project to the audience in accordance



with Susan Bennett's research on the mechanism of audience reception and their horizons of expectations (Bennett, 2003, p.210). The production process of R. T. puts Gadamer's hermeneutics into dynamic practice. When R. T. is performed on stage, the audience joins in the hermeneutic circle of the elderly participants' memories. The audience is invited to engage in the process of asking questions and finding answers in the reception process of the performance of memory. This particular process explores how the performance's interpretation of history influences the audience and engages them in experiencing the fusion of their horizons with the performance's internal horizon.

*Echoes of Taiwan I* is an explicit example that demonstrates the fusion of horizons in the production and the reception process between the cast and director, the performance and its international audience. *Echoes of Taiwan I* presents a selective historical reflection on Taiwanese history, based on the elderly participants' oral history accounts. The production particularly focuses on the Japanese occupation of Taiwan and the affliction of the Taiwanese under colonial rule and the Second World War. One scene shown in the DVD documentation of the production portrays how a Taiwanese man recruited by the Colonial Japanese Army waved goodbye to his wife when he left for the Japanese battle in South Eastern Asia. He was forced to fight the war and he did not know whether he would come back alive or not. This scene is the result of the fusion of horizons between the elderly participants' and the director's collaborative interpretation of the war memories. At the end of the play, the director arranged a tableau scene for all the cast to stand together posing for a family album on stage. Slides of family portraits of many young soldiers and their families were projected onto the screen behind the performers. As shown in the DVD documentation of the performance, one of the last series of slides in the production was family albums with the whole family either sitting or standing together. Slowly all the young men in the slide, one by one, were fading away from the projections of the pictures leaving the elders, women and children behind. The absent figures seemed to be vividly present with the remaining figures on the screen. This image implied that the war left an enduring empty space in the families' lives as many of their young men were lost in the war. This powerful stage image is the director's interpretation of the elderly participants' war memories as she posed a question: "Did the war really end when it physically ended?"

When *Echoes of Taiwan I* toured to the United Kingdom, these scenes were presented to an international R. T. audience; mostly British elderly people and families in the community. Their horizons of culture and history were confronted with those of the Taiwanese elderly participants of R.T. and the director's. Yet, in terms of similar memories of Second World War, they were able to identify with the heart-wrenching experience of seeing beloved families off to war. They were also invited to understand the unfamiliar experience of those reluctant and helpless emotions when the Taiwanese had to fight for their colonizer—the Japanese. In the

end, questions concerning the incalculable cost of war were raised by the last tableau image resonant with the missing figures of young soldiers projected on screen that the audience across cultures could possibly all identify with in similar war experience. In order to make the hermeneutic process happen, the audience's horizons were inevitably engaged in the fusion of the horizon of the performance. This happened through the mutual interaction involved in a theatre reception process between audience and performance. Likewise, the performance is the result of the fusion of horizon between the elderly participants and the director in the production process. As demonstrated, R. T. therefore engages multi-layers of fusions of horizons in the production and reception process and has great potential to expand horizons of its practitioners and audience.

## **An Equal and Dialogical Model in Cross-cultural Theatre Communication**

With the previous theorization and exemplification, I have uncovered the major mechanism of cross-cultural communication through R.T. in the aspect of production and reception process. It is an intricate perceptive mechanism based on perceiving the similarities and differences. The similarities establishes the base of understanding while the differences holds the possibility of wanting to understand more and therefore expanding existing cultural horizons and perhaps unfixing our cultural presumptions towards other cultures. Therefore I shall continue to clarify the point that I made earlier about the issue of balancing the unequal working models in terms of cultural politics in the present cross-cultural or intercultural performance. I argue that R.T. provides a more equal model for cross-cultural theatre communication than Pavis' and Lo and Gilbert's models (Lo & Gilbert, 2002; Pavis, 1992). I argue R. T.'s reception process presents a model of two-way and dialogical communication between audience and performance in cross-cultural theatre communication. Pavis' hourglass model of intercultural theatre communication, Lo and Gilbert's criticism of Pavis' model with their alternative model will be applied to support my argument.

In his research into interculturalism theatre, Pavis proposed the marked hourglass model to illustrate the ways of interaction between the source culture and target culture involved in an intercultural theatre reception process (see figure 1) (1992, p.39).



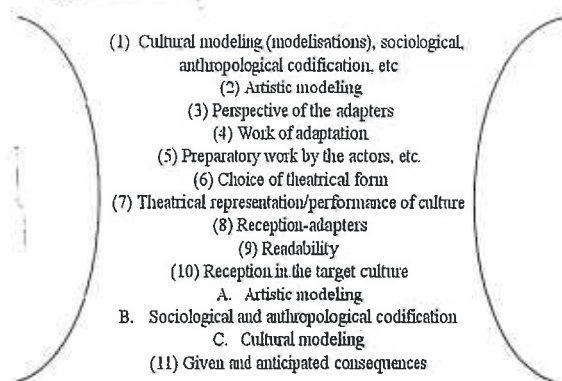


Figure 1. The hourglass of intellectual exchange source by Patrice Pavis

However, his model was criticised for its implication of the “one-way traffic” that the target culture adapts or appropriates from the source culture (non-Western cultures) to make it understandable to the target culture (Western cultures). Lo and Gilbert criticised the hourglass model of Pavis as “one-way cultural flow based on a hierarchy of privileged” (2002, p.42). They suggested another paradigm in the hope that they could “adapt what is essentially an appropriative/assimilationist model into a more collaborative/negotiated one” (see figure 2) (Lo and Gilbert, 2002, p.45).

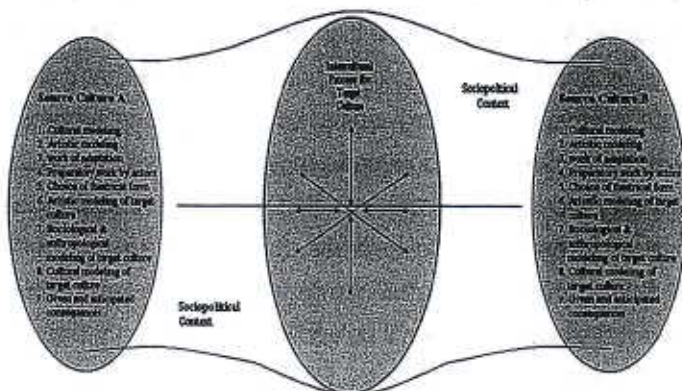


Figure 2. Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert's Proposed Model for Interculturalism

They claimed that “in our model, intercultural exchange is represented as a two-way flow”(Lo & Gilbert, 2002, p.44). They argued that “the partners involved in the intercultural theatre production and reception are both considered to be source cultures, whilst the target culture’s position is flexible in flux and constantly interactive with both source cultures. The target culture is pulled, influenced and changed between both source cultures and by its performative locations and situations” (Lo and Gilbert, 2002, p.44). Lo & Gilbert’s model

"foregrounds the dialogical nature of intercultural exchange but also takes into account the possibility of power disparity in the partnership" by matrixing post-colonialism and interculturalism and including the sociopolitical context of performance in its reception (Lo & Gilbert, 2002, p.43-44). However, both Pavis' and Lo and Gilbert's models have not focused on discussing a particular type of cross-cultural theatre communication happening on the international stage all over the world.

This is when a performance of a source culture which is distinctively different from that of a target culture, presents itself directly to the western audience without the mediation of western culture. Cross-cultural communication in R. T. Festival exactly explores how this kind of cross-cultural theatre reception process takes place and functions and provides their distinctive model.

An explicit example can be drawn to illustrate this dialogue when Taiwanese Reminiscence Theatre performance (source culture), was performed in the international R. T. Festival in London to a local British audience and an international festival audience (target culture). It is a two-way flow between the source and target culture. When the audience in the target culture receives the source culture's performance, the reception process would employ the filtering process in Pavis' model but without the mediation of adaptation of the source culture. In addition, the reception process would involve employing the perceptive structure of body-subjects to identify with the similarities and discern the differences in their being-in-the-worldness as I have discussed before. The source culture is not appropriated by the target culture in the production process but is created by the source culture itself through a collaborative and dialogical process. This kind of cross-cultural theatre communication model can therefore encompass the original socio-political context of the source culture in the production process and the performance then provides it to the audience. Due to the inevitable differences of contexts between the source and target culture, the performance potentially evokes the audience to respond to the performance with their own socio-political context in their local society and therefore can perceive more clearly the differences between the two social contexts. The socio-political context has therefore been highlighted in Reminiscence Theatre performance as an important factor in understanding the local specificity of the disparate elderly participants' stories. For example, the local Diaspora experience of mainlanders in Taiwan was emphasized in *Echoes of Taiwan IV-If You Had Called Me* when it toured to London. International and London audiences could identify these mainlanders' stories based on their own local experiences related to Diaspora and then aspired to understand the different local experiences from Taiwan. Furthermore, they have also been made to understand different subtle and personal experience of how the Chinese Civil War has torn many mainlanders' families apart and left profound emotional scars on their lives in the specific political and social context of Taiwan. These specific understanding came



from giving the source culture adequate space and self-determined subject positions to tell their own stories without the appropriation and adaptation of target culture. I therefore argue this model of R.T. can provide a more equal way of cross-cultural theatre communication. This specific model may further help to counter imaginary construction of other cultures. It could therefore further balance the more or less uneven cultural political topography on international stage as Lo and Gilbert has argued in their model.

## **Conclusion**

According to the phenomenology of perception, R. T. performance relies on those similarities audiences perceive in performance which enable them to identify and associate with the elderly participants' performance of memory. The success of this reception process is based on similar body schema, perceptive structures, empathy, cultural objects, historical experience and knowledge. Moreover, the reception process also involves the differences the audience perceive in the performance such as the elderly participants' different "being-in-the-worldness", languages, customs, behavior patterns and socio-political contexts. These elements may make the audience access and attain more heightened awareness in their perception. The similarities and differences interact and interchange in the formation of audience perception so that they can understand unfamiliar cultures through performance of memory. Moreover, the differences of the cultures embodied by the elderly participants' performance facilitate the potential for fusion of horizons between audience and performance and induce mutual expansion of cultural horizons. Through these complicated processes of perception in receiving R.T. performances from different cultures, cross-cultural communication is therefore achieved. Meanwhile, cross-cultural theatre communication in the R. T. Festival can destabilize the existing power structure of theatre interculturalism. This often focuses on Euro-American centric performance and its one-way flow of communication as well as its perpetuation of the power hierarchy of "West and the rest". It creates a more balanced two-way flow between the source and target culture and shifts the source culture into non-Western cultures to secure their agency and local perspectives. It takes the peripheral cultures' social and political context into a central focus in performance.

Drawing from the above theories as well as demonstrating how the mechanism of audience's reception works and how the examples of performances put this mechanism into practice, I therefore conclude that Reminiscence Theatre provides a rare chance to communicate across cultures and to expand the existing and familiar cultural horizons of audience and performers both locally and globally in its reception process of performance.



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