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**Høgskulen
på Vestlandet**

The recipe of laughter – how
comic elements function in a TIE
production?

Zhanqiong Wang

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The recipe of laughter – how comic elements function in a TIE production?

Adam Zhanqiong Wang

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Abstract:

This study intends to explore the function of comic elements in Theatre in Education. TIE is a kind of interactive theatre that offers chance to explore values and create meaning through dramatic through the dramatic form. Comedy might be a captivating method to achieve TIE's educational purpose. Yet there are little theories about comic elements in TIE. In this study, based on the pre-understanding of the field of TIE and drama in education, and close reading of comic theories from the perspectives of aesthetics and psychology, three hypotheses was made. Comic might function in TIE as estrangement aesthetic, dynamic distancing device and protective mechanism. An original TIE production is designed to test out the hypotheses in Mainland China. It is a performance-based case study; data is collected with practice and interview. Video recording and immediate notes from the participants were collected. The textual analysis is following the procedure of systematic text condensation, with the experience of designing, together they may illuminate how comic elements functioned in the field of TIE. The performance was designed in the Chinese traditional style of cross-talk comedy (xiangsheng), in order to explore how this form of comedy function in its native culture background.

Key word: Theatre in Education, Drama in Education, Comedy, Comic, laughter, Distancing, Xiangsheng

Chapter 1 Description

1.1 Intention

I will start my thesis with words from the Swiss playwright Friedrich Dürrenmatt's on the need for comedy. He writes:

“...[T]he task of art [...] , and hence also the task of drama today, is to create something concrete, something that has form. This can be accomplished best by comedy. Tragedy, the strictest genre in art, presupposes a formed world. Comedy /.../ suppose an unformed world, a world being made and turned upside down, a world about to fold like ours. (Dürrenmatt, 1982, p.253)”

Dürrenmatt held a skeptical point of view on if art can have a task. The idea of applied drama is based on the belief that drama is to “mak[e] a difference in the human life span”. (Taylor, 2006, p.93) I believe the history is in loop; the world of 1953 is not so different from how the world is now. Dürrenmatt's description of “a world about to fold like us” coils with the social issues that applied theatre aims at. In

Applied Drama: the Gift of Theatre the British researcher Helen Nicolson writes:

“The gift of applied theatre is that it offers an opportunity for an ethical praxis which disrupts horizons, in which new insights are generated and where the familiar might seen, embodied and represented from alternative perspectives and different point of view.” (Nicolson, 2014, p.174)

The possibilities for new insights, which Nicolson describes, according to Dürrenmatt, can be accomplished best by comedy.

My lifelong experience with attending theatre performances in China, especially interactive theatre, have given me these perspectives: the Chinese

audience/participants seem to have a tendency to deconstruct the heavy talk, and make jokes out of it. One of the reasons for this can be the current situation in Chinese speaking societies, where people are facing huge competitions caused by overwhelming marketing and rapid economic growth. Serious discussion of tragedy doesn't seem to trigger the audience. It is less eye catching, comedy has become the popular aesthetics of cultural productions in the 21st century. In conventional theatre and film making industry, there are some successful examples of this. In Hong Kong movies, there is Stephen Chow Sing-chi's comedy, which starts from 1990s; in Tai Wan, there are Comedians workshop's adaptations of the traditional comedy form xiangsheng (crosstalk comedy); in Mainland China, there are tremendous amount of xiangsheng, comedy talk shows and comedy short plays are being staged, used in films and television every single night. The big population who watch comedy can indicate an attitude of a need for deconstruction of the serious topic. How can the genre Theatre in Education grow and survive such an environment?

When the Australian researcher and practitioner John O'Toole did a process drama about the Vietnam War in Bergen University College, (September 2016) he shared his experiences from doing the same process drama in Hong Kong (January 2016). From his observations, he found it hard to keep the group in Hong Kong within the dramatic frame. Most of participants distanced themselves from the dramatic moments and created comic scenes with a lot of laughter. The piece is designed under the aesthetic of tragedy; these attempts of the participants surely disrupt the educational purpose. In an e-mail O'toole describes his own reflections on that

workshop: “Thinking about the Hong Kong workshop I spoke about, I believe that there were at least two or three different manifestations of humour and playfulness – two within the drama, one outside the drama.”¹

Together with Huiru Yan, a master student who was one of the participants in the workshop in Hong Kong, we discussed the workshop and the different ways the participants in Hong Kong and in Bergen perceived and responded to the drama. It is interesting to note that we both saw the potential of comic aesthetics, as becoming an aesthetic paradigm in both TIE and DIE practice. Unfortunately,

The German psychologist Sigmund Freud claims that "our enjoyment of the joke" indicates what is being repressed in more serious talk. (Billig, Michael. 1997, pp.139-159.) Laughter has always been a by-product in theatre, sometimes it is a self-defending mechanism for emotional immersive other times it can be a moment of stepping out of the situation and view it in a double perspective (from inside and outside). In George Eman Villiant's (1977) categorization, humor is a level IV defense, which stands for mature and constructive defenses. This is unavoidable when the participants are over distanced from the dramatic narrative, a hypothesis is raised by that:

What if the dramatic narrative itself is in the form of comedy, creating laughter while encouraging rational thinking?

The notion of distancing is discussed a lot in the field of DIE and TIE, it opens up a new arena of applying different aesthetics other than tragic catharsis. The theory

¹ From the e-mail interview with John O'toole (2016.11.25).

of distancing can therefore be of relevance in this research and I will discuss how comic elements can be useful when introducing young people into a TIE-performance. To control the level of distance might turn this self-defense laughter into psychological sublimation and achieve another form of dramatic resonation.

How can these elements fit in the frame of TIE and help promote the educational purpose is something I consider needs to be solved.

1.2 Research question

The paramount theme of this research is to explore how comic elements function in TIE practices. Dramaturgically, I will examine how the principle of distancing helps to structure the comic aesthetics and therefore helps the comic elements in a TIE production. The main focus of the research will be on the side of how does them serve the educational purpose. The aesthetics of the work will be presented along with the structure of the research.

Main research question:

- How does the principle of distancing help to frame the comic elements in a TIE production?

Hypotheses

Three hypotheses are deduced after close reading to drama, aesthetic and psychology literatures.

- Comic elements might function in TIE as estrangement aesthetic.
- Comic elements might create dynamic distancing in TIE production.

- Comic elements might function in TIE as a protective mechanism.

1.3 Theoretical foundation

Gavin Bolton points out the kinship between DIE and TIE in his article “It’s All Theatre”, he writes:

“I want to suggest that what we have all been doing is indeed theatre and that it is about time we acknowledged it more fully [...] ‘Drama in Education’, a term that in fact first appeared in print in 1921, but in the ‘60s and ‘70s became associated with the use of teacher-in-role and whole class ‘living through’ dramatic activity. Dorothy Heathcote always claimed that she was working in ‘theatre’ a view I used to find very difficult to swallow, but she never got round to changing the name of her course to ‘teaching teachers to use theatre’, because it would certainly have been misunderstood.”(Bolton, 2000, p. 22)

DIE and TIE are closely related, as kin-disciplines, sharing common features. Therefore, some of the theories in the field of DIE will also be introduced in this study, to explain the potential transformative process which happens on the educational level. The term distancing is mentioned a lot in both fields, and it will be the basic theoretical entry point of this study.

Stig Eriksson’s research explains how the notion of distancing influences the practice of both DIE and TIE. The root of his concepts can be traced back to the British researcher Dorothy Heathcote’s frame distancing (which is from the field of DIE), Victor Shklovsky’s formalist theory, and Brecht’s concept as “*Verfremdung*”, (from theatre science), also Edward Bullough’s theory of psychology. The concept of distancing will in this thesis be have an essential role. I investigate if this can be a

way open the gate of TIE for the form of comic elements.

Eriksson indicates that the notion of distancing has relevance to drama education in three different aspects: "(a) **Protection**, (b) **aesthetic principle**, (c) **poetic device**." (Eriksson, 2011, p. 65)

From his exploration on distancing, I will raise the hypothesis of how comic aesthetics also can have this notion of distancing and therefore comedy can play a part within the TIE genre through the three aspects. I intend to establish a theoretical model for comic adaptation in TIE and examine it in practice. Therefore a production is designed for test-out these theories. (Check the section of method)

The first, **protection**, didactically, distancing in drama pedagogy is a protective device to avoid ethical dilemma in dramatic fiction. (Bolton, 1984, p.128) Just like Sigmund Freud augured in his work *Joke and Their Relation to the Unconsciousness* (1960),

"Joking provides the means of evading constraints, of reopening the path to lost pleasure. The "relief" of the joke, says Freud, is a saving of the psychical effort that was required to batten down the springs of enjoyment." (Sturge, 2002, p. 404)

Despite Freud even traced these feelings back to the children playing; jokes and comedies often help people ease the pressure from uncomfortable situations. That works both for the teller of the jokes and the listeners. In the field of TIE, that indicates both the actors and the participants. The distanced comic figure provides an exit for the constraint social code, by offering a "non-penalty zone". Will it be some links between these theories that might indicated how comic elements function as

protection in a TIE production.

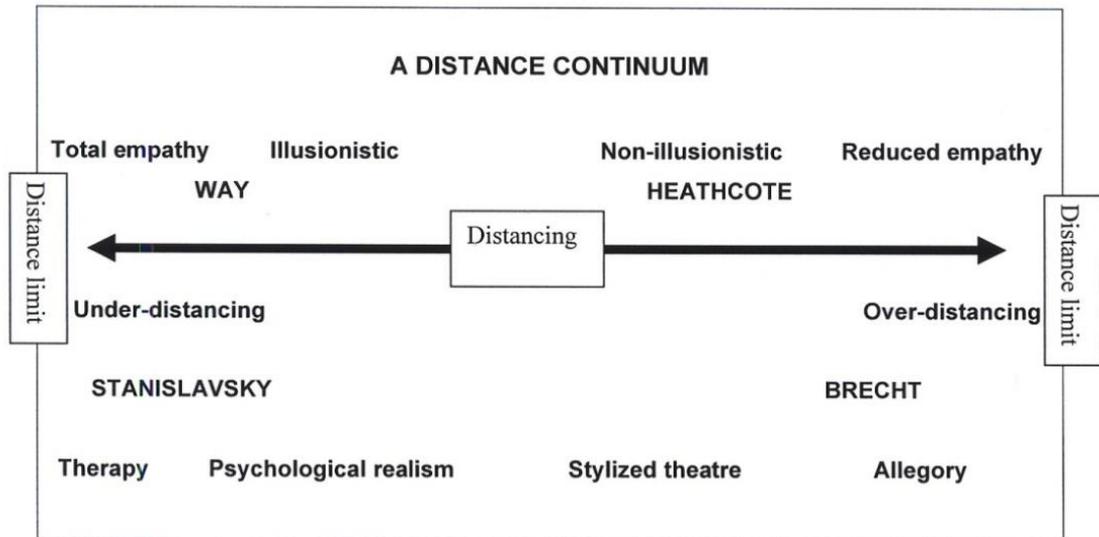
Aristotle explains the same phenomenon at the start of the 5th chapter in *Poetics*, “Comedy, just as we said, is an imitation of what is inferior to a greater degree, not however with respect to all vice, but the laughable is a proper part of shameful and ugly. For the laughable is a sort of mistake and ugliness that is painless and not destructive, such as for instance the laughable mask is something ugly and distorted, but without causing pain.”(Aristotle, 2002, p. 14)

It shows comedy has the factor of distancing from its origin. Bergson’s theory of comedy shares the same argument of Aristotle, we laugh at the people who makes us feel superior, this feeling comes from an intellectual judgment that “I would have a better solution in that situation”. And this feeling is distanced with emotional immersion. (Bergson, 2002, p.11-12) The audiences can have the awareness when they are observing an event, a performance.

TIE with its tight orientation to the social context, requires a powerful distancing device to dramatize the reality, which Brecht did with the form of narrative theatre, might also be done in the form of comedy. Comic effect comes from distortion of the reality like Aristotle said former in the description, while other theorists believe that laughter comes from incongruity and surprise.

Secondly, to see distancing as an **aesthetic principle**, Eriksson writes:

“Distancing is seen as a generic principle in art and that it exerts itself, to a lesser or greater degree, in all dramatic contexts. [...]” (Eriksson, 2011, p. 66)



(Eriksson, 2009, p. 45)

By explaining how distancing function in dramatic art forms, the chart above is designed. Comedy is not covered in the chart. In other forms of art or social event, the degree of distancing is often fixed. But under comic aesthetics, different forms of comedies require different degrees of awareness in fiction. In comedy performances like xiangsheng (cross-talk comedy) and comedy talk shows, the dramatic frame can be set extremely non-illusionistic, the performers directly communicate with the audiences instantly, yet all the participants have the agreement that all the behaviors that happen on the stage are “jokes”, a dramatic fiction. It is intentionally done by the performers from the tradition. The dramatic narrative in TIE works in a similar way:

“The essential difference between TIE and conventional theatre is the quality of relationship the actors share with the audience... TIE directly engages its’ audiences by encouraging them to participate within the art form, to be actively – and interactively – responsive to and responsible for the dramatic narrative.” (Hennessy, 1998, PP. 86-87)

TIE with its’ participants-based nature, requires active responds from them.

there has been argument that if the participants should always directly responsible for the dramatic narrative on the level of dramaturgy. It is not the emphasis of this study. React or not, TIE should always respect the participants' logic of reality, and consider that as an important part of the performance.

There might be a dynamic in comedy form like talk show and cross talk; the degree of distancing can be shifting from one extreme to another. Seeing distancing as an aesthetic principle might illuminate how comedy works in TIE, why do people laugh, is it from immersion or is it from distortion? Or it can be both? When it come s to TIE practice, these particular performing forms open the possibilities for creating such an active, interactive and responsive dynamic with the participants. Comic aesthetics in TIE makes the degree of distancing much easier to control and yet leave room for the participants to explore the possibilities within the closed social context. Unfortunately, there is hardly any theoretical model of frame distance in comedy, and therefore the test-out of this hypothesis is needed in the research.

The third, distancing as the **poetic device**, as Eriksson wrote in his work:

“The purposeful use of distancing as an artistic device [...] implies the act of making transparent, or of breaking illusion. Resources for realizing distancing on this level are distancing devices.” (Eriksson, 2011, p. 66)

Brecht's *Verfremdung* concept implies more than just distancing, the other translating of this German word would be estrangement.

Eriksson gives a short summary of the application of estrangement in Brecht's own practice.

- To make the familiar strange, to recognize what is false.

- To de-mask the self-evident of an event, to raise curiosity.
 - To make social structure transparent, to understand the known anew.
- (Eriksson, 2011, p. 4)



Brecht's approach in Epic theatre on this particularis multifarious. Under the method of narrative, he developed multiple conventions to achieve these aims of estrangement. To explain this notion more clearly, a parallel practice in modern visual arts is putting into sight. Marcel Duchamp's Dadaism works of L. H. O. O. Q is present in the year of 1919. He simply drew a tuft of moustache on well-known painting Mona Lisa,

by his work of deconstructing, he managed to estrange the famous painting into a common portraiture that can be interpreted in multiple perspectives. ²

The work is funny in the first place; many audiences would burst in laughter when they watched a familiar thing being deconstructed. On the level of aesthetic, this feeling of pleasure comes from the incongruity and surprise. American stand-up comedian Michael Jr. explains how comedy works in a speech for Life. Church:

“First there is a set-up, and then there is a punch-line [...] The set-up is when a comedian will use his talents and resource to seize any opportunity to ensure that his audience is moving in the same direction; the punch-line occurs when he changes that direction in a way you weren't expecting. When you catch on to this change you have received the punch-line, the

²(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L.H.O.O.Q.#/media/File:Marcel_Duchamp_Mona_Lisa_LHOOQ.jpg)

results are revelation, fulfillment and joy expressed through laughter.”³

The comic text is tightly structured, with a rhythm and flow that keeps the audience, as Michael Jr states, very focused on the story – to in the next moment be taken by surprise. This specific structured theory of incongruity and surprise will be addressed later in this study (chapter of the comic elements on James Beattie, Henri Bergson and Arthur Schopenhauer).

In the field of DIE, a sudden change can be added to the situation by for example a Teacher-in-role bringing a new message to the society that changes or challenges the direction of the play. This leads to the Dorothy Heathcote’s model of frame distance with be discussed later in the theory chapter as well.

Another important theory regarding to TIE and how its educational purpose be done is mention by the British dramatist Edward Bond. The word “gap” keeps repeating in his concepts:

“The gap is the site of the meaning we give to reality and ourselves. This meaning is our ‘being’ (and the meaning of our ‘being’). We are the gap, it is our consciousness and self-consciousness because ‘being’ is its meaning to us.” (Bond, 2000, p. 176)

The “gap” is an open space, which allows the participants to put their own understanding – the way they read and associate with what comes to mind. It brings the participants right into the drama with its’ free room that gives participants a chance to co-write the scene.

Comic elements, which is caused by the incongruity/estrangement, can raise the

³ (Michael Jr., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZb6yngru5A>)

awareness of these gaps between individual, fiction, and reality; therefore seize solutions with participants through imagination.

“The Tragic and Comic involve the logic of imagination. Imagination must be fancy-free in order to have the possibility of logic. [...] All important human truths involve some unknown. [...] Extreme drama does not imitate reality, it creates it by changing its meaning.” (Bond, 2005, p. 91)

Bond offers a space for imagination with his theory, for the young people to fill in the gaps with their imagination. In this perspective, it is somewhat different to how comedian Michael Jr. describes his relationship with the audience. While he needs them to be exactly on the focus of the story in order to be taken by surprise in the next moment, Bond uses gaps for the audience/participants to add their details of the story through imagination to then go to the extreme, the unthinkable.

Is there a dynamic model for immersing and distancing, detachment and empathy, thinking and feeling fused all together in a single TIE production? Or it could be a dynamic frame for the participants to freely enter and exit through the performance, which will be explored in the following research.

1.4 Method and Research structure

Performance based case study is the main researching methodology in this project. A TIE program is designed and analyzed in order to test out the hypostasis of the research problem. The analysis will be done qualitatively mainly; the whole process will follow the procedure of STC (systematic text condensation). Video recordings and interviews are supplementary data.

(1) Introduction of the TIE program

The TIE program is designed for the research purpose, how does comic elements function in a TIE program, targeting 16-17 year olds. It is an episodic production, in the part of dramatic narrative; the style of light comedy and Chinese traditional cross-talk comedy is introduced to the structure. (The detailed introduction of cross-talk comedy is in chapter 4.) It is designed under the guidance of comic aesthetic and examined by the theories for the educational purpose; the fields of drama pedagogy and psychology are included. The final analysis will be based on the data collected from the praxis. Together they might illuminate how comic elements function in a TIE production.

The focusing point of the TIE program will be a simple word in Chinese, 理想. The closest translation for that word will be ideal, ethically; it refers to a principle or value that one actively pursues as a goal. The huge population and rapid economic growth in China cause a huge complication, even among high school teenagers; to pass the college entering exam is a tremendous pressure on these pre-adults. Under that pressure, they have little time to think about their future, their plans, and their purpose. This is not only a problem for Chinese teenagers; the teenagers are facing a step of personal value forming, it is common for them to feel lost and confused in this period. To quote the Norwegian writer Erlend Loe in his work *Naïve*. Super:

“I know [a hell of] a lot.

[...]

My problem is what I am supposed to use it for.

What do I do with it?

I'm confused?." (Loe, 2001, p.37)

Personal value is formed in this particular age under different social factors; their cognition of themselves is influenced by others' perspectives. It's not always a bad thing, especially in Chinese society; it helps people forming a social personality. Their dream and value is shaped through these impactions of perspectives, both personal and social.

"Personality can be defined as consistent behavior patterns and intrapersonal processes originating within the individual [...] the second part of the definition concerns intrapersonal processes. In contrast to interpersonal processes, which take place between people, intrapersonal processes include all the emotional, motivational, and cognitive processes that go on inside of us that affect how we act and feel."

(Burger, 2008, p.4)

The "intrapersonal processes" in this context implies both individual and social being of a person. The acceptance and the identity becomes the center of this TIE program. How does different perspective influence the way you see yourself? The participants may seek a comfortable area for themselves between individualism and extreme socialism. Their personality forming may be optimized through the exploration of their identities.

The first episode was designed to show the origin of a dream. Most Chinese kids in our generation are familiar with card collecting of the Water Margin heroes; kids these days are familiar with card colleting in the online game hearthstone. We hope to

create moments that resonate to their own earlier dreams, which will bring back memories from childhood.

The second episode was designed as a traditional cross-talk comedy; the unique performing form will be introduced in the later chapters. Two extreme characters were designed to enlarge the discussion interspace. A dreamless straight-A student, the only thing he knows is to study; a total loser in high school, the only thing he has is an unrealistic dream. The talk between two clownish characters might lead them to self-reflection within the protection of comedy as distance.

The part of interaction will be integrated through the whole production; both parts are devised originally by professional theatre practitioners.

The main methodology of devising the program will be under British Dramatist Geoff Gillham's concept:

“And, because such things concern the processes of social and human interaction, the domain particularly of drama and theatre in education, real understanding is a process of coming to understand: we cannot ‘give’ someone our understanding. Real understanding is felt. Only if the understanding is felt can it be integrated into children’s mind, or anyone’s. Resonance is the starting point of the integration process. The resonance of something engages us powerfully; that is, affectively. But significantly, it also engages us indirectly with that which it resonates. Resonance is not authoritarian; yet it’s an offer you cannot refuse.” (Gillham, 1994, p.5)

The dramatic narrative will be devised as a material of resonance and aiming to create a room for dialogue. Comic elements will be focused as the form of expression, specifically as aesthetic principle and performing method.

(2) Structure of the research

Illuminating the pattern of this research, the initial structure is presented below:

- Pre-understanding of the TIE genre and TIE dramaturgy, together with comic aesthetic and some research on the targeting group
- Designing the script for the program individually
- Self-reflection, theoretically, through Edward Bond's "gap" concepts and other theory of applied theatre (distancing and so on)
- Devising with colleagues, focusing on the comic elements and educational purpose.
- 1st test out in High School with video recording and interviews
- Reflection and Re-devising
- 2nd test out in High School with video recording and interviews
- Reflection and Re-devising
- Possible more test outs, and analysis
- Result and Conclusion

1.5 Challenges

At the starting phase of the project, challenges must be predicted through different perspectives. In fact, some of the sub research question was designed deliberately for dealing with these challenges.

Dramaturgically, the difficult challenge this study will face is how do we

coordinate the relationship with dramatic narrative and interaction. It relates to the main research question also, after all, TIE is a dialogue with the participants. Not only the dialogue between actor-teachers and participants, but also the dialogue among the participants, it shares the equal importance in a comic TIE production. In these two kinds of dialogue the frame distance is different, the participant takes various perspectives in these dialogues. Proportion and the quality of the interaction create a subtle link with the story itself. There is possibly an active “path” between the two parts that make them influence each other dynamically. Otherwise, the piece is a conventional theatre production with rigid interaction, not a TIE program. It closes its way to communicate with the participants and cause ethical problem. It becomes a one-way convey, and deviates the original spirited of TIE.

To avoid this situation, the first draft of the script will be analyzed with Edward Bond’s theory of drama devices, together with some of the key concepts in the field of drama pedagogy. Regarding the distanced relevance from DIE and TIE, these theories might illuminate the ethical concern from another perspective. It all builds on the belief that TIE is not a tool to convey even for propaganda. As Helen Nicolson carefully questioned in *Applied Drama: the Gift of Theatre*: “If the motive is individual or personal transformation, is this something which is done *to* the participants, *with* them or *by* them? Whose values and interests does the transformation serve?” (Nicolson, 2014, p.15) The pattern of self-reflection should be placed constantly through the whole producing process.

The other possible challenge is about the ethics in cross-cultural communication.

Anne Trine Kjøholt wrote an article on a MA program in NTNU, she described in her reflection:

“There is need for more research on children’s everyday lives and childhoods in the global south, not only in order to obtain empirical knowledge about varieties of different childhoods but also in order to challenge and revise theoretical concepts of children and childhood developed in global North, and avoid exporting them to the global South.”(Kjøholt, 2012, p. 28)

In this study, the native cultural-eco should be fully respected. This study intends not to export any values, moral standards or political stands from a foreign cultural background, but to talk about it within a frame of my native cultural context. Comic effect connects tightly with the culture background, and sometimes even ideologically. This study is situated in the Chinese cultural environment, and it should be interpreted with the consideration of the naïve cultural context. It might illuminated the similar practice but with the understanding of the specific corresponding culture background.

Chapter 2 Terminology

This chapter will give an introduction to the concepts: ‘Theater-in-education’, ‘frame and framing’, ‘distancing’ and ‘gap’. I will present the concepts from different theories. This chapter gives a more systemized view of the perspectives that enlightened the possible entry aspects of comic elements. The theory in this thesis would be presented in this thesis will be divided into two parts. This chapter included pre-understanding of the field of TIE and DIE, and the theory about comic aesthetics and psychology will be presented in the next chapter. It is because there is few theories specifically on comedy in the field of TIE currently, and the research need theory from both aspects.

2.1 Theatre in Education

Theatre in education in a narrow sense implies a definable movement began in in Britain in the mid-1960s as a direct response to the needs of both school and theatre. (Jackson & Vine, 2013, p.4, Prendergast & Saxton, 2009, p.31) Academically, it implies a new genre of the theatre that developed from this moment. It can find its historical roots in both Brecht’s political theatre, Boal’s theatre of the oppressed and process drama.

A more generalized definition of TIE would be “a theatre form that seeks to harness the techniques and imaginative potency of theatre in the service of education. It challenges and stimulates the participants for further thinking or investigating a chosen subject continually. “(Jackson & Vine, 2013, p.5)

Anthony Jackson described the characteristic of TIE in the later chapter of

Learning through theatre:

“TIE at its best has shown, in perhaps the most complete way yet, that theatre and learning need not be incompatible bedfellows. It is possible to learn through theatre.” (Jackson & Vine, 2013, p.33-34)

It answers the question of TIE is de facto education or theatre; it could be both.

Chris Cooper, the British TIE director described this theatre form in post-SCYPT era as following:

“The aim [of TIE] is to use the dramatic art of theatre to explore values, by dramatizing the human condition and behavior so that the audience makes meaning through experience.” (Cooper, 2013, p.44)

That gives a boarder sense of this theatre form to distinguish it from other practices for educational purpose. It is often done with a high interactive structure and invite the participants actively enter the dramatic narrative. Due to its participatory characteristic, TIE practice nowadays has absorbed a quite among of theatrical foundation from drama in education, which developed by drama pedagogues such as Dorothy Heathcote.

A more detailed definition of TIE was made by James Hennessy in 1998, (which he does not claim as absolute term), there is few descriptions which specifically related to this study:

“TIE, like all forms of theatre, is socially-oriented activity usually taking place in a defined space and requiring the willing and tacit agreement of all involved to be bound by conventions necessary to sustain an awareness of fiction.” [...]

“TIE, like other forms of theatre, is dependent on physical, emotional and intellectual involvement of the participants.” (Hennessy, 1998, PP. 86-87)

What Hennessy refers “the willing and tacit agreement” might imply the principle of “Suspension of disbelief” which coined by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1817.

It is also mentioned in Hennessy’s description, TIE requires “sustain(ing) an awareness of fiction”, and it depends both “physical, emotional and intellectual involvement of the participants”. (Heathcote, 1984, p.82) The level of the immersion and distancing is just as critical in the practice of DIE as in TIE.

Now in the new century, TIE no longer survives as an identifiable moment in Britain but a new form of theatre combining art and education all over the world. It lies under the term of applied theatre, serving its educational purpose, and still hold on to its interactive characteristics.

2.2 Frame and Framing

Dorothy Heathcote’s explained in her article “Sign and Portents” about the term “frame” in the footnote:

“Frame: In any social encounter, there are two aspects present. One is the action necessary for the event to progress forward towards conclusions. The other is the perspective from which people are coming to enter the event. This is frame, and frame is the main agent in providing tension and meaning for the participants.” (Heathcote, 1984, p.163)

Theoretically, what ought to be presented in a TIE is fixed as the “given circumstances” in Stanislavsky system, but an open situation with materials for interpretation from different perspectives from different participants. Given circumstances influence the logic of the fiction; Heathcote’s interpretation of the

frame gives an integrated view on the situation influenced between actor-teacher and participants, the liminal area between fiction and real-life situation could be researched closer in this model. In others words, framing not only refers to establishing a fictional situation, but also invite the participants looking in to the change between themselves and the role, the participants' perspectives and roles can be changed simultaneously in this process.

John O'Toole explained the term of frame in DIE with four different contexts in his work *The Process of Drama*. (O'Toole, 1992) He pointed out in any drama or theatre, there are three simultaneous contexts for the participants, the real-world context, the context of the performance, and the dramatic context. They are interpreting the dramatic narrative in the roles and perspectives of participants (as their own social role), audiences (who participates in the dramatic event) and the immersive characters. In educational drama like DIE and TIE, he especially added the fourth context:

“The context of the setting – [especially in genres like DIE and street theatre] how a place and group of people that is designed for a different specific purpose need to be changed to create a context of performance... but will still retain strong messages of its original purpose.”⁴

This context involves both participants and the actor-teachers; their roles and perspectives in this case can probably be seen as an active learner or one who study the problem. In his work *Dramawise*, (Haseman and O'Toole, 1989)he simplified these four layers of frames in a way of focusing within the dramatic (fictional) context;

⁴ From the interview of O'Toole, see appendix.

the drama can be focused to provide emotional and intellectual distancing:

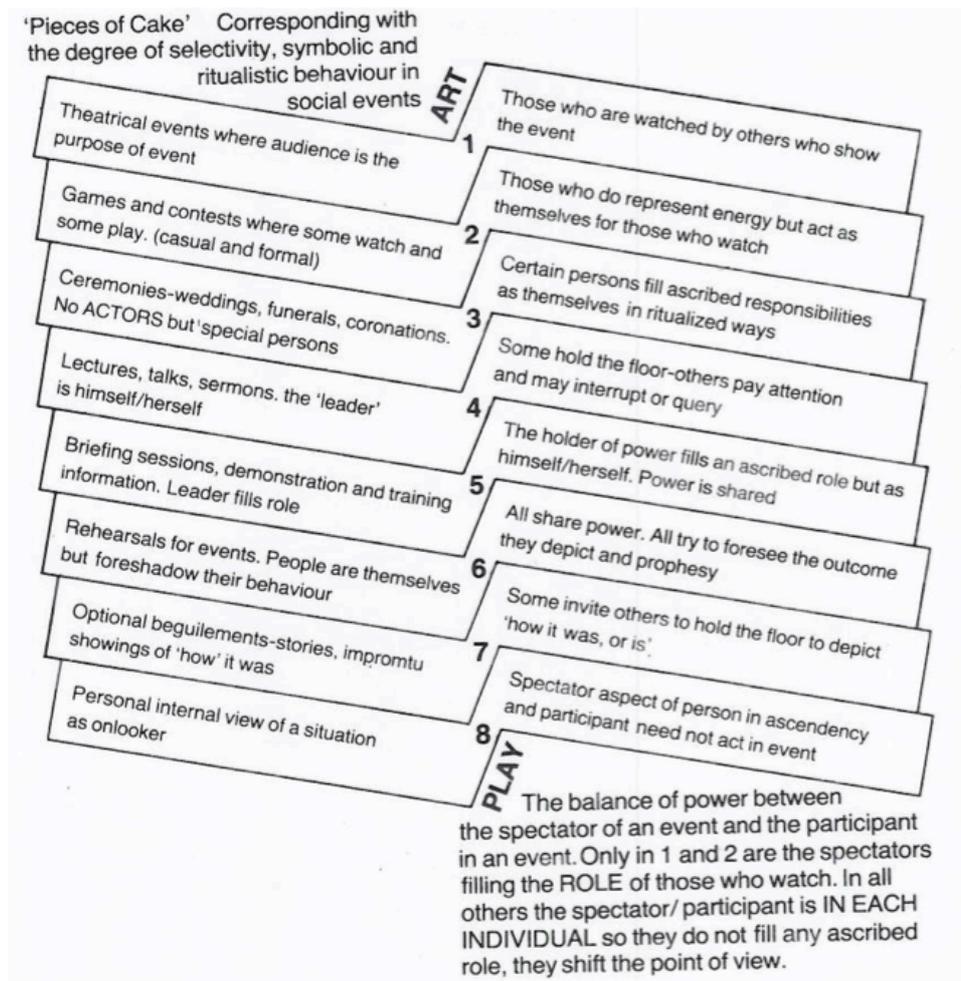
“A scene – or the whole drama – can be framed

- a.) inside the central dramatic or event
- b.) on the edge of the dramatic event
- c.) outside the dramatic event”⁵

In the explanation, inside the central dramatic or event the former d equals to a, which is inside the central dramatic or event. Former b and c is more or less on the edge of the dramatic event, and the real-world context is effecting outside dramatic event. The educational transformation happens when the participants realized the link between these contexts and finally resonates with their real-life experiences. Emotional and intellectual reflection is done through those processes.

If we see fictional situation as the most immersive context, real-life context as the most distanced context, the on the edged context can be sorted in different frame distance. Heathcote herself categorized performance distinctions on the basis of Goffman’s five distinctions of performance (Goffman, 1986, p. 125-127), which can be shown as the chart below:

⁵ From the interview of O’Toole, see appendix.



Later in 1980 Heathcote presents a model called General Role function in Relation to Frame Distance, which John O'Toole think is connected with the concept familiar in literary theory of "narrative viewpoint" (O'Toole, 1992, p.109), she pointed out from different perspectives, the same object can be observed from various distance, which will be linked to the concept of distancing later in this chapter.

The roles and perspectives the participants take in the dramatic event decide the level of distancing and directly influence their interpretation of the event.

The concept of frame and framing might be adapted in the dramaturgy of comic TIE, shifting between frames might create humor and playfulness according to the concept in comic aesthetic that comic can be seen as incongruity and surprising, and it

will be elaborated in the later chapter.

2.3 Distancing

The German director Bertolt Brecht explained in *The Modern Theatre is Epic Theatre* (1950), how his Epic theatre is different with the principle of estrangement (verfremdung), which Heathcote claim her theory has no direct trace to the source. Admitted or not, there are countless ties between these two genres of theories. Norwegian drama researcher Stig A. Eriksson made his own interpretation after close research on the theory of distancing in theatre science, pedagogy and psychology, including these two genres. He generalized and summarized the distancing effect in Drama pedagogy has three significant meaning connotations as three aspects of protection, aesthetic principle, and poetic devices. (mentioned in the Description, Eriksson, 2011, p. 65)

To talk about distancing in educational drama, there has always been an argument of the level of empathy and detachment, how does it affect the learning, especially learning through theatre.

“But the premise of Best’s Position is that when ‘artistic feelings are rational and cognitive in character’, they are not two separate dimension of feeling and reason,’ but only one, rational/cognitive feeling’.⁶ ” (Eriksson, 2009, p. 47)

David Best holds the view that artistic empathy is based on rational thinking as

⁶ Reference of David Best idea is in *The Rationality of Feeling. Understanding the Arts in Education*, London: The Falmer Press, 1992. The theoretical foundation, according to Stig Eriksson, is from Robert Witkin’s position in *The Intelligence of Feelings*. (1974)

well, while Gavin Bolton holds an opposite standpoint. He asserted, “aesthetic meanings are felt rather than comprehended” (Bolton, 1984, p.147). To criticize Bolton on this point, Best wrote in 1992 that it is not necessary to “disown understanding while emphasizing feelings”. (Best, 1992, p.6)

Despite of the argument on whether feeling or reason is the subject in this learning process, both of them admit it is a combination between empathy and detachment. According to Bolton, the dramatic experience “invites in the role-player both submission and detachment.” Bolton, 1984, p.147) From Bolton’s point of view, the dramatic learning process contains both emotional feeling and intellectual understanding what Best has focused on.

“If submission regarded as the quality of feeling, and ‘detachment’ understood as a premise for cognition, Bolton’s observation represents a convincing parallel to the combined experience of feeling and understanding that Best is after.” (Eriksson, 2009, p. 47)

Bolton elaborated his idea from the tradition of process drama; he seeks for a way of combining feeling and understanding together.

The principle of distancing attached tightly with humor and comedy. Firstly, as mentioned before, humor can be seen as a type of healthy and reasonable self-defense mechanism according to Freudian psychology theory. “The bracketing and distancing of the aesthetic point of view allow the spectator access to different degree of detachment and involvement.” (O’Neill, 1995, p.113) The safe space is created between fiction and non-fiction. The laughter can cause by the detachment of the fiction as well.

Also, distancing can create estrangement and surprise, which connected to the incongruity aesthetic in comedy. Last but not least, the relationship between audience and performers in a comedy is mercurial; it might be possible to create a dynamic distancing system in comedy.

2.4 The 'gap' theory

From this point, the British TIE dramatist Edward Bond has brought his “gap” theory into discussion. His perspective is a more philosophical exploration of the ‘centre’ of TIE programs. He focuses on the nothingness, the void, the unknown between meanings, anxiety and fear pervades from these gaps among human beings. In *Edward Bond and the Dramatic Child*, Bill Roper interpreted Bond’s 2004 comments on ‘the gap’:

“In summary, Bond sees self, the world and society oriented, though the question of meaning, around nothingness. Nothingness is an absence of meaning, around nothingness. Nothingness is an absence of meaning, value and justice in a particular place or time, which provokes humans to ask questions; often this place is a contested site, such as the future, where different sources instate different meanings, values and interpretations of justice in answer to the question asked. Nothingness is therefore the place or site where the most important events, conflicts and human inquiries are played out.” (Roper, 2005, p.129)

According to Bond’s view, the aim of TIE is to remind the participants “the gap” and provoke them for further thinking, both emotional and intellectual. The layers of frame mentioned before can provide possibilities to look into these gaps in distance. To discuss under the frame, with controlled level of immersing and distancing, is how

TIE function among the participants. It's a typical Rashomon⁷ kind of mechanism, how the event is happened, interoperated in distance, deconstructed and reconstructed.

2.5 Edward Bond and Drama Devices

Edward Bond elaborated his concept of how to construct a TIE program in his work Drama Devices. The use of the devices is covered by the general notion of TE (Theatre event). It focused on the theatrical part of a TIE.

“TE invalidates received and ideological meanings and establishes new meanings in their place. The audiences are aware of the TE outcome but the character need not to be.” (Bond, 2005, p.85)

On dramaturgy level, Bond developed his own pattern and style of forming up the dramatic narrative, which can provoke and stimulate the participants. Beside the usage of objects that trigger the cathexis effect of the participants, the other devices such as repeated pattern, palimpsest, site and situation, centre, barrier, extreme, drama reality and the logic of humanness, they can be adapted to the form of comedy and functioned just as well in serious discussion; Bond said for himself that:

“TE restores to the Tragic and the Comic their formidable power. It opens

⁷ Rashomon, The **Rashomon effect** is a term used to describe the circumstance when the same event is given contradictory interpretations by different individuals involved. The term derives from Akira Kurosawa's 1950 film Rashomon, in which a murder is described in four mutually contradictory ways by its four witnesses. More broadly, the term addresses the motivations, mechanism, and occurrences of the reporting on the circumstance, and so addresses contested interpretations of events, the existence of disagreements regarding the evidence of events, and the subjects of subjectivity versus objectivity in human perception, memory, and reporting. (Wikipedia page, Rashomon effect,)

up vast new areas of meaning and drama and places it back at the
centre ”(Bond, 2005, p.85)

Chapter 3 Comic Elements

Comic elements in TIE

Comic elements in this thesis refer to three different aspects: comic performing form, comic interactive form and, above all, comic aesthetic.

Comic aesthetic is the theoretical guidance for both comic performing and interaction form, but in this thesis, these two aspects are emphasized as two possibilities for exploration. There are not only aesthetical principles concerned in the operation of both performing and interaction, but also the field of pedagogical and psychological included.

Comic Aesthetic in TIE

In this section, the theoretical deduce will focus on the hypotheses made form chapter before that comic aesthetic is related to the principle of distancing. After close reading of drama pedagogy literatures, basic on Eriksson's integration of distancing in educational drama, a similar structure is deduced:

Comic aesthetics can function in TIE as:

1. Estrangement aesthetic
2. Dynamic frame distancing device
3. Protection

From these three deduced hypotheses, this study intends to investigate the adhibition of the aesthetic in real practice, two aspects of performance is pre-designed,

which focus on both aesthetical and educational side of the production.

3.1 Comic elements as estrangement – from the basic comic theory

In Aristotle's *Poetic*, there is a clear distinction between tragedy and comedy:

“Since the objects of imitation are men in action, and these men must be either of a higher or a lower type (for moral character mainly answers to these divisions, goodness and badness being the distinguishing marks of moral differences), it follows that we must represent men either as better than in real life, or as worse, or as they are. [...] The same distinction marks off Tragedy from Comedy; for Comedy aims at representing men as worse, Tragedy as better than in actual life.”(Aristotle, 1902, p. 11)

The words of “higher”, “lower”, “better” and “worse” in the paragraph above can be interpreted in different perspectives. Despite of the moral concerns, no matter comedy and tragedy, they all possess characteristic of artistic exaggeration.

Edward Bond brought out the idea of extreme in his article *Drama Devices*. He explains extreme as an aesthetic principle in his production.

“Need not to be physical or violent. It may be (and must also be) extremely of meaning. In the extreme ordinary meanings break down. When a situation's extremity faced the barrier is crossed. On this side of the barrier there may be pain and pleasure, on the other side there are the Tragic and Comic. The latter two integrate meanings into emotion. They then become agents of justice. All change in history is a change in meaning. The violence that holds ideology together is hidden under platitudes and sentimentality – the extreme forces this violence to reveal itself.” (Bond, 2005, p.89)

Bond's elaboration indicates the room of non-sentimental thinking created by extreme situation. Demonstration of the extreme could also create humor. Aristotle sees comedy as the imitation of the lower type of the human behavior. It discloses the

unreasonable in a sarcastic way. It determines that in comedy, the audience is in a higher level “examining” the imitation, just like the form of ancient Greek theatre implies, the audience higher up, and the stage lower down.

“We even laugh when the baby falls down and goes boom. We defend this sadistic release by saying, "That's cute." It's not cute—especially from the baby's perspective. Humor often ridicules the intelligence, social standing, and physical and mental infirmities of those we consider inferior to ourselves. [...] But those we consider superior to ourselves are not spared. We delight in publicizing and mocking every shortcoming—perceived or real—of people who are in positions of authority, who are richer, more famous, more intelligent, physically stronger, or more admired. The greater the prestige of the victim, the greater our desire to equalize.”(Helitzer, 2005, p. 23-24)

Helitzer’s elaboration pointed out a popular genre of comic theory, which comic effect is created by the feeling of superior. To link it with Aristotle’s definition on comedy and Bond’s idea of extreme, this might be one of the possible explanations of why the participants laugh in the TIE production. And it is a popular explanation in the research of comic writing that laughter is comes from the feeling of superior.

It inspires a genre in comic theory that laughter comes from the feeling of superior, French philosopher Henri Bergson wrote three essays about laughter. He thinks this kind of feeling of superior requires indifferences that lead to lead to a detachment of emotion and sentimentality.

“Here I would point out, as a symptom equally worthy of notice, the ABSENCE OF FEELING which usually accompanies laughter. [...] Indifference is its natural environment, for laughter has no greater foe than emotion. [...] Now step aside, look upon life as a disinterested spectator: many a drama will turn into a comedy. It is enough for us to stop our ears to

the sound of music, in a room where dancing is going on, for the dancers at once to appear ridiculous. How many human actions would stand a similar test? Should we not see many of them suddenly pass from grave to gay, on isolating them from the accompanying music of sentiment? To produce the whole of its effect, then, the comic demands something like a momentary anesthesia of the heart. Its appeal is to intelligence, pure and simple.” (Bergson, 2002, p.11-12)

It appears in Bergson’s elaboration that the comic effect requires certain level of distancing. The problem that TIE engages is often unobvious, customarily right, it takes time to understand the seriousness of the situation, like Edward Bond said, in extreme situation, “ordinary meaning break down”.

The “good” and “bad”, the tragic and comic is distorted and exaggerated. An element in real-life situation can be identified easier after distortion. The term of distortion is mentioned a lot in the field of DIE:

”The theatre [...] shows life in action, how people fill the spaces between themselves and others – it can do what is the reality of life but seems to be opportunity or art, distort the view productively.” (Heathcote, 1984, p.202)

Comic distortion might well function productively in extreme situation, the distort figure offers new meaning and understanding in a production.

As it mentioned before, Bergson assumed that comic aesthetics is more intelligence based instead of sensibility. By Intelligence he meant socially accepted rules and regulations. Sociologically, laughter is a moral correction mechanism.

“Laughter must answer to certain requirements of life in common. It must have a SOCIAL signification.” (Bergson, 2002, p.13)

Then Bergson used absent-minded people (which is commonly used in comedy) like Don Quixote as an example, he thinks laughter has a moral role, it is a factor of

uniformity of behavior. People make fun with the people who have vice, objectively it reminds the one and raise awareness in a gentle way. Similar phenomenon occurs when people are watching a comedy. The character which is “lower” than us remind us as the people around, this effect raised by laughter is like the catharsis raised by fear and pity, but not through the self-reflection system, it’s in a more social way. (ibid.) On the contrary, aesthetics in traditional tragedies require full immersion; the tragic catharsis is triggered by pity and fear, the fear is triggered by the feeling that the same thing would have happened to themselves, it could be explained with empathy effect in psychology.

Bergson’s assumption that laughter is a social intellectual experience matches with Bolton’s idea in detachment. Laughter presents as an emotional manifestation in comedy, but it works in an intellectual way. The way laughter works might well function as the part of intellectual detachment in TIE.

Bergson explained the intellectual detachment on the level of aesthetics, is it similar with what Brecht emphasized in his production of epic theatre, which is a genre more closed to TIE.

After Berholt Brecht pointed out that modern theatre is epic theatre, the principle of *Verfremdung* is commonly accepted in theatre, especially the in the field of TIE, for its connotation of alienation and detachment.

In the Modern Theatre is epic theatre; Brecht presented the changes of emphasis as between the dramatic and epic theatre: (Brecht, 1950, p.37)

DRAMATIC THEATRE	EPIC THEATRE
plot	narrative
implicates the spectator in a stage situation	turns the spectator into an observer, but
wears down his capacity for action	arouses his capacity for action
provides him with sensations	forces him to take decisions
experience	picture of the world
the spectator is involved in something	he is made to face something
suggestion	argument
instinctive feelings are preserved	brought to the point of recognition
the spectator is in the thick of it, shares the experience	the spectator stands outside, studies
the human being is taken for granted	the human being is the object of the inquiry
he is unalterable	he is alterable and able to alter
eyes on the finish	eyes on the course
one scene makes another	each scene for itself
growth	montage
linear development	in curves
evolutionary determinism	jumps
man as a fixed point	man as a process
thought determines being	social being determines thought
feeling	reason

As it is mentioned in the former chapter, the concept of distancing plays a significant part in TIE. The third essential application of distancing in educational drama, as Stig Eriksson wrote in the summary, is served as a poetic device, namely, estrangement. To say it more detailed, it might be the estrangement that creates laughter.

In Brecht's theatre, the emotional touching is no longer the prime goal of his production, what he pursuit is the "Gedanken und Gefülle" (thoughts and feelings) (Brecht, 2001, p.190).

Bertolt Brecht:

"It [epic theatre] in no way renounces emotion. Least of all emotions like love or justice, the urge to freedom or justified anger: so little does it renounce these emotion that it does not rely on their being there, but tries to strengthen or to evoke them. The "critical attitude" in which it is trying to

put its public cannot be passionate enough” (Brecht, 1952, p.254 in translation by Esslin, 1971, p.148)

Brecht’s idea is often misunderstood as total detachment of emotional feelings, that his aesthetic “cognitive realism is radically anti-empathetic” (Kuhn and Giles, 2003, p.207). As the quotation shown above, he was no way against emotional feelings, but to seek for a “critical attitude” that balances empathy and detachment. Comparing to what Bergson said before, the aesthetics Brecht was describing matched exactly with Bergson means how laughter works. The theory of laughter that created by intellectual social thinking offers a possible methodology for Brecht’s epic theatre approach. Laughter, or to be more precise, “to banter”, is a way of estrangement, to make things weird, unrecognizable, then look at them in distance. Eriksson gives a short summary of the application of estrangement in Brecht’s own practice.

1. To make the familiar strange, to recognize what is false.
 2. To de-mask the self-evident of an event, to raise curiosity.
 3. To make social structure transparent, to understand the known anew.
- (Eriksson, 2011, p. 4)

When a “lower” action is staged, the audiences might realize the action in reality. When it is artistically exaggerated, it is more likely to be accepted as a bad sample in life. Su Shi (1037-1101), the Chinese poet in Song Dynasty wrote a poem on the wall of Xi Lin temple in Lu-shan Mountain. He was puzzled by the foggy mountain and could not give a complete picture of it; it seems like a whole range of ridge in one way and like a single peak in another way. He wrote, “Why can’t I tell the true shape

of Lu-shan? Because I myself am in the mountain.”⁸ The poet was not merely writing about the mountain, it refers to the same kind of effect that Eriksson pointed out. The tourist sees Lu-Shan Mountain unrecognizable because he is in the mountain; the scenery is familiar. One who lives in the society is hard to recognize the fault cause one is familiar with the context. In comedy, it is a common method that to present a familiar situation in a distorted expression. Comic aesthetic, from its origin, contains the principle of distancing.

Eriksson interpreted Brecht’s opinion in order to draw a link between distortion and estrangement:

“ (Brecht’s description on what *Verfremdung* is:)

‘It is just a method by which the interest is concentrated on the object we will describe, in order to make it interesting’⁹ [Eriksson’s translation], so by implication: to bring it to notice. Distortion is in itself, like *Verfremdung/apostasioposis*, a de-familiarization concept.”

To sum it up, comic aesthetic implies distorted figure that creates the feeling of superior, and de-familiar the real-life situation, which is part of the meaning of estrangement.

Theoretically, comic elements might create the effect of estrangement, the tested-out and examination would be presented in the later chapter.

⁸ Ti Xi Lin Bi, Su Shi, “不识庐山真面目，只缘身在此山中”，translated by Burton Watson, it is a poem written in Song Dynasty, commonly spreads in China, even in primary school text book.

⁹ “Es ist lediglich eine Methode, da Interesse auf das zu Beschreibende zu konzentrieren, es interessant zu machen”, From Brecht, Bertolt “Der V-Effekt”. In *Schriften zum Theaer*, b. 3, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, [?] 1963, (pp. 182-183)

3.2 Comic elements as dynamic distancing device – further hypothesis

For further research on the last point, why does it laughable when a familiar situation got distorted, another theoretical hypothesis is made.

The concept of superior in comic theory might be a possible explanation for that kind of effect; the concept of incongruity and surprise could be another. Humor emerges from incongruity between perspectives and situations, when expression of the perspectives is in an uncommon way, or the situation is ill-suited to the common logic. The feeling of inner inconsistent results in a ridiculous scenario.

“The cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through it in some relation, and the laugh itself is just the expression of this incongruity ” (Schopenhauer, 1933, p.174)

The later section is all about estrangement and artistic distortion; Schopenhauer believes that it is the incongruity that causes the laughter, not necessarily the feeling of superior. The incongruity can be interpreted from different perspectives, with or without intervention of the fiction.

In the real TIE practices, we often encounter two different kinds of laughter, within the drama, or outside drama¹⁰. People laugh for different reasons in the experience of TIE, they may laugh because of they don't believe the fiction at all; they may also laugh when they are fully immerse in the theatre event. There might be the third kind of laughter, which is on the edge, the participants could even laugh when they suddenly jump from immersive to disbelieve, and probably another way around. And this kind of laughter can be explained as the theorists said about the

¹⁰ See in the interview with John O'Toole, appendix

incongruity and surprise. They might burst into laugh when the well-established fiction breaks, yet they might experience playfulness when unrelated subjects suddenly make sense in a dramatic fiction.

As it mention in the chapter of terminology, there is a frame distance in the field of DIE, it might function as well in TIE. If we take participants of consideration, they are experience the event from different role and perspectives, the whole theatre event that involving multiple layers of frames. When Chris Cooper describing the common feature between TIE and DIE, he particularly noticed that frame is a part of it:

“The participatory element is sometime integrated even further into the structure with much more fluid boundary between different model of audience and active participants. The aim is always engage the young people in direct participation in the art form – often through role-play or dramatization. Each participant is consciously framed. [...] Frame, role, task and enacting moments or dramatic situation enable the participants to bring their whole selves to the TIE programme.” (Cooper, 2013, p. 45-46)

The quotation about showed the link between DIE and TIE on the term of frame and framing. The engagement here is not equals to full immersion, by a fluid distancing, shifting between frames might lead to laughter while creating meanings.

In TIE, because of its interactive nature, there are role distinctions of pure actor, actor teacher, facilitator; in different episodes of the production, the level of distancing is constantly shifting. That means the “role” of the participants is shifting as well. In Heathcote’s model of frame distancing, she presents in a first person singular task perspective in the order of distancing:

“Participants (I am in the event)

Commentator (I am telling you what happened)

Guide (I was there and I am recalling it for you)
Investigator (I have the official authority to find out what happened)
Recorder (I am recording the event for all times)
Critic (I critique or interpret the event as an event)
Artist (I change the form of the event and remake it) “
(Heathcote and Bolton, 1999, p.64)

By the theoretical inferring, it is possible to set up a dynamic distancing system in TIE with the help of comic elements, according to the incongruity theory. Since by the power of laughter, it is easy to break down the fiction and re-establish it repeatedly. Each time the fiction breaks, new meaning emerges, as Edward Bond said in Drama Devices:

“Patterns of the events are repeated. Each time they may be TE¹¹ in new ways. Later TEs related to meaning created in earlier TEs.” (Bond, 2005, p.85)

Edward Bond indicated that repeated pattern may enhance the understanding of the participants in TIE, it might achieved through comic reconstruction.

New hypothesis is formed, can comic elements serve, as a dynamic distancing device in a TIE production? The hypothesis will be tested in praxis, and being analyzed in the later chapters.

3.3 Comic elements as defense mechanism – applications

As outlined above, comic elements is linked tightly with the concept of distancing in drama pedagogy, notion of estrangement and frame distance was outlined. Stig Eriksson pointed out that distancing could also be used as protection in

¹¹ TE, Theatre Event, see the quotation that explains it in the former terminology chapter. (Page)

DIE, he elaborated:

“Distancing as protection from ‘the real’ – a psychological aspect of distancing - has a prominent position in drama education literature as a safeguarding strategy in the drama classroom. The issue explored in the drama can be distanced, and therefore experienced as less threatening, by keeping the action at once (protected) remove from real-life situation.”
(Eriksson, 2011, p. 65)

This idea of distancing of protection of DIE can also function in TIE as well, due to their similar models of framing the participants. The participants are often framed into fiction with tension and extreme situation, just like Edward Bond and Chris Cooper mentioned in the former text. Laughter can be a get-away mechanism for too much tension for the participants.

Comic elements have their essence of distancing, for laughter itself has the function of release in the first place. Freudian theory of humor could be introduced into our sight in order to explore how the mechanism works. Firstly, Freud himself was partly agreed with the superior theory, his own explained the motive of this kind of behavior as the aggression unconsciousness urge; to express it with joke is a socially acceptable method. Due to the limitation of his era, his focus is closer to sexual repression, and he implies that sexual repression can be expressed in obscene jokes as well. (Burger, 2007, pp. 84-89) (Freud, 1905)

“Freud said that the more tension people experience before a punch line, the funnier they’ll find the joke. In other words, a nervous and slightly frightened person is more vulnerable to a funny joke than someone who is calm and there- fore tensionless. (Burger, 2007, p.87)”

As we often experience in a not-so-succeed theatre event, the unpredicted

laughter sometimes implies the participants are repressed with certain feelings, the problem is in which frame they are repressed, does it has something to do with fiction, or sometime that has nothing to do with the production?

The quotation above can be interpreted in two different aspects. From my observation, there are at least two kinds of protective laughter in the practice is TIE. In some cases, the participants are over-distanced from the fiction, the feeling of oppressed is directly pointing at the production itself, “I am not interested in the topic, so I made jokes that express the repression”. It is a kind of protective laughter. In other cases, the participants are over-immersive to the fiction, the feeling of oppressed is pointing to the fiction, “This is too much for me, I need a break, just think of it as a joke.” It is a kind of distancing protective laughter.

In the first situation, that indicates the participants are not fully engaging in the theatre event, it because either the topic is not related to the participants or there are not framed in the situation convincingly. They feel uncertain or uncomfortable with the situation, Heathcote wrote:

“So drama is a means of learning, a means of widening experience even if we never act in a play or stand upon a stage. It is a human instinct to have ‘a willing suspension of disbelief’ (attributed to Coleridge). That from the moment we open a book, or our ears and eyes, we are willing to discard all prejudices, all pre-knowledge and wait for the story or the play to take control of our imagination and for the time we believe in the action.”
(Heathcote, 1984, p.82)

The willing suspension of disbelief might prevent this first kind of protective laughter from happening. But what about the other kind of distancing laughter, which

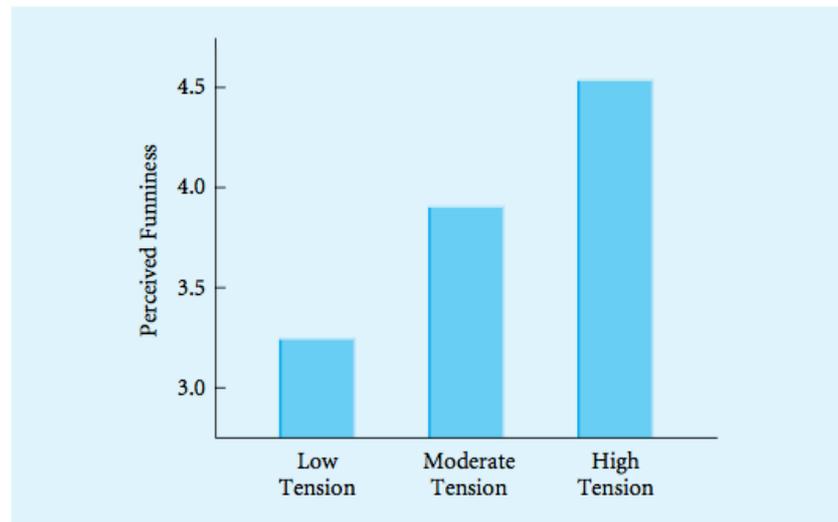
protect the participants from over-immersing, how does it function?

This prediction is tested by Shurcliff in 1968 with lab rats, and he assumed it is functioned as well in human. The higher the tension is, the funnier the participants

Figure 4.4

Perceived Funniness
as a Function
of Tension

Source: Based on Shur-
cliff (1968).



feels:

Based on these researches, the Freudian psychologists finally defined humor as a defense mechanism, it is attached to the main defense mechanism of sublimation, “the ego channels threatening unconscious impulse into socially acceptable actions.” (Burger, 2007, p.49) In George Eman Vaillant’s categorization, it is placed under the term of Level IV – mature defenses. (1977). This kind of defense is commonly found among emotionally healthy adults or considered mature. It functions as an optimized system to encourage the success in life and relationship, and integrate conflicting emotion and thoughts, while still remains effective. It is considered virtuous to apply these mechanisms. Vaillant defined humor as the overt expression of idea and feelings (especially those are unpleasant to focus on or too terrible to talk about) that gives pleasure to others. The thoughts retain a portion of their innate distress, but they are

“skirted round” by witticism. (Villant, 1986, p. 794)

The material above can be summarized as laughter is a submission of the fear of not being socially accepted. That is why I suggest the jokes should be told by the actor-teacher or the facilitator, so the participants know the topic is not tabooed, then start a communication with the language of comic theatre. Under the cover of jokes and humor, the participants are substantially protected. It might do a better job than pure distancing; too much distance may close the possibilities of discussion, but under the pleasant atmosphere, comedy could be a way to start and maintain the communication in the fiction.

As we mentioned before in the estrangement section, Bergson pointed out laughter itself is a social event. The participants might laugh to show they understand the humor. As Bergson wrote:

“Our laughter is always the laughter of a group. [...] How often has it been said that the fuller the theatre, the more uncontrolled the laughter of the audience!” (Bergson, 2002, p.12)

The participants may get encouraged by the laughter from the others, “it’s OK to think this way, and it was just a joke, it’s not necessary to hide my thoughts.” In this case, their thoughts are “being laughed out”. They may not **agree with** the fiction, but they are **with** the fiction.

Laughter can be a marker of not being able to be involved in the fiction, or laughter can also be a marker of a stage where participants – carefully - try to be a part of the fiction, and that forms the third hypothesis of this section.

Chapter 4 Method

In the former chapter, few hypotheses are deduced theoretically. In order to test out these hypotheses in the real-life practices, a TIE program is designed with the comic aesthetics mentioned above, adapting the Chinese traditional cross-talk xiangsheng as the performing form, facing groups of different sizes. There are multi-applications of methods and methodologies, in this chapter, there would be a brief introduction of the main methodology and the TIE program designed.

4.1 Methodology

To define the strategy used in this thesis, there will be mainly two parts for the methodology; one is the over-all methodology for the whole program, the other is the methodology for textual data analysis.

4.1.1 Performance-based case study research

The over-all method of this program could be defined as a performance-based research; this is a term under the qualitative research tradition. Practice-based research is an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and outcomes of that practice. (Candy, 2006, p.3) In this case, the word practice could be replaced by the word performance, since the main practice of this program is all surrounding the TIE performance designed.

The relevance and necessity of the applying comic elements in TIE is already

deduced through close reading of the literature. To test out the theoretical hypotheses and to find “the situation of practice – the complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflicts which are increasingly perceived as central to the world of professional practice”. (Schon, 1983, p.14).

The strategies used here in this thesis are reflective practitioner, (both reflection in action and reflection on action) and participants research. Not adapting the originally designed participatory observation, we gain the flexibility to deal with the personnel storage that occurs in the devising process.

Since the program is performance based, the method taken is not limited to the quantitative ways; the feedbacks and reflections of the participants can be categorized and quantified, in order to show a complete picture of the transformation process.

4.1.2 Psychological phenomenological analysis

Since the data collected in this program would be huge, there must be a systematic way of data managing and analyzing. The first methodology comes to mind is the phenomenological approaches.

“A phenomenological attitude looking at objects from the perspective of how they are experienced – allow a search for the essence of the phenomenon, using free, imaginative variation to reveal why the object makes a specific example of the phenomenon. A particular object is reduced to its essence through phenomenological reduction. Bracketing presuppositions of the object may allow for critical attention to the experience. Then the essence of the object is described as accurately as possible, including the relationships between the essence and other phenomena.” (Malterud, 2012, p. 796)

Kirsti Malterud described Amedeo Giorgi's psychological phenomenological analysis like the paragraph above. The approach starts from the statements' general sense of the description, then go through the data and aiming the "meaning unities". By discriminating the units with the perspective of aesthetic, pedagogy and psychology, focus on the hypotheses being researched as a phenomenon, the professional insight contained in the units can be appeared and expressed. Therefore the subjective experience no longer speaks the highest voice, the synthesized transformed meaning unit will be formed in to a consistent statement, the conclusion is more objective than the first impression.

4.1.3 Systemic text condensation

From that point of departure; STC (systematic text condensation) is formed. This approach includes 5 procedures, total impression, identifying and sorting meaning units, condensation, synthesizing and further sequences of analysis.

As its flexibility, Malterud elaborated:

"I regard STC more as a procedure than as a theoretically dedicated method. However, theoretical analysis will always add important surplus value to descriptive, empirical findings. A broad range of theories can be applied to support STC analysis, depending on the research question. Although the phenomenological inspiration is obvious, I will not claim STC to be a phenomenological method. Nevertheless, a committed phenomenological analysis can also be conducted with the STC procedures as a scaffold." (Malterud, 2012, p.802)

Methodologically, STC has underlying theoretical foundations of social

constructionism. It can be traced from Vygotsky's theory of cognition; the knowledge is constructed in society, and it is reconstructed dynamically, the situated cognition can be interpreted as several possible version of reality. (Beger & Luckman, 1967)

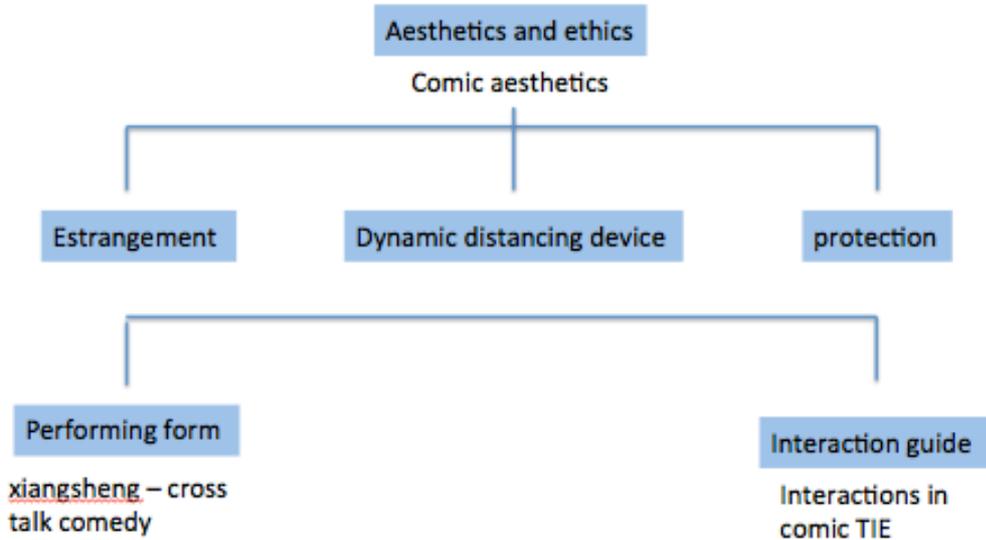
To speak of the meaning unit, which is essential in this 5 steps procedure, it implies a text fragment containing some information about the research question. In this thesis, that means any textual material that related to the research question, how does the principle of distancing help to frame the comic elements in a TIE production? The word distancing is breaking down according to the three hypotheses before, words such as alienation, familiarization, detachment, perspectives, roles, protection etc. would be taken in to consideration.

“Then we start coding, which includes identifying, classifying and sorting meaning units potentially related to previously negotiated themes. Coding implies decontextualization, temporarily removing parts of the text from their original context for cross case synthesis with the theme as road signs. We identify meaning units and mark them with a code – a label that connects related meaning units into a code group.”(Malterud, 2012, p.797)

There are three aspects hypotheses mentioned in the former chapters. which are comic elements serve as estrangement, comic elements serve as dynamic distancing device, comic elements serve as protection. These are the main categories identified. Then sub categories of xiangsheng as a performing form and interaction method would also be consider in order giving concrete conclusion. The structure is like it is shown below:

Pervious negotiated categories of meaning units in the thesis –
sorting by functions

Comic elements in TIE functions as:



However, the textual material is not the only data collected in this study. It needs to be an integrated overview and un-textual material from the point when the production was devised. From my point of view, any reaction that the participants gave has something to do with the designing process, looking at the meaning units in the feedbacks separately can cut-off some possible logic link with production itself. Therefore, the strategy of STC here is only strictly used for interpretation of the feedbacks of the participants.

The reflection of the analysis will accompany with the whole research process to ensure the reliabilities and ethic of the whole procedure. A consistent statement will be made after the analysis as a well-reflected conclusion.

4.2 Method

4.2.1 The TIE Program designed

Most of the method used here in this thesis is start from the TIE program designed. There will be an introduction below to demonstrate how it was designed and how does it relevant to the research questions.

The TIE program is called *I'm a teenager and I'm not happy*. The aim of the thesis is to analyze the comic elements in the production; it is rather a methodological exploration than a discussion to a demonstration of how TIE program engaging real-life problem. Nevertheless, the program is designed under the comic aesthetic, adapting comic performing form. It may illustrate how it will be done in a common practice, even if the center of the program is non-comic and socially oriented.

The problem we focused is the ideal education in Chinese high schools; ironically it is not even in the curriculum. I would like to briefly introduce how the center is developed through devising process.

China is a country with huge population; the development between areas is deeply unbalanced, as the educational resource is limited, the competition between high school students is increasingly fierce. To study seems to be the only way fair to change one's fate. The stress is from different social relations, the teachers, the parents, the companions and the employers. The students are facing an inevitable dilemma; few people can get into college, to study is the only way ahead, but under

that stress, it is hard to identify what they truly want to do in the future.¹² The feeling of being? lost and meaningless is common among pre-adult, not only in China, but also in other part of the world. They may have hobbies, or things they want to do, but studying seems to be the only thing they? “should” be doing.

Aiming at this issue, the center of the TIE program is developed. The center is the core of the TIE program; according to Edward Bond, “Particular plays deal with the centre in relation to specific situation. The play’s main metaphors and similes reflect its centre. Its patterns are based on structures extended from the centre.”(Bond, 2005, p.88) Chris Cooper made a more detailed definition to the word centre, “The centre of a TIE program or drama workshop for young people, then, refers to the particular aspects or areas we are exploring for learning with the participants.”(Cooper, 2013, p.134) Our devising group is formed by four members of postgraduate students; all have been through that “dark period” in high school. Firstly, we made our presumptions, the meaningless feeling is caused by dream missing, the centre of the TIE program will be the? simple word in Chinese, 理想. The closet translation for that word will be ideal, ethically, it refers to a principle or value that one active pursues as a goal. The “gap” here is the fear and anxious for the unknown future, the dream, concrete or not, weaken the unpleasant feeling, stronger the will is, less possible one got stressed.

In later devising, we find the presumption dream missing rather offensive, it

¹² In the year 1994, 21.21million people was born, in the year 2012 only 9.04 million entered the college entering exam, and 8.8% of them was admitted in the first patch of undergraduate. (The figure is from Internet, there is no figure of the First Patch College entering rate in National Bureau of Statistics of China.)

somehow is? describing out participants a groups aimless zombies. After the in-group reflection and interviews with the high school teacher, we gradually understand that the? dream, as a value they pursuit, is? based on their cognition of the world. It is formed under the social situation; other's opinion is an important factor in the value-forming period, namely, adolescent pre-adults. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, only from the fulfill needs of esteem and self-esteem, the self-actualization can be established. (Maslow, 1943) The centre of the TIE program shifted slowly towards identity and esteem. The level of self-esteem sometime is different with the esteem from others, and how to we mange the acceptance issue with rational thinking. It is actually a common process that Chris Cooper has elaborated:

“In the rehearsal r devising of a TIE programme, the centre is defined and tested and redefined throughout the process. There is an overall centre but also the centre of each scene and central image, actions and objects.” (Cooper, 2013, p.134)

Surprisingly, through feedback of the actual performance, the discussion raised from the participants is shifting back to the original centre. Seems like in that group of the participants, the emphasis is not strictly attached to identity and esteem.

The design of the TIE program is inspired by the theory of comic and laughter. As the structure of the whole dramatic narrative, it is a two-episodes comedy skit with ad-lib placed interactions. The parts of massive intervene for the participants are placed before the episodes, between the episodes and after the episodes. Mentionable, in the last part poetic reflection convention with is included in the sturcture, the participants are invited listen to 46 relevant questions to the program in the darkness with eyes closed; they were invited to share their thoughts anonymously afterwards.

The notes we collected could be a valuable resource of data for analysis of how comic aesthetics serves educational purpose. (Of course, we already notice the participants, the notes would be collected for research purpose anonymously right before the performance, it is voluntary.)

On the level of dramaturgy, the script will be presented in the appendix; it will be analyzed first in the later chapter. The text is devised by the team of four, including two postgraduate student of drama pedagogy, one professional actor from theatre directing undergraduate, and a postgraduate student from psychology. The text is changed thoroughly during the devising process and after the performance is done, the sample in the appendix is the latest version after the two performances in the high school. It was shown both in Shanghai Bei Hong High School and Suzhou No.10 High School. The curriculum and the condition of educational facilities is different in each province in China. In Shanghai, we did the performance with the whole grade of 197 participants and in Suzhou, we did it with 20 participants. There will be a direct example for the size of participant's group influencing the result of the performance. The pre-text of the production is based from a social event in our childhood. In the year 1999, the instant noodle manufacturer Little Racoon Co. produced a collection of toy cards and sends them as gifts with the noodles as sales promotion. The cards is based on the classical Chinese novel *the Water Margin*. The heroes of the Water Margin were printed on the cards and lifted a wave of card collection among kids and teenagers. Together with the swordsman novel tradition in Chinese literature, the metaphor was established between card collecting and dream pursuing. The first part

of the play is the childhood memory of the main character, in the form of light comedy, expressing the lost and confusion in the way pursuing dreams. The second part of the play is in the form of Chinese traditional crosstalk comedy – xiangsheng. Two characters were devising to show two extreme situations in school therefore stimulate the discussion. One of the characters was the main character in the first part; the detailed explanation will be presented in the later chapters.

4.2.2 Comic acting form – xiangsheng as drama

Another thing that need to be discussed theoretically in this thesis is the application of the traditional Chinese comedy form – xiangsheng, also know as Chinese cross-talk comedy. Not to get away with the Western comic theory, xiangsheng contains all the characteristics mentioned above.

Xiangsheng is a performative art form origin from Qing Dynasty (1820-1825), it means imitation of humans' behavior by words.¹³ It first starts with jokes telling, and developed into a cross-talk comedian show. As Beijing Opera, it belongs to the genre of Quyi;¹⁴ it has developed a group of mature and systematized stylish performing approaches. It becomes a popular kind of theatre art in China, being loved by audiences from different social levels.

Formally, it is closed to stand-up comedy shows in Western world, but in the form of two actors dialogue, using the simple setting of two chairs and a table, simple props like paper fans and wooden block. In content, it has a hundreds of

¹³ Xiangsheng, 相声, in ancient time, it is written as 像生, it means imitation of others words and behavior.

¹⁴ Quyi, can be translated as Chinese folk art form.

traditional jokes that developed through history, and there are new production written through the years.

In xiangsheng, the unique pattern that actor communicate with the audience is the factor which persuade me to adapted in my design of TIE. Chinese audiences are not familiar with the innovative theories that drama can be interactive. They are more used to siting in the theatre and receiving message that given by the actors, that is especially prominent among pre-adults. Because of the stress of getting into collage, there is little chance of them to touch theatre; the most familiar situation for them is to learning in the class. But xiangsheng, is a form that wins universal praise in China, the relation between xiangsheng actors and audience is familiar to them. As the stylish acting is presented, the audience is turning into participants immediately. The interaction between participants and actor is permitted, even encouraged in traditional xiangsheng, since its origin of folk art form, it was performed in the street, in the market, in the tea house in the ancient time. The actors were trained to improvise when they face the flowing crowds. It is closer to TIE's interactive nature.

Besides, because its interactivity, the dramatic narrative in xiangsheng is flexible, multi-dimension distanced. Acting, enacting, narrative, and direct communicating between participants and actor is can be fused dynamically and organically in xiangsheng. The participants are already familiar with the situation, shifting between frames becomes nature and amusing.

Last but not least, xiangsheng already possess the critical aesthetics that

Brecht has mentioned above. Aesthetics of xiangsheng, is more closed to comedy and satire in ancient Greece, presenting its social orientation.

“Comedy differs from abuse, since abuse openly censures the bad qualities attaching [to men], whereas comedy requires the so-called emphasis” (Cooper, L. , 1922, p.225)

The laughter that creates in xiangsheng, is usually though the term emphasis, it will be analyzed in the later chapter to demonstrate how the laughter is created.

4.2.3 Other ways of data collecting

Beside the notes and reactions we got directly from the performance, there are other ways of data collecting involved in this program. The log in the devising process will be the main analyzed material on the aspects of how comic elements helps on the level of TIE program designing. For the evaluation of the program, the videos were recorded in order to check the instant reaction of the participants. The notes can be seen as another form of interview, which the participant were not constrained to answer the designed questions.

The interview of the practitioner is covered within the log, and also, the observation of the on spot reaction from the perspective of the facilitator, actors and pure observer is valuable as well. That requires the interviews with the teachers involved who watched the whole performance.

Mentionable, a teacher of Chinese literature in Beihong High School, spontaneously required the students to write an impression of the experience afterwards, we are not informed before he handed the texts to me, total 197 articles. It is in his designed curriculum of writing training, and all the materials are anonymous when they are handed. The personal information of the students will not be traced for the protection of the students.

4.3 Reflection

For ethical concerns, the name or any other personal information of the students will be concealed; the students will only be traced by the name of the school.

On the other hand, since they were told the performance is involved with a research program in Norway, it might be concerns of the reliabilities of the material. To avoid that situation, several un-related questions were asked for control group of data, the reaction of these questions would be recorded and analyzed. The questions asked could ease up the tension and also set a standard that how they speak their true feelings.

Since the research involves comic elements, it can offer a situation of relaxation and security, therefore is it easier for them to tell the truth. But, we can't avoid some of the students are over-distanced, and seeing the form of comedy as a projection, joking around and conceal their true feeling of the performance. These materials should be sorted and excluded from the analysis. Luckily, we found the percentage of that situation is creditability low.

Chapter 5 Analysis

The analysis of the production is based on the script and two performances we did in two different schools in China, Shanghai Bei Hong High School and Suzhou No.10 High School. The textual analysis will follow the procedure of STC, other than that, it will be a performance-based case study.

The production, no matter from the on spot reaction and feedbacks from the participants, can be considered as a success. That is from a quantitative point of view; the result will be shown below as an overview of the production.

At the end of the performance, there is a step of reflection for the participants; the participants were asked to write a little note about anything comfortable after they heard the 46 questions in the darkness. All the questions were related to the centre of the performance, and divided in three levels. Level one linking tightly to the dramatic narrative, such as which character do you think you are more closed to, regarding to personality. Level two is more closed to their real-life experience; such as do you sincerely like to study. Level three is questions that seem to have nothing to do with the performance and asked just for fun, such as, when you go to the toilet, do you usually with someone? The questions is deliberated designed in this way to test out there degree of distancing in each period of the performance with certain level of protection. The part is voluntary, nearly everyone wrote something, and we got 151 notes in Bei Hong. Among these notes, 13 of them wrote something not about the centre, that means neither about dream or about identity or acceptance, that is about

8.6%, some of them directly answers to the 46 questions we asked, not related to the play itself. The rest of them express thoughts about the centre in various ways, some of them already got a “mature” point of view, one of the participants even quoted a line from our pre-text coincidentally; while some of them were still struggling to explore a proper position for themselves. They will be simplified in the later analysis. There are about 18 notes we got from Suzhou No.10 High School. One of them did not write anything, and another special case hard to define, which will be analyzed in the part of comic as protection. The rest of the response was ideally link to the centre of the play. That is 5.5% to 11.1%, for the sample size is too small, that figure cannot tell much. Anyway, the figures of the final feedback tells that at the end of the production, most of the participants still follows the dramatic narrative, and seems to be willing to think more about the centre.

For the comic elements in the play, laughter seems to be the collective response, throughout the performance (documented on video (attachment 3 (?) How laughter contribute to the final result, will be analyzed by analyzing the detailed reactions in the following paragraphs.

The following sections are based on hypotheses from the comic elements chapter. The material from the former practices will be analyzed to testify these hypotheses that serve as condensation units here in this chapter. Meaning units will be sorted and placed under each hypothesis.

The hypothesis we got from the former chapters is that Comic aesthetics can serve as aesthetic principle or ethical protection in a TIE production. Comic aesthetics

is different from the classical tragic aesthetic in the first place, and it is a curative part of comic elements. Introducing comic as aesthetical principle and moral ethical protection might enhance the acceptance of the dramatic narrative, promoting the educational discussion and, also, protecting the participants from emotional harm.

The samples will be given with interpretation as demonstration and meaning units on how it's done in Chinese high school practices.

5.1 Comic as estrangement

In the former chapter, the “gap” theory of Edward Bond was introduced. During our devising; the gap became a part of an aesthetical guidance of the play. The “gap” we assumed in this production is the fear of the future; it is created by the uncertainty to which path they will be taking in the future. It is also shown in the feedback of the participants that verify our assumption.

I will randomly share some quotes from random notes of student-feedbacks:

“What is a dream? Or an aim? I feel like it is a question that troubles me for a long time. I would never believe myself if you told me few years ago that the day I get into high school I would be without an aim. I once want to be a swordsman, like Guojing, ‘a true hero would speak for the people’, or just be someone that accomplish something, a person that someone would consider successful and outstanding. But I think now I will find a new answer.” (See appendix, p. 18) (my translation)

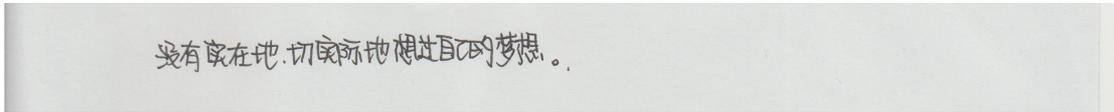
“I don't have a dream.”(See pictures below)

“My dream is ... get a dream first.” (See pictures below)

“I never REALLY thought about my dream.”

In the culture background of China, it is embarrassing for them to admit they

don't have dreams, cause the notes is anonymous; they dare to speak it out. That is the first sort of feedbacks, the dreamless. There are two other sorts of the feedbacks, their



没有实实在在地、切实际地想过自己的梦想。



我没有梦想。

dreams are either too “realistic” or too “romantic”, that they were not willing to share; they feel like the situation, the environment is stopping them from pursuing. They either gave up or hide their dreams.

China is a country that has currently been through an innovation, where new values and traditions are impacting and coalescing. In every nation, there is a gap between school and society, that gap is even more highlighted in China. The issue of feeling aimless or having uncertain aims are becoming more common among pre-adult, the realities they are facing is a high-load of studying, the things they hear is the contrasts of easy success and sudden death of people. The situation in Shanghai is not so much different from the paradise of adventure as of last century, it was and still is the city of opportunities and challenges, but unfortunately, the students got shanghaied by life itself. The school credit becomes the only thing to identify a student.

Based on this and with reference to Edward Bond's extreme theory (Bond, 2005, p.91), two extreme characters are devised. They are abstracted from the everyday life of the participants with distortion and exaggeration. It was shown in act 2 of the play,

the cross-talk comedy. Ma Ant, one of the characters, was set as a pole of the extreme situation. He is the “perfect student”, he is doing good in all studies, and always be the best in the class, a straight A-student, this is, however, the only thing he is good at. But he has no aim; he doesn’t know what he is studying for. As a contrasting character, Dugu Xia, is a character that has deep obsessions on swordsman novels; (it could be replaced to superhero comic in western context). He wants to be a kongfu hero in the future but he has absolute no idea how to accomplish that dream. He has the worst score in school and yet hating anything related to study. These two characters both have some characteristics the participants would relate to themselves. It framed the participants in a rather familiar situation (them being students themselves), but still it was distanced and estranged through the extremes of the characters (?).

An example to illustrate this is taken from the start of the act 2, Ma Ant has a line: “I truly like to solve problems in the school paper/tests.” (P.9)

The participants burst into laughter immediately. The logic is, there is some participants who truly loves to solve problems that are given in school papers/tests, but to say it loud is pretentious in a classroom setting, most people would consider this as showing off, and if they still cannot get a good mark in the exam, that will be even more embarrassing. When the actor speaks his line honestly, the participants laugh for the distortion and incongruity from their real-life experience. When they think about that behavior rationally, it creates laughter. Here the laughter is created by estrangement. Usually the line will be said pretentiously, but here it has been said

with true feelings, that makes the familiar strange, then it triggers further thought, is there any reasonable motivation for a man who loves to study? What am I studying for? (Eriksson, 2011, p. 4)

Besides, the laughter is social, when they see others laugh in the same way, the participant will be encouraged by each other, the echo of laughter would motivated the participants to a even more engagement in the dramatic narrative. (Bergson, 2002, p.12) Even if they do love to study and hold a different opinion than the others, the laughter gives them an opportunity to think.

A student got irritated about one of the extreme characters. “He could blame those who sweat, work hard as an ant, bold with ‘justice’. [...] Who gives him the right to blame those people! From where he got this feeling of justice? Does he deserve a cerrtain position that gives him the authority to blame those hard workers? He is not pursuing his dream, he is bragging about the dream, and any way his dream is ridiculous.” (See appendix, feedback from students)

It seems this student was a bit over-immersing in the fiction, but the laughter of the classmates did stimulate his/her thoughts. He/she is looking into the event with a different perspective, “there is no fault of loving studying, but why people are laughing, this is not right”. He/she may not enjoy the laughter at this point, but by observing the laughter, there is a different voice being exposed and discussed.

Another vivid example that comic aesthetics serves as estrangement can be found in act 1, when the behavior of purusing the goal is “alienated” into a sick competition. By the way, the student who got irritated describes the logic of the character is

“ridiculous” and used it against the character in his/her later argument.

The story in act 1 describes a process of a boy collecting Water Margin hero cards¹⁵. The boy first starts collecting because he wants the card of Song Jiang, the No.1 hero. He admires Song Jiang and wants to take a page from Song, the helping “guardian”. After helping a girl finding her monthly tickets from a water pool, the girl gave him the card of Song Jiang. Then the alienation starts, the boy begin collecting all the cards seriously, even tricks others for trading cards. The participants laughed hardly when the other boy is being tricked. I understand their laughter in this way: They laugh because the behavior is perfectly logic, but immoral, they feel superior when they watch it. The harder the other boy gets tricked, the harder they laugh. Through the estrangement, the event is de-masked from the real-life logic; they recognize the false within the familiar situation, which has nothing to do with the awareness of the seriousness of the behavior. The reaction is normal and reasonable. After the pattern is repeated, (Bond, 2005, p.85) the main character get caught by his own desire, he drifts further away each day, the alienation becomes more obvious. When they were watching the boy burning all his cards for jealousy, the participants stopped laughing, no one even smile anymore. Here comic elements serve as the first step of the estrangement, the laughter is the by-product of that effect, and it is easier to enter with laughter. Mentionable, as Bergson said in his essay:” To sum up, whether a character is good or bad is of little moment: granted he is unsociable, he is capable of becoming comic. We now see that the seriousness of the case is of no

¹⁵ In Chinese traditional swordsman novel the Water Margin, there are 108 heroes with different nicknames and starting a revolution against the tyranny

importance either: whether serious or trifling, it is still capable of making us laugh, provided that care be taken not to arouse our emotions.” (Bergson, 2002, p.69)

Serious or not, the participants laugh because the character’s behavior is not socially accepted; it distanced the event and made it clear, without emotional arousing. The silence after implies the participants were thinking about the issue both intellectually and emotionally.

Here is the later argument of that particular student who got irritated by the character:

“He [Dugu] lost in his way pursuing the dream, why and what should he continue pursuing? Becoming the ‘leader’ of the school, because everyone wants to trade with him? Is it the evil eight (six) destroyed his dream? Or he just loose his original direction while he is dreaming? Didn’t he start collecting because he likes these 108 heroes? But why he lost the original dream because of the cheering and vain glory.” (See appendix, feed back from students)

Basically she/he means the same that we analyzed before, after finding the logic “ridiculous”, the thought flows. In this case, it is the logic of comic that is promoting his/her learning process and makes her fully engaged.

5.2 Comic as dynamic distancing device

The former example is associated with this hypothesis as well. The interpretation of a certain event in under the concept of the frame, according to Kari Heggstad’s definition:

“An interpretation of this explanation of frame is that frame is not only a situation with some action participants. It is also a situation and interpretations of situation by the participants involved and by possible

viewers.” (Heggestad, 2011, p.262)

The frame is situation and the perspective for the participants to experience the action; the interpretation of the situation can be various from different perspectives. In the case of card collecting, there are at least existences of two kinds of frame distance, the simple action of card trading can be interpreted in the logic with the drama, ”I have to collect all the cards no matter it takes”, and the participants interpretation, “this is immoral, the one who got tricked is silly”. Some participants even spontaneously took the role of the one who got tricked, experience the event with the feeling of jealous. We were not previously framing the participants in the certain role, but they spontaneously found their “extra role” other from the fictional character as the thicker. The incongruity of this two even three frame distances creates the comic effect.

To laugh is a natural and spontaneous reaction of the participants; it requires shifting between frames to create the comic effect. The participants in a comic production are familiar with the comic pattern and expecting the shifting. It is rather fragile balance, which promotes the emergence of a dynamic distancing system in comic TIE.

The perspectives of the participants are constantly shifting in a comic production; they are more open to different position in the play. There are some unexpected interaction in the practice of this TIE production, let us take them as examples.

Example 1:

In act 1, when the boy was describing the appearance of Song Jiang the hero, a

girl pointed out that he looks just like Song Jiang, the participants responded spontaneously with laughter, some of them even made the comment that the boy is not even dark skinned as Song Jiang was described, but yet they accept the situation. (See the video of Bei Hong practice, from 19 minutes) (Script, appendix, p. 4)

Example 2:

In act 2, when we are adapting the traditional xiangsheng jokes in our practice, Dugu Xia said, "I went home and told my dad. Dad..." and Ma Xiaoyi responded, "Yes?" The participants got the joke immediately, when the actors was trying to carry on, they responded the same way, "Yes?" (Bei Hong practice, 48 minutes) (Script, appendix, p.14)

Those two examples both have something to do with identity and perspectives. In the first example, it is obvious they took the place of the commentator at that moment, when they realize it is just a show, a narrative, a story telling. It was distancing for a second, and they went back to the dramatic fiction almost immediately. That second of distancing made them laugh, and thought about the link between the character and Song Jiang the hero. Multi layers of frames lie within that short structure of narrative.

In the second example, that is a more complicated frame distance. The participants are watching the theatre event with both the perspectives from the identities of the character, his father, and also as themselves. It could be verified in the later response, when the actors asked the participants directly for the consequence of his behavior of changing the family name, the participants already has a pre-assumption as the dad of the character. The participants also responded with

laughter when the actor finally tells what actually happened to him. The difference between their presumptions from the position of the dad and the dramatic fiction creates that second laughter. These identities of the participants emerge in the same time and shift dynamically.

As we know, in the tragic aesthetics, the catharsis is coming from fear and pity of the participants, it requires incessantly immersing of the participants, the frame distance is rather stationary, at least in an episode. But in comic, because the social nature of comic aesthetics, it asks for dynamic distance in the first place. That encourages the participants to think in a dynamic way, with both intellectually and emotionally. Objectively, it explores the flexibility of dramaturgy for comic TIE. It could be more possibilities tried in such a model.

5.3 Comic as protection

Let us start with another pair of meaning units, two samples in the production:

Example 1:

In the second interaction of the play, we asked the participants to describe the characters with us. We placed the coat of the characters on the chairs; the participants gave us adjectives to label the characters. Two characters with extreme characteristic were pre-decided as two extreme situations in the school, the “good” and the “bad”. Surprisingly, we found the participants gave both negative and positive comments on both the characters with laughter spontaneously. (Script, appendix, p.8)(Video, Bei Hong, minute 30)

Example 2:

In act 2, there is a long paragraph of story telling describing how the female general Mu Guiyin is the ancestor of Yang Guo, the hero. The participant responded spontaneously, following each time the actor say the repeated word, Yang Jia Qiang. The more they repeated, the harder they laughed. (Script, appendix, p.12-13) (Video, Bei Hong, minute 45)

In the first example, both of the characters were designed as agencies, for the participants to relating themselves or people around to the character. In the performance before, the style of comedy was already established; the participants are already familiar with the aesthetics. The “good” students are well protected in the common situation; we seldom hear negative comments to them. With the protection of “I am joking”, the aggressive feeling is expressed in a social accepted way, humor. And the one being mocked on will not be heavily offended cause it is under the cover of jokes. On the other hand, the “bad” students, they were constantly mocked on, under the cover of joking, they could express the characteristics they appreciate with the protection of humor. The labels were re-mentioned near the end of the performance, it was not used with the protection anymore, since it was pre-distanced before with jokes, it was designed as catharsis effect for the participants.

The second example implies another kind of protection. The “family tree” of Yang Guo, can be seen as a banter on the class who has privilege. It offered a way of expressing the oppressed complains under the cover of humor. The name of Mao is mentioned later of the example, not implying his descendants are privileged class, but a deconstruction of the respected. It might be considered as politic, cause it truly

reflects the reality, not because it mocking on the former chairman, banter like that is permitted in China currently, cause it is nothing serious. Comic elements can be seen as a useful tool to protect the oppressed when they express the dissatisfaction.

5.4 Comic performing form

The application of Chinese traditional xiangsheng comedy is collected in act 2. Adaptation of this form will be analysis in two aspects.

5.4.1 The setting of xiangsheng

In tradition, xiangsheng was performed as a story-telling art form in the market or the teahouse; the setting is simplified as practical as possible. Traditionally, it was performed with the setting of just one table. In this TIE program, we accepted that table as the only supporting point on stage, this rough setting furthest utilizes the imagination of the participants.

The fiction and the space on the stage is accomplished together by the actor-teachers and the participants, in a comic production, the requirement of the supporting point for the action is not that urgent, on contrary, is it more playful for the actor-teachers using the “magical if” as Stanislavsky said on the stage, even creates humor.

In the production, there is a point that Ma Ant is pointing at the floor, using ants as a metaphor of him, the participants laugh with the action and accept the setting. (Script, p.17, video, from minute 53) It is common in traditional xiangsheng that using visual directing to create a fictional targets. The ant is tiny; it is convincible to

act with no actual object. At that moment, an inner-contract between actor and participants is connected, the participants laugh to accept the contract. So do we see, the comic acting is more tend to communicate with participants rather than acting behind “the fourth wall”.

We can see this kind of aesthetic in different genres of acting, both in Shakespeare and in Chinese opera, from ancient Greek theatre to contemporary dances. In comedy, it can be seen as another source of the laughter.

There are still another examples when Dugu Xia the character describing a book he found in a store. During his narrative, the table suddenly becomes a bookshelf. (Script, p.14, video, from minute 47) At the start of the act 1, the boy went around the table to shown he was on the way of going home. After he met the girl, the table suddenly became a bus stop. (Script, p. 2-3, video, from minute 15) Objectively, it can simplify the setting and the cost that makes the production adapting different performing environments in different schools. More importantly, it set a style for comic acting.

5.4.2 Narrative in xiangsheng

Chinese cross-talk comedy, is the imitation of human’s behavior in the beginning, during the long-term development, it has become an art form that focus on the element of narrative. Aesthetically, it is different from conventional dramatic theatre; it is more closed to the epic theatre that Brecht brought out. (Brecht, 1950, p.37)

In the act 2, the story in the structure is weakened, it become a montaged narrative with lines. The narrative is mostly from a third-person perspective to distance the event. It is common in the performance of traditional xiangsheng, that we express the points of views within a comic fiction; all the story telling serves the topic and stimulates the thoughts of the participants. Allegories, legends, novels are introduced in to the narrative not as the theme, but to form the theme with the participants. In this production, the legend of the Water Margin, Chinese swordsman novels, the scientific fact of the ants, the story of the swimmer Shavarsh Karapetyan were used as metaphors to deconstruct the reality in a Chinese High School. The laughter is not merely coming from the fictional story itself, it comes from the critical attitude that is stimulated by the narrative.

The concept of narrative theatre is not only applied in the act 2 the traditional cross-talk form. In the act 1, the story is told part dramatic part narrative. The following parts were established by dramatic action in the episode:

1. The boy met the girl and started the relationship; the girl gave him the card of Song Jiang.
2. The moment the boy collected all the card
3. The part when the boy leave the girl
4. The boy found out someone got the wishing card collecting all the cards
5. The boy burned all his collection, including Song Jiang

The rest of the story is presented in the narrative of the character. It pushes the pace of the story (which is crucial in comedy) on the one hand, and distances the process the boy got alienated. When the participants realized the process could be that fast, the things they cherished got destroyed that easy, the critical thinking started.

5.5 Interaction in Comic TIE performance

The subtitle of this section doesn't imply that the interactions in comic TIE performance should be comic as well all the time, yet it should be a tool to link the participants to the comic dramatic narrative.

Comic or not, we should understand the differences of requirement between two aesthetics. Unlike tragedy, comedy needs a delight atmosphere from the beginning, therefore the opening interaction before the play need to be playful. The participants need to be directly engaging the event with their sense of humor; it requires the guidance of the facilitator.

The first interaction of this production is designed under that concept. (Script, p.1, video, minute 2) It can be seen in the video that our facilitator met some problems when she asked for some volunteers. Here is the direct translation of her improvising from the video.

[The facilitator carried out a smiling pillow, the participants laugh.

[...]

“Is there any volunteers?”

(No reaction, twitter from the participants)

“If no one volunteer, I'm going to follow the principle of proximity.”

(Laugh from the participants)

“OK, I will come for the last role...”

(Laugh even harder)

The ridiculous looking pillow created the first laughter, and the following laughter was stimulated by deliberate incongruity of the lines. It started a attitude of joking and deconstruction of the serious.

Beside the playfulness of the interaction, the interaction is also used for dragging the thoughts from joking back to serious in a comic TIE.

In the first interaction, the participants were asked to pass the pillow and say a sentence as the sample, with their own answers. The sentence is designed in the following format:

1. I went to bed at ... (time)
2. My idol is...(person)
3. I think I am...(adjective)
4. The others think I am ... (adjective)
5. I want to be a ... in the future.

The participants would not realize the seriousness of these questions, and they will be re-mentioned later in the last interaction as an approach for reflection. The question is directly connected to centre.

The second interaction of this TIE program is to ask the participants to label the coming character with adjectives. Playfulness was still the main theme in this part, but the participant were asked to think in a way of philosophical binary opposition. They will set the two poles for the extreme situation in fiction, the discussion will not beyond the limits of the two poles, which create a free room for dialogue under the topic. Comic elements were used as protection to stimulate the discussion.

The third part of interaction is what we called “the questions in the darkness”, 46 questions were as in the darkness to the participants with their eyes shut. There was no need for them to answer the questions, the participants were actually asked to reflect in a ritualized event. Most of the questions were related to the dramatic

narrative, a few questions were asked to ease up the tension in order to protect the participants from too much immersion.

The theme irrelevant questions are:

[...]

8. Have you ever played your cellphone in the class?

9. What did you play?

[...]

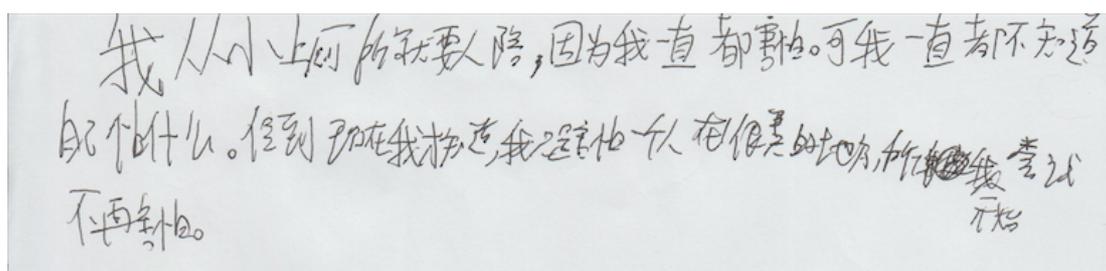
14. Have you ever block anyone in Wechat? (Chinese fackbook, you can block someone if you don't want someone to see a post.)

[...]

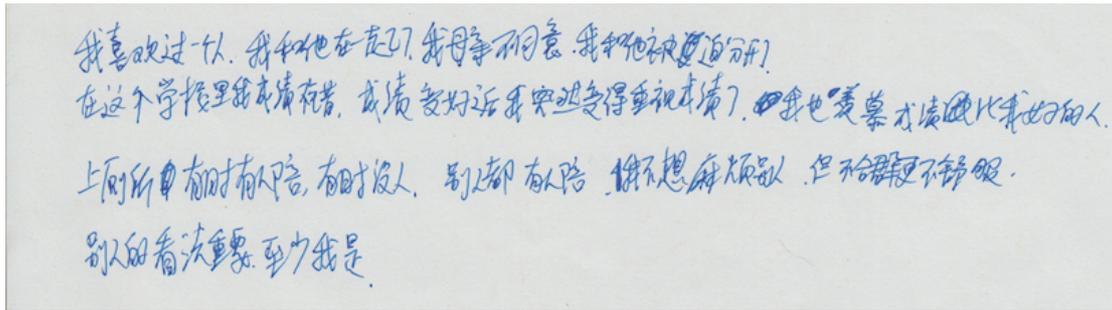
34. When you go to the toilet, is there anyone with you?

35. Why do you need accompany?

These questions intentionally leave the space for joking for the participants, for protection, we did hear the sound of snicker in the darkness. Unfortunately, there is a student cried after this section in both two schools. It was hard to evaluate if the protection mechanism did its job. As it showed in the notes after, some participants even tried to relate those questions to the theme.



“I need someone with me when I go to the toilet since I was little, because I’m always afraid. But I realized now, I’m just afraid of being alone, without others, in the unknown darkness. I’m trying to not be afraid.” (Notes for the performance, translated from picture above)



“[...] My credit is OK; I began to pay attention to it after my score is improving. I admire those who got higher score than me. When I go to the toilet, sometime there is someone with me, sometimes without, I don't want to bother other, but I felt uncomfortable to be unsocial. Opinions from others do matter, at least to me.” (Notes for the performance, translated from picture above)

The answers to the question about toilet were addressed directly to the theme topic of social identity and acceptance, by the participants in an unpredictable way. This can be explained by term coined by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1817 “suspension of disbelief”, once the fictional situation is established, the participants will suspend their critical faculties and believe the unbelievable. (Coleridge, 1817, Chapter XIV) In this case, when the participants got involved in the comic narrative, they would arouse any possible explanation to “rationalize” the question, which means some participants would related all the questions to the theme topic even some of the questions is not designed under the theme.

“The factor special to drama is that it achieves these in “heated” not “cold” circumstances, for it draws directly upon the individual’s life and subjective experience as its basic material, and achieves this in circumstances which are unique – that is when ‘a willing suspension of disbelief’ applies, and When those concerned are using their subjective world to illuminate and understand the

motivation of others through role-playing.” (Heathcote, 1984, p.55)

Heathcote explained the same kind of effect in process drama, which shares the same factor in TIE. The participant will use their subjective experience to fill the gap between images. The behavior of going toilet with someone is explained in his or her own way related to the theme. It is a unsuccessful attempt of comic protection, but a successful approach for the participants to reflect the content of the production.

Chapter 6 Conclusion and Reflection

In the section above, the meaning units in the production is found and condensed.

In this section, the condensation will be synthesized and concluded as description.

6.1 Comic as estrangement

From the feedback, we can see most of the participants gain intellectual cognition while experiencing the theatre event, and thinking continuously during and even after the performance. Since comedy is the major way of expression in this production, here we need to figure out how it functioned in this particular piece. In this production, the laughter is overall caused by de-familiarization of the participants' real-life experience. The fiction we designed is an abstract embodiment of their school life, either the card-collecting story or the narrative in xiangsheng. The characters were distorted to an extreme to, yet they followed the logic of the reality. That makes them laughable comic characters. Based on the examples we gained a glance on how comic works in this case.

As we seen in the chapter of theory, the popular explanation of the comic effect is that the laughter comes from the feeling of superior or incongruity and surprise. Both of these concepts were testified in the production. The performance is designed under the guidance of Edward Bond's theory of extreme. The characters were distorted and therefore incongruous, extreme and therefore un-socially accepted. The un-socially accepted fictional characters aroused the feeling of superior. According to Bergson's theory of laughter, this process not emotional but intellectual.

But through the actual practice we can see it is a combination between feeling and thinking. The empathy and the detachment worked as a unit in the comic so they can learn while laughing. Just like Bolton said, the process is rather affective than cognitive.

Another assumption that is made in the chapter of theory is testified as well in the practice. As Bergson wrote in his article of laughter, comic is social process, it need to be understand in a collective social context. We did two performances in two different schools, one with 20 participants and one with nearly 200. It can be told from the video recording and the observation forthwith, that the one with more participants engaged more closely in the performance. For the internal transformation process, the example of the irritated participant implies that laughter can be seen as a socially accepted expression method and arouse possible discussion.

6.2 Comic as dynamic frame shifting

In this production, the participants were not deliberately framed in a fixed perspective in each episode. In common process drama practice, the participants are often framed into one certain perspective all together, at least in a fixed perspective in a fixed section.

“In process drama, the participants literally project themselves into the action. They become actors in the event, whose immediacy and spontaneity will prompt a necessity of building the dramatic world, responding to developments and taking responsibility for remaining this world in existence is likely to demand a level of objectivity and ‘unselfing’.”(O’Neill, 1995, p.90)

What the participants experience in this particular TIE production is different from the experience that O'Neill has described in DIE. The participants were not responsible for existence of the fiction; yet hold the desire to maintain the playfulness and joy they gained from the comic narrative. This provides flexibilities for their roles and perspectives in the production. They would spontaneously seek for different possibilities that can trigger the feeling of surprise and incongruity in a comic production, for those are how laughter comes from. The two examples in chapter of analysis implies in this case of comic TIE, the participants do has a tendency to frequently shifting between perspectives and yet able to back to the dramatic narrative immediately. Furthermore, they were able to hold multiple perspectives simultaneously and respond both emotionally and intellectually.

Moreover, the laughter can be seen as a marker of sudden change of the frame. Within Heathcote's model of frame distance, I think it is hard to place participants of this production with a fixed role or perspective. They constantly experience the theatre event as a pure participants, but when they laugh, it means there has been incongruity with their current fictional role and the role as the participants at that specific time, as it always happen smoothly, the participants will go back to the controlled dramatic narrative almost immediately. With that kind of mechanism, they are able to experience several perspectives at the same time. The internal motive of the participant in a comic production is always seeking for incongruity and surprise. More conflicts between the frames, more the incongruity would grow, hence, harder they laugh.

To conclude this session of the research, the perspectives and roles in this comic production were inconstant; the frames were flexible and dynamic; and laughter can be seen as a marker for these changes.

6.3 Comic as protection

As it is mentioned former in the theory chapter, there are two kinds of protective laughter, pure protective laughter and distancing protective laughter. It has happened both in the production.

The first kind of the protective laughter is happened mostly in the starting part of the production, when the participants were not entering in the fiction. It is functioned as Freudian theory of defense mechanism described; the suppressed feeling of not included in the fiction was expressed in a socially accepted method, namely, laughter.

In the study, the focus is the other kind of protective laughter in TIE, which distance the participants too much empathy to the fiction. Jokes can be aggressive sometimes from Freudian points of view (Martin, 2010, p.39), to protect the participants from getting hurt psychologically, and let out the true thoughts and feelings, a protective mechanism is required. From the two examples of the production, we can see most of the time humor itself can function as a defense mechanism, to see the fiction as a non-harmed joke can help them distance the fiction to prevent too much empathy, and therefore more like to tell the truth in the form of jokes as well.

But we also observed a hard limit of this kind of protection; laughter is not

cure-all in this case. As it mention in the analysis chapter, the example of the misunderstood jokes in 46 questions can be seen as a failure of the attempt. Due to the function of “the willing of suspension of the disbelief” in the later part of the production, when the atmosphere of comic was diluted, the participants were less sensitive to the jokes, and therefore unable to detach from the fiction. And also, when the dramatic narrative is to close to the participants’ real-life experience, the protection will not function as well, just like it is elaborated in case of the irritated participant.

To sum up, laughter can function as a distancing device on it own when the atmospheres of comic still function and the dramatic narrative is distanced in certain degree from participants’ real-life experience.

6.4 Reflections

6.4.1 Xiangsheng as TIE

About this Chinese traditional comic form, its function has been elaborated in detail in the former chapter. Quite a lot of participants express they like the traditional art style adapted in a new form; some of them even think it is easier for them to accept than previous Shakespeare piece they had experienced. Here in this session, the focus is on the challenge of adapting this form.

Firstly, xiangsheng is a form that based on narrative, comparing to the traditional form that focus on the action, it has its disadvantage on lack of concrete visual figures.

Not to mention the highly abstract settings in its form, without the traditional aesthetical contracts that developed through the history, there might leave too little material to inspire the imagination.

Also, comic is the highly cultural experience; jokes would be interpreted differently in different cultures even when they were correctly translated, some comic elements that embodied in the original form of xiangsheng may not be understood in the same way. It can be seen in the appendix script that there is quite a amount of jokes needs long descriptions for better understanding, the feeling of surprise might already gone while interpreting. For example, the comic effect raised by the ethical jokes of making fun of the actor while playing role of the character might be difficult for cross-cultural understanding. This kind of ethical jokes is part of original dramaturgy structure of xiangsheng.

The culture differences could be exposed not only in the way of understanding the material, but also on the level of ideology. Bergson elaborate that laughter is a social experience, and it will echo among people. We can see comedy requires more people to participate. And the ideology focus on comedy is often group forming rather than individual transformation.

6.4.2 Comic interaction

TIE is a sort of participatory theatre; it ought to have the continuous interaction with the participants. But how is the interaction in a comic TIE production?

In traditional TIE or DIE, for the effective communication with each participant,

it is not suitable to carry out a performance with the group too big. Comic TIE, however, requires much bigger group to provoke laughter, than, logical thoughts.

“This intelligence, however, must always remain in touch with other intelligences. And here is the third fact to which attention should be drawn. You would hardly appreciate the comic if you felt yourself isolated from others. Laughter appears to stand in need of an echo, Listen to it carefully: it is not an articulate, clear, well-defined sound; it is something which would fain be prolonged by reverberating from one to another, something beginning with a crash, to continue in successive rumblings, like thunder in a mountain. Still, this reverberation cannot go on forever. It can travel within as wide a circle as you please: the circle remains, none the less, a closed one. Our laughter is always the laughter of a group.”(Bergson, 2002, p.12)

For that reason, we developed a new approach for TIE interaction fitting bigger groups up to 200 participants. Interaction in TIE doesn't mean the interaction should be funny or amusing. At the beginning of the program, it might carries the function as breaking the ice and ease up the mood, for comic get involved smoothly, it also require in the later part of the performance, filling the gap between comic emphasis (like what is means in ancient Geek) towards logical thoughts. Also, comedy is not one-way conveying; to open up the possibilities for the participants to contracture the dramatic narrative together and create new meanings is another essential function for interaction in TIE. At the ending point, interaction in TIE carries the duty to simulate, to poetize, to abstract, to enhance the individual thinking and forming it in to a socialized sublimation.

And last let me end this description with the word Socrates said to Agathon and Aristophanes in Symposium: "...Socrates was making them agree that the same man knows how to compose comedy and tragedy, and he who is a tragic poet by art is a comic poet too." (Allen, R.E., 1993, P.170)

The comment from Socrates seems less radical than the manifesto made by Dürrenmatt in the beginning of this description. It somehow shows my stand in this thesis. This study is not asserting that comic is the only way to do TIE in China, but intends to explore a possible method, after all, they are aiming a same goal.

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Appendix 1:

Script and Video

The link of the video: <https://youtu.be/m8VcjHGe374>

Interaction 1

Throwing the pillow

A pillow was thrown among the participants, the one who got the pillow have to throw the pillow out and speak out a sentence asked by the facilitator.

Facilitator:

Firstly, welcome to watch our production by prism theatre.

Before the performance starts, I would like everyone to do a little warm up game with me.

Is there any volunteer? Let's do a little sample.

Here is a Smiling face (the pillow, with a hilarious face on it), a serious smiling face. I will throw the pillow around, the one who catches is will say a sentence as my sample, with your own answer.

My name is....

Before it formally starts, I have two requests, please speak out the truth; if you don't want to share or just can't think of an answer, please pass the pillow right away.

6. I went to bed at ... (time)
7. My idol is...(person)
8. I think I am...(adjective)
9. The others think I am ... (adjective)

10. I want to be a ... in the future.

We have already heard some answers, some wants to be... some wants to be...

I curious about went did you get that thought? Have you ever stuck on that thought? How long had you held it? 3 years ago, 5 years ago even 10 years ago, want did you want to do in the future? Who is around you at that time? What happened? I assume everyone in the house is born in 00s, I would like to invite you all to watch a memory from 90s.

Act 1 No.1 Hero.

In the year 1999, Little Raccoon Co. hired professional artists to design the cards of heroes in the novel Water Margin. The cards were sent as gifts in package of snack noodles. I was 7. It took me a while to understand the significance of the cards. In my third grade of elementary school, when I was 9, I began to collect these cards.

In the beginning, I just thought these figures are cool, and then I started to notice the stories written on the backside of the card, they encouraged me to read the novel Water Margin. Step by step, I feel like I am one of these characters in the novel, a hero, saving people, hunting evil. The habit of collecting the cards started to grow.

Girl Hey!

Boy Er... Hi!

Girl You're heading home? Where do you live?

Boy Nanmen.

Girl It's quite far. On foot? By yourself?

Boy Yep.

Girl Every day?

Boy Yep.

Girl Why don't you take the bus?

Boy I don't want to. (Grab a package of snake noodles out of his pocket, and tear off the seal)

Girl Did you spend the money to buy the noodles? You should have taken the bus.

Boy (Take the card out of the package, watch, and put it in the back pocket of his jeans disappointedly)

Girl WHO did you get?

Boy Ho Jian, The flying monkey. I don't want it.

[The girl grabs a package of snake noodles out of her pocket tear off the seal, take the card out, watches.

[The boy watches with expectation.

[The girl notices the boy's glance, smiles, and put the card in to the back pocket of her jeans.

[Silence.

Boy Who is it?

Girl You want to know?

Boy Yes.

Girl I won't tell.

[The boy turns around disappointedly, go.

Girl Don't go... Comparing to the cards, I like the snack more. I don't care which card I got.

Boy Who is it... please.

Girl Here is the bus stop, I will tell you if you wait for the bus with me.

Boy OK.

Girl Won't you eat your snack?

Boy OK.

[They sit at the bus stop, eating the snack noodles.

Girl Have you read the novel, Water Margin?

Boy Yep.

Girl Ho Jian, the flying monkey, what is his rank?

Boy 71th.

Girl Who is the first?

Boy Song Jiang, the Guardian.

Girl Isn't he the strongest?

Boy Not exactly. Hu Sanniang, the cyan fairy, she can defeat Qin Ming, the blaze.

Hu is 59th, Qin is 7th. The rank doesn't tell all sometimes.

Girl SHE? Hu is a girl?

Boy Yep.

Girl A girl can be a hero in the Water Margin?

Boy Yep.

Girl Haha, the cyan fairy, it's cool. I would like that nickname. I can be a heroine too... You want to be a hero?

Boy Yes, I want to be the No.1 hero. The best.

[Both eat the snack noodles.

Boy Did you read the novel?

Girl No, but I do know some character from it.

Boy Who's your favorite?

Girl I do know one... Li Kui, the black tornado, is he good?

Boy Puhhh, I have his card, he's ugly and terrifying, with scary beard.

Girl But I heard he's strong and kind. What's his rank?

Boy 22nd.

Girl That low? How come?

Boy The guys with high rank all have some famous ancestors. Guan Sheng, the blade, his ancestor is Guan Yu. Huyan Zuo, the double whips, his ancestor is Huyan Zan. Chai Jin, the breeze, his ancestor is the king in Zhou Dynasty.

Girl Not interested, never heard about them.

[Eat the noodles.

Girl So, Song Jiang, the No.1 hero, who's his ancestor?

Boy Er... I don't know.

Girl Why is he the No.1 hero?

Boy His nickname is the guardian, and someone calls him the in-time rain. It means he is helpful all the time; he would try his best to help anyone in need. But no one has seen his card, Bjon said Little Raccoon Co. has never made a single copy of it.

Girl He is your favortie?

Boy Yep, he is my favorite. All I want is his card.

Girl What's he looks like?

Boy He... He is not tall, dark-skinned, skinny, that's why someone called him the dark hero.

Girl You look just like him!

Boy (smiles) No I'm not, he is a hero.

[Eat the noodles.

Girl Thank you for finding the monthly ticket for me.

Boy It's cool, anyone would do that.

Girl It means a lot to me, I already lost one this month, I can't get on the bus without it. My dad blamed me for the first time, if it cannot be found, I will be doomed. Thank you for gets it out form the water.

Boy You should have hang it nicely on your neck like everyone else.

Girl Never, it looks funny.

Boy No it's not, looks nice.

Girl What do you mean? Me or the ticket?

[The boy is blushing, and watching a little stone on the floor.

[Eating the noodles.

[The bus comes.

Girl Here comes the bus.

Boy I should leave.

Girl Wait? (hiding the card in her hand) Am I pretty?

Boy What?

Girl You heard it.

Boy Er... yes, you are.

Girl Here (throw the card to him, and get on the bus)

[The bus goes.

Sound of the girl Bye, little Song Jiang

The next day, when I showed up in the school with that card, everyone gathered around. Someone offered me 10 yuan for it, 10 yuan, that means twenty

packages of the noodles, 20 brand new cards. Of course I won't take that offer. If I got card that rare, why shouldn't I start to collect the whole set of it, 108 heroes. I started to trade my spare cards with others, sometimes trick them a bit. The more I got, the more spare cards I had, I got two cards of Song Jiang, the No.1. Guan Sheng the blade and Hu Sanniang the cyan fairy is only cards I missed.

Boy I got Yu Baosi the black devil, Tao Zhongwang the nine-tailed turtle, Guo Sheng the junior. What do you got?

Classmate I got Hu Sanniang the cyan fairy and Zhang Shun the white fish, you want trade?

Boy I already got the white fish, Do you want to trade the fairy with my three cards.

Classmate I got all of it. Anything else you have?

Boy Trade called off. The fairy is not so rare anyway.

Classmate Ha, liar, it is rare.

Boy She is a girl, have you hear a heroine in the Water Margin before... Puhhh, you like her, sissy!

Classmate What else do you got, impress me.

Boy Here.

Classmate WOW!! All these! I have never seen someone who got this many, impressive!

Boy Hahaha, I'm the No.1 collector. See this card of Song Jiang, Bjøn said he had never seen this card, and I got two of it!

Classmate Do you want to trade it? For the cyan fairy?

Boy No, he is the No.1 hero, it definitely worth more. Do you got Guan Sheng the blade?

Classmate I only got two of it... OK! I will do it! Deal!

Boy Hmm... Deal!

Classmate Cool, it's mine.

Boy Wait... that one... is the old one, here, give it back to me , I will give you the brand new one.

Classmate Eventful!

Boy YESSSSS! I GOT IT ALL!!!

Classmate What! I don't believe it!
Boy 108 HEROES, every single one!
Classmate Fuck! I call off the trade, give them back to me!
Boy Deal is deal! I GOT IT ALL! I GOT IT ALL!

Those 108 heroes made me happy for a few months, truly. I guess I was the only one who collects all of the cards in town. Every kids treated me as a true hero, they followed me, begged me to show the whole set to them. I kept them in charged, only showed it to the ones who support me a 'gang leader'. I became the big boss of the school. It felt so good to success.

Classmate You were wrong! You still miss six extra cards! The hateful eight! Liar!

Little Raccoon Co. made six extra cards few months later. I felt like I was dropped from the summit. The follower had turned to the guys who got the new cards. The hateful six, six villains, Pan Jinlian, Ximen Qing, Gao Qiu, Gao Yanei, Tong Guan. I got five of them. Gao Qiu, the missing villain was much more hard to found than Song Jiang the hero. Most of the kids seemed lost there interest. I was not the big boss any more. In those years, for some mysterious reason, I kept waiting the bus with the girl every day.

[Bus stop, the boy sits with the girl.

Classmate (pass, with two new cards he got) Pan Jinlian, Ximen Qing, hahahaha.
(the famous adulterers couple in the Water Margin)

[The boy moves unobservably.

Girl What did you mean! You are meaning you know! (to the boy) Don't bother to answer.

Boy Er... there is something... I must go and help my dad... with the roof.

Girl Wait!

[The boy leave.

After that day, I have never waited the bus with that girl ever.

Gao Qiu, the villain, kept missing like a legend.

Classmate (tears off the package of the noodle) What is it? Wishing Card?!

Boy What?!

Classmate the lucky one who get this card, can send this card back to Little Raccoon Co. And we'll send you the whole set of the cards in Water Margin, including...

Boy and Classmate THE HATEFUL SIX!!!!

That classmate became the new hero; Little Raccoon Co. sent him the whole set, with an extra collecting cover. There's a group of followers around him all the time.

I already forgot why I started to collect the cards. No, I don't know.

[throw the card on the floor one by one, until he reach for Song Jiang, the No.1

Boy (read from the backside of the card) Song Jiang, from Yun Cheng, dark skinned, got the nickname as the dark hero. He was the most popular hero in the Water Margin for his reputation of being helpful. Whoever comes to him would get his support with no paying back. Most well known hero in Shan Dong. (POEM FOR THE HERO) “山东呼保义，豪杰宋公明”。 **(The Guardian in Shandong Province, The hero Song Jiang.)** The No.1 Hero.

[Pull out a lighter and light all the cards.

Sound of the girl Bye, little Song Jiang.

Interaction 2

The Label

Facilitator We have just watched the childhood memory of little Song Jiang, What's your childhood memory? I guess you guys have a lot to say. I won't ask, and you don't need to tell me. Let's hide the thought for a while, and let the time flows faster. It's the high school time for little Song Jiang now. As all of you, he is a high school student. What will he become?

(push a chair with little Song Jiang's coat on it)

Here is the seat of him, I want you to help me know the guy better, using the adjective, describe what do you think he would become?

I think he will be a bit **pretentious**.

(write a label and stick to Song Jiang's coat)

Some other thoughts?

(8-9 words)

[Invite little Song Jiang on the stage, put on the cloth and do the same to another opposite character "Ant Ma". Song as an actor teacher, improvise to define a opposite character, the first adjective is raised by Song, "superficial".

When these two characters are defined, Act 2 can be started.

Act 2 the Zoo

A I want to be a nice guy.

B I want to be a hero.

A No one should look down on me.

B I should earn respect from others.

A Still, there is someone look down on me.

B Someone just doesn't know how to respect others.

A They said I'm too ... practical.

B They said I'm too ...unrealistic

A They said I am superficial.

B They said I am pretentious.

A I'm a teenager.

B I'm not happy.

B I really like to read the swordsman novel.

A I truly like to solve problems from the school paper.

B 飞雪连天射白鹿，笑书神侠倚碧鸳。**(first letter of All Jinyong's Swordsman novel, it sounds like a poem.)**

A 三年高考五年模拟，黄冈正卷启东真题。**(popular exercise collections in Chinese High School, together the sentence sounds like a poem as well)**

B They said I never do the stuff I should do now.

A They said I never think about the stuff I will do in the future.

B Dugu Xia.

A Ma Ant.

A&B Bow before the play. (In Chinese traditional cross-talk comedy, it's a iconic start line.)

B I once collected the whole set of Water Margin Card when I was a child, original version, it has Little Raccoon label on each of them.

A The teachers in our school seems to have some obsession on Water Margin.

B They must be mad. Whenever the exam comes, they will rank our score in the order of Water Margin Hero. (Ranking the student's exam score is a common thing teachers would do in Chinese school in order to motivate the students)

A The first 36th is Tian Rank.

B The last 72th is Di Rank.

A I'm Tian Rank, the guardian, Song Jiang.

B I'm Di Rank, the lice, Shi Qian.

A The lice? What's his rank exactly?

B 107.

A Haha, the second last, that explains I never saw you in the class.

B I sit right beside you!

A Really?

B See it for your self. (Hiding his head beneath the desk, like he always does in the class, reading the novel)

A Don't blame me for not seeing you, I never saw your face before.

B Of course you didn't, you're the first in the class, you don't need to.

A I'm the first, that doesn't mean I'm a jerk.

B Yep, you are a bitch.

A What do you mean by that!

B Nerd! Don't you know a word called dream, what do you want to do in the future?

A Huh! You are the only one who knows what dream is?

B Go ahead! What's your dream?

A ...

A Seriously, I don't know what I would do. I don't even know what I like.

I liked to go to the zoo when I was a child, not to watch the other animals, but to watch the ants.

B I believe I would become a hero since I was a child.

A I knew study is the only thing I am good at since I was a child

B I will be the strongest in the Wulin. (fantasy world that the swordsman lives in)

A I am always the best in the class.

B Doggy Niu (Lame Chinese name) would not care about whether he is the leader of the Wulin.

A Let's do a Math task, a tempest is moving from city A with the speed 20km/h, direction north-east. City B is 40km away east from city A, the tempest can affect 30km from its centre. The task is, how long B will be in the dangerous zone.

B (ignore) You have to have a fancy family name in order to be the hero.

Such as, Ouyang, Nangong, Murong, Dugu.

Have you seen a hero with the name Niu? Niu should be the guy who forges the iron in the first house of the village.

A Of course, (towards B), Niu, would never get the answer, I can, it only takes me two seconds to figure out the answer which is 1 hour. City B will stay in the tempest for 1 hour.

B It's called fate! If you have the name Gongyang, your fate waiting is to find a deep valley, hiding for a century, training for invincible power, waiting for a lucky young guy to fall, and pass all your power to him, and your mission is over. That's how it is written in a swordsman novel.

A That's how it is written in the math task. Niu takes 1 hour to figure out the answer; when he gets it, the tempest has already passed. I can predict there will be 59 minutes 58 seconds, the tempest would pass. But it seems useless.

B It's not that easy. There are some heroes with common family names. Yang Guo for example, one-armed, his father is the traitor, Yang Kang, it is lucky he was not blown away like Niu, yet he managed to be a hero at last.

A I never thought I could become a hero. When I was a child, I like to visit the zoo, not to watch the other animals, but to watch the ants. I never thought I could be

the tiger in the zoo.

B If you are not **二代 (second generation, popular expression in China, if your father is an officer, then you are a 官二代)**, the only way for you to become a hero is to kill a tiger like Wu Song the tiger hunter in the Water Margin novel.

A I'm no **second generation**, the only way to change my fate is to study.

B Yang Guo, is different, he is a swordsman **second generation**.

A Yang Guo? Didn't you say that his father is a traitor Yang Kang?

B His ancestor, is Mu Guiying, the famous female general in the history.

A Yang? Mu? They don't even have the same family name.

B See it for your self

想当初，天波府老令公杨继业首创盖世神功——杨家枪，杨继业的第六个儿子杨延昭镇守三关，使得一手杨家枪，杨延昭的儿子杨宗保阵前招亲，使得一手杨家枪，娶了穆桂英，生下杨文广，使得一手杨家枪，这杨文广的后人是谁，族繁不及备载，只知道后来豹子头林冲在水泊梁山跟青面兽杨志比武的时候，发现这杨志使得一手杨家枪，这才抖露出来原来这杨志是天波杨府的后人，杨志的后人是谁，族繁不及备载，只知道岳飞打仗打倒朱仙镇的时候收伏了一位小将军，名叫杨再兴，使得一手杨家枪，自称是是天波杨府的后人，杨再兴后人是谁，族繁不及备载，只知道后来杨铁心带着穆念慈在街头比武招亲的时候，使得一手杨家枪。杨铁心那个没出息的儿子杨康，成天只练九阴白骨爪，就是不肯好好学杨家枪，欺骗穆念慈的感情，害得她未婚怀孕生下杨过，神雕大侠杨过，练过蛤蟆功，练过玉女心经，练过三十六路打狗棒法，练过独孤求败的剑法，甚至于自创了黯然销魂掌，可就没练过杨家枪啊。但是，血浓于水，杨过的爸爸杨康，杨康的爸爸杨铁心，杨铁心是杨再兴的后人，杨再兴是杨志的后人，杨志是杨文广的后人，杨文广的爸爸杨宗保，杨宗保的爸爸杨延昭，杨延昭的爸爸杨继业，过头了，杨继业的儿子杨延昭，杨延昭的儿子杨宗保，杨宗保的太太穆桂英。你不要质疑我在武侠小说方面的研究！神雕大侠杨过，就是不折不扣的侠 n 代。郭靖是梁山好汉郭胜的后人，姓袁就必须是山海关总兵袁崇焕的后人。姓赵就必须是陈桥兵变赵匡胤的后人。姓毛的就必须得是和谐的后人——姓郑就必须得是下西洋得郑和的后人，哦不对，记错了，郑和没有小鸡鸡，那他得是郑成功的后人。

Once upon the time, the leader in Yang's House, the famous general Yang Jiye, invent the invincible spear technique: Yang Jia Qiang. His sixth son

Yang Yanzhao, defended the three passes with Yang Jia Qiang. Yang Yanzhao's son Yang Zongbao captured the heart of his wife's heart with Yang Jia Qiang in a battle, he married with Mu Guiying, give birth to Yang Wenguang, and learned him Yang Jia Qiang. Who's the descendant of Yang Wenguang? It was not written in the history. The only thing we know is when Lin Chong the Leopard battled with Yang Zhi the Green Beast in the Water Margin, Yang Zhi, the hero, used the technique Yang Jia Qiang, so we know he is the descendant of Yang's House. Who's the descendant of Yang Zhi? It was not written in the history as well. The only thing we know is when Yue Fei, the hero had his battle in Zhu Xian Zhen (famous Chinese Opera scene), he subdued a little general called Yang Zaixing, and he knows Yang Jia Qiang. He claimed to be the descendant of Yang's House. Who's the descendant of Yang Zaixing? It was still not written in the history. The only thing we know is when Yang Tiexing take Mu Nianci with him, Joust for a spouse in the street, Yang Tiexing, he knows Yang Jia Qiang. Yang Tiexing's son Yang Kang, training the skeleton claws (evil Kong Fu power in the novel) all day long, never trained Yang Jia Qiang. He seduced Mu Nianci, and got her pregnant without marriage. Mu Nianci gave birth to Yang Guo. The hero Yang Guo, he trained Frog Kong Fu, The Maiden Classics, Dog beating Stick Style, Nine swords of Du Gu, even invented his own Kong Fu, Palm of Despair, but he had never trained Yang Jia Qiang. But! The blood in always sticker than the water. (old Chinese saying, means family bond us all). Yang Guo's dad is Yang Kang, Yang Kang's Dad is Yang Tiexing, Yang Tiexing is the descendant of Yang Zaixing, Yang Zaixing is the descendant of Yang Zhi, Yang Zhi is the descendant of Yang Wenguang, Yang Wenguan's dad is Yang Zongbao, Yang Zongbao's dad is Yang Yanzhao, Yang Yanzhao's dad is Yang Jiye! Sorry, over traced, Yang Jiye's son Yang Yanzhao, Yang Yanzhao's son Yang Zongbao, Yang Zongbao's wife Mu Gui Ying!!!!!!

Don't ever have doubt on my research of swordsman's novel! Guo Jing must be the descendant of Guo Sheng, the general. Yuan must be the descendant of Yuan Conghuan, the guardian of Shanhai Pass. Zhao must be the descendant of emperor in Song dynasty. Mao must be ...

A Ops.

B The descendant of the red sun... Zheng must be the descendant of Zheng He, the navigator...

A Zheng He is a eunuch! He doesn't even have a dick!

B Then he must be the descendant of Zheng Chenggong, the one how got Taiwan back to China.

A Wow, seriously, you need a break.

B Pity, my family name is Niu, my ancestor might be the scamp who killed by Yang Zhi, the hero.

A Aren't your name Dugu?

B Until one day, I was trying to find a swordsman novel in an old bookstore. There was an old shelf, an old cloth. Beneath the old cloth, I found this old book.

A Nine Swords of Dugu?

B The book is empty, only a line in the front page, "To gain the superpower, you must ..."

A Shit?! Did you...

B What are you thinking about? That is the Sunflower Legend, this is the Nine Swords of Dugu. The line is, "To gain the superpower, you must change your family name to Dugu."

A So you are a fake Dugu.

B So I went back home, say it to my dad. Dad!

A Yep. (traditional joke in Chinese cross-talk)

B I said it to MY dad, dad, I want to change my family name.

Could you imagine the expression on my dad's face?

A You gained the superpower?

B I was beaten, hardly. So I know it, it is not easy to change my family name.

A Dugu, loneliness.

B My name is Niu, my dad's is...

A Niu.

B Niu is a black smith's name, so is my dad. He said he already decided, I should work hard in school and go to a forging college, become a black smith.

A **Smith Junior. (铁二代) (pronunciation is like Tie Er Dai.)**

B My mom's name is Tie, she is a accountant, she said she already decided, I

should work hard in school and go to a accountant college, become an accountant. **(There is a joke lies between, Niu and Tie is famous couple in the novel Journey to the West, there kids name is Hong)**

A **Accountant Junior.** (会二代)

B My counselor don't agree, she's name is Hong, she said I should work hard in school and choose any school would take me in, at least, I got somewhere to go in the past four years.

A Isn't that right?

B Seems like everyone have a idea about my future or their furfuture. I turn the list up side down and could not find a college that teaches a man to be a hero.

A It's not everyone, somebody...

B I wonder, before all these started, in the beginning, why am I having this idea to become a hero.

A You want to be a hero?

B Yep!

A So, you know Kong Fu?

B I can do push-ups, 50 in a row.

A Even if you can do 100, 你会降龙十八掌么, 你会九阳神功么, 你能拎得动八十二斤青龙偃月刀么, 你会还我漂漂拳么, 你能练葵花宝典不先自宫么?! 你能打得过杨过么, 你喝了三碗还能过岗么, 你能接得住鹤笔翁得玄冥神掌么。你能和四大恶人大战三百回合汗不往下淌么? **(All the super powers in swordsman novel)**

B These are just in a novel! (angry, drop the book)

A (pick up the book) See! Forget your unrealistic dream! Pretentious!

B You mean I should be someone like you? Without future and dream, superficial.

A Who said I don't have dreams? I want...

B You want to be an ant! No one ever paid attention on an ant! Even if you are an ant in a tiger's cage, no one has ever seen you.

Even if you are an excellent ant, you can carry two grains corn in a row, you worked 3 times harder than the other, you are still are an ant. There are thousands of ants looks exactly as you, dispensable as you.

B I don't know Kong Fu, I just think being a hero is cool, is justice. “山东呼保义,

豪杰宋公明”, (**The Guardian in Shandong Province, The hero Song Jiang.**)

the No.1 hero.

A I do know how to study, I just feel comfortable for doing the thing I am good at,

“书中自有颜如玉，书中自有黄金屋”(**ancient poem, says material fortune all comes from studying**), so they said.

B I just want... when someone talked about me, he would look straightly to the other's, says, he is a...

[They want to say something, but failed, at the same time.

B I want to be a hero, they said I am pretentious.

A I want to be useful, they said I am superficial.

B They could be right.

A We could be wrong.

B Are we wrong?

A Aren't we wrong?

B Why do you study so hard?

A to get into a college.

B Why are you going to college?

A to find a job?

B Why is that?

A get married, raise a child.

B Why raising a child?

A to... study?

B Why study?

A So why do you want to be a hero?

B to help people?

A how?

B punish the evil, help the kind.

A So be a cop.

B No, I don't want to.

A Why is that?

B I want to be a hero.

A What is a hero!

B I think I might just Niu.

A I think I might just be an ant.

A I liked to visit the zoo when I was a child, not to watch the animals, but to watch the ants.

B I still like to visit the book store, not to find text book, but to read the swordsman novel.

A No one has stopped and watched the ants, they are always there, carrying the food.

B Everyone in the book store likes to turn some pages of the swordsman novel, I can't believe the thing that loved but so many people is fake!

A I really want to put a sign beside the ants. Ant, Arthropoda, Insecta, Hymenoptera, Vespoidea.

B Hymenoptera? (in Chinese, it is obvious the words means 'the one who has wings.')

A Hymenoptera.

B You mean that every ants can grow wings?

A Not every one, but some of them can.

B You want to be a flying ant?

A I don't know.

B What if you can't fly?

A So be a working ant, carrying corns every grain of it, be a useful one!

B So be a dispensable working ant?

A The working ant is not dispensable, every one of them!

B What the fuck are you thinking!

A I don't know! I might just be a working ant, someday I might grow wings, maybe the day won't come, but I don't want... when it comes, I don't know how to fly.

B Everything you do now is to grow the wings?

A No, everything I have done is to... no matter I have wings or not, I ought to be a decent ant, a useful (mutable meanings there in the Chinese word 有用,useful,

valuable, meaningful) ant.

See, that one is me, that one is me, that one is me as well, they are all me! (lift up and not watching B) if one day I grows wings, that would be me, that would be me, that would still be me.

B If I was you, I would rather be the flying one, the one who fly the highest, only the flying ones can be called hero.

A You still did not answer my questions, what is a hero?

B OK, I'll tell you. 侠之大者，为国为民 **(a true hero would speaks for the people)**, 行侠仗义，扶危济困 **(help the helpless and save the endangered)**

A Do you think you are a hero?

B I will be one, I will be the strongest swordsman in the world.

A And now?

B Now... Now I'm just Niu, all I did, I watched novel every class so I can have a taste of that feeling.

A So you changed your name? So you are a hero?

B Niu! My family name is Niu!

A Who said a Niu can't be hero?!

B My dad is a black smith, my mom is an accountant, how could I become a hero?

A Guo Jing, his dad is a poor hunter, he's mom is just a farmer. Yang Kang, his mom is a lady, his dad is Yang Tiexin, the inheritor of Yang Jia Spear (the kong fu skill). You said it yourself!

Guo Jing is a hero, and Yang Kang ... (in former text, he is the traitor)

Yang Guo, son of Yang Kang, he can be a hero not because his family name is Yang. He trained for 16 years on an icy rock and get the skill the Maiden Classics, then lost an arm in a battle, train for another 16 years in a rapid waterfall and get the sword skill of Dugu. He killed the king of the enemy with a stone and save thousands of people, that is called 侠之大者，为国为民. **(a true hero would speaks for the people)**,

Shavarsh Karapetyan, a Soviet swim athlete, he need to swim across the swimming pool for hundreds of time every single day, plus high load physical trainings. He held 11 worlds records and 17 world-champions.

1976, September, 16th, he was jogging along a lake. All of a sudden, a bus, which holds 92 passengers, ran into the lake, and sank into the lake for 10 meters.

In 30 minutes, he dived for 30 times into the icy lake.

20 lives were saved.

His skin and flesh was cut by the edge of the glasses.

The witness said, the glassed were all over him.

After 30 times dived, he passed out, heavily injured, pneumonia, septicemia

He waked up 45 days later, could not swim anymore.

行侠仗义，扶危济困 (**help the helpless and save the endangered**)

B I think I get it, there are all outstanding ones among us.

A That's why you never gets scores in your literature test. You can't even find the emphasis! Yang Guo, 16 years, lost an arm, another 16 years, hundreds of times each day across the swimming pool!

The only thing you see is they are outstanding. You never see a ant's pain and hardship to struggle, struggle to break the pupa, in order to get those transparent wings!

You said I'm superficial, I admit! I am superficial; I don't have a dream, like I don't want to! You have a dream, but what are you doing every day! Without down-to-earth effort, you are nothing! Pretentious! Fuck you and your illusory dream!

B I still want to be a hero.

A I still want to be a decent guy.

B They were right, I'm freaking pretentious.

A They were right, I'm a bit superficial.

[take off there coat and read the labels.

[Music

A I like to study, that has nothing to do with the dreams.

B I like swordsman novel, that has something to do with realistic.

A Climbing up step by step, at the place I'm accepted.

B Walking forward inch by inch, at the direction I accept.

A Indispensable.

B Out-standing

A I want to be a ...

B Decent human.

A Ma Ant

B Dugu Xia

A&B Bow and off the stage.

Interaction 3

46 questiones in the darkness

[music, turn off the lights.

Facilitator I would like everyone to close our eyes, listen to the music. There are few questions we would like to share. There is no need to answer, just listen and please think about your every day life meanwhile.

1. Are you willing to share your dreams in your childhood?
2. Do you think they are naïve?
3. Have you changed your dreams?
4. What made you to do that?
5. Have you adored someone?
6. Why you adore him/her?
7. Do you want to be someone like him/her?
8. Have you ever played your cellphone in the class?
9. What did you play?

[pause]

10. Have you ever liked (in Chinese the word 'like' can be interpreted in different meanings) someone?

11. Did he/she change you?
12. Have you ever regret anything?
13. Is it possible to redeem?
14. Have you ever block anyone in Wechat? (Chinese facebook, you can block someone if you don't want someone to see a post.)
- [pause]
15. Do you like Xia Dugu (the character)
16. Do you like Xiaoyi Ma (the character)
17. Who do you think you were more similar with?
18. Is it wrong to just be ONESELF?
19. Do you think Ma can accomplish his value?
20. Do you think Dugu can become a swordsman?
21. Is there a swordsman in ants? (refers to the script, metaphor)
- [pause, change the reader]
22. When did you cry for the last time?
23. Why did you cry?
24. When did you burst into laughter for the last time?
25. Why did you laugh?
26. Do you care about your scores?
27. Do you envy those who have higher score than you?
28. What do you want to be in the future?
29. How do you think of yourself?
30. How do others think of you?
31. Do you think your dream would come true?
32. Have you told anyone your dream?
33. If you did that, would they support you?
- [pause]
34. When you go to the toilet, is there anyone with you?
35. Why do you need accompany?
36. Do you think your dream is ambitious?
37. Is an ambitious dream USEFUL? (the word useful can be interpreted in different meanings as well, can be seem as a metaphor in the play)
38. What is a USEFUL human being?

39. How you think a man can be USEFUL?
40. Do you like studying? (it can be interpreted into both study and reading)
41. Do you think studying is USEFUL?
42. Do you think studying is NOT USEFUL?
43. If you don't study, what will you become?
44. Do other's opinions matter?
45. Do other's opinions NOT matter?
46. You are a teenager, are you happy?

Interaction 4

Facilitator Please open your eyes, any questions that touched you? Anything you want to say? Anything you want to share? A paper is placed before you, you can write down some of your thoughts, could be a sentence, a poem, a song, or a letter to anyone including yourself, anything. The paper is anonymous.

[collect the paper and share 6 to 10.

[the end.

Appendix 2 The e-mail with John O'Toole

From: "John O'Toole";<j.otoole@unimelb.edu.au>;

Date: 25th November 2016 (Friday) PM 12:00

To: "闻笛赋"<adamhanibal@qq.com>;

Subject: Re: asking for a little interview

Dear Adam

A first, quite brief response – and random rather than well-considered thoughts.

If you are using the three elements of a) protection, b) Dynamic distancing device, (comic catharsis and comic distancing), c) estrangement (poetic device) from Stig Eriksson's categorisations, I think this will be a very useful structuring device for your study.

I am therefore puzzled that you think that 'humour and playfulness' is outside the scope of the study - particularly if you are considering the quality of the audience's responses in both TIE and DIE, and not just the playwright/teacher's intentions and meanings. Humour and playfulness (carefully defined) are a very important aspect of protection (e.g. giggling or joke-making to reduce or puncture uncomfortable tension). Also, all sorts of playful and 'outside the frame' material can be used as a dynamic distancing device – ie direct address out-of-role for the TIE actor (and stepping out of the drama in DIE). Think about how brilliantly some comic film directors use this device – eg Mel Brookes, Woody Allen.

Regarding your question about inside and outside the frame, this is a complex area, and we need to distinguish between two uses or hierarchies of ‘inside/outside the drama’. If you don’t mind, I’ll refer to my own earlier work in this area.

•€€€€€€€€€€ **The Process of Drama.** In any drama or theatre event, there are three - or especially in DIE, four [see below: c] - simultaneous contexts for the participants:

- a.) The *real-world context* of the participants - as themselves, their lives and attitudes and feelings that they bring
- b.) The *context of performance* – how they and their location are framed for the purpose of drama (how Peter Brook’s ‘empty space’ is turned into a ‘special space’, and the participants have different roles and functions: as ‘actors’, ‘playwrights’, ‘directors’ – in Process drama often all three simultaneously
- c.) The *context of the setting* – [especially in genres like DIE and street theatre] how a place and group of people that is designed for a different specific purpose need to be changed to create a context of performance... but will still retain strong messages of its original purpose
- d.) The *dramatic context* – the fictional world of the drama and the people who inhabit it.

So in this sense, ‘inside the drama’ just means context d.

•€€€€€€€€€€ **Dramawise** (and see attached ppt.) All this focusing is within that Context d. *the dramatic (fictional) context*. The drama can be focused to provide emotional and intellectual distancing:

a scene – or the whole drama – can be framed

- a.) *inside* the central dramatic or event
- b.) *on the edge* of the dramatic event
- c.) *outside* the dramatic event

Have a look at the Powerpoint slide (from a recent Beijing workshop) to see what I mean – I think it will be animated so that in full-screen view the ideas come up in sequence.

Actually, this version of framing within the dramatic action is a simplification. You do need to read the marvellous work of Dorothy Heathcote and John Carroll on Framing – which you probably already know – which shows there are many levels of distancing can be the frame of the drama.

Let me know if this makes sense, or is relevant to your work.

Best wishes

John