

**The Exploration of Age Exchange Center's Aesthetic
Strategies in British Reminiscence Theatre**

**英國老人劇場的劇場美學策略探究：
以歲月流轉中心為例**

Wan-Jung Wang 王婉容

Assistant Professor / Department of Theatre Creation and Application

National University of Tainan

臺南大學戲劇創作與應用學系助理教授



Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the aesthetic strategies in British Reminiscence Theatre. I intend to explore how and why Age Exchange Center develops its aesthetic strategies in the devising process and applies them to performance. Firstly I analyze how it establishes its two manifest aesthetic strategies - using theatre exercises to reconstruct signs of art and employing the elders' personal narratives drawn from storytelling. Citing from Gilles Deleuze's (2002) aesthetic theory, I decipher how Age Exchange uses theatre exercises to distill signs of art and how they evoke empathy from audience. I also use narrative and oral history theories to explain the significance of personal narratives. Reflexivity evoked in rehearsals and performance of Age Exchange is demonstrated accordingly. Secondly, John McGrath's (1996) theory of popular theatre is applied to illustrate other aesthetic strategies of Age Exchange and their political implications. Thirdly, I shall explicate how Age Exchange incorporates these three aesthetic strategies and weave them into a unified style of its own. Finally, I argue Age Exchange's works pose reinterpretation and reflection of the past in the present and is considered as an important part of British Alternative Theatre Movement in 1980s according to Baz Kershaw's (1992) argument. Age Exchange's aesthetic strategies explored here hope to inspire community theatre worldwide.

Keywords: empathy, oral history, popular theatre, reflexivity, reminiscence theatre

摘要

此篇論文探討英國的老人劇場歲月流轉中心的劇場美學策略及美學意涵。首先分析最明顯的美學策略，引用 Gilles Deleuze 的美學理論來佐證轉化記憶中的感官符號成為藝術的符號的策略，並論證此手法如何能使觀眾產生移情和共鳴。再引用敘事理論與口述歷史的理論來闡釋其建立社會集體認同的意義和反省歷史的功能。接著，引用 John McGrath 大眾劇場的理論，來闡釋歲月流轉中心所用的其他美學策略及政治意涵。最後再引用英國當代劇場史家 Baz Kershaw 的論證，闡釋歲月流轉中心的老人劇場由於其鮮明的社會特殊族群性格，及以老人口述歷史重新詮釋英國現代歷史的柔性社會批判特色，實屬於英國 1980 年代另類劇場運動中十分獨特的一支社區劇場派別。

關鍵詞：口述歷史、大眾（通俗）劇場、反省作用、老人回憶劇場、移情作用



Introduction

As the numbers of the elderly keeps on growing in our society as well as globally, the elders' welfare and quality of life after retirement has become a major concern in contemporary society. Reminiscence Theatre emerged in 1980s seems to foresee this demand for elders' creative engagement in activities and becomes popular more and more nowadays. Founded by Pam Schweitzer in 1982, Age Exchange Centre is one of the earliest and most influential Reminiscence Theatres in Britain. It is still active in diverse forms of Reminiscence Theatre practices today. I would like to define what Reminiscence Theatre is and why I choose Age Exchange Centre as my case study in the paper. Baz Kershaw created the title of Reminiscence Theatre in late 1970s. He and other groups of theatre people started to devise performance with elderly participants in their residential homes in local community as part of the social service to enhance the psychological wellbeing for the elderly (Kershaw, 1999, 178-179). He used their memories as the major source of their theatre performance and therefore he called this kind of performance-Reminiscence Theatre. Afterwards, Reminiscence Theatre is thus defined as theatre created by the elderly participants through their dramatization of their memories. The reason I choose Age Exchange Centre as a focused group for my case study is because it is one of the most developed and representative Reminiscence Theatres in United Kingdom. Age Exchange Centre has deliberately worked with elderly people from different social classes, geographical areas and different ethnic backgrounds around U.K. for more than twenty years. With its egalitarian approach in choosing its elderly participants, its influence has crossed the social and cultural barriers through mixing the elderly participants from different social standings. Its performance process has enhanced the life quality of the elderly participants as well as passed on their life experience to the younger generation in educational settings when they devised and performed with school children. On the other hand, Age Exchange has formulated its unique aesthetic strategies and spread its influence through Reminiscence festivals and exhibitions worldwide. In this paper, by using the methodology of case studies, interview accounts and rehearsal observational notes and related cultural and aesthetic theories, I intend to explore how their aesthetic strategies have been developed through devising and rehearsal process. I also like to uncover how and why they can move the audience deeply as well as make them think profoundly from multiple

perspectives. Since Reminiscence Theatre is considered as a branch of community theatre according to the updating definition of community theatre which defines community as a group of people who have the same interest to gather together and create theatre to address their special concerns and needs (Kuppers, 2007, 3-5, 10-11). Reminiscence Theatre works for community of its elderly participants to voice out their concerns and thoughts to a wider audience. Many community theatre workers and participants can share this goal. Therefore I hope this aesthetic exploration can help more theatre practitioners and scholars to learn from their rich experience so as to advance their practice and research in community settings and educational settings.

I will divide my analysis into three parts: first, the analysis on the exercises Age Exchange uses to distill signs of art from sensuous signs of memory according to Deleuze's aesthetic theory. Accordingly, I use empathy theory to explain why it can work effectively for the audience. Secondly, I will analyze the second significant aesthetic strategy Age Exchange employs-the elders' personal narratives or their oral history accounts. I firstly examine how these narratives are drawn from the devising and rehearsal process through dialogical process. I cite from oral history theory to prove the significance of these personal narratives in contrast with the official historical accounts. I also use reflexivity theory to explicate the special features of these narratives devised and edited from the collaborative rehearsal process.

Thirdly, I will employ John McGrath's theory of popular theatre to argue that Age Exchange's productions employ British popular theatre traditions to mark their style and make their political comments by reinterpreting past. Fourthly, I will demonstrate how Pam Schweitzer (the founder of Age Exchange Center) incorporated the above two strategies developed in the devising process and weaved them two together along with aesthetic strategies of popular theatre to make Age Exchange's unique production style. I finally cite from British contemporary theatre scholar Baz Kershaw that Age Exchange's Reminiscence Theatre works can pose different perspectives towards British official historical accounts from usually marginalized elderly citizens' life experience and thus it forms a distinctive branch in British Alternative Theatre Movement in the community settings in 1980s.

1. Theatre exercises developing into aesthetic strategies

According to Age Exchange's founder and major director Pam Schweitzer's interview



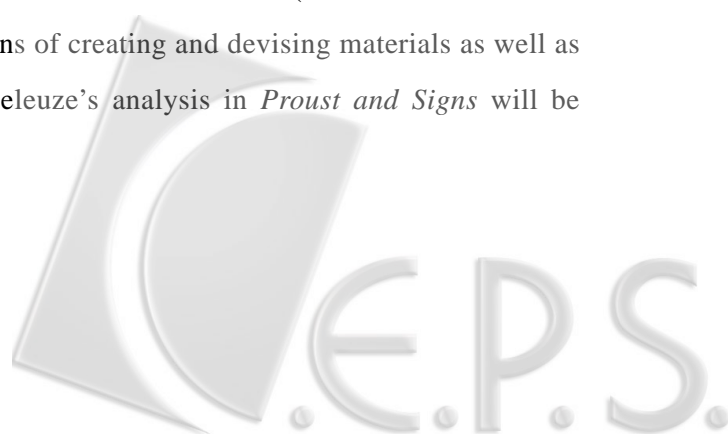
with the author, She defined and divided her devising process into five periods: (1) storytelling, (2) discussion of the elders' stories, (3) improvising around their stories based on sensorial recall and effective theatrical activities, (4) scripting from improvisation and (5) finding a common thread on structure through the material (Schweitzer, 2002a, 61-81). From her own accounts, I consider there are three important factors in her devising process which I consider as the major ways for her to develop Age Exchange's aesthetic strategies. They are: (1) the sensorial recall and effective theatrical activities which I term them as "theatre exercises", (2) the elders' storytelling and discussion of these stories which I term them as "personal narratives" and (3) the "final scripting" by finding a common structure within the improvisation and make it a whole which I term as "incorporation". I will illustrate these three elements accordingly in this essay and analyze how they have built the basis of Age Exchange's aesthetic strategies and why they can evoke Age Exchange's unique aesthetic experience. Firstly, I will focus on how she used theatre exercises to reconstruct elders' oral histories and reframed them into performance.

According to Schweitzer's accounts about rehearsals, she believed theatrical exercises effectively trigger the elders' sensorial and physical recall from the past. Distilled from these exercises in the rehearsal process, the community-based elders' memories are transformed into representational means in theatre. The significance of this performative form of memory representation lies in the physicalization and visualization of memories in performance. This particular way of representing memory conveys what other representational forms of memory (writings) cannot fully achieve through spoken word, sounds, images, gestures and movement. For example, in a theatre exercise called "re-enacting a scene about my life at a specific time" (Schweitzer, 2002a, 63), Schweitzer would ask the elder performers to improvise dramatic scenes around the stories they told. In *Jubilee*, premiered in 2002, the opening scene was developed from the elders' re-enactment of a scene from "End of war celebrations." They represented this episode of celebration of the end of the Second World War mainly through their audio and physical memories of it. Celebratory songs such as *Pearl of Bells*, *Happy Days Are Here Again* and *Knees up Mother Brown* were flowing over the stage. When Hilda recalled that all the Mums were out in the streets, doing *Knees up Mother Brown*, she joined the cast in the re-enactment of the dance as they had done in the past to celebrate the end of the Second World War. The reenactment

of singing and dancing brought back the whole atmosphere of the memory of victory and the happiness of the British people immediately after the Second World War.

There are numerous exercises and activities recorded in the *Reminiscence Handbook*, compiled by Age Exchange Center, which specifically aimed to conjure up the elders' memories through sensorial recall (Osborn, 1993, 13-94). They echoed the physical and sensorial elements in the remembering process. In the training workshop of reminiscence workers, Schweitzer shared an effective exercise called "four photographs" to recapture distinctive moments in memories. In this exercise, the elders chose four pictures to depict the most unforgettable events in their lives and then re-enacted them in rehearsals. In the final performance, only one of their favorites would be chosen to present to the audience. For example, in *The Journey*, performed in 1999 at Boscombe, Center for Community Arts in Bournemouth, one of the female elders in her eighties shared her most memorable experience. That is her speedy and exciting downhill bike-riding at the seaside with her boyfriend when she was a teenager. She and the actor (David Savill) who played her boyfriend were holding the handlebars of an old bicycle and shouting as they acted out how they raced down the hills ringing bells. The audience was invited to feel the wind blowing in their face and flying in their hair through this re-enactment of sensorial recall (Savill, 2001). This woman relived the sweet excitement and fun of her ride of youth. The exercise triggered her memory and gave her personal memory a concrete aesthetic representation in theatre in order to share with a wider audience.

Through the exercises and with the help of props and supporting actors, the physical and emotional memories were relived in the elders' bodies and came alive on stage. This formed a unique aesthetic strategy of Age Exchange--to relive memories through sensorial and physical recall that also constituted the basic elements of the remembering process. This sensorial recall was transformed into artistic and expressive means in the theatre, and potentially communicated with the audience who was invited to identify with the relations between memory and art creation. To further elaborate how R.T. (Reminiscence Theatre shortened) used sensorial memories as a means of creating and devising materials as well as a way of developing aesthetic strategies, Deleuze's analysis in *Proust and Signs* will be employed for further analysis.



(1) From sensuous signs to signs of art

R.T. places an emphasis on representing sensorial memories other than visual, such as taste, smell, corporeal and spatial memory extracted from involuntary memory. This artistic feature resonates with Proust's theory that involuntary memory can reveal the hidden truth that intellect and logic cannot (Warnock, 1987, 92-95). The physical representation of these involuntary memories differs from Proust's literary experiment and formulates its unique aesthetic strategy. Deleuze, one of the most prominent philosophers after 1980s, developed a systematic theory in his book *Proust and Signs* in order to decipher Proust's secret of art in his writing of *Remembrance of Things Past*. In *Proust and Signs*, Deleuze articulately and poetically divided signs in the world into four categories: worldly signs, signs of love, sensuous signs and signs of art (Deleuze, 1964/2000,3-14). He considered Proust's meticulous literary work as his "apprenticeship" of finding and explicating "signs of art" from these four kinds of signs in the world. Deleuze defined Proust's "search" for meaning in his remembrance of the past was his "search" for signs of art. Deleuze pointed out that since involuntary memory often intruded into our life with similar sensuous re-encounters with such an unavoidable "violence" (when we suddenly encounter the similar sensorial now as we experienced in the past), we are forced to "think" or to "figure out" what the past means to us now (Deleuze, 1964/2000, 16-17).

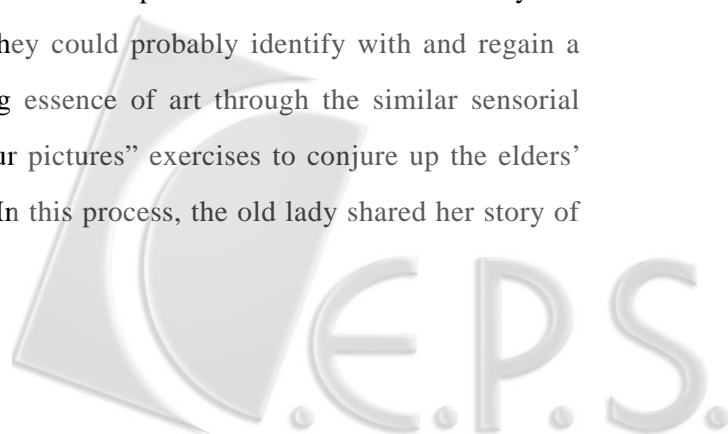
For example, Proust was reminded of the smell of books between pages in the library he visited in a party where he was kept to wait for some one. By turning pages of book in the library at present, suddenly he was called back to his memory of his childhood when he was reading in his family library as a child. The sweet innocence and joy of his childhood reading was evoked at present that he might have long forgotten now. When re-encountering similar sensuous signs from the past in the present, the search into the meaning of the past is evoked and the journey of searching its meaning thus starts. This is what Deleuze defined as Proust's search for "signs of art". In this search, the signs of art might contain the meaning of the past events and they can perhaps capture one of the essences of life for us all.

Deleuze argued for memory as a secondary material of art creation or as a preparation of art because memory contains similar elements of art, such as sensuous signs (Deleuze, 1964/2000, 52-53). However, sensuous signs are not yet signs of art because they will only evoke the feelings of "lost time" in us. For example, Deleuze cited from Proust's description

of the tying of his shoelace at the corridor when he stooped down at his grandmother's house. This particular act of movement triggered the recollection of his grandmother who would have been at the door watching or calling Proust in his memories. However, he could suddenly be saddened at present by thinking about losing his grandmother and their shared time in the past (Deleuze, 1964/2000, 19-24). However, signs of art, unlike sensuous signs, will give us a sense of "time regained" by making us attain a glimpse of the "Essences of art" that might help us to transcend our lives and even deaths (Deleuze, 1964/2000, 24).

How can this be done? Now, I shall continue to probe into Deleuze's theory to decipher how R.T. employs material means with sensuous signs to dematerialize "signs of art" from "memory." The exercises in R.T. provided "the material means" to represent memories and helped to recall and gather sensuous signs from elders' memories for the preparation of art creation. Through the distilling process of rehearsal, the director excavated "the signs of art" from sensuous signs extracted from the elders' involuntary memory. The process is similar to Deleuze's analysis of how Proust filtered from his reminiscence of the past, from worldly signs, signs of love and sensuous signs in order to distill his "signs of art". Deleuze cited from one of the Proust's most famous descriptions in his novels in which the sensuous sign of the Madeleine cake (a famous French-made cake which specifically conjured up Proust's childhood memories in Combray). The Madeleine cake has been transformed into Combray that represented Proust's childhood hometown as well as where his heart settles and clings to as his eternal spiritual hometown. The Madelain Cake and Combray as sensuous signs were thus transformed into signs of art that conveyed one of Proust's individuating "essences of art". They make him transcend his illness and imminent death by regaining his lost time of youth and innocence (Deleuze, 1964/2000, 53).

Director of Age Exchange, David Savill has also distilled "signs of art" from elders' signs of memory in the rehearsal process. The previously stated scene in which an old lady re-enacted riding a bike with her boyfriend when they were young was a vivid example of this (Savill, 2001). The audience could almost feel the speed and wind that the old lady has experienced when riding a bike at youth. They could probably identify with and regain a sense of youth and love as an individuating essence of art through the similar sensorial experience of riding a bike. Savill used "four pictures" exercises to conjure up the elders' concrete memories through sensorial recall. In this process, the old lady shared her story of



riding a bike with her boyfriend and then Savill picked this particular picture out from many stories. They then re-enacted this sensorial experience by transforming it into appropriate and lively physical and verbal representation of theatre. If Proust's medium to convey signs of art is words and linguistic structure, Savill's medium is spoken words, movement, gestures and facial expressions as well as mise en scene in theatre. Through theatre medium, R.T. distills signs of art from sensuous signs in memories and conveys them to the audience. The working order of the whole process of developing aesthetic strategy from sensuous signs to signs of art is: theatre exercises, choice of a story and finally selection of suitable theatre forms to represent this story and sharing with an audience.

(2) Empathy as basis of the aesthetic experience in Reminiscence Theatre

Why would Age Exchange's R.T. performance move an audience? I will argue through the sensorial representation of memories that the audience can find a common ground to access and understand the elders' experience. This is the basis of empathy happening in the aesthetic experience while watching a R.T. performance. In fact, the empathetic relationship was also embedded in the rehearsal process where the stories were firstly shared among participants. Schweitzer put special emphasis on the fact that the empathetic relationship between her and the elder performers and between the performers themselves. She stated, "It is a relationship of trust and love" (Schweitzer, interview with author, Aug 24, 2003). With this solid relationship, therefore, she could pick out stories that moved her as well as all the other actors and hopefully their theatre audience. I will argue the empathetic relationship is crucial for the audience to understand the production in terms of anthropologist Clifford Geertz's empathetic theory. Clifford Geertz argued that gaining the emic¹ experience is necessary for the understanding of other cultures. Geertz claimed,

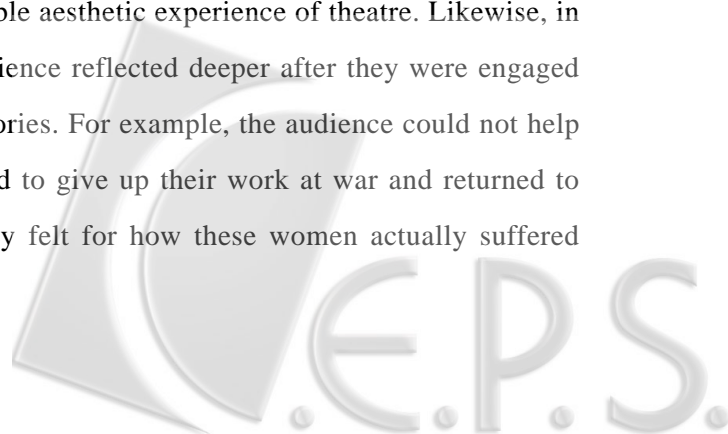
If we are going to cling--as in my opinion, we must--to the injunction to see things from the native's point of view, where are we when we can no longer claim some

¹ In contrast to the etic approach an emic one is in essence valid for only one language (or one culture) at a time. It is an attempt to discover and to describe the pattern of that particular language or culture in reference to the way in which the various elements of that culture are related to each other in the functioning of that particular pattern, rather than an attempt to describe them in reference to a general classification. In other words, it is the specific understanding related to specific culture rather than generalisation of cultures. Geertz refers to the culturally specific knowledge that anthropology strives to present and research on.

unique form of psychological closeness, a sort of transcultural identification, with our subjects? What happens to verstehen (understanding) when einfühlen (empathy) disappears (Geertz, 1983, 56) ?

He asserted that empathy is a key to gaining knowledge and what he called “experience-near” concept from people who are distinct from each other in cultures. In R.T., the directors were keen to acquire empathetic knowledge and experience-near concept from the elders from different ethnic backgrounds through oral history interviews. Empathy is the first step for the director to understand the elders’ stories and for the audience to empathize with the elders’ stories based on similar or shared sensorial experiences.

According to psychological research into memory, memory will always involve emotions, and memories with strong emotional impact often have an enduring effect (Luria, 1973, 285). Theatre educator and practitioner, John Somers, has argued significant and specific narrative works as a powerful medium to engage people and create strong impact on audience (Somers, 2007, 11-16). R.T. often found elders deliver their personal narratives that had strong emotional impact on them in rehearsal process. These personal narratives could often create strong effects on audience through empathy too. The audience’s reflexivity on these narratives is actually strengthened by the mechanism of empathy. This seems to counterbalance what Bertolt Brecht has argued about the reflective effect of epic theatre. Brecht considered that narratives in epic theatre mainly aim to create objective reflexivity from audience. His use of direct addresses of objective narratives in the play resisted the empathetic relations that Aristotelian theatre relied upon to achieve illusions and emotional identification (Brecht, 1964/1982). That is why Brecht promoted the usage of narratives in epic theatre instead of dramatic representation. However, even Brecht’s own production of *Mother Courage and Her Children* demonstrated that the moving power of epic theatre would not hinder audience’s judgments and reflection towards theatre works. Nevertheless, they sometimes reinforce each other. Empathy and reflexivity actually work hand in hand to achieve and enhance a valuable aesthetic experience of theatre. Likewise, in Age Exchange’s production-*Jubilee*, the audience reflected deeper after they were engaged in empathetic relations with the narrators’ stories. For example, the audience could not help but be empathetic about the women who had to give up their work at war and returned to their homes to bear and raise children. They felt for how these women actually suffered



from their isolation and boredom when they were forced to go home after the Second World War instead of working in factories and having their own jobs and friends (Schweitzer, 2002a). This empathetic emotion towards these women could enhance the audience to reflect deeper on the fact of socially constructed gender inequality that women experienced after the Second World War. R.T. demonstrated reflexivity and empathy can actually work side by side in a successful theatrical aesthetic experience and did not necessarily contradict with each other.

2. Employing personal narrative as a distinctive aesthetic strategy

According to Schweitzer's accounts quoted previously, aside from using theatre exercises to evoke the elders' memories and stories, the other most important aesthetic strategy Age Exchange developed in devising process is--storytelling and the discussions of the elders' stories. I will term them as "gathering personal narratives" (or oral history accounts) in the following section according to Schweitzer's own definition of Age Exchange's production trademark. These storytelling and discussions would be edited into representations of personal narratives or oral history accounts later in the production. These personal narratives or oral history accounts could best articulate the quality of the elderly participants' lively speech style that they used to tell their life stories and lived experience. The questions I intend to explore here is: (1) how and why these elders' personal narratives are gathered through storytelling process? (2) what is the significance of these personal narratives compared to other historical narratives? (3) what are the special features of these elders' personal narratives gathered through theatrical rehearsal process? I will employ memory and identity research, narrative theory, oral history theory and reflexivity theory in order to answer these questions accordingly in the following section.

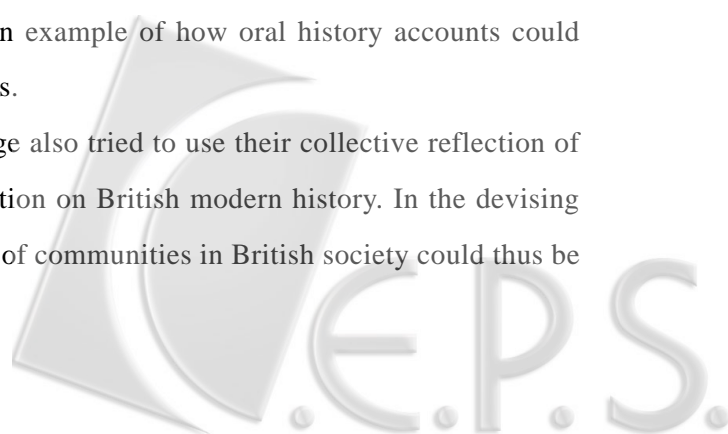
(1) Reconstructing identities by personal narratives and community narratives

Age Exchange's devising process usually started with the director's inspiration to explore certain period of historical time that the elders had lived through. For example, in *Jubilee*, Schweitzer set out to look into the time in 1950s in Britain with the elder performers. She brought some of the official historical documents and video clips of the time to conjure up their common memories of 1950s at the very beginning. The elders'

interest of exploring the past had thus been aroused and the storytelling and discussions came naturally after that. I would like to explore deeper into why these elders' personal narratives of memories are important and I also like to understand how their narratives are related to the narratives of community and what the meanings of these narratives are to us today.

Firstly I would like to turn to the research about the relationship between narrative, memory and identity. According to King's and Davies and Logie's research, they argued that narratives constantly help to re-shape personal identity and re-construct fragmented and discontinuous memories into a meaningful structure. Through this re-shaping, the narratives secure a consistent personal identity and adapt to the changes that human beings inevitably encounter in life. (King, 2000, 21-23; Davies & Logie, 1993, 290). Applying this theory to the elders' personal narratives shared in the devising process of Reminiscence Theatre, I found the similar conclusion. The elders looked back their lived experience under the historical framework or structure that the director set out. They tried to re-construct the meaning of their own past in comparison with the historical accounts and other elders' lived experience. In other words, they went through a journey of re-constructing their own identities through looking at and sharing their past together. For example, in *Jubilee*, the elders firstly thought that 1950s was a time of boredom and there was nothing special to reflect on. Nevertheless, after the discussions in the group, the elders found lots of interesting details that they forgot. These details such as the women had to leave their jobs at war and went back to homes to give birth to and raise babies. They had to do all the housework and this transition was not full of blessings and rosy colors of re-building their sweet home and the Great Britain after the Second World War as the government publicized and promulgated then. The elderly women re-constructed their struggles of raising children after the war and thus re-establish and restore their individual female identities through their own lived experience of the time. They also rewrote what some of the official accounts have generally defined women as "anonymous" "national heroine" who rebuilt the country at the expense of their individuality. This is just an example of how oral history accounts could restore and rebuild contested female identities.

As a community of elders, Age Exchange also tried to use their collective reflection of historical times to rebuild a collective reflection on British modern history. In the devising and rehearsal process, the different identities of communities in British society could thus be



reconstructed and restored through sharing of personal narratives or oral history accounts. As Govan, Nicholson and Normington (2007, 82) articulated about the community narratives as such,

Theatre that is devised in community situations may be similarly concerned with the representation of memory, and participants are invited to recognize that autobiographical narratives have social, communitarian and historical significance as well as personal relevance.

For example, in the production of *Dockers on the River*, In Age Exchange's productions, all the personal narratives of the elders helped to construct their distinctive professional identity. Such as the production of *Dockers on the River* reconstructed what the Dockers' busy and hard life and work were like on River Thames before they were disbanded and disappeared after 1960s (Schweitzer, 2002b, 13). *Mothers of Invention* recovered the detailed conditions of what the male and female laborers' industrious life of work and leisure were like in the industrial cotton factories in the countryside of North England in 1950s. These performances reclaimed what these elders had contributed to the modernization of Britain. These productions rebuilt these elderly participants' lost and forgotten professional identities as Dockers or cotton factory workers (Savill & Arigho, 2003). These are all evidence of how Age Exchange used personal narratives to build community narratives. Through the performing process, they re-constructed certain lost or originally unrecognized identities of communities and reclaimed certain long forgotten personal identities of individuals in the community.

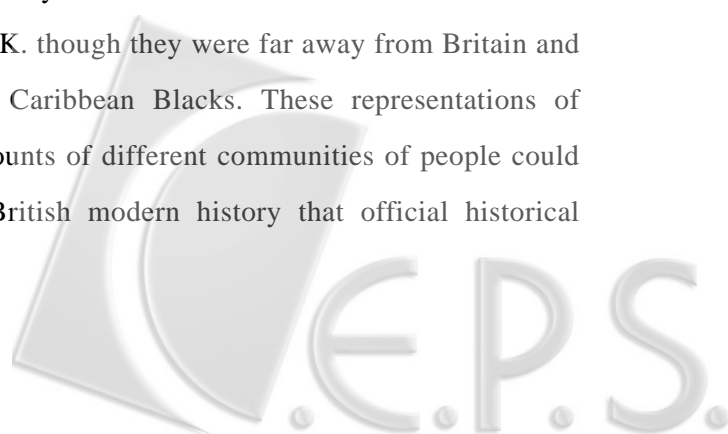
(2) Oral History complementing official historical accounts

These personal narratives and community narratives are also very important in terms of oral history accounts from different communities and historical periods in modern British history. I have to argue this point about the significance of oral history account from Michel Foucault's theory of "subjugated knowledge". Foucault contested the relations between knowledge and power with his erudite and genealogical research on the construction of knowledge in the Western world. He proposed two ways to counter the mainstream system of knowledge-power construction. They are the erudite and the local (popular or indigenous) knowledge. Particularly in the later kind of knowledge, since it does not belong to the ruling

class, the restoration of this kind of knowledge can possibly act as a counterbalance to the dominant power/knowledge structure (Foucault, 1980, 82). I consider the elders' personal narratives, community narratives and oral history accounts belong to the second category of the subjugated knowledge-the local (popular or indigenous) knowledge. When these elders' oral history accounts (as subjugated knowledge) are restored, they might complement sometimes even counter the dominant power/knowledge constructed historical discourse (mainly the singular, sometimes authoritative official historical accounts). Thereby they can reconstruct multiple discourses and perspectives about history through their dramatic representations of multiple oral history accounts.

For example, In *Jubilee*, the elderly participants' oral history accounts posed ironical criticism towards the prevailing trend of modern technology sales in the 1950s that pressured people to buy all those new inventions of household. They were novel inventions such as vacuum cleaner, washing machine and even encyclopedia. The play portrayed how these women ironically all dreamt about a labor-free and luxurious technological paradise of home that has been delivered by movies or television commercials. Their dreams contrasted with the scarcity and poverty in their real life which was what most of them really had right after the war. Let alone the fact that these women all remembered that they had to consult their husbands before they bought any of these new household gadgets since the husband took charge of all the expenses of home. This also offered an authentic page of social history in Britain that challenged the historical positive account of great advancement of technology during 1950s.

Another important aspect that was often neglected that *Jubilee* tackled is the big immigration and emigration wave in 1950s. Due to the difficult times in Britain right after the War, some of the oral history accounts depicted how British citizens emigrated to previous British colonies and tried to start a new life in the new world. Whilst some other oral history accounts portrayed how people living in previous British colonies also considered Queen Elizabeth is their queen. They watched her coronation with similar awe and happiness as British citizens living in U.K. though they were far away from Britain and constituted by different ethnicity such as Caribbean Blacks. These representations of neglected and marginalized oral history accounts of different communities of people could really provide multiple discourses about British modern history that official historical



accounts often lack.

Schweitzer recounted in her interview that she always juxtaposed the elders' oral history accounts with some landmark historical events in British history. It worked as a way to contrast the official historical record with the personal. For example, she recounted that she and the elders "have revisited key moments across their lives, putting their personal experience into the wider context of social change" in the making of a play called *Our Century and Us* for the millennium celebration in 2000 (Schweitzer, 2002a). She used the question such as "What did you do immediately after the war?" to stimulate the elders' specific personal memories relating to the specific time frame in 1950s. She used specific historical events such as raising baby and home life reconstruction in London or the ceremony of coronation as triggers to reframe the elders' personal memories in the social context. This particular aesthetic strategy made the landmark historical events relate to these elders' personal lived experience. Thus it made the objective historical event resonate with personal and subjective significance.

In next paragraph, I will continue to explore the special features of oral history accounts. I consider the feature of it lies in the dialogical process in which these oral history accounts were drawn from. I term it as dialogical process since oral history is based on the interview process. Age Exchange used oral history interview extensively in the early stages of rehearsal too. Therefore the question and answer structure of interview has formed a basis for the dialogical process of Reminiscence Theatre. In order to further understand about the process of retrieving oral history and its embedded problems and advantages, here I will turn to Portelli's research about oral history to illuminate.

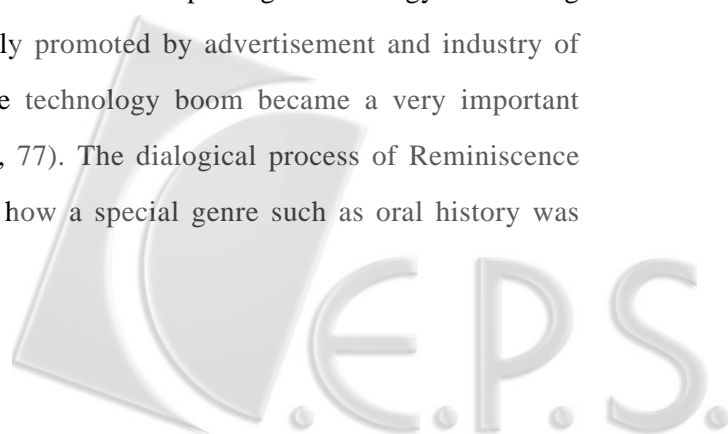
Alessandro Portelli argued that "oral history is both a genre of narrative and historical discourse" (Portelli, 1998a, 23-24). Adding performative elements to oral history narratives and historical discourse, the performance of oral history stands as a special genre and provides specific aesthetic strategies in presenting memories. However, in recording and representing oral histories through interviews and storytelling, Age Exchange's R.T. inevitably encountered problems and challenges in the collection and representation of oral histories.

(3) The dialogical devising process

In accordance with Portelli's research on oral histories, the first question that arose in

the interview process of recording and representing oral histories was “whose stories they are” and “who speaks for whom” (Portelli, 1998b, 71-72). Portelli emphasized this in his discussion of the significance of the interviewer as well as the interviewee. He considered that the oral history interview is a process of “interrogation” and “thick dialogue” built upon the dialogical relations between interviewee and interviewer (Portelli, 1998b, 68). Portelli argued that “both subjects bring to the interview an agenda of their own, which is constantly renegotiated in the course of conversation” (Portelli, 1998b, 69). In reminiscence theatre rehearsals, the director took the role of interviewer. At Age Exchange, R.T. was a collaborative creative process based on the dialogical reflection on oral history materials between elderly participants and directors. They spoke through a mutually respectful creative process to devise theatrical form and content in order to present the elders’ oral histories from their negotiated perspectives. In the interviews with Schweitzer, she emphasized her attitude towards the elders’ life stories. She stressed that a long-term time investment in working with the elders was required for reaching the depths of their stories. It also helped to explore the different interpretations of stories in repetition of telling stories. In a workshop during the oral history exhibition and performance training program held for five days in the August of 2003 at Age Exchange Center which I attended fully, Schweitzer also talked about openness, the importance of active listening (attentive and genuine interest in the act of listening), the necessity to build a relationship of trust in the interview process (Schweitzer, interview with author, Aug 24, 2003). These interview accounts reaffirmed the directors’ respect for the elders’ stories and their dialogical relationship in the rehearsal. However, as directors, they were still very keen to take on their leading roles in the later part of rehearsals in making final editing decisions for productions in terms of mise en scene.

Schweitzer also emphasized the importance of asking questions in improvisations and discussions in the devising process with the elderly participants. In the rehearsal of *Jubilee*, she asked the female elders what they would buy in the exhibition fair in 1950s for their ideal homes. This question therefore led to a whole scene exploring the ideology of building an ideal home in 1950s that has been heavily promoted by advertisement and industry of house wares. This critical discussion of the technology boom became a very important section in the play later (Schweitzer, 2002a, 77). The dialogical process of Reminiscence Theatre demonstrated Portelli’s insight into how a special genre such as oral history was



made through a question and answer process to challenge assumptions. The final production is the product of constant negotiation between interviewers and interviewees with different agendas. As Portelli argued eloquently that it is a process where history meets memories and private place encounters public space where history can be seen from multiple and brand-new perspectives through the dialogical process (Portelli, 2006, 2-3).

In R.T., the performers' agenda was to tell their stories to define themselves while the directors' agenda was to bring out the meanings and emotional resonance of their stories. He or she then transformed them into theatre forms that could communicate with an audience. Schweitzer conducted the rehearsal process as collaboration between the elder performers and themselves. In terms of their emphasis on mutual communication in their interviews, the dialogical process constituted the essential basis of Reminiscence Theatre's poetics of memory. Moreover, R.T. highlighted this dialogical process in rehearsals by engaging the performers to answer the director's questions that often challenged the elders' assumption of their memories. Questions were put into the improvisations and discussions to explore. Different answers could possibly be gained from these theatre exercises. The final answers often came out of group negotiations in rehearsals. The rehearsal is therefore a continuous dialogical process between the elderly participants and the director.

(4) Triple reflexivity evoked in age exchange's Reminiscence Theatre performance

Next I will continue to explore why the representation of these personal narratives and oral history accounts becomes meaningful to the participants and audience. The key reason that I figure out from my research is the reflexivity that the devising and performance of these personal narratives can offer to the participants and the audience. As Baz Kershaw (1992, 234) argued,

Cultural performances are reflective in the sense of showing ourselves to ourselves. They are also capable of being reflexive, arousing consciousness of ourselves as we see ourselves...At once actor and audience, we...watch ourselves and enjoy knowing that we know.

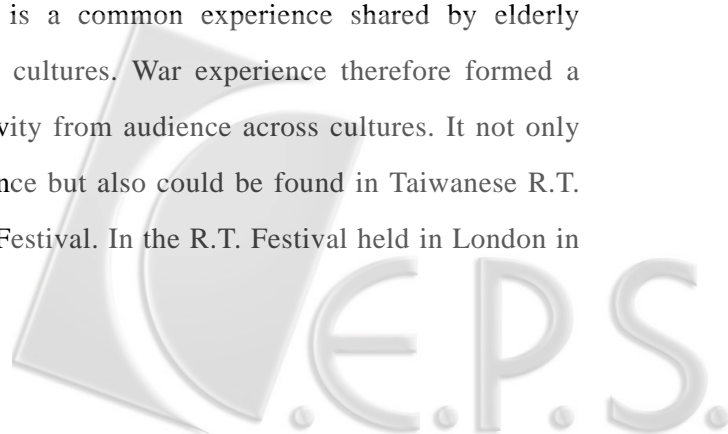
These elders' performances of their oral history accounts are cultural performances that may urge the participants of the performance (including director and actors) and the

audience reflective about themselves. Furthermore, since theatre is a reflective means itself as well as reminiscence implies reflection in itself, Reminiscence Theatre therefore contains double reflexivity in the devising process. When the audience comes into the theatre to watch a R.T. performance, they are very likely prompted by the performance to reflect on their similar lived experience and thus R.T. formulates a “triple reflexivity” from devising to the performance process. Therefore reflexivity is another key feature of R.T.’s aesthetic experience so much as the previously argued empathy. When witnessing the performance of the elders’ oral history accounts, reflexivity and empathy therefore work hand in hand in devising and performance process of R.T. Reflexivity and empathy co-establish R.T.’s profound aesthetic experience of feeling and thinking which cross-fertilize each other.

After analyzing the two prominent aesthetic strategies of Age Exchange, I will go on to explore other aesthetic strategies of it and finally analyze how Age Exchange structured all these aesthetic strategies into a unified whole and made them into its unique artistic style.

3. Aesthetic strategies adapted from British popular theatre traditions

Aside from the two major aesthetic strategies of Age Exchange: exercises developed into signs of art and the representation of the elders’ personal narratives around a common historical theme, Age Exchange also employed other aesthetic strategies such as songs, dance and music from specific period of historical time. These strategies can be clearly identified as British popular theatre traditions according to the leader of one of the most important community theatre company 7:84 in Britain, John McGrath’s (1996) theory of popular theatre. Furthermore, I will argue that Age Exchange Centre’s Reminiscence Theatre is a contemporary revival of the legacy of Popular Theatre in Britain that addresses social concerns with the elderly participants’ historical perspectives. Accordingly, the awareness of their rights and welfare were also evoked by the audience’s response and understanding of them. For example, their sharing of war experience was a common theme in R.T. performance across cultures. War is a common experience shared by elderly participants in 20th century across different cultures. War experience therefore formed a solid basis for evoking empathy and reflexivity from audience across cultures. It not only applied to Age Exchange Centre’s performance but also could be found in Taiwanese R.T. performances and other R.T. groups in R.T. Festival. In the R.T. Festival held in London in



1995, R.T. companies from all over the world shared their memories about Second World War to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the end of the War. They not only shared their similar war memories as a basis of their empathy and reflexivity of war but also tried to understand the differences and individualities of the war experience in different cultures. For example, through watching Uhan Shii Theatre Group's R.T. works, they understood how Taiwanese men were so reluctant to be drafted to fight for a Japanese war since Taiwanese were colonized by Japan at that time. The elderly people also got to understand and communicate their different theatre aesthetics presented by elderly people from different countries in the festival. Therefore the unique aesthetic strategies of R.T. in each country were the important medium to convey different cultures in R.T. Festival and they helped to deliver the elders' distinctive individuality. For example, the aesthetic strategies of popular theatre were a trademark for Age Exchange Centre that could be learned and applied by other R.T. performances from different cultures. The popular theatre traditions were close to ordinary people's everyday life. Since the majority of common people in each culture usually shared this form of entertainment, popular theatre traditions could therefore evoke the most of audience's response and resonance towards the performance. I will demonstrate the impact, techniques and effects of British popular theater tradition utilized by Age Exchange's performance in the later section to prove its effectiveness and to argue for its political implication.

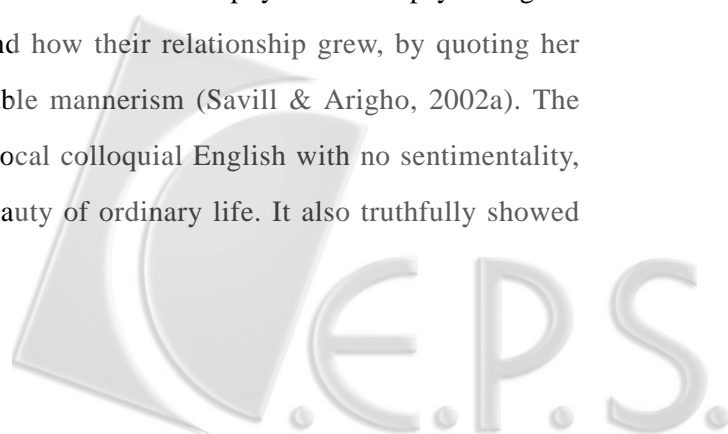
Age Exchange's performances were usually constituted by the verbatim languages of the elderly participants and drew inspiration from popular songs, music hall performances, stand-up comedy and other popular entertainment forms in Britain. According to McGrath's definition of Popular Theatre, he argues, "Popular Theatre is a public event and it is about matters of public concern" (McGrath, 1996, 83). He states that "a great deal of Popular Theatre has got to be about a social criticism of the audience" (McGrath, 1996, 97). Popular Theatre invites the audience's active responses, tends to create a lively and exciting energy in performance and aims to address the audience's serious concerns in society. From my observation and field work in Age Exchange Center, their R.T. performance was always full of elder audiences' singing familiar melodies from the past along with the cast, cheering and recognizing similar memories and experiences, identifying their similar viewpoints from their own past. The performers employed Popular Theatre forms and styles in order to

mediate and comment on contemporary reality. Age Exchange Centre used R.T. as a political forum to address the concerns of the usually marginalized elders' in British society.

Although McGrath's Popular Theatre was aimed at a working class audience whereas R.T. is aimed at an elderly audience, it is still quite useful to review McGrath's discussion about the characteristics of Popular Theatre and compare them with Age Exchange. McGrath has listed directness, comedy, music, immediacy, effect, emotion, music and localism as the major traits of Popular Theatre and given vivid examples for each of them from his practices (McGrath, 1996, 54-58). I will refer to productions of Age Exchange Centre to make a comparison with McGrath's list.

"Music" always plays a major role in Age Exchange Centre's productions. For example, in *Jubilee*, devised and performed by The Good Companions at Age Exchange Centre, the songs of the 1950s were flowing and intersecting with the episodic narration and dramatic representation from beginning to end. They conveyed the mood and feelings of the elderly participants in specific scenes. For example, when the baby boom mothers sang various nursery songs from the 1950s, they vividly portrayed their shared memories about raising children. Joan Pearce and Kitty Finch sang along with *You'll Never Know* while reading their love letters to communicate how much they missed their boyfriends and husbands who were still far away in the battlefields at the end of the war. Employing the elders' personal narratives in verbatim language, "directness" and "immediacy" is an indispensable trait in Age Exchange Centre's productions. The elderly participants' lively narratives invited the audience to respond to them directly and immediately with "localism," "emotion" and "effect".

For instance, in *View from the High Beech*, performed in 2003 at Cromer Parish Hall in collaboration with the Benjamin Court Day Cent, an elderly woman, Joyce Blumfield in one scene talked in her local accent about how she could not recognize her father. She recounted how distant and frightened her mother felt when he came back from the Second World War after four years. She described the details of her father's physical and psychological recovery from the injuries caused by war and how their relationship grew, by quoting her memories of his quiet, understated yet amiable mannerism (Savill & Arigho, 2002a). The story was delivered through her earthy and local colloquial English with no sentimentality, yet it carried the power of simplicity and beauty of ordinary life. It also truthfully showed



the process of how a father and daughter's relationship grew and developed. The audience invited to the Benjamin Court Day Center listened and watched this scene in sheer silence and responded with solid applause, as seen from the video recording of the production (Savill & Arigho, 2002a). In the same production, Fred Bale, one of the elderly actors, performed a section of a piece of a stand-up comedy and aroused roaring laughter among the audience as comedy was also a common technique employed by Age Exchange (Savill & Arigho, 2002a).

The other story in *The Mother of Invention* conveyed Margaret Huttington's memories about her father playing in the FA cup for Huddersfield in 1922 (which was when Huddersfield won the championship for the first time). During the scene, the video player projected the newsreel of her father playing the game at the back of the stage. She also recollected how her father was busy with football games and was rarely at home. However, he once took her out on his motorcycle and bought her a toy horse while her mother went out shopping. He also taught her how to play billiards while she was helping when he ran a billiard store in town. Her father taught her how to have a winning spirit and honest sportsmanship and he was always her hero. The liveliness and excitement of sport and the affection exchanged between father and daughter came alive on stage while she retold the story (Savill & Arigho, 2003). The simplicity of the elders' daily language and the liveliness of their description and local accents communicated with their audience with directness and immediacy as in popular theatre.

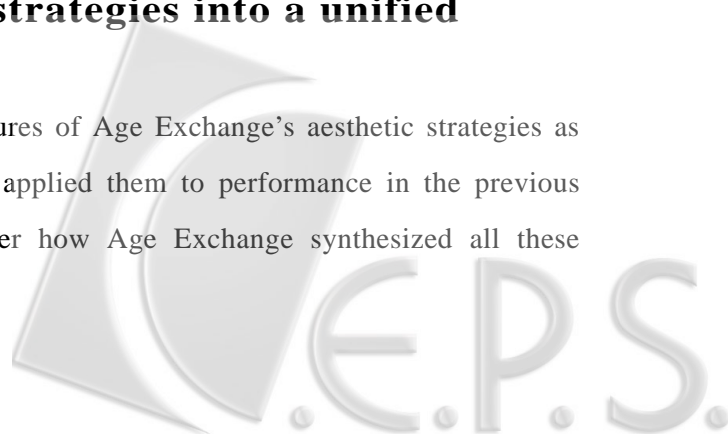
At the Theatre Museum, in the production of *Jubilation* in 2002, elders in London shared their memories about London in wartime in the 1930s, with storytelling and simple forms of dramatization assisted by Age Exchange actors. Once again, music and comedy played a key role in the elders' storytelling. The production aroused the elderly audience to sing along with familiar songs and laugh heartily at the various comical scenes that they could identify from their similar past experience in the War (Savill & Arigho, 2003). For instance, when Doris shared her memories of going to the beach with her parents the day before World War II broke out; she remembered that her mother was tearful worrying about the coming war while her father still insisted the whole family to sing songs together while driving to the beach. On their way home, she remembered that her mother sang a tender and melancholy song--*Let the Great Big World Keep Turning* to keep her father awake while

driving. Both the songs she recalled, prompted the audience at the theatre museum to sing along with Doris and they probably conjured up their own memories of the time before the war broke out (Savill & Arigho, 2003). Singing was always an effective theatre technique for Age Exchange to conjure up shared memories from a specific time and to invite the audience's participation of singing along.

There are various kinds of comedy employed in this production such as situational comedy, witty wordplay and punch lines in storytelling, comical characterization and exaggerated movement. For example, a small detail of ordinary life put in a historical context made wonderful material for a situational comedy, such as Victor's story of his mother. On the evening of the VE-Day celebrations, Victor's mother was given so many whiskies to drink to celebrate victory in the war that she could not possibly finish them all. Consequently, she poured some of those whiskies into a flowerpot on the table in a local bar. The next day, the bar-owner smelt strong whiskey in the flowerpot and found the flowers were all drowned (or "drunken") to death. When he asked Victor, Victor pretended he did not know why. The audience chuckled along to the story in the context of victory, while a slide of a street party full of smiling faces was projected onto the screen behind the scene (Savill & Arigho, 2003). The re-enactment of the dance in Ruby's story, with the bold movement of swinging hips and waving hands and boisterous rock-and-roll music, made the audience go back to the time of the Great War and relive their collective memories of youth and fun in dance halls with American G.I. though with the threat of war (Savill & Arigho, 2003). Age Exchange Center was conscientious in the employment of popular theatre techniques that evoked collective memories of singing, dancing and popular entertainment. These techniques aroused an immediate response from its audience who can thereby identify with the elders' oral histories. Based on this kind of immediate audience response, Age Exchange could therefore get across their political concerns through the historical reflection of elderly citizens.

4. Structuring all aesthetic strategies into a unified whole

After analyzing all the significant features of Age Exchange's aesthetic strategies as well as demonstrating how Age Exchange applied them to performance in the previous sections, now I will explicate and decipher how Age Exchange synthesized all these



aesthetic strategies into a unified whole. According to Schweitzer's own notes of rehearsal of *Jubilee*, and my observational notes of attending their rehearsals, their way of structuring can be divided into the following five parts: (1) finding a common theme about a particular period of historical time to explore as a start point and exposing the participants to related official historical accounts of the period to share and stimulate their remembering process, (2) using sensorial exercises to conjure up the elders' memories and employing improvisations to develop these lived experience from the past into episodic scenes which are dramatic representations of these stories, (3) using personal narratives as direct address to the audience in the play to convey the elders' own voices and feelings in their own words, (4) using songs, dance and music as the connecting tissue between these dramatic scenes and direct address of personal narratives. They can also serve the purpose of elaborating associated and shared feelings about the historical time explored and creating a distance from the direct engagement with the elders' personal narratives and episodic dramatic scenes, (5) adding or cutting (editing) the above aesthetic elements under a unified theme against a historical framework and weaving them into a flowing and fluent unity. This structuring method that embraces the spirit of collaboration and group discussion marks Age Exchange's distinctive artistic style-authentic, naturalistic, egalitarian and lively.

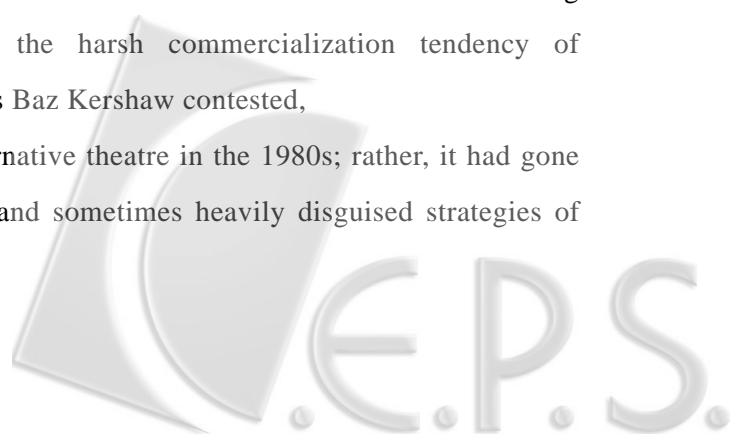
Conclusion

Drawn from all the above arguments, I will conclude by pinpointing out Age Exchange Centre's unique aesthetic strategies and its political significance. It utilized sensuous signs distilled from rehearsal exercises and transformed them into signs of art. These signs of art could evoke audience's empathy based on their similar sensorial experience in the past and therefore they can identify with and respond to the performance emotionally. On the other hand, Age Exchange also represented the elders' oral history accounts and transformed them into episodic dramatic scenes or direct address to audience. It often depicted the collective historical experience of 20th century such as experience in war or endearing personal family memories about their parents. These memories were shared by most of the elderly people in 20th century across cultures and therefore established a solid ground for their strong identification and response to the performance. Reflecting on personal histories can also evoke participants' as well as audience's reflexivity on historical events or a particular

period of historical time through the self-reflexive feature of both reminiscence and theatre. This feature of reflexivity towards common historical experience can be seen as Age Exchange's prominent characteristic. The other aesthetic strategy Age Exchange employed is British popular theatre traditions. By using these popular theatre aesthetic techniques, Age Exchange could gather most of the audience's response since the audience and the actors were all familiar with these popular traditions and they were part of their shared social memories. By acting these popular traditions out, the elderly participants invited their audience to re-live their shared memories of these popular entertainment alive in their past. With this powerful aesthetics to communicate with the audience, Age Exchange can therefore make their historical reflection and political comment so successfully.

The uniqueness of Age Exchange's aesthetics also lied in its devising process. It provided a dialogical and reflective opportunity to re-interpret each other's past by telling stories of past to each other. Through discussing them altogether and acting them out repeatedly from multiple perspectives, R.T. could thus obtain opportunities to offer multiple historical discourses and various re-interpretation of British modern history. This is because Age Exchange Centre's elderly participants are often community elderly people from different social standings, ethnic backgrounds and geographical areas in United Kingdom. It always foregrounds an egalitarian and democratic spirit to voice out these generally marginalized elderly people's concerns in public as demonstrated in previous production examples. These British community elders' dramatic representations distilled from their life histories could therefore countered some of the British cultural stereotypes created by elites and intellectuals. Their stories from everyday life often countered social presumptions perpetuated by singular historical accounts. Their performances composed by the elders' multiple oral history accounts celebrated the multiculturalism and diversity in British society. Therefore I argue the aesthetic strategies of Age Exchange's works could act as a subtle political theatre created of, by and for the people. It clearly belongs to a new trend of community theatre development in the U.K. in 1980s. It resisted the cutback of art funding for alternative theatre development and the harsh commercialization tendency of mainstream under Thatcherism in its time. As Baz Kershaw contested,

Radicalism did not disappear from alternative theatre in the 1980s; rather, it had gone to ground, in the sense of adopting subtle and sometimes heavily disguised strategies of



resistance at a localized level. A similar tendency can be detected in the tactics of the campaign and groups of special needs (this is a term used in U.K. to address for groups of people with special needs, such as blind, deaf or physically challenged people) and even in some of the soft ideological companies (Kershaw, 1992, 204).

So much as I have demonstrated in this essay, Age Exchange aims at giving voices back to one of the groups of special needs-the community elders. By representing their oral history accounts and multiple perspectives, they made insightful reflections and re-interpretation of British modern history through theatre. They subtly resisted the dominant and mainstream historical narratives and posed their social criticism and intervention through active reflexive theatre activity. Therefore I conclude that Age Exchange belongs to what Baz Kershaw has defined for the British alternative theatre movement in the 1980s. It could well be seen as one of the pioneer companies of political and democratic theatre of the people in the community settings in Britain. Its aesthetic strategies and practices explored here is in the hope to give specific inspirations and insights to similar groups of special need or community theatre groups worldwide. Hence they can continue to create innovative performance on oral history accounts by non-professional community people in the future.

References:

- Brecht, B. (1982). *Brecht on theatre*. (J. Willett, Trans.). London: Methuen. (Original work published 1964)
- Davis, G. M., & Logie, R. H. (Eds.). (1993). *Memory in everyday Life*. Amsterdam: North-Holland.
- Deleuze, G. (2000). *Proust and signs*. (R. Howard, Trans.). London: The Athlone. (Original work published 1964)
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings*. New York: Panteon Books.
- Geertz, C. (1983). *Local knowledge: Further essays in interpretive anthropology*. U.S.A.: Basic Books.
- Govan, E., Nicholson, H., & Normington, K. (2007). *Making a performance: Devising histories and contemporary practices*. London: Routledge.
- Kershaw, B. (1992). *The politics of performance: Radical theatre as cultural intervention*. London: Routledge.
- Kershaw, B. (1999). *The radical in performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard*. London: Routledge.

- King, N. (2000). *Memory, narrative, identity: Remembering the self*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University.
- Kuppers, P. (2007). *Community performance: An introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Luria, A. R. (1973). *Memory, the working brain*. New York: Penguin Books.
- McGrath, J. (1996). *A good night out: Popular theatre: Audience, class and form*. London: Adhern.
- Osborn, C. (1993). *The reminiscence handbook*. London: Age Exchange Theatre Trust.
- Portelli, A. (1998a). Oral history as genre. In Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson (Ed.), *Narrative and Genre* (pp. 23-45). London: Routledge.
- Portelli, A. (1998b). What makes oral history different? In Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (Eds.), *The oral history reader*. (pp. 63-74) London: Routledge.
- Portelli, A. (2006). A dialogical relationship: An approach to oral history. Retrieved May 16, 2006, from www.swaraj.org/shikshantar/expressions_portelli.pdf
- Somers, J. (2007) Applied drama-its theory and practice. In *2007 Project of Theatre Education for the Public-The Local Development and Future of Theatre in Education - Conference and Workshop*. 4-6 November 2007. Department of Theatre Creation and Application, NUTN: Tainan.
- Savill, D. (Director). (2001). *Journey* [DVD]. London: Age Exchange Center.
- Savill, D., & Arigho, B. (Directors). (2002a). *View from the High Beech* [DVD]. London: Age Exchange Center.
- Savill, D., & Arigho, B. (Directors). (2002b). *Jubilation* [DVD]. London: Age Exchange Center.
- Savill, D., & Arigho, B. (Directors). (2003). *Mothers of invention* [DVD]. London: Age Exchange Center.
- Schweitzer, P. (2002a). *Jubilee*. London: Age Exchange Center.
- Schweitzer, P. (2002b). *Age exchange: The story so far-1982-2002-a twenty year retrospective*. London: Age Exchange Center.
- Schweitzer, P. (2003). *Interview with author*. Aug 24, 2003. London: Age Exchange Center.
- Schweitzer, P. (2007). *Reminiscence theatre: Making theatre from memories*. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Warnock, M. (1987). *Memory*. London: Faber and Faber.



英國老人劇場的劇場美學策略探究： 以歲月流轉中心為例

王婉容¹

摘要

此篇論文聚焦探討英國最早成立也是重要的老人劇團—歲月流轉中心的美學策略及其背後的文化意涵。首先在文中介紹了老人劇場在當代社會的重要性，由於高齡化社會的來臨，全球各地的老人在退而不休的生活中要如何從事創造性的休閒活動，使得他們老年的生活品質得以提升，成為全球社會的重要課題，老人劇場因而崛起，提供老人們有發揮創意、分享豐富生命經驗，傳承後世的美學展演場域。為了更進一步提供實際地老人劇場工作和展演方式的特色與方法，本文選擇專注在探討歲月流轉中心發展的社會背景和其美學的策略，藉以展現老人劇場已發展出的獨特美學策略和其背後深刻的文化與社會意涵。

全文分為六個段落來詳細論析歲月流轉中心在創作排練和演出過程中，所發展出的美學策略，並引用當代美學、文化研究理論和劇場理論來闡釋演繹這些策略的文化與社會意義。首先，研究者先引用了德勒茲 (Gilles Deleuze) (2000) 評論普魯斯特「追憶似水年華」中的記憶美學理論，來分析歲月流轉中心將記憶中的感官符號，透過劇場的聲音和動作與意象及場面安排來轉化成為藝術的符號，並透過歲月流轉中心的劇場演出實例，來證明他們在劇場透過演出，再現具有共通性的感官記憶經驗，能使觀眾對老人劇場產生移情作用，引起共鳴。

接著，再舉證歲月流轉中心的招牌美學策略，運用個人的口述歷史來對照大時代的歷史事件，串組呈現出庶民對歷史多元的經驗和看法，研究者在這段論述中引用了

¹ 王婉容，助理教授，任教於臺南大學戲劇創作與應用學系暨研究所，連絡信箱為 carlowa@mail.nutn.edu.tw, carlowa@yahoo.com

傅柯 (Michele Foucault) (1980) 的知識權力說，來佐證民間的口述歷史，以補充和制衡官方歷史的單向和權威，提供多元史觀和詮釋歷史的角度。同時，也運用史學家博德勵 (Alessandra Portelli) (2006) 的口述歷史研究理論，來論證老人劇場在排練發展故事過程中，導演與演員運用口述歷史的訪談方式來創作故事，也具有開發歷史素材成為開放性對話的特殊意義。另外，透過最後展演的行動，將這個與歷史的對話延伸到觀眾和演出之間。劇場本身已具有反省性，回顧歷史的老人劇場創作本身又是另一重反省，加上透過展演來刺激觀眾反省共同的歷史經驗，形成老人劇場獨特的三重反省效益。

除了達成移情和反省的美學作用外，歲月流轉中心也擅長運用通俗劇場的美學手法，來引起最大多數觀眾對歷史經歷的共鳴，其中引用了約翰·麥格斯 (John McGrath) (1996) 對通俗劇场的分析，包括了對：直接、喜劇、音樂、臨場感、情感性和地方性等元素的掌握，來作為分析的基礎。接著，研究者再運用歲月流轉中心許多廣獲觀眾迴響的作品演出實例，來演示他們如何運用前述的元素通俗劇場引起共鳴的效果，並表達出大眾心聲的政治批判性。最後，也論述了歲月流轉中心綜合前面三個主要美學策略的整合方法。

結論中舉證了貝茲·卡蕭 (Baz Kershaw) (1992) 的英國劇場史觀來闡明老人劇場作為英國當代另類文化運動的一支，所富涵的以老人的庶民歷史觀點，創作展演柔性的社會批判之深意。

關鍵詞：口述歷史、通俗劇場、反省作用、老人回憶劇場、移情作用