In Search of an Aesthetic Pathway: A/r/tography of Young Children's Encounters with

Drama Improvisation

by

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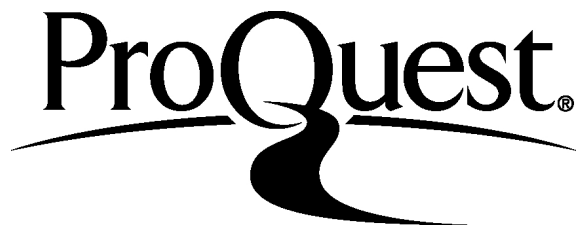
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To my beloved daughter Isabel LAM.

Statement of Originality

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Abstract

Aesthetic education has become an essential domain in worldwide curricula to facilitate children's creativity and imagination. In Hong Kong, aesthetic education is a developmental objective in the early childhood education curriculum. It is usually fostered through arts education but literature reveals that not every art activity can convey aesthetic experiences. In this study, Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of rhizome, aesthetics and drama improvisation were used to form a theoretical framework. A/r/tography as an arts-based methodology was used to study the aesthetic process of six fluent Cantonese-speaking children, aged 3-5 years, as they participated in five drama improvisation workshops. Data were gathered using video recordings, focussed discussions, children's art journals, and reflective journals. A/r/tographic analytical devices of contiguity and excess were used together with Deleuze's concepts from theatre of multiplicities as a mapping strategy to identify similar data and locating surprises across the 22 co-created drama improvisation scenes. Thereafter, nine categories were identified and then regrouped into three themes: the exercise of decisiveness, introspectiveness, and empathy. Such finding revealed that both tangible and intangible environments were equally important for creating young children's aesthetic encounters. While tangible environment is referred to a safe environment, the intangible environment is identified as teacher's perspective and power relations. Young children's cognitive and sensory exercises, as well as the ethics of self-consciousness building were recorded. The recordings demonstrated the results that such activities can transform the life of a child. The research recommends teaching for aesthetic experiences using teacher as co-improviser approach for the educators. Thus, this evidence-based research promotes fostering aesthetic education through aesthetic encounters in a collaborative and improvisational approach for young children of Hong Kong.

Keywords: Aesthetics, A/R/Tography, Deleuze, Drama, Early childhood

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Chapter 1: Prologue – Aesthetic Education without Aesthetic Encounters

Figure 1. Picture took by Isa during a Countryside bus ride (Lam, 2012).

"*Mommy, isn't God amazing!*"

"(Assuredly) *Yes, surely my dear God is amazing… but what do you mean by this, Isa*?"

"(Pointing towards the trees) *Look, HE can create so many different shades of green.*"

The journey of the research undertaken by me began from a conversation with my 3 year old daughter Isa. We went on a bus ride from Hong Kong countryside to the town centre on a bright autumn day in 2012. Looking at the brownish, reddish, yellowish trees and leaves (scenery that is similar to Figure 1), Isa was astonished by the various shades of green colour. She thought God was superior as HE could create so many different shades of green. As she only knew two shades of green, the light and dark ones, from her crayon pack, thus the new

observation made her more curious. After pondering over this conversation with Isa, I was amazed at her sensibility and expressive ability when she experienced an aesthetic encounter during an ordinary bus ride. I wondered how come a young girl can be so sensitive to her surroundings and was able to voice out his opinions towards what she thinks and feels! This ordinary conversation turned out to be an extraordinary experience that inspired my interest in understanding the cognition of young children's aesthetic encounters.

The purpose of my study is to understand how young children experience and respond to aesthetic encounters in the context of Hong Kong's early childhood education. Since aesthetic education is valued as a means to cultivate creative and imaginative power, thus, it has become an essential developmental objective in the Hong Kong's early childhood education curriculum (Curriculum Development Council, 2006). Based on the common philosophy that aesthetic education is fostered through arts education, drama improvisation is used as an art medium to convey and observe aesthetic encounters with young children. However, some literature shows that not every art activity can convey aesthetic encounters. Thus, it is important to find out: *what is aesthetics? How does it work with young children?*

Starting with a drama educator perspective, the research takes on a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary approach to study young children's aesthetic encounters. The study will deal with both arts and education perspectives under the postmodern concept of rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Sharing Lather's (1993) point of view, Jones et al. (2005) also agrees with the concept of rhizome that it is useful as "a metaphorical way of conceptualising the terrain of early years" (Jones et al, 2005, p. 205). The concept of rhizome constitutes a sense of continuity that can link (educational) conversations of the past to the future. It is also (physically and metaphorically) a multiplicity in the nature that allows diversity of acting (or movements) and thinking. Therefore, using the concept of rhizome to investigate early childhood issues can produce new perspectives and insights.

The concept of rhizome is used as the theoretical framework of the research and a/r/tography as the methodology for this arts-based qualitative research. By studying the inter- and intra-relations between the multiple-layers of data obtained from the drama improvisation workshops, the essential elements of young children's aesthetic encounters are visualised and examined. The study also records the reflexivity of my aesthetic encounters in each of these roles as an a/r/tographer (i.e., *a*rtist, *r*esearcher, and *t*eacher). My perspective and practice as an artist, researcher and teacher for facilitating young children's aesthetic encounters is reflected thereafter. The findings contribute in reconceptualising the implementation of aesthetic education with young children. It also contributes in encouraging the alternative ways of facilitating young children's aesthetic encounters.

This introductory chapter showcases the background of the research, aim of the study, research questions, and the significance of the study. It also overviews the theoretical and methodological frameworks of the study. Further, it explains the structure of the thesis with definitions of the terms and concepts that are used in the research.

Background of the Research

As inspired by my beloved daughter, as a drama educator and a second year doctoral student, I started to look into the aesthetic education issue in Hong Kong's early childhood education. Surprisingly, even though aesthetic education is included in the *Guide* for Hong Kong pre-school curriculum (Curriculum Development Council, 2006), it comprises of only a short section about aesthetics and the young children. Although aesthetic education is considered as a developmental objective and ways of implementation are suggested in the *Guide*, there is still little understanding about what aesthetics are and how they work with young children in Hong Kong. To achieve the developmental objective of aesthetic education that is encouraged by the *Guide*, there is a need to widen knowledge about aesthetics and young children, and explore strategies that can support the implementation of aesthetic

education in schools of Hong Kong. The first part of this chapter will present aesthetic education through arts education in the context of Hong Kong's early childhood education. The problem of the research as identified is "*not all arts activities can convey aesthetic encounters*". Thus, the problem states the rationale behind the study that how my professional drama experience can contribute knowledge towards this research undertaken.

Aesthetic Education through Arts Education in the Hong Kong's Early Childhood Educational Context

As a British colony since 1841, Hong Kong's education system was influenced by the Western education system. In Hong Kong, arts education began in 1862, but aesthetics as a part of education was taken up in discussions by the government and educators, for secondary school education, that too in the year 1954 (Wah Kiu Yat Pao, 1954; Wong, 2001). It was partly taken up as a topic of interest by some Chinese scholars (e.g., Wang Guowei (王國維) and Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培) who wanted to rebuild and reform Chinese national values in early 20th century.   The same idea was also partly influenced by British governance over Hong Kong at that time. Followed by the surprise that Russian launched a satellite successfully in 1957, America was awakened towards the importance of teaching creativity in education (Winston, 2010). As aesthetics can stimulate creative and imaginative powers (Amadio et al., 2006; Benavot, 2004; Curriculum Development Council, 2006), aesthetic education started drawing attention and spread throughout, in the Western countries. Almost 40 years later, aesthetic education was officially promoted in Hong Kong's early childhood education (Curriculum Development Council, 1993). Aesthetics was considered as one of the five educational goals among ethics, intellect, physique, and social skills (Curriculum Development Council, 1996, 2006). Later in 2006, the Hong Kong Education Bureau made aesthetic education as one of the four developmental objectives in the early childhood curriculum.

The *Guide to the pre-primary curriculum* (Curriculum Development Council, 2006) makes specific statements about aesthetic sensitivity and imagination, and identifies four objectives of arts education for young children:

Aesthetic sensitivity is cultivated through observation and feelings. Imagination is stimulated when one observes the environment with one's senses and compares the forms of different things. Children express their inner thoughts, feelings, emotions and imagination through the language of different media. The objectives of arts education for early childhood include:

1. To allow children to explore different art media and symbols in an aesthetically rich and diversified environment.

2. To enrich children's sensory experiences and encourage them to express their thoughts and feelings.

3. To stimulate children's creative and imaginative powers, and encourage them to enjoy participating in creative works.

4. To enhance children's quality of life and foster their interests in life by guiding them to appreciate the surrounding environment. (p. 20)

Aesthetic education in Hong Kong, like most of the Western education systems, is promoted and fostered through arts education. However, there is a fundamental difference between art and aesthetics: while art seeks quality construction and techniques, aesthetics does not, instead aesthetics relates to perception by using the five senses (Diaz, 2002). It can be a problematic aspect during the implementation of aesthetic education if the research is unaware regarding what aesthetics are. Also if the researcher is unable to identify a child's aesthetic encounters or how it works with him/her, it would be difficult to achieve the developmental objective. For example, the *Guide* stated that young children's aesthetic senses can be fostered by active experiences retrieved from sensory experiences and feelings they

cultivate in different art forms and materials. Children should have freedom to express their thoughts and feelings in a physical environment that is "an aesthetically rich and diversified environment" (Curriculum Development Council, 2006, p. 20). So many educators make use of this advice and use arts activities to convey aesthetic education. However, they can be easily mistaken in thinking all the arts activities are equal to aesthetic encounters. It is important to note that there is no definition and function of aesthetics or aesthetic education listed in the *Guide*. It is necessary to provide more information on concepts of aesthetics and how it works with young children, so that educators can better understand, design and implement aesthetic education instead of just relying on the short description of 121-words about aesthetic development in the *Guide*.

Also, according to the *Guide*, arts education has many mediums, which includes dance, drama, music and visual arts. There are also various strategies to convey arts education through the mentioned media, e.g., art-making, art-appreciation and art-criticism. Research about aesthetics in early childhood educational settings seems to focus on the study of young children's aesthetic encounters through only art-appreciation (Bundy, 2003; Tang, 2011), with arts materials (Fredriksen, 2011), and in pedagogical discussion (Einstein, 2006; Samuelsson et al., 2009). Regarding the practice of aesthetic education through arts activities, imitation (Plato, 380 BCE/2009; Aristotle, 335 BCE/1992) and art-appreciation (Bundy, 2003; Chow, 2007; Curriculum Development Council, 2006; Dewey, 1934; Tang, 2011) there are the two common approaches in education, for developing the concepts and practices of aesthetic education in children (Curriculum Development Council, 2006; McLennan, 2010). Imitation is about repeating a prescribed model, and art-appreciation normally refers to sharing one's opinion on art products (e.g., discussion after a museum visit museum). These two approaches anchor contemporary aesthetic education as a learning process of making, responding to, and acquiring knowledge of art (Abbs, 1991). Therefore, these approaches

seem to have developed an assumption that from young children it is required that they need to appreciate, imitate and reproduce before they can create. Although I doubt the validity of this assumption, these approaches are common in the arts practices of local Hong Kong early childhood education classrooms as the *Guide* suggests (Curriculum Development Council, 2006; Hui, 2011, 2012; Tang, 2011).

The Problem: Not All Arts Activities can Convey Aesthetic Encounters

In Hong Kong, cognition and sensory exercises through arts experiences are encouraged in the general guidelines for aesthetic education (Curriculum Development Council, 2006). Many educators often engage young children in 'prescribed' arts activities as a part of the cognition and sensory exercises. Therefore, art-making through imitation is a popular practice in early childhood education settings in Hong Kong. In these arts activities, all children will "experience the same process using identical tools and materials" (McLennan, 2010, p. 83). For example, an arts session with K2 children (about 4 years old) can include *candle shades-making*. The teacher will first show some beautifully made paper candle shades to the children. After raising their attention and interests, when the child will become curious, the teacher will introduce the related arts materials, e.g., colour papers, scissors and glues. Thereafter the teacher will demonstrate the process of cutting out shapes to make patterns on a colour paper. Further the teacher will stick the two ends of the paper together to form a cylinder. Through this practical demonstration children will get an idea of how they can make a similar candle shade like the one with the teacher. Although these kinds of art experiences provide cognitive and sensory exercises (mainly motor sensory though), they often result in repetition of a prescribed model by a child. Children are asked to practice drawing, cutting skills, or participate in intellectual cognition exercises, but these imitative activities leave little room for young children to create, imagine, and express their emotions and feelings. Therefore, young children may acquire knowledge of art (e.g., design and

techniques) through these imitation activities but it is difficult to claim that they have engaged in various aesthetic encounters.

Aesthetic encounters are specific experiences of cognition and sensory exercises (Bundy, 2003), that human beings use for understanding and interacting with their surroundings (Eisner, 2002; Heid, 2005). However, here sensory is not only about five senses (sight, hear, taste, smell, touch) or motor exercises, but also include emotions and feelings. The *Guide* states, arts activities can "encourage them [children] to enjoy participating in creative works" and "encourage them [children] to express their thoughts and feelings", so that "child's quality of life" can be enhanced (Curriculum Development Council, 2006, p. 20). However, arts experiences of imitating under the prescribed models are focussed on product reproduction, and have little relation to aesthetics because here children's emotions or feelings are not engaged (Diaz, 2002; Eisner, 2002). Therefore, it is difficult to claim that these models supporting the repetition of activities can convey "aesthetic sensitivity" (Curriculum Development Council, 2006, p. 20). Aesthetics is "an untidy discipline" (Dickie, 1997, p. 109), thus, even though the *Guide* lists some suggestions for implementing aesthetic education, early childhood educators can still find aesthetics difficult to define, observe or evaluate. It is easy for educators to mistake aesthetics as master art pieces, or mistreat aesthetics and art-criticism as one concept (Heid, 2005). It is important to understand the meaning of aesthetics and how it works with young children; otherwise arts activities, without engaging any emotions or feelings, may render just a labour of work (McLennan, 2010).

Aesthetics, in fact, refers to a style, a way of being beautiful or sensually interesting that human beings adopt according to their individual preferences (Koren, 2010). It is a perception of value through one's senses and feelings (Diaz, 2002; Eisner, 2002). For everyone values of aesthetic encounters vary and are based on their own perceptions. As a

subject of philosophy, aesthetics is "directly concerned with criticism" (Beardsley, 1970, p. 7) and is always linked to, but not restricted to, fine arts (Eisner, 2002). Contemporary views on aesthetics claim that it is "the science of how things are cognized by means of the senses" (Levison, 2003, p. 9). While Western notions emphasise the measures of aesthetic encounters (e.g., techniques like imitation of nature's beauty), Chinese notions focus on the function of the aesthetic encounters (e.g., building better people). From the Chinese perspective, aesthetics constitutes self-reflexivity (Confucius, 500 BCE/2000; Laozi, 551 BCE/2008) in social and ethical aspects. It means aesthetics in Chinese culture is an educational tool for building better people for a better society.

Latest Taiwanese national research recognises the importance of aesthetics for right-brain developments. Thus, it promotes aesthetic education as a way to cultivate creative personnel for future competitive work fields (Lin, 2014). The recent aesthetic education study of UNESCO International Bureau of Education (Amadio et al., 2006) also reports that aesthetics is not only beneficial for versatile/comprehensive personal development but also for socio-economic progress. Therefore, aesthetics is not merely beneficial to enhance creative and imaginative power, but also building better people for the society. Educators in China and Taiwan also realised the value and importance of starting aesthetic education from early childhood educational context. They started doing nationwide research to reform the aesthetic education (Lin, 2012; Zhang, 2014). Taiwan has even set up Preschool Development Grant with an investment of 2.5 hundred millions of U.S. dollars. It aims to implement a 15-year plan of national aesthetic education for early childhood education. However, this research is only based on an education perspective with a developmental approach. As a dramatist and educator, I wondered how performing arts can facilitate young children to experience and respond to aesthetic encounters.

Professional Aspects of Aesthetics and Drama to the Research

As a dramatist, for more than 25 years, I have witnessed how children's theatre has developed to drama-in-education. Drama-in-education focuses on drama as a means of learning (Neelands, 1992). In the last 20 years, drama-in-education has developed quickly across cultures and education disciplines. In Hong Kong, particularly with the Education Bureau's encouragement from the *Guide* (Curriculum Development Council, 2000, 2006), more educators started to employ drama games (e.g., hot-seating), forms (e.g., comedy, musicals) and activities (e.g., script-writing, role plays) for domain learning (e.g., English, literacy). However, essential aspects of drama such as history, genre, acting techniques, or drama aesthetics can rarely be found in pre-school classrooms. From my dramatist perspective, drama-in-education is not treated as an art form (Hendy & Toon, 2001) but pedagogy (e.g. interactive). It is a tool for domain-learning enhancement (e.g., language, ethics, mathematics) (Tam, 2010), or an entertainment in festivals and celebrations, (Hui, 2011, 2012; Yuen, 2004) in Hong Kong's early childhood education settings.

Aesthetics in drama refers to the live experiences derived from a multi-sensory exercise. Those exercises cover a wide assortment of activities, including script-writing, performing, directing, scenography, audience participation and appreciation. Some researchers in Hong Kong have investigated drama as pedagogy for domain learning (Tam, 2010), and creativity (Hui, 2011; Hui et al., 2011) in early childhood education context. However, research into drama as aesthetic encounters is less common. Tang's (2011) study on aesthetic responses through drama appreciation in early childhood education is one of the very few. Yet drama education should aim at the aesthetic development of all students with a fundamental concern for the development of people (Bailin, 1993). Thus, drama is a means of aesthetic encounters which calls for appreciation, but is not limited to it. Instead, it requires active participation of children and teachers (Ho, 2012).

As an experienced dramatist, the aim of this study is to investigate how young children experience and respond to arts-based aesthetic encounters. Among various forms of drama, drama improvisation was selected to promote active participation between children and teacher (or artist) for aesthetic encounters. Some people (including my supervisors) may think it is not easy, if not completely impossible, to engage children between 2-6 years old in drama improvisation. However, as I perceive young children as "deeply complex, holistic beings" (Jones & Barron, 2005, p. 1) they are not empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge. They are my knowledge co-creators whom I trust as I use appropriate tools to research on them. They are competent to illuminate their thoughts and feelings through performative approaches. Therefore, drama improvisation was used in the study as the research medium. Drama Improvisation can enhance young children's ability to engage in aesthetic encounters through exercises of creativity and imagination. Drama improvisation also allows children to connect to their past experiences, enhance emotional engagements. It also raises their sensory awareness of the surroundings while creating the character or story plots.

This thesis reports a small-scale research which is expected to contribute to the understanding of young children's aesthetic encounters. The research does so by visualising the enactment of how the encounters happened and what made them happen in the local context.

Overview of the Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks in Postmodern Concept of Rhizome

This section presents the theoretical and methodological frameworks of the research. In this study, drama improvisation is the art medium used to create aesthetic encounters, together with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's (1987) concept of rhizome and aesthetics. They are also used as a scaffold for the theoretical frameworks to construct, analyse and

interpret the research data and its findings. The postmodern concept of rhizome also

contributes to the choice of methodology - A/r/tography (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Springgay,

Irwin, & Kind, 2008). This arts-based qualitative methodology provides multiple ways to

know and allows the study to visualise the process of young children's aesthetic encounters

through their engagement in art-making (drama improvisation), art-appreciation (focussed

discussions) and art-criticism (children's arts journals).

Hong Kong pre-school curriculum takes a developmentally appropriate approach to

early childhood education (Curriculum Development Council, 2006). There is a general

understanding that a developmentally appropriate approach references to Piaget's

developmental psychology with the notion of *stage and structure* (Wasiak, 2010). However,

sometimes over-familiarity leads us to miss out the essences of the subject. For example,

Piaget claimed the (developmental) stages were not fixed and variations should be expected

(Muller, Carpendale, & Smith, 2009; Piaget, 1960), but in reality, these stages and structures

in education system are still fixed according to age (Jones & Barron, 2005). For example,

kindergarten is for children aged 3-5 years, whereas K1 is only for 3 years old and the

curriculum of K1 is easier than K2 and K3 according to children's cognitive development.

Aesthetic education in Hong Kong's early childhood education is also framed on the similar

lines of developmentally appropriate approach. However, I argue that aesthetics don't require

skills or techniques, and they are not related to age of a child. I wondered what young

children's aesthetic encounters would be like if age, stage and structure are not fixed. Taking

Piaget's (1960) suggestion, the study attempts to search for variations. In order to gain a new

understanding of young children's aesthetic encounters, particularly from the viewpoint of

children, the study seeks an alternative perspective and approach to conduct the investigation.

The Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizome fits in the research as the concept of rhizome advocates

multiple yet overlapping stages. They also include time and space that make the study of

non-linear and non-age related aesthetic encounters possible. So, as suggested by Piaget, the (developmental) stages will be no longer fixed, and numerous other variables can emerge. In other words, the postmodern concept of rhizome allows me to *de-familiar* the learnt concepts of current aesthetic education and provide alternative thinking about young children's aesthetic encounters.

Overview of the Theoretical Framework – The Concept of Rhizome

The theoretical framework of the thesis is grafted with aesthetics, drama improvisation and the concept of rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) to investigate young children's aesthetic encounters. I see this as grafting work because concepts of aesthetics, drama improvisation and Deleuze are used to analyse the data at the same time. The framework of the thesis is not gelling but grafting. Gelling refers to blending or mixing so that the original inputs will no longer remain recognisable. However, grafting works like putting a peach-tree branch on a plum tree to produce nectarines. The branches of the peach and the plum are still clearly identical, yet the fruit is a new kind of species. Therefore, by grafting drama improvisation concepts to the postmodern philosophical concept of rhizome, new insights about young children's aesthetic encounters can be produced.

Postmodernism is a way of thinking that critiques all master narratives. (Lyotard, 1984) It promotes multiplicity (Baudrillard, 1994) and entails thought that is provisional with continuity, yet without a foundation, universal or transhistorical truth (Vattimo, 1998). Taking the postmodern perspective, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) developed a philosophical concept of rhizome to show how thinking is non-linear; and occurs across time and space. Like a rhizome plant (Figure 2), aesthetic encounter is an open system, where time and space are non-linear. Unlike a scripted drama performance that has a linear story plot, drama improvisation is also a non-linear system. It constitutes various unexpected short moments or

incidents that are called *happenings,* without knowing when and where an improvisation

performance will be completed.

Figure 2. The rhizome plant (e.g. ginger).

Thus, as Figure 3 shows that the three areas of study: aesthetics (as marked in red

ovals), drama improvisation (as marked in yellow ovals) and the concept of rhizome (as

marked in blue ovals). These three areas are inter- and intra-connected as they share the

common characteristic of carrying non-linear time and space in nature. Drama improvisation

as a performing arts form constitutes aesthetic elements, such as cognitive and emotional

engagements, imagination and awareness of the environment. The characteristics of rhizome,

e.g., non-linear time and space, de-authorship and in-between relationships, are connected to

the characteristics of aesthetics and drama improvisation. Along with it they also provide a

postmodern perspective to this arts-based educational investigation.
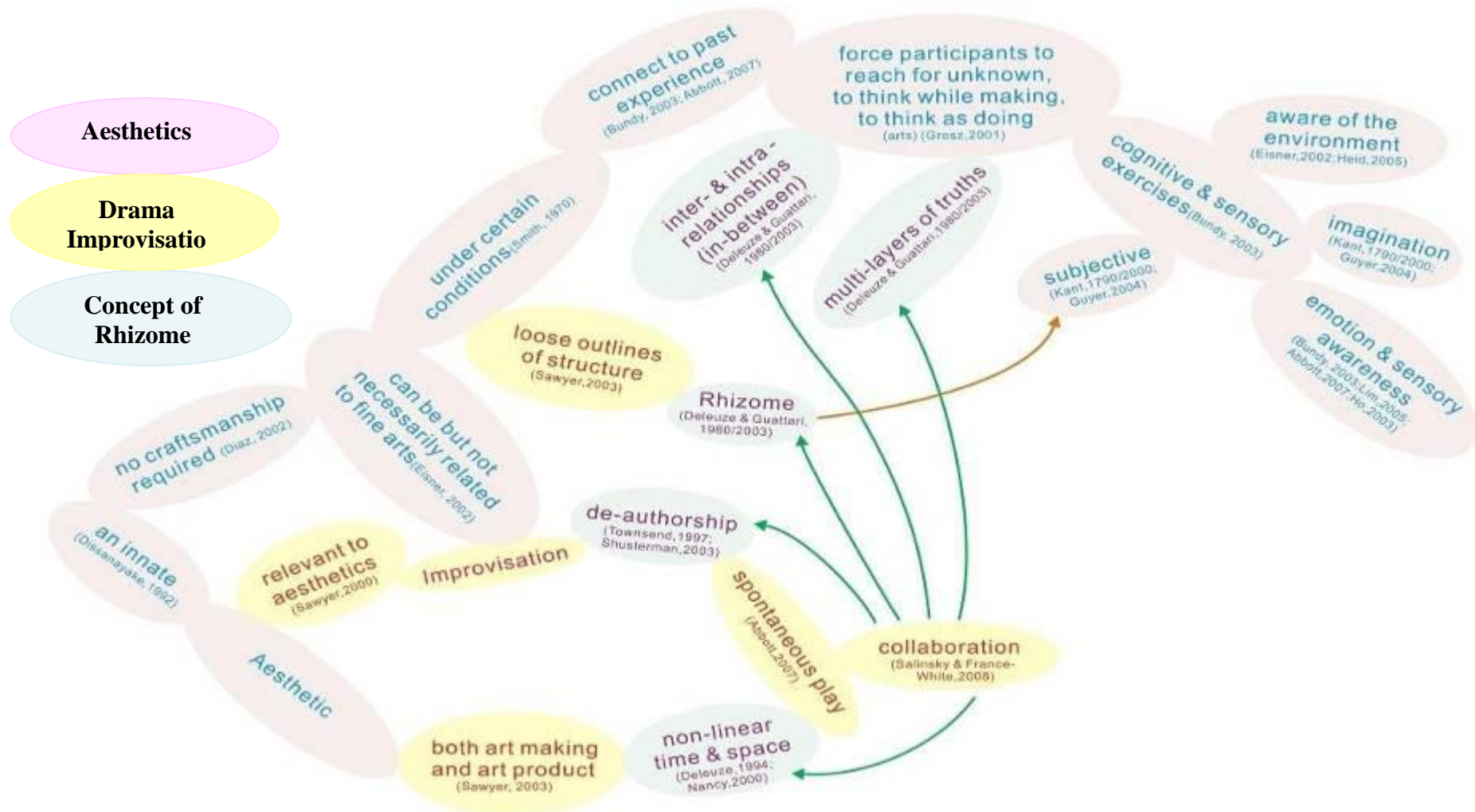
Figure 3. The three studied areas: aesthetics, drama improvisation and the postmodern concept of rhizome, are inter- and intra-connected.

The concept of rhizome is useful because it provides new theoretical and analytical tools (detailed discussion in Chapter 2) to investigate aesthetic encounters. Figure 4 shows the initial concept of how aesthetics, drama improvisation and the concept of rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) contribute to the understanding of young children's aesthetic encounters from the postmodern perspective. It refers to the process of young children's aesthetic encounters, which responds to the first research question (Chapter 1). Similar to the Figure 5 that is Ngui's (2012) understanding of Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizome, every thought, movement, utterance, or visual cue in aesthetic encounters is inter- and intra-related among participants as they interact and influence each other in the same drama improvisation scene spontaneously. Knowledge of how young children experience and respond to aesthetic encounters is produced by understanding the multi-layers, in-between and overlapping relationships. It includes gaining knowledge of thought, movement, utterance, and visual cue in aesthetic encounters. The second research question about the environments that are required to facilitate aesthetic encounters will be answered by analysing the process of aesthetic encounters. This aesthetic knowledge can be found in the end product of drama improvisation, as well as through the process of how participants, art materials, and happenings interact during aesthetic encounters (Irwin, 2003; Jevic & Springgay, 2008). With the findings and recommendations of the research, the knowledge of aesthetics and young children will emerge. So the implementation of aesthetic education might be reconceptualised in the context of Hong Kong early childhood education.

Figure 4. The initial concept of the research.
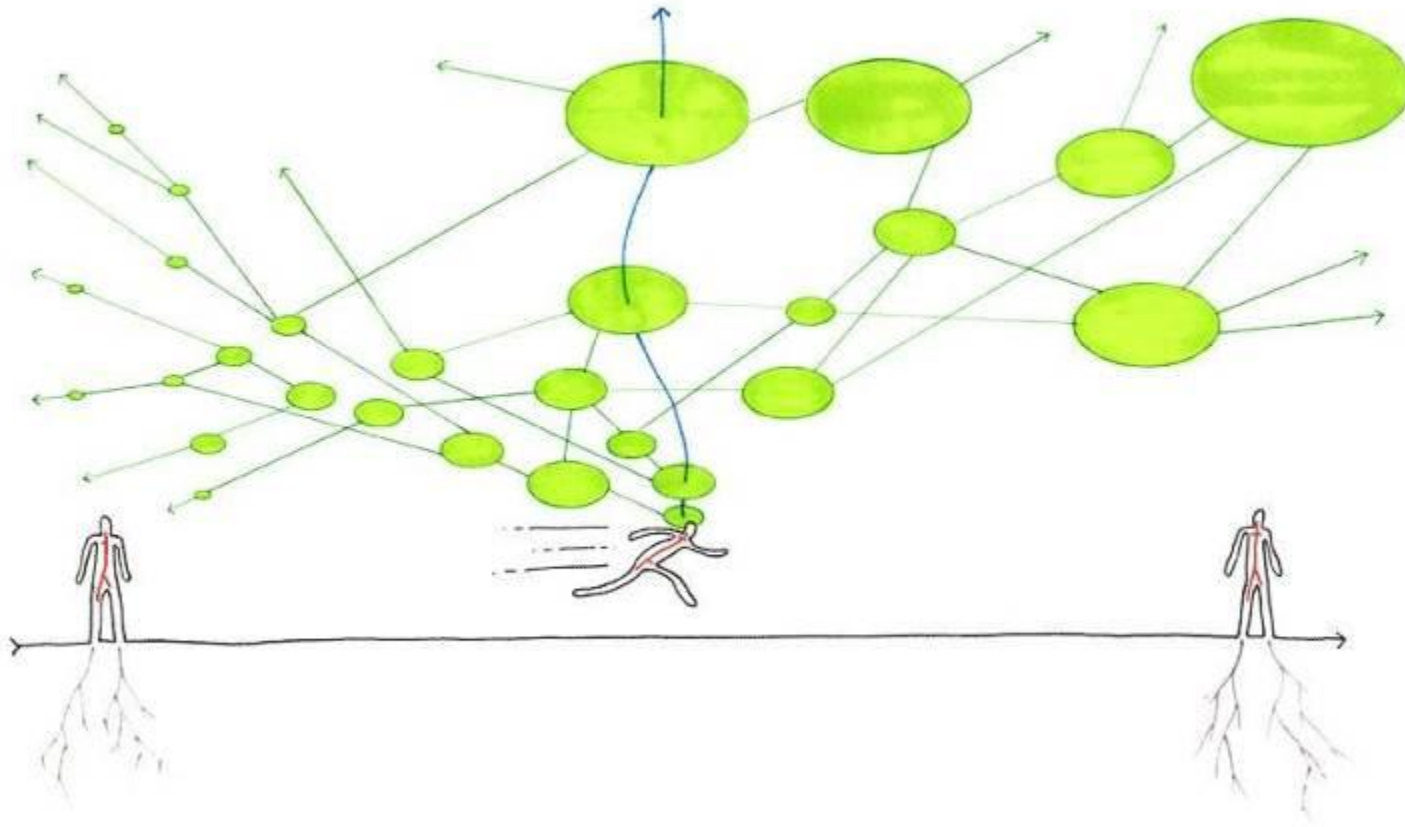
Figure 5. An illustration of how the concept of rhizome works in thoughts and minds by Ngui (2012).

Overview of the Methodological Framework – A/r/tography

The study used an arts-based methodology, *a/r/tography*, to observe and document the aesthetic processes of a small group of six young children aged 3-5 years. The six young children also participated in five drama improvisation workshops. A/r/tography is a newly developed qualitative methodology (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004) that has drawn on various postmodern theories including Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizome (Springgay et al., 2008). A/r/tographic research allows me, the principal researcher to have two angles of disciplines (arts and education) from three perspectives (as artist, researcher and teacher). A/r/tography entangles theory, practices and process. It is a postmodern arts-based inquiry about knowledge that problematise "the structures of research through aesthetic, artistic, and creative means" (Springgay et al., 2008, p. 87). A/r/tographer's take on multiple overlapping roles as *A*rtist (actors)-and- *R*esearcher-and-*T*eacher (Springgay et al., 2008) and engage in active thinking while being engaged in *living inquiry* (Springgay et al., 2005). Living inquiry is an approach for a/r/tographers to "make sense and create meaning out of difficult and complex questions in daily life that cannot be answered in straightforward or linear telling" (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 902). The study investigated how drama improvisation could deepen the understanding of young children's aesthetic encounters under the postmodern concept of rhizome, while acknowledging that all participants (children and I) were a/r/tographers.

During the workshops, opportunities were provided to the children to use their imagination, to connect their previous experiences, express their emotions and enhance sensory awareness of their surroundings. Data were gathered using video recordings, focussed discussions, children's arts journals, and an a/r/tographer's reflective journal. The data analysis adopted an arto-rhizomatic mapping approach, an arts-based qualitative data analysis strategy that was inspired by Sellers (2009). As adopting the a/r/tographic practice of

living inquiry, the six child a/r/tographers co-planned the drama improvisation activities acting as co-researchers. Later they shifted to become artists (child actors) and performed in the 22 scenes of drama improvisation. Those six children then shared their views and feelings about the aesthetic encounters in the focussed discussions and arts journals. The workshops provided various means for the children to explore, enact, and reflect upon their aesthetic encounters.

The ethical considerations of this investigation drew from Alderson's (1995) child-centred approach to research, in order to inform the documentation. As for trustworthiness of the research is concerned, Lather's (1993) *rhizomatic validity* was used in the study. Detailed research design and ethical considerations are presented in Chapter 3.

The Aim of the Study and the Research Questions

The aim of the research is to investigate the experiences and the responses of young children's aesthetic encounters using drama improvisation activities. As a dramatist, I commence to promote drama as an art form with a central focus on aesthetics. As an educator and researcher, I am interested in knowing how aesthetics are enacted with young children. Therefore, my motivation was to investigate how young children experience and respond to aesthetic encounters through drama improvisation. As an aesthetic "way[s] of knowing" (Eisner, 2002, p. 214), this a/r/tographic research investigates two questions:

1. How do young children experience and respond to aesthetic encounters through drama improvisation?

2. What kinds of environment(s) are required to facilitate aesthetic encounters for young children?

Significance of the Inquiry

> …a tightly focussed study that is well designed and executed can contribute to the delineation of an issue or problem in the field of enquiry. It may open up a new avenue for investigation, illuminate and exemplify a substantive topic already identified within the field, or approach a familiar substantive issue from a different theoretical perspective. …it might even develop a new methodological approach to a topic. (Poulson & Wallace, 2004, p. 38)

As a doctoral study has limited resources with a tight time-scale, this qualitative study is set as a small scale investigation on young children's experiences towards aesthetic encounters. I hope that the study might extend into more conscious rethinking of local curriculum in early childhood education. According to Poulson and Wallace (2004), although this research is small in scale and its findings cannot be generalised (or taken to represent large groups), the study still reveals new understandings about young children's aesthetic encounters. The study does so from a different theoretical perspective with a new methodological approach to the topic. The research is significant in three ways for aesthetic education, theory and methodology.

Firstly, there is little research about aesthetic education with drama in the context of Hong Kong's early childhood education. In the past twenty years, only two research studies were noted, by Tang (2009, 2011), one on aesthetic education's teaching perspectives and practices, and the other on children's creativity through arts-appreciation. There is a need to encourage more research about aesthetic education in Hong Kong early childhood education context. Falling leaves of red and gold signify that autumn is in place, whether these leaves are from a backyard or a park that does not matter. What matters is that they share the same characteristics in signifying the change of season. Aesthetic encounters are also not limited to specific time and space, or number of participants. Therefore, taking a small group of

children participants, they can contribute to focus the study regarding whether young children can experience aesthetics. The study will revolve around, *how they (children) experience it (aesthetic encounters)* and *what kinds of environments are required for facilitating such encounters*. This small yet purposeful study is valuable because it can provide important information, not because it represents larger populations (Reid, 1996). The essential value of qualitative studies is their *meaningfulness* rather than *generalisability*. Even though their findings cannot be applied directly yet they are still relevant to other similar situations (Sullivan, 2004). These new understandings provide a step forward in the knowledge of aesthetics and young children, and suggest how aesthetic education might be reconceptualised and implemented.

Secondly, Tang's (2009, 2011) research on young children's aesthetic appreciation uses only education theories, e.g., Dewey and Vygotsky. Instead, this study takes up both arts and education angles with three perspective including aesthetics, drama improvisation and the postmodern concept of rhizome. Young children's aesthetic encounters and the aesthetic environments were investigated through the postmodern lens of Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizome. This investigation was done by using drama improvisation as both art-making and art-appreciation strategies. The postmodern lens allows researchers to review the mainstream perspective of developmentally appropriate approach, as well as challenge the take-for-granted practices. Thus, new insight on young children's aesthetic encounters can emerge.

Thirdly, while generally drama research in Hong Kong early childhood education context used a quantitative approach (Hui & Lau, 2006; Hui, 2011), case-study (Tang, 2011) and phenomenography (Wong, 2007), the research methodology for this project adopted an a/r/tographic approach. A/r/tography had made the complex investigation about young children's aesthetic encounters possible. As a postmodern arts-based methodology,

a/r/tographic approach allowed the study to investigate young children's aesthetic encounters. The investigation was conducted from the angle of arts to see how drama improvisation created aesthetic encounters. While from the angle of education, a/r/tography required that I, the artist-researcher-teacher, be reflexive on my teaching perspective and practice. Thus, by using this new methodology, the research provides vital information to widen the understanding of how young children experience and respond to aesthetic encounters. The research also provided insight about the environments that are required for aesthetic encounters in Hong Kong's early childhood education context.

The Structure of the Thesis

The concept of rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) is used as the theoretical framework for this study. The rhizomatic concept extends to the use of a/r/tography as the methodological framework. It could have been ideal if the presentation of the research documentation (i.e., thesis) could carry on with the rhizomatic concept. But, after a serious consideration, the thesis is presented in a traditional format to ensure every aspect of the research is well-covered and clearly presented.

Chapter 1 introduces the interdisciplinary scene where the study is situated in. That is investigating young children's aesthetic encounters with drama improvisation under the lens of postmodernism. The chapter states the background, aim, significance and structure of the thesis. It introduces the theoretical and methodological frameworks of the study, and concludes by defining the terms that are used in this research.

Chapter 2 sets up the theoretical framework of the study. The first part of the chapter discusses aesthetics literatures in both Chinese and Western contexts. It also discusses aesthetics through drama education in Hong Kong early childhood education, and the relation between drama improvisation and the concept of rhizome. The second half of the chapter works on the theoretical framework of rhizome in relation to theatre performance. The

Deleuzian theoretical framework includes the redefined drama concepts of *becoming,*

presence, major and minor, power, and *affect*. These newly redefined concepts also become a

part of analytical devices used for carrying out data analysis and finding discussion.

Chapter 3 lays out the paradigm of the study. Keeping in consideration a postmodern

perspective, the chapter opens with an introduction of how knowledge is conceived through

the postmodern qualitative research of a/r/tography. By positioning the research within the

a/r/tographic tradition, the chapter provides details of the research method, data analysis

strategies, ethical considerations and finally the limitations of the study.

Chapter 4 is a report of a pilot study that serves as a basis of technical rehearsal of the

main study. Three important issues are recorded in the pilot study which are, (a) drama

improvisation is supported as suitable to create aesthetic encounters with young children; (b)

time constraints are considered (c) data analysis strategy is reconsidered. Taking the pilot

data as an example, the chapter discusses the problem of coding approach and reveals the

need for changing the data analysis strategy. Arto-rhizomatic mapping is developed thereafter

as a new data analysis strategy to generate findings for the main study. The chapter also

provides evidence to support the idea of using drama improvisation to convey aesthetic

encounters. Along with it workshop schedule has been revised in the chapter to resolve the

problem of time constraints.

Chapter 5 is about children's performing aesthetic encounters through drama

improvisation. It presents a detailed data presentation that visualises how young children

experience and respond to aesthetic encounters. By bringing together aesthetics, drama

improvisation and the rhizomatic notion of becoming, four happening snippets of an

exemplary scene are presented and analysed. After mapping across 22 drama improvisation

scenes, nine characteristics are mapped in response to the first research question. By

regrouping the nine characteristics, the three themes includes: *decisiveness, introspectiveness*

and *empathy*. They are identified as the major elements of the process of young children's aesthetic encounters. Findings are discussed with aesthetics of Daoism, drama improvisation and Deleuzian concepts.

Chapter 6 discusses the findings in response to the second research question regarding the environments that are required to facilitate aesthetic encounters. Compared to a physical environment that is normally concerned (Curriculum Development Council, 2006), an intangible environment is revealed as an essential requirement for young children's aesthetic encounters. This intangible environment explains the significance of providing opportunities for young children to engage in exercises of decisiveness, introspectiveness and empathy. By drawing towards both Chinese and postmodern aesthetic perspectives, the chapter also discusses *what to teach* and *how to teach* in aesthetic encounters.

Chapter 7 is my self-reflexivity as the principal a/r/tographer. The chapter explores my aesthetic encounters in each of my multiple and overlapping roles. The roles assumed by me were of drama artist, novice researcher, experienced teacher, and a mother during the three years of the doctoral study. The exercises of reflexivity examine and alter my perspectives and practices in each of the roles.

Chapter 8 is the epilogue of the a/r/tographic study that summarises the research, suggests potential applications, makes some recommendations for aesthetic education in Hong Kong early childhood education context. Concluding, it proposes future related research areas as well.

Definition of Terms

In order to understand young children's aesthetic encounters, this thesis brings together three different perspectives: aesthetics, drama improvisation, and the philosophical concept of rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Each perspective has its own unique language, which involves specific philosophical concepts and terms. I present here the terms used in the study.

The concepts that are used in both drama improvisation and the philosophical notion of rhizome are defined separately to avoid confusion or misinterpretation.

Aesthetics

     Aesthetics and aesthetic (as nouns). Aesthetics refers to the overall field of inquiry related to the meaning of beauty (Koren, 2010). However, when one is referring to a particular tradition or form of art, the term aesthetic can be used. Western aesthetics is traditionally a subject of inquiry related to the beauty of nature. It also refers to a perception of values gained through working with one's senses and feelings. Within a Chinese context, aesthetics as a term is educational and has elements of society based self-awareness. It is usually used as a vehicle for ethics education. . Both Chinese and western concepts of aesthetics are considered as the study is situated in cross-cultural context.

     Aesthetic encounters. Aesthetic encounters refer to specific experiences that are processed by human beings to understand and interact with their surroundings and the world they are in (Eisner, 2002; Heid, 2005). In association with returning to nature's beauty (Laozi, B. 551 BCE/2008; Zhuangzi, B. 369 BCE/1996), human beings exercise cognition and sensory exercises, including feelings and emotions (Bundy, 2003). Through these exercises, human beings may generate their own set of ethics (Chi, 1995).

A/r/tography

     A/r/tography. It is an arts-based methodology that brings together theory, practice and process (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Springgay et al., 2008). It was developed from a postmodern rhizomatic study of knowledge to problematise "the structures of research through aesthetic, artistic, and creative means" (Springgay et al., 2008, p. 87). A/r/tographers bear multi-overlapping roles as *A*rtists/ *R*eseachers/ *T*eachers. It also engages in inquiry that involves active thinking and making of arts and practices.

In-between. This concept refers to the slashes (/) in a/r/tography and designates an activation of the space in-between art, research and education, thus making it a useful space for studying aesthetic encounters.

Drama Improvisation

Drama improvisation. It is a theatre art form with unscripted performance of spontaneous and simultaneous collaborative performative acts by the performers. Drama improvisation is an open system comprising of surprises and unexpectedness. This also explains the reasons for many interruptions in the performance. In early childhood education, drama improvisation is usually categorised as a form of creative drama (McCaslin, 2006). However, the notion of improvisation used in this research refers to improvisation as a non-scripted spontaneous collaboration (Abbott, 2007) that has loose outlines (e.g., 'y*es, and ...*') to guide the performance (Sawyer, 2003).

Scene. This is a unit of drama that builds through blocks of plots and happenings. For example, a stand-alone short story such as the five-minute improvisation scene that I used in the data analysis (Chapter 5).

Happenings. They are regarded as the smallest unit of drama. Happenings can be short moments, performances, events or situations. A happening can be an individual event or a collection of events that develop a plot. In this study, happenings were the events/ spaces when children experienced aesthetic encounters. A happening is the 'tiny bit' in a hierarchy e.g., *Happenings → Plot → Scene → Act*. Happenings are not necessarily chronological or linear; yet, like montages, they can be simultaneous or overlapping acts.

Becoming. In drama terms, "becoming" refers to an acting technique. While method acting promotes *being* the character from the actor's inside-out (true feelings), other methods of acting work towards outside-in (imitate appearance and physical aspects) to *become* the characters. In this research, "becoming" refers to how the young children portray their

characters. A different understanding of becoming is also used, based on Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of rhizome.

Major and Minor. These are the terms referring to the immediate status of a character. For instance, *major* refers to the leading character (e.g., Hamlet or Romeo) who is speaking; and *minor* refers to the supporting cast to the *major* (e.g., helpmates or crowds). Major and minor can also refer to the characters in focus – the speaking character is major, and the quiet one is minor. Therefore, major and minor can change as per the change in happenings and plots.

Concepts in Relation to the Deleuzo-Guattarian Rhizome

Concepts. In this research, a concept is defined as a philosophical idea, "an idea or mental image which corresponds to some distinct entity or class of entities, or to its essential features, or determines the application of a term (especially a predicate), and thus plays a part in the use of reason or language" (Oxford Dictionaries online, 2014). The French philosophers, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari established their unique philosophical concepts by re-interpreting the work of certain philosophers (e.g., Spinoza, Kant, Nietzsche, Bergson and Foucault) to create new understandings of some terms and ideas (e.g., rhizome, minor, power, and desire). Some of these Deleuzo-Guattarian philosophical concepts, which are used in this study, are introduced in Chapters 2, 3 and unpacked for data analysis and discussion of the findings in Chapters 5, 6.

Concept of rhizome. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) took a rhizomatic plant root (e.g., ginger) as a metaphor and developed a philosophical concept of rhizome. This rhizome, like ginger or potato, grows in non-linear time and space and encourages new interpretations of *becoming, in-between,* and *multiplicit*y. In this research, the rhizome is defined as non-linear, yet multiple, relational and overlapping. This postmodern understanding of rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) allows for an alternative investigation of what an aesthetic encounter is and

how it works. Therefore, as a rhizomatic approach to inquiry, this investigation involved three areas of study (aesthetics, drama improvisation and the concept of rhizome). The study also examined multiple-layers of data, and reflected on the in-between roles of an a/r/tographer.

Arto-rhizomatic mapping. Inspired by Sellers (2009), arto-rhizomatic mapping is a data-analysis strategy. This is an arts-based system of analysis that is open, contingent, unpredictable, connectable, yet reversible and detachable. It is also an ongoing inquiry emphasising the *in-between* relations that consist of multiple entrances and exits where conclusion is not a concern. In this study, it is used as a way of visualising children's happening and learning with/in/through their aesthetic encounters. The Arto-Rhizomatic mapping works with the two basic principles of the rhizome: "lines of articulation" and "lines of flight" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 3). The images from selected snippets of data are explored to discuss the interweaving lines of flight, which aims at generating understanding of the process of children's aesthetic encounters.

Becoming. Unlike the becoming found in drama, Deleuzo-Guattarian becoming is a state of being-in-between movement through a unique event in which experimentation and change are produced (Stagoll, 2010). The rhizomatic concept of becoming is about someone or something in the middle of a process (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). It focuses not on the beginning or the end, or the completeness of a process, but in the middle – the process of the process, or the continuity of process.

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Summary

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The current chapter has presented the research background and aims of the research. Having identified the problem of the study as aesthetic education without aesthetic encounters, there is a need to widen the understanding of young children's aesthetic encounters. By considering drama improvisation as the research medium, the study investigates how young children experience and respond to aesthetic encounters. The study

also suggests that what kinds of environments are required to facilitate such encounters among children. The cross-cultural and interdisciplinarity nature of the study refer to three perspectives, namely aesthetics, drama improvisation, and the philosophical concept of rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) to form the research's theoretical and methodological frameworks. Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizome philosophy influenced the choices, methods and ways of conducting the inquiry and, consequently, the outcomes of this study. Followed by the aim of the study and the research questions, the various ways of responding to the research questions were also presented. Findings of this small-in-scale research focussed on the *meaningfulness* to reveal the process of young children's aesthetic encounters. The last part of the chapter presented the layout of the thesis and the definition of terms that were essential for the study. The next chapter will present the background of aesthetics in both Chinese and Western perspectives. It will also present the interweaving essential elements between aesthetics, drama improvisation and the concept of rhizome to form a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary theoretical framework of the study.

CHAPTER 2: *Mise En Scene* **– A Postmodern Theoretical Framework for**

Reconceptualising Aesthetic Encounters

Chapter 1 introduced the cross-cultural and interdisciplinary scene of the study, explaining that the study took drama improvisation as the art medium to investigate young children's aesthetic encounters under a postmodern concept of rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). After realising not all arts activities can convey aesthetic encounters, the problem of the study was identified as aesthetic education without aesthetic encounters. Educators cannot implement aesthetic education effectively with insufficient understanding of young children's aesthetic encounters. To provide more information about young children's aesthetic education, the study set on the quest to investigate how young children experience and respond to aesthetic encounters, and the environments that are required to facilitate such encounters.

This chapter sets the stage for the study by presenting a critical review of the literature covering the three major areas area of study, which are aesthetics and drama improvisation in relation to the concept of rhizome. This review is essential for the study to build a solid understand about what aesthetics is, how it works in education, and why drama improvisation is useful to convey aesthetic encounters, particularly under the postmodern perspective. The study is situated in a cross-cultural context as it focuses on Hong Kong's Chinese children who live in a mixed culture. In the same direction aesthetics in both Chinese and the Western contexts are considered. The chapter starts with a discussion on the similarities and differences between Chinese aesthetics and Western aesthetics perspectives, including the history of aesthetics, the postmodern aspects, function of aesthetics, aesthetic encounters and aesthetic environments. Then the chapter moves forward to see how aesthetics have been applied in education, particularly using drama in Hong Kong's early childhood education context. The session brings in the contemporary teaching perspectives and practices that international researchers and educators recommend for the implementation of aesthetic

education. The roles of drama and the rhizomatic relations between aesthetic encounters and drama improvisation will also be examined. The last part of the chapter discusses how the philosophical concept of rhizome is applied to Deleuzian theatre performances especially the ones that contribute to theorising the construction of aesthetic encounters. The theoretical framework of the study as well as a new set of analytical devices for data analysis is formed. This has been achieved by redefining five drama concepts (*becoming, presence, major and minor, power* and *affect*) under the rhizomatic perspective.

Aesthetics

This section introduces the history of both Chinese and Western aesthetics through various paradigms and perspectives. Through the lens of postmodernism, the Chinese aesthetic perspective of Daoism is identified as similar to the postmodern aesthetic perspective of the West. For example, both of the perspectives share the idea of de-authorship and promote self-consciousness/ self-awareness. So, the postmodern perspective is selected as the base of this aesthetic encounters investigation. Instead of focusing on creative and imaginative power, the mission of aesthetic education is to emphasise on *building better people*. This philosophy is the core value of Chinese perspectives on aesthetic education. An argument presents that aesthetic education should be conveyed through aesthetic encounters and thereafter aesthetic encounters and aesthetic environment are discussed. The literature builds up the inter- and intra-related infrastructure of this cross-cultural and interdisciplinary study.

Setting the Stage - The Cross-Cultural Perspectives of Aesthetics

The research targeted local Chinese children in Hong Kong who grew up with Chinese customs and beliefs. Also as they grew with the values and knowledge of a post British colony too so, it is important to incorporate both Chinese and Western aesthetic aspects into the study. By critically discussing the aesthetic perspectives of Chinese and the West, this

section presents the intercultural definition of aesthetics that is used in this study. As Figure 6

shows, the perspectives include Confucianism, Daoism and Postmodernism.
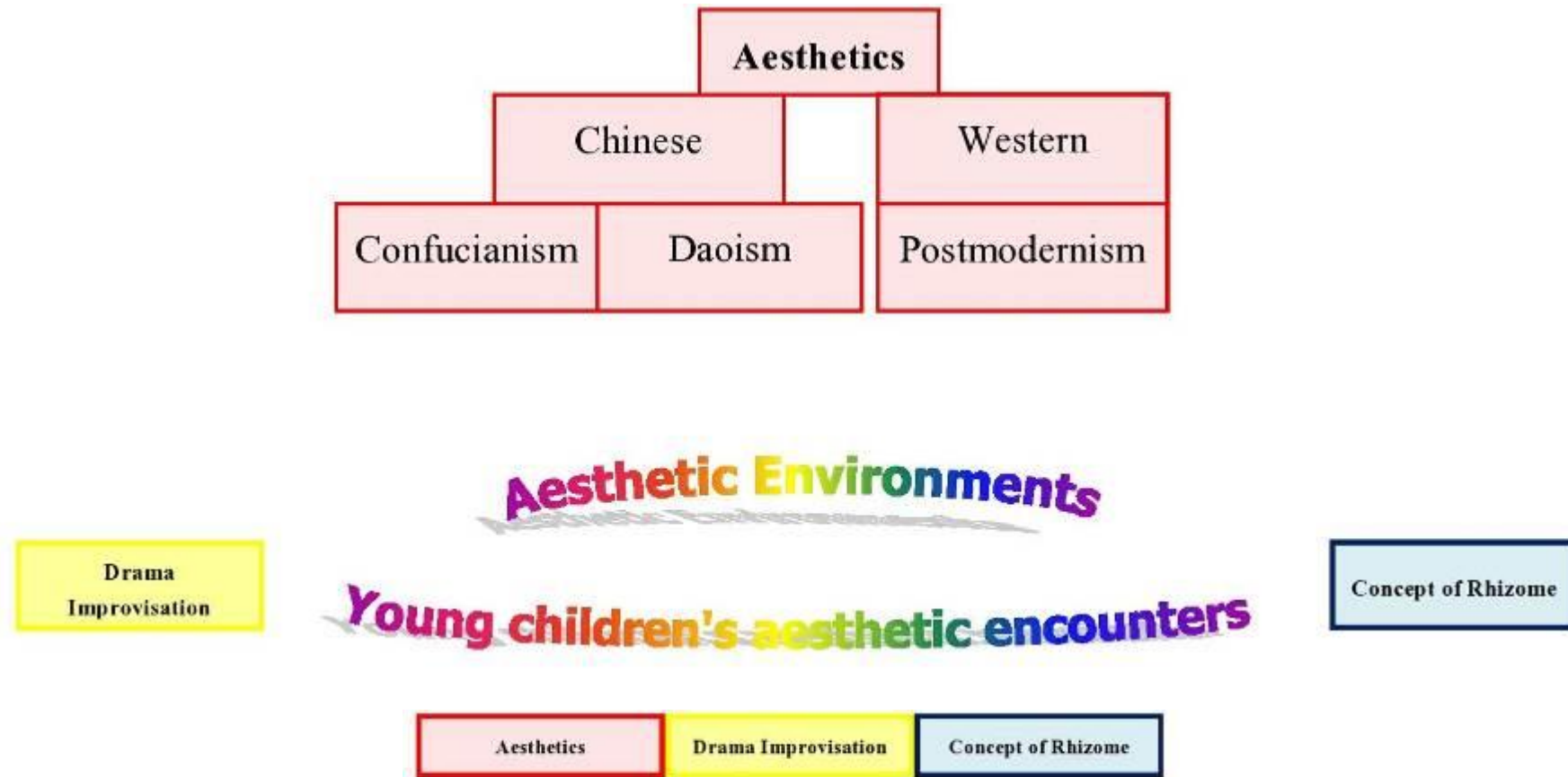
Figure 6. The schools of Chinese and Western aesthetics used in the study.

History of Aesthetic Concepts. People might think aesthetics was a Western concept; in fact, aesthetics in the West has a history of only about 300 years. Whereas in China aesthetics has a much longer historical association According to Li (2010), Chinese aesthetics started from the Chinese character for the word 'beauty/ beautiful' (*mei* 美) that was engraved on oracles. The earliest Chinese dictionary *Shuowen Jiezi* 說文解字 (Xu, c.55 – c.149/1972) which belongs to the late Han Dynasty, there the word 'beauty' is composed with a 'ram' (羊) sitting on the top of 'large' (大). Xu further explained that "when a ram is large, it is beautiful" (volume 4a); "beautiful means delicious" (volume 5), and 'beauty' is synonymous to 'good' (volume 12b). Therefore, aesthetics in the Chinese perspectives constitute the concept of *beauty* and *good* since both the word existed.

On the contrary, the term aesthetics did not exist in the West before the 18th century. It was first named by Alexander Baumgarten (Winston, 2010) in 1735 as a subject of philosophy (Guyer, 2004). Aesthetics was seen as "an area of scholarly study and inquiry" of arts (Smith, 1970, p. x). Therefore, Western aesthetics as a branch of philosophy was "devoted to conceptual and theoretical inquiry into art and aesthetic experience" (Levinson, 2003, p. 3). As a philosophical subject, Western aesthetics was about systematic and logical thinking of facts (Winston, 2010) until the mid-18th century, when Kant (1790/2000) started relating the term aesthetics to *beauty*. Regarding the concept of beauty, the focus of the Western philosophical arguments about aesthetics was linked primarily to the *imitation of truth*, e.g., the nature's beauty. Plato condemned arts, especially theatre art, for these were not imitations of any truth (Courtney, 1968). However, Aristotle (335 BCE/1992), another famous Greek philosopher, advocated in *The Poetic* that art and particularly theatre tragedy, were imitations of life. No matter theatre arts are imitation of truth or not, Plato and Aristotle argued about personal cognitive issue. Nevertheless, Chinese philosophers had taken a different stand. Beauty in the traditional Chinese aesthetics was "not the ordinary form but

significant form – natural form that has acquired a socially-defined content" (Li, 1988, p. 36).

It means that unlike Western aesthetics, Chinese aesthetics' theoretical perspectives were

concerned with "not cognition or imitation, but emotion and experience" (Li, 1988, p. 72).

This means *yixiang* (imaginary environment 意象) is the concern. This Chinese perspective of

beauty was in alignment with the Kant's humanistic view on aesthetics.

  Different humanistic views. Kant's (1790/2000) moral philosophy about positive

freedom enabled subjectivity in aesthetic judgements and expressions of beauty. *Beauty,* in

Kant's (1790/1987) perspective, is about "beautiful what we just LIKE" (p. 52, emphasis in

original) e.g., nature, food or things that we enjoy. He promoted freedom of imagination in

aesthetic encounters (Guyer, 2004). It means that based on imagination, people can have

different aesthetic judgements about the same object. This was the first time in the West that

imagination was discussed in relation to aesthetics. In comparison of looking at (appreciation)

beautiful objects, Kant proposed that the knowledge of beauty should be gained by analysing

our own responses (self-awareness) towards beautiful objects (Winston, 2010). The aesthetic

notion of Kant became an anchor of Western aesthetics within a humanistic perspective.

Intuition and intelligence are the two streams of the humanistic perspective. While intuition

seeks visual perception and emotional expression, intelligence requires logical thinking in

terms of regulation and interpretation. This intuitive stream of Kant's humanistic perspective

on aesthetics (in relation to beauty and self-awareness) shares similarities with Chinese

aesthetic perspective.

  From the Chinese aesthetic perspectives, beauty lies in the harmony between nature,

social activities and communal rituals (Zhou, 1997). Li (2010) claimed *mei* (*beauty* 美) in the

ancient Chinese context was found in the ritual. Especially the "communal totemic dance" (p.

5), was one of the rituals that "took disparate individual sensuous existence and sensory

activities and knit them consciously together" (p. 6). Through "committing to memory and

rehearsing" (p. 3) the ritual, *mei* was found when individual skills and communal cooperation

were maturing. This was coupled with human consciousness, intention, and will being

aroused and unified. Beauty in the ancient Chinese context consisted of both beautiful objects

and aesthetic appreciation that was "inseparable from perception" (p. 10). The Chinese

aesthetics tradition "emphasises the moderation of violent sensuality, the rationality inherent

in the perceptual senses, and the social inherent from the nature" (p. 10). Therefore, Chinese

aesthetics also form a humanistic notion of emotions and experience of nature's beauty. The

Humanistic notion is still a concern among Chinese artists even today. As Lo (2012) recorded,

both drama director Xiong Yuan Wei (熊源偉 also the guest professor of Shanghai Theatre

Academy) and Lin Ke Huan (林克歡 the President and Artistic Director of the China Youth

Art Theatre) pointed out that Hong Kong drama was good at exploring different forms of arts

but lacks a humanistic concern (reflecting the society or lives). Although both Chinese and

Western aesthetics carry a humanistic perspective, Western perspectives are based on

individual subjectivities and are meant for personal growth. On the contrary, the Chinese

perspectives are always communally related. Yet the humanistic perspective on aesthetics,

e.g., related to nature's beauty, cognition and emotions through intuitive perceptions (in both

Chinese and the Western perspectives) provides the basic definition of aesthetics to this

cross-cultural and interdisciplinary study of the postmodern paradigm.

Postmodernism refers to the art-related movement that emerged after the period of

'modern' in the late 20th century (Oxford dictionaries online, 2014). The movement

challenges the dominated practice from modernism by criticising the culture, literature, art,

philosophy, and architecture. This challenge grows into a way of thinking that critiques all

master narratives (Lyotard, 1984), promotes multiplicity (Baudrillard, 1994). They even

entail thought that is provisional with continuity (Vattimo, 1998). Taking Piaget's (1960)

suggestion on developmental stages, it should be expected that these stages are flexible and

variables. Thus, this study focusses on the postmodern aspects on 'changes', 'multiplicities',

and 'co-constructed' knowledge (Crewswell, 2013). Henceforth, the study also focusses on

the discovery of new or alternative practices that can build on the current practice. This study

accepts the postmodern perspective as it enables postmodern knowledge to co-create

"multiple ways of knowing" (Creswell, 2013, p. 36). Thus, instead of taking the

post-structural perspective, which challenges the structure of current practice, postmodern

perspective is adopted. In the summary of this study, postmodernism is regarded as an

ontology of reality that is multiple and relational in nature. The knowledge of young

children's aesthetic experiences will be co-constructed by the child participants and me

through the drama improvisation activities.

Links between aesthetics of Daoism and Western postmodern aesthetics. After the

18th century, Western aesthetic theories developed into various schools of thought, including

instrumentalism, mimesis, formalism, expressionism and *postmodernism*. These schools of

thought represented various philosophical concerns over either the made objects or natural

objects. For example, instrumentalism concerns art with rules (Dickie, 1997); mimesis

(Aristotle, 335 BCE/1992; Plato, 380 BCE/2009), formalism (Kant, 1790/2000) whereas

expressionism (Collingwood, 1938; Croce, 1902/1909; Tolstoy, 1896/1960) considers art in

relation to natural objects. Nevertheless, these four schools of thought are still focussing on

representation of art by emphasising on quality of skills and techniques. Whereas only the

school of postmodernism (Baudrillard, 2005; Hutcheon, 1988; Jameson, 1991; Lyotard, 1984)

advocates that art should include *self-reflexivity*, *inter-subjectivity*, *decentredness*, and

multiplicities (in terms of culture, nations, relations, and meanings, etc.) (Shusterman, 2003;

Townsend, 1997). *Self-reflexivity* in postmodern perspective entails constant

self-consciousness or self-awareness. *Inter-subjectivity* refers to knowledge and meanings

getting co-constructed instead of getting practised by individual thinking alone.

Decentredness is advocated by Lyotard (1984) through his de-authorship concept of denials

with the grand narrative. This concept is in synchronisation with the idea of *multiplicities*

regarding the plurality of realities. These postmodern perspectives of Western aesthetics share

similarities to a stream of Chinese aesthetics - Daoism.

The aesthetics of Daoism situated in the same period of Confucius, where Laozi's (老

子) and Zhuangzi (莊子) promoted the understanding of *Dao* (the Way 道). *Dao* is a spiritual

status of "*wu*" (nothingness 無) (Laozi, 551 BCE/2008, Chapter 37) that "cannot be captured

in language, concepts, or names, but can only be grasped and experienced by the creative

intuition of a free spirit" (Li, 2010, p. 105). In *Dao de jing* (Book of Dao 道德經), Laozi (551

BCE/2008) wrote about everything becomes "the unique" (or being as one 一) that implies,

things become a unity (Chapter 39).

Heaven grasped the unique and became clear;

Earth grasped the unique and became still;

Spirits grasped the unique and became ghostly;

Gullies grasped the unique and became full;

[The myriad things grasped the unique and became alive;]

Counts and kings grasped the unique and became the norm for the word.

[天得一以清；地得一以寧；神得一以靈；谷得一以盈；萬物得一以生；

侯王得一以為天下貞。]. (Laozi, 551 BCE/2008, Chapter 39)

According to Chen and Hou (2009), Laozi's concept of *the unique* (or being as one 一)

refers to the free spiritual status of *Dao*. Some Chinese aestheticians suggest that *Dao*

constitutes an aesthetic perspective of "*true, kindness,* and *beauty*" (真善美) (Chen & Hou,

2009, p. 100). In the Daoism perspective, *true* refers to non-artificial; *kindness* means kind

behaviours or intentions, and *beauty* is about the nature's beauty. However, among the various teaching of Laozi's *Dao*, I found *wu* (nothingness 無), is a more useful idea for the aesthetic study conducted with the young children.

Regarding *wu* (nothingness 無), Laozi (551 BCE/2011) writes "the Way is always "not-doing" yet there is nothing it doesn't do." (道常無為而無不為) (Chapter 37). This *not-doing* is Laozi's *wuwei* ("non-assertive activity" 無為) (Hall & Ames, 1998, p. 167). It means *something* will be achieved/ happened/ realised in the state of doing/ being/ thinking of nothing (*wuwei* 無為). Although it sounds contradictory, Laozi means something will be 'done' even nothing can be done *purposefully*. It is because by being in the state of *nothingness*, humans will situate in a state of *going with the flow of the nature* (順應自然) that is *wuwei* (non-assertive activity 無為). It achieves the essence of the status of *Dao*: human is in unity with the nature (天人合一) (Laozi, 551 BCE/2011). This unity is important because Laozi believes human being can have freedom of mind, body and soul and attain the status of unifying with the nature. Human being will then be freed from desire and get into the state of *wuyu* ("objectless desiring" 無欲) (Hall & Ames, 1998, p. 167). It means the thoughts and behaviours of the human being will no longer intend self-advantages (e.g., richness, fames or authorities). This is also a main idea of Daoism that is contradictory to the short-sighted practice of seeking instant benefits. Human beings can achieve *wuwei* (non-assertive activity 無為) and *wuyu* (objectless desiring 無欲) through constant self-reflexivity. According to Hall and Ames (1998), when a human being is in the status of *wuwei* and *wuyu*, s/he will be "dissolving the dichotomy of self and others to integrate fully into the continuity of existence" (p. 167). This is the Daoism way of achieving cohesion and harmony with nature, individual, society aesthetically (Chen & Hou, 2009).

Way-making (Dao) gives rise to continuity, continuity gives rise to difference,

difference gives rise to plurality. And plurality gives rise to the manifold of everything

that is happening (wanwu [萬物]). (Ames & Hall, 2003, p. 142)

Dao constitutes similar nature as Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizomatic *becoming*.

According to the interpretation of Ames & Hall, achieving *dao* (the Way 道) is not a 'one-off

deal', instead, the achievement of *dao* is a continuous process. To Laozi, it is a life-long

process for an individual to fulfil the status of *dao*. So when a person pursuits the spirit of

dao, s/he will have to daily practice about *wuwei* (non-assertive activity 無為) and *wuyu*

(objectless desiring 無欲). These daily practices become a process to fulfil *dao*, where *dao* is

a life-long process of *becoming*. The insight that Wong (2014) finds in Daoism through his

intensive research on Chinese paintings, I found her claim of "[t]his emanative nature of *dao*

as "materiality" on a continuum of becomings" (p. 93). Her claim connects Daoism to

Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of rhizome through the concept of *becoming*. The understanding

of *Dao* (e.g., *wuwei* and *wuyu*) is useful in the research. In this study, the child participants

had no pre-set objectives (e.g., academic results) or intentions of getting instant rewards (e.g.,

fames, snacks or toys). They didn't seek any skills for drama acting neither they expected

getting praised for their performance in front of audience as it was a closed performance not

meant for public. They were there to support my study about young children's aesthetic

encounters. By being just as they were, they chose the roles they liked and acted intuitively

and spontaneously through collaboration. These performances of drama improvisation were

products of collective creativity without any pre-set messages (e.g., ethical or parable). As the

child participants went with the flow as conceived by their imagination and creativity. But

during the interaction of drama improvisation, they could experience (and perform) the status

of *Dao*. They enjoyed the process of acting yet being *freed from desire* and *self-advantages*.

Therefore, drama improvisation performances became the space of the "continuity of

existence", which allowed the child participants to "integrate fully" as they dissolved their

"dichotomy selves" (Hall & Ames, 1998, p. 167) in the drama improvisation scenes. These

child participants experienced (gained) the freedom of mind, body and soul in/through the

workshops.

      The four postmodern characteristics between aesthetic concept of Daoism, drama

improvisation and concept of rhizome. The aesthetics of *Dao* in Daoism advocates "the

communing of nature" (Lin, 1967, p. 43). It consists of philosophical concepts such as

decentralism (Laozi, 551 BCE/2011, Chapter 34; Zhuangzi, 369 BCE/1996, Chapter *Autumn*

floods), *self-reflexivity* (Laozi, 551 BCE/2011, Chapter 33), "interthing inter-subjectivity"

(transcendental subjectivity) (Pang-White, 2009, p. 71), and *anti-scientific politics* (Laozi,

551 BCE/2011, Chapter 18, 65). Surprisingly, these characteristics of aesthetics belonging to

Daoism relate more to the aesthetics of postmodernism rather than the traditional realm of

Plato or Aristotle. In Figure 7, the connections between the postmodern perspective of

Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), the theatre of multiplicities

(Deleuze, 1997a), aesthetics of Daoism, and drama improvisation are identified as useful for

the study. For example, *intuition, self-reflexivity, inter-subjectivity* and *multiplicities* (in

relation to de-authorship). Detail explanations will be present in the next session.
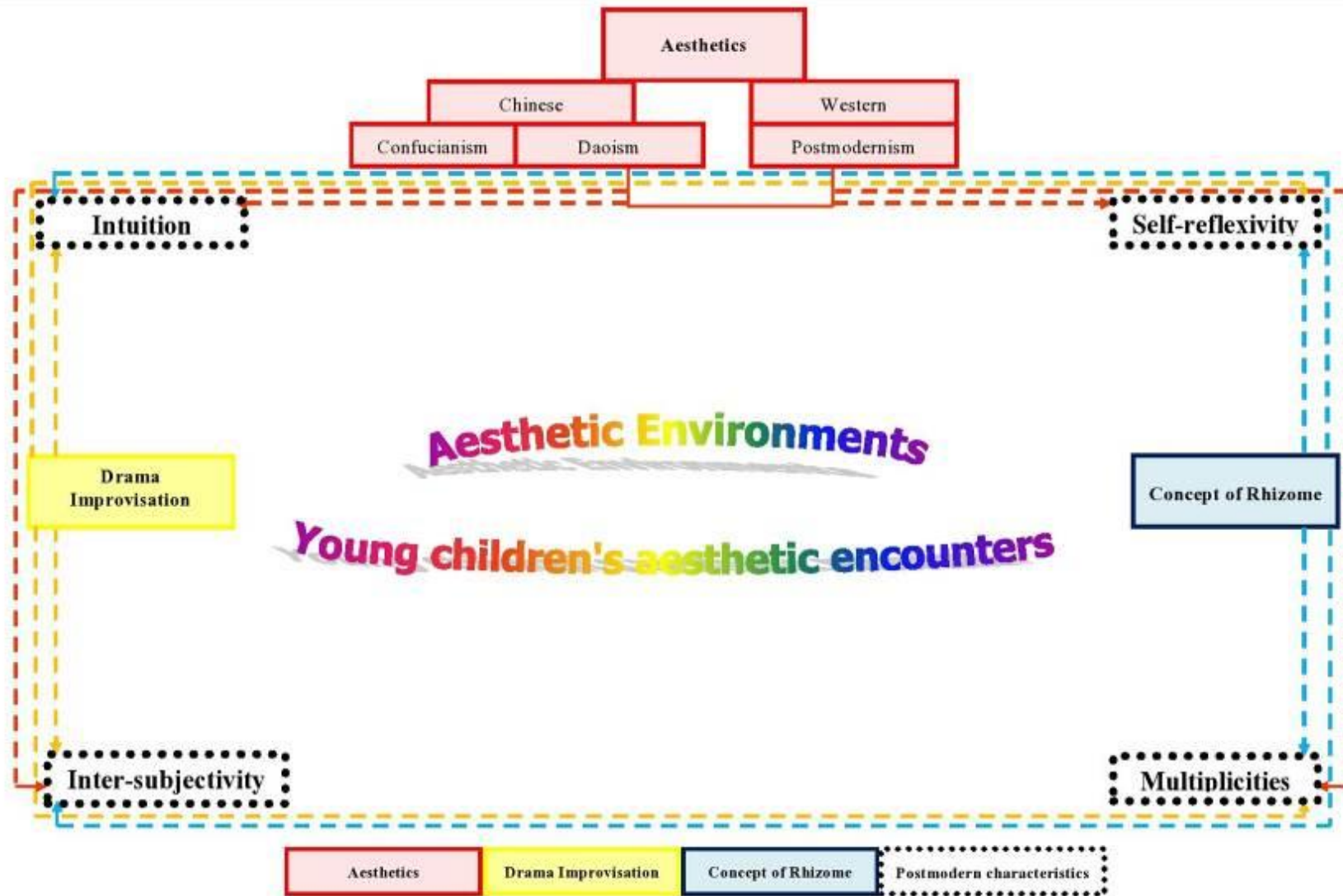
Figure 7. The four postmodern characteristics between aesthetics of Daoism, drama improvisation and concept of rhizome.

He [Deleuze] conceives intuition as a deliberate reflective awareness or willed

self-consciousness, a concentrated and direct attention to the operations of

consciousness (in contrast with mediated 'observations of' consciousness by

consciousness in a quest for transparency of thought to itself). (Stagoll, 2010, p. 136,

emphasis in original)

Intuition and self-reflexivity (or self-consciousness). Stagoll (2010) explains that

Deleuzian *intuition* is a deliberate act of constant *self-reflexivity and self-consciousness*, and

it is not a basic instinct. This understanding of intuition is tied tightly to Daoism's

interpretation about *wu* and *wuyu*. In Daoism, a human being can achieve the status of *wu*

(nothingness 無), which is also called *Dao* (the Way 道), if s/he constantly practices *wuwei*

(non-assertive activity 無為) through self-consciousness. According to Chen and Hou (2009),

wuyu (objectless desiring 無欲) is an intuitive thinking that refers to a self-conscious mind

which is non-calculative for self-benefits. When a person wills to be freed from desire, s/he is

in the state of *wuyu*, so that everything s/he does is *wuwei*. In the status of *wuwei,* the human

being will be open to his/her own feeling and situation in relation to his/her surroundings.

Thus s/he can engage in the beauty of the surroundings and enjoy the peace of mind – this

can be coined as the achievement of *Dao*. However, the status of *Dao* cannot be achieved by

a one-off enactment but a life-long process of practicing *wuwei* and *wuyu*. This Daoism

practice of *Dao* links to the concept of *becoming* in Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizome. Both the

concepts of *Dao* and *becoming* make up the non-linear time and space, and situate in a

perpetual process (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Similarly, Geertz (1983) claimed that "The

sense of beauty… [is] brought into actual existence by the experience of living in the midst of

certain sorts of things to look at, listen to, handle, think about, cope with, and react to" (p.

118). He suggested that aesthetic encounters are experiences of cognitive, sensory and

emotional experiences with self-awareness. This understanding of intuitive engagement of

one's surrounding can be found in drama improvisation. In Drama improvisation, improvisers act spontaneously in the given situation on stage in accordance to their intuitive thinking and feelings. These intuitive thinking and feelings should not be fake or a result of rehearsals, but they should make an actor become open towards his/her feelings and situation on the stage. Improvisers engage in spontaneous acts and reactions. They also exercise their intuition, self-consciousness, self-reflexivity, and enjoy the process of co-creating drama scenes.

Inter-subjectivity. Regarding inter-subjectivity, Deleuze proclaims that subjectivity "is not given; it is always under construction" (Boundas, 2010, p. 274). This notion of inter-subjectivity relates to the "interthing inter-subjectivity" (transcendental subjectivity) (Pang-White, 2009, p. 71) of Daoism. According to the idea of *unity with the nature* (天人合一), human (人) is encouraged to *go with the flow of the nature* (順應自然), that is including the "Heaven" (天), "Earth" (地), and "Myriad Things" (物) for the achievement of *Dao* (the Way 道) (Laozi, 551 BCE/2011, Chapter 39). So Daoism advocates a state of mind that man is capable of being reflexive when s/he is living among the inter- and intra-related environments of multiplicities.

Multiplicities can be best presented by the philosophical concept of rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). This reinterpretation of rhizomatic plant root constitutes the complex idea of multiple entrances and exits regarding things, time and space. In *The Thousand Plautus*, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explain that things, knowledge and power don't develop in linearity but rhizomatically and contextually. Within the postmodern perspective that there is no one universal truth, multiple realities are visualised through the image of rhizome that also signifies the characteristic of decentredness (e.g., de-authorship). Similarly, the concept of *wu* in Daoism goes along with the rhizomatic idea of non-linearity and decentredness (Ran, 2008). The concept of *the unique* (or being as one 一) is similar to the multiplicities concept of rhizome, whereas "heaven", "earth", "spirits", "gullies", "counts and kings", all can be

constituted in one root namely *the unique* (Laozi, 551 BCE/2008, Chapter 39). This also fits

in the nature of drama improvisation, as initiative and spontaneous thoughts, movement,

languages, visual and ethics in an experience will come together to form a unique story.

The traditional Chinese and Western notions of aesthetics are rooted in totally different

perspectives. Western concepts emphasise personal growth (e.g., skills and techniques) but

the Chinese notions focus on communal influences. As Chinese traditional values and

ideologies are deeply rooted, hence, Chinese aesthetics have a firm relation with Chinese

philosophies (e.g., Confucianism, Daoism). However, in this research, based on the shared

humanistic notion and postmodern aspects, Chinese aesthetics are considered in connection

with the postmodern perspective of the Western aesthetics. The relationship of art with

aesthetics cannot be defined or limited by theories (Dissanayake, 1988; Greene, 1971). Thus,

by adopting a postmodern perspective on intuition, inter-subjectivity, self-reflexivity and

multiplicity, it can contribute towards realisation of a new understanding. The understanding

would be of the concept that how young children in Hong Kong experience and respond to

aesthetic encounters beyond the mainstream practice of a developmentally appropriate

approach. Therefore, the postmodern view of Western aesthetics is used to frame this research

study. The view has influenced the choice of methodology and data-collection methods. For

example, a/r/tography, a postmodern arts-based research approach (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004;

Springgay et al., 2008) has been adopted to highlight the inter-subjectivity (in-between the

child participants and the researcher's multiple identities) and self-reflexivity (a/r/tographer

journals) during the investigation and discussion of this study.

Functions of Aesthetics – Building better People for better Society. There are

different thoughts about the functions of aesthetics. While Aristotle (335 BCE/1992) suggests

aesthetic experience is the process of catharsis, produced through emotions of pity and fear in

tragedy (performances), Kant (1790/2000) claimed that aesthetics produces (personal)

pleasure. He said that aesthetic pleasure can be defined as an emotional response of a person towards a work of art. After three centuries, the notion of pleasure is still valued in the latest nationwide research on aesthetic education in Taiwan. The Taiwanese educators and researchers determine *pleasure* as the learning goal of aesthetic education in the recent early childhood education curriculum reform (Lin, 2014). On the other side, Dewey (1934) proposed aesthetic education is an education of empathy as well as creativity. These two are internationally accepted goals for aesthetic education (Amadio et al., 2006; Benavot, 2004; Curriculum Development Council, 2006). However, this study adds on to the traditional Chinese perspectives.

From a Confucian perspective, both arts and aesthetics are educational. Education is "referred precisely to the process of making the culture of rites and music self-conscious and 'transmitting' it to the younger generation" (Li, 2010, p. 39, emphasis in original). As Confucius claimed, regardless of how skilful or gorgeous the music is it is of no value to the one who lacks the inner emotion of humaneness (Confucius, 500 BCE/2000). According to Chen and Hou (2009), Xunzi (荀子), one of the followers of Confucius, stated that the terminal aim of art is transforming human desire to "li" (courtesy 禮) and "yi" (righteousness 義) (p. 88). In *The Discussion of Music* (*Lelun* 樂論), Xunzi (266-255 BCE/2003) proposed "takes joy in carrying out the Way [Dao] [樂得其道]" (p. 120). Chinese aesthetics are established with a purpose of achieving perfection of human personality. They are established on the grounds of a socially based self-consciousness and educational context. This personality building, aims at cultivating people with *ren* (benevolence 仁). Similarly, Zhuangzi of Daoism (369 BCE/1996) also proposes the concept of *ren* ("benevolence", 仁) (p. 16) that constitutes the idea of "love one another" (Chen & Hou, 2009, p. 118). Famous Chinese aestheticians and educators such as Wang Guowei (王國維) and Cai Yuanpei (蔡元

培) applied the Daoism perspective of *wuwei* (non-assertive activity 無為) towards the

aesthetic education of China in early 20th century (Ran, 2008). They advocated using

aesthetic education to rescue China (out of the invasion of Western countries). Zhu

Guangqian (朱光潛) (1953) furthered Wang and Cai's idea and promoted aesthetic education

should begin from children. Zhu believed that that human being could rebuild their world

vision and national values. They can achieved by rebuilding their mind set through

"perceptual knowledge" (Ran, 2008, p. 23), i.e., aesthetic education. As discussed earlier,

aesthetics in Chinese perspectives are always education related and has a function of building

people with benevolence. Hence, benevolence will be cultivated through constant exercises

of self-conscious ethics. If a society has more people with self-consciousness ethics, they

may contribute in building a better society. This assumption is a fulfilment of Chinese

aesthetics which focusses on building better people for a better country.

In fact, psychologist Abraham Maslow shares similar thought about the Chinese

perspectives on aesthetic functions. In *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, Maslow

(1971) claimed that "the concept of creativeness and the concept of the healthy,

self-actualizing, fully human person seem to be coming closer and closer together, and may

perhaps turn out to be the same thing. … Education through art may be especially important

not so much for turning out artists or art products, as turning out better people" (p. 57).

Furthermore, the latest report of UNESCO International Bureau of Education (Amadio et al.,

2006) on aesthetic education reports that aesthetics is not only beneficial for overall personal

development but also for attaining socio-economic progress.

In recent years international organizations, ministries of education and curriculum

developers across the world have increasingly emphasized the potential social benefits

of aesthetic education. They also have an understanding of its expected contribution

towards socio-economic development and various other aspects. Those aspects are the

fight against poverty, the promotion of universal values and cultural understanding, or

the fostering of local cultural values and identities. Hence, certain forms of aesthetic

learning are therefore expected to positively transfer to other learning areas. This will

be beneficial for the overall development of individuals and also for the well-being of

society. (Amadio et al., 2006, p. 19)

From this UNESCO research, it can be inferred that social problems such as poverty

and social cohesion can be improved with the implementation of aesthetic education.

However, such improvements cannot be achieved by relational problem-solving alone; the

humanistic aspects of aesthetics, such as emotional engagements and self-consciousness

ethics, are also important for the study. In other words, aesthetic education is important for

young children because it does not only stimulate children's creative and imaginative power,

but aesthetic encounters constitute exercises of emotional engagements and

self-consciousness. Those aesthetic encounters can make human being a better person. This

study focuses on some more ideas beyond the ideas of cultivating children's creativity and

imagination. Hence, in this study, aesthetic education has a function for building one's ethics

of self-consciousness. These facets may contribute to personality building as well as social

cohesion and harmony in the long run.

Aesthetic Encounters and Aesthetic Environments

While aesthetics is a subject of philosophy or a personal style, aesthetic encounters

refer to the experiences of aesthetics. In discussing how human beings experience and

respond to aesthetic encounters, the *Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics* (Levinson, 2003) stated

that ways to distinguish aesthetic states of mind from others are:

...disinterestedness, or detachment from desires, needs and practical concerns;

non-instrumentality, or being undertaken or sustained for their own sake;

contemplative or absorbed character, with consequent effacement of the subject; focus

on an object's form; focus on the relation between an object's form and its content or

character; focus on the aesthetic features of an object; and figuring centrally in the

appreciation of works of arts. (p. 6–7)

Aesthetic encounters. According to Winston (2010), the perspective of Kant

highlighted that human beings can experience nature's beauty through "a set of necessary,

inter-related conditions or 'moments', all of which happen in the human mind" (p. 20). These

experiences of beauty are the results of "harmonious free play" in relation to "our capacity

for understanding and our capacity for imagination" (p. 20). To summarise the aesthetic state

of mind and how humans experience and respond to aesthetic encounters, some refer to it as a

perceptual focus on experience under certain conditions (Smith, 1970), while others suggest it

is an activity of the nervous system (Langer, 1962). However, Hutcheson (1738) stated that

aesthetic response was sensory not rational, while Burke (1989) put Hutcheson's statement

forward and supported aesthetic responses to emotional engagements rather than merely

perceptions. Burke's argument affirmed the importance of emotional engagements in

aesthetic encounters. This supports my claims about the notion that why imitation-oriented

arts activities cannot be counted as aesthetic encounters (Chapter 1).

As the arguments about the nature of aesthetic encounters moved towards education

contexts, the Western notions of aesthetic encounters became more child-oriented. Heid

(2005) portrayed aesthetic encounters as "a-ha" moments (p. 50). In "a-ha" moments children

learn to attend, learn about mind and body connections, and learn to critique with others. Lim

(2005) furthered the idea by identifying young children's aesthetic encounters in three

dimensions: a sense of awareness, art materials, and convergence of ideas and feelings.

Though Heid (2005) and Lim (2005) held similar views on describing young children's

aesthetic encounters, only the Australian drama lecturer Bundy (2003) has explicitly

explained the characteristics of aesthetic encounters. She described aesthetic encounters as

"the experience of intimacy" (p. 173) rather than "aesthetic encounters" simply being "at a

gut level" (p. 172). She claims that there are three characteristics of engaging in aesthetic

experiences: "animation, connection and heightened awareness" (p. 176). When people

experience *animation* they feel "more alive, more alert" (p. 180). Alternatively, *connection*

refers to "when the percipient (via senses and feelings) experiences connection to an idea

stimulated by the work but not necessarily directly contained in it" (p. 180). Lastly, Bundy

explained *heightened awareness* as "a product of the simultaneous experience of animation

and connection" (p. 180). Generally speaking, these aestheticians refer to aesthetic encounters

associated with emotions and feelings and not merely the cognitive experiences. Therefore,

while aesthetics can be "a subject of inquiry" (Smith, 1970, p. x), aesthetic encounters are

experiences of cognition, sensory perception and feelings.

In the traditional Chinese perspectives of aesthetics, Daoism's aesthetic perspective

provides a well-rounded concept of aesthetic encounters. According to Laozi, Chen & Hou

(2009) four themes of Daoism aesthetic encounters in relation to emotional engagements and

self-consciousness have been presented. Referring to the purple squares in Figure 8, the first

three themes of Daoism's aesthetics relate to aesthetic encounters and the fourth theme relates

to aesthetic environments.
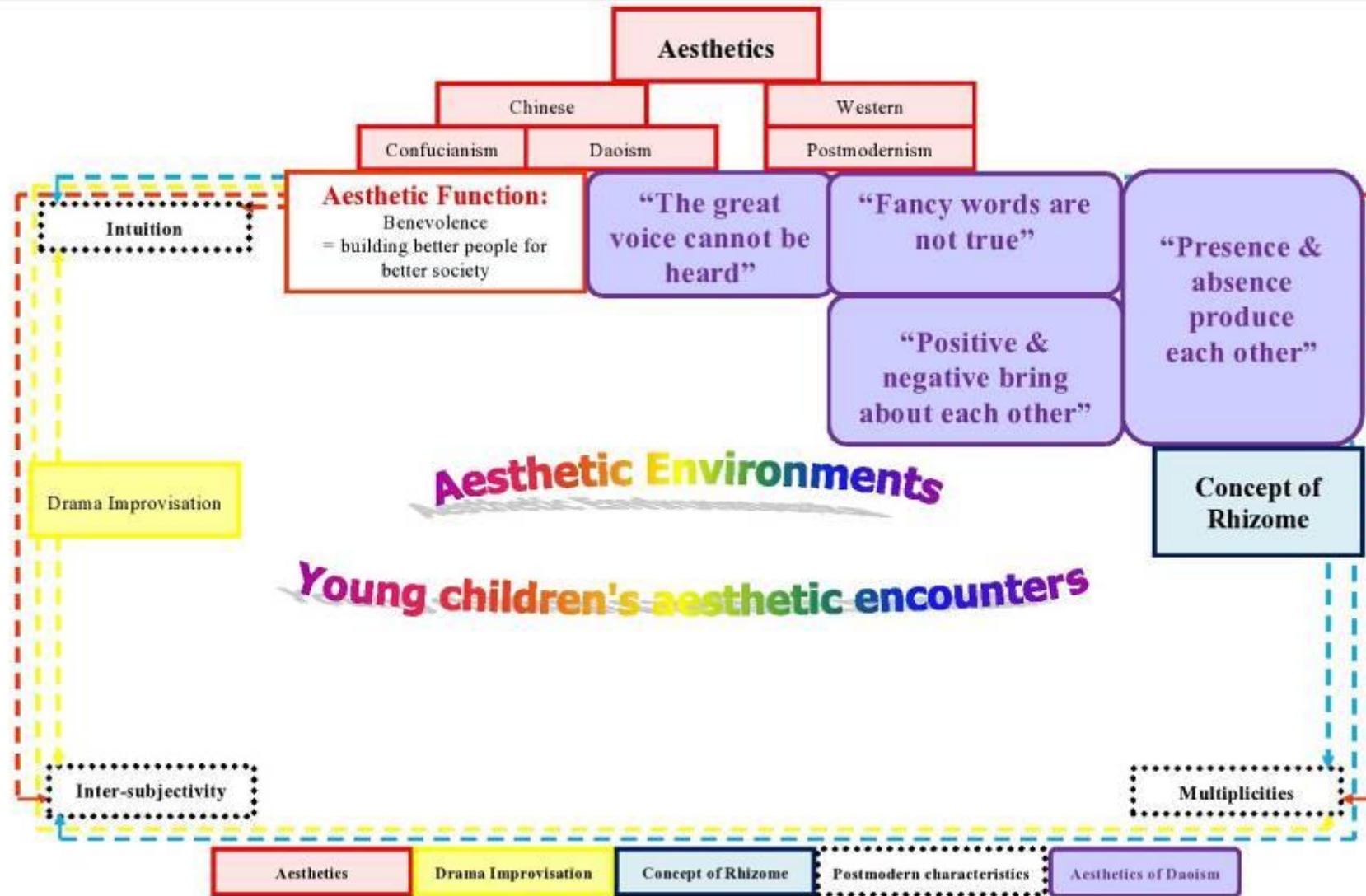
Figure 8. The four aesthetic concepts of Daoism in relation to the concept of rhizome.

1. **"The great voice cannot be heard [大音希聲]"** (Chen & Hou, 2009, p.102) - It means aesthetics encounters like the voice of *Dao* (the Way 道) are difficult to be heard with ear but available if listened with "personal association [to the past], imagination, emotional engagement and thinking" (p. 103). This develops a similar understanding about aesthetic encounters which are not pure encounters of cognition but also of one's emotions and self-consciousness (or self-awareness). It therefore suggests that without feelings and emotional engagement, one cannot experience aesthetic encounters.

2. **"Fancy words are not true. [美言不信]"** (Chen & Hou, 2009, p. 105) – In Chapter 81 of *Dao de jing* (Book of Dao 道德經), Laozi (551 BCE/2011) says "True words are not fancy. Fancy words are not true". This statement is against hypocritical behaviour. Laozi claims that virtuous and ethical people do not like to speak with fancy words. Thus, from the perspective of Chen and Hou (2009), Laozi sees *intuitive presentation* is a kind of *truthfulness*. It implies that aesthetic encounters are about truthful experiences of one's mind, body and soul in relation to his/her surroundings.

3. **"Positive and negative bring about each other [正反相成]"** (Chen & Hou, 2009, p.107) – According to the Chapter 2 of *Dao de jing* (Book of Dao 道德經), everything is made with two opposite sides, e.g., the positive and the negative sides.

4. Presence and absence produce each other. Difficulty and ease bring about each other. Long and short delimit each other. High and low rest on each other. Sound and voice harmonize each other. Front and back follow each other. (Laozi, 551 BCE/2011, Chapter 2)

Based on Laozi's idea that two opposite sides bring about each other, Chen and Hou (2009) suggest the third characteristic of Daoism aesthetic encounters. It is about "Virtual and reality bring about each other [虛實相生]" (p.107). Taking the Chinese painting of *mountain and water* (山水畫) as an example, Chen and Hou (2009) explain that the first brush stroke of the ink breaks through the *void of thought* on the white paper. It means as the black ink first encounters with the white paper, the colour of the ink determinates the space between black (the ink) and white (the paper). The marks of the ink (e.g., drawing or words) become the reality (the form or shape), where the empty space of the white paper is considered as the virtual. Thus, even though black and white are opposite terms, but it is only with the shapes of the black ink that the white paper may has got shapes. The white paper then can be transformed to an art work, and yixiang (imaginary environment 意象) from the painting can emerge. The three themes of Daoism aesthetics provide a general idea of how Daoism sees the elements of aesthetic encounters: imagination, emotions, thinking, truthful expressions, and reality and virtual coexist. These elements are referenced in the data mapping of young children's enactments in drama improvisation scenes and findings discussion of their aesthetic encounters in Chapters 5, 6. As situated in a mixed-culture of Hong Kong, the study consists of both Chinese and Western aesthetic concepts in relation to postmodern perspective. The implementation of aesthetic education in this project is fostered through aesthetic encounters, with special reference to drama improvisation.

In this research, aesthetic encounter is defined as "a unique process of an ability that human beings use for understanding and interacting with their surroundings and the world they are within" (Eisner, 2002; Heid, 2005). In association with returning to nature's beauty (Laozi, B. 551 BCE/2008; Zhuangzi, 369 BCE/1996), human beings exercise cognition and sensory exercises, including emotions and feelings (Bundy, 2003). Through these exercises, human beings may generate ethics related to self-awareness or self-consciousness (Chi, 1995)

under certain conditions (Smith, 1970). Drawing Chinese aesthetic perspectives as well as

Goodman's (1984) statement that attention to artworks should be based on their function, I

wondered how young children would experience and respond to aesthetic encounters. I also

wonder, what functions of aesthetic encounters with drama improvisation can be, in the

mixed-cultural environment of Hong Kong's early childhood education context.

  Aesthetic environments. In Western education, aesthetic environments, particularly in

early childhood education, generally refer to physical environment (Nutbrown, 2013). The

physical environment can be a classroom or outdoor environment, which is safe for young

children and "aesthetically rich and diversified environment" (Curriculum Development

Council, 2006, p. 20). Therefore, it is a common observation that kindergarten classrooms are

decorated with children's artworks and colourful learning aids. However, if educators know

little about aesthetics, these physical environments can only reflect the "mass marketing and

craft-store culture" that "does not challenge children aesthetically to respond deeply to the

natural world, their cultural heritage, or to their inner worlds" (Tarr, 2001, p. 3). It implies

that the natural world can be understood as a physical world, and an outer world, while the

inner worlds can be interpreted as intangible worlds. In terms of theatre, aesthetic

environment has different meanings. Aesthetic environment can be scenography of a

performance. For example, theatrical effects of visual and audio aspects, or an intangible

dimension of psychological state, atmosphere, emotional status, and theatre audiences'

readiness. Similarly, in the aesthetic perspective of Daoism, there are also two kinds of

aesthetic environments: a physical space and an intangible space.

  In *The Contemporary Development of Aesthetic Education*, Ran (2008) suggested that

the implementation of aesthetic encounters work in various ways and methods, and do not

limit to specific time and space. According to Chen and Hou (2009), the Daoism perspective

calls the physical space of aesthetic environments as "*you*" (presence 有), and the intangible

space as "*wu*" (absence or nothingness 無) (p. 237). It is related to the idea of "Presence and absence produce each other [有無相資]" (Chen & Hou, 2009, p. 111; Laozi, 551 BCE/2011, Chapter 2). As referenced from a Chinese architect, Chen and Hou (2009) refer the idea of "Presence and absence produce each other" (Laozi, 551 BCE/2011, Chapter 2) to physical building and the interior space of the building. It means the physical building is the *presence* while the interior space is the *absence*. Taking a room as an example, furniture is the *presence* while the intangible space of length, width and height is the *absence*.

   Absence exits as long as *presence* is in place. *Presence* and *absence* are coexisted. This is linked in relation to the third mentioned characteristics of Daoism aesthetic encounters (Chapter 2, p.53, (3) *Positive and negative bring about each other*). Drawing the Chinese painting of mountain and water (山水畫) as an example again, the existence of the painting relies on both the white paper and the ink (brush strokes) to coexist at the same time. The empty space of the whiteness (absence) stands out the shapes of black (presence). At the same time, the shapes of black bring out the whiteness of the paper. Together, the black and white make a picture. Figure 9 shows, Tang Shixia's (唐石霞, 1993) painting is a good example. Although the painting was from Qing Dynasty, so the white paper became yellowish and grey in colour but, it could still clearly present how the ink and the empty space of the white paper bring about each other to create a *yixiang* (imaginary environment 意象) showing a temple in a quiet forest.

The idea that *presence* and *absence* coexist contributes to this study in response to the second research question. The second research question is about the environments that are required to facilitate young children's aesthetic encounters. Taking architecture as an example, of aesthetic environment, there must be a physical environment for aesthetic encounters to take place. Yet, such environment should also coexist with an *interior* space, or in my term an *intangible* space. Malaguzzi (1996) describes aesthetic encounters as "spaces for relations, options, and emotional and cognitive situations that produce a sense of well-being and security … which reflects the ideas, ethics, attitudes and culture of the people who live in it." (p. 40). This can be a kind of understanding regarding the intangible aesthetic environments. However, an aspect that needs further investigation is, what is the content of this intangible aesthetic environment, particularly with drama improvisation in Hong Kong early childhood education context.

Figure 9. Tang Shixia's (1993) *Qiao Mu Ling Qian Ren* 喬木凌千仞 [painting].

Aesthetics in Education

Aesthetic education is often an essential element of most official curricula worldwide (Amadio, Truong & Tschurenev, 2006; Benavot, 2004; Curriculum Development Council, 2006).It stimulates children's creative and imaginative powers (Curriculum Development Council, 2006; Einstein, 2006). It is generally fostered through arts education (Amadio et al., 2006; Benavot, 2004; Curriculum Development Council, 2006) for art symbolises and expresses human feelings (McKenna, 2004). Art conveys both cognitive and perceptual knowledge (Ran, 2008) and explores, reflects and expands human experience (Mesler, 1972), which can bring insights into human existence (Reimer, 1967). Arts activities also provide opportunities for children to create and imagine, whereas imagination "improves language, creativity, and the ability to solve problems" (Neville, 2009, p.155). Thus, in *Education through Art*, Read (1943/1956) argued that art should be the basis of education. Chinese philosophers, such as Zhu Guangqian (朱光潛) and Li Zehou (李澤厚) share the same advocacy (Liu, 2010). However, as discussed in Chapter 1 not every arts activities can convey aesthetic encounters. Imitation of arts constitutes lack of emotional engagements and self-consciousness which are area of concern. Hence, this study had to choose an art form that can tackle these concerns. Additionally, the art form should be able to produce aesthetic encounters with young children. Therefore, drama improvisation is selected as the art medium to investigate young children's aesthetic encounters. This section firstly discusses how aesthetic knowledge can be obtained through arts. Thereafter it examines how drama works in early childhood education. At the end it, introduces aesthetic encounters with drama improvisation and its relation to the postmodern concept of rhizome.

Aesthetic Knowledge through Arts

Dewey (1934) advocated aesthetics is not about an end product but the process of an active experience. Even though, in *Arts as Experience, "*arts" is used as the medium for the aesthetic experiences. Similarly for the self-reflexivity characteristic of the Daoism aesthetic perspective, Dewey's concept of aesthetics focuses on how people critically reflect not on the object itself (art work) but on the object they experience (the process). Dewey proposed aesthetic encounters involve "reconstruction [of past/present] experiences" (p. 522), whereby emotion "provides unity in and through the varied parts of an experience" (p. 523). Here the term 'experience' refers to the process of art-making. Based on Beardsmore (1973) and Walsh (1969), the production (process) of art is aimed at aesthetic encounters for such experiences of art can produce knowledge (Gaut, 2003; Goodman, 1976). This knowledge, according to Gaut (2003) includes "philosophical knowledge" (p. 436), knowledge of the universe (the nature of our concepts and moral concepts); "knowledge of possibilities" (p. 437); and knowledge of the actual (e.g., insights into human nature) (Beardsley, 1981).

Therefore, aesthetics in education nowadays has much more to offer than the common notions that aesthetics only cultivates children's creativity and imagination (Bailin, 1993; Heid, 2005; Tang, 2011). Aesthetics is valued as an essential element to support children's learning. It does so by improving the quality of learning, enhancing the creative process, and leading to critical thinking while children learn to interact with their environment (Mayesky, 2002). Aesthetics promotes self-learning and children can be more independent because they are more open towards their own thoughts. In aesthetic encounters, children engage in exposures to what is "unfamiliar", which can "raise awareness of and provide insight into personal experience" (Blank, 2012, p. 59). Aesthetics are special because it allows us to engage with the world and the wonders of life (Heid, 2005). These are processes of negotiation of meaning. As we learn to interact with the smallest differences in art and of life,

a deeper understanding (presence) about ourselves and our world may emerge (Greene, 2001).

It is the deeper presence that stimulates imagination, passions, curiosity, and sometimes

extraordinary circumstances. In other words, the process of making and interpreting art adds

"to our understanding as new ideas are presented which help us see in new ways" (Sullivan,

2010, p. 97). It is therefore clear that, arts activities can be the effective mediums to convey

aesthetic education particularly with young children. However, it is important to avoid pure

imitation or art-appreciation activities.

Negotiation of meaning in aesthetic encounters refers to how we "make the world with

our thoughts" through exercising "our perceptual powers, discipline, and choices" (Tomlin,

2008, p. 11). It requires a mental flexibility and freedom to transform perceptions into

valuable and beneficial constancies. Empathy refers to sensuous aesthetic encounters

(Korsmeyer, 2008). They can lead us to a better understanding of ourselves (Higgins, 2008),

but not emotions of "pleasure and affect" (Tomlin, 2008, p. 8) or "garden-variety emotions"

(Higgins, 2008, p. 106; Kivy, 1989, p. 238). Self-consciousness in the aesthetic encounters of

this study focussed on the self-reflection of the artists (Neill, 2008). It refers to a mode of

self-reflection of ordinary practice that requires a specific consciousness of presence (Menke,

2008). Therefore, this study emphasises aesthetic education through aesthetic encounters.

Aesthetic encounters provide participants with a kind of consciousness that no other mode of

experiences can provide (Seel, 2008).

Drama in Early Childhood Education

Aesthetics is important in education because it is not simply an appreciation of life and

nature. It is also a constant decision-making exercise with expression of emotions and

feelings (Curriculum Development Council, 2006). Aesthetics are fundamental to children's

development. For this project, aesthetics elements were considered to be the outcomes of the

process that child participants used for understanding and interacting with their surroundings

and the world they were within (e.g., the drama improvisation scenes), using their senses and sensibility (Eisner, 2002; Heid, 2005). Bailin (1993) claimed that drama education should not aim at the narrow meaning of training for performances. It should encompass the aesthetic development of all students with a fundamental concern for the development of people. This illustrates drama as a means of aesthetic encounters. In the last ten years, aesthetic education through drama is getting popular especially in early childhood education context (Anderson, 2006; Blank, 2012; Heid, 2005; Lim, 2005; McCaslin, 2005; McLennan, 2010; Tang, 2011).

A number of researchers in Hong Kong have investigated the usage of drama in early childhood educational settings (Hui, 2011, 2012; Tam, 2010; Yuen, 2004). But the research about drama aesthetics or aesthetic encounters is rare. Tang's (2011) study on aesthetic responses of N4 children (aged 6 years) through drama appreciation is one of the few that serves the purpose. She conducted a case study on creative drama in order to investigate drama appreciation in children's aesthetic education through classroom observations and teacher's dairies. Based on the theories of Dewey (1934) and Vygotsky (1978), Tang concluded that drama appreciation can be a teaching strategy for aesthetic education. She also claimed that drama appreciation enhances young children's creativity and imagination. Tang's study contributes to the knowledge of how young children experience aesthetics through arts appreciation, yet, she only presents the view from educational perspective (e.g, education theories and play theory). In order to widen the understanding of young children's aesthetic encounters, this research takes on both arts (drama improvisation) and education (aesthetic education) perspectives under the lens of postmodernism (Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizome).

Aesthetic Encounters with Drama Improvisation

Children can explore varying scenarios with a multitude of emotions… Drama aids children in refining their communication skills by providing them the opportunity to verbally articulate and project their voices. They can communicate nonverbally as well

through the safety and distance of their new character. … The use of improvisation, rather than the use of scripts, gives the children the opportunity to create their own words with which to communicate, further enhancing these skills. … As the imagination is at play, their use of all five senses of hearing, touch, sight, smell, and taste is heightened. A child pretending to be a kitten eating the porridge river must use her memory to imagine the taste and smell of the porridge. (Bouzoukis, 2012, p. 3)

In this study, drama improvisation was chosen to be the art medium to convey aesthetic encounters. As Bouzoukis (2012) suggests, the nature of improvisation allows children to explore different scenarios. The children can do so by expressing emotions and feelings, exercising communication skills, creativity, and imagination through five senses, memory and pretendence. Improvisation in drama refers to spontaneous acting (verbal, physical or emotional) with respect to other players (Leep, 2008). Many people have mistaken the Italian primitive performing art form *Commedia dell'arte* (Johnston, 2006; Salinsky & Frances-White, 2008) as the beginning of improvisation. According to Leep (2008), there was a record from Aristotle that "tragedy and comedy at first were presented in improvisations, as spontaneous creation of the moment, presumably with no script and little planning" (p. 6). Later, drama improvisation was developed by incorporating mimes (masked acting), stage combat, acrobatics and it emerged to be Commedia dell' arte in the beginning of the Renaissance. Since then, improvisation has existed in various forms, e.g., theatre games, actor-training exercises, story-devising, or a performance (Abbott, 2007; Leep, 2008; Salinsky & Frances-White, 2008), where the last-mentioned is the means adopted for this research study.

It is not common to see improvisation as a subject for aesthetics but Sawyer (2000) argues that, "at the core of both Dewey and Collingwood's [aesthetic] theories is a theory of art as improvisation" (p. 151). Improvisation represents a "more common, more accessible

form of creativity" and is "relevant to aesthetics" (p. 150). For example, our daily conversations are usually an act of spontaneity with creativity; they are filled with improvisational elements. Improvisation is a unique art form. It requires concentration and awareness in performance or appreciation to experience its aesthetics. According to contemporary notions of aesthetics related to the importance of the art process (Heid, 2005; McLennan, 2010; Sawyer, 2000), improvisation, by itself, is both the art-making process and the art product. Each improvisation is a unique experience of spontaneity that requires intensive sensory perception, feelings and creativity. By taking Dewey's (1934) statement that art-making is "active and experienced" (p. 162), Sawyer shows how Dewey's theory of art, as an experience, has leads to the performing arts and improvisation. When children engage in art-making, it is not only the final artwork but the process (experience) of creating the art that is valued as it can enhance their aesthetic encounters (Beardsmore, 1973; Bresler & Thompson, 2002; Dewey, 1934; Walsh, 1969). Sawyer's understanding of aesthetics is the core reason for adopting drama improvisation as the art-making approach to be incorporated in this study.

The nature of drama improvisation can produce aesthetic encounters (Winston, 2010). Through the collaborative acting ("harmonious free play") and exercises of "imagination", the child participants became child actors to perform spontaneous yet "inter-related" dramatic happenings ("moments") to form plots and stories (p. 20). It is because actors engage in acts of improvisation, they engage in both the process of art-making and the presentation of the art product at the same time. Thus, aesthetic encounters might occur during an improvisation performance. Therefore, drama improvisation was found suitable technique, to convey young children's aesthetic encounters. However, improvisation in an early childhood educational context is usually mistaken as free play or dramatic play. To provide a clear definition of the way drama improvisation is used in this research, it is appropriate to clarify some common

terms used in "drama-in-education". In the book of *Creative Drama in the Classroom and Beyond,* McCaslin (2006) provides simple yet clear definitions about the common drama terms including, *dramatic play, creative drama, process drama, role play* and, lastly, *improvisation.*

Dramatic play often points to free spontaneous play of young children, usually in imitation of people around them. It is "fragmentary, existing only for the moment … the repetition is in no sense a rehearsal … [it] has no beginning and no end and no development in the dramatic sense …" (McCaslin, 2006, p. 7). It does not require narrative developments and tensions, and it doesn't require a complete story.

Creative drama is "an umbrella term that covers playmaking, process drama, and improvisation" (McCaslin, 2006, p. 7). It is a kind of educational drama that is created by the participants, normally through improvisation. It is not intended to be exhibitional but is a process-centred form of drama in which participants are "guided by a leader rather than a director" (p.8). The leader directs them to imagine, enact, and reflect upon human experiences. It aims at strengthening the participants rather than perfecting their performance. McCaslin (2006) claimed that creative drama is a form for children aged five or older. As it has a form, it is thus more structured than *dramatic play*.

Process drama is another kind of educational drama. Cecily O'Neill (1995) explained that process drama is a group's creativity development on a pre-text. It emphasises "learning through drama rather than on drama as an art form in its own right" (McCaslin, 2006, p. 8). It is the learning outcome that process drama as concern and not the artistic, theatrical or aesthetic value of the production.

Role play refers to "the assuming of a role for the particular value it may have to the participant rather than for the development of an art" (McCaslin, 2006, p. 10). It is a common strategy in classrooms to enhance children's understanding on a particular subject or topic. It

is done through character enactments. It does not require a complete story, or any plot development, or any art products (performance).

Lastly, **drama improvisation** used in the study is a kind of drama performance that combines "paidia" and "ludus":

> Free play, *paidia*, was subsumed under, or governed by, rule-bounded behaviour, *ludus*. Caillois uses the Greek word "paidia" (related to the world for "child") to mean a spontaneous burst of play, turbulent and unconstrained. On the other hand, the Latin "ludus" means a game governed by rule-bound behaviour. (Schechner, 2002, p. 95)

Therefore, drama improvisation can be an art form that constitutes children's free play. It has artistic and dramatic characteristics, such as:

1. There is no script; thus, it is spontaneous yet truthful (Abbott, 2007), created in the moment;

2. There are loose outlines of structure that guide the performance (Sawyer, 2003), e.g., '*Yes, and …*' (accept, augment), '*Yes, But …*' (accept, redirect), and '*No, But …*' (reject, redirect);

3. It is a collaboration, where each performer's act is influenced by the others' (Salinsky & Frances-White, 2008, session 2.9);

4. Lastly, improvisation can be performed for public audience (Abbott, 2007).

Aesthetics in drama refers to the live multi-sensory feeling of experience and imagination which covers a wide range of art forms. It includes script-writing, acting, directing, scenography, audience participation and appreciation. In *The philosophy of improvisation*, drawing from the experiences of improvisers of drama and music relates to Peter's aesthetics of drama improvisation. Peters' (2009) aesthetics of drama improvisation

were drawn to form an operational framework from the theoretical definition of aesthetic

encounters as reference to the study. As Figure 10 shows, these characteristics include:

1. Becoming a character - It refers to actors' verbal and physical features of

   performance (McAuley, 1998).

2. Narrative development and tension of an act, a scene, or a performance segmentation

   (e.g., plots or happenings) (McAuley, 1998).

3. Scenography – It is about the utilisation of the scenic space by the actors (McAuley,

   1998).

4. Presence – It is related to the "disobedience, independence, and spontaneity" of

   acting (Adorno, 2007, p. 26).

Similarly, according to the professional drama improviser John Abbott (2007), drama

consists of three basic components: narrative developments, tensions, and characterisation.

Each of these components requires a certain extent of creativity and imagination. For scripted

drama, part of the creativity and imagination will be done by the playwright. On the other

hand for a drama improvisation play, narrative developments, tensions and characterisation

will depend on the intuitive and spontaneous creativity, imagination and collaboration among

the improvisers. During the improvisation, improvisers are not *"working in a vacuum"* but

should *"listen to what their improvising partner is saying and respond to that"* (p. 116, Italic

in original). Improvisers need to *"embrace the creativity of other improvisers"* and *"allow a*

scene to travel in unpredictable and exciting directions" (p. 123, Italic in original). It is

because improvisers give each other *"mutual support and they share a common creativity"* by

welcoming *"change and go with the flow"* (p. 123, Italic in original).
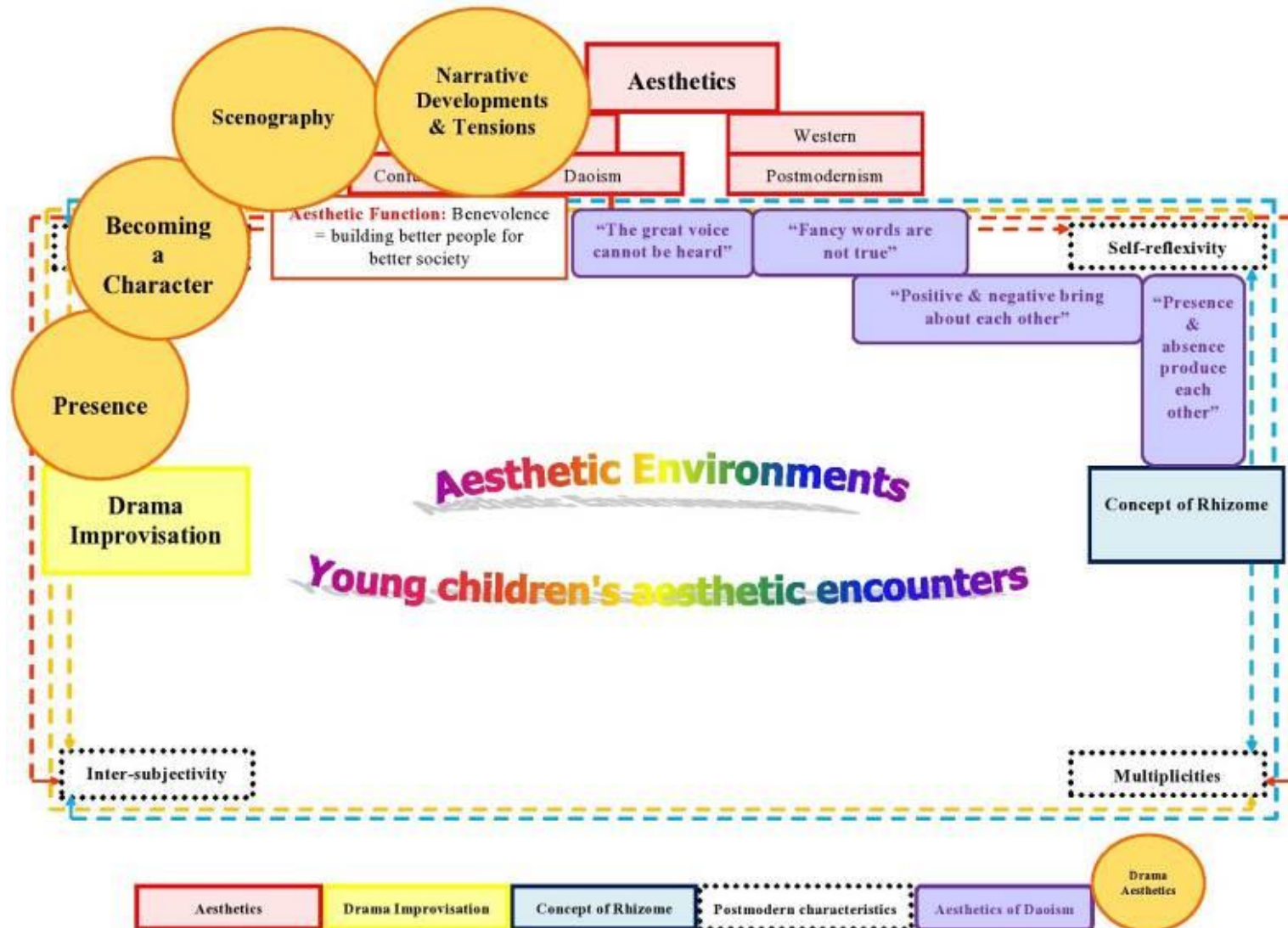
Figure 10. The four characteristics of drama improvisation aesthetics.

The other characteristic of drama improvisation is about its spontaneous nature. Since it is not pre-scripted, improvisers are required to act and react to each other using their intuitive thoughts and emotions. "The real joy of a reality-based [truthful] performance improvisation is that it can also be moving, exciting, dramatic, absorbing, romantic and thought-provoking" (p. 7). Each of these emotions bring "*passion, humour, suspense, dynamics and tension to an improvisation*" (p. 77) and working under these virtual realities, the children will learn about emotions and expressions from their sensory input. Each of the drama improvisations is a truthful and unique performance as they can never be the same. Improvisers experience, express and explore with/ in/ through drama improvisation scenes. They are "constantly discovering more about themselves if they stay open to the messages that come through" (Johnston, 2006, p. 7). Therefore, the aesthetics of drama improvisation allows deeper meanings to be revealed and this would enable, the children perceive the world (surroundings and within) personally.

Borrowing ***the basic skills of drama improvisation*** from Abbott (2007), here is the list for educators to refer for conducting drama improvisation with young children:

1. They have to pretend to be someone else and then remain truthful to the character they are pretending to be.

2. They have to imagine that they are in another situation. This will allow their characters to behave the way they would, if the situation was really happening.

3. They should know what their character wants from them and then let that 'objective' affect the way their characters would behave.

4. And finally, they have to realise that their improvisations don't have to be interesting or entertaining: they just have to be truthful. (Abbott, 2007, p. 6)

Improvisation is also a research tool widely used by artists for character development, story building, and meaning making (Johnston, 2006). It is because while engaging "in free play with our capacity for understanding, the imaginative process is arrested and prolonged in a pleasurable manner without reaching any conceptual generalization" (Winston, 2010, p. 20). Therefore, the drama improvisation in the workshops is referred to the theatre art form that was intended for performance in compliance with the basic rules. Besides, the improvisations workshops were about "exploration and discovery and, as such, there should be no thought of entertaining an audience" (Abbott, 2007, p. 142).Hence, the drama improvisation workshops were not aimed at the public audience. Although drama improvisation was used as closed performances meaning "no thought of entering an audience" (p. 142), the child actors and I were both actors and audience as we acted for the video camera. We were actors when we were acting in the scene, but we were audiences as we sat at the side stage watching the other child actors' performances. For a clear illumination of the experiences and responses of young children's aesthetic encounters, I chose to conduct the drama improvisation workshops on an empty stage. This implied a venue without any scenery settings, furniture, props, costume, sounds, or light effects, but with an emphasis on child-led storylines, characters and plot developments.

Drama Improvisation and Postmodern Concept of Rhizome

The connection I have drawn from Deleuze and Guattari (1987) in context of drama improvisation was their most prolific concept of the rhizome. Their postmodern understanding of rhizome is defined as relational. It is a style of thinking that works against linear logic. Compared to modernism, art from a postmodern perspective focuses on intuition, self-reflexivity, inter-subjectivity, de-authorship and multiplicities (e.g., multi-relationships) (Shusterman, 2003; Townsend, 1997). De-authorship focuses on reader's "here and now" interpretation (Barthes, 1967/1977, p. 145) that aligns with the unique nature of

improvisation. As each improvisation performance is bounded in time and space specified no improvisation are the same. Multiplicities refer to the openness of a text, of which different reader can have a different interpretation (Barthes, 1967/1977). The meaning of the improvisation performance also varies, as there is no author or pre-script, so there is no centre message or "correct meaning" (Hick, 2012, p.85) to be conveyed. It is up to individual audience's interpretation. Besides, improvisation does not have a fixed narrative development or story plot, no improviser knows how the story ends or who ends a story. These kinds of openness go with the concept of de-authorship and multiplicities for no master narrative remains in place. Still, variation and differences should be expected. Several studies used the concept of multiplicities to explore new meanings or insights for educational issues (Honan & Sellers, 2008; Lather, 2003; Sellers, 2010). For example, Sellers (2010) inquired into re(con)ceiving children in curriculum with Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizome. Unlike other postmodern research using coding or narrative analysis, Sellers used rhizomatic mapping to generate emerging findings. She mapped across the data of three simultaneous events (free dramatic play of three different fairytales at the sandpit) and mentioned that the children were engaged into one collective map. So the inter- and intra-relations of the three events were visualised and revealed insight of how children (re)conceived the curriculum. Her rhizomatic approach also inspired my choice of data analysis strategy.

As educators and aestheticians (Beardsley, 1981; Bresler & Thompson, 2002; Dewey, 1934; Sawyer, 2000) generally view the process of art-making as a way to convey aesthetic encounters, thus in this study, aesthetic encounters through drama improvisation were defined in terms of participative experiences. Thinking of *experiences* in terms of practices, I was attempting to follow the mobile and transitory aesthetic encounters of young children. I tried to imagine the space of aesthetic encounters as a territory defined by a network of relationships with people (participants), ideas and objects in spontaneous movements. The

investigation takes off to interrogate and represent the encounters by producing drama improvisation scenes. This is done by initiating the assumption that we (the child participants and I) were all engaged in different yet overlapping aesthetic encounters. This introduction of drama improvisation as a tool invited young children to imagine and reflect on their aesthetic experiences and responses. The resulting improvisation scenes should bring more complexity and nuance to the current aesthetic education practice. Drama improvisation, therefore, became the a/r/tographic research tool (Johnston, 2006) for this postmodern arts-based research.

Deleuze and *Theatre of Multiplicities*

Deleuze discussed theatre in relation to the concept of rhizome and calls it "theatre of multiplicities" (Deleuze, 1994, p. 192). Taking Carmelo Bene's *Romeo and Juliet* production as an example, Deleuze (1997a) writes about his postmodern idea of theatre in *One Less Manifesto*. This kind of theatre should have no author or director, no (pre)text or script, and the performance should consists of "no other purpose and does not extend further than the process of this creation" (p. 240). Therefore, nobody knows how the story develops and how it ends. Everything is up to the "whims" of the characters (p. 239); yet the characters have no "Ego" (p. 241) to engage in any special activities to make them noticeable from among the crowd. Most of all, theatre of multiplicities is not "representational" (presenting the same world once again) (p. 214). In the concept of rhizome, theatre of multiplicities constitutes de-centredness (de-authorship), differences, and unexpectedness.

Drama improvisation, especially the one performed by novice improvisers such as young children, shares many similarities with Deleuze's theatre of multiplicities. Taking the child participants in this research as an example, they were young (aged 2–5 years) and had no previous experience in actor training or performing. They portrayed their characters by using their intuition and perceptions. They engaged in drama improvisation, which carried no

script or pre-text of the story. The children only had the information of the characters' names, the place and the beginning of the story as they proposed. The stories developed as the child actors acted along. No one knew what would happen next or how the story would end. The child actors had few, if any concepts about theatre elements, e.g., narrative development or dramatic tensions. Adding to it, these concepts were also not in their conscious consideration. There was no specified message for the performed improvisation stories. Thus, the characterisation or story meanings were non-representational.

To the child actors, the workshops were all about the opportunities of performing drama. However, as the principal researcher, I focussed on whether their experiences of drama improvisation could produce aesthetic encounters. The process of how young children experience and respond to aesthetic encounters emerged by mapping the happenings of the drama improvisation scenes. This exercise was carried out in relation to the characteristics of aesthetics and drama improvisation. Therefore, as an artist-and-researcher-and-teacher, I had no intention to claim drama improvisation (especially with young children) as Deleuze's theatre of multiplicities. However, since drama improvisation and *theatre of multiplicities* share some common ideas, i.e., de-authorship, differences, and unexpectedness, I would like to borrow some concepts of *theatre of multiplicities* in studying theories of young children's aesthetic encounters.

In Figure 11, there are five theoretical ideas in the theatre of multiplicities: *becoming, presence, major and minor, power* and *affect* (the five green ovals at the bottom). These terms are also an integral part of drama improvisation elements. These terms mean very different things in these two perspectives, therefore re-definition of these shared terms were needed. Since theatrical experience is "a hub for idea exchange" (Cull, 2009, p. 13), I now discuss these five theoretical concepts: *becoming, presence, major and minor, power* and *affect*, and elaborate how they are used in the data analysis of the study.
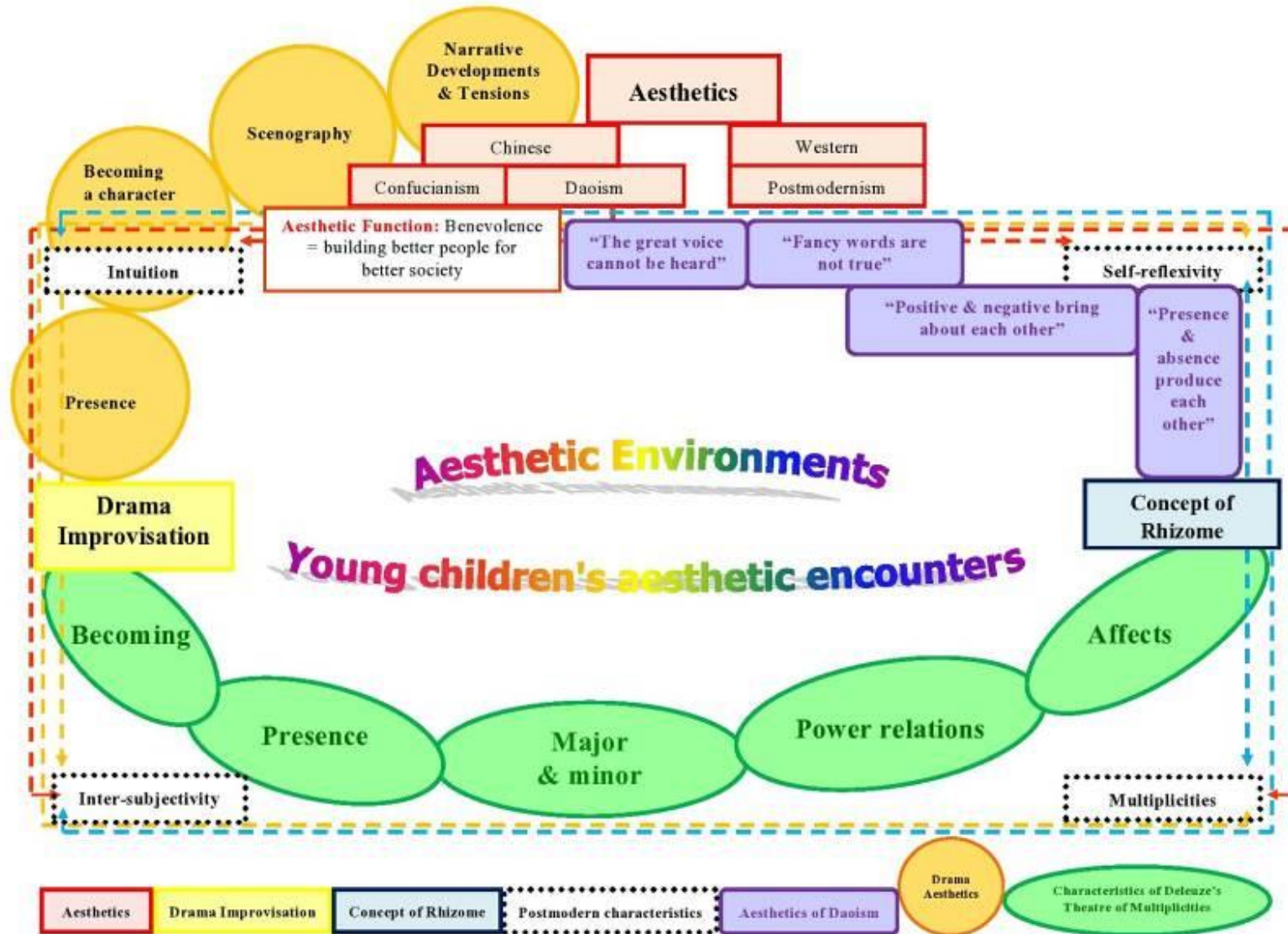
Figure 11. The five theoretical concepts of Deleuzian *Theatre of Multiplicities* are used in thefi study as an analytical framework.

Becoming

Becoming in theatre refers to a physical and psychological representation of a person, animal or an object. It also includes its common recognisable appearance, form, movement, tune and sound. For example, a lion walks with the help of four limbs and roars fiercely; so the more an actor moves and sounds like a real lion, the better the performance becomes.

Becoming produces nothing other than itself … What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes. Becoming can and should be qualified as becoming-animal even in the absence of a term that would be the animal become. The becoming-animal of the human being is real, even if the animal the human being becomes is not; and the becoming-other of the animal is real, even if that something other it becomes is not. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 238)

However, as the quote stated, *becoming* in Deleuze's perspective has nothing to do with imitation or representation. It is about someone or something which situates in the middle of a process (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). It focuses not on the beginning or the end, or the completeness of a process, but on the process of a process – perpetual in process. In addition, everything that happens in this process of process is real to the participant(s). In drama improvisation, narrative developments and tensions refers to the dramatic events that turn away from what audiences believe that characters can or cannot do. These dramatic events are normally surprises for the audiences (or readers). This concept is similar to Deleuzo-Guattarian *becoming*:

[T]he pure lived experience of double becoming … [For example] The tarantella is a strange dance that magically cures or exorcises the supposed victims of a tarantula bite.

But when the victim does this dance, can he or she be said to be imitating the spider, to

be identifying with it, even in identification through an 'archetypal' or 'agonistic'

struggle? No, because the victim, the patient, the person who is sick, becomes a

dancing spider only to the extent that the spider itself is supposed to become a pure

silhouette, pure colour and pure sound to which the person dances. One does not imitate;

one constitutes a block of becoming. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 305)

What Deleuze and Guattari illustrated was not how much the dancer could represent as

a real spider on stage by wearing his costume or showing some movements. Instead, they

explained that the dancer had performed a re-territorialisation of what a spider could be. The

movements of the dancer were not an archetypal of spider. In other words, these movements

were not identical as a real spider's movements but they were still potent enough to signify

the pain of a tarantula bite. It projected a new image of spider wherein the dancer of tarantella

was becoming-spider. Becoming in a Deleuzo-Guattarian concept refers to a substance in a

situation that is forever-in-process and has no specific destination. For example, becoming

moves through every involved person and thing that connects the changing of character

identities or personalities, "such that each is simultaneously start-point, end-point and

mid-point of an ongoing cycle of production" (Stagoll, 2010, p. 26). Thus

becoming-character means deterritorialisation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) of identities

(territories), i.e., the process of the character leaving its common characteristics (normative)

and becoming the creation of an actor.

Thinking with the becoming-spider example, the child actors in the study were found to

have performed similar deterritorialisation of identities. The child characters did so by taking

on and shifting in-between many different characters, e.g., animals, princesses, doctors,

patients, and policemen. On one hand, I analysed how the child actors portrayed their

characters with their understanding of the roles with a drama perspective. On the contrary,

thinking with Deleuze's (Deleuze, 1997a; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) concept of becoming, an alternative reading of performance has emerged. The becoming-characters of child actors played out the process from child actors becoming child character. For example, since Deleuze's becoming illuminates a process of experience instead of the end product of artwork. Hence, it visualises the process of the child actors' aesthetic experiences and responses. This is how Deleuze's philosophical concepts have made the study of aesthetic encounters in which something abstract, complex and difficult, becomes possible. Yet, becoming in Deleuze's (1997a) concept is not a stand-alone entity but exists in relation to time and space, meaning *presence* in his terms.

Presence – Actual vs. Virtual Relation

In theatre concepts, *presence* is difficult to define (Harrison, 1998). One of the definitions of presence can be "a collision between the social *event* of theatre and the fiction of the character and the *fibula*" (Pavis, 1998, p. 286, emphasis in original) as everything on stage is a representation in relation to the actors' actual situation. Thus, presence is about how an actor acts and reacts in a lived fashion to the situation on stage. Usually, these physical and psychological actions and reactions are scripted in the text. Actors are required to practise these actions and reactions through gestures, movements and emotions in rehearsals. Professional actors are expected to represent all these rehearsed gestures, movements and emotions as real and new – which implies that the character will "come alive" (Abbott, 2007, p. 159) on stage.

In *Bergsonism*, Deleuze (1988a) addressed a different idea about presence. He claims everything that happens on stage ("virtual") is real ("actual") for characters (Boundas, 2010, p. 197) that means being real in virtual reality. So the immediate presence on the stage is a live situation for the characters as well as actors. Therefore, the enactment of the child actors were real (actual) movements and emotion of their "liveness" decisions (Cull, 2009, p. 3).

This was a product of their intuition and self-consciousness, not acting or representation. This postmodern concept of presence helps me to explain how self-awareness or self-consciousness occurs to the child actors. In Deleuze's perspective, everything happening on stage is a *presence* (real to the character and actor), where each character makes constant decisions to deal with the immediate situation on stage and henceforth carry on with the story. So, *presence* is related to the actors' simultaneous self-consciousness and is associated with their decision-making. As Deleuze's philosophical notions are relational, his concept of consciousness is also found within the idea of *major and minor*.

Major and Minor

Major and minor are common theatre terms referring to different roles in the story. The major characters usually are the focus of the story, e.g., protagonist, antagonist, or confidant. Minors are often stereotypical characters. Their function is to support and react to the major characters, e.g., helpmate, narrator, and chorus. Totally different to the theatre practice, Deleuze's concept on major and minor is in association with consciousness and power.

In *One Less Manifesto*, Deleuze's (1997a) concept of "minor" character means the subject who is in "continuous variability" (p. 245). It is about a role "without multiplicities or past, s/he has only a becoming, a middle, by which s/he communicates with other times, with other spaces" (p. 242). In other words, a minor character is in a process of *becoming*. This becoming-minor is open to everyone and not restricted to specific (category, ethnic, class) or actualised (age, size, number) minorities. For example, women and children are generally seen as minors in the world of male dominants (major). It is regardless of the fact whether the number of women and children may be much greater than the number of men. In this case, the group of women and children become a group of minor. Each minor (individual or as a group) holds her/ his/ their thoughts or minds that generates "minority consciousness" (p. 253). To elaborate this concept of minority consciousness with a theatre example, Deleuze

explained that only the actor who acts as the stammerer (a minority) "has acquired the right to stammer in contrast to the well-spoken majority" (p. 254). The stammerer plays out self-consciousness to make decisions that will fit with her/ his understanding of the character. There is no other person (not even the director or playwright) who can decide how long the actor should stammer. Only the actor who is stammering can act and react according to her/ his presence on the stage by exercising her/ his minority consciousness. S/he is the only one in power to claim what is right for her/ his created character. Deleuze's understanding of the concept of "*minor*", brings out a new notion of power that not only "*major*" (the authorities) have power, but minors (the weaker, suppressed and neglected) also carry power in them.

Power

The theatre concept of "major and minor" is normally associated with representational power relations, i.e., major characters have power over the minor characters, and the minor characters are powerless (Deleuze, 1997a). For example, kings rule over slaves, lions rule over rabbits. Representational power is embedded in the elements of power in theatre, such as "the Text, the Dialogue, the Author, the Director, the Structure" (p. 251). These elements of power in theatre are both "what is represented and the power of theatre itself" (p. 241). Deleuze also argued that the actual power of theatre "is inseparable from a representation of power in theatre" (p. 241). As the *theatre of multiplicities* "opposed in every respect to the theatre of representation" (Deleuze, 1994, p. 192), hence, the study sought for new perspectives on power relations, starting with the famous French theorist on power, Michel Foucault.

Foucault and power. Foucault claimed that "power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault, 1978, p. 93). This argument ties to Deleuze's opposition to the representational power in theatre that power is not about hierarchy but about relationships – the power circulates. Thus, unlike the traditional

understandings that adults are the only one who have power, young children can also exercise

power. This Foucauldian thinking about power helped me to free myself from the linear flow

of power, e.g., that someone older has more power; someone younger has less power.

However, this Foucauldian notion of power created fear – I was suddenly afraid of losing my

power as a teacher-and-artist. It seemed there would be two forces in the classroom, one with

the teacher and one with the children/ students. By thinking that children also have power, I

started worrying regarding the classroom control, which seems to have lost by me. Just as

Liselott Olsson (2009) described in her Deleuzian research on young children's learning, I

too felt distress when my comfortable "definitions and positions … [were] not functioning or

not available" (p. 85). I was very concerned about losing class control and considered (by my

supervisors and myself) as an unskilled teacher. The classroom might become a war zone.

Whenever I went to teach, I might have to fight with the children to keep control as a teacher.

I may certainly sound like being over-sensitive about power relationships but Foucauldian

perspective on power was a dangerous thought for me. So I think Foucault's writing did help

me to get rid of the representational power in theatre. Contrastingly, the idea of power was

observed to be shifting and circulating, creating a fear of losing class control.

While reading *Discipline and punish* (Foucault, 1977) and *Foucault* (Deleuze, 1988b), I

was able to see that both of these philosophers wrote about power and their works are

complementary to each other. I decided to focus on Deleuze's writing about power as his

concept of power aligned with the concept of rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) and

provided further argument to consolidate the theoretical framework of this study. Building on

Deleuze's rhizomatic concept on theatre performance, the function of Deleuze's theatre of

multiplicities can serve as a "hub" to "provoke discussion" (Cull, 2009, p. 13). This idea

provoked consideration of power relations with young children: if resistance from the child

actors had some kind of meaning or function, what might that be?

Deleuze and power. Unlike Foucault, Deleuze's (1983, 1997a) concept of power is not about who has the power, how to use the power, or how big the power is, and it is not about being represented. He argued that power itself does not have power (Deleuze, 1997a). He feels power can be considered in a much more complex way. Based on Nietzsche's philosophical notion of *will to power* (Deleuze, 1983), similar to Foucault, Deleuze considered power as flows, networks, but he also sees power as intensities. He explained power is an encounter of two individual forces. Power emerges when one of the forces acts over the other. Both Foucault and Deleuze wrote about how power circulates (Foucault, 1978; Deleuze 1983); however, Deleuze took power further from how it works, to what it can produce (e.g., affect).

Puissance and *pouvoir* are the two French words that Deleuze used for power. While *puissance* means immanent power to act, *pouvoir* refers to superior or transcendent power to dominate others. *Pouvoir* constitutes dominant (superior) and dominated (inferior) power relations. Generally, in pouvoir, it is a major/ active/ dominant who acts over a minor/ reactive/ dominated (Deleuze, 1983, 1997a). Sometimes, the minor/ reactive/ dominated force will act over a major/ active/ dominant. Yet, in Deleuzian perspective, unlike power in theatre where the status of major and minor can be changed, the role or the status of a minor/ reactive/ dominated character will never change into a major/ active/ dominant because Deleuzian power is not about changes but "affect" (*affectus,* original in French) (Deleuze, 1988c, p. 49). In Deleuze's (1997a) perspective, power can be "subtracted, amputated, or neutralized" (p. 241); which means power is productive and generative. Deleuzian power produces *affect* through "minority consciousness" (Deleuze, 1997a, p. 253). The next section will explain how power is productive and generative through *affect.*

Affect

In the theatre context, affective aspects, i.e., emotions, feelings or empathy are related to the psychological response of a character. Generally in theatre perspective, the daily (ordinary) dramatic plays of the children will not be understood as theatre art. For example, a child crying in a dramatic play is seen as either a pretended cry or a real cry of pain; yet neither of these occurs as a result of acting techniques or theoretical considerations. Thus, even though children express emotions or feelings in daily dramatic play, they are not seen as professional actors. So it is the psychological reaction that theatre affect is having. However, Deleuzian affect is different.

Deleuze's affect has nothing to do with psychology (Deleuze, 1997a). It is related to how power as an affect is embedded in power relations (Deleuze, 1983, 1997a). Affect remains in place whenever a power relation is formed. It means that there is influence in every power relation. Affect is an "intensity" characterised by an increase or decrease in power (Deleuze, 1997b, p. 181). Deleuze further explained "affectus" as "an increase or decrease of the power of acting, for the body and the mind alike" (Deleuze, 1988c, p. 47). It means that the affected person is able to think or act differently. Just like a rhizome plant, affect can also change an individual's relationship with a socialised structure (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Therefore, affect in Deleuze's perspective refers to influence (Deleuze, 1983, 1997a). One can be affective as well as affected; in other words, one can be influential as well as influenced.

> Children are Spinozists. When Little Hans talks about a 'peepee-maker', he is referring
> not to an organ or an organic function but basically to a material, in other words, to an
> aggregate whose elements vary according to its connections, its relations of movement
> and rest, the different individuated assemblages it enters. … Children's questions are

poorly understood … they are not understood as question-machines; that is why indefinite articles play so important a role in their questions (a belly, a child, a horse, a chair, "how is a person made?"). Spinozism is the becoming-child of the philosopher. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 256)

For Deleuze, children are good examples to illustrate the affect that is produced by the power of *minority consciousness*. Unlike the other common views on child as adult-to-be, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1983, 1987), similar to rhizome plants children do not grow but transform to become adults. By revisiting Freud's famous case of Little Hans in *A thousand plateaus* (1987), Deleuze and Guattari named children as 'Spinozists', who "live on an affective level that is lost to most adults" (Hickey-Moody, 2013, p. 273). Children are in the process of "becoming-child[ren]" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 256). Different to the Spinoza's children are the ones who "depend very heavily on external causes" (Deleuze, 1997c, p. 219). The Deleuzo-Guattarian's reading of Spinozian children is a way for adults to learn about "subjective variability: the form through which positive and negative affect is cast" (Hickey-Moody, 2013, p. 274). Therefore, in Deleuze's perspective, children are in power to create differences and transformation, e.g., transform to be adults (Deleuze, 1997a, 1997c).

Deleuze's philosophical concepts on *theatre of multiplicities* further enriched the theoretical framework, as well as the analytical devices of the study. The concepts of *becoming, presence* and *major and minor* bridged up Deleuzian philosophy towards drama improvisation elements. It thus provided a common platform (a hub) to investigate the young children's aesthetic encounters. Deleuzian *power* in terms of theatre performance granted a new understanding on how power might work in the workshops. The concept of *affect* brought out the importance of children being able to make affects (influences) through their

minority consciousness. The Deleuzian relationships between *power, minority consciousness* and *affect* produced an alternative reading of the data from the drama improvisation scenes.

Summary

The second chapter discussed the cross-cultural and interdisciplinary theoretical framework. The framework investigates the experiences and responses of young children towards aesthetic encounters using drama improvisation. Based on the general understanding that arts education contributes to children's aesthetic sensitivity, creativity and imagination, the *Guide* to the Pre-primary Curriculum promotes aesthetic education through arts education (Curriculum Development Council, 2006). Similar to a grafted rhizome, the chapter therefore presented a broad theoretical framework of the study, with the following areas of study: (a) aesthetics in Chinese and Western contexts; (b) drama in early childhood education; and (c) Deleuze and theatre performances. Each of the mentioned areas of study was found inter- and intra-related to each other, as an input toward the research problems.

In the first part of the chapter, Chinese aesthetics of Daoism was identified being relational to the Western aesthetics of postmodernism. It was relational, particularly to Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of rhizome, including: becoming, intuition, self-consciousness, inter-subjectivity and multiplicities (in relation to de-authorship). By identifying both emotional engagements and self-consciousness as essential in aesthetic encounters, the section further discussed (a) the function of aesthetics used for building better people; (b) aesthetic environments could be referred to both physical and intangible spaces, though the contents of intangible environment were yet-to-be-known. The second part of the chapter discussed aesthetics in education particularly through drama. It presented the limitations of research about aesthetic education with young children, and provided the rationale of using drama improvisation to convey aesthetic encounters. It also formulated five characteristics of drama improvisation aesthetics by using concepts of aesthetics and elements of drama. They

were *creativity and imagination in narrative developments, tensions and characterisation, spontaneous (being in presence), collaboration,* and *emotional engagements*. The last part of the chapter presented how Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of rhizome and *theatre of multiplicities* contributed to the study. Five shared concepts of drama improvisation and Deleuze as showed in Figure 11: *becoming, presence, major and minor, power,* and *affect* were also discussed and used as theoretical tools. They were also used as analytical devices for the data analysis of the study.

Chapter 3: *Scenography* – A/R/Tography: A Postmodern Approach To Investigate Young

Children's Aesthetic Encounters

Chapter 2 set up the scene of young children's aesthetic encounters with drama improvisation in Hong Kong early childhood education context. The cross-cultural and interdisciplinary theoretical framework of the study was formed by connected a postmodern concept of rhizome to aesthetics of Daoism and drama improvisation. The critical literature review brought up some important questions that enriched the ways of responding to the research questions. Firstly, postmodernism is used as an alternative perspective to a developmentally appropriate approach which is meant for investigating how young children experience and respond to aesthetic encounters. Secondly, beyond creativity and imagination, aesthetic encounters can also aim for building better people for better society. Thirdly, aesthetic encounters constitute cognition, emotional engagements and self-consciousness. Lastly, aesthetic environments consist of both physical and intangible spaces, though the contents of intangible environments are yet-to-be-known.

Followed by a discussion on the limitations of the current aesthetic education through drama in Hong Kong early childhood context. Finally, after presenting the rhizomatic relations between aesthetics, drama improvisation and the concept of rhizome, five Deleuzian rhizomatic concepts on theatre performances, *becoming, presence, major and minor, power* and *affect*, were discussed as part of the theoretical framework and analytical devices for data analysis. Therefore, the postmodern concept of rhizome underpins the theoretical and methodological frameworks of the study.

This chapter positions the study under the postmodern perspective with an a/r/tographic approach. The chapter first recapitulates the research aims and research questions. Then it presents how a postmodern concept of rhizome develops the paradigm of the study. It also

discusses why a/r/tography is useful to investigate aesthetic encounters with drama

improvisation from a rhizomatic perspective. Details of the main study research design, data

collection and analysis strategies, a/r/tographer's roles, the ethical considerations,

trustworthiness and limitation of the study are also discussed before closing the chapter.

Research Aims and Research Questions

The aim of the research is to investigate the experiences of young children's aesthetic

encounters from aesthetics, artistic and postmodern perspectives through dramatic art of

drama improvisation. A/r/tography is both epistemologically and methodologically aligned

with my research and it proposed a "way of doing" that is coherent with the object of study.

A/r/tography is an aesthetic "way[s] of knowing" (Eisner, 2002) and is used to examine two

research questions:

1. How do young children experience and respond towards aesthetic encounters

   through drama improvisation?

2. What kinds of environments are required to facilitate aesthetic encounters for young

   children?

Aesthetic encounters can be found in three situations: art-making (e.g., artists at work),

art-appreciation (e.g., discussion about art products or experiences), and art-criticism (e.g.,

evaluation or reflection about art products or experiences). In this research, the three sets of

data were collected to address the first research question about children's experiences and

responses towards aesthetic encounters. Firstly, drama improvisation was used as the

art-making tool to promote aesthetic encounters. By taking part in the drama improvisation,

the child a/r/tographers became actors. Thereafter they performed as well as produced the art

products of improvisation scenes. The video recordings of the drama improvisation scenes

were the data of art-making. Child participants then shared their responses towards the

aesthetic encounters in the focussed discussions. These responses became the data of

art-appreciation. Lastly, child participants and I created the art-criticism data by making arts journals and writing a/r/tographer's reflexive commentary. The commentary was on my aesthetic encounters as an artist-and-researcher-and-teacher in relation to my teaching perspective and practice for facilitating young children's aesthetic encounters.

To answer the two research questions, the first strategy that I used was, to value children's input as they are experts about their own lives (Clark, 2005). In their daily lives, children know the best of what they like. They have their own ways and preferences of doing things. They have the required expertise for expressing their perspective and views. They can do this by making use of both verbal and non-verbal forms. Therefore, the first strategy which is used to respond to the research questions is researching *with* children, not *about* or *on*, but as co-a/r/tographers. The professional academic researcher's practice was not the focus but as "an embodiment of respect and responsibility, of honouring their understanding of themselves, others and the cultural, physical, social and imaginative worlds they operate with/in" (Sellers, 2009, p. 148). Borrowing the summary that Sellers (2009) made from Sumsion's research in 2003, and having children as co-a/r/tographers required "approaching children with open-ness, honesty and humility, expressing authentic interest in them and their activities towards fostering their well-being being in the research context and the wider research community" (p. 148).

The second strategy to respond to the research questions was, taking the art form of drama improvisation as the art medium for the a/r/tographic research. This strategy answers the first research question by attaining active participation and reflection from the child participants during the processes. Additionally, by getting responses from the children's aesthetic encounters in the drama improvisation workshops. Regarding the second research question, the data collection was set in a dance studio. The empty studio allowed a clear

observation on how child participants interacted in the space. This environment was required to facilitate young children's aesthetic encounters which might emerge during interactions.

Research Paradigm - Postmodernism

Ontology refers to how one constructs reality, while epistemology frames how the knowledge of reality is achieved (Crotty, 1998). Ontology affects the epistemological perspective that leads an individual understand the selection of methodology, the practices and methods to convey such epistemological knowledge. Since three concepts are inter-related, there should be coherence and consistence in a research.

Ontology of the Study - Postmodernism

This study is underpinned by postmodernism. Regarding the nature of reality, the ontological knowledge of postmodernism comes from both the researcher and the communities (or individuals) which are being studied. It means reality is not singular or pre-existed but is multiple and non-rational in nature. Through their "co-created findings with multiple ways of knowing" (Creswell, 2013, p. 36), the postmodern epistemological knowledge is made-known. Since each research participant is respected as a knowledge contributor, postmodern methodologies often are collaborative in nature.

As living in a post-colonial environment and being a Hong Kong Chinese, I grew up in a mixed-culture. I root in Confucian *filial obedience* and *respect* from Chinese traditional values, but learn about freedom and equity through the British influenced school system. These two, are considered as contradictory yet coexisting practices, provide proof to me that reality is not singular but multiple and complex. These multiple realities normally are socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and constantly changing. Based on such ontology, postmodernism was chosen as the epistemology and a/r/tography was used as the methodology to conduct the research.

Knowledge and power are simply two sides of the same question: who decides what

knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided? (Lyotard, 1984, p. 8, 46)

When conceptualising research, how knowledge is conceived remains a basic question

but power is also concerned in the postmodern era. In *The Post-modern Condition: A Report*

on Knowledge, Lyotard (1984) advocated the loss of grand narrative (the only truth) to reject

the dominant thought and practice of modernism on universal truth. Postmodernists claim

that there is no such thing called *universal* or the *only truth*. They promote multiple realities

and the knowledge is in relation to power. Lyotard (1984) explained that "postmodern

knowledge refines our sensitivity towards the differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate

the incommensurable" (p. xxv). He also argued that "the status of knowledge is altered as

societies enter what is known as the postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as

the postmodern age" (p. 3). Eagleton (2003) further elaborates the content of postmodernism:

> …the contemporary movement of thought which rejects totalities, universal values,
>
> grand historical narratives, solid foundations to human existence and the possibility of
>
> objective knowledge. Postmodernism is skeptical of truth, unity and progress, opposes
>
> what it sees as elitism in culture, tends towards cultural relativism, and celebrates,
>
> pluralism, discontinuity and heterogeneity. (p.13)

Postmodernism celebrates fragmentation and diversity of perspectives, challenges the

dominant/ mainstream thought and practices. It denies *master narrative* or singular authority.

As postmodern knowledge is socially constructed, it implies knowledge is always in

multiplicities and plurality, critically questioning the dominant perspective and practice. It

acknowledges that such knowledge is contextual, partial and fragmented. Knowledge, in

postmodernism, is stated as ever-in-progress. Reflexivity is another characteristic of

postmodernism. It is in relation to "the production of academic texts, a willingness to allow

multiple voices to speak in these texts (including those of research "subjects") and an

emphasis on empowering the dispossessed or silenced in societies" (Fox, 2014, p. 5, brackets in original). Reflexivity acknowledges context-dependent knowledge and concern about power relations (Fox, 2014). The knowledge of such reality does not exist prior to the investigation, and such reality is dismissed when it is no longer being concerned (Smith, 1983).

The study was aimed to provide "another set of perspectives and discourses" for looking at young children's aesthetic experiences that are both "challenging and engaging" (Grieshaber & Ryan, 2006, p. 535). This was to be achieve by thinking and doing postmodern approaches (e.g., concept of rhizome, a/r/tography) with reflexivity. In postmodern perspectives, there exists postmodernism and post structuralism. Although Deleuze is a postmodern philosopher, he is also known as a poststructuralist for his criticism on structuralism (e.g. Freudian psychology) (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). However, this study is focussed on the relational aspects between aesthetics, drama improvisation and philosophical perspectives as an alternative perspective. They are used to implement young children's aesthetic education through aesthetic encounters. Not to criticise any particular structure (e.g., developmentally appropriate approach), I decided to stay with postmodernism.

Epistemology of the Study – Generating Knowledge under Postmodern Concept of Rhizome

In this study, drama improvisation was used to generate knowledge of young children's aesthetic encounters. Qualitative research with postmodernism emphasises on processes and meanings. Taking a postmodern epistemological approach, the study chose the qualitative research approach to observe how aesthetic encounters could be constructed by a group of young children. As the principal researcher, I tried to strive for an "emic perspective, or insider's view" (Thornton & Goldstein, 2006, p. 526) of the study so that I chose to use a/r/tography, an arts-based participated research approach. The knowledge of young children's aesthetic encounters was then socially constructed with the help of child

participants, concepts of aesthetics, drama improvisation, as well as philosophical notion of rhizome. A diversified theoretical and analytical framework was needed to examine the inter- and intra- relationships between each and every data obtained from the workshops. The workshop carried three studied areas in details. The drama improvisation model I was used to define the aesthetic encounters in this inquiry. That aesthetic encounters was influenced by the philosophical concept of the rhizome or rhizomatic relations (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Taking a physical rhizome or a plant root as the metaphor, *experience* is viewed as an open system, wherein time and space are not linear. The relations among thoughts, movements, languages, visuals and ethics in an experience are inter- and intra-related to every participant. Through the multiple layers and overlapping relationships in an experience, knowledge is not only found at the end product of art. But knowledge is also found through the process of how the participants, art materials, and happenings interact during the experience (Irwin, 2003; Jevic & Springgay, 2008). Therefore, as the thinking of aesthetic encounters in educational contexts from a postmodern perspective. Thus, this study is situated in a multiplicities and complexity scene that challenges participants to think more originally.

In the book *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*, Lyotard (1984) claims postmodern knowledge is about questions of "who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided" (p. 9). Drama improvisation sits within a postmodern aspect as even the performers on the stage may not know how the story ends. Similarly, the child participants and I don't have a deeper understanding of aesthetics; we did not know exactly how the research would operate. Working with young children created a good chance to reveal the knowledge (about drama improvisation, aesthetics and young children) yet-to-be-known to educators (adults).

Methodology of the Study – A/r/tographic Approach to Research

A/r/tography, as a research methodology (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Springgay et al., 2008), is best described as an arts-based research with a postmodern perspective. This inductive qualitative approach was firstly documented by Alex de Cosson in 2004. It was documented as a methodology drawn from the theories of philosophy, phenomenology, educational action research, feminist theories, and contemporary art-criticism (Springgay et al., 2008). It entangles theory, practices and process, with an emphasis on the in-between relations "where meanings reside in the simultaneous use of language, images, materials, situations, space and time" (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xix). It consists of a relational dynamic to produce the conditions for learning from within the investigation itself (Fredriksen, 2011; Irwin, 2003; McLennan, 2007). This arts-based inquiry to knowledge problematises "the structures of [traditional] research through aesthetic, artistic, and creative means" (Springgay et al., 2008, p. 87).

A/r/tography entails the concepts of postmodern arts-based research with an emphasis on a consciousness of and sensitivity to multiple ways of knowing, of seeing, of being in the world (Greene, 2004). By approaching research with renderings of *contiguity, living inquiry, metaphor/ metonymy, openings, reverberations,* and *excess* (Springgay et al., 2008), a/r/tography sets out an alternative approach to the knowledge of ourselves and the world. In this research, a/r/tography allowed me to have two angles (arts and education) in three perspectives (as artist, researcher, and teacher) while investigating young children's aesthetic encounters. All participants (both the children and I) were engaged in active thinking *while* making and doing the inquiry. Taking drama improvisation as the art medium to convey aesthetic encounters, was a strategy for tapping into the creativity of all participants. This strategy was adopted so that aesthetic education could be re-imagined and re-written in a manner that allowed for experience sharing.

A/r/tography: A World of Rhizome

Rhizome is a philosophical concept which originates from *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia* by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), to describe research theory allows "for multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points in data representation and interpretation" (p. 27). A rhizome is "an assemblage that moves and flows in dynamic momentum. The rhizome operates by variation, perverse mutation, and flows of intensities that penetrate meaning" (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xx). Postmodern early childhood education scholar, Mindy Blaise (2013) understands that Deleuze's assemblage "focuses on the processes of bringing together heterogeneous elements in order to produce something new" (p. 805). She explains Deleuzian assemblages are "not hierarchical" (p. 806) and against "binary framings" e.g., "individual/society" or "adult/child" (p. 805). By engaging in such dynamic assemblage(s) and exposing to numbers of dimensions and connections, new capacities can be imaged and created. As a model for culture, a rhizome "ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 7). Thus, rhizome in a/r/tography represents a world of complexity and a never-ending exploration (Beare, 2009) through art medium and reflexivity. Unlike the scientific approach, in rhizomatic and a/r/t/ographic research, time, space, relation and meaning are non-linear; yet they are inter- and intra-related. For example, *time* in the study involved, five, two-hour workshops. However, the data analysis and findings were not built on the linear time progression of the workshops. Instead, the data of the workshops were mapped together to create one collective picture. This picture visualised the overlapping characteristics, the inter- and intra-relations between the mapped data and there after the findings emerged.

Knowledge Making through A/r/tographic Renderings

A/r/tographic renderings are about creating theoretical spaces to explore knowing and being in artistic approaches (Springgay et al., 2005). Williams (1976) referred to 'praxis' as a uniting of theory with practice as action. He claimed that praxis emerges where the distinction between its theory, method and practice is made in analysis but is not observable in practice. A/r/tographic exploration is about approaching the research with renderings in forms of *contiguity, living inquiry, metaphor/ metonymy, openings, reverberations, and excess*. In this exploration questions and understanding are presented through texts and artwork in an effort to convey meaning rather than facts (Springgay et al., 2005, 2008). Thus, renderings are the forms of how a/r/tographers engage actively in inquiry. Yet a/r/tography is a never-ending exploration (Beare, 2009): "thought and action are inextricably linked, and through a hermeneutic circle of interpretation and understanding, new knowledge affects existing knowledge that in turn affects the freshly conceived existing knowledge" (Irwin, 2004, p. 34). Three renderings (i.e., *living inquiry, contiguity* and *excess*) were used in the research to analyse and describe the work for readers.

Rendering 1 – Living inquiry. This was used as an approach for a/r/tographers to "make sense and create meaning out of difficult and complex questions in daily life that cannot be answered in straightforward or linear telling" (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 902). This investigation was an artistic *living inquiry* on how the art form (improvisation) deepens understanding of young children's aesthetic encounters, while acknowledging all participants (children and I) were co-a/r/tographers. Living inquiry encourages artist-and-researcher-and-teacher to seek individual perspective and to "encourage audiences to define themselves not as passive spectators but rather as active participants in the artworks" (Finley, 2005, p. 684).

Rendering 2 – Contiguity. This refers to ideas that lie close to one another. In a/r/tography, knowledge and meanings are inter- and intra-related through text, image and art, with the multi-roles of a/r/tographers (i.e., child participants and I as artists-and-researchers-and-teachers). Contiguity concerns those ideas that are related and emerging. This approach "enables an outsider [child participants and me] to view a happening from the inside [performed in the improvisation scenes]" (Alexander, 2003, p. 5). In this inquiry, contiguity was used as an a/r/tographic analytical device in the arto-rhizomatic mapping for tracing the lines of flight with similar ideas or happenings (Chapters 4, 5).

Rendering 3 – Excess. Referring to surprise or an insight in a research, *excess* looks for varied possibilities. It is also a "continual process of exploration" of "how things come into being" (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 908). Excess was used as another a/r/tographic analytical device in the arto-rhizomatic mapping to identify surprises of the research process and data. It is used so that new knowledge or meaning could emerge.

Three Essential Elements of A/r/tographic Inquiry

Generating knowledge through practice. The first element refers to the practice-based investigation. A/r/tography is developed from investigators' long-term relationship with action research. A/r/tography is built on the belief that research must be based on practice. With the intent on collapsing the separation between theory and practice, it proposes a process of knowledge-building that combines "knowing (theoria), doing (praxis) and making (poesis)" (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxiii). By emphasizing practice, a/r/tography turns the research into an organic process, where one's own experiences influence not only academic inquiries, but artistic and pedagogical research as well. The characterisation of an investigation as a *living inquiry* is a way to authorise all people to accept a research process. It is also a way to demistify investigation by bringing it closer to

one's personal experiences, and to expand the criteria for who possesses an acceptable

know-how which is required to produce knowledge.

    Overlapping roles. The second element is about the nature of a/r/tographer, which

constitutes three overlapping roles as an artist, researcher and teacher at the same time during

the investigation. A/r/tography troubles traditional researchers as it allows for overlapping

identities of researcher as artist-and-researcher-and-teacher. He examines educational

phenomena through an artistic understanding and arts-based inquiry process (Springgay et al.,

2008). This first-person and hands-on practice is an act of searching one's senses and finding

one's voice (Greene, 1995). In order to draw on their own aesthetic encounters in children's

lives (Donovan, 2004), I extended the multiple roles in a/r/tography towards the child

participants. I did this by inviting children to act as co-a/r/tographers. We worked as a team to

co-plan the workshop activities and co-create the drama improvisation scenes in order to

identify and explore aesthetic encounters.

    In-between. Finally, the last essential element of a/r/tography that informed the

research was the way it redefined the finality of a research project. As I have mentioned in

Chapter 1.5.2, the slash ("/") among a/r/tography activates the in-between space between art,

research and education. Thus, it makes it a useful position to study aesthetic encounters.

Irwin and Springgay (2008) advocated that other than just a thesis, research can also be

modelled as an exegesis, diegesis or mimesis. These three options comprising of a critical

interpretation, a narration/re-telling or a showing, respectively will provide new answers to

the questions: *What does the research achieve and why is it useful?* This research claimed

drama improvisation is an effective way of developing both a diegesis and mimesis (narration

and showing) about aesthetic encounters in the educational context. Yet, it is important to

remember that the focus of the research was on using drama improvisation. The focus led to

illuminate the experiences and responses of young children's aesthetic encounters, but not to promote drama in education.

Research Design

The research design started with a one-off 3-hour workshop pilot study to test the feasibility of using drama improvisation. It was designed to convey aesthetic encounters, the operation of the workshop, and data analysis strategy. According to the experience of the pilot study on 20 January 2013 (Chapter 4), the main study extended to five weekly workshops with 2 hours each. I participated in each workshop and documented the children's individual and collective experiences and responses towards the art form using video recordings, focussed discussions, children's arts journals, and my reflective journal. Children's experiences, as I observed and interpreted through video recordings, were presented using first person narratives with snippets of an exemplary scene. It was done in an effort to artistically represent the living moments from the workshops, and the children's evolving aesthetic abilities within the theatrical work (Chapter 5). This section presents the research design.

The Participants

Participant selection was purposively meant for local Chinese families (both parents were Chinese with fluent Cantonese) who shared the same language of Cantonese and with similar family traditions. It was conducted to minimise misunderstanding in communications during drama improvisations, focussed discussions and reflections. A total of six children, including my daughter, with equal numbers of boys and girls, in the age range of 3-5 years old, from the same local kindergarten, were invited to participate in the research. Among the six children, there was one boy with developmental and speech delay. Also, there was a girl with traumatic stress caused by the separation from her father as her parents got divorced

recently. The group with mixed-ages was set purposefully because aesthetics is not necessarily age or developmentally appropriate related.

Improvisation Workshops – Creating Aesthetic Encounters

The workshops. To investigate how young children with a Hong Kong experiential background can respond to aesthetic encounters in an a/r/tographic approach, the child participants were co-a/r/tographers in five drama improvisation workshops. The workshop took place from 17 September to 22 October 2013 (except 15 October 2013) is as showed in Table 1. The workshops were different from formalised, structured lessons of kindergartens that are guided by mandated curriculum expectations and assessment (meaning adult perspectives). Each workshop lasted for two hours and the format of the workshops is presented in Table 2. The first four workshops were designed in three sessions: (a) art-making (ethics procedures, co-planning improvisation activities, and drama improvisation scenes); (b) art-appreciation (focussed discussions); and (c) art-criticism (making children's arts journals). The fifth workshop was a focussed discussion for rhizomatic validation on the emerging findings.

Table 1.

The content of the five research workshops

Workshops (Date)	Content
Workshop 1 (2013-09-17) with Scene 1-3	· Introduced the project and the ethics procedures · Co-planned for warm-up games and improvisation activities · Drama improvisation scenes · Focussed discussion and making children's arts journals
Actions taken in between each workshop · Wrote the principal researcher's reflective journal · Drew lines of articulation maps for every improvisation scene · Processed emerging analysis with mapping lines of flight across the scenes in every workshop · Generative or iterative questions for next focussed discussion.	
Workshops 2 – 4 (2013-09-24 with Scene 4-9, 2013-10-01 with Scene 10-15, 2013-10-08 with Scene 16-21)	· Conducted ethics procedures · Co-planned for warm up games and improvisation activities · Drama improvisation scenes · Focussed discussion and children's arts journals making
Actions taken after Workshop 4 · Wrote the principal researcher's reflective journal · Drew lines of articulation maps for every improvisation scene in Workshop 4 · Processed emerging analysis with mapping lines of flight across the scenes in Workshop 4 · Organised and performed arto-rhizomatic mapping across all 21 scenes in the four workshops for rhizomatic validation · Generative or iterative questions for rhizomatic validation.	
Workshop 5 (2013-10-22) with Scene 22	· Conducted ethics procedures · Focussed discussion on rhizomatic validation – review the video recording and comment on the emerging findings according to the maps (drawings of the lines of flight). · Drama improvisation scene · Making children's arts journals
Actions taken after Workshop 5 · Wrote the principal researcher's reflective journals · Drew lines of articulation maps for every improvisation scene in Workshop 5 · Processed emerging analysis with mapping lines of flight across the scene in Workshop 5 · Performed arto-rhizomatic mapping across all 22 scenes in the five workshops. · Organised transcripts, snippets, notes from focussed discussions, children's arts journals and re-organised the principal researcher's reflective journals for further arto-rhizomatic mapping.	

Table 2

The format of the main study

Time (Total 120 minutes)	Activities
5 minutes	Child participants arriving and set-up video camera
10 minutes	Ethical procedures
10 minutes	Co-planning the improvisation activities
25 minutes	Drama games, solo and pair performances, and focussed discussions
10 minutes	Toilet break
20 minutes	Group drama improvisation and focussed discussions
40 minutes	Children's arts journal-making and tidy-up

Art-making. In the planning stage, prior artistic experiences and knowledge of the children were considered. After going through the ethics procedures, the participants, as child participants, started with designing the activities of the improvisation sessions (e.g., the topics and context of improvisation exercises). Child participants took turns to perform or watch in the drama improvisation session as artists and audience members. Before the drama improvisation action began, the children collectively determined the warm-up activities, forms of improvisation (i.e., solo, pairs or group) or theme(s) they wished to explore in the drama. Typically, this was done via group discussion and surprisingly this didn't seem to be a difficult concept and task for these kindergarten children. Even though children had limited drama experiences (only once during the pilot study) still planning the activities was a smooth task. Drama in an early childhood context normally starts with a concern or theme by exploring a story book or a number of pictures depicting varied situations (Eckloff, 2006).

But here, we preferred to use themes or situations that the children initiated. Therefore, there were no teacher-directed topics but only children's choices of story themes and characters.

Art-appreciation and art-criticism. The child participants also responded to aesthetic encounters in the form of art-appreciation. At the conclusion of each workshop, all child participants engaged in group discussion about the performed improvisation scenes. Then in the section of art-criticism, the child participants evaluated and reflected upon their aesthetic experiences by making arts journals. The focussed discussions and making of arts journals allowed the child participants to explore and respond to their aesthetic issues and concerns. After concluding each workshop with both oral discussion and artistic reflection, child a/r/tographers were provided with opportunities to review their involvement. They reviewed their involvement in the workshop and imagined how their explorations might extend into their daily lives.

These reflections allowed child a/r/tographers to share their experiences about their participation in drama improvisation. It also helped them to consolidate their thoughts, behaviour and emotions to aesthetic encounters through dramatic action (Eckloff, 2006). This exercise also enabled them to clarify and enrich some of my observations regarding children's experiences and responses to aesthetic encounters within the workshops.

The Site of the Workshop

This a/r/tographic research was bound in a specific time and place (Berg, 2001). I conducted the research at a private dance studio during the months of September and October 2013. As an artist and the teacher, I considered how children would respond to, and interact within the drama improvisation activities, especially in relation to the specific time and place. So the choice of site was purposefully set up in a non-formal-educational classroom yet safe venue to avoid classroom rules and regulations (e.g., children should be quiet in a classroom, roles of drama characters are usually assigned to children by the teachers… etc.). As the

classroom setting could have influence the children's drama improvisation performances that required spontaneity and intuition.

My preference for generating data in a rehearsal room was based on providing children with ample time and space. This would enable the child participants to move freely through the workshops and the venue. With the help of the parents of the child participants, I identified a private dance studio as a possible research site. The dance studio was having an empty space, and a bare stage without scenery, props, costumes, sound or light effects. Just as the Daoism perspective on aesthetic environments (Chapter 2), the emptiness of the dance studio produced opportunities for child participants to be creative and imaginative. It also brought about the enactments of their aesthetic encounters during the drama improvisation scenes. The dance studio, like Deleuzo-Guattarian assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), was a useful venue to generate data of children performing aesthetic encounters with drama improvisation.

Data Generation Strategies

A/r/tographers work continuously to explore how to collect and (re)present educational inquiry. This enables them to convey meaning and not facts about the artistic exploration which has occurred (Irwin, 2004). In order to implement arto-rhizomatic mapping (details will be discussed in Chapters 4, 5), I divided the data into two groups, video recordings (drama improvisation and focussed discussions), and the physical artefacts (e.g., children's arts journals, and my a/r/tographer's reflective journal). Video recordings of drama improvisation and focussed discussions were transcribed and translated into English. Children's arts journals were photographed in colour. All collected data was stored and organised using the qualitative research software NVivo 10. Each improvisation scene was drawn as an individual picture that represented the lines of articulation map (Maps 1, 3). Then the rest of the data (my observations, focussed discussions, arts journals and reflective

journals) was added in the picture to create the lines of flight on the map (Maps 2, 4). After all five workshops, I mapped the lines of flight across the 22 improvisation scenes to create a collective map of the lines of flight (Map 5) according to emerging *contiguity* and *excess* ideas. By following the lines of flight, I searched for emerging happening(s) or meaning(s) that revealed responses to the research questions.

Photo snippets of the video images (Chapter 5) within this thesis (re)present the dramatic experiences of children. The improvisation moments in the workshops had been (re)presented through arto-rhizomatic mapping in Chapter 5. The selection of snippets were meant to "shape experience and enlarge understanding" (Eisner, 1997, p. 8) for readers. The aesthetic encounters of the child a/r/tographers had been reflexively observed and mapped across the collected data (i.e., focussed discussions, children's arts journals and my reflective journals). These aesthetic encounters had been presented in this way in an effort to make the aesthetic encounters that occurred accessible to readers. These mappings were my understanding of what were performed individually and collectively amongst child participants in the improvisation workshops. I wanted to clearly portray the performative aspects of children's aesthetic experiences and responses, as I observed it to be occurring, in each of the five workshops.

Video recordings of the drama workshops. One standalone video recorder was set up at a corner of the dance studio to capture most of the activities in the workshops, e.g., ethical procedures, drama improvisations, focussed discussions, and the making of arts journal. There should have been 10 hours of video recording for five 2-hour workshops but in reality there were only 7.5 hours recording. It was because sometimes the video recording was not ready or was being stopped for setting up for toilet breaks and the tidy up activities. As a performative process of living inquiry, the format of the workshops was outlined as five experiences with co-planning, drama improvisation, and focussed discussions (Table 1 and

Table 2). Video recording became an important data-collection means in the research workshops. With drama improvisation as a live performance, its "dramatic moments disappear the moment they are conceived and acted upon, existing only in memory after the experience" (McLennan, 2007, p. 24), therefore it is challenging to explore, discuss and represent data unless they are video recorded. Video recordings allowed close attention to the uniqueness of the moment. It became a way to capture diversity of expressions in children, and their understanding of world within (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005).

Though reminded by qualitative researchers that observation in the research should be "purposeful, circumstantial, intuitive, and empathetic" (Schram, 2003, p. 98), I, as a participant researcher, I could not write field notes during the workshops. Thus I made use of the video recording by clarifying a child's wording/ concept at the spot (point of interest). It might not be ideal practice but it served my immediate need of making notes. As I reviewed the video recordings, I could then fill the gaps/ wonderings that I had noted in my reflective journal.

Focussed discussions. The a/r/tographic approach seeks to "encourage audiences to define themselves not as passive spectators but rather as active participants" (Finley, 2005, p. 684). Based on the video recordings of the improvisation activities, the five focussed discussions were guided by five open-ended, pre-specified questions (Appendix F). After each of the drama improvisation scene, the child participants and I sat down and discussed the performance of the scene we just did. I asked five open-ended questions and sought for the child participants' views on what they thought was good and beautiful. Focussed discussion provided a platform for the child a/r/tographers to think critically about their hands-on experience in aesthetic encounters and analyse their own interpretations of aesthetics.

Hong and Broderick (2003) claims that children are attracted while "revisiting previous events by watching their actions on the viewing screen of the video camera" (p. 15). Thus the fifth workshop was devoted to a focussed discussion for the final evaluation of the research workshops, data and validation (Table 1). When I replayed the videos of the drama improvisation, scenes opened a space for children to listen and see themselves (Sellers, 2009). It became an effective way to allow myself "slowing down and tuning into the children's performance" (Sellers, 2009, p. 170) that also enabled my reflexive understanding to emerge.

Children's arts journals. Reflection refers to a metacognitive activity (e.g., oral discussion, pictorial or textual entries in a journal) that is "designed to promote the children's awareness of their thinking, learning and meaning-making process" (Crumpler, 2003, pp. 19–20). According to Edwards (2001), one of the major advantages of using qualitative research with young children is that reflexivity allows the examination of often "messy and constantly changing contexts of early childhood" (p. 123). Therefore, children's arts journals in this investigation served as a form of data presentation (Stephenson, 2004).

Stephenson (2004) explained that visual images explore and express ideas beyond the confines of written or spoken language. According to Swadener (2005), children's drawing is a form of response that they use their "'semiotic sense' or ability to show things where they cannot always name or discuss" (p. 140). Similarly, Diaz Soto (2005) suggested that children's drawings are a form of "visualizing voice... understanding that visual representations have functioned as a form of communication since the earliest cave drawings of ancient peoples to the present" (p. 9). Since the drawing and the narrative that accompanies the art work (e.g., picture) are claimed to be a powerful means of data collection (Einarsdottir, Dockett, & Perry, 2009), I also video-recorded the process of the children making arts journals. As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, all child a/r/tographers engaged with

reflexivity as they performed in improvisation scenes (through introspectiveness) and shared their improvisation experiences in focussed discussions and arts journals.

Principal a/r/tographer's reflective journals. Keeping a reflective journal is a powerful way for artists and educators to represent their experiences. It allows both professional and personal elements to remain interwoven while simultaneously portraying changes in belief, comprehension, and attitudes (Darell, 2003). Being a participant researcher, it was impossible for me to make any field notes during the workshops, so I made use of the a/r/tographer's reflective journals to record my surprises and queries.

I wrote about my different roles, e.g., an artist, and/ or researcher and/ or teacher in a personal reflective journal. I did this after each workshop and whenever I felt the need to reflect or record an idea. For examples:

1. During the Pilot Study, I discovered some incomprehensible data about HaHa going on and off the stage in a drama improvisation scene that I wrote:

    "Why did HaHa always wandering around in the scene? Is he too young to concentrate?" (Reflective Journal-20130120)

2. Another example located in the main study at the first time was when I encountered child resistance. It was from Ironman when he refused my suggestion of being a kind crocodile. I marked:

    "How come he refused the suggestion? Is it about being daring? Or being brave?" (Reflective Journal-20131008)

These texts allowed me to reflexively inquire and reflect upon my observations about children in the improvisation workshops, on a weekly basis. By getting into the details of the improvisation workshops, I was able to ask questions about my observation. These texts also illuminated connections among the data and became the lines of flight mapping contiguity

and excess ideas in new ways. As a reflexive a/r/tographer, I was continuously having an

"ongoing conversation" (Berg, 2001, p. 139) with myself while collecting, analysing, and

interpreting data. I was not reporting the findings as facts, but rather I was attempting to

provide insights into the experiences of participants and how these insights come to

existence.

Data Analysis Strategies

Multiple data analysis strategies were used in the study. First of all, arto-rhizomatic

maps were drawn to visualise the *lines of articulation* and *lines of flight*. By mapping the data

on the maps according to the a/r/tographic analytical devices of *contiguity* and *excess*, similar

and surprising data were located and sorted as primary findings. Next, Deleuzian analytical

devices of *becoming, presence, major and minor, power relations,* and *affect* were used to

further examine and regroup the sorted findings into themes. Lastly, in responding to the

research questions, the findings were presented, interpreted and discussed with aesthetics of

Daoism, aesthetics of drama improvisation, and Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts.

A/r/tographic analytical devices – *contiguity* and *excess*. A/r/tographic rendering is

about creating theoretical spaces "to explore artistic ways of knowing and being research"

(Springgay et al., 2005, p. 899). Two of the six a/r/tographic renderings, *contiguity* and *excess*

are used in the data analysis. *Contiguity* refers to ideas that lie close to one another. In

a/r/tography, knowledge and meanings are inter- and-intra-relational through text, image and

art, with the multiple roles of participants (children and I) as

artists-and-researchers-and-teachers. Contiguity concerns ideas that are related and emerging.

This approach "enables an outsider [teacher] to view an event from the inside [children's

aesthetic encounters]" (Alexander, 2003, p. 5).

As Figure 12 shows, each of the participants (children and I) is an a/r/tographer who

contributes to layers of findings. When these multiple-layers of data were mapped among the

children, new knowledge or meaning for aesthetic education may emerge. *Excess* is a surprise referring to whether other varied possibilities have occurred. It is a "continual process of exploration" of "how things come into being" (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 908). After identifying surprise about the research process or data that leads into an in-depth study of an issue, insight or meaning could emerge.

Improvisation as a theatrical performance is an open system, full of surprises and unexpectedness with interruptions, rejections and blockages (Abbott, 2007; Johnston, 2006; Leep, 2008; Salinsky & Frances-White, 2008). In order to survive in the scene to carry on the narrative development, all participants created verbal and non-verbal cues after reading verbal and/ or non-verbal cues. These cues became happenings in the scene. These aspects of improvisation were in harmony with the postmodern nature of the rhizome. The happenings in improvisation scenes could also be multiplied, in-between and relational rhizomatic happenings that worked against linear logic (Chapters 4, 5). After identifying the ideas of *contiguity* (similarities) and *excess* (surprise) from the maps young children's aesthetic encounters were mapped.
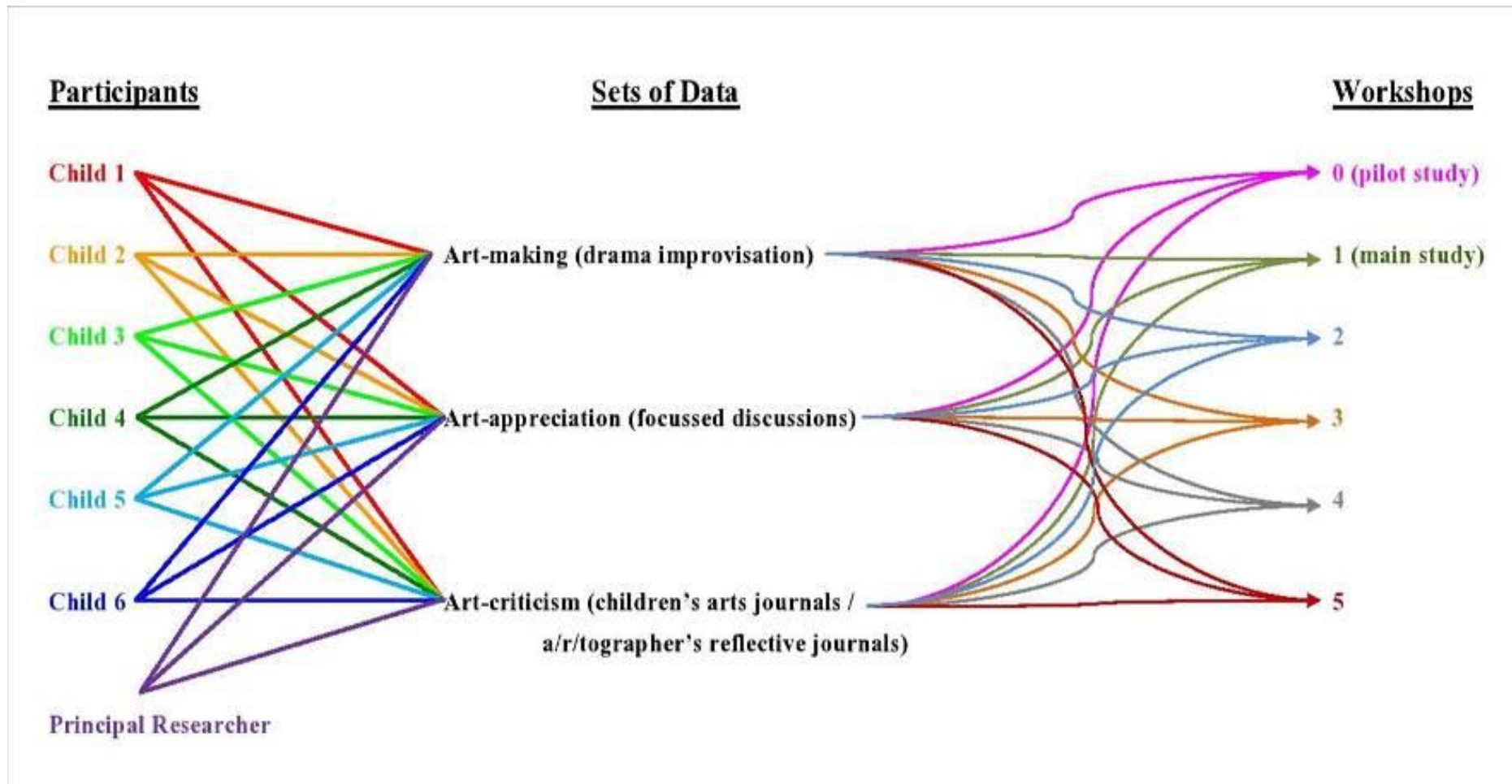
Figure 12. Multiple layers of data.

Mapping lines of flight. Inspired by Sellers (2010) who used rhizomatic mapping of "lines of flight" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 3) in her qualitative case study of curriculum research, I developed the arto-rhizomatic mapping for revisiting the pilot data. In this section, I first explain the basic idea of lines of flight and then introduce the process of mapping the lines of flight.

The mapping works with the two basic principles of the rhizome: "lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories" and "lines of flight, movements of deterritorialisation and destratification" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 3). Lines of articulation can be understood as recursive discourses and practices. Lines of flight are visualisers of how things are inter- and intra-connected and "evolve in creative mutations" (Lorraine, 2005, p. 144). That indicates emerging happenings through diversified movement towards change (Parr, 2005). Deterritorialisation is "the operation of the line of flight" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 508) that enhances the "creative potential of an assemblage" (Parr, 2005, p. 67). Taking the pilot study as an example, the child participants performed their understanding of aesthetic encounters with drama improvisation. Thus, two basic happenings emerged: the improvisation scenes (acting activities) and aesthetic aspects. Further the happenings emerged as the workshop went on, for example, happenings of characters, actor-selves, aesthetic properties, the physical space of the workshop studio, and the immediate presence of the imaginative spaces of improvisation scenes. These happenings were mapped to show children's aesthetic encounters. – The data shows how they played out their understanding of aesthetics. By drawing the lines of flight of both child actors' verbal (dialogues) and non-verbal (movements, expressions and gestures) data, the process of their aesthetic encounters were visualised.

Rhizomatic mapping is an open system that is unpredictable and connectable, yet reversible and detachable (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Martin & Kamberelis, 2013). It is also an ongoing inquiry emphasising the in-between relations that consist of multiple entrances and exits where conclusions are not a concern (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). It involves a complex reciprocal relationship of various territories. Those territories are the imaginative immediate presences of improvisation scenes or the space in the dance-studio workshop, characters in drama improvisation scenes, and the actor-self. Each of these territories becomes an individual (singular) territory (happening). Like a rhizome plant, these happenings connect (*grow* in Deleuzo-Guattarian terms) ceaselessly to one another just as "any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 7). From this perspective, these happenings gradually became a collective happening without a specific end or entry points, and without beginnings and endings. Generating rhizomatic happenings that were "open and connectable in all of its dimensions" disrupted the linear progression that "always comes back to the same" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 12). Happenings in improvisation are similar to a rhizome of multiplicity, in-between and relationality that work against linear logic (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

Unlike drawing or painting, rhizomatic mapping does not have points, "… only lines" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 9) that are lines of flight. This system of de-territorialised lines of flight "opens possibilities for connections between what otherwise may be regarded as disparate thoughts, ideas or actions" (Sellers, 2010, p. 85). These connections become a network or a hub where different territories meet; that is, the collective happening in which different happenings interplay. Taking Sellers's (2010) research as an example, she first stated the lines of articulation (the actions in the video recording) in her early childhood curriculum research, by drawing a picture to visualise the scene young children played (Sellers, 2010, p. 567, Map 1). The first picture might seem just like a two-dimension version

of the video recording. The words on the picture were discursive and did not seem to align with each other in a sensible manner. Then based on the first picture, Sellers drew a second picture to further illustrate the movement and relationships among the happenings and participants (p. 569, Map 2). The second picture added the lines of flight, that is, observations and comments that the researcher made (e.g., brief dialogues, emotions, actions). These details provided new data to support the scene. The discursive data was then mapped and the process of aesthetic encounters emerged.

Based on Sellers's (2009) rhizomatic mapping, I developed an arts-based version. I used arto-rhizomatic mapping to visualise how young children experienced and responded to aesthetic encounters within the context of drama improvisation. The process of their aesthetic encounters with improvisations also illuminated the environments that were required to facilitate such aesthetic encounters. As the different happenings in the drama improvisation scenes interplayed, each improvisation scene became a collective happening of aesthetic encounters where children interplayed with/ in/ through the happenings.

The process of data analysis for the main study. There were a total of 22 drama improvisation scenes in the five workshops with solo, pair and group works. The workshops were conducted in a private dance studio without any scenographic supports (e.g., costume, props, setting, lighting and sounds). Each scene included a mapping of individual lines of articulation (the actual storyline) and lines of flight (my observations). In response to the first research question about how young children experienced and responded to aesthetic encounters through drama improvisation, arto-rhizomatic mapping was used. It was used to examine a selected exemplary scene as it consisted of the nine found characteristics of aesthetic encounters. All 22 improvisation scenes were mapped by the lines of flight with the a/r/tographic analytical tools of *contiguity* and *excess* to illuminate the process of young children's aesthetic encounters. Together with the Deleuzian theoretical and analytical tools:

becoming, presence, major and minor, power, and *affect* (Chapter 2), the nine characteristics regrouped into three themes namely *decisiveness, introspectiveness* and *empathy*. These three themes were identified as the essential elements to produce young children's aesthetic encounters with/ through/ in improvisation scenes, focussed discussions and the children's arts journals.

 Ebbs and flows of the data through intersecting lines of flight. This new data mapping strategy worked along with the essence of a/r/tographic research in that the rhizome in a/r/tography presents a world of complexity and a never-ending exploration (Beare, 2009). Considering the relational nature of a/r/tographic research, I decided to examine the data of the main study with the questions and insights found in the pilot study. Re-visiting the pilot data with an arto-rhizomatic mapping opened a new possibility for analysing and understanding the data of the main study. I discovered some of the limitations of coding. Those are that its linear data-analysis approach was not coherent with the concept of rhizome. Instead, thinking with Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of rhizome opened up new ways of thinking and seeing with the data. For example, as the concept of rhizome emphasises the notions of in-between and relational, I wondered what findings would be produced if I interwove the pilot study data with the study data? What insights could be found for my identities of artist, researcher and teacher? What kind of alternative understanding could be found for young children's aesthetic encounters? What kinds of environments were required to facilitate such encounters? With these queries in mind, the pilot data acted not as an extra set of evidence, but another set of inputs to interweave with the data of main study in the arto-rhizomatic mapping. Therefore, the arto-rhizomatic mapping became a collective happening. In this collective happening, the data of the main study was problematised. It was done by more complex interplay among the perspectives of aesthetics, drama improvisation and the concept of rhizome with the pilot data.

Ethical Considerations

In accordance with the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at the Hong Kong Institute of Education, an ethics application was submitted and approved for this project (Appendix A, B). To inform the documentation, I used a child-centred approach that included the research information letter, parent consent and child consent form (Appendix C, D, E). The ethical considerations of this investigation drew from Alderson's (1995) research which she conducted for Barnardo (a large UK childcare organisation. That organisation is famous for policy and research with children and young people). Throughout the inquiry I remained cognisant of the following ethical considerations: respect for the person; minimisation of harm and maximisation of benefits (e.g., freedom for verbal and physical expressions); informed consent; voluntary participation; respect for privacy and confidentiality; avoidance of conflict of interest; and power-relation sensitivity (Cullen, Hedges & Bone, 2011).

To implement the child-centred approach, I was aware of the ethical considerations of researching with children. As in this research, in order to support the child participants' involvement as co-a/r/tographers, I took on the four strategies suggested by Priscilla Alderson's (2008), an experienced early childhood education researcher:

1. Avoid 'talking down' to children by using over-simple words and concepts, restricting them into making only superficial responses";

2. Try to invite children with relevant experience so they can "give much more informed responses";

3. Beware of misleading the children by "over-complicated or poorly explaining terms, topics and methods"; and

4. Be reflexive on the "common assumption by adults". (p. 278, emphasis in original)

To obtain the informed consents from the child participants, we went through the Child Consent form at the beginning of each workshop. So the child participants were reminded of their rights to participate as well as withdraw. The child participants acknowledged their understanding of their rights by putting Mr. Smiley stickers under the column of 'agree'.

Roles of Principal Researcher and Child Participants

A/r/tography problematise the traditional character of researcher because it allows overlapping identities of researcher as "artist-and-teacher-and-researcher who examines educational phenomena through an artistic understanding and inquiry process" (Springgay et al., 2008, p. 87). An a/r/tographic approach enhances the practice of the teacher-and-children embodied knowing. During the a/r/tographic research activities (e.g., drama improvisation), teacher and children are supposed to act and react spontaneously (no pre-scripted dialogues or movements). All participants have to perform as they think simultaneously, especially among their multiple and overlapping roles as a/r/tographers.

Role of principal researcher. In the role as principal a/r/tographer, I was involved in three roles (artist, researcher, and teacher) during the research. As an artist, I outlined the design and implementation of the workshops and also acted as a participant while facilitating the drama improvisation activities. As a researcher, I developed the research framework and conducted the literature review of the research. I also organised and conducted the workshops, observations, and data analysis. Lastly, I made ongoing reflections during the process of the research as a teacher. The multiple and overlapping roles of a/r/tographer had made my research process much more complex than traditional qualitative research. For example, while I was conducting the drama workshops, my role as an artist was in constant conflict with my role as a teacher and a mother of a child participant. I was often found maintaining classroom control with hand signals while I was narrating the story on the stage during the

improvisation scenes. There were also situations wherein I had to work on my daughter Isa's emotional turbulence while conducting the improvisation activities.

Another example about my challenging role as a/r/tographer is also about being a participant-researcher. This problematises the traditional ways of thinking about the role of the researcher, even as an active participant. Usually, an active participant is at times actively involved but a/r/tographer takes this further. My objectivities as a researcher were blurred by my total involvement in the drama improvisation scenes. During the workshops, I could not take any written field notes or have any time to recollect my mind before tapping into the next activities. I had to act and react to the child a/r/tographers spontaneously without considering much about my researcher role. Thanks to the technology that with help of the video recordings, I could step back and recap thoughts and concerns in the workshops. These recaps together with my a/r/tographer's reflective journal drew me back to the role of the principal researcher.

Role of child participants. The children participated in drama workshops (as artists), inquired (as researchers) and reflected (as teachers) upon emerging issues and themes of aesthetic encounters. Through active participation (in acting), observation (appreciation), and reflection (criticism, focussed discussions and children's arts journals), the child a/r/tographers engaged in the process of aesthetic encounters. These types of hands-on experiences were acts of searching one's senses and finding one's voice (Greene, 1995) that allowed meaning and implications to be revealed to the child a/r/tographers. Therefore, both the child participants and I were a/r/tographers who took on the three roles of artist-and-researcher-and-teacher. We did this to identify and explore aesthetic encounters among young children.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Trustworthiness is the quality assurance of qualitative research, which resonates with the validity of quantitative studies. In qualitative research, validity is about the 'truth value' of the findings and the accuracy of the researcher in interpreting the research participants' experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In other words, it refers to whether "the research has captured important features of the field and has analysed them with integrity" (Edwards, 2001, p. 124). A validated research produces trustworthiness. Like quantitative validity, trustworthiness of qualitative research builds on "careful work in constructing the research design and approach, conducting the research ethically and honestly, analyzing findings carefully, and providing a presentation of results informed by rich descriptions" (Borman et al., 2006, p. 130). While quantitative studies seeks for *internal and external validities*, *reliability* and *objectivity* (Newby, 2013), trustworthiness of qualitative research looks at *credibility, transferability, dependability,* and *confirmability* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). *Credibility* concerns the truthfulness of the findings, while *transferability* looks at the issue of whether the findings can be applicable in other contexts. *Dependability* refers to the consistence and repeatability of the findings, and lastly, *confirmability* regards the objectivity of the researcher.

Although this widely used trustworthiness qualitative validation model is generally referenceable to the reliability and validity of quantitative research, the scope of the two validations are ontologically different. The quantitative research requires *accurate evidence* of the (single) truth (Newby, 2013) but qualitative research believes in multiple truths (Lather, 1993) and strikes for *understanding* (Creswell, 2013). Thus, qualitative validation seeks *meaningfulness* instead of *generalisability* of the findings (Sullivan, 2004). Yet Lincoln and Guba's trustworthiness model is insufficient to provide a thoughtful consideration or response to postmodern research which is complex and multiple in nature. It is because

postmodern research, particularly rhizomatic research, against single authorship that it moves from linearity to multi-centred complexity (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Lather, 1993). It also signatures in temporality that 'truth' and 'findings' are localised, temporary, and situational (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Lather, 1993). Nevertheless, the continuity nature of rhizome, means the study's findings are changeable, and it further complicated the validation on 'truthfulness' of the research. Therefore, in order to achieve ontologically consistence and coherence, Lather's (1993) *transgressive validity* was considered for the study.

Transgressive validity. With the array of postmodernism and post-structuralism, Lather (1993) pushed the boundaries of the possibilities for validity that she posited validity as "a space of constructed visibility of the practices of methodology" (p. 676) and as "an incitement to discourse" (p. 673). She placed validity in a broader perspective by reconceptualising validity as "a dispersion, circulation and proliferation of counter-practices of authority" (Lather, 1993, p. 677), through integrating reflexivity, ethics and politics in the process (Newton, 2009). Therefore, transgressive validity focuses on "mov[ing] discussion from the epistemological criteria of validity as a relation of correspondence between thought and its object to the generation of counter-practices of authority grounded in the crisis of representation" (Lather, 1993, p. 676) by using "a reflexive exploration of our own practices of representation" (Woolgar, 1988, p. 98 as cited in Lather, 1993). What is so profound about Lather's transgressive validity concept is that she challenges and advocates for the fundamental value of what validity can mean and function. Her reconceptualised validation methods allow qualitative research to shift from representation of truth to "foreground how discourse worlds the world" (Lather, 1993, p. 675). She emphasised that 'truth' is produced by human through very specific time, space, and material practices. This thought implies that it is not important whether representation of truth is possible but the meaningfulness of the localised experience is more important.

There are four frames of transgressive validity: *simulacra/ ironic validity, Lyotardian paralogy/ neo-pragmatic validity, Derridean rigour/ rhizomatic validity*, and *voluptuous validity/ situated validity.* In *simulacra/ ironic validity*, the truth is presented as a problem, while *Lyotardian paralogy/ neo-pragmatic validity* concerns the "undecideables, limits, paradoxes and complexities" (Fox & Bayat, 2007, p. 110) with an emphasis on multiple interpretations of data. *Derridean rigour/ rhizomatic validity* questions how rigorously reflexivity on the multiple yet overlapping data is mapped through "creativity that arises out of social practices" (Lather, 1993, p. 680) that such creativity indicates the ability to transform. Lastly, *voluptuous validity/ situated validity* examine the situated or embodied accounts of the data through reflexivity.

Reflexivity as a tool of *rhizomatic validity*. After learning about how the four frames of transgressive validities works, Lather's "*rhizomatic validity*" (Lather, 1993, p. 681) was used for it aligned with the epistemological, theoretical and methodological framework of the study. Drawing from the concept of rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), Lather (1993) developed *rhizomatic validity* for postmodern qualitative research. According to Creswell (2013), rhizomatic validity questions about "proliferation, crossings, and overlaps without underlying structures or deeply rooted connections" (p. 247). It allows researchers to look into "taxonomies, constructs, and interconnected networks whereby the reader jumps from one assemblage to another and consequently moves from judgment to understanding" (p. 247). Rhizomatic validity acknowledges multiplicity yet locality, complexity yet tentativeness and partiality nature of rhizome (Lather, 1993). Taking McWilliam's (1995) research on pre-service teacher education as an example, Lather (1993) explained that by moving from hierarchies to networks, rhizomatic validity emphasises using researcher's reflexivity as a tool to trouble the intersections, re- and de-territorialisation, and multi-centred data and findings. Reflexivity is claimed as the "new canon" for generating counter-practices

(Rajchman, 1985). It is "a questioning text" that "signals tentativeness and partiality"

(McWilliam, 1995, p. 271). It is a "self-examination" practice for postmodern or

poststructural researchers (Jones, Browne, & Keating, 2005, p. 17). It doesn't aim at claiming

expert authority but allows "both researcher and researched to rethink their attitudes and

practices" (Lather, 1993, p. 681). This rhizomatic validity met my needs as a novice

researcher who was anxious about being over-familiar with the data by working relentlessly

for years. Using reflexivity to rethink the study through the multiple and in-between roles of

a/r/tographer allowed me to examine the same set of data with different perspectives (i.e.

from a dramatist, researcher, and a teacher). These repeated examinations with

multi-perspectives complicated and further troubled the mainstream practice. It also

challenged my understanding of my own perspective, attitude and practices. This kind of

reflexivity acted like a sword with two blades that prevented over-familiarity of data, as well

as forcing in-depth self-reflexivity. Therefore, rhizomatic validity not only illuminated the

trustworthiness of the study but also embodied de-authorship and multiple truth nature of

rhizomatic research. However, rhizomatic validity also has some conditions:

1. I worried that showing all the flaws of the study might project a feeling of my

   immaturity as an independent and reliable researcher.

2. Besides, being reflexive can become an act of self-indulgence. Lenzo (1995) and

   Newton (2009) warned that taking reflexivity approach as the research

   trustworthiness can be a trap to allow the researcher's own enthusiasm overrides or

   interferes with the supposed observations.

Implementation of rhizomatic validity in this study. With all these worries and

warnings in my mind, I accept learning to be a rigorous postmodern researcher. I am also

determined to avoid, doing a 'self-satisfied' reflexivity. By referencing to the comments that

Lather (1993) made for McWilliam's (1995) research, the rhizomatic validity of this study

was developed in three phases:

1. *An initial reflexive phase* – This was the research designing phase. The theoretical

   and methodological designs of the study were "put under scrutiny by moving back

   and forth among various contestatory discourses" (Lather, 1993, p. 681). For

   example, the theoretical framework was not fixed in the beginning of the research

   but was fixed through a continuous process of development throughout the study.

   Also, I tested all the research instruments and materials with a pilot study (Detail

   information will be presented in Chapter 4). When I encountered some discursive

   data after coding the pilot data, I did not 'swipe it under the carpet' but kept being

   reflexive. I did this to find out what caused the problem, and eventually located

   that the linearity of coding approach was not the best choice for this rhizomatic

   research data analysis.

2. *An empirical phase* – In this phase, I focused on "student-teacher constructions" (p.

   681) of aesthetic experiences. For example, I encountered some child resistances in

   the main study. I could have treated these child resistances as *children's*

   naughtiness but through multi-perspectives on reflexivity I found that power

   relations were realised as an alternative understanding of the child resistances.

3. *A final reciprocal phase* – Refers to a "reflection in action and an extended

   co-theorizing process that contested and reconstructed the researcher's reading of

   the phase II data" (p. 681). An intangible environment was discovered as an

   essential aspect for young children to experience and respond to aesthetic

   encounters. It is a good example of my being repeatedly reflexive on my

   perspectives and practices with different research roles towards the same set of

   collected data. With further reflexivity, the study was able to reconceptualise how

aesthetic education should be fostered through aesthetic encounters. Thus, it enabled me to make recommendations to educators on *what to teach* and *how to teach* aesthetic encounters.

To summarise, rhizomatic validity was developed and implemented though my tenacious and relentless reflexivity on the study throughout each stage of the research. It was also developed in each of my in-between roles, i.e., as a dramatist, educator, researcher and an inevitable role of being a mother of a child participant. Learning from Newton's (2009) experience, I realised that the more transparent I can be about my values and assumptions as a dramatist, educator and researcher, the more valid my research can be. In addition, my reflexivity in the study I did not stop at realising what I did and how I did it. But, I was persistent in being reflexive until it reached an insightful understanding or caused a shift of perspective. For examples, to carefully construct the research, the pilot study was made 8 months before the main study. That allowed sufficient time for me to organise and be reflexive on the experience of the pilot study. So adjustment could be made to ensure the process and quality of the main study. As the principal a/r/tographer, I provided active and ongoing reflexivity on reconstruction of interpretations for the research concept and design (Chapters 1, 2, 3) and process (Chapters 3, 4), data and findings (Chapters 4, 5, 6). I also used it with relevant theories, and questioning of how these interpretations came to be (Chapters 5, 6, 7). Child participants were also involved in the reflexivity through focussed discussions and arts journals on each drama improvisation experience in the workshops (Chapters 5, 6). To establish trustworthiness of the study, "discrepant data", "the facts unfit to fit categorical schemes" and the "uses and collides" ideas or findings were drawn into discourses and produced affects – on our "attitudes and practices" (Lather, 1993, p. 681) (Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7). The transformations of child participants are recorded in Chapter 5 and mine in Chapter 7.

In order to avoid 'self-satisfied' reflexivity, I used three strategies for caution, (a) on-going supervision; (ii) participants' review; (c) public yet professional academic exchanges. Firstly, all my supervisors had monitored every research design, data analysis, and the finding discussions from the Pilot Study to the main study, to keep the process clear and transparent. My three supervisors had expertise in early childhood and one had an expertise in drama. We discussed each process in details with at least two angles, i.e., arts (drama) and education (early childhood). Apart from this, we constantly cross-checked that how the theories (aesthetics, drama improvisation, and concept of rhizome) were used and developed during each stage of the research.

Secondly, apart from focussed discussions after every drama improvisation scene, the fifth workshop of the main study was dedicated to a participants' review. Like 'peers checking' in quantitative research, in this specific focussed discussion I presented the data (video clips of the drama improvisation scenes) and primary findings of the study to the six child participants. They then gave conclusive responses towards their aesthetic experiences with drama improvisation. They used verbal discussions and non-verbal mediums, i.e., drawings and artworks of the children's arts journals to express their thoughts and feelings on the presented data and the primary findings.

Lastly, to raise the integrity and trustworthiness of the study, I put the study *on the stage* for public criticism in front of academic and professional circles. I presented it in six different international conferences, including disciplines of Arts and Humanities, Early Childhood Education, and Theatre Education, to test different aspects of the study. For example, at the Singapore Drama Educators Association (SDEA) Theatre Conference, I presented *Aesthetic encounter through imagination* (HO, 2013b) to challenge the fundamental research concept on the feasibility of fostering drama improvisation. I did this exercise to convey aesthetic encounters with young children aged 2-5 years. Then in the

Conference on Deleuze's Cultural Encounters with the New Humanities, I presented

Arto-rhizomatic mapping and Deleuze (Ho, 2014a) to test the theoretical and methodological

frameworks. I wanted to test that whether the use of Deleuzia theories as analytical tools in

the newly developed data analysis mapping was clearly articulated. Besides putting the study

to the test through various international conference presentations, I also submitted one of my

conference papers *Aesthetic environments for young children in Hong Kong* (Ho, 2014b) to

an international journal called *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*. The paper is now

under peers' review.

　　　With these three strategies for caution, I was engaged in relentless reflexivity not only

by myself, but also throughout the supervisions of my supervisors. Along with it child

participants' review, and the public yet professional academic exchanges as well. Therefore,

through constant reflexivity, the design, process, generated data and findings of the study

were validated. By documenting my reflexive struggles and insights, the integrity and

trustworthiness of the study was built and presented.

Limitations to the Study

　　　According to the nature of rhizomatic research and drama improvisation, the results of

this investigation cannot be generalised to the general population, such as kindergarten

children in Hong Kong. The rhizomatic research and drama improvisation is bound in a

specific time and space. As well as it was a small scale research with a specific group of

young children for understanding their experiences and responses to aesthetic encounters.

Participant selection was purposive. Due to the fact that specific children were invited to

participate in the research, i.e., Cantonese-speaking families only, during a specific period of

time, the study was not replicable (Gay & Airasian, 2003). Providing these workshops in

different contexts (for example if children are unfamiliar to each other or located in a

classroom environment) will produce different findings.

The art form of drama improvisation was used as a research tool to investigate the process and environments of young children's aesthetic encounters. I purposefully designed the drama improvisation workshops as closed-door performances. I did this as the aim of the research was focussed on how young children experience and respond to aesthetic encounters. It was not the purpose of the research to perform the improvisation scenes openly to public audience. Though, my supervisor (in Workshop 3) and some parents of the child participants (in Workshop 5) observed in some workshops. Thus, having children performing openly to public will also produce different observations.

Summary

The third chapter started with the research aims and research questions, and the paradigm of the study. With the lens of postmodernism, three different areas of study: aesthetics, drama improvisation and the philosophical concept of rhizome were grafted together to develop the skeleton of this qualitative research. Based on the present aesthetic education in the Hong Kong early childhood education context, the chapter attempted to uncover the rationales and practices of how this newly grafted perspective could make the research methodological, ethical and analytical choices, transparent for the readers.

The second part of this chapter accounted for the choice of a/r/tography as the research methodology that influenced the process of data collection and analysis. Discussion on the postmodern concept of rhizome in a/r/tography reported how the inter- and intra-related nature of rhizome underpinned the research design. Through the detailed descriptions of the research methods, the ways of responding to research questions and the different applications of my a/r/tographer roles were also made visible. The section also discussed the data-generation strategy in details. With the lesson learnt from the pilot study (Chapter 4), arto-rhizomatic mapping was introduced. The last part of the chapter presented the limitations of the study. It also discussed how 'reflexivity' was used as the research trustworthiness

validation under the postmodern qualitative research concept of rhizomatic validity (Lather,

1993). The next chapter reports the important learning and findings from the pilot study,

which serves as an essential foundation for the main study.

Chapter 4: *Technical Rehearsals* – The Pilot Study

In Chapter 3, the detailed methods of the a/r/tographic research were presented by taking drama improvisation as the art medium. It presented a postmodern ontological and epistemological position of the study that led to the choice of the qualitative arts-based research of a/r/tography. Thereafter the research was followed by an explanation of the choices of methods that addressed the two key research questions: the process of young children's aesthetic encounters and the environments that are required to facilitate such encounters. The second part of the chapter focussed on the a/r/tographic approach in the data collection and data analysis strategies.

Chapter 4 describes the valuable experience that I learnt from a pilot study. The pilot study of this research was a feasibility study which used drama improvisation to investigate young children's experiences and responses towards aesthetic encounters. This chapter covers the definition and value of pilot studies. It also examines (a) whether drama improvisation works with young children; (b) the flow of the workshop and; (c) the data analysis strategy. The chapter ends with the application of the pilot study in the main study of the research. Thus, it contributes to strengthen the analytical framework of the research.

Definition and Value of Pilot Study

A pilot study is a trial run done while preparing the main study. It is also known as feasibility study that tries out research techniques and methods. Therefore, a pilot study will work according to a clearly designed research topic, questions and methods, and follow a tentative research schedule. By trying out all aspects of the research (e.g., techniques and methods), the researcher will be able to see how well the desired process and procedures will work in practice. So adaptations and modifications can be made accordingly (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 2010).

You may think that you know well enough what you are doing, but the value of pilot

research cannot be overestimated. Things never work quite the way you envisage, even if you

have done them many times before, and they have a nasty habit of turning out very

differently from how you expected on occasion. (Blaxter, et al., 2010, p. 138-139)

As a novice empirical researcher, I was inexperienced about how to run the process and

procedures at the actual research environment. To make it worse a/r/tography brought in itself,

numerous multiplicities and complexities to the scene. I found myself switching constantly

among three very different roles (artist, researcher, and teacher) at the same time. In order to

keep a better estimate of time, methods and procedures, a pilot study was urged to detect

possible flaws and variables in chosen strategies and instruments (Welman & Kruger,

1999).

The pilot study undertaken in this research was used to try out the workshop and

identify practical problems which might emerge in the methods, processes and procedures,

during the workshop. I had to consider various issues, to examine whether drama

improvisation was an appropriate instrument that can create aesthetic encounters with young

children. Firstly, drama improvisation has certain rules (as discussed in Chapter 2). The child

actors and I followed those rules (e.g., spontaneous and collaborative acting, '*yes, and … no,*

but') to ensure the dramatic activities were in the art form of drama improvisation. Secondly,

I had to consider some vital aspects, as a researcher and teacher, keeping in view the young

age of children and the nature of the non-formal-educational environment. Those aspects

were how to implement the improvisation activities in the private dance studio as there would

be no props, settings or costume supplies. Thirdly, I also considered the dramatic abilities of

the children and whether they would be able to participate fully in the drama improvisation.

Lastly, as the principal a/r/tographer, I wanted to ensure that I should be able to observe the

aesthetic encounters in their purest form. This would enable me to record, reflect upon, and accurately represent the experiences and responses children were exhibiting in the workshop.

A pilot study helps to identify whether the planned methods and instruments will be appropriate. Will the pilot study give advance notices of possibilities where certain methods or techniques could fail? Hence, this pilot study was invaluable for testing the feasibility of the research instruments (the art form of drama improvisation), the data collection instruments (focussed discussions and arts journals), and also the practical details of running the research process and procedures (the run-down of the workshop). The outcome of the pilot study was very useful for the main study as it identified three important issues:

1. It affirmed *drama improvisation is suitable* to work with young children, as young as 2 years old;

2. *Time constraints* might pose negative impact on collecting data for the study;

3. It also brought out the issues of the *discrepant data* that led to the reconsideration of data analysis strategy.

The following section presents the detailed account of the pilot study in relation to the three issues mentioned above.

The Pilot Study – A Dry-run of Young Children's Aesthetic Encounters with Drama Improvisation

The pilot study followed the proposed design of the study that was stated in Chapters 1 and 3. The pilot study was executed on 20 January, 2013 according to the research design after ethical approval for the study was obtained. The execution of the study was done after determining the strategy of methods, process and procedures. My supervisors were also very concerned about whether young children could compose drama improvisation performances. Usually, it was not a common exercise to use drama with young children without a pre-text. Besides, whether drama improvisation could create aesthetic encounters was another key

concern for us. Therefore, the pilot study was used for trying drama improvisation as the research instrument with a group of young children.

In the pilot study of young children's aesthetic encounters, six preschool children, with 3 boys and 3 girls who aged 2–5 years were invited to engage. The pilot study was conducted in a one-off 3-hour drama improvisation workshop at a private dance studio. As Table 3 shows that the first 15 minutes of the workshop were used to understand the ethical procedures of the study carried out with child participants. The aim of the research workshop, their rights of participation and withdrawal, and the consent of video recording were explained in details. Each child participant was given a Child Consent Form that indicates their understanding and agreement to participate in the workshop. Then the child participants co-planned the improvisation activities with me. Next, the child participants became child actors and engaged in drama improvisation games which were solo, pair and group performances. The games continued for about 66 minutes. In-between the performances, there were focussed discussions for child participants to share their thoughts and feelings of their immediate experiences. In the end, for about 45 minutes, children reflected in arts journal-making, showing their drama improvisation experiences.

Table 3.

The detailed rundown of the one-off 3-hour workshop of the pilot study

Time (Total 180 minutes)	Activities	Data Generation Strategies		
15 **minutes**	Child participants arriving and set-up video camera			Reflective journal
15 **minutes**	Ethical procedures	Video recording		
10 **minutes**	Co-planning the improvisation activities			
30 **minutes**	Drama games, solo and pair performances, and focussed discussions		Focussed discussion	
15 **minutes**	Toilet break			
45 **minutes**	Group drama improvisation and focussed discussions	Video recording	Focussed discussion	
45 **minutes**	Children's arts journal-making and tidy-up		Children's arts journals	

Identified Issue 1 - Drama Improvisation Is a Suitable Instrument for the Study

As elements of both aesthetics and drama improvisation were identified, thus, drama improvisation was affirmed as a suitable instrument for the study. The six child participants included *Big Elephant, Buzz Light Year, HaHa, Isa, Sleeping Beauty and Swordy.* The children were named with their choice of pseudonyms, except Isa who was the only child who insisted to use her real name. Without any training in drama or artistic instructions, the child participants claimed their actors' pre-positions and understanding of the roles. They did it by acting out the facial expressions, gestures, and body movements as though they were running from a fire in an improvised scene called *Forest on fire*. In these happenings, I was first assigned as a narrator by the children in the improvisation scene. Then I shifted to my researcher role in the focussed discussions and at last as a teacher when children were making the art reflective journals. This drama improvisation workshop provided multiple opportunities for children to explore, enact, and reflect upon their own aesthetic encounters.

Artistic (drama improvisation scenes), textual (focussed discussions and my reflective journal) and visual data (video recording and the children's arts journals) were collected (Figure 13).
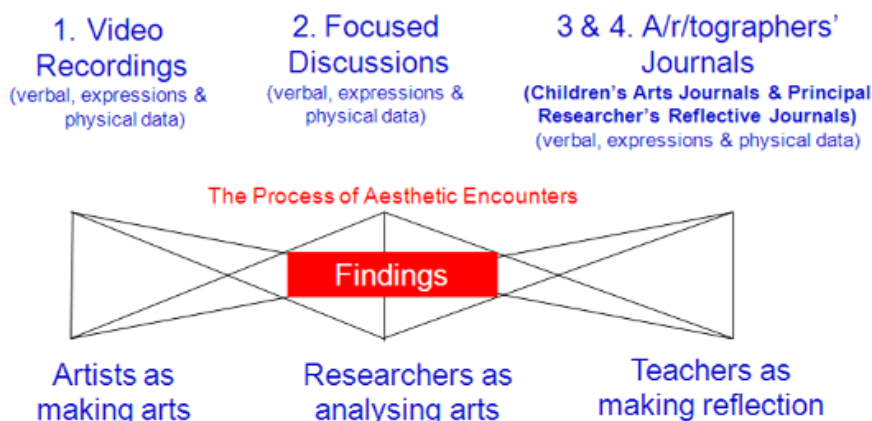
Figure 13. The inter- and intra-relations of data in a/r/tographic analytical method.

Except the 30 minutes for introductory set-up and toilet break, a 141-minute workshop video and photos of 7 drama improvisation scenes, focused upon discussions and children's arts journals. Those scenes were recorded and transcribed with the nodes managed by NVivo 10 software. All transcripts were first coded by pre-set concepts that were drawn from literature review. By sorting out the frequent coded words, 10 nodes were identified (Figure 14). After coding, sorting, grouping and regrouping of similar data, themes and the a/r/tographer's reflection emerged. These themes were aesthetic experiences and response of artists through: Presence on Stage, Reflection as Researchers, and Reflection as Teacher. Using these three themes, discussion were included on: Presence; Presence releases imagination; Representation; Emotional engagement; Relatedness; Tension of being in-between the roles of Artist/ Researcher/ Teacher; and Children enjoying autonomy and respect. As aesthetic encounters were recorded by identifying the elements of aesthetics and drama improvisation (as discussed in Chapter 2), drama improvisation was noted as eligible to convey aesthetic encounters with young children.
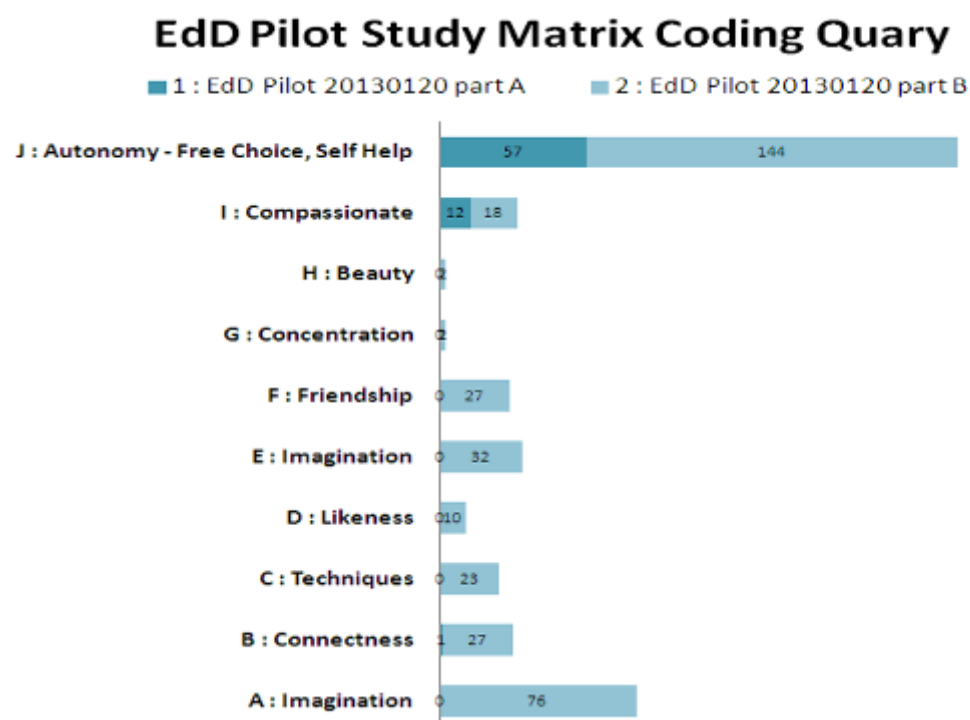
Figure 14. The ten identified nodes of the pilot study.

Identified Issue 2 – Time Constrains

Although aesthetic encounters were recorded in the 3-hour workshop, time constraint was identified as a serious issue. There is no guarantee that any aesthetic encounters might occur in the workshop. Besides, as a participant researcher, I shifted constantly in-between my roles as artist, researcher, and teacher. At times I felt I might have hindered children's artistic responses by being concerned with discipline and time constraints. To mention a few instances, many children were creating chaos by speaking in chorus. In another instance, they were asking for more improvisation activities but there was no time to engage them further. Therefore, after discussing with the child participants, the length of the research workshop for the main study was revised. In order to allow more time to create and observe young children's aesthetic encounters, the main study was extended to five workshops and subjected to 2 hours for each workshop. Yet, the most difficult issue found in the pilot study was when the discrepant data was found.

Identified Issue 3 – The Discrepant Data

Since a/r/tographic research does not follow a standardised data-analysis method, I referred to other a/r/tographic studies. Thereafter different kinds of data-analysis methods were found. For example, rendering reflections through art forms such as paintings or scripts (Durham, 2011; Irwin, 2003; Jevic & Springgay, 2008; Lea et al., 2011), a/r/tographic commentary (McLennan, 2007), or a coding approach (Fredriksen, 2011; White, 2012). After finding these approaches, I followed the general qualitative practice of using coding and reflection methods for the pilot study data analysis (Ho, 2013a). For example, as the study was about children's aesthetic encounters, I went to the literature which states that an aesthetic encounter involves *heightened awareness* (Bundy, 2003) and *concentration.* I used these notions of aesthetic encounters as the pre-codes. I went through the data in video recording and the focussed discussions, and identified any moments or discussions related to

these two pre-codes. Next, these two pre-codes were then grouped under the category of

concentration. Later*,* referring to drama improvisation (Abbott, 2007) a theme called

presence emerged to answer the first research question about how young children experience

and respond to aesthetic encounters. Therefore, *presence* became one of the themes of the

pilot study.

However, since I only looked for moments and discussions related to *heightened*

awareness and *concentration* while coding, the *lapse of concentration* moments or

discussions were completely left out during the coding process. Therefore, I revisited the data

from the pilot study and was surprised to find that some important data became invisible

during the coding process. For example, a single entry in my reflective journal I marked a big

question mark and wrote *"why was "HaHa" always wandering around in the scene? Is he*

too young to concentrate?" (Reflective Journal–20130120), thus HaHa leaving the

improvisation scene caught my attention. Henceforth, I wondered what might have caused

him to leave and re-enter the same improvisation scene. So, I put aside the pre-codes and no

longer considered whether this moment was or was not an example of heightened awareness

or concentration. Instead, I revisited the video recording with this particular reflective journal

note in my mind to investigate what this event had to do with aesthetic encounters. The

two-year old boy named HaHa left the improvisation scene at 3.14 minutes after the play

started and returned to the scene 1.21 minutes later. Though, he then stayed in the play until it

finished and the reason for his absence was unknown. To find out more about his absence, I

went back to all related data and found he seemed to have lost interest in the play. This time,

instead of using a traditional coding approach, I drew a flow chart to illustrate the actual

happenings of that drama improvisation scene. Then I wondered if he was not concentrating

then what was going on in the group. Suddenly, lots of questions came in my mind: Was he

not able to concentrate as he was only two years old? Or was it because the happenings were

not interesting enough to hold his concentration? Or was it caused by some other reason? There, with all these questions spinning in my head, I wondered about my role, HaHa, and the play. However, soon I realised that all of these questions were problematic as I asked myself, why would I have labelled HaHa's leaving as 'lapse of concentration' in the first place? Could this HaHa-happening indicate something other than a concentration issue of a child? By revisiting this HaHa-happening, I started to ask myself questions about the happening and I began to show reflexivity. Being constantly in reflexivity, it signalled me the need for changing the method of data analysis.

Revisiting Pilot Data with Arto-Rhizomatic Mapping

As evident in the HaHa example, I reflected on my data-analysis method. This was the moment when I realised that I had neglected the rhizomatic concept that is embedded in a/r/tography. Though I have attempted to use the codes and themes, but the coding exercise turned out to be a linear model of deductive construction with a reductive nature (Lather, 2004; Martin & Kamberelis, 2013). Based on the usage frequency, coding picked up and built on the most frequently appearing items, but the *odd* data was made invisible. During the practice of sorting, grouping and regrouping of similar data, themes with coherence and patterns emerged, (Jackson, 2013) but there was data (e.g., HaHa leaving the improvisation scene) that was missed and the relationships between the coded data and the missed data became invisible. This aspect was problematic because it went against a relational rhizomatic nature that Deleuze and Guattari (1987) suggest in their "*A Thousand Plateaus*".

Using Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of rhizome, a/r/tography as a research methodology emphasised the relational and in-between nature of rhizome. What this means for the thesis is that I should not take happenings as a "single/ independent entry" but as a "relational and collaborative events". For example, I should not focus on HaHa leaving the improvisation as a singular issue of his lack of concentration. Rather, I should try to find out the relation or

influence of his leaving act in the scene. As a/r/tography is an open investigation, a

comparatively open data-analysis process is suited for the rhizomatic nature of this study.

While working with the pilot data analysis, I began to wonder about an alternative approach.

Could that alternative approach connect the rhizomatic concept for better analysis of the data

belonging to in-between and a multi-relational perspective (e.g., analysing data across the

roles of artist, researcher, and teacher). I turned to rhizomatic research data-analysis methods

for insights after reconceptualising the rationale of the data analysis. As a first step to revisit

the pilot data, some selected physical movements of the improvisation scene were drawn. The

scenes were drawn as pictures and this acted as the lines of articulation. The rest of the data

(my observations, focussed discussions, reflective journals) were added to the picture to

create the lines of flight (Maps 2). By following the lines of flight, I searched for emerging

happening(s) or meaning(s) that revealed responses for the two research questions. However,

to develop the lines of flight, analytical devices were required in the study.

6. : (all aboard) "(in Cantonese) 下
一站森林! (in Mandarin) *Xia yi zhan sen lin!* (in English) *Next station is "Sum Lum"* (meaning forest in Cantonese). "

8b. and are putting away the fire.

9b. is dying in the fire.

10. At the end, announced the death of .

5. : (after finding out Wolf is only returning a scarf) "*Good. We all will take the police train back to the forest!*"

7. : "*We are back to the forest! Oh, my gosh! There is a big fire in the forest! The forest is in fire! What should we do?*"

4. : "*I'm a police train! A police train!* choo choo...choo choo"

8a. is on fire.

9a. :(pulling Narrator's leg) "*Go to hospital ... go to hospital ...*"

3. : (running to the Train Driver) "*Take me, please! It's a big wolf!!!*"

2b. is following quietly.

1. In the beginning, is picking flowers at a forest.

2a. and : (warning) "Here you can't pick flowers..."

	Cinderella		Police HaHa
	Fireman		Train driver
	Narrator		Wolf
	Policewoman	*The numbers indicate the staging of the plot. Details refer to video recording (Appendix G).	

Map 1. Revisiting data of pilot study – Lines of articulation.

8b. and are putting away the fire.

9b. is dying in the fire.

10. At the end, announced the death of .

6. : (all aboard) "(in Cantonese) 下

一站森林! (in Mandarin) *Xia yi zhan sen lin!* (in English) *Next station is "Sum Lum"* (meaning forest in Cantonese). "

7. : "*We are back to the forest! Oh, my gosh! There is a big fire in the forest! The forest is in fire! What should we do?*"

5. : (after finding out Wolf is only returning a scarf) "*Good. We all will take the police train back to the forest!*"

8a. is on fire.

9a. :(pulling Narrator's leg) "*Go to hospital ... go to hospital ...*"

4. : "*I'm a police train!* A police train! choo choo...choo choo"

3. : (running to the Train Driver) "*Take me, please! It's a big wolf!!!*"

2b. is following quietly.

1. In the beginning, is picking flowers at a forest.

2a. and : (warning) "Here you can't pick flowers..."

Side

Stage

Cinderella	Police HaHa		
Fireman	Train driver		
Narrator	wolf		
Policewoman	*The numbers indicate the staging of the plot. Details refer to video recording (Appendix G).		

Narrative developments & tensions		Emotional engagements	
Making bold decisions		Being in presence	
Changes & shifting		Spirit of unity	

Map 2. Revisiting data of pilot study – Lines of flight.

Mapping Aesthetic Elements to Drama Improvisation

From the last scene, happenings from the video and focussed discussions were selected. To present the interweaving lines of flight, this was the only scene recorded with aesthetic encounters. This scene illuminated the process of aesthetic encounters among the children's improvisation and showed how they performed their understanding of aesthetic encounters. The interweaving lines of flight became part of the conversation, to map the movement and gestures of the plots and the actors. In other words, I sketched the scene onto a map like a stage floor plan, bringing several happenings in one map. Thereafter, I generated "very diverse map-tracing, rhizome-root assemblages, with variable coefficients of deterritorialization" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 15). These inputs, which were identical to the improvisation aesthetics, were mapped as the lines of flight (Map 2). Rhizomatic maps were generated for illuminating the process and environment of aesthetic encounters through a Deleuzo-Guattarian reading. The happenings (data) in the drama improvisation scenes were mapped according to Peters' (2009) aesthetics of drama improvisation (Chapter 2) to validate whether any aesthetics of drama improvisation were found. Figure 15 shows the modified analytical framework of the study. Now, I will discuss the six aesthetic elements that are newly identified when I revisited the pilot data using arto-rhizomatic mapping. They included *narrative developments and tensions, changes and shifting, making bold decisions, emotional engagements, being in presence,* and *spirit of unity* (the six yellow circles on the left-top corner).
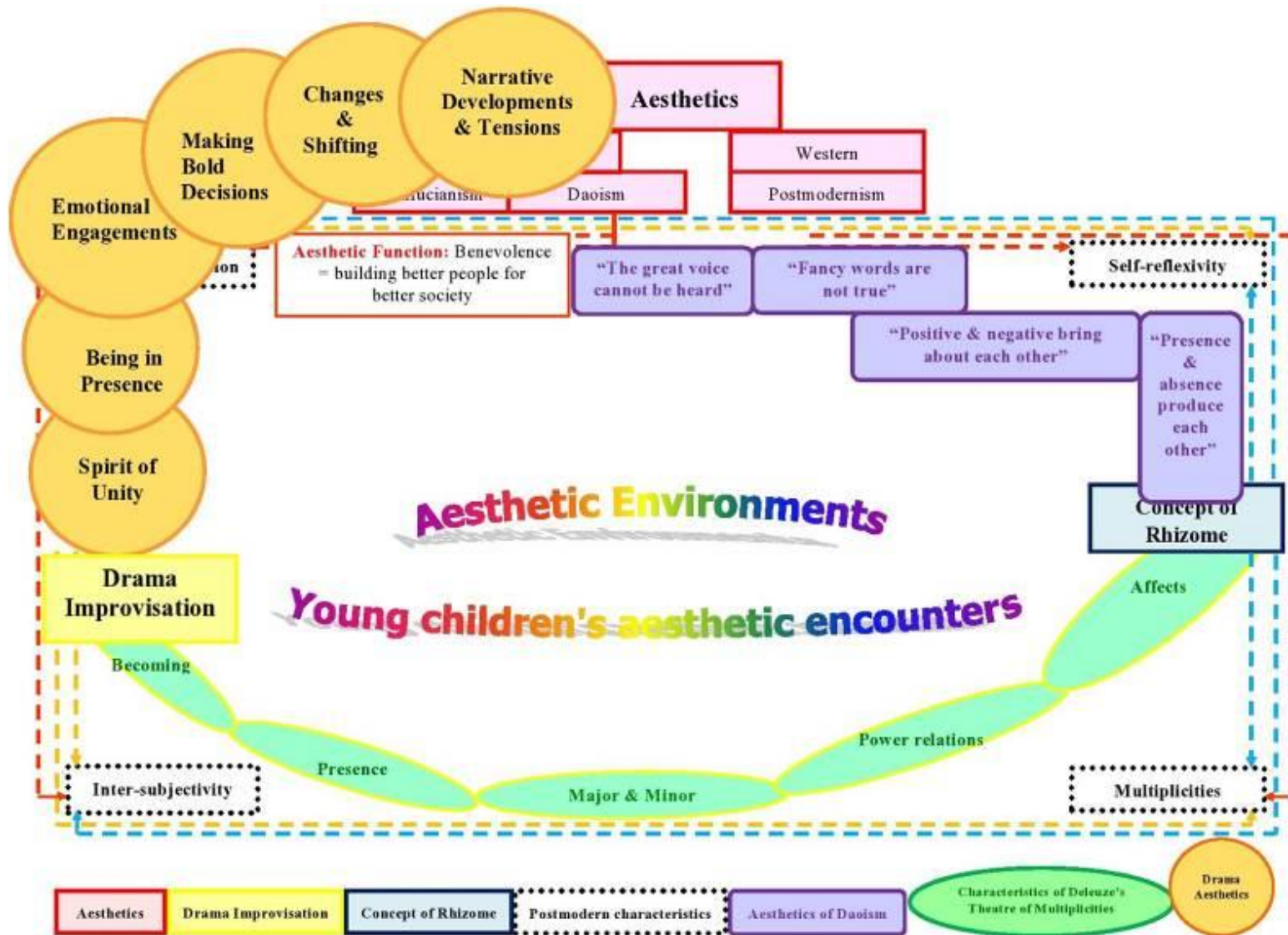
Figure 15. The modified analytical framework of the study with newly found drama improvisation aesthetics.

Narrative Developments and Tensions

Narrative developments and tensions refer to plot(s) or happenings that lead to develop a story rendering a reader suspending (or audience) to wonder about what will come next. The nature of drama is about "something [that] alters" (Johnston, 2006, p. 117), so that narrative tensions and developments become a crucial aesthetic property of improvisation. In this "*Forest on fire"* scene, the completed story lasted for almost ten minutes and was developed through devised happenings. Those happenings were created spontaneously by the participants as part of the collaborative effort of the ensemble. To begin, I (Carrie) as the narrator suggested Cinderella (Isa) was in a forest being chased by a wolf (Swordy). The children took over the scene and created the first tension when Train Driver (Big Elephant) went to rescue Cinderella (Isa). After finding that the Wolf (Swordy) had no intention of causing harm to any of the other characters, but was simply returning a scarf to Cinderella (Isa), the misunderstanding between the Wolf (Swordy) and Cinderella (Isa) was resolved. Then all characters (including me, the narrator) were sent home by the Train Driver (Big Elephant). However, as the narrator I suggested that the forest was on fire. All the participants responded to the newly created narrative tension with panic, running and screaming. The participants hurried to find their own jackets and scarves and used them to extinguish the fire. The story ended with a climax of tension when Cinderella (Isa) was found dead due the fire in the forest.

As just explained, the improvised narrative developments and tensions flowed rhizomatically from the narrator/ adult/ teacher (Carrie) to the characters/ children/ students (Isa the Cinderella, Big Elephant the Train Driver, and Swordy the Wolf) and back to the narrator/ adult/ teacher (Carrie). The narrative development was spontaneous and simultaneous rather than linear. The narrative development and tensions were deterritorialised by the characters. The participants exhibited boldness by changing or shifting

their characters (e.g., Train Driver became Police Train Driver). These narrative

developments and tensions not only created happenings but also became inputs for the

research (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) that triggered other aesthetic elements to work, for

example, changes or shifting and making bold decisions.

Changes or Shifting

As defined under the drama perspective, changing or shifting refer to a dramatic twist

to an original idea or action that occurs in the plot. These changes and shifts are triggered by

narrative tensions and development. For example, to fit (or to solve the problem) in the

narrative tension on stage, Train Driver (Big Elephant) decided to shift his role to Police

Train Driver so that he could arrest the Wolf who was chasing Cinderella. The following

transcript excerpt from the video record shows what happened.

Video Excerpt 1 (20130120 – 84:36–85:07)

Carrie: *You catch the train driver and ask him if he can take you with him in the*

                   train...

Isa: *Take me, please! It's a big wolf!!!* (Screaming) *There is a wolf!!!*

                   (Swordy the Wolf is catching Isa the Cinderella) *Help!!!*

Carrie: *Police! You got to go to save people! There is a big wolf!*

(Big Elephant the Train Driver stands up suddenly)

Carrie: Sit down, please!

Big Elephant: I'm a police train! A police train!

(Big Elephant is making sound effects like "choo choo... choo choo" and going around the

stage.)

(Swordy doesn't want to let go of Isa and Sleeping Beauty.)

Big Elephant: (trying to unlock Isa from Swordy) *Quickly, get on the police train!*

Justifying how he made the role of Train Driver "come alive" (Abbott, 2007, p. 159), Big Elephant (the actor of Train Driver) showed his understanding of the immediate tension. He immediately shifted his role from a train to a police train. Being positioned as a police train brought in him an authoritative figure to rescue Cinderella (Isa) and arrest the Wolf. Big Elephant was daring in building his character and he did this by spontaneously changing and shifting his role.-, he didn't seek the approval from me, the narrator (teacher/ adult). As the narrator, I tried to stop his appearance on stage by saying "*Sit down, please!*" (Carrie, 28:53.5 – 28:53.7), but he quickly proclaimed "*I'm a police train! A police train!*" (Big Elephant, 28:53.7 – 28:57.7)By rejecting my request to sit, Big Elephant boldly and spontaneously altered his character from Train Driver to Police Train Driver. After the attempt to rescue Cinderella and arrest the Wolf, Big Elephant shifted back to Train Driver by reminding passengers to queue, and announced the name of the next station. Big Elephant, as an actor/ student/ child made changes according to his understanding of the immediate narrative tensions and developments. His bold decision (Johnston, 2006) also enabled him to claim the originality and authority of the character that he, as per his own understanding, transformed as an actor.

Making Bold Decisions

In drama improvisation, bold decisions are deliberate acts involving introspectiveness or self-reflection that build tension (Johnston, 2006). Bold decisions are located throughout the happenings in the improvisation scene. Sometimes these might be physical actions and other times they can involve a character who is not responding at all. In the video excerpt 2, in addition to Big Elephant's shifting of characters, HaHa the Policeman also made bold decisions that contributed to the narrative tension and development of the improvisation scene. To rescue the injured characters from the forest fire, HaHa dragged my (the narrator) leg to hospital.

Video Excerpt 2 (31:29.6 – 31:44.4)

Carrie: *We are back to the forest! Oh, my gosh! There is a big fire in the forest! The forest*

   is in fire! What should we do? (Screaming... running around).

HaHa: (HaHa pulling Carrie's leg) *Go to hospital... go to hospital...*

Isa (Cinderella) also made a bold decision to act as another victim of the fire. Instead of playing it safe and staying with the 'yes, and …' rule of drama improvisation or being passive as a cue-taker, Isa decided not to respond to anyone. As an idea of her own thinking perspective she blocked the idea of being saved. She did not respond to my questions, *"Did Cinderella die? Cinderella, what happened to you? Cinderella, are you recovered? Or are you dead? Cinderella? How can we save you?"* (Carrie, 89:29 – 89:38). Isa playing the character of Cinderella remained motionless even when she was being dragged by Swordy to the hospital (88:43 – 88:57). Even after being hit by the flying jackets and scarves that were used to try and revive her she remained silent and static (89:00 – 90:37).

In theatre terms, Isa the Cinderella kept stillness in the happening for long enough (four and a half minutes) to suspend a narrative tension and development of the scene. She forced a response from the rest of the child actors who made a collaborative decision to announce her death. They improvised over her motionless body, commenting that *"Cinderella... has a lot of sickness"* (Sleeping Beauty, 89:52 – 89:57); *"The fire went into her heart"* (Buzz Light Year and Big Elephant, 89:57 – 90:05), and *"She pretends she's dead..."* (Sleeping Beauty, 90:39 – 90:41). Isa the Cinderella was so determined to play dead that even when the scene was called off by me (the narrator) saying *"So she died eventually... Let's cry... Cinderella is dead... woo woo... poor she..."* (Carrie, 90:41 – 91:12) she did not move until the rest of the group began a new activity of focussed discussions. She successfully built her role silently, physically and emotionally. What Isa demonstrated was not only the drama characterisation of Cinderella but also the process of becoming-character herself (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987;

Deleuze, 1997a). Being in-between as an actress-and-improviser, she performed her interpretation of Cinderella with firmness, boldness and decisiveness by determinedly not responding to the rescue operation carried out by the child actors.

These multiple and unexpected bold decisions deterritorialised (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) the imaginative territories of the characters' identities and also the narrative developments happening in the scene. This also highlighted the child actors' abilities and willingness to work with the unexpected; yet they became an intensity (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) that demanded the rhizomatic machine of aesthetics (the process of the drama improvisation scene) to produce responses. However, the production of responses drew not only on cognitive exercises from all of the child actors, but also on their emotional engagement while they were reacting to the happenings taking place on stage.

Emotional Engagements

Emotional engagement is an essential element of drama that (re)presents the feelings and emotions that an actor has experienced from or expresses for a created character. Improvisers usually claim understanding of their characters through body and emotional knowledge (Abbott, 2007). Emotion lies at the heart of the improvisation scene and "…brings passion, humour, suspense, dynamics and tension to an improvisation. It is the lifeblood of drama" (p. 77). Improvisers are required to recognise and act on actors' feelings and making them visible to the audience.

With the understanding of their created characters, the child actors "externalise[d] the sensation" (Johnston, 2006, p. 106) in the form of empathy. Externalising the sensation was noted when they expressed their feelings, emotions or cares. This was first seen when Swordy the Wolf was trying to catch Cinderella (Isa), who was running in panic and screaming *"Take me, please! It's a big wolf!!! There is a wolf!!! Help!!!"* (Isa, 84:39 – 84:41). Later, the emotional engagement was even more obvious when Cinderella was hurt in the forest fire.

Swordy was in a hurry to get more jackets and scarves to stop the fire, saying *"Put the fire away!"* (Swordy, 90:20 – 90:37) while checking Cinderella's status. HaHa the Policeman was also observed being compassionate to other actors in the scene. He found Cinderella lying motionless on the floor when the play was finished and spoke to her in a worried tone: *"Don't be sick... don't be sick..."* (HaHa, 91:32 – 91:34), *"I'm afraid you'll get cold... afraid to get cold..."* (HaHa, 91:35 – 91:52) (to me, the narrator); *"afraid she will get cold..."* (HaHa, 91:53 – 92:00). Likewise, when the Policewoman noticed that Cinderella did not react to the rescuers, she changed from saving Cinderella to accepting her motionless form. Thus, she suggested a new idea in a sympathetic tone *"...in fact, she has a lot of sickness..."* (Sleeping Beauty, 89:52 – 89:57). Child actors exercised their emotional engagement through acts and reactions of empathy.

Children's emotional engagement was also found in the focussed discussions and while making arts journals. During the discussion, the group of child actors commented that the last improvisation scene of the workshop was "the most focussed" (Sleeping Beauty, Swordy, and Buzz Lightyear – Focussed Discussion, Pilot Study) and "beautiful" (Big Elephant - Focussed Discussion, Pilot Study). The child actors pointed out that the death of Cinderella was most concerning as they shared their eagerness to save her. When making the children's arts journals, Swordy the Wolf brought up the issue again. Sleeping Beauty the Policewoman remarked sadly during the arts journal-making, *"I, actually, didn't want her to die"* (Sleeping Beauty – Children's Arts Journal, Pilot Study). Swordy agreed in a sorrowful manner. Isa the Cinderella then reassured everyone by declaring *"I'm not dead! It's only a pretend"* (Isa – Children's Arts Journal, Pilot Study). The child actors' emotional engagement and exercise of empathy was identified through these children's comments and conversations. Among the six children's arts journals, four referred to the forest fire, and two had a drawing of the dying Cinderella in red and orange. The sense of losing someone they knew troubled their emotions,

even though they understood it was a drama improvisation scene and not real. Hence, the pretending act of death allowed the child actors to encounter the feeling of losing a friend. This feeling allowed them, experience and exercise empathy.

Being in Presence

Presence is the term that theatre practitioners use for the moments when the characters "come alive" (Abbott, 2007, p. 159). Others (e.g., co-actors on stage or audience) can see what the actors see, and they feel what the actors feel. Being in presence is "vital" for improvisers (p. 43). In drama, "presence" generally refers to "being there", meaning the actor doesn't need to 'put on a show' for the audience but just being "in the moment". The Actor should behave according to the identity of the character and the present situation of the performance (p. 43). Being in presence, in a performance means that an actor is engaged with a high level of concentration that allows openness and readiness to listen, act and react in all forms such as verbal, emotional, and physical. It can be difficult for trained performers, but without any drama craftsmanship, a strong sense of presence was displayed by all the child actors. For example, Big Elephant the Train Driver character came alive (Abbott, 2007) when he made sounds of "*choo choo …choo choo*" and moved around the stage. These enactments indicated that he was driving a train as he was hurrying to rescue Cinderella. He also resumed the duty of Train Driver to make announcements such as "*Remember to queue up!*" (Big Elephant, 87:04 – 87:06), and announced 'next station is Forest' in three languages (Trains in Hong Kong have a trilingual language system): "(Cantonese): 下一站森林. (Mandarin): *Xia yi zhan sen lin*. (English): *Next station is 'Sum Lum'* [sounds like forest in Chinese]" (Big Elephant, 87:20.3 – 87:26). Big Elephant's effort in becoming a character were recognised by the children as he was voted best actor in the focussed discussion, with comments such as "*Because I feel he is acting with concentration*" (Isa, 94:31 – 94:34).

Unexpected changes are evident when Big Elephant the Train Driver shifts his identity to a Police Train Driver. When Isa the Cinderella refuses to be rescued from the forest fire, this act of her indicates how the child actors input knowledge of their characters into the narrative tension. The child actors do so by being open to act, react and enact, to "be[ing] there" in the immediate present (Abbott, 2007, p. 43). The child actors concentrated intensively, showed compassion and vivid imagination. They became characters, actors and artists, children, subjects and authorities all in one; and seemed to reach the point "...where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I. We are no longer ourselves" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 3). Aesthetic encounters were found in the presence of improvisation scenes. They were seen where openness, surprises and compromises were woven rhizomatically through spontaneous overlapping identities, actions and emotions. These overlapping identities, actions and emotions were the "fabric of the rhizome" that are inter- and intra-related in the improvisation happenings (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 25).

Spirit of Unity

There was a spirit of unity among the happenings in the scene as well as the child actors. A spirit of unity is a characteristic of drama improvisation and it is the consistency between things and relations. Spirit of unity includes story plots and development, character-building, or the unity of a team while collaborating or devising a story. Improvisation is a devised ensemble performance where unity of collaboration is a basic requirement. The improvisers must operate from "courage and trust. Supporting the early decision as far as possible … to go with it and accept it" (Johnston, 2006, p. 105). The child actors demonstrated a spirit of unity by accepting cues and hints from each other and the narrator, thereby exercising the rules of improvisation (including '*yes, and ...', 'no, but ...'*). They were regardless of how sudden or unusual the ideas were. Examples of this include the Wolf returning the scarf to Cinderella; the Police Train abruptly turning back to a Train in order to take everyone home;

the sudden forest fire which caught Cinderella who did not want to be saved, and Buzz Light

Year, the Fireman, Sleeping Beauty, and the Policewoman, announcing the death of

Cinderella due to the forest fire. Through a rhizomatic reading of the improvisation, the scene

became an open system that was full of surprises, and unexpectedness happening. They were

caused by interruptions, rejections and blockages. However, as drama improvisation always

does, rejections and blockages in this scene came back in agreements or compromises for the

spirit of unity. This unity is required for continual and continuous movements among

inter-characters, inter-happenings, inter-minds and inter-spaces.

The aesthetics of drama improvisation were mapped clearly with the data in the pilot

study. The new data analysis strategy of arto-rhizomatic mapping was then confirmed to be

useful for the data analysis of the main study. The pilot study had made a definite

contribution to the success of the main study. Its possibilities for further research in

a/r/tographic approach as an artist-and-researcher-and-teacher of young children's aesthetic

encounters.

Summary

This chapter covered the definition, value and application of a pilot study. The pilot

study was of value for (a) testing the feasibility, using drama improvisation with young

children; (b) identifying time constraints of the tightly-scheduled programme; and (c) giving

advance alerts to reconsider the data analysis strategy to incorporate the discrepant data as

well.

The first part of this chapter discussed the need and value of a pilot study. The second

part of the chapter accounted for the choices that influenced the process of data analysis.

Although drama improvisation was affirmed as a suitable art medium to convey aesthetic

encounters with young children, the pilot study granted a meaningful insight. It gave a very

significant input that coding approach as the data analysis strategy was insufficient as

discrepant data were found. Also, the linear approach of coding was contradictory to the

concept of rhizome and unexplainable as to why the discrepant data was found. These

analytical challenges set out my journey for searching alternative qualitative data analysis

strategies. The last part of the chapter mapped the six aesthetic elements of drama

improvisation by revisiting the data of the pilot study. They were *narrative developments and*

tensions, changes or shifting, making bold decisions, emotional engagements, being in

presence, and *spirit of unity.* As time constraint was concerned, the next chapter covers the

revised workshops, the application of the workshops, to what extent the research questions

have been answered, and whether the aim and objectives were reached or not.

Chapter 5: *Scene One* – Young Children's Experiences and Responses to Aesthetic Encounters with Drama Improvisation

The first step in answering the research question of young children's aesthetic encounters was to investigate the feasibility of using drama improvisation. It was necessary to convey young children's experiences and responses to aesthetic encounters. In the last chapter, I reported the process of the pilot study. It affirmed drama improvisation could convey aesthetic encounters with young children. However, it also showed that the linear system of coding was not the best choice for a/r/tographic study as discrepant data was found. Therefore, arto-rhizomatic mapping was introduced to generate findings of the study. Lastly, as time constraint was concerned the main study had to be adjusted and extended to five workshops with 2-hours each to allow more drama improvisation attempts and observations for young children's aesthetic encounters.

Rising Curtains – Findings of the Main Study

Taking Figure 15 as the analytical framework of the study, this chapter presents the data and findings of the drama improvisation in a narrative approach (Creswell, 2013). This illustrates that how the postmodern paradigm (Chapter 3) informs the Research Question 1, which is about the experiences and responses of young children's aesthetic encounters. The data presentation, analysis (mapping), and discussion are focussed on the "processes, theories, and unique and general features of the life" (Creswell, 2013, p. 191). By using arto-rhizomatic mapping (similar to thematic analysis) with the rhizomatic concept of becoming, the lines of flight were mapped across four happenings to visualise the process of how young children experienced and responded to aesthetic encounters. Firstly, by exercising the a/r/tographic data analysis devices: contiguity and excess, eight findings were mapped throughout 22 drama improvisation scenes. Nine characteristics of young children's aesthetic encounters were mapped. These nine findings were regrouped into three themes (*decisiveness,*

introspectiveness and *empathy*) in response to the first research question. The question was about how young children experienced aesthetic encounters. By using snippets from an exemplary scene, these three themes were presented, interpreted and discussed with perspectives of drama improvisation, Deleuzian philosophies and aesthetics of Daoism. Lastly, the chapter is summarised by two observations about life transformation that the child participants had experienced. They experience it through the aesthetic encounters in the workshops.

Table 4.

The 22 improvisation scenes in five workshops of the study

Date of the Workshop	Number of the Scene (G=Group; P=Pair; S=Solo)	Name of the Scene	Remarks
Workshop 1 2013-09-17	W1-01G (38:36.0 – 41:13.2)	In the Circus	
	W1-02G (44:26.2 – 47:42.0)	In the Circus (2a)	
	W1-03G (47:42.1 – 50:45.0)	In the Circus (2b)	
Workshop 2 2013-09-24	W2-04G (27:53.0 – 29:27.9)	In the Forest (1)	Ended as Carrie's eye was hurt.
	W2-05G (39:15.0 – 42:44.3)	Ice Age (1)	Ended as Shark and Ironman bumped together.
	W2-06G (44:00.0 – 48:32.0)	Ice Age (2)	
	W2-07G (53:00.6 – 1:01:21.2)	Ice Age (3)	
	W2-08P (1:05:25.8 – 1:06:22.4)	Ice Age (4)	An unfinished scene.
	W2-09G (1:06:59.0 – 1:10:48.2)	Ice Age (5)	
Workshop 3 2013-10-01	W3-10S (17:42.2 – 18:52.5)	Police fixed the Police Car	Supervisor observed the workshop
	W3-11P (19:56.0 – 21:02.3)	Secret Agents (1)	An unfinished scene.
	W3-12P (23:44.5 – 24:38.8)	Secret Agents (2)	An unfinished scene.
	W3-13G (33:20.0 – 36:38.0)	The Black Forest (1)	
	W3-14G (45:16.0 – 53:46.0)	The Black Forest (2)	
	W3-15G (1:01:03.5 – 1:11:03.5)	In the Queen Mary's Hospital	An unfinished scene.
Workshop 4 2013-10-08	W4-16S (20:49.8 – 22:59.5)	Frogie	
	W4-17S (25:50.0 – 27:54.8)	Dinosaur	
	W4-18G (28:35.0 – 29:44.5)	Police	
	W4-19G (31:27.0 – 35:49.0)	Dinosaur	
	W4-20G (46:30.0 – 51:11.5)	The Black Forest (3)	
	W4-21G (52:21.0 – 57:41.6)	The Black Forest (4)	Selected as the Exemplary Scene
Workshop 5 2013-10-22	W5-22G (1:04:56.5 – 1:11:23.5)	A Forest with a River	Visited by three mothers of the child participants An unfinished scene.

Responding to Research Question 1: Children's Experiences and Responses to Aesthetic Encounters with Drama Improvisation

Following the similar data mapping process as the revisited pilot study data, the data analysis in the study began by drawing the story plots. Each improvisation scene was drawn into a two-dimension picture that became the map of the *lines of articulation*. Next, the observations and comments during the workshops were added on the map of the *lines of articulation* to create a new picture that became the map of *lines of flight*. Lastly, by mapping the *contiguity* (similarities) and *excess* (surprises) across the 22 maps of lines of flight, nine categories were identified. They were *releasing of creativity and imagination, constant decision-making, being bold to express oneself, changing of identities, switching in and out of characters, lapse of concentration, child's perspectives on ethics, emotional engagements,* and *unsuccessful scenes*.

As I started to present the data of the study, I recapped basic information about the data collection methods. There were five, two-hour drama workshops with six child participants, whose age was in the range of 3-5 years. The child participants included equal number of boys and girls. They were the same group of children who participated in the pilot study. They chose new pseudonyms: *Foreigner, Ironman, Isa, Police, Shark* and *Spiderman.* I again acted as an a/r/tographer who shifted constantly in-between the roles of artist, researcher, and teacher. I also participated in some of these 22 drama improvisation scenes, sometimes as a narrator and sometimes as a co-improviser.

Releasing of creativity and imagination were recorded. Children were eager to make suggestions to the drama improvisation activities. According to Bundy (2003) that "animation, connection and heightened awareness" (p. 176) were found during the workshops. It is true that when the child actors were feeling "more alive, more alert" (p. 180), rich creative ideas and imaginative suggestions (in both words and actions) emerged. They co-created the story

plots, initiated characters, spontaneous dialogues, expressions and body movements for each of the 22 improvisation scenes. Although there were similar characters (e.g., dinosaurs) but the personalities, and body movements of the characters were not the same. Regarding the story themes and plots, referred in Table 4 shows, there are 3 times *in the circus*, 4 times *in a black forest,* 5 times *in the ice age*, and 2 times animal trapped in fire. Similarly, although the themes or plots might be similar, the narrative developments and tensions were never the same. For examples, when they suggested a hospital scene (W3-15G, Table 4), the child actors connected to their daily life. The doctor characters asked for masks as they said doctors wear masks as they do operations. They also mentioned about 'H7N9' (the predominant flu in Hong Kong at that time) and 'ice packs' for the patient who was running from high fever. The child participants' creativity and imagination were also recorded in the character building.

Since these drama scenes were not pre-scripted performances, the spontaneous dialogues, movements, emotions, characters and story plots were collaborative creativity. An example is the doctor character played by Ironman in Scene 15 (W3-15G, Table 4), who performed surgery to heal the patient. To let the patient have a quick recovery, he also cooked for the patient. This illustrated Ironman's becoming-doctor. It was no longer the usual doctor we know in a clinic or hospital. With the interpretation of Ironman, this doctor was deterritorialised from its normative character and became a new kind of doctor. Similar example can be found in Scene 21 (W4-21G, Table 4) as Ironman turned his fierce crocodile into a fire-eating crocodile to save the forest from fire.

From being creative to design their own characters unto the unexpected drama improvisation story plot developments, young children's creativity and imagination were richly recorded in every workshop. Noted from the data of the drama improvisation, child actors did not imitate the characters physically instead they portrayed the characters emerging from their own beliefs and understandings. The child characters did this using their intuition

with animation and connection through the spontaneous and imaginative natures of drama improvisation. For example, Foreigner performed a solo improvisation scene about how a policeman fixed his police car (W3-10S, Table 4). In the beginning of this scene, he found out that the car produced weird sound, so he parked it in a car park. Then he came out of the car and checked what was wrong with it. Lastly, he fixed the police car and used the car key to restart it before driving it away. Foreigner performed the scene with improvised miming. Although there were no props or costume, the *audience* (both the resting child actors and I) understood and enjoyed his clear portrayal, showing how a policeman repaired his car. Foreigner turned his imagination into physical body movements and gestures. We saw him enacting the actions of taking out car keys, opening the door before came out of the car, and going around up and down to check the car. Foreigner released his rich imagination and was able to turn his imagination into a performance. There were more examples, such as *helping a sick zebra in a circus* (W1-01G, Table 4); *calling ambulance to save a hurt panda* (W2-04G, Table 4); *secret police agents could turn into transparency* (W3-14G, Table 4); doctor would take the role of conducting operation as well as of a cook for the patient (W3-15G, Table 4).

        Constant decision-making was also recorded in all 22 drama improvisation scenes. The best example of the child actors' constant decision-making was at the beginning of each scene. It was observed when they made their own choice about the character they wanted to be and the story they would like to do. They picked different characters each time, sometimes in a particular relation with another child actor (as they were best friends) and sometimes without a specified reason. Another example of their decisiveness appeared after the first attempt at group improvisation in the first drama workshop. This first scene (W1-01G, Table 4) was messy with child actors moving violently and the scene ended without an understandable story. After a short group discussion, the child actors realised and agreed on the need to have

a narrator who would describe what was happening in the scene. As a result, Foreigner

appointed me as the narrator for the later improvisation scenes.

At the end of the first drama improvisation scene (W2-04G, Table 4) in the second

workshop, while I was acting as a bat on the stage, my left eye was hurt accidentally by

Foreigner. So the scene had to be stopped. Shark suggested me that may be it was better for

me to rest at the side stage and watch the show (W2-Reflective Journal). In the focussed

discussion, child actors expressed a serious attitude about *how to avoid getting hurt in the*

drama improvisation. Shark reminded everyone "do not be rough but be gentle"

(W2-Focussed Discussion). Ironman and Spiderman suggested that they would discipline the

ones who would make mistakes. For example "time-out for those being rude" or "they need

to calm down before re-enter the show" (W2-Focussed Discussion).

Being bold to express oneself was a category that was in close relation to the category

of *constant decision-making*. Because the child actors expressed what they thought and what

they wanted, so this decisiveness turned into action as decision-making. This boldness of

expression was particularly obvious in Scene 15 (W3-15G, Table 4), which was a hospital

scene. In that scene four doctors were in an emergency operation to rescue Baby Dinosaur.

As the scene started, the Doctors realised that they did not have any masks, so they turned to

me and asked for some masks. "*We are doctors, we need masks*" said Ironman and Police, the

Doctors. However, as our improvisation workshops adopted an empty-stage approach, there

were no pre-set props or costumes. So as the narrator, I replied: "*I'm sorry, I don't have any*

masks". "*But we doctors need to put on masks before starting the operation. Or the patient*

will be infected!" Spiderman, the Doctor explained it eagerly. The child actors realised there

were no way to get any masks. Thus, these four Doctors ended up miming the action of

putting on invisible marks before performing the operation to rescue Baby Dinosaur. To

portray their characters, the child actors were bold and expressed what they needed. Their firm reasoning and decisive problem-solving demonstrated the relationship between the category of *being bold to express* and that of *constant decision-making*.

Changing of identities was noted as child actors were changing from a character to new character identities in a scene. Generally, these child actors would stick to their first chosen character throughout the improvisation scene. But, on some occasions, these child actors altered their character to become a new identity. For example, in Scene 1 (W1-01G, Table 4) the actor of Pony changed her character to Zebra. She thought a zebra runs much faster than a pony. She wanted to escape from the lions in the scene, so she changed her character. Similarly, the actors such as Policeman and Policewoman in Scene 11 (W3-11G, Table 4) shifted their Police characters to a new identity as Secret Agents. These Secret Agents specialised in becoming invisible, so the Policemen turned Secret Agents to enable himself in arresting the invisible criminals.

Switching in and out of characters was recorded as the child actors switching in-between being a child – actor – character – friend. As they acted in the scenes, they switched between their characters and as actors. For example, in the middle of Scene 2 (W1-02G, Table 4), as the lions could not find their prey, one of the lion called "Spiderman" the Lion King suggested directly to me (the narrator) that there should be an actor to play the character of a man. It was a suggestion made by an actor not a character; thus, as requested, I then played the character of a human in the scene. Another example is situated in Scene 4, when my eye got hurt accidentally in the scene (W2-04G, Table 4), child actors stopped acting immediately. They turned from characters to children who came to comfort me and helped me to rest at the side stage.

Some situations of switching in and out of characters were recorded as cause of *lapse of concentration*, particularly with Foreigner and Isa. For the first two workshops, Isa was very

emotional and cried a lot in the drama improvisation sections. There were times when Foreigner left the scenes and went over to comfort the crying Isa especially during workshops 1 and 2. As Isa calmed down, Foreigner went back to the scenes and joined back in the stage performance. He was switching in and out of characters because he cared for his friends. Therefore, I wondered if this lapse of concentration was in relation to their understanding of ethics.

Child's perspective of ethics was noted during the workshops. When physical or verbal incidence happen, foot hurting, minor scratching…etc., they would come out of the character and report immediately to me (the narrator yet the teacher). It was because they had to sort out what was right and what was wrong at the spot. It seemed that there were two reasons for what they did: self-consciousness (e.g., I have done something wrong) or empathy (e.g., poor she, it must be painful). These incidences may help in building up self-consciousness or self-awareness. The child actors generally see good scenes as somebody being able to save someone in the scenes. For examples, "I saved the Panda by calling the ambulance" (Police, W2-Focussed Discussion), "Surgery save people that is good" (Ironman, W3-Focussed Discussion), "I can save the others" (Ironman, W5-Focussed Discussion). Also, through the drama improvisation scenes, child participants could express their feelings towards some difficult topics such as *death*, for example: "I think 'death' is not good" (Spiderman, W5-Focussed Discussion).

In this research, as drama improvisation was used to promote aesthetic encounters, dramatic story plots and character relationships easily aroused these young children's *emotional engagements*. For example, in Scene 2 (W1-02G, Table 4), Isa the Zebra was sick and she was unable to speak. She played that she was getting weak gradually by crawling back to the side stage slowly. She even showed sadness and painfulness on her face to further indicate her sickness. Her acting won the praise from the other child actors during the

focussed discussion, as they appreciated Zebra's spirit of never giving up. They praised\ no matter how difficult it was; Zebra tried all she could to crawl back home (the side stage). Another good example of children's emotional engagement occurred in Scene 20 (W4-20G, Table 4), a forest scene with crocodiles trying to catch Baby Dinosaur. When the hungry Crocodiles almost caught the Baby Dinosaur, a Zoo Keeper came to rescue. He tamed the Crocodiles and saved both Mommy Dinosaur and Baby Dinosaur in a sweat.

Unsuccessful scenes. There were total 22 drama improvisation scenes, with 4 solo, 3 pair and 15 group performances. Seven out of the 22 scenes were recorded as incomplete performances. Two scenes were stopped as minor accidents occurred (e.g., Carrie's eye was hurt in W3-04G, and Shark was caught too tight by Ironman W3-05G, Table 4). Four scenes ended up with running around in pretend, catching games (W2-08P, W3-11P, W3-12P, W3-15G, Table 4). The last scene was unsuccessful as the child actors were found uncooperative. All of them wanted to be the train driver at the same time and no one wanted to take the turns (W5-22G, Table 4).

The arto-rhizomatic mapping across the 22 drama improvisation scenes produced a collective map. As Figure 16 shows, according to the *contiguity* and *excess* of the lines of flight of the 22 drama improvisation scenes, the nine categories of *releasing creativity and imagination, constant decision-making, changing of identities, switching in and out of characters, being bold to express oneself, lapse of concentration, child's perspectives on ethics, emotional engagements,* and *unsuccessful scenes* were mapped. These characteristics were re-grouped into three themes, including *decisiveness, introspectiveness* and *empathy* (Figure 17). Through observation, interpretation and reflection, these themes were identified as chiefly contributing to the process of aesthetic encounters. They will be discussed in detail with an exemplary scene in the next section.
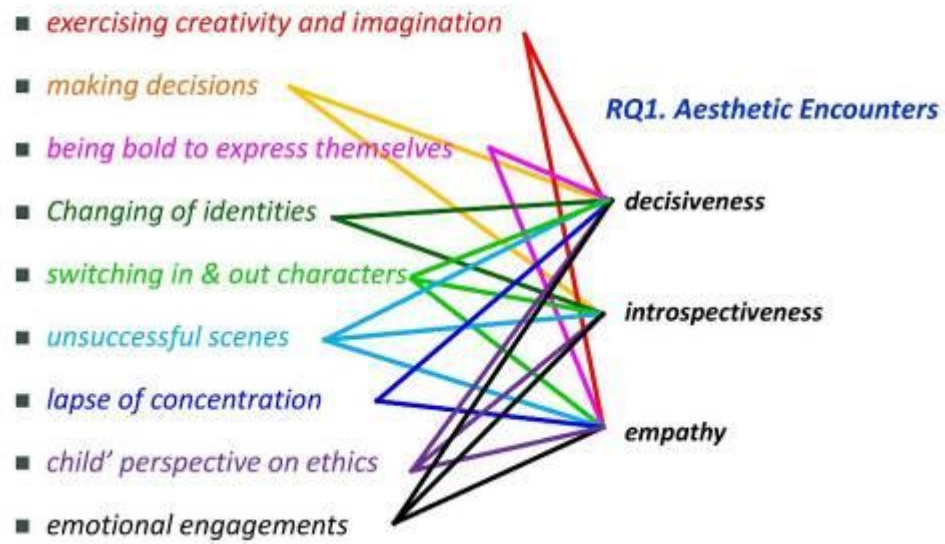
Figure 16. Re-grouping nine characteristics of young children's aesthetic encounters into three themes.
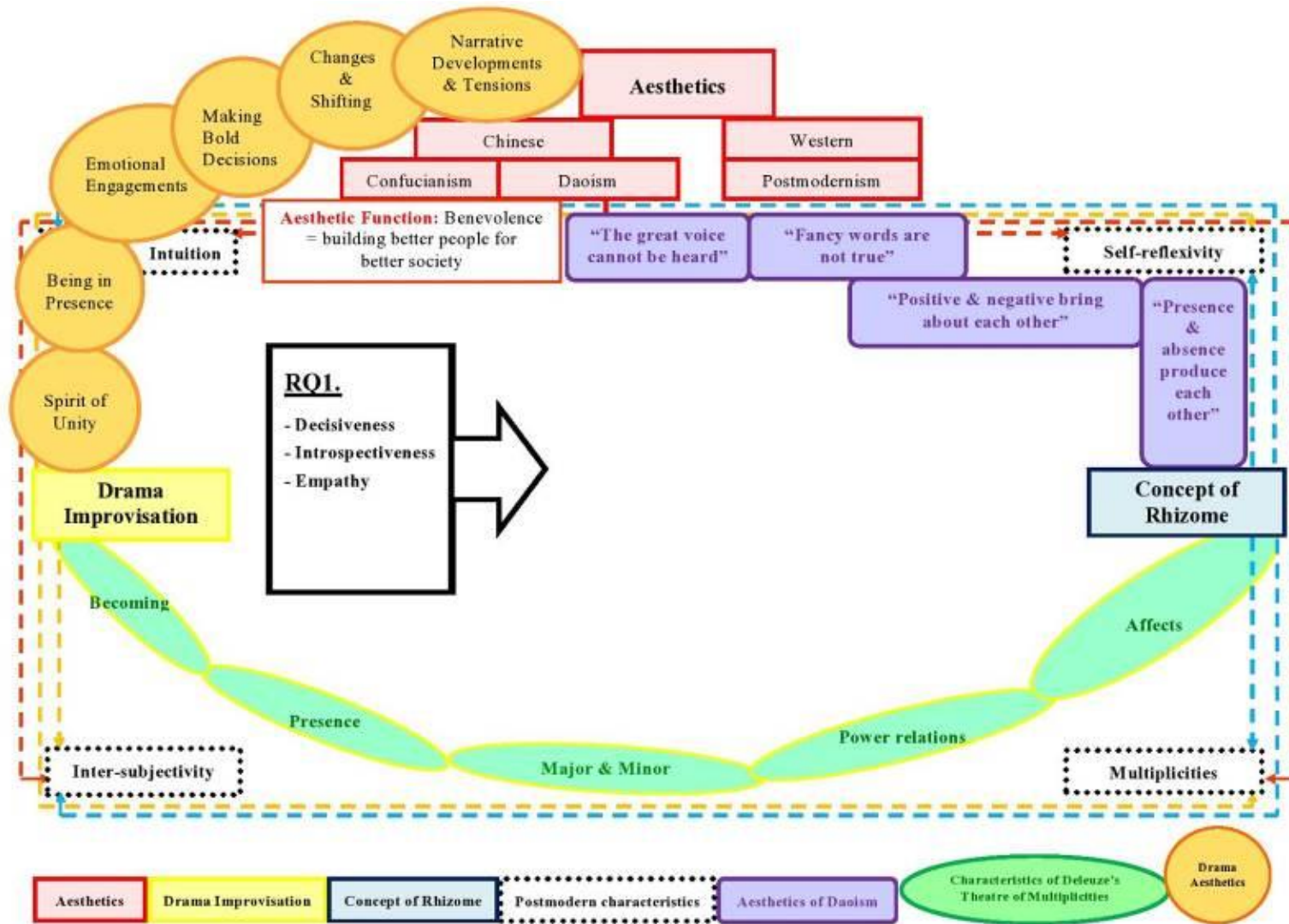
Figure 17. Young children experienced and responded to aesthetic encounters through decisiveness, introspectiveness and empathy.

An Exemplary Scene to Illuminate Children's Experiences and Responses to Aesthetic

Encounters

The 21st scene (W4-21G, Table 4) was selected as an exemplar to elaborate the primary research question. The question is how the children experienced and responded to aesthetic encounters with *decisiveness, introspectiveness* and *empathy*. This was the scene that consisted of all the nine found characteristics and the regrouped three themes. Through this scene it would be easier to draw examples to elaborate and discuss the multiple yet overlapping data in a clear manner. The data mapping led onto the discussion of the second research question about the environments that were required to facilitate such aesthetic encounters. In this scene, six children acted as the characters they chose (in the present on stage): Isa the Sister Dinosaur, Foreigner the Brother Dinosaur, Shark the Mommy Dinosaur, Ironman the Crocodile, Spiderman the (Lady) Crocodile, and Police the Lifeguard. I presented child actors' intuitive and spontaneous performances to envision how they experienced and responded to aesthetic encounters. First, based on the lines of articulation of the 21st scene (Map 3), I added my observation from the focussed discussions and my a/r/tographer's reflective journal to create the lines of flight (Map 4). By mapping the lines of flight across the 22 improvisation scenes with *contiguity* and *excess*, a collective map of lines of flight was produced (Map 5). Next, the two concepts of becoming were used to analyse the data: the drama improvisation concept of becoming that refers to character-building. The rhizomatic concept of becoming that refers to being-in-between movements, within a unique event that produces experimentation and change (Stagoll, 2010).

6. (still running in circle) *"I'm going to the market!"* (stopped suddenly) *"No, I can't. As they eat a lot of food. They need lots of food, they need to it as they are growing up!"*

7. (crying) *"ngggg nggg..."*

(crawling towards)

12a. rushes to the stage and acts like he is a driving a car, circling the stage in with a car engine sound.

12b. saves her babies from the fire.

12c. *"We can eat fire, these crocodiles."*

13a. *"Can't help... as we can't fight (the fire)."*

13b. (taking her babies hand in hands to the side stage) *"I am not afraid of fire!"*

5. But runs away from him.

4. finds

1. In the beginning, and are lost in the forest with her brother.

16. At the end, and have eaten all the fire and saved the forest.

15. *"We can eat fire, we crocodiles!"... "Finished!"*

14. *"We have to go because here has fire!"*(taking the babies up and hurrying her babies to leave) *"Go, go, go!"*

Side Stage

2. *"At this moment, there are two kind crocodiles..."*

3. *"No, it is not... Fierce one...",* and remain in the Side Stage.

11. *"Suddenly, the Black Forest is in fire!"*

10. and are running around.

9. and crawl quickly towards the baby dinosaurs on stage.

8. *"There are two fierce dinosaurs appear!"*

	Sister Dinosaur		Brother Dinosaur
	Mommy Dinosaur		Lifeguard
	Girl Crocodile		Boy Crocodile
	Narrator		*The numbers indicate the staging of the plot. Details refer to video recording (Appendix G).

Map 3. The exemplary scene – Lines of articulation.
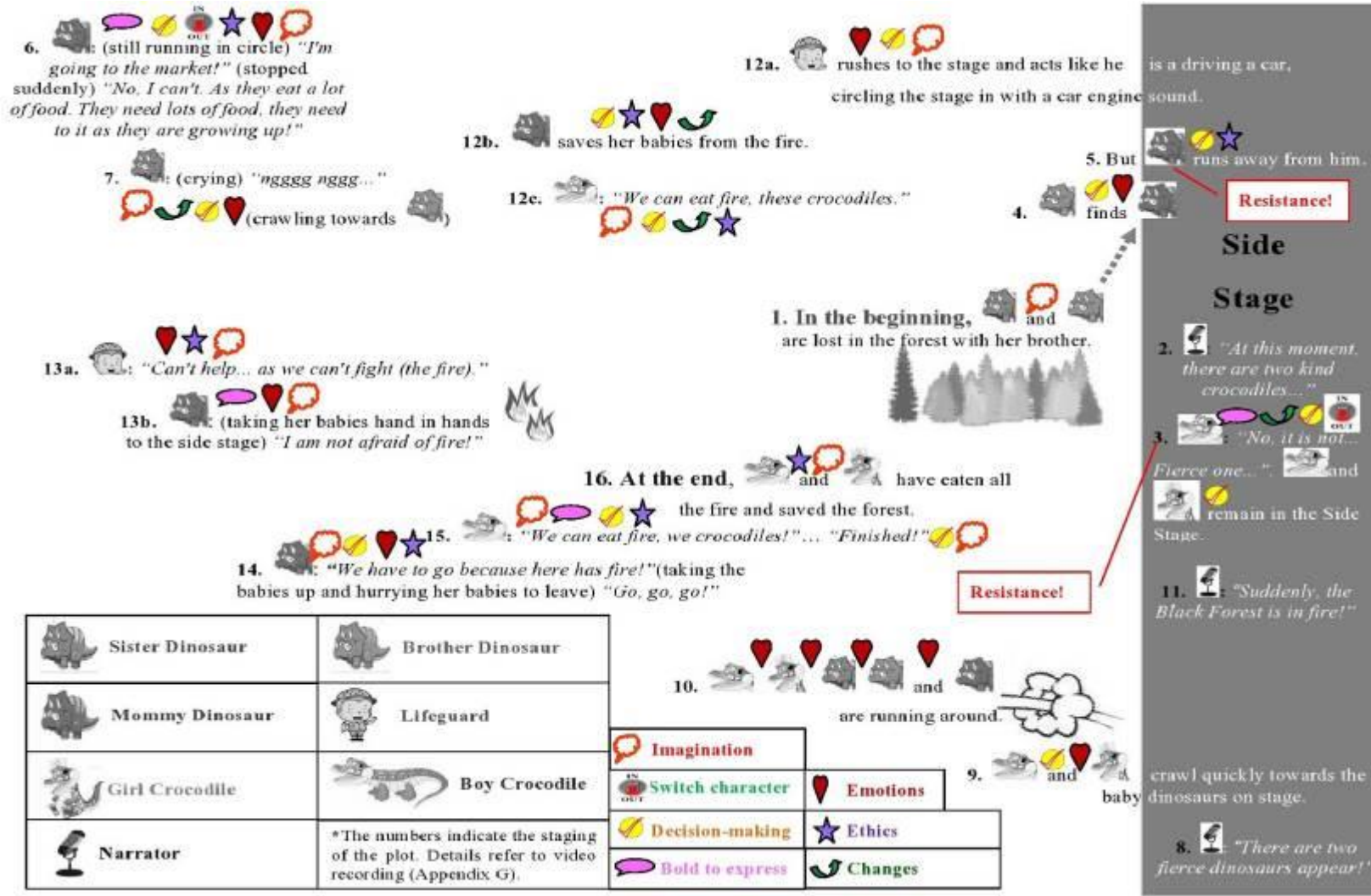
Map 4. The exemplary scene – Lines of flight.

Improvisation scenes

Reading verbal cues

Creating verbal cues

Decisiveness

💬 **Being bold to express themselves**
✅ **Constant decision-making**
💭 **Releasing creativity and imagination**
🔄 **Switching in and out of characters**

Reading non-verbal cues

🌐 **Unsuccessful scenes**

?Lapse of concentration

aesthetic encounters

🎵 **Changing of identities**

❤️ **Emotional engagements**

Creating non-verbal cues

Empathy

⭐ **Child's perspective on ethics**

Introspective

with virtual vs. reality spaces

struggles

with the world

within one-self (character, identities)

Map 5. The collective *line of flight* map of the 22 drama improvisation scenes illuminates the process of children's aesthetic encounters.

A five-minute improvisation scene named The Black Forest (4) was selected to illuminate the process of aesthetic encounters in the children's improvisation. It reflected how they played out their understanding of aesthetic encounters. After a few improvisation attempts, both the child actors and I realised that having all the actors acting at the same time could be chaotic. Thus, as an experienced artist, I suggested that a narrator could be used to describe the happenings of the scene which might contribute to avoid further confusion in drama scenes. My suggestion was soon agreed and I was assigned to be the narrator, by the child actors. "If a director or teacher wants to take a scene in a new direction without interfering with the flow, they can ask someone else to enter the improvisation as a new character or a person with a particular task." (Abbott, 2007, p. 159). As an assigned narrator, I was aware of not manipulating but just giving suggestions to build on the narrative developments and tensions. My primary duty as a narrator was to describe out loud what was going on in the scene or on stage. Sometimes, I took the initiative to introduce who (character) would go on stage next based on the child actors' decisions and agreements (e.g., introducing fierce crocodiles, Images 16–17). However, since I was also one of the improvisers of the story, I also made plot suggestions in order to assist the story development (e.g., "*Suddenly, the black forest is on fire!!!*", Images 29–30). I assumed that I was responsible for describing the scene, inviting characters to go on stage. I was also responsible for making suggestions about the narrative developments and tensions. This assumption was based upon the assigned task of a narrator, given to me, by one of the child actors.

The scene contained three spontaneous plots, including *Searching for family, Saving the Baby Dinosaurs* and *The fire-eating crocodiles*. Young children's aesthetic encounters were illuminated, through the three plots of the exemplary scene. Within the three plots, there were four happenings in the scene: Happenings 1 and 2 illustrated the theme of *decisiveness,* Happening 3 was about the theme of *introspectiveness*, and Happening 4 discussed the theme

of *empathy*. The four happenings in the three plots worked both aesthetically and

rhizomatically for themselves (individual and singular) and also continued to make a

collaborative scene. These happenings could be seen as singularly (individually as a

happening) and together (as a plot, then onto a scene), "proceeding from the middle, through

the middle, coming and going rather than starting and finishing" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987,

p. 25). Each happening contained its own aesthetic encounters. But, when the four

happenings were acted out as one drama scene, then this scene could be seen as one

collective aesthetic encounter as well. Since the drama improvisation scene was not scripted,

child actors sometimes interrupted. They were also being interrupted by spontaneous or

simultaneous acts of others. These arto-rhizomatic mappings presented how drama and

rhizomatic perspectives were linked and appeared as lines of flight. This phenomena occurred

as happenings traversed to other happenings through smooth plots and through interruptions.

Detail discussion with data from the exemplary scene will be made in the coming sections of

the four happenings.

I worked to generate arto-rhizomatic mapping of the inherent process of aesthetic

encounters. First I sketched all three plots into one (Map 3, the lines of articulation). By

breaking one (scene) into several (plots and happenings), I then brought them back to form

one map again (Maps 4, 5 lines of flight), generating a "very diverse map-tracing,

rhizome-root assemblages, with variable coefficients of de-territorialisation" (Deleuze &

Guattari, 1987, p. 15). Next, I used images of these four happenings from the five-minute

exemplary scene to present how happenings were spontaneous plots. Thereafter, I showed

how the lines of flight illuminated the children's aesthetic encounters. The three plots of the

exemplary scene are discussed separately but only for ease of understanding the inherent

process. This is not to suggest that any sort of linearity existed in these happenings. Rather, it

was an attempt to visualise how young children experienced and responded to aesthetic

encounters.

Decisiveness – **Introducing** *Searching for Family* **(Images 1–15)**

In this opening set of images, I presented the plot commencing with a group of three

children. They were improvising dinosaurs, or what I have named *Searching for family*,

noting that the snippet was from an improvisation scene that lasted for 79 seconds. It was the

beginning and the major storyline of the improvisation scene with two baby dinosaurs

looking for their family in a black forest. It started with an empty stage without scenery,

props, costume, sounds, or light effects. Isa the Sister Dinosaur crawled from the side stage

(the actors' waiting area) towards the centre stage, entering the imaginary black forest in

search of her parents (Images 1–3). Soon Isa realised that the actor who was her baby brother

dinosaur was not coming on the stage (Image 1). Without any verbal cues, she returned to the

side stage and gently took Foreigner, the Brother Dinosaur by his hand (Image 2). Then the

two of them slowly moved to the stage, looking around to locate their family members

(Image 3).

Isa the Sister Dinosaur realises the actor who was her baby brother dinosaur, is not coming on the stage. Without any verbal cues, she returns to the side stage and gently took Foreigner, the Brother Dinosaur by hand. Then the two of them slowly and hesitantly moved on stage.

At this time, as the narrator, I suggested that there were two kind crocodiles moving on to the stage but Ironman the Crocodile refused to be a kind crocodile. Spiderman the Crocodile supported his decision by not moving onto the stage (Images 4–8). As Isa, the Sister Dinosaur and Foreigner, the Brother Dinosaur found Shark, the Mommy Dinosaur she started chasing her to seek reunion. Shark refused this idea by running away. However, as Shark the Mommy Dinosaur explained that her baby dinosaurs should grow up and be independent (Images 9–15), both the baby dinosaurs looked miserable about these unexpected suggestions.

Happening 1 (Images 4–8) – *Decisiveness*

(There is no sight of Mommy Dinosaur. The two baby dinosaurs wandered around hesitantly and restlessly.)

Carrie: *At this moment, there are two kind crocodiles...*

(Ironman moves towards the stage with four limbs on the ground. Suddenly, he turns back to Carrie.)

Ironman: (immediately and firmly) *No, it is not! A fierce one.*

Carrie: (to Ironman) *Oh, if you are a fierce crocodile then it won't be you to go* (on stage) *first...*

(Ironman returns slowly to the side stage.)

Carrie: (suggesting to Spiderman) *Are there any kind crocodiles? Is there a kind one?*

(Turning to the baby dinosaurs sitting on stage) *No kind crocodiles... So no kind crocodiles.*

(Turning back to the Crocodiles) *So crocodiles are not going to stage now* (waving hand to sign 'no')

(Both the crocodiles sat back quietly in the side stage.)

These children were operating the drama improvisation scene rhizomatically, unlike those dramatic plays, which does not require dramatic narrative development or tension. Child actors were flowing with both their individual and collective understanding of how the scene could progress. They did it using use of intuitive and spontaneous expressions. Without any training in drama acting or artistic directions, the children claimed their actors' pre-positions. They developed an understanding of the characters and story plot by acting out facial expressions, gestures, and body movements, as though they were searching for their family. It was these performative decisiveness qualities towards which I have now turned the spotlight on. Both Ironman the Crocodile and Shark the Mommy Dinosaur managed to portray their characters in a style that was distinctively their own. They figured out their physical movements and emotional expressions to suit their interpretation of each character. They did it to optimise its continuity. Now, in order to give a detailed account of the arto-rhizomatic mapping, I presented the decisiveness that Ironman, the Crocodile expressed through the drama improvisation in the concept of becoming and the rhizomatic concept of becoming.

4	**Carrie**: *At this moment, there are two kind crocodiles...*
5	**Ironman**: (immediately and firmly) *No, it is not! A fierce one.* **Carrie**: *Oh, if you are a fierce crocodile then it won't be you go (on stage) first...*

Decisiveness was exercised and performed through Ironman's initiative in his daring proclamation of refusing to be a kind crocodile. From the performance perspective, Ironman executed his authority over the character he created. He became the crocodile character by moving with four limbs on the ground and preparing to get on the stage. However, my narrative description of the "*kind crocodiles*" (Image 4) did not seem to fit his expectations of the character. He turned quickly to correct me by clearly proclaiming that his interpretation of the personality of his character was of a fierce crocodile, not a kind one (Image 5). So I, as the narrator, proposed that, if he did not want to be the kind crocodile, then he could not go on the stage immediately (Image 5). He did not answer me verbally, but remained seated quietly on the side stage (Images 6–8). Ironman was struck decisively to claim his right towards the originality and authority of the character that he had created as an actor. Likewise, Spiderman, the Crocodile also practised her decisiveness as an actress. She also did not trade off her understanding of the character by getting tempted and going on the stage immediately. Spiderman didn't respond to me verbally. But, she showed her subtle consent to support Ironman's interpretation of the crocodiles' characters as she physically didn't come on the stage. While Ironman and Spiderman were forthcoming in exercising their authority over their characters, they were unperturbed about my confirmation of "*so crocodiles are not going to stage now*" (Image 7). Their appearances in the scene were then delayed as a consequence of refusing to be kind crocodiles. Simultaneously, as the crocodiles were sitting on the side stage, the baby dinosaurs who were expecting the Crocodiles, they were also interrupted by this surprising twist of plot. Isa and Foreigner, the actors of the baby dinosaurs, exercised their decisiveness, in that moment by quickly resuming to wander in the forest. They resumed as a response to the unexpected situation of "*crocodiles are not going to stage now*" (Images 6–7).

Carrie: (suggesting to Spiderman) *Are there any kind crocodiles? Is there a kind one?*

(Turning to the baby dinosaurs sitting on stage) *No kind crocodiles ... So no kind crocodiles.*

(Turning back to the Crocodiles) *So crocodiles are not going to stage now*. (Waving hand to sign 'no')

In the closing moment of this happening, Isa took Foreigner by the hand and resumed their *Searching for Family* plot decisively. Meanwhile the two crocodiles sat quietly on the side stage (Image 8).

Both of the crocodiles show disappointment, yet sit quietly in the side stage.

From a performance perspective, the reaction from Isa and Spiderman, were responses of the actors in action. This only happened when the children became their created characters and were willing to support the decisions of each other (i.e., the crocodiles should be fierce, or the unexpected twist of the plot). The consequence of Ironman's unexpected refusal

interrupted the decisions and actions of the narrator, the co-actors on stage, and caused a twist in the plot. However, as drama improvisation does, the interruptions and rejections came back to agreements or compromises at the ending of the story.

In a rhizomatic terms, the decisiveness flows rhizomatically from the narrator (who invited kind crocodiles) to Ironman (who decides boldly crocodiles are fierce), then spreads simultaneously to both Spiderman (another crocodile who agrees with Ironman) and the baby dinosaurs (who decide to resume the family-searching plot). Instead of seeing this as a linear process, it is simultaneous. Ironman's understanding of his crocodile character meant he performed an unexpected rejection to the act as a kind crocodile. By reading the improvisation rhizomatically, the plot *becomes* an open system, full of surprises, unexpectedness occurrences. This was caused by interruptions and rejections. Next, I will present a similar arto-rhizomatic analysis but this time by showing group decisiveness that was expressed by Shark the Mommy Dinosaur, Isa the Sister Dinosaur and Foreigner the Brother Dinosaur.

Happening 2 (Images 9–15) – *Decisiveness*

(Foreigner the Brother Dinosaur goes up to Shark the Mommy Dinosaur who sits at the side stage.)

Carrie: *Oh, they found their mommy!*

(Shark gets up like a human being and starts running away from the baby dinosaurs.)

Carrie: *It's so lucky that they found their mommy!*

(Brother Dinosaur is happy to see his mommy.)

(Sister Dinosaur is also excited to see Mommy Dinosaur. She runs quickly like a human being intending to catch up with Mommy Dinosaur with happy sounds. However, Mommy Dinosaur doesn't stop for them. She just keeps running around quickly. The baby dinosaurs get nervous.

They sound worried while waving hands towards their mommy signing "wait for me". But

Mommy Dinosaur just doesn't stop. Sister Dinosaur can't catch Mommy Dinosaur. She stops

running after Mommy and starts crying loudly.)

Carrie: *Oh, no, Sister Dinosaur is crying. Why is Mommy Dinosaur running away and*

              leaving the baby dinosaurs behind?

Shark: (still running in circles) *I'm going to the market!*

Carrie: *You can bring your children to the market too.*

Shark: (stopping suddenly) *No, I can't. As they eat a lot of food. They need lots of food.*

              Here is lots of food. They need to do (get) *it by themselves as they are grown-ups*

              now!

Carrie: *Oh, they grew up.*

              (Turning to Isa) *Sister Dinosaur, you are grown up now. Can you do it by yourself?*

Isa: (weeping) *ngggg nggg...*

(Isa leans forward to reach Foreigner the Brother Dinosaur.)

9 | Foreigner the Brother Dinosaur goes up to Shark, the Mommy Dinosaur who sits on the side stage.

Being child actors, while Shark was forthcoming in exercising her performance, the

actors of baby dinosaurs were interrupted again by this unexpected response of Mommy

Dinosaur (Images 11–15).

Carrie: *Oh, they found their mommy!*

Carrie: *Oh, no, Sister Dinosaur is crying. Why is Mommy Dinosaur running away and leaving the baby dinosaurs behind?*
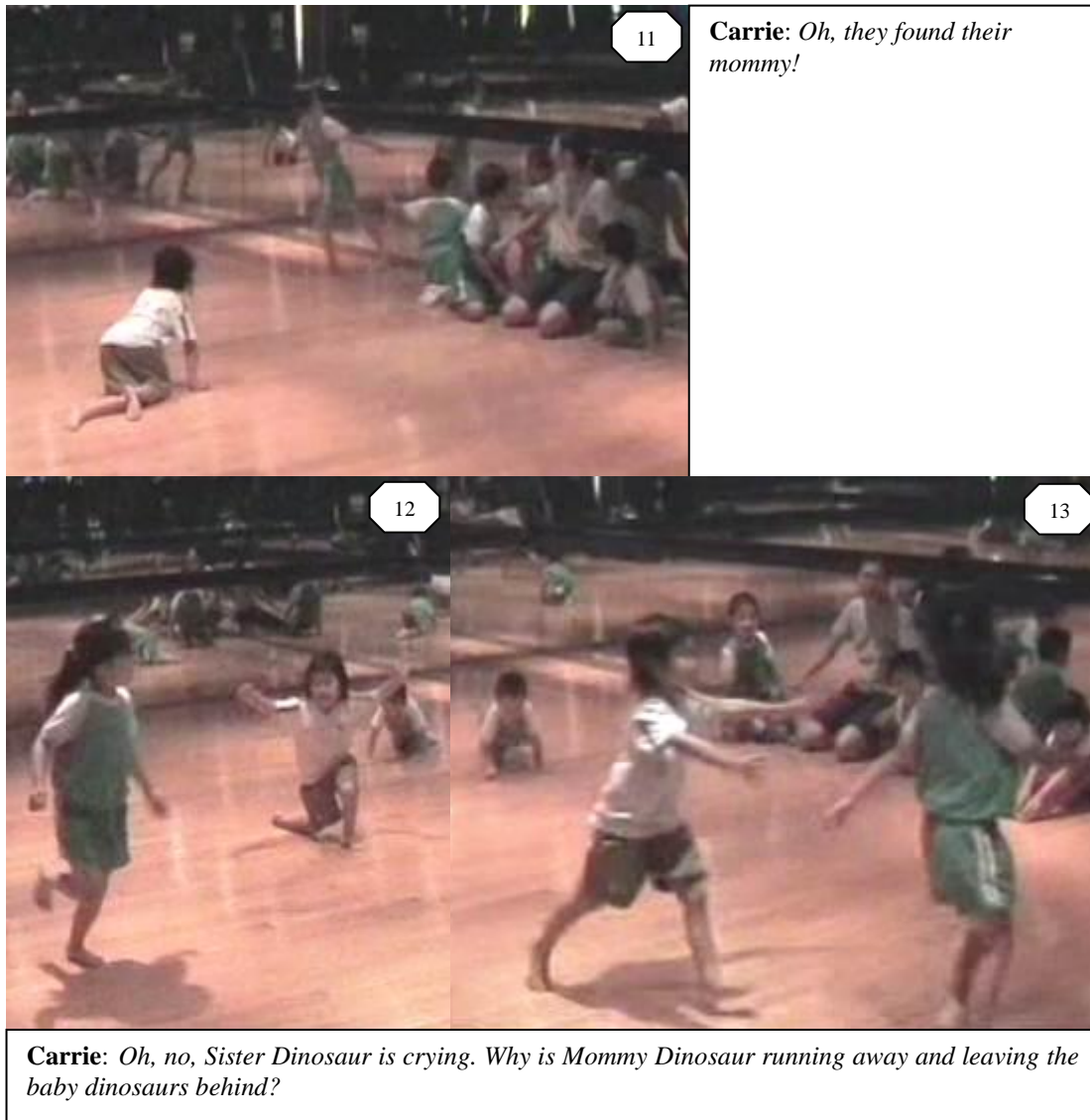
With Ironman's surprise of refusing to be a kind crocodile in Happening 1, Shark's

unexpected enactment triggered the partner actors to respond. For example, in the snippet of

the video data, after knowing Mommy Dinosaur was not going to reunite with them,

Foreigner the Brother Dinosaur resumed their plot of searching for lost family without

hesitation. At the same time Isa the Sister Dinosaur sent her consent (agreement) in response

to Shark's open invitation to play (the *no, but…* game) together. Isa the Sister Dinosaur

pretended to collapse into sadness, as seen by her facial expression and crying (Image 15).
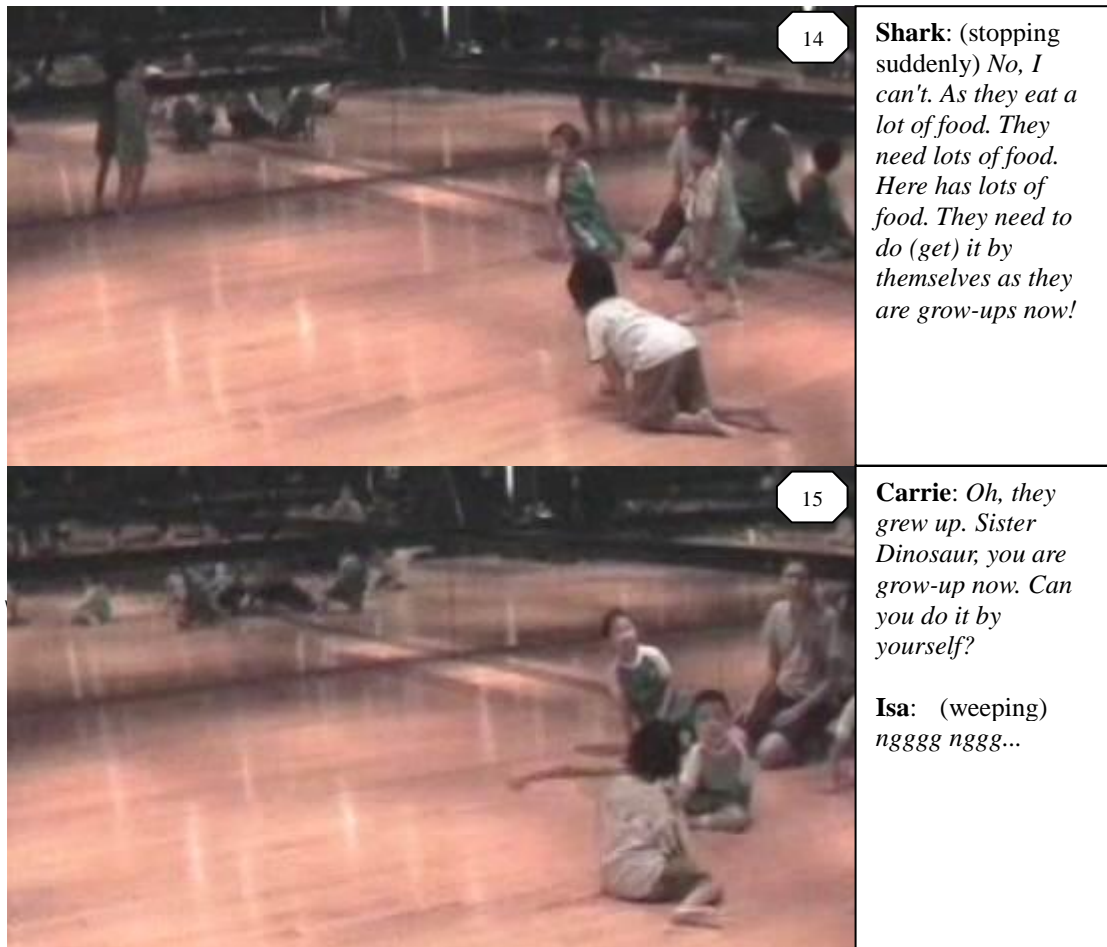
14

Shark: (stopping suddenly) *No, I can't. As they eat a lot of food. They need lots of food. Here has lots of food. They need to do (get) it by themselves as they are grow-ups now!*

15

Carrie: *Oh, they grew up. Sister Dinosaur, you are grow-up now. Can you do it by yourself?*

Isa: (weeping) *ngggg nggg...*

In theatre terms, Mommy Dinosaur was playing the major character on stage, while the baby dinosaurs were playing the minors because they were supporting the scene. Thus as actors, both Isa and Foreigner were, again, decisive in their responses. They also became the characters who responded to Mommy Dinosaur's refusal acts. They were happy to see mommy and sad when mom turned them down. In the scene, the children usually claimed their understanding of their characters through body and emotional knowledge (e.g., Sister Dinosaur collapsing on the floor with crying expression, Image 15). Emotion here, lying at the heart of the improvisation as the aesthetic encounters, not only illuminated these children's abilities and willingness to work with the unexpected, it also "… brings passion, humour, suspense, dynamics and tension to an improvisation. It was the lifeblood of drama" (Abbott, 2007, p. 77). Emotions contributes to the production of aesthetic encounters.

Decisiveness was visualised in the process of how children's aesthetic encounters "come alive" (Abbott, 2007, p. 159) through the presentation from/ with/ in the becoming-characters. However, reading with a rhizomatic understanding of becoming (referring to the idea of forever in the middle of a process), the child actors' becoming characters also deterritorialised (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) (Chapter 1) the identities (territories) as actors and the characters. These child actors were the characters-actors-children-authorities all in one. They seemed to have reached the point "where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I. [S/he is] no longer [his/herself]" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 3). As they were not simply the characters but also actors, so they were constantly shifting in-between the identities of the character when they acted.

Surprisingly, the unexpected happenings of *refusing to be kind crocodiles* (Happening 1) and *reuniting with the baby dinosaurs* (Happening 2) did not discrepant the narrative developments and tensions but added suprises to build on the plot. What these happenings signaled was how Ironman the Crocodile and Shark the Mommy Dinosaur contributed to the knowledge of their characters. They did it to progress the tension of the plots by being open to act and react, by "being there" in the immediate presence (Abbott, 2007, p. 43). Presence is about the live emotions and feelings of an actor who acts and reacts to the scripted situation on stage (Stanislavsky, 1989). Usually, these actions and reactions are scripted in the text and actors are required to practise their (e)motions in rehearsals. Yet, professional actors are expected to represent all these rehearsed (e)motions as real and new – to "come alive" (Abbott, 2007, p. 159) on stage. However, from Deleuze's (1997a) perspective, everything that happens on stage is real to the character(s); that is, related to the actors' consciousness. Aesthetic encounters lie in these improvisation presences where openness, unexpectedness, surprises, refusals, blockages, disputes and compromises are inter- and intra-woven rhizomatically by spontaneously overlapping identities, actions and reactions, and emotions.

Since "to render a potentiality present and actual is a completely different matter from representing a conflict" (Deleuze, 1997a, p. 254), the resistance between Ironman the Crocodile, or Shark the Mommy Dinosaur and me, were real for the scene. At least they were real for the child actors in their characters. This resistance was not representational – not a representation of a script. They might be coming out of the child actors' consciousness. This resistance brought out the second theme of *introspectiveness*, which was derived from the rhizomatic concept of becoming-presence (being real in virtual reality). Thus, the actor's conciousness was another theme in aesthetic encounters that I was about to explore within *Saving the Baby Dinosaurs* plot. This new plot emerged when Shark, who had once acted indifferently towards her baby dinosaurs, twisted her character unexpectedly again and again. According to Deleuze (1997a), decisiveness comes from "minority consciousness" (p. 253), which can also be understood as *introspectiveness*, which I discuss in the following happening.

Introspectiveness – Introducing *Saving the Baby Dinosaurs* (Images 16–44)

Introspectiveness as the second theme that was played out by the child actors in the second plot named *Saving the Baby Dinosaurs*. It was the longest plot of the scenes lasting approximately 2 minutes and 13 seconds. Following the story line, the centre stage was an area dominated by two fierce crocodiles who were hunting for prey. Two baby dinosaurs were wandering in the black forest. The scene seemed suddenly falling into chaos. This happened because all the child actors were running around and screaming, either hunting or escaping, and running away from fire. At first, the running and screaming seemed merely to be a group of excited children that could be found in any ordinary chasing games. However, after generating the data for all 22 improvisation scenes, this seemingly meaningless repetitive running around caught my attention. It made me wonder if the children were

running just for fun. With the running examples of Mommy Dinosaur and Lifeguard in the

Saving the Baby Dinosaurs plot, I present how children played out their introspectiveness.

Happening 3 (Image 16–44) – *Introspectiveness*

Carrie: *She doesn't want to* (do it by herself)...

       At this very moment... Mommy Dinosaur is in the market

       (Prompted Mommy Dinosaur to leave the stage with hand gestures.)

       Two fierce dinosaurs appear!

(The two crocodiles crawl quickly towards the baby dinosaurs on stage.)

Ironman: (turning back to Carrie) *Crocodiles!*

Carrie: (correcting herself) *Oh, crocodiles! Sorry... it's crocodiles.*

(Baby dinosaurs are running around.)

Carrie: *So scary! Help! Help me!!!*

Isa: (scared and screaming) *Ah…*

(All dinosaurs are running around to escape from the crocodiles.)

(Police says the screaming scared him; so Carrie covers his ears.)

(Mommy Dinosaur goes back to the side stage.)

Carrie: *Suddenly, the black forest is on fire!!! There is a fire again! What can we do?*

(Lifeguard is circling on the stage with a siren sound as if he is an ambulance.)

(Everyone is running around. Crocodiles are still running after the baby dinosaurs. The

Lifeguard is running in circles and seems as if he wants help for putting out the fire. Mommy

Dinosaur is running around, with a sense of urgency.)

(Carrie prompts the actors to come back to the centre stage.)

Carrie: *You need to be 'here'* (pointing to the centre stage) *to be seen. We* (the video cam)

       can't see you over there.

(Lifeguard comes back and sits next to Carrie at the side stage.)

Carrie: *Oh, lots and lots and lots of fire everywhere! It's so lucky that Mommy Dinosaur*

has protected her baby dinosaurs. It's very lucky that Mommy Dinosaur came back

in time to save her babies. But the two crocodiles are still in the fire!

(Lifeguard jumps up and goes on to the stage.)

Carrie: *Lifeguard, the two fierce crocodiles are still in the fire. What can be done?*

Police: (rushing to the stage) *Put out the fire!*

Ironman: *We can eat fire, we crocodiles* (with a raising hand).

Carrie: *You* (two) *can eat fire. So what can be done?*

(Spiderman the Crocodile is making body movements like gymnastics.)

(Lifeguard is busy sprinkling water around to put out the fire.)

Carrie: *Lifeguard is trying hard to fight the fire.*

(At the same time, Mommy Dinosaur takes her babies hand in hand to the side stage.)

Shark: *I am not afraid of fire!*

Carrie: (prompts to the dinosaurs) *You bring them back ... you can sit down...*

Shark: (to Carrie) *I'm going to save...*

Carrie: (to Mommy Dinosaur) *So how about your...?*

(Mommy Dinosaur comes back to the side stage)

Shark: (to Carrie) *We have to go because the fire is here!*

(Taking the babies up and hurrying her babies to leave) *Go, go, go!*

Carrie: (to the dinosaurs) *So you need to hurry up and go...*

(The dinosaurs go to the opposite side of the stage.)

Carrie: *At this moment, Mommy Dinosaur has escaped from the forest fire with her baby*

dinosaurs.

As the data snippet opened, the baby dinosaurs were still involved in the *Searching for family* plot on the centre stage, Ironman the Crocodile and Spiderman, the Crocodile were crawling quietly towards the baby dinosaurs (Image 16). They were physically acting like two fierce crocodiles who were hunting for food (Image 17).

Carrie: *Two fierce dinosaurs appear!*
(The two crocodiles crawl quickly towards the baby dinosaurs on stage.)

Then the plot segued into a *Saving the Baby Dinosaurs* plot. After being rejected by Mommy Dinosaur, the baby dinosaurs walked up and played by being typical prey and stayed passive, weak, and lost (Images 18–23).

Carrie: *So scary! Help! Help me!!!*
Isa: (scared and screaming) *Ah...*

They defined and narrated their characters of baby dinosaurs in the imaginative spaces of their plot. However, they did not choose to surrender easily. Isa the Sister Dinosaur rushed to take care of her younger brother, Foreigner, the Brother Dinosaur. At the same time, she tried hard to catch her breath and escape from the two fierce crocodiles (Images 24–28). Meanwhile, even though Shark the Mommy Dinosaur kept a short distance from her babies, she did not give them a helping hand (Images 19, 20, 22, 23, 28 in the red circles).

All dinosaurs are running around to escape from the crocodiles.
The red circle is Shark the Mommy Dinosaur.

Not long after I suggested "*the black forest is on fire*" as the narrator, Police the Lifeguard acted spontaneously by running around (Images 29–32 in the blue circles). He made sounds of alarm as if he was an ambulance. Mommy Dinosaur also reacted quickly to save her baby dinosaurs from the fire (Images 33–38). Mommy Dinosaur later decided to leave the black forest fire, with her babies for safety reasons (Images 39–44). On the surface it appeared that through this *Saving the Baby Dinosaurs* plot, Mommy Dinosaur resumed her

role as a mother to take care of her baby dinosaurs during the fire outburst. However, a

generative arto-rhizomatic reading offered another. By thinking with character-building in

acting skills, these running-around body movements could be an act and expression of

introspectiveness. I suggested through the lines of flight, that Shark's moves could be

understood as an introspective exercise which was embodied in the performance. In other

words, these were decisive actions that Mommy Dinosaur performed through her decisions

when to reunite with her children.

In this section, I interpret introspectiveness with the drama concept of becoming and

Deleuze's rhizomatic concept of becoming (Chapter 2). Introspectiveness in this happening

was evident in the actions by the actress Shark, the Mommy Dinosaur. In relation to the

Happening 2 that Shark the actress of Mommy Dinosaur refused to take care of her babies as

she stated that her babies should grow up. Next, again she did not give any help to her babies

even though she saw that two fierce crocodiles were breathlessly chasing the baby dinosaurs.

It was not clear why Shark the Mommy Dinosaur acted like that. From a theatre perspective,

Shark the actress was continuously becoming her character as Mommy Dinosaur. Revisiting

the video showed that she was running in a reachable distance towards her babies (Images 19,

20, 22, 23, 28 in the red circles) while the crocodiles were hunting the baby dinosaurs. It

looked as if she was prepared to rescue her babies from the fierce crocodiles at any moment.

Carrie: *Suddenly, the black forest is on fire!!! There is a fire again! What can we do?*
(Lifeguard acts like he is an ambulance, circling the stage in with a car engine sound.)

(Lifeguard jumps up and goes on to the stage.)	(Lifeguard is busy with sprinkling water around to put away the fire.)
Carrie: *Lifeguard, the two fierce crocodiles are still in the fire. What can be done?*	**Carrie:** *Lifeguard is trying hard to fight with the fire.*
Police: (rushing to the stage) *Put away the fire!*	

A few moments later, the black forest was on fire. Immediately, Shark the Mommy Dinosaur who was circling around the baby dinosaurs in a reachable distance ran towards them (Image 32). Next, Shark took the two baby dinosaurs hand-in-hand and proclaimed loudly that *"I am not afraid of fire!"* (Images 33–34).

Carrie: *Oh, lots and lots and lots of fire everywhere! It's so lucky that Mommy Dinosaur has protected her baby dinosaurs. It's very lucky that Mommy Dinosaur came back in time to save her baby dinosaurs.*

(At the same time, Mommy Dinosaur takes her babies hand in hands to the side stage.)

Shark: *I am not afraid of fire!*

Carrie: (prompts to the dinosaurs) *You bring them back... you can sit down...*

While escorting her babies back to the side stage safely, she left immediately saying *"I'm going to save..."*. After looking around the stage, Shark came back to the side stage with a look of worry. By saying *"we have to go because the fire is here!"* she was urging her babies to get up and leave quickly to the opposite side of the stage. This time, Shark, the actress again played out the character of motherhood. I once doubted whether Shark could act as a mother as she was only four years old, the second youngest child in the workshops, and she rejected reuniting with the baby dinosaurs at the beginning of the scene. But after reviewing the video recording of the scene, Shark as an actress acted according to the presence. She performed "variation" and "always vary itself. That is, it must to travel though new and always unexpected routes" (Deleuze, 1997a, p. 254). These variations include her decisive acts (not only verbal lines) on refusing to reunite with the baby dinosaurs. Some other acts include circulating around her babies in a reachable distance, and a respectively quick introspective reaction to save her babies from the fire. As an unscripted improvisation scene, it was believable that these subtle acts were deliberate choices of the actress through her own conscious analysis of the situations and constant decision-making.

Shark: (to Carrie) *I'm going to save...*
Carrie: (to Mommy Dinosaur) *So how about your...?*

(Mommy Dinosaur comes back to the side stage)
Shark: (to Carrie) *We have to go because the fire is here! Go, go, go!*
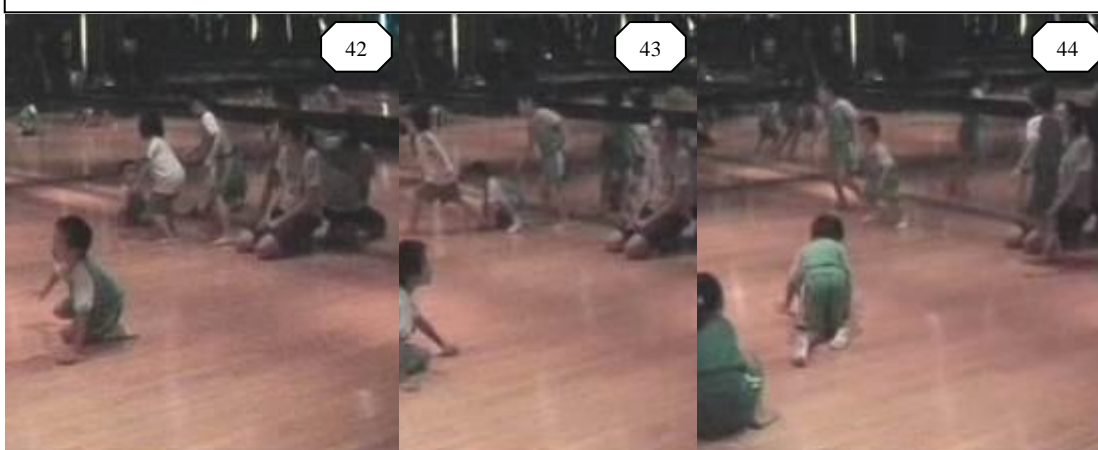
Shark: (taking the babies up and hurrying her babies to leave) *Go, go, go!*
Carrie: (to the dinosaurs) *So you need to hurry up and go...*
(The dinosaurs go to the opposite side of the stage.)
Carrie: *At this moment, Mommy Dinosaur has escaped from the forest fire with her baby dinosaurs.*

Introspectiveness was also evident among the minor characters, i.e., the baby dinosaurs. In this scene, even though the baby dinosaurs were plotting to search for their mother at the beginning, it was unexpected that they were continuously rejected or ignored by Shark, the Mommy Dinosaur. It was surprising that the actors of the baby dinosaurs did not complain about this but played along with the rejection plots. It might be a deliberate choice of the actors who chose to fit in with the improvisation scene. They seemed to be taking in what the (virtual reality) world offered to them, e.g., the storyline of searching for family, rejections

from Shark the Mommy Dinosaur. Other incidents were, being hunted by the two actors who refused to be kind but fierce crocodiles, and finally in the fire of the black forest. These four imaginative crises could not be easy for children, aged three years and five years, to respond spontaneously.

The actors of the Brother Dinosaur and the Sister Dinosaur created several touching moments to show their close brother and sister relationship. They did this by holding hands when wandering in the dark forest, escaping from the crocodiles, and finally leaving the forest fire together. From an acting point of view, these two child actors, minor characters, were required to exercise their introspectiveness in each of the crises before their enactments through intuitive responses. They possibly struggled in these virtual crises as they expressed different emotions and reaction. They expressed weeping when they learnt that Mommy Dinosaur was not going to reunite with them. They ran breathlessly in horror to escape from the fierce crocodiles. They could have refused to play along or block the ideas which were unfavourable to them, but they did not. Through these enactments, they successfully portrayed the vulnerable, yet lovable image of baby dinosaurs. Similar to Shark the Mommy Dinosaur, these two actors also struggled in-between character and the actor self, the situation of the immediate presence, and how to become their character. They constantly made decisions from crisis to crisis throughout the scene using the spontaneous exercises of introspectiveness.

Introspective exercises are common to actors especially during rehearsals when they study the script for character-building. However, in drama improvisation, these introspective exercises are executed in a much shorter time-frame, sometimes spontaneously, because there are no rehearsals in this form of drama. The improvisers are required to respond to the *immediate presence*. Therefore, improvisers think and act simultaneously to fit into the *immediate presence* and carry on with (or even develop) the story plot. This practice has a

close relation to becoming the character and requires actors to work constantly in-between

the character and the actor self and the *immediate presence* spontaneously. It is a very

challenging task even for adult improvisers. Yet, these child actors performed introspective

exercises throughout the 22 scenes.

Introspectiveness in theatre normally refers to as a "self-conscious activity" (Cull, 2009,

p. 3). Introspectiveness is a must in drama as actors need to study their characters before

rehearsals. Particularly, in drama improvisation, since no pre-script is available and no one

knows how the story or the character will develop. Hence, improvisers have to 'do'

introspectiveness on the spot. Thus, it is difficult to discuss introspectiveness within an

improvisation context. However, with the concept of presence, that everything is real to the

characters and actors, Deleuze's (1997a) concept of power can be used to explain how

introspectiveness worked among the children. While introspectiveness was suggested as the

aim to "re-explore and affirm the place of aesthetic experience" (Tomlin, 2008, p. 4),

empathy was the third theme that I used to examine the further process of children's aesthetic

encounters. In the last plot of the scene, Ironman and Spiderman the Crocodiles segue into

fire-eating crocodiles to perform their interpretation of emotional engagement and empathy.

Empathy – **Introducing** *The Fire-Eating Crocodiles* **(Images 45-63)**

In the last set of images, I presented the closing moment of the Black Forest (4)

improvisation scene which was named *The Fire-Eating Crocodiles*. This set of snippets

lasted for 65 seconds. It was the last part of the scene; in theatre terms it was also the climax

of the show. In this section the tensions of both the story and the emotional struggles should

be resolved. This indicated that the searching for family and the fire in the black forest

problems should be solved. Although the storylines seemed to have a logical development, it

is important to remind readers that this was actually an unscripted and unrehearsed

improvisation scene performed by six child actors aged 3–5 years and implied no guarantee of a complete or satisfactory ending of the story.

As the final scene, this plot contained multiplied movements of unexpected story flows and the child actors' emotional engagements. Although the story seemed to have a linear development, it was made of multiple surprises and interruptions. This happened due to the spontaneous ensemble of the child actors and their characters. Special attention was drawn towards the creativity of Ironman the Crocodile (Image 45). He shifted his identity from the character of a fierce crocodile to a fire-eating crocodile to eat up all the fire in the black forest (Images 52–54). Surprisingly, these novice improvisers produced a happy ending to the improvised performance with blooming creativity, empathy and imagination (Images 55–63). Empathy, as the third theme of the aesthetic encounters, was made visible through the fourth happening in this scene by the fierce crocodiles.

Happening 4 (Images 45–63) – *Empathy*

Ironman: (waving to Carrie) *We can eat fire, we crocodiles*.

Carrie: *You can eat fire. So what can be done*?

(Spiderman the Crocodile is making body movements like a gymnast.)

Ironman: (crawling towards Carrie) *We can eat fire. We crocodiles!*

Carrie: (to Ironman the Crocodile) *But have you eaten all the fire?*

Ironman: (stunned then turned to the stage) *Very soon*...

(Ironman starts to eat fire)

(Mommy Dinosaur brings her babies back to the side stage.)

(Lifeguard comes back to the side stage.)

Ironman: *Done!*

Carrie: *So you have finished eating fire... You two dinosaurs finished eating fire... no,*

                  no, crocodiles...

(Carrie makes a gesture like holding a microphone)

Carrie: *Could you share what do you think about the fire?*

Police: *I want to speak as the third* (person)…

Carrie: (stopping Lifeguard) *Wait...*

                  (To the crocodiles) *What do you think about the fire, you two fire-eating*

                  crocodiles?

Ironman: *As I can eat fire ... lots and lots and lots of fire...*

                  It's really yummy! Very hot (warm as fire)!

                  Very burning! Very yummy!

Carrie: *Oh, Is the fire your food?*

Spiderman: *I think the same.*

Carrie: (to the crocodiles) *Both of you like eating fire?*

Spiderman & Ironman: *Yes, as I can finish eating all the fire, so that I can save the people*

                  (animals)…

Carrie: (clapping hands) *3, 2, 1, finished! Please sit down.*

Improvisers usually claim understanding of their characters through body and emotional knowledge (Abbott, 2007; Stanislavsky, 1989). Emotion lies at the heart of the improvisation scene as a rhizomatic machine of aesthetic that "…brings passion, humour, suspense, dynamics and tension to an improvisation. It is the lifeblood of drama" (Abbott, 2007, p. 77). Improvisers are required to "understand emerging sensations and feelings as improvisatory material and then work[ing] them not unlike a sculptor who works with clay" (Johnston, 2006, p. 101). In short, it is about recognising and acting upon the actors' feelings and making it visible to the audience.

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings and emotions of and to

another. In these workshops, drama improvisation provided a virtual reality of the children to

exercise empathy. The child actors experienced and responded to the aesthetic encounters

through "externalising the sensation" (Johnston, 2006, p. 106), such as emotional

engagements, empathy and care. When I (as the narrator) suggested that the black forest was

on fire, the actors of the dinosaur family chose to run away. On the other hand, Police the

Lifeguard was determined to rescue the animals. Yet, the most surprising act was proposed

by Ironman "*We can eat fire, we crocodiles*." (Image 45).

Ironman: (waving to Carrie) *We can eat fire, we crocodiles.*

Carrie: *You (two) can eat fire. So what can be done?*
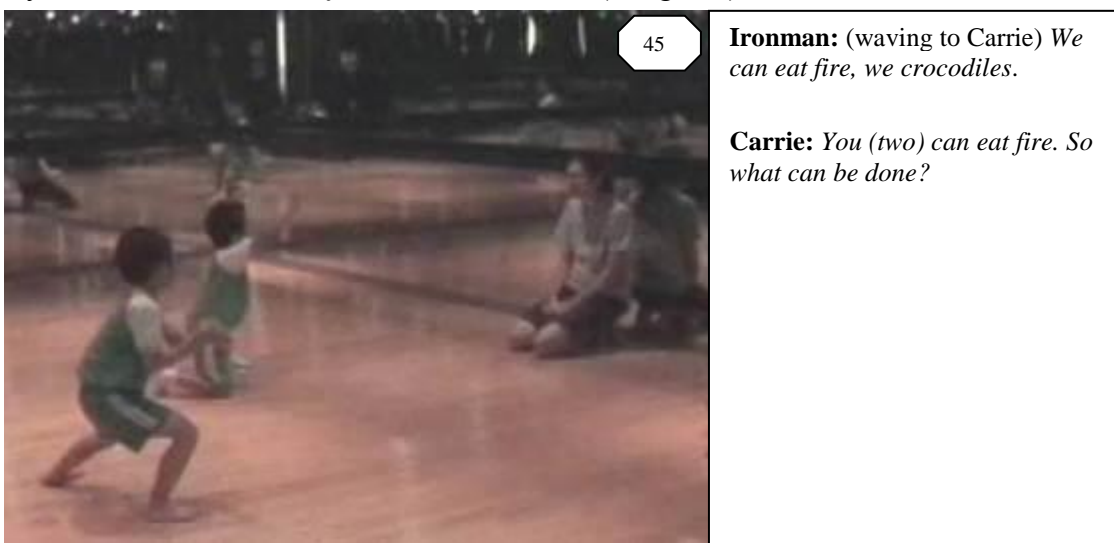
When Police the Lifeguard reported the disappointment of not being able to put out

the fire, Ironman the Crocodile asserted, "*We can eat fire. We crocodiles!*" (Images 46–49).

Ironman: (crawling towards Carrie) *We can eat fire. We crocodiles!*

As a sign of being in immediate presence, where the fire in the forest was of concern, Ironman as an actor was "be(ing) moved" (Johnston, 2006, p. 99) by the emerging circumstance. He became the crocodile who was situated in a crisis. He seemed to have imagined the critical emergency that fire may turn many animals homeless or kill them. So, to fit in the immediate presence, he quickly and decisively altered his character from a fierce crocodile to a fire-eating crocodile. In the virtual reality of drama improvisation, this was a surprising yet acceptable alteration of his character. As the narrator, I wondered about his persistence as my rational mind was scared about how Ironman's fire-eating crocodile could lead the story plot development. However, since improvisers should work together "out of courage and trust" (Johnston, 2006, p. 105), I decided to support his proposal. So I asked, "*But have you eaten all the fire?"* (Image 50). He then looked at me blankly and motionlessly for a second; he was obviously stunned by the unexpected question but quickly resumed his character and replied "*Very soon...*" (Images 51–52).

Carrie: (to Ironman the Crocodile) *But have you eaten all the fire?*
Ironman: (stunned then turned to the stage) *Very soon...* (Ironman starts to eat fire.)
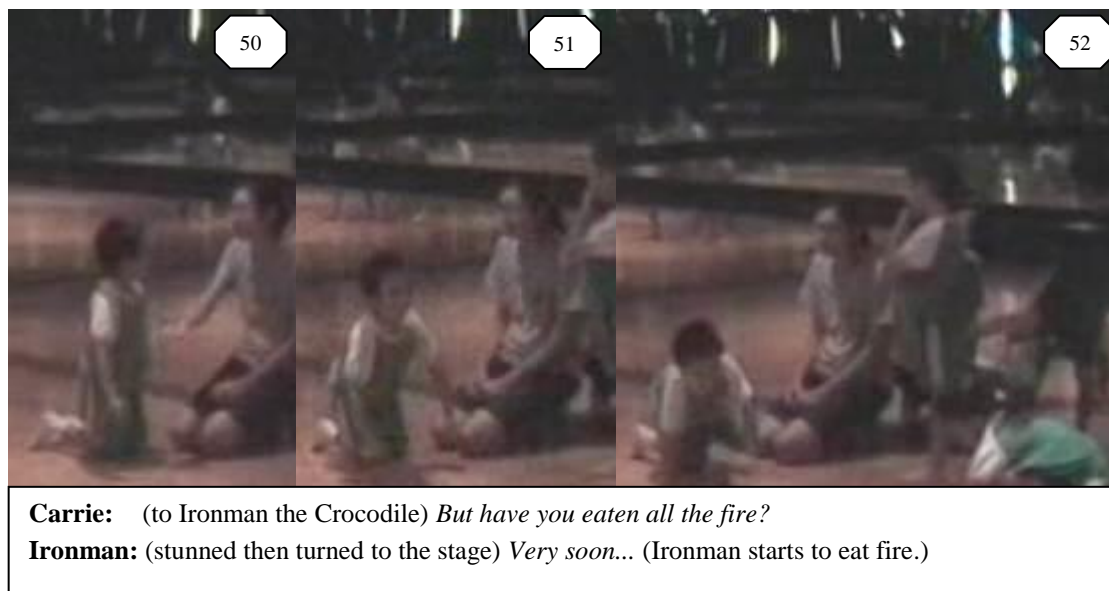
He then immediately moved his four limbs like an animal and manoeuvred his body on the stage and pretended to eat all the fire in his mouth. "*Done!"* he declared, firmly and happily, reporting that the fire had been put out and the black forest has been saved (Images 53–54).

Ironman: *Done!*

Later when he gave the news report interview, Ironman shared his thoughts of saving the forest by eating all the fire. He claimed fire was his favourite food, "*As I can eat fire... lots and lots and lots of fire... It's really yummy! Very hot* (warm as fire)! *Very burning! Very yummy!"* (Image 55–61).

Carrie: *So you have finished eating fire... You two dinosaurs finished eating fire... no, no, crocodiles... Could you share what do you think about the fire? What do you think about the fire, you two fire eating crocodiles?*

Ironman: *As I can eat fire... lots and lots and lots of fire… It's really yummy! Very hot* (warm as fire)! *Very burning! Very yummy!*

Carrie: *Oh, does the fire is your food?*

Spiderman: *I think the same.*

The empathy spot light was in the ending of the scene. It revealed his reason for

becoming a fire-eating crocodile "*Yes, as I can finish eating all the fire, so that I can save the*

people (animals)*"* (Images 62–63).

Spiderman & Ironman: *Yes, as I can finish eating all the fire, so that I can save the people*
[animals]…

Empathy was illuminated through the unexpected, yet decisive alternation of character

by Ironman, the Crocodile. This was not only a sudden shift of his character but it also

created a twist of narrative tension that developed a surprising happy ending for the scene. As

a novice improviser, Ironman was not "be(ing) indulgent" (Johnston, 2006, p. 101) in the

virtual reality but exercised his cognition, emotion and self-awareness/ self-consciousness.

He first recognised the danger of fire in the forest. Then he felt for the animals in the forest,

which could be harmed by the fire. Lastly, he made a decision to alter his character from a

fierce crocodile to a fire-eating crocodile. He empowered himself for the rescue operation. Such an exercise of cognition, emotion and self-consciousness, produced a decision that could save the crisis of the immediate presence. His urgency and determination to save the forest was made visible (Johnston, 2006) through the character becoming-empathy, by performing the verbal, bodily and emotional knowledge of the character. Ironman's empathy was all-at-once acknowledged, supported by, and shared aesthetically with the actors in the happening.

In theatre, emotion or empathy is something related to an actor's psychological expression while performing her/ his character. However, Deleuze (1997b) understood that affect has nothing to do with psychology. It's related to power, as power flows where affect can be found. It looks like a passage from one state to another, an increase or decrease in power (1997b). One can be affective as well as affected; in other words, one can be influential as well as be influenced. Generally, dramatists will not take children's dramatic play as theatre art, as children are pretend playing. For example, if a child cries in dramatic play, it is either a pretend cry or a real cry of pain, not as a result of professional acting techniques. When children express emotion or empathy in their play, they are not seen as professional actors. However, in the workshops, as a professional dramatist, I witnessed how the child actors performed drama improvisation just as a dramatist does. They enact it through constant exercises of cognition, emotion, and self-consciousness. However, promoting drama in early childhood as a way of developing children's empathy is not the purpose of this investigation. Instead, with the help of Deleuze's concept of affect, I can see how these children produced affect through the exercises of cognition, emotion, and self-consciousness in the process of their aesthetic encounters with power. Taking this formal study as an example, I witnessed how these children's *minority consciousness* produced an effect on me. As a teacher or even as an artist, I was influenced by the experiences of

co-acting in these workshops. These experiences have made me reflect on my practice as a teacher. They made me reflect on my aesthetic consideration as an artist, and also consider the benefits and challenges of researching with children. Detailed discussion is made in the Chapter 7, *A/r/tographer's reflective commentary*, about my reflexivity throughout the process of the research study.

Empathy was not a fixed, linear or accumulated progressive activity, but rather a discursive energy circulation in this happening. Similar to the rhizomatic flows of decisiveness, the energy of empathy multiplied and flowed rhizomatically. For example, in the exemplary scene, empathy started from an actor's (Ironman) impulse who was trying to deal with the fire in the forest. His act was performed in a particular improvisation happening. However, this singular impulse activated the process of an aesthetic encounter. In this specific aesthetic encounter, empathy was shared by the fellow actors in the happening and, such in time and space empathy reached its multiplicity. This empathy deterritorialised from Ironman the initiator and multiplied among the child actors. As in its multiplicity, empathy was then located in-between the improvisation scenes. It focussed discussions and children's arts journals among the children as child actors performed, discussed and reflected on their acting experiences in the exemplary scene. Empathy exceeded (or escaped) from the "original trajectory" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 96) and travelled to other time and space. For example, child actors' thoughts and feelings of empathy started from the improvisation scene, which was set in a specific time and space in a specific improvisation happening. It later got carried into the focussed discussions and children's arts journals. That means the emotional engagements of empathy were not only located within the happenings in the drama improvisation but in the focussed discussions and children's arts journals as well. So that the aesthetic encounter was not only located in the drama improvisation scene (art-making) but also extended to art-appreciation and art-criticism. The child actors were able to experience

and respond to aesthetic encounters in the virtual scenes of drama, and as well as express and discuss it in the real life.

The children were emotionally involved not only as actors but also as researchers. In the focussed discussions, the child participants commented that the crocodiles in this scene were *"the best scene"* (Ironman, Big Elephant, Shark, W4-21G – Focussed Discussion) as "*we saved the forest*" (Spiderman, W4-21G – Focussed Discussion), so "*nobody gets hurt in the fire*" (Ironman, W4-21G – Focussed Discussion) and "*no one needs to leave the forest*" (Ironman, W4-21G – Focussed Discussion). Shark (who played Mommy Dinosaur) thought she was "*good*" (Shark, W4-21G – Focussed Discussion) as an actress because she saved her babies from the fire. Police the Lifeguard was happy, even though he could not put out the fire but he "*rescued the family of the dinosaurs*" (Police, W4-21G – Focussed Discussion). Similar empathetic comments were found in the children's arts journals. Five of the six arts journals directly related to the forest on fire. Police, the Lifeguard made a ladder for a fire-engine (Picture 1). Although there was no fire-engine in the drama improvisation scene, Police's arts journal revealed Police's empathic thought of having a fire-engine to save the forest. Both Spiderman and Ironman made fire balls with red, yellow, blue and black clay dough to represent the fire in the forest. Spiderman claimed her art work that *"It's a fire ball."* (W4-21G – Children's Arts Journal) (Picture 2). While Ironman was making his arts journal, he said "the fire was like a ball rolling around". Later, Ironman named his art work as "*The fireball I ate in the forest!*" (Picture 3). Isa made two crosses in the fire, which was blazing in the forest (Picture 4) signifying the death of the animals. Shark explained her picture was "*a tuneable exit for the animals to escape from the fire*" (W4-21G – Children's Arts Journal) (Picture 5). The fear of fire troubled the child actors, even though they understood it was a drama improvisation scene and not real.

Picture 1. Children's Arts Journal – Workshop 4, 2013.10.08, Police the Life Guard – *"It's a fire-engine."*

Picture 2. Children's Arts Journal – Workshop 4, 2013.10.08, Spiderman the (girl) Crocodile – *"It's a fire ball."*

Picture 3. Children's Arts Journal – Workshop 4, 2013.10.08, Ironman the Crocodile – *"The fireball I ate in the forest."*

Picture 4. Children's Arts Journal – Workshop 4, 2013.10.08, Isa the Sister

Dinosaur – two crosses in the fire of the forest.
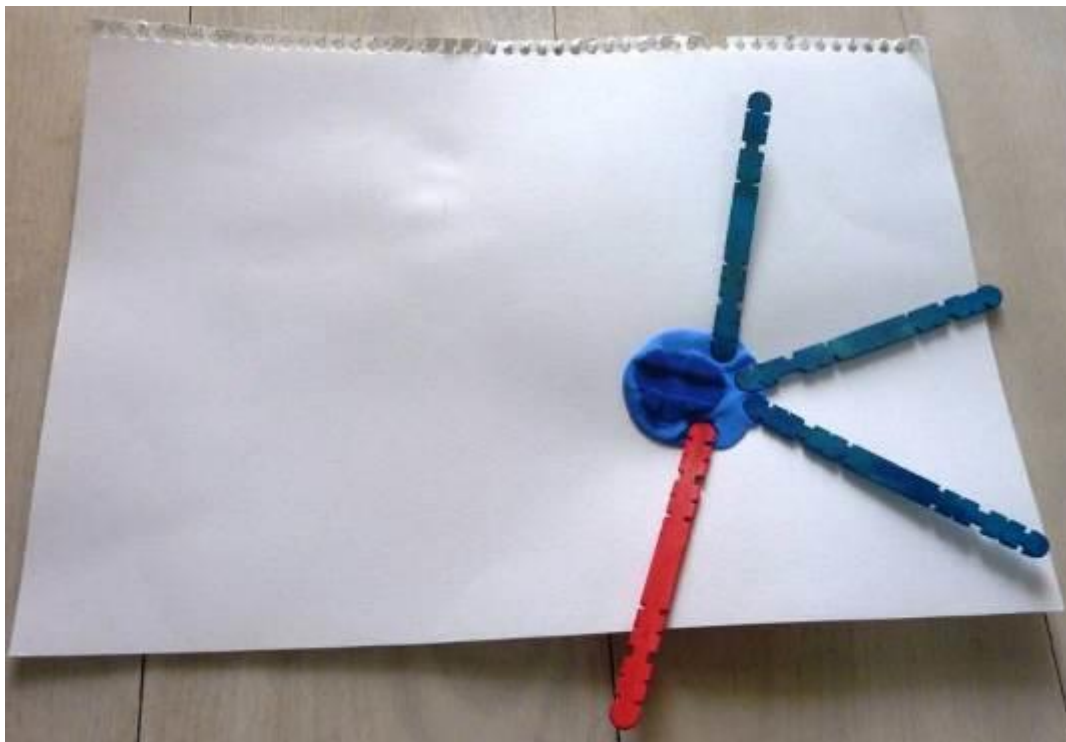
Picture 5. Children's Arts Journal – Workshop 4, 2013.10.08, Shark the Mommy

Dinosaur –*"A tuneable exit for the animals to escape from the fire."*

Discussion on Aesthetic Encounters from the Child's Perspective

As qualitative research seeks for *meaningfulness* (Sullivan, 2004), it was not the *frequency* but *meaning* of the aesthetic encounters that this study was concerned. Therefore, there was no intention to present a numeric figure on how many times the child participants had experienced aesthetic encounters throughout the workshops. Instead, this section would like to discuss how these aesthetic encounters of the research had been meaningful for the child participants.

First of all, drama improvisation was affirmed as suitable art medium to convey aesthetic encounters. As suggested by the *Guide* (Curriculum Development Council, 2006), drama improvisation became a space where child participants could be open to observation and feelings. While engaging in drama improvisation, child participants were situated in constant observations of their environments (the physical venue of the dance studio, as well as the virtual spaces of drama improvisation stories) with their five senses. Referring to the aesthetics of Daoism suggest about "Fancy words are not true. [美言不信]" (Chen & Hou, 2009, p. 105; Laozi, 551 BCE/2011, Chapter 81), Laozi sees *intuitive presentation* is a kind of *truthfulness*. It implies that aesthetic encounters are about truthful experiences of one's mind, body and soul in relation to his/her surrounding. Therefore, the intuitive performances of the child participants in the drama improvisation scenes were truthful preferences. The imaginative story plots, characters and dialogues, though were unreal, but they revealed the child participants inner thoughts and feelings. Through intuitive and spontaneous enactments, child participants were able to express their "inner thoughts, feelings, emotions and imagination through language of different media" (e.g., dialogue, body movements, gestures, and emotions) (p. 20). These expressions were produced while the child participants were performing the scenes at the status of *wuwei* (non-assertive activity 無為) and *wuyu* (objectless desiring 無欲). From the Daoism aesthetic perspective, the child participants

were not aiming at any self-benefits of any kinds (e.g., fames, toys or snacks). The child

participants were simply enjoying the moments of co-creating drama improvisation with each

other. Drama improvisation provided opportunities for the child participants to have truthful

performances by engaging their intuitive thinking and feelings. These performances in turn

became the truthful aesthetic experiences of the child participants.

> What's more, imagination allows a child to try on new roles and in the process expands
>
> the child's own identity and perspectives on life. By becoming various characters, a
>
> child develops more depth in his or her own persona. This includes expanding a child's
>
> ability to empathize and understand others' plights. The new experiences explored
>
> through play acting become etched in the child's repertoire of life experiences. The
>
> pretend interactions of dramatic play help prepare a child to interact in real-life
>
> scenarios. After all, if a child can deflect a witch using his or her own wit and wisdom,
>
> facing a daily obstacle such as dealing with a bully on the bus may not be so hard.
>
> (Bouzoukis, 2012, p. 181)

During these drama improvisations, child participants were encouraged to enjoy the

participation in creative works. As in those works their creativity and imagination were

stimulated and released. Just as Bouzoukis (2012) suggests, during these imagination

exercises, children can try out various characters and identities. These new experiences with

new identities and scenarios allow children to explore and discover new thoughts, emotions

or even new aspects of life. This is related to the Daoism teaching about "Virtual and reality

bring about each other [虛實相生]" (Chen & Hou, 2009, p.107). Although the story plots

were virtual situations, the emotions and feelings that the child participants had, through their

characters were real. The virtual stories in the drama improvisation scenes brought out the

real thoughts and feelings of child participants. In these *wuwei* (non-assertive activity 無為)

and *wuyu* (objectless desiring 無欲) performances, the child participants were able to have

truthful experiences and becoming-characters they portrayed (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987)

through imagination. While engaging in these imaginative yet truthful experiences, the child

participants were able to understand a little more about themselves and each other. As famous

improviser Keith Johnstone (1979) claims that "the imagination is our true self" (p. 105), so

improvisers are "discovering more about themselves" through the imagination (Johnston,

2006, p. 7). However, not every imagination has such effect. As Winston (2010) explains that

in general situation "our *imagination* is the cognitive link between the material world and our

human consciousness", only when it is in free play (e.g., improvisation), the imaginative

process is "arrested and prolonged in a pleasurable manner without reaching any conceptual

generalization" (p. 20, Italic in original). Because improvisation constitutes "a degree of

consciousness" that "involves the performer being 'at one remove' from real life – yet

crucially attached to it" (Johnston, 2006, p. 8). Also, exercises of imagination can improve

young children's "language, creativity, and the ability to solve problems" (Neville, 2009, p.

155). It is because when people are engaging in improvisation, they can "*gather nourishment*

from the world around them" (Abbott, 2007, p. 116, Italic in original).

Although drama improvisation was the art medium, the focus of the study was on the

aesthetic encounters. The process of how young children experienced and responded to

aesthetic encounters was illuminated through the exercises of *decisiveness, introspectiveness*

and *empathy* in drama improvisation workshops. The workshops provided truthful

experiences for child participants to perform, discuss and evaluate their aesthetic encounters

on what they thought was good and what they liked (Kant, 1790/1987; Xu, c.55–c.149/1972).

Through art-making using improvisation scenes, art-appreciation in focussed discussions, and

art-criticism with arts journals, the child participants were given various opportunities to

"experience free expression and the joy of creation" (Wang, 2013, p. 55). These are process

of negotiation of meaning. With the intuitive and spontaneous natures of improvisation, children and I made decisions about how to act, react and enact the situations. From aesthetic perspectives, it was here, where the child actors constantly struggled within themselves (the actor self). They struggled with the world s/he lived within (the imaginative and co-created virtual reality) aesthetically and rhizomatically. This is how the process of aesthetic encounters was made visible. Engaging in a struggle of identities, emotions and expectations led to negotiations and confrontations. The participants (both the children and I) created verbal and non-verbal cues after reading these cues from each other. In this study, these were the ways how drama improvisation worked to "enhance children's quality of life and foster their interests in life" (Curriculum Development Council, 2006, p. 20). Yet, as suggested, aesthetic encounters should have a function of building better people (through cultivating ethics of self-consciousness and benevolence). The last section of this chapter presents observations on life transformation of the two child participants.

Transformation through Aesthetic Encounters

In aesthetic encounters, children engage in exposures to what is "unfamiliar" that can "raise awareness of and provide insight into personal experience" (Blank, 2012, p. 59). Aesthetics is special because it allows us to engage with the world and the wonder of life (Heid, 2005). As we learn to interact with the smallest differences in art and of life, a deeper understanding (presence) about ourselves and our world may emerge (Greene, 2001). It is the deeper presence that stimulates imagination, passions, curiosity, and sometimes extraordinary circumstances. In these aesthetic encounters, child participants experienced "the real joy of a reality-based [truthful] performance improvisation" (Abbott, 2007, p. 7), while engaging in "moving, exciting, dramatic, absorbing, romantic and thought-provoking" (p. 7) experiences. The child participant's lives were subtly transformed. In the five drama improvisation workshops, children's transformation through aesthetic encounters was gradually emerging.

The following sections will present the observations of the two child participants and their transformations.

Observations on a Child with Developmental and Speech Delay

Police was a five years old boy who could speak fluent Cantonese but he hailed from a mixed-family comprising of Hong Kong Chinese (Cantonese speaking) and Taiwanese (Mandarin speaking). He is a child with special education needs as he was diagnosed with developmental and speech delay when he was three years old. He often ran around in the drama improvisation scenes regardless of what characters he portrayed. At first, these behaviours were taken as non-sense movements by other child actors. Some child actors even filed complaints about not being able to understand Police's performances of running around (W3-Focussed Discussion). I also found it quite difficult to work with him as it was not clear what was the purpose or meaning of his running. Maybe it was caused by his special needs and speech delay. Police seldom explained himself verbally and he had made it even more difficult for us to cope with his running around behaviours.

> In the spontaneous moment, essential social and communication skills can be practiced. This is because spontaneity opens up a gap between the past and the future in which impulses can be followed. Drama operates using a gestural and verbal language that is shared with the culture of social interaction, so it's particularly useful for re-imagining social interactions. (Johnston, 2006, p. 35)

In a general drama perspective, these running around acts of Police did not fulfil the characteristics of drama improvisation. It required narrative developments and tensions in collaboration with other actors on stage. However, with Johnston's (2006) explanation, then I slowly realised the spontaneity of drama improvisation was actually providing the opportunities for Police to re-imagine his social interactions. So later in the drama

improvisation scenes, it was not difficult to see a map of his transformation through aesthetic

encounters. For example, in the 22 drama improvisation scenes, Police acted two times as a

policeman, and two times as a doctor, and two times as a zoo keeper / guard. His characters

had a common characteristic of *helping the others*. With this 'hint' in mind, I revisited his

performances. In scene 12 (W3-12P, Table 4), Police acted as a character of policeman. To

express the emergence atmosphere of the situation, instead of using words, he chose to use

sound and movement to express. He made sounds of siren while running around as fast as he

could. He wanted to indicate that a policeman was working at an emergence event. Therefore,

even though Police did not make any spontaneous dialogues, as long as the child co-actors

and I was willing to pay attention to Police's gestures. We could still catch up Police's

performances and act along with him.

It takes a lot of listening for children to "*listen to what their improvising partner is*

saying" and realise that the noises and actions made by their co-actors might have

"recognisable patterns that can be used to communicate ideas" (Abbott, 2007, p. 116-115,

Italic in original). As Police had speech delay thus verbal language is not his first expressive

medium. On the contrary, verbal language can probably be a hindrance for Police to express

himself, especially in the art form like drama improvisation which requires spontaneous

exchanges. In this case, if I relied on Police's verbal expression in the aesthetic activities

(e.g., verbal improvisation or discussion), then it could be difficult for me to facilitate

aesthetic activities. Hence, Police might not be able to experience aesthetic encounters.

However, Police used his own way to express and, the other child actors and I did not stop

him but tried to understand his performances. So I was able to be more sensitive to his

aesthetic encounters. Just as Abbott suggests, as improvisers:

> *…give each other mutual support and they share a common creativity…. They need to*
>
> *embrace the creativity of other improvisers who may suddenly arrive with unusual*

characters and unexpected ideas. They need to allow a scene to travel in unpredictable

and exciting directions. They need to welcome change and go with the flow! (p. 123,

Italic in original).

Police took the freedom to use different mediums so that he could express and

perform. As the trust between Police, the co-child actors, and me was building up, Police

started releasing verbal expressions. Then the speech delay was no longer such a special

need or the unfavourable pre-set condition of him, which was as obvious in the beginning. I

could not tell that Police has speech delay at all by watching the video recordings of his

drama improvisation scenes in the last two workshops. In fact, during the later drama

improvisation scenes, Police has turned his *disability* into **abilities** to build up his chosen

characters.

> Through spontaneity we are re-formed into ourselves. It creates an explosion for that
>
> moment, it frees us from handed-down frames of reference, memory choked with old
>
> facts and information and undigested theories and techniques of other peoples'
>
> findings. Spontaneity is the moment of personal freedom when we are faced with a
>
> reality and see it, explore it and act accordingly. In this reality the bits and pieces of
>
> ourselves function as an organic whole. It is the time of discovery, of experiencing, of
>
> creative expression. (Spolin, 1963, p. 4)

As Spolin (1963) suggests, Police reformed himself while engaging in the drama

improvisation. The spontaneity moments no longer *choked* Police, for he has speech delay.

Instead the art form forced him to face his reality/limitation. Police as a child with

developmental and speech delay experienced a transformation through aesthetic encounters.

He has transformed from obviously a speech delayed child to a child who could flexibly

express himself. He expressed himself with a mixture of verbal and non-verbal expressions in the characters. In the later workshops, both his co-actors and I could fully understand what he was doing and were able to co-create drama improvisations with him. This was an obvious transformation of Police through aesthetic encounters. Yet, in this transformation, he was not struggling alone. The friendships between Police and the other child participants had made the transformation through aesthetic encounters even more obvious and meaningful. Sharing with Pedagogist, Marta Pegoiani (2012) that people with disability are actually people with different abilities, I too believe "there is no disability in arts, only abilities" (p. 39).

Observations on a Child Labelled as a Naughty Boy

Ironman is another five years old boy from a Hong Kong Chinese family. He is a talkative boy and his parents always say he is naughty. However, after the six drama improvisation workshops (including the Pilot Study), I wondered, as he was exercising empathy and building on his benevolence personality (Xunzi 荀子, 266-255 BCE/2003; Zhuangzi, 369 BCE/1996). It could be because Ironman loves to play hero games in which he always plays the roles of fighting baddies. He had done similar roles in the drama improvisation scenes. Comparing to Isa who always acted as a victim, Ironman often chose heroic characters, e.g., wolf (pilot study), lion (In the Circus (2a), In the Circus (2b), Table 4), crocodile (W4-20G, W4-21G, Table 4), policeman (W3-11P, W3-12P, Table 4), and doctor (W3-15G, Table 4). As Ironman fully expressed his emotions and feelings while engaging in these heroic characters, so sometimes he accidentally hurt his partners (e.g., grabbing Shark's arm too tightly in Scene 5, W3-05G, Table 4). Therefore, Ironman was easily mistaken as a naughty boy or even a bully. However, from the drama improvisation workshops, it was not difficult to identify the good intention behind Ironman's over-excited enactments.

In the last drama improvisation scene of the pilot study, to save Cinderella who was on fire, Ironman (Swordy was the name at that time) devoted all his strength to *fan* the jacket on

Cinderella's body. But, Cinderella felt pain as the jacket hit against her body. Or from the exemplary scene where he insisted to be a fierce crocodile, so he was *hunting* the two baby dinosaurs (Isa and Foreigner) in full-speed with catching gestures. It looked as if he really decided to *eat* the baby dinosaurs. However, instead of seeing these enactments as naughtiness, I could see how empathy worked in Ironman. Just as Abbott claims, "*emotion brings passion, humour, suspense, dynamics and tension to an improvisation. It is the lifeblood of drama*" (p. 77), Ironman injected lots of emotions into his acting. He does it so that his character was brought *alive* on the stage. These excessive emotions could be difficult for his partners yet they evidenced Ironman's full-engagement with his character in the scene. Especially when crises occurred (e.g., the forest was on fire or some animal injured), these emotions would bring out empathic enactments from Ironman. For example, in the mentioned pilot study scene, Ironman was the first one who ran to get his own jacket (which was on the other side of the room) as a prop to put away the fire on Cinderella. He was also the only child participants who talked about how to find out and *arrest* the *bad guy* who set the forest on fire during the arts journal-making (Pilot Study-Children's Arts Journal). Or in the quoted exemplary scene, Ironman altered his character of a fierce crocodile into a fire-eating crocodile to save the forest from fire. He wished to save the forest from fire, so that the animals won't burn. These imaginative improvisation scenes provided opportunities to other people (e.g., his co-actors and parents) to understand there was a good intention behind his excessive and emotional enactments. They were not results of naughtiness, instead, they were exercises of empathy that building on his ethics of self-consciousness. These empathic enactments could contribute to the building of a *benevolence* personality in Ironman. In the Chinese aesthetic perspective, it is the ultimate goal of aesthetic encounters to build better people for better society through cultivating benevolence (Xunzi 荀子, 266-255 BCE/2003; Zhuangzi, 369 BCE/1996).

To summaries this session, this a/r/tographic study has shown that young children are competent to experience and respond to aesthetic encounters. They can achieve this though their embodied interactions with cognitive and emotional engagements through/ in/ with drama improvisation. Spontaneous play with drama improvisation, where children can experience verbal, physical and emotional happenings and apply their creativity and imagination, are seen as extremely valuable contexts. These plays can help in learning and developing one's capacity towards aesthetic development.

The drama improvisation workshops illuminated a space that consisted of *decisiveness, introspectiveness* and *empathy*. These three themes constituted in the aesthetic encounters. It was shaped by relations (between children and drama improvisation), connections (the cognitive and emotional engagements), and the meanings that existed in the immediate presence (the happenings in the improvisation scenes). These co-existing relations became forces that aesthetic encounters, decisiveness, introspectiveness and empathy brought about each other (Laozi, 551 BCE/2011). Deleuze reminds us that "when forces meet and interact, the relation that they construct affect their own nature and changes them in the process" (Goodchild, 1996, p. 91). The performative understanding of the children's aesthetic encounters through *decisiveness, introspectiveness* and *empathy* produced a space called an aesthetic encounter. *Becoming* is a being-in-between movement within a unique event that produces experimentation and change (Stagoll, 2010). Thinking from Deleuze and Guattari perspective, it prompted my thoughts, not only on how an aesthetic encounter functions but also on what is being produced, what changes it makes and who it benefits (Deleuze, 1995; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Drawing Nelson Goodman's (1984) statement that attention to artworks should be based on their function, I wondered what the functions of aesthetic encounters can be. I also wondered what is worth seeking in aesthetic encounters, especially in the Hong Kong's early childhood education context. From the space of decisiveness,

introspectiveness and empathy, the aesthetic encounters seemed to produce a specific space –

an intangible environment. An intangible environment is the one that lets the children

produce various experiments and changes. In the next chapter, I will discuss how intangible

environments can facilitate aesthetic encounters and its functions.

Summary

This chapter brought together the revisited findings from the pilot study (Chapter 4). It

also highlighted the new emerging insights from the main study to reveal how young children

experienced and responded to aesthetic encounters. Through detailed data mapping and

interpretation with both the concepts of drama improvisation and Deleuze, the first part of the

chapter introduced the workshops information. It also presented the process of

arto-rhizomatic mapping lines of flight across the data of the 22 scenes in the five drama

improvisation workshops. With the a/r/tographic analytical devices, the *contiguity* and *excess*

characteristics of data from the lines of flight emerged. Nine characteristics are presented

according to the inter- and intra-relations of aesthetics, drama improvisation and rhizomatic

concepts.

In response to the first research question, four happening snippets of an exemplary

scene were analysed in detail. The arto-rhizomatic mapping on becoming (in both concepts of

drama improvisation and Deleuze) identified that the process of children's aesthetic

encounters. It was illuminated through/ in/ with *decisiveness, introspectiveness* and *empathy.*

Young children's aesthetic encounters were discussed with the aesthetics of Daoism and

Deleuzo-Guattarian becoming. Transformation of two child participants were observed and

interpreted in relation to their aesthetic encounters with drama improvisation before the

chapter was closed. The next chapter carries on the findings and discussion in response to the

second research question about the environments that are required to facilitate young

children's aesthetic encounters.

CHAPTER 6: *Scene Two* – Environments that are Required to Facilitate

Aesthetic Encounters

Chapter 5 presented, analysed, and interpreted data of the five workshops in response to the first research question: *how do young children experience and respond to aesthetic encounters with drama improvisation?* In the last chapter, nine characteristics of young children's aesthetic encounters were mapped across 22 drama improvisation scenes through the arto-rhizomatic mapping: *releasing creativity and imagination, constant decision-making, being bold to express themselves, changing of identities, switching in and out of characters, lapse of concentration, child's perspectives on ethics, emotional engagements,* and *unsuccessful scenes.* These nine characteristics were regrouped into three themes: *decisiveness, introspectiveness* and *empathy*. From Deleuzian and Daoism perspectives, young children experienced and responded to aesthetic encounters with spontaneous and intuitive acts and reactions. Young children did this in such a manner that a number of benefits or self-advantages was involved. The process of their aesthetic encounters was illuminated by exercising creativity, imagination, decision-making, self-expression, and empathy through art-making (drama improvisation), art-appreciation (focussed discussions) and art-criticism (arts journals) in the five workshops. These transformations as the effect of the aesthetic encounters in these five workshops were also discussed with a report of two child participants.

Using the findings from Chapter 5 in response to the first research question, this chapter focuses on the findings and discussions. This is done in response to the second research question about *what kind of environments are required to facilitate aesthetic encounters with young children?* First of all, the chapter discusses the nine characteristics of the physical and intangible aesthetic environments. An intangible aesthetic environment is identified as important environment to facilitate young children's aesthetic encounters. Intangible

environment enables child participants to exercise *decisiveness, introspectiveness* and *empathy*. Figure 18 shows the teacher's struggles by reflecting on my experiences in the workshops. They revealed that the teacher's perspective and power relations are essential to support the intangible aesthetic environment. Through Deleuzian concept of power, the power relations between teacher and children are reconceptualised. Thus, as an alternative teaching perspective, practice are suggested to facilitate young children' aesthetic encounters.
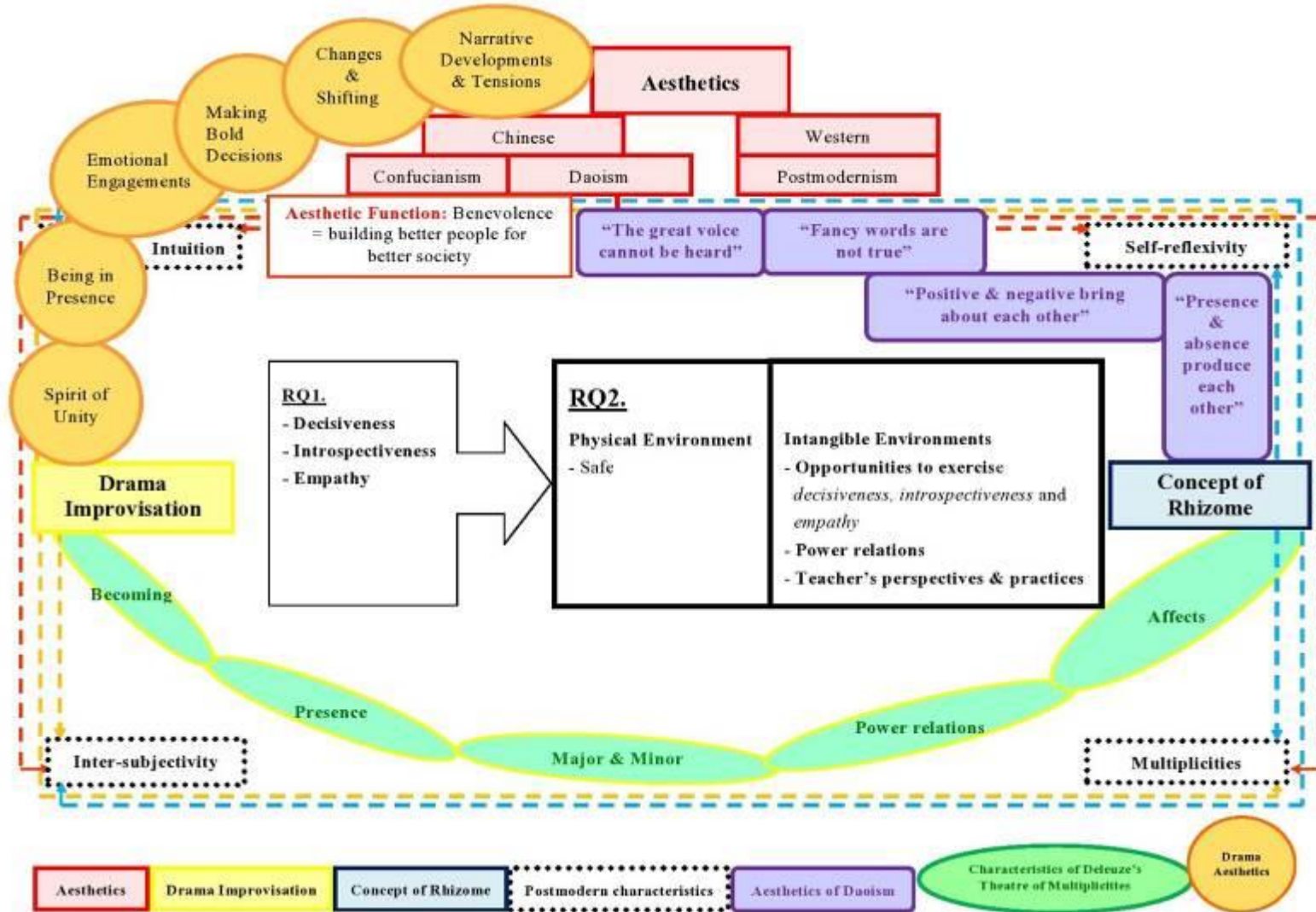
Figure 18. Both physical and intangible environments are required to facilitate young children's aesthetic encounters.

Both Physical and Intangible Environments are Required to Facilitate Young

Children's Aesthetic Encounters

In the early childhood education context, environment generally refers to a physical venue (e.g., a building or a classroom) that is safe and equipped for young children. When aesthetics is concerned, such environment is commonly encouraged to be decorated with children's artworks or colourful learning aids (Curriculum Development Council, 2006). However, to clearly record the process of young children's aesthetic encounters, the workshops for conducting this study were purposefully located in a non-classroom setting (Chapter 3). The physical environment used in the study was a private dance studio. It was a safe and an empty room. There were full length mirrors and some handrails on the walls, and some yoga mats on the floor designed for yoga exercises. It had no desk, chair, artworks, learning aids or any colour decoration. Therefore, as discussed in the pilot study (Chapter 4) and last chapter (Chapter 5), the physical environment - the empty stage of the private dance studio proved to be suitable and acceptable to facilitate young children's aesthetic encounters. Yet, according to the findings stated in last chapter, the process of children's aesthetic encounters suggests an alternative understanding. As per that understanding there is another layer of aesthetic environment – an intangible environment as mentioned in Chapter 2. This intangible environment is the *opportunities* for young children to *exercise* decisiveness, introspectiveness and empathy.

From the Daoism aesthetic perspective, the acting area of the theatre stage is the virtual (e.g., a white paper), and the body movements, expressions and lines (monologues or dialogues) of the characters become the reality (e.g., black ink). By expressing the body movements, expressions and lines of the characters (the reality), the drama story emerges on the stage (the virtual). Thus, the acting and the stage "bring about each other" (Laozi, 551 BCE/2011, Chapter 2) that produces not merely a story but young children's aesthetic

encounters were also visualised through these stories. Using the same concept in aesthetic environments, young children were given opportunities (the virtual and intangible environment) to exercise *decisiveness, introspectiveness* and *empathy* in drama improvisation scene (the reality and physical environment). It is because drama improvisation became the tool (e.g., the white paper) to visualise young children's aesthetic activities (e.g., the ink).

The spontaneous and collaborative natures of improvisation activities in the workshops created an intangible aesthetic environment. That environment was "complex, varied, sustained, and [of] changing relationships between people, the world of experience, ideas and the many ways of expressing ideas" (Cadwell, 1997, p. 93). From the aesthetic perspectives, it was here, in the intangible environment, where children struggled constantly within themselves (the actor and her/ his character) and the world (the immediate situation on stage and fellow actors) aesthetically, affectionately and rhizomatically. Engaging in struggles of identities, emotions and expectations led to negotiations (e.g., to be a kind or fierce crocodiles), confrontations (e.g., baby dinosaurs should grow up) and compromises (e.g., being fierce crocodiles might delay stage appearance). These struggles triggered children's responses through/ in/ with improvisation scenes, and such processes became aesthetic encounters. According to the definition of aesthetic encounters used in this study (Chapter 2), it was the intangible environment of aesthetic encounters that provided *opportunities* for children to exercise their skills constantly. The definitions suggests the aesthetic encounters to take place in in negotiation of meaning (cognition) and empathy (emotion and sensory) to build their ethics of self-consciousness.

These intangible environments (opportunities for young children to exercise *decisiveness, introspectiveness* and *empathy*) of aesthetic encounters become "spaces for relations, options, and emotional and cognitive situations that produce a sense of well-being and security … which reflects the ideas, ethics, attitudes and culture of the people who live in

it." (Malaguzzi, 1996, p. 40). Compared to imitating pre-scripted models or art-appreciation activities, drama improvisation allows young children to have more opportunities. In drama improvisation children can experience, explore, and express what they think and feel. To my surprise, these intangible environments not only worked for the young children but also for me to reflect on my teaching ideas, ethics, attitudes and culture background. I stayed constantly reflexive with the data, findings and the theories that were used in the study. Hence, power relations and teacher perspective were identified as important aspects to support the intangible environments for young children's aesthetic encounters. Such environments provide *opportunities* for children *to exercise* their *decisiveness, introspectiveness* and *empathy*.

Power Relations in the Intangible Environment of Aesthetic Encounters

I once assumed myself as a leader of the child actors by considering myself as an experienced dramatist in the workshops. This assumption was in me before learning about Deleuzian power relations. As an artist, I thought that I represented the major power, while the novice child actors represented the minors who were powerless. However, there were situations/ events involving power wherein I couldn't explain. For example, in some instances, the child actors dared to say no to my narrative suggestions. At that time, I was reminded by my supervisors that the power relations between the child participants and I were inter- and intra-related to their aesthetic encounters. So during the data anlaysis, I was not only mapping the lines of flight throughout the happenings in the improvisation scenes (Chapter 5). Instead, I was also sorting out how the rhizomatic power relations worked. With the examples from the workshops, I will first state how Deleuzian power relations work and then address how power produces affect in the workshops.

The first surprise that I received in the workshop was from Ironman, who was actor/ student/ child. He rejected my suggestions even though he knew my role as the narrator/

teacher/ adult. The resistance was unexpected, but Ironman did not back down, even though it meant his appearance on stage would be deferred. I realised as a researcher that I used my power as a narrator (also as a teacher and an adult). I did that to test Ironman by making him choose between two choices, either following my idea or remain persistent in his own belief. I even tempted him by allowing him to go on stage immediately, if he agreed with my suggestion. However, I was surprised at his choice of refusal and found myself feeling uneasy about his rejection. In my reflective journal, I wrote, *"How come he refused the suggestion? Is it about being daring? Or being brave?"* (Reflective Journal-20131008). The idea of Ironman drew my attention to the power relations between the myself and child actors He was a novice improviser aged five years but he dared to refused an experienced actor and a drama teacher's suggestion right on the spot. Was I surprised at Ironman's boldness? Or, was I feeling uneasy because my self-assumed teacher and adult authority was being challenged?

This act of Ironman was a direct conflict between an actor and the narrator. The similar struggle consisted of multiple participants and power relations. As the decisiveness flowed rhizomatically among the participants, so did power. I assumed the power was first with me as narrator, and suggested that the kind crocodiles could go on stage. Then I thought that the same power would flow to Ironman (who firmly refused the suggestion) and spread to Spiderman (who decides to support Ironman in action), Isa and Foreigner (who took the initiative to carry on with their original plot). This power relation was not just happening among individuals, it also happened as a group or collective force.

While reviewing the video recording showing the group decisiveness, I encountered the second surprise. Isn't it common that children will complain when there was a playmate who is not acting cooperatively? However, in this happening, none of the child actors complained about Shark's refusal to reunite with her babies when all the baby dinosaurs were expecting the reunion. I found myself at a state where I was letting my power go off as a teacher. I

might have easily overridden Shark's decision and forced a reunion. But I was acting as one of the improvisers in the scene who watched how the power relationship changed between Shark, Isa and Foreigner. If any of the child actors complained about Shark, then the improvisation scene might have been forced to stop. Thus, the flow of power relations in the scene would also stop. But while Isa and Foreigner resumed their family searching plot in actions, subtly they retook the focus of the story, which enabled them to carry on the narrative development. Then the power relations kept flowing rhizomatically from actor to actor throughout the happenings.

My multiple overlapping roles as an a/r/tographer (artist-and-researcher-and-teacher) were already complicated; making my situation even more problematic and messy. I don't know if this was happening, as I am also the mother of one of the child participants. So, the way that the child actors responded to me left me feeling very confused and I wondered if their resistance was caused by our friendship? Or it was simply due to their naïve childhood responses? Or whether it was a direct challenge to authority (teacher, adult)? Did they do it purposefully to me? Maybe these were their normal behaviours but I just didn't know this before? Many questions were revolving in my mind as I conducted and reflected on the workshops. In fact, I was ashamed to discover that I was helpless in those resistance situations. I thought I should not feel helpless as an experienced artist and teacher. In fact, I should know more than the children. However, these children resistances were running out of my comprehension.

Reconceptualising Power Relations with Child Participants

From Deleuze's (1997a) perspective, theatre power is constituted by "the Text, the Dialogue, the Actor, the Director, the Structure" (p. 251). It is representational; for example, a king represents himself as dominant who is in power over the slaves. He usually represents the dominated ones and react to the dominant's power. But Deleuze's power is about energy

that flows through networks or circulations. It is an operation of re-terriorialisation between two individual forces in relations where one force acts over another force (Deleuze, 1983). Thus, in rhizomatic theatre, power can be "subtracted, amputated, or neutralized" (Deleuze, 1997a, p. 241). This means power is productive and generative. This thinking helps me to unlock a linear flow of power, e.g., someone older has more power; someone younger has less power. For example, I am an experienced drama teacher and a professional artist. I know drama and drama improvisation, and I know it well. So even though I was appointed to act as a narrator for the child actors, I assumed I could exercise the power of a narrator.

Power can be neturalised. Since as I know the language and rules of drama improvisation, so when the child actors assigned me as the narrator in some of the scenes, I assumed the role of narrator brings with it with certain power in professional theatre practice. In other words, I empowered myself with my knowledge about the role of narrator. Therefore, I assumed myself as the powerful narrator authority who is a major, while the child actors were seen by me as minors as they were novice improvisers. From the perspective of Deleuze (1997a), I was the major, the artist and teacher who was in power. The child actors were minors, the novice improvisers and students. Though they were large in size and number (six of them), they were the minors/ dominated/ reactive to power. However, when tapping into a group of six novice child improvisers, I entered a space where "the entire world is minority" (Deleuze, 1997a, p. 253). In this space, my power was being neutralised by the "minority consciousness" (p. 253) of the child improvisers. No matter whether the young children were conscious or not, they formed a force; they were in power. For example, Ironman refusing to be a kind crocodile, or Shark deciding when to rescue her babies. These were decisions made by the child actors' minority consciousness (Chapter 2). These decisions became resistances to my narrative suggestions. By following these re-territorialised lines of flight of the constant negotiations in-between the character and the actor self and the continuous

"variation or movement" (Cull, 2009, p. 6) of *immediate presence*, the child actors exercised

their individual decision-making through intuitive and spontaneous enactments. They did it to

suit their understanding of the characters that neutralised my power as the narrator. This

explains why I was surprised when I encountered rejection from the child actors. I saw these

rejections as resistances or challenges to my role as narrator. My role was a representation of

power and/ or authority. I then felt offended. However, by thinking of my power as a

co-improivser, acting as a narrator means I was simply one of the characters. I now can see

these resistances or challenges as intuitive and creative responses, and no longer feel

offended by the children. Thus, the relationship between the children and I would not be

ruined by mistaking their intuitive and creative responses as misbehaviours. After thinking

with Deleuze's concept of power, now I can understand more about children's resistance and

take their behaviour as children's intuitive and creative responses.

    Power can be subtracted. In order to affirm the virtual presence on stage, "the

elements of power" in theatre have to be removed (Cull, 2009, p. 5). Taking my multiple

roles of an a/r/tographer, which was contradictory to my authority roles of an artist and

teacher, as a researcher, I was willing to co-research with the young children. It meant that I

shared my power with the children at the beginning of the research. But I was unaware of

how these power relations worked and what they meant. With Deleuze's power concept, I

realised that my power as a researcher was subtracted by myself. This means that I let go of

my power. This affected my behaviour in the research workshops, where I was constantly

aware of my identity as a researcher and tried to remain careful with my teacher tone. As a

researcher during the workshops, this awareness created opportunities for me to listen to the

child participants.

    Power can be amputated. It was certainly a scary thought if all my power as a teacher

in classroom can be amputated. Deleuze's concept of power is a concept of positive power; it

is not about losing power but concerns what power can produce. According to Deleuze (1983, 1997a), a reactive force (minor) can never become an active force (major) of power (Chapter 2). This means that the status of the child actors and adults cannot be reversible, swapped or exchanged. Yet their *minority consciousness* produced affect.

In other words, whether the status of major and minor can be changed is not the concern. Rather the concern is what can be produced (affect or influence) through this major and minor power relation. Thus, for me, the question was no longer about losing power in the classroom or how to secure my power as a teacher. The question now is what I see, what I can do, or what it means to be in such a situation. I realised that similar to the child actors who were becoming-characters, I was also in the process of becoming-a/r/tographer! The Deleuzian concept of power can be "subtracted, amputated, or neutralized" (Deleuze, 1997a, p. 241) produced an affect that is my awareness of my power relations with young children. This was the moment when my teaching concepts were turned upside-down.

Inter-subjective relations with a teacher also play an essential role for children engaging in aesthetic encounters. The roles of artist-and-researcher-and-teacher in power relations towards child participants, as well as researching with children, are elaborated in the thesis. The study has proposed a specific understanding of learning environments for aesthetic education. It suggests that young children's aesthetic education is through/ in/ with aesthetic encounters. Children's resistance during drama improvisation activities has been highlighted as a driving force behind children's self-conscious actions for negotiation of meanings. This resistance also lead on to my reflexivity on power relations towards those children with whom I deal in daily classroom practice. Deleuze is about seeing things in different ways. This new understanding led to an emergence of a new question: *what does the affect of this new understanding of power relations have to do with young children's aesthetic encounters?* Maybe more affects will emerge as I carry on the study, yet in the meanwhile, two affects are

identified: children's transformation through aesthetic encounters with drama improvisation

(Chapter 5) and reflexivity on my teaching perspective and practice.

The Intangible Environment of Aesthetic Encounters Shifted My Teaching Perspective

and Practice

The teacher's perspective and practice were identified as essential to provide

opportunities for young children to *exercise* their decisiveness, introspectiveness and empathy.

From the nine found characteristics of young children's aesthetic encounters in Chapter 5,

some characteristics were in relation to the teacher's perspective and practice. As a teacher, I

found the concept of *respect* was problematic in facilitating young children's aesthetic

encounters. Maybe this was caused by my Chinese background with Confucian mind that

states *respect* is a basic manner in our custom. That means younger people should listen and

obey older people as an act of respect. Through the discovery of Deleuzian power relations, I

realised that my encounters of the children's resistances in the workshops could have

occurred due to my Confucian mind set. The reconceptualisation of power relations with

Deleuze's philosophical concepts, led to the new understandings and insights for my teaching

perspective and practice.

Switching in-between Roles as an Artist, Researcher and Teacher

In the study, I had three roles, an artist, researcher and teacher. When I conducted the

research ethics procedures, I assumed the researcher role. I was a co-artist, working with the

child participants, as I acted in the drama improvisation scenes with them. I also took on a

teacher's responsibility on introducing drama improvisation, room safety and disciplinary

issues. It was obvious that I had to be constantly switching in-between these three roles

during the workshops. However, I found my roles getting changed due to the child

participants. When there were disciplinary problems, the child participants would listen to me

for my authorities. For examples, if any accidents happened, they would come to me and

show me their hurts or wounds. At this moment, the child participants changed my role from their co-actors to a teacher, and they assumed me to be at a higher level of authority. Thus, expecting me to maintain the classroom disciplines in that situation. Then when the child participants resumed acting in the drama improvisation scene, they would take me back as their co-actors. For example, their assigned narrator, who had the equal level of authorities to co-create the story and narrative development. For example, as the narrator, I could suggest any plot developments or character arrangements. Yet the child participants as my co-actors of the story could accept or refuse my suggestions according to their individual preferences. They were not bound by my suggestions and they don't need to practice obedience on the lines of my authorities. In their eyes, while being their co-actors, I was just acting as a partner of theirs who did not assume any higher authority. However, when it came to research ethics procedures, as a researcher, they would give me a sense of respect. Thus, they sat down and listened to me carefully. It seemed that I could be who I was (being an artist, researcher and teacher) only with the child participants' subtle consents.

It looked as if my roles were changing in two ways, like the Earth's rotation and revolution. While I could initiate my own switching in-between roles, the child participants also switched my roles in accordance with their action and reaction in the workshops. My statuses were kept on changing suddenly. However, as a facilitator or educator of aesthetic encounters, I realised that I should be aware of the fact that my roles as teacher and artist can be changed. I should not insist on being a pure artist who focuses only on the artistic value of the activities. I also cannot always act as a teacher to deal with class disciplines and the fulfilment of the lesson plan. I need to be aware of the artistic as well as aesthetic elements of the experiences. This *awareness of* and *be flexible to* roles changing is one of the crucial elements that allows young children to freely experiences and respond to aesthetic encounters. As an educator, if I am unaware or even don't allow these kinds of change their roles, then I

may take the child complaints and resistances as interruptions or challenges to my authorities. If I go with the situations and interact with the children in accordance with the situation, then I can strike a balance between my roles of an artist and a teacher simultaneously. I will be in a better position to facilitate young children's aesthetic encounters.

It Is Intuitive Creativity, Not Talkback!

> Children all have great imaginations. … They imagine anything they want, and have no problems with it. …The trouble starts when other people – grown-ups, older brothers and sisters – make children question their imaginative creations. (Abbott, 2007, p. 132)

It is very true what Abbott claims that sometimes, somehow, grown-ups like me, who are supposed to be a teacher for cultivating imagination may actually block children's creativity and imagination. For example, I, as an adult, assumed Shark the Mommy Dinosaur would be happy to reunite with her lost babies. This was due to the perception that I carried that a caring mother should take care of her children. However, according to her own imagination, Shark as the actress of Mommy Dinosaur portrayed a different interpretation of a caring mother. She portrayed a mother who would like to see her babies to be independent. As the actress of the character, Shark had the right to make the decision based on the interpretation of her character. Thus, that interpretation should not be intervened in by adult's (regardless from an artist or teacher) perceptions. Therefore, even though "connection" of past experiences was noted (Bundy, 2003, p. 176), these child actors' connection through imagination could be very different than the common understandings.

Being situated in a Chinese custom, young children are expected to respect seniors (older schoolmates) and authorities (e.g., teachers). Hence, any verbal or physical expression on disagreement or rejection will be easily counted as challenging or naughty. So, as discussed in the section of power relations, some behaviours of the child actors, e.g., Ironman refused to be a kind crocodile, and Shark the Mommy Dinosaur refused to reunite with her

babies) were once seen as *child resistances*. These responses were understood as behaviours of talkbacks, which in Chinese custom are counted as misbehaviours and impolite. This was the reason why I was once getting confused and offended. A child who talks back frequently will be seen as a naughty child. However, as the data have shown, these talkbacks are not scripted or pretext, they are child actors' intuitive and spontaneous replies.

> *By making something unexpected happen during an improvisation, an improviser can*
> *stimulate the creativity of both themselves and the person they are working with.*
> (Abbott, 2007, p. 149, Italic in original)

These talkbacks are child actors' creativity through their understandings and imaginations of their characters. The child actors' creativity and imaginations don't abide to traditional Chinese customs or logics. For example, listen to the teacher, or a mother should take care of her children. These acts of talkbacks are imaginations that not only show their capability with language and creativity, but also show the ability to solve problems (Neville, 2009).

As the improviser and educator Abbott (2007) observes, there is no such thing that some people have "'no imagination' or 'a weak imagination'" (p. 132). It is how their creativity or imaginations is repressed and restricted, either by grown-ups or some kinds of self-censorships (e.g., should be well behave in front of teachers, or listen and obey to adults). In the workshops, though I was feeling odd in those mentioned moments, I did not stop the child participants at the spots, nor disciplined anyone of them for being *rude* as per my traditional Chinese perceptions. Instead, I played along with their counter suggestions (e.g., being a fierce crocodile, or let the baby dinosaurs learn to be independent), so that I could witness their creativity and imagination on the narrative developments. I also observed how aesthetic encounters were experienced and responded. Learning from these experiences, I

realised that I could have "incarcerated" the child actors' creativity and imaginations (Abbott, 2007, p. 133). I could have done this if I insisted on my influenced style of Chinese custom teaching perspective. Thinking with Deleuze's power relations helps me to change my teaching perspective by not consider any child's actions and reactions as talkbacks. Rather I should consider those talkbacks as their intuitive and spontaneous creativity and imaginations. This change of teaching perspective supported me to create an intangible space that "allows the child a chance to experience and be in touch with a diverse array of emotions. May be, a child for the first time become able enough to get in touch with his [/her] feelings by viewing those feelings through a character's eyes" (Bouzoukis, 2012, p. 4). In these intangible spaces, children will have freedom and opportunities to release their creativity and imagination. They will also have the opportunity to exercise decisiveness, introspectiveness and empathy.

Artistic Values vs. Aesthetic Values

There are a million distractions: seeing other people out of the corner of their eye can spoil their concentration; remembering who their improvising partner really is can make their minds wander; something their partner says can distract them from the fragile fantasy they have created. *But when they continually think back on the improvisation so far, it can help them stay concentrated and thus avoid distractions.* (Abbott, 2007, p. 143, Italic in original)

Being an improviser, it is normal to encounter distractions either from the audience, the environment, or a sudden thought of him/herself. Experienced improvisers are trained to contain those distractions but the child actors in the study are novice improvisers. Thus, distractions and lapse of concentrations seemed to be unavoidable for them. Yet, who can *judge* such a distraction? The audience (in the case of theatre performance)? The teacher (in the case of a class work)? Or The actor (self-denunciation) or co-actor(s)? By being reflexive

with the data, I realised that I always *judged* the performances of the child actors from the

perspective of a teacher (not as a drama artist or a researcher).

According to Bundy (2003) that "animation, connection and heightened awareness" (p.

176), *concentration* and *heightened awareness* are two important characteristics of children's

aesthetic encounters. However, the findings of the study widened the understanding of these

characteristics that also affected my teaching perspective. As presented in Chapter 5, four

characteristics in relation to children's concentration were identified, including ***changing of***

identities, ***switching in and out of characters***, ***lapse of concentration***, **and** ***unsuccessful***

scenes. These four characteristics seemed to be individual categories but in fact, they were

inter- and intra-related. As every child participant worked with multiple identities (e.g., being

as an actor, character(s), child, and friend), it was easy for them to be distracted when things

were happening. For example, another child-actor stepping on the foot, someone crying for

mommy, someone took out candies, trying to find the props they wanted… etc. For the child

actors in the drama improvisation scenes, these distractions were real concerns that they

which made them stop in between the task that they were doing (acting a character) to sort

out the concerns. These distracted moments could be identified as children's lapse of

concentration. Therefore, while they were distracted by happenings, they may shift from one

identity to another (from a character to a child for reporting a hurt, an idea or a verdict of

what s/he witnessed).

Just as Laura Cull, a Deleuzian theatre practitioner claimed (2009), Deleuze helps us to

rethink theatrical presence as "differentiated not by representation, but by variation or

movement" (p. 6). In other words, during the process of becoming-characters, the child actors

constantly made "liveness" (p. 3) decisions in the *presence* on the stage to carry on the

narrative developments and tensions. Introspectiveness is a must in drama because actors

need to study their characters before rehearsals. It refers to a "self-conscious activity" (Cull,

2009, p. 3). Recognising that children have these constant switching of in-between roles, it is one of the findings for me to understand and facilitate their empathy and self-consciousness/ self-awareness. When the child actor needed to make a decision, s/he would exercise his/ her decisiveness, introspectiveness and empathy. This finding links to the definition of aesthetic encounters of this research. It shows that aesthetic encounters are exercises of cognitive and emotional engagements with the function to build self-consciousness/ self-awareness ethics. As the child actors needs to make a decision, the multiple and in-between roles enhance his/her aesthetic encounters. This can be achieved through exercises of cognitive, emotional engagements and self-consciousness ethics. It was also the main reason for the child actors to switch in and out of their characters. So unsuccessful scenes might occur if the distraction continued and the child actor(s) find it difficult to resume acting in the story.

In order to have successful scenes, educators might think that "heightened awareness" (Bundy, 2003, p. 176) was needed. If I took these being in and out of characters as *problems* of concentration, I might have stopped their performance. It might result that the child actors would *learn* to stop *doing* being in and out of a character and then we could have more *successful* drama improvisation scenes. But, the children might also learn to ignore their surroundings. In fact, "improvisers should also allow the sights and sounds of the *real world* to impact on them and affect their improvisations" (Abbott, 2007, p. 116, Italic in original), so that the child actors should be able to express their true thoughts and emotions about the situation. Otherwise, I won't be able to understand that exercising empathy and their ethics knowledge could be the probable reasons and implications of their shifting identities and switching in and out of characters. From the mentioned examples, the child actors exercised their empathy as being compassionate to a hurt friend and practiced decisiveness as they insisted to sort out the *accident*. Their self-conscious ethics were also built through these incidents. The reasons of the unsuccessful scenes were not artistically acceptable but these

scenes provided opportunities for the child actors to practice "li" (courtesy 禮) and "yi"

(righteousness 義) (Xunzi 荀子, 266-255 BCE/2003, p. 88). These empathic and introspective

practices enabled the child actors to learn about "ren" (benevolence 仁) (Zhuangzi, 369

BCE/1996, p. 16). Therefore, unsuccessful improvisation scenes can't be equated to useless

data. These unsuccessful scenes might have less artistic values but the children in these

unsuccessful scenes entered in their life aesthetic encounters.

Discussion on Aesthetic Encounters from the Teacher's Perspective

To talk about providing aesthetic education, educators usually will think of the tangible

environment that can facilitate arts experiences, e.g., colourful decorated classroom, or

various arts materials. But do aesthetic encounters work in the same environment of arts

activities? It is easy, even for foreigners, to locate a kindergarten on the second floor of a

residential complex or shopping mall in Hong Kong. It is not because of the spacious outdoor

facilities or obvious signpost, but because the windows are decorated either with the colourful

children's art work or childish visual learning aids. These colourful environments are also

easily mistaken for an environment that can facilitate aesthetics education. The finding of the

research suggested otherwise. From the a/r/tographic investigation, aesthetic encounters

occurred in an intangible environment. This environment allowed the participants various

opportunities to engage in *constant negotiation of meaning, opportunities to practise empathy*

and *exercise self-consciousness.* These three components of an aesthetic environment (in

relation to decisiveness, introspectiveness and empathy) were played out by the process of

children's experiences and responses to aesthetic encounters. The emphasis of the intangible

environment didn't stop the finding of the three components. Instead it grew rhizomatically

(Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) to further study of young children's aesthetic encounters. The

emerging intangible environment enabled in considering that how to facilitate these three

components during aesthetic encounters. The focus now shifted to understand how to conduct

the exercises from giving opportunities of exercises. This shifting consideration leads towards a discussion on teaching approaches and practices of aesthetic education.

> "Aesthetic education," then, is an intentional undertaking designed to nurture appreciative, reflective, cultural, participatory engagements with the arts by enabling learners to notice what is there to be noticed, and to lend works of art their lives in such a way that they can achieve them as variously meaningful. (Greene, 2001, p. 6, emphasis in original)

It is difficult to discuss aesthetics in Hong Kong's early childhood education settings even though it is one of the four developmental objectives with clear goal "to stimulate children's creative and imaginative power, and encourage children to enjoy participating in creative works" (Curriculum Development Council, 2006, p. 20). In my experiences of conducting teacher education over the past seven years, most of the early childhood educators still make their first connection of aesthetics with high arts, e.g., classical music, paintings, ballet, or opera. Only a few of them can quickly relate their practices and approaches of aesthetic education to arts activities. As Greene (2001) suggested arts as a medium of aesthetic education, most aesthetic education curricula worldwide (Amadio et al., 2006; Benavot, 2004), and in Hong Kong (Curriculum Development Council, 2006), foster arts education to convey aesthetic education. Arts appreciation, reflective comments, and culture related participatory activities are common strategies in the early childhood education context (Bundy, 2003; Curriculum Development Council, 2006; Tang, 2011). But, contrastingly it is still not easy for educators to fulfil the developmental objective. Although the goals of aesthetic education and suggestions for its implementation are listed in the *Guide*, educators still do not really know how aesthetic education works. These comments were made clear by Suen Wai Fong, Director of Hong Kong Institute of Aesthetic Education, who has promoted

aesthetic education in Hong Kong proactively since 2001. In an interview with Mike Chow

(2007), the Deputy Head (Outreach and Education) of the Hong Kong Repertory Theatre,

Suen shares that

> [i]n fact, I found aesthetic education, to certain extent, is a good assistant for teachers to
>
> implement an all-round arts education. For example, arts education in Hong Kong is
>
> focussed on the cultivation on techniques and trainings but teachers may not be able to
>
> grasp an effective method to lead students to appreciate an art piece from an aesthetic
>
> experience perspective. (Chow, 2007, para. 7)

Therefore, Teachers always take an important part in children's creative learning to

support children "to find the means and the confidence to bring out their ideas" (Cheung,

2010, p. 378). Still, educators find it difficult to implement aesthetic education in the Hong

Kong early childhood education context. Suen further explains that "[s]ince Hong Kong

education focussed on result, [and their understanding] to the ability of aesthetic appreciation

is still abstract, therefore the decision makers of schools may not be able to have a solid idea

of what aesthetic education will teach? What practical learning result will student have?"

(Chow, 2007, para. 9). Her comments reveal two problems of aesthetic education in Hong

Kong. First, educators know little about aesthetics and that results in their hesitation about

what to teach and how to teach. Second, aesthetic education has become a tool for better arts

education. The next section will discuss the content and approach in facilitating young

children's aesthetic encounters. This will be done by using the findings of the process of

young children's aesthetic encounters and the environments that were required to facilitate

such encounters.

Facilitating Aesthetic Encounters – *What to Teach?* Teaching for Aesthetic Experiences

What to teach is one of the difficulties that educators have encountered. As previous

literature (Chapter 2) revealed that not all arts activities can convey aesthetic encounters. For

arts activities are about skills and techniques while aesthetic activities require cognitive,

emotional engagements and ethics of self-consciousness. Also, Arts activities do not

necessarily yield aesthetic encounters or responses. Therefore, this study suggests aesthetic

education through aesthetic encounters, instead of arts activities. However, it is essential for

educators to know *what to teach* in aesthetic encounters, to achieve the aesthetic

developmental objective listed in the *Guide* (Curriculum Development Council, 2006).

An aesthetic encounter, in this research, is defined as a unique process of cognitive and

emotional exercise with a function to build self-consciousness/ self-awareness ethics.

However, as aesthetics has been started as a subject of philosophy (Guyer, 2004) it can easily

be categorised under cognitive learning. After referencing Lim's (2004) research on young

children's aesthetic appreciation, Cheng (2010) in her newly developed evaluation framework

for children's learning and development also categories aesthetics as an element of cognition.

Cheng (2010) explained "the term 'aesthetics' is a higher level cognitive appreciation, it

should belong to cognitive category and in relation to everything" (p. 78). As a result, the

current practices of aesthetic education in Hong Kong early childhood settings are focussed

mainly on arts appreciation (Bundy, 2003; Curriculum Development Council, 2006; Chow,

2007; Tang, 2011). However, the perception of aesthetics through arts appreciation or

imitation of crafts can pin children down as passive viewers (Young, 2011) or render them

merely a labour of reproduction (McLennan, 2010). If educators provide arts activities

without aesthetic considerations, this can blindfold the possibilities for children to experience

decisiveness, introspectiveness and *empathy* as a collective package of aesthetic encounters.

In the reflective journal on the retreat of the Curriculum Development Council, Liu

Zaifu (劉再復, 2010), a Chinese author and literature commentator, remarked about the

Chinese Philosopher Li Zehou's (李澤厚) opinion. He remarked that the primary objective of education should be cultivating people's feelings and emotions (情感), wherein the development of techniques (e.g., doctor or lawyer) should be a secondary objective. Li further explained that "this primary objective should cultivate ethic-self (倫理本體) and emotional-self (情感本體) so that these people can become a real human, a complete human being, and that is the root of education" (p. 13). Li's statement made clear that self-consciousness ethics and emotional engagements are essential for cultivating better people. Therefore, when educators plan for aesthetic encounters, they must consider the opportunities for young children's cognitive exercises. They should also consider their emotional engagements, in relation to the potential of cultivating their self-consciousness ethics.

In *Teaching for aesthetic experience: The art of learning*, Diaz and McKenna (2004) teachers proposed "teach for aesthetic experience, experiences that prompt questions" (p. 2) because, as children wonder about their hands-on experiences, they will be eager to question and to take action to find out. They stated that a learning experience that incorporated a balance between "inquiry and experience" (p. 2) could be an effective strategy for teaching aesthetics. Young children can learn to ask questions, organise thoughts, voice out opinions, and respond to the inquiry by participating in experiences of inquiry. Such experiences provide frequent opportunities for decision-making, self-reflection and emotional engagement. Thereby, an aesthetic encounter, though art is not necessarily involved. Early childhood educators suggested "aesthetic education involves different routes, varied places, contrasting experience, and many answers" (p. xii). This new insight of fostering aesthetic encounters through *inquiry and experiences* to convey aesthetic education becomes a cornerstone of reconceptualising aesthetic education. Now it is clear that aesthetic education is not just for serving as an assistant to convey better arts education. It is not even to merely

promote young children's creativity and imagination. The mission of aesthetics is, through

the perspective of *teaching for aesthetic experiences*, to build better people for the society.

Facilitating Aesthetic Encounters – *How to Teach?* Teacher as Co-improviser

Another difficulty that educators have to think about is ***how to teach*** aesthetic

encounters. A child-oriented approach is common, particularly in the early childhood

education context in Hong Kong as the *Guide* suggested (Curriculum Development Council,

2006). But there is research to claim the opposite (Fung, 2009; Leung, 2012). Therefore, as

an a/r/tographer, who chooses to use drama improvisation as the research medium, I naturally

and deliberately designed myself as a co-improviser of the child participants. I do so to create

a child-led research experiences. Although this co-improviser role sometime clashes with my

teacher and researcher roles (Chapter 5, 6, and 7), it allowed me to be reflexive on the

conflicts. It also allows me to turn them into insightful studies on young children's aesthetic

encounters, for example, power relations, as well as my teaching perspective and practice.

Taking Sawyer's (2004) view on "teaching is improvisational performance" (p. 12), I realised

that my choice of acting as a co-improviser of the child participants allowed me to reflect on

my teaching practice. Thus as a resultant it suggested that teacher can be a co-improviser of

children in aesthetic encounters as well as in other subject learning.

Wang Xi Yu (王興虞, 2013) a mainland Chinese early childhood educator and dancer

has suggested that the function of teachers can be "enhancing young children to experience

aesthetics (beauty), express aesthetic feelings, and enrich their aesthetic appreciation

experiences, so that young children can experience free expression and the joy of creation" (p.

55). However, regardless of how eagerly educators want to fulfil the aesthetic developmental

objective, it is possible that educators cannot 'function' as effectively as the *Guide* suggests.

It is common for Hong Kong class teachers in the early-years classroom to teach all subjects

including arts activities. It seems that they were expected to be skilled performers who strive

for perfect presentation in each lesson (Hayhoe, 2008). However, there are blind spots in all

educators, even those who are confident and comfortable in their daily teaching approaches

and practices. For example, a play-based approach is a common strategy that is encouraged

by the Education Bureau (Curriculum Development Council, 2006), but the existence of a

'teacher-centred approach in teaching' was consistently reported by the Quality Assurance

Inspection Annual Reports from 2000 to 2007 (Education Commission [EC], 2000/01,

2001/02, 2002/03, 2003/04, 2004/05, 2005/06, 2006/07). Similarly, a teacher-centred

approach was noted in Fung's (2009) research based on the fulfilment of play-based

curriculum in Hong Kong. She noted the explanation of the teacher-participant that "children

are used to being the listeners and followers of adult's instruction … teacher-instructed and

teacher-directed approaches are just used to accommodate their needs" (p. 20). Leung's

recent study in 2012 also reported that a teacher-centred approach still dominates in

early-years classrooms in which she found "'teachers planned to extend the period of play …',

'teachers move among groups and individuals to offer suggestions…', and 'do planned

movements'" (p. 44). With such a strong pre-conception, it is not easy for teachers "to 'listen'

to the situation and to learn to surf it" (Dahlberg & Moss, 2010, p. xvii). Instead, it seems

easy for teachers to overlook the potential of playful and exploratory activities in their lessons

(Fung, 2009). Especially when teachers "perform almost all of the steps" on their own, their

children's learning is "confined to observing" (Fung, 2009, p. 20).

On the contrary, I took on a child-orientated approach with a concept of *teacher as*

co-improviser during the research workshops. The way I conducted the drama improvisation

workshops, was similar to Sawyer's advocacy on *teaching is improvisational performance*.

Firstly, the drama improvisation workshops purposefully took on a child-led approach, where

children chose the characters they wanted to portray (no pre-set relations or connection

between the characters), the story theme and the setting (theatre term of location) they wanted

to start during the improvisation. As the children performed in the drama scenes, they seemed to enjoy living out the multiple identities. Secondly, as an experienced dramatist, I took on the spontaneity of drama improvisation, and went with the flow of the scenes to provide maximum freedom to the child actors so that they live out their multiple identities in the virtual reality of drama improvisation scenes (Deleuze, 1997a).

Besides, by positioning myself as an artist and teacher as well as a co-improviser of the participated children, the opportunities of engaging the children in "creative dialogues" (Sawyer, 2004, p. 14) got opened up. Through creativity and imagination, they were freed to create characters or crisis (e.g., Cinderella's death), to imagine the impossibilities (e.g., fire-eating crocodiles), and to question and wonder (e.g., *"Why can't we four doctors take the same operation on the same patient at the same time? The patient will recover much faster!",* Ironman, W3-15G, Table 4). There in the intangible environment of aesthetic encounters through drama improvisation, the child actors exercised negotiation of meaning, empathy and self-consciousness. In this portrayal of characters, the child actors' de- and re-territorialised among identities (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). This helped them to (re)conceptualise their self-identity. Therefore, the findings of the research suggest that an alternative teaching approach, for example, *teacher as co-improviser*, can be considered. Especially, this teaching practice is an effective way to implement the previous suggestion of *teaching for aesthetic experiences* in young children's aesthetic education.

Summary

This chapter has responded to the second research question based on aesthetic environments. According to the findings of the first research questions, *decisiveness, introspectiveness* and *empathy* were identified as the basic elements of young children's aesthetic encounters. These three themes led to the discovery of both physical and intangible environments that were essential to facilitate young children's aesthetic encounters.

Regarding the physical environment, safety was found as an important consideration but it doesn't necessarily need to be aesthetically rich or colourfully decorated. Instead, an intangible environment, which provided *opportunities* for young children to *exercises* decisiveness, introspectiveness and empathy, was found equally important in facilitating such aesthetic encounters. The second part of the chapter revealed that by participating in constant reflexivity, children's resistances in the workshops led to the realisation of power relations. Studying Deleuze's concept of power enabled an alternative reading of the data. As Deleuze proposes that power can be *subtracted, amputated, or neutralized*, children's resistances and power relations in the workshops were reconceptualised. These new insights about power contributed towards a review of my teaching perspective and practice as an artist and teacher in the study. I realised that my perspectives on naughtiness in relation to children's behaviours of *talkback* and *lapse of concentration* were also being challenged. With the new understanding about power relations, children's talkback was reconceptualised as their intuitive creativity, while the lapse of concentration enactments were related to their introspectiveness on empathy that was produced from their aesthetic values. Together the issue of *power relations* and *teaching perspective and practice* were identified as essential elements of the intangible environment to facilitate young children's aesthetic encounters. The last part of the chapter advocated aesthetic education through aesthetic encounters. By discussing *teaching for aesthetic experiences* and *teacher as co-improviser*, it was suggested to foster young children's aesthetic education via aesthetic encounters.

Although "these interpretations are seen as tentative, inconclusive, and questioning" (Creswell, 2013, p. 187), the findings mentioned in both Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, are invaluable for reconceptualising young children's aesthetic encounters. They also enable establish a reflexivity habit on my personal perspective and practice on my art, teaching, and life. My reflexivity of the research will be presented in the next chapter. It will serve as a

record of my own aesthetic encounters in roles of a/r/tographer, as well as a part of the

researcher's trustworthiness validation.

Chapter 7: The Greenroom – Reflexive Commentary on the A/R/Tographer's Aesthetic

Encounters

In response to the research questions, Chapter 5 presented and discussed how young children experienced and reacted to aesthetic encounters with drama improvisation through exercising *decisiveness, introspectiveness* and *empathy*. This finding contributed to the answer of the second research question about the environments that were required to facilitate young children's aesthetic encounters. Therefore, Chapter 6 presented and discussed both the physical and intangible environments.

In the last chapter, the physical environment should be a safe environment but not necessarily colourful and decorated. However, the opportunities for young children to exercise *decisiveness, introspectiveness* and *empathy* were revealed as the intangible environment. In the intangible environment power relations and teaching perspective and practice were identified as essential elements to support it. In conclusion of the discussion, both *what to teach* and *how to teach* aesthetic encounters were discussed. In this chapter, as part of the research trustworthiness validation, I present my struggles and insights throughout the research in the four different yet overlapping a/r/tographic roles of an artist, researcher, teacher, as well as a mother.

"*Could you share your aesthetic experiences?*" This was the first question that I encountered in proposing the research to my supervisor during the first pilot study supervision meeting. It is true that a teacher who facilitates aesthetic activities should be able to identify his/her own aesthetic encounters because one cannot teach something one does not know. The research was a journey searching for young children's aesthetic encounters; hence, the focus was naturally on the children. However, as the journey started, I have not stopped considering the question of *how about my own aesthetic encounters* as an artist and a teacher? As the research went on, I encountered a lot of problems with theories, methodologies, and

data analysis strategies. Then I began to wonder whether a researcher can also have aesthetic encounters with his/her own research.

These questions enhanced constant reflexivity throughout the study. While the research promoted young children's aesthetic education through aesthetic encounters, I, as one of the participants, was constantly thinking whether I had experienced any aesthetic encounters. If yes, what affect (Deleuze, 1997a) these experiences produced in me. Thus, as inspired by Bone (2009), I took this chapter as my "autobiographical stories" (p. 144) to record the aesthetic encounters that I encountered during the research with four overlapping roles as: artist, researcher, teacher and an additional yet inevitable role of being a mother. These stories recorded my struggles in the past (during the workshop), my personal aesthetic encounters at the present and raised questions for future consideration.

A/r/tographer's Reflexivity

Reflexivity engages inter- and intra-relationships of subjectivities that were constituted in this study, by and through me as an artist-and-researcher-and-teacher. As well as an additional role of being a mother of one of the child participants added another dimension. I identified my aesthetic encounters in the research, coupled with the subject matter with which I worked – the literature, the art form, the philosophical notions and the research data. Although the multi-overlapping roles of a/r/tographer are meant to be "blur[ed]" (MacRae, 2013, p. 51) and to be seen as *one*, my reflexivity on aesthetic encounters was made visible separately according to each of the roles.

It is common for qualitative researchers to promote "value neutral" (Berg, 2001, p. 140) in their research. This implies, researchers should be as objective as they can be. However, Woods (1986) suggested that "however much we try to neutralize our own views, opinions, knowledge and biases and open ourselves to the understanding of others, we cannot accomplish total purification" (p. 9). A/r/tographers are encouraged to acknowledge their

"biases, values, and experiences" (Creswell, 1998, p. 248). Therefore, in this chapter, my

biases, values and experiences of each of my a/r/tographic roles is presented. A/r/tographic

reflexivity allows me to conceive myself from/ with/ in the lived aesthetic encounters with

the young children while also building upon my theoretical understanding. In this research, I

was continually reminded that my *thinking* about and *doing* the research were constituted and

affected by my previous understandings. This historical aspect of my personality contributed

towards the inquiry processes and text. As suggested by Gergen and Gergen (2000), this

thinking should be opened to critique around various issues. Suh issues could be related to

my unique identity of being a Chinese person educated under the Western education system.

Also, my personal perceptions of the research, my biases as an experienced theatre

practitioner, and the surprises that emerge from these thoughts, are some other examples.

Choosing to use a/r/tography as the research methodology leads me into the

wonderland of the Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizome. It affected the research process and the

reading of the happenings in the drama improvisation scenes. More affected aspects were, the

grafting of aesthetics, artistic, postmodern philosophical understandings that I employed and

the perspectives I chose to put aside (e.g., developmentally appropriate approach,

drama-in-education approach). While I produced this research thesis, the philosophical

understandings affected and produced new thoughts in me. Those thoughts were what if I had

more than one identity and these identities were situated in the process of forever becoming

(Deleuze, 1997a). A/r/tography emphasises the constant shifting and in-between roles among

artist, researcher and teacher in a research. Yet I also took on the fourth inevitable

overlapping role of being a mother of one of the child participants. As the mother of Isa, this

additional identity of being a mother in the research was a role that I could not ignore. I had a

different relationship with Isa compared to the other child participants. Initially, I did not

consider her participation in this research would have any particular problem. The reason

behind the same was that Isa used to participate in most of my drama teaching classes.

However, my supervisors brought up the questions of the mother–child tensions in the

workshops. During the workshop I confronted with some behaviours and emotions expressed

by Isa. Then, I realised being a mother of a research participant, was also an inevitable role in

this research.

Becoming in Deleuzo-Guattarian term is a process of a process (Deleuze, 1997a;

Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Becoming-a/r/tographer refers to a transformational process –

from *knowing* to be *comfortable about unknowing*. The coming sections will present my

process of *becoming* in the roles of artist, researcher, teacher, and mother, with a focus on the

reflexivity about my aesthetic encounters of each these a/r/tographic roles.

Becoming-Artist

As an experienced drama artist, I am confident in talking about my drama aesthetic

encounters. Those "aesthetic encounters" includes that how lighting merged with the set, or

how actors produced 'chemical'/ 'dramatic' moments for the audience, etc. Yet, in the

research workshops, I was scared! I kept asking myself that *why did I find it difficult to*

identify my own aesthetic encounters?

This scary thought had its roots in the pilot study. It was a one-off workshop with only

three hours. I recalled the day when I arrived at the bare dance studio. I was busy setting up

the video camera with its tripod. The six young children were excited as this was their first

gathering during the Christmas holiday. They were running around and racing with each

other happily in the big and empty room. The parents were standing at the door and kept

asking their children to behave. I calmed down the parents, saying that it was fine for the

children to play while I was doing the set-up. After about 15 minutes, I finished all the

necessary set-up and bid farewell to the parents politely. The children and I started sitting

down and began going through the research ethic process. I was very careful and aware of my

tone and language in facilitating each section. Everything looked fine and the drama activities went smoothly until we researched the sixth drama improvisation scene. I, as the artist-and-researcher-and-teacher, started becoming nervous because none of the five scenes that we had done could be counted as an aesthetic encounter, from my experienced of the dramatist perspective. I told myself, the sixth scene had to be treated seriously or else I would have to revise my research methodology if drama improvisation did not work with young children for have aesthetic encounters.

However, once again, I was disappointed. The sixth scene was not even a completed story as we were forced to a stop by the noise among the child actors. I was in total distress. After the two hours of the workshop, though the child actors seemed to grasp the *yes, and ...* principle of drama improvisation, there was still no glimmer of any aesthetic encounters. *What should I do? Should I give up?* I kept thinking what else I could do to *enhance* aesthetic encounters but nothing came up. Because of the time constraint, I had to move on to the focussed discussions and children's arts journal. Right at the moment when I accepted the truth that there were no aesthetic encounters in the workshop, the child actors started begging for one last drama activity. Although I thought it would not make any difference to have one more improvisation scene, there was no harm in trying again. So, due to the eagerness of the child actors, we decided to do engage in one last drama improvisation. The child actors told each other this time they had to listen to each other, concentrate, and not run around. I could say that it was that moment that the miracle happened!

This seventh scene was the selected scene for the pilot-study data analysis. It was not only the child actors who experienced their aesthetic encounters (Chapter 4); even I did. My aesthetic encounter happened at the end of the scene when I (as the narrator) got the train with other characters. In my aesthetic encounter I reached to the forest which was suddenly on fire. I lay on the floor with my four limbs moving fanatically in the air to pretend I was the

fire. However, the youngest child participant, HaHa the Policeman, came quickly towards me and pulled my left leg very hard, saying "*Go to hospital! Go to hospital!*" (32:10.1-32:17.3 - Pilot Study). This implies that HaHa did not *see* me as the *fire* but a victim on fire! HaHa's eagerness and urgency to rescue could be observed in his effort of pulling my leg. Even though he was two year old he attempted to drag me to the hospital with his small body. Although it was not my intention to be a victim, yet I went along with his surprising plot and acted as if I were being rescued by him. I stood up slowly with a limping leg and thanked HaHa for his help. He was very glad that I was safe and he quickly went off to rescue another victim.

This was my very first moment of an aesthetic encounter in the research, as an artist. In this particular happening, I was totally involved in the urgency of being caught in a fire and was surprised by HaHa's unexpected performance. Honestly, I enjoyed this surprising moment, even though I was actually laughing at my silliness to pretend as *fire* when I was transcribing the workshop video. However, in that moment, I forgot I was a teacher and a researcher. I also did not remember that I was more experienced than HaHa as an artist. I just played along with the presence of mind on stage, especially the immediate presence that was suggested by HaHa. I altered my role from a narrator to a fire, then with HaHa's *unspoken* suggestion that I was being shifted to be a victim of fire. There was no juggling between my multi-overlapping roles, no burden on the time constraint as a researcher, no need to do classroom control as a teacher. I simply enjoyed the collaborative improvisation as a co-artist on stage. This was my first aesthetic encounter as an artist in the research. From this very first aesthetic encounter in the pilot study, I started becoming aware of my own aesthetic encounters, as an artist in the study. I reminded myself constantly to enjoy the scenes instead of worrying whether any aesthetic encounters happened or not. Indeed, my multi-overlapping a/r/tographic roles made me too busy to notice my own aesthetic encounters. Therefore, I

wondered whether the root cause was maybe my over-confidence and comfort in the "definitions and positions" (Olsson, 2009, p. 85) of my role as a drama artist.

With 25 years of experience as a professionally trained actress, director, producer and drama educator in performing arts, I considered myself a highly qualified and competent person who is able to lead others in dramatic activities. Not only this my roles includes specialised forms such as drama improvisation (Piirto, 2002). However, this self-confidence and recognition has also turned out to become a blockage in this particular investigation. As illustrated in the findings discussions in Chapter 6, especially on the arto-rhizomatic analysis of power relations, I discovered that my professional theatre experiences and knowledge resulted in technical theatre assumptions. Assumptions were such as the tasks and authority of a narrator. These unintentional assumptions underpinned my thoughts, mind and actions so that there were biases and preferences as I interacted with the child actors. For example, in the pilot study, I really had a bias about HaHa, the two-year-old boy. It seemed as if he was walking around as he liked and was not able to stay fully attentive in the drama improvisation scenes.

I was not being able to realise such a blind spot until I encountered the disturbing video data which showed the children's resistance to my narrative suggestions (i.e., Ironman refused to be a kind crocodile). For me, the discovery of Deleuze's (1983, 1997a) power-relation concept was not only a solution to a data-analysis problem, but these happenings (experiences of resistances) had made me (re)think what it means to be a professional dramatist in terms of practise and vision. As a typical Chinese woman, certainly I pay respect and find it easy to stay humble in front of senior dramatists, but not to novice child actors. Though I am ashamed to accept it, and must admit that earlier I did not have the same respect for the child actors. It could be because of my pride, as I am an experienced dramatist or as an adult that I didn't treat the young child actors as the way I treat my adult

co-artists. Also, this attitude could be because of the responsibilities that I have towards them, as the only adult in various workshops.

Deleuzo-Guattarian (1987) philosophical concepts of *becoming* and *power relations* granted me a new opportunity to reposition myself in this aspect of theatre. I am not like a fixed solid stone but like a sponge which is soft and flexible; so that I am still able to learn and get transformed. I can now see myself as becoming-artist, an artist (regardless of my professional level) in a process of artistry. Through this research study I learnt to *be content with who I am, no more and no less*[1] (Holy Bible, 2001).

Becoming-Teacher

Learning and teaching is a paired-up activity. After thinking my happenings in the course of study, I realised that I was in a rhizomatic circulation process of learning to become a researcher while teaching as a drama educator. Then the research outcome reversed my learning to become a teacher and artist with new perspectives.

From the Viewpoint as a Teacher

Being a teacher, a drama educator to be precise, was my second confident role in the research. Unfortunately, just like an experienced artist, I was blind-folded with my own take-it-for-granted teaching perspective and practice. I was so used to teaching drama that I had never thought of whether a teacher could have any aesthetic encounters in their daily teaching practice. So as the research started, the doubts of whether teachers can have aesthetic encounters with his/her teaching kept troubling me.

In fact, when I gave more thought to the everyday teaching practice in the classroom, I started considering whether teaching is actually a form of drama improvisation. There are no pre-determined scripts to recite, no rehearsed interactions with the children, but each class is full of unexpected situations, accidents and spontaneous emotional engagements. As Sawyer

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[1] Original text is extracted from Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV) Philippians 4:11 as "*Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content*."

(2000) suggested, the daily conversations (including the teaching and learning in classrooms) represents a "more common, more accessible form of creativity" and is "relevant to aesthetics" (p. 150). With this understanding, each of the lessons can be seen as drama improvisation scene, where, teacher(s) and children both participate as actors. What this argument suggested is that there are potential aesthetic encounters in every teaching and learning activity. Previously I was worried about "how could teachers have aesthetic encounters". But thinking on Sawyer's lines had made me excited about the same. Sawyer gave an alternative reading of the daily teaching practice. That reading made it possible for me to think about teacher's aesthetic encounters. Now, my question is whether I had any aesthetic encounters during my teaching session in the workshops?

With the aesthetic encounter that I had in the pilot study, I realised that if I wanted to have aesthetic encounters, I could not keep myself distant from the child actors and the context (e.g., drama improvisation scenes). Therefore, during the main study, I tried to remain beware of my relationship with the child participants. I was careful with my language to avoid an authority tone, such as instead of giving a command to be quiet, I silenced myself to wait for their attention. I also avoided any classroom disciplinary features, such as a quiet corner. When encountering classroom control issues, I quickly drew the children's attention to something new and positive so that they cease to carry on with their misbehaviour. However, these acts of mine did not count as aesthetic encounters, so what was the problem? As the research went on, I was delving into the literature, where I read about Maxine Greene and I started to locate my blind spot as a teacher.

Maxine Greene (1971) advocated teaching aesthetically and this statement circulated in my mind endlessly. As a drama educator, do I teach aesthetically in the research workshops? Greene suggested teaching aesthetic encounters should involve: engagement with aesthetic inquiry (i.e., experiences that prompt inquiries). In short, aesthetic encounters should allow

the children freedom of "questioning, choosing, and learning through and with the arts free students to make sense of their own experiences and develops awareness of art and the world in which they live" (Diaz & McKenna, 2004, p. 2). In this research, the emerging findings, which revealed the process and environment of the children's aesthetic encounters, also implied that my teaching achieved a certain extent of teaching aesthetically. Though, I believe there is still room for me to improve. For example, regarding the level of freedom and autonomy of the children in the improvisation scenes, or exploring further ways to neutralise my role of a dominant teacher. Also, my "intellectual discourse" with the young children on drama improvisation could have "block[ed] out children's sensitivity" (Chung, 2004, p. 43) to further express and explore ideas. So learning to becoming-reflexive teacher allows me "to extend thinking beyond a specific event to a consideration of the interconnectivity of experience" (Rose, 2004, p. 103). This rhizomatic act of reflexivity can make abstract ideas meaningful. For example, (re)conceptualising the function of aesthetic encounters, the meaning of teaching aesthetics, and the power relations in daily classroom practice. These reflexive exercises had prompted me towards intensive self-awareness and empowered new knowledge and insights to emerge.

From the Viewpoint as a Student

In the previous chapters the struggles, resistances, perspectives and practices had been discussed and reflected on in the section of arto-rhizomatic analysis of power relations with young children. Here, I would like to take the opportunity to reflect on the parallel valuable experiences of becoming-teacher that I have learnt in the research.

I, as a drama educator, teach not only young children but also diverse group of people belonging to different ages, languages, cultures and professions. As a teacher, I teach using my profession and knowledge. When new methods and techniques come into being, I learn them with professional colleagues but very seldom I would think of learning them with my

students. In this research study, my supervisors have demonstrated how scholarly supervisors

can become by guiding and exploring different theoretical frameworks for this project with

me. Since I am a dramatist who has little knowledge about any early childhood educational

theories, in parallel, some of my supervisors are not familiar with drama contexts. Yet their

guidance revealed a teaching practice that bridged between the two sets of our experiences.

First, they took me through the major educational theorists, pointing out my problematic

understandings and arguments. Secondly, they patiently walked me through the rhizomatic

growth of my theoretical framework. Though I decided to conduct the study in a postmodern

perspective, it took me two years to work out a complete theoretical framework with the

aesthetics of Daoism, drama improvisation and the concept of rhizome. In these two years,

the most frequent words that I heard from my supervisions were: *Who says that? What do you*

think? Why do you think it like that? Tell me more ..., and *maybe ...* At first, these

open-ended questions were disturbing as I had never encountered this teaching approach in

my 20 years in schooling from kindergarten to a master degree programme. As a typical

Chinese student who grew up in Hong Kong, I was not expected to ask questions in class but

recite answers. It was because the time of each lecture was short and quietness was a must to

enable the teachers to finish all they planned to teach. So, while experiencing a higher

academic level of supervision, I felt embarrassed and inferior being unable to answer the

questions. However, it did not take long for me to admit I was "not all knowing" (Holt, 2004,

p. 14). These questions became a drive for me to take more initiative in the habits of reading,

thinking and discussing. These habits gradually equipped me to be an independent researcher

with a critical and analytical mind to produce logical articulation and discussions.

For example, one day in a data-analysis supervision meeting, my supervisors asked me

why I thought a narrator had the power to assign the sequence of character appearance or the

story development. Was I assuming that as a narrator I would be in charge of controlling the

actors? Then I started to reflect on my role as an appointed narrator. At first, I thought, "*yes, of course I knew what a narrator was and what a narrator would do as I am an experienced dramatist!*" I thought I understood and took the situation for granted. Then as I retold that I was appointed as the narrator by the child actors, and then I realised that I empowered myself as a narrator. I assumed the narrator would have certain power by whatever I knew about what a theatre narrator is supposed to do. The power of the narrator seemed to be coming from my assumptions about the role. But when the child actors started resisting my power as the narrator, I was surprised until I took on previous advice from my supervisor about the pilot study. It indicated that I should consider the power relations between the child participants and me. As I was not familiar with theories of power and did not want to step too much into philosophical concepts, there was a strong resistance about investigating power relations. However, as I was conducting the data analysis, even though with the analytical model of rhizomatic mapping, there was still something missing, something insufficient. This was the time when I decided to confront the issue of power. I started wondering about these resistances from the child actors that I encountered during the scene. How can power flow or shift? What does it mean when I, as the teacher or artist, lose power? Or in Deleuze's (1997a) philosophical notions, what does it signal when I realised that novice child actors were in power? Though Olsson (2009) suggested teachers to 'latch on' to what the children were doing and go with it, rather than trying to 'deal' with the power relations. I just simply could not let go of the hard feelings that my suggestions were rejected by the children in the workshops. I was eager to understand how this resistance occurred from children and what I could do with them. I was stuck. So eventually, I learnt to face my own weakness – reading philosophy. I started with Foucault's (1978) power circulates and moved forward to Deleuze's (1997a) power can be neutralised, amputated or subtracted. These newly learnt

concepts of philosophy contributed to my study as well as my personal growth by being

reflexive on my teaching perspective and practice.

At the time of the completion of my doctoral study I have learnt an alternative teaching

practice. I also learnt that it was not only through the data that I can have an alternative

teaching approach to facilitate young children's aesthetic encounters. Such practice requires

no fear of differences or difficulties but ongoing efforts on integrity, reflexivity and

meaning-making. Learning to becoming-teacher therefore does not stop at the graduation of a

teaching license, but it is a continuous process of growing that acquires openness, eagerness

and affection in thoughts, minds and acts about teaching.

Becoming-Researcher

Among the roles of a/r/tographer, being a novice researcher has worried me the most.

On one hand, I had to carry out every little step of the research process carefully but, on the

other hand, I had to worry about whether the collected data were useful. I was totally

unconfident about my role of researcher, whether or not there were any aesthetic encounters.

As I was preparing this documentation of a/r/tographer's reflexive commentary, I still had no

idea of what to write in this section. Irwin's (2008) suggested that "[p]ractice is created

through the negotiation and sharing of aesthetic and educational stories and understandings"

(p. 74). It implies that in an a/r/tographic research, aesthetic stories and understandings can be

found. So I realised that a/r/tography as a methodology that allows researchers to have

aesthetic encounters with their research.

A/r/tography entangles theory, practices and process. During the inquiries about

knowledge, an a/r/tographer problematises "the structures of research through aesthetic,

artistic, and creative means" (Springgay et al., 2008, p. 87). These exercises of *a/r/tographic*

troubling produce aesthetic encounters. For example, this research takes on the

Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizome to build a theoretical framework together with the concepts of

aesthetics and drama improvisation. However, I struggled with how this theory could work to carry out the data analysis from the pilot study to the main study. I experimented with data analysis strategies from coding to arto-rhizomatic mapping, and then went on to develop a new set of Deleuzian analytical devices of *becoming, presence, major and minor, self-consciousness, power* and *affect.* I had a serious encounter with the theory of rhizome that I dug deep into its meaning and usage to form the skeleton of the research. I also dug wide to extend the theoretical framework. I did this by seeking Deleuze's implementation of the rhizomatic theory in theatre performances to develop the new set of analytical devices. The *becoming* and *multiplicities* were extended in relation to Daoism so that a set of operational definition of aesthetic encounters was formed (Chapter 2.3). This documentation of my thesis also *lived out* the spirit of rhizome by reporting my reflexivity throughout the thesis. Therefore, my aesthetic encounters in the research as a novice researcher were identified in the long and complex process. Those processes were found while working out the concept of rhizome to become the infrastructure of the research from the design to the thesis.

In the beginning of the doctoral programme, all I had in mind was drama. To be precise, my question was *how can I do justice to drama in education with its aesthetic value?* I found the research gap which showed that even though aesthetic education is one of the four developmental objectives of Hong Kong preschool curriculum; yet little research has been done. However, though there were some connections between drama and aesthetics, this was not sufficient detail for me to do a project. So I knew that a theory was crucial to provide a specific perspective in which I could examine the context. When I started looking for a theory and methodology to conduct my research, I searched various education and performing arts theories but nothing in particular caught my attention. Until I read about a/r/tography, an arts-based methodology that was developed from various postmodern theories (Irwin & de

Cosson, 2004; Springgay et al., 2008); that seemed to resonate with my experience! So I learnt more about a/r/tography in which the concept of rhizome was first introduced. After going in greater depths of the concept of rhizome, I found that it constitutes postmodern perspectives. Those perspectives match with the notions of Chinese and Western aesthetics, and the nature of drama improvisation. All of a sudden, it seemed that the theory (rhizome), practice (drama improvisation) and process (aesthetic encounters) could be linked up. This was the time I suddenly realised how a theory could connect all my scattered thoughts together.

Thinking with Theories

Finding a theory and methodology that works in sync with the research is like finding a couple who were born-to-be together! At the beginning of the doctoral programme, I was very scared about philosophical thinking. In many Western countries, children learn philosophy as one of the subjects in their secondary school but in Hong Kong we do not have such privileges. So, when I was preparing the pilot study, my supervisor asked me what theory I would be using and, my brain was completely blank. She asked, "*Who did you read or write about for your essays?*" I could only recite some works of directors or playwrights. I was thinking that we theatre practitioners don't read theories but read scripts and make productions. Theories or ideologies are only labels that critics put on us. I was even so silly to ask my supervisor that "*Why should we write with theory? What makes these people's theory so great that I need their endorsement?*". I was completely annoyed by the idea of using other people's theory to support my thinking. I did not have any knowledge of any philosophy (not even Confucianism or Daoism) and I did not even know what questions I could ask in this direction. Thus, my supervisor spent one whole month guiding me the importance of researching using the theory. In that month, I immersed myself in the library, checking on terms, reading very big and very thick books of philosophy. It was in this

intensive seeking and learning that I read about a/r/tography and the concept of rhizome. However, my aesthetic encounters with theory did not stop at that moment. Instead, it was an aesthetic encounter that continued for two years, as the biggest problem was how to bring aesthetics, drama improvisation and the concept of rhizome together? For months, I kept on toying with my computer and kept on drawing funny graphics in an attempt to visualise the inter- and intra-relations of the three different perspectives.

Figure 19 was the first attempt wherein I was trying to summarise how I grafted the rhizome-related philosophical concepts in relation with aesthetics and drama improvisation. I wanted to make it like a *kaleidoscope* where all the components would change to illuminate the ever-changing inter- and intra-relations among the components. However, since this is a two-dimensional graphic it just does not move. It looks linear, hierarchical, organised and it is hard to find out where the relationships are linking with each other. So, after more than ten revisions, I revised the graphic into a comparatively more dynamic version.
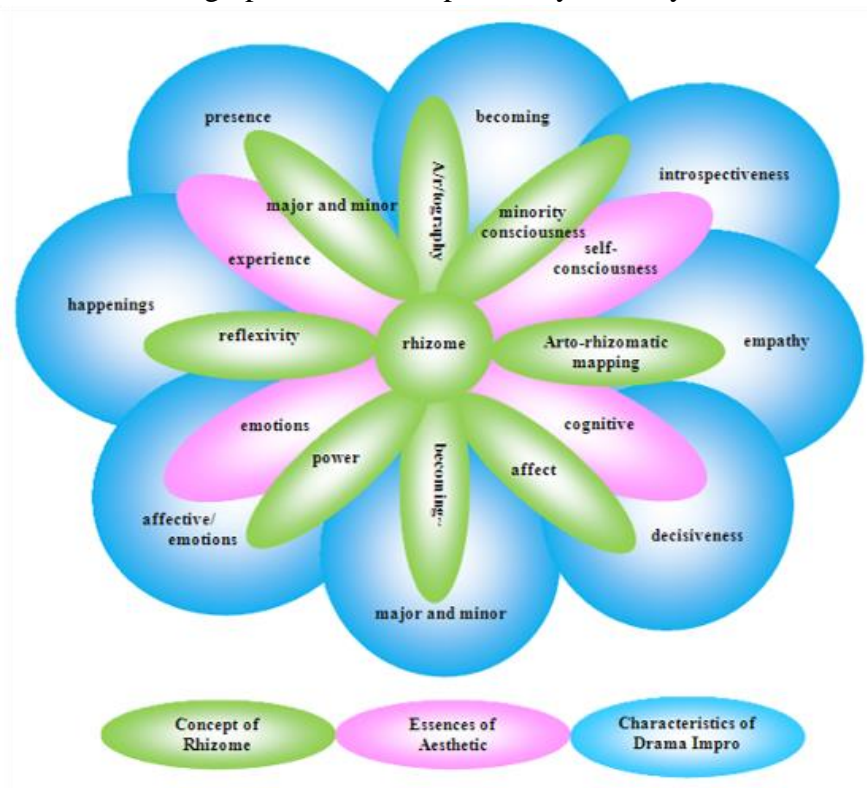
Figure 19. The kaleidoscope – the first attempt of grafting aesthetics, drama improvisation and the philosophical concept of the rhizome.

Figure 20. The bubble world – the 10th attempt on the rhizomatic grafting of aesthetics, drama improvisation and the philosophical concept of the rhizome.

I chose to use overlapping circles to visualise the movement of how my thinking with theories works in the research. I did this because Deleuze and Guattari (1987) don't believe in linear, centred or hierarchical models. With the purpose of showing the connectivity among the components of three different theoretical frameworks while avoiding any hierarchical or linear relationships, this tenth revision came closer to a Deleuzian concept. Figure 20 was the new image that (re)presents the grafting of three theoretical frameworks: aesthetics, drama improvisation and philosophical concepts of rhizome. How do these three categories connect to each other? How they are highlighted in relationships? And how are inter- and intra-related to each other? How are they connected to the difference and similarity of grafting? For example, I developed arto-rhizomatic mapping from rhizomatic mapping that connects to cognition, aesthetics, decisiveness, empathy and introspectiveness. The reason that

decisiveness, empathy and introspectiveness are coloured in both pink and blue is because

they are shared components (inputs) of both aesthetics and drama improvisation. In addition,

these three components are circled with dotted outlines. This was done as they are also the

entities (outcomes) of aesthetic encounters as a part of the study findings.

This image serves as a symbolic mind map of how I thought making use of the theories.

It has no hierarchy. The composition of this image requires a different logic that helps me to

think differently. It is useful. It illuminates how I think thoroughly and how I actually

conducted the research bringing in use the following theories. It visualises how these three

categories graft together and produce new understanding of aesthetic encounters. This new

picture was not only evidence of my research progression but also another aesthetic

encounter that I had. My aesthetic encounters as a researcher were found in while I was

seeking and learning how to think using these theories. I can still remember how happy I was

when I found out the connection between Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizome, Daoism, and drama

improvisation (Chapter 2)! Thus, the pilot study was the first proper research that I had done

with a theory. However, like many love relationships, I also encountered problems with the

theory during the data analysis (Chapter 4). With the persistence of seeking and learning, I

had extended the concept of rhizome and Deleuzian *becoming* to theatre performance that

reconciled the problems I had encountered in data analysis.

This long and complex journey of working with a grafting theoretical framework

changed the way I think. For example, during the pilot study, I found the child participants

responded to me differently, i.e., they didn't prefer treating me as a teacher. That was my first

encounter with the notion of power as my pilot supervisor suggested. However, I strongly

resisted tapping into the philosophical thinking on power or power relations as I thought it

was a black hole in which I might certainly get lost. And then one day as I read about

Deleuzo-Guattarian concept on power relations which helped me in understanding odd

situations, like the resistant acts of young children. It was not about finding an answer or

interpretation of the happening but a strategy that allowed me recognise that the happening

was there for some reason(s) that had an influence. This rhizomatic thinking acts "like a

zig-zag crack in between the other lines – and it is only these lines that, from the perspective

of Deleuze and Guattari, are capable of creating something new" (Olsson, 2009, p. 58). It is

not about who makes the influence but it is rather a process which enables me to see that in

which other alternative ways I can do or think through the things.

Thinking from the perspective of the theory really helps me to understand myself and

the world I am within. These aesthetic encounters produced a theory in me led to a new

perspective on philosophy. Now I value and enjoy the importance of philosophy. This is the

first time as a student that I read books, not only for searching an answer but also for me to

think what is going on within me and what am I doing. This is different. In the past, I read

books as a process of doing comprehensions – that is, a game of getting answers, but now

there are no questions. This aspect can be likened with a Chinese medicine pharmacy where a

big cupboard holds hundreds of little drawers, and each kind of Chinese medicine is

categorised in one of these little drawers. The philosophical concepts help me to categorise

my scattered thoughts into a systematic way of thinking. Never in my life before this doctoral

programme could I think "why do I think it this way?" or "why should I do it this way?". I

did not realise the importance of sorting out all the pieces of knowledge in my head. Now,

because I have started learning sharing my thoughts with people or trying to make an

argument, then I realised it is really important that I have logical thinking and articulation.

After being able to categorise the knowledge in my mind, it helps me to tell the story in a

more comprehensive way. Unlike a scratched music CD jumping for cues all the time.

The journey of my research is reaching not a full stop but a pause, because in

rhizomatic perspective there is no beginning and no ends. This is the amount of work that I

could do in a three-year doctoral programme. My research journey stumbled on scattered ideas of drama, education, young children and aesthetics. The doctoral study looks like a linear process because; once the rhizomatic concept is incorporated, all scattered thoughts are inter- and intra-linked up. With this very first experience of aesthetic encounters as a researcher, I realised that I am situated in a process of becoming-researcher there are more inquires and experiences yet to be explored. However, just as the multi-overlapping identities of a/r/tographer are inter- and intra-related, the Deleuzian *becoming* affects reflexivity of my role as mother of Isa, one of the child participants.

Becoming-Mother

This was an unexpected section. Yet, the point of making a special note on *becoming-mother* is to acknowledge my inevitable identity in the research. Surprisingly, by the affect of Deleuze's concept of becoming, I had experienced a special aesthetic encounter as a mother.

In Hong Kong, it is common for teachers to let their child study in those kindergarten(s) where they work. While considering this phenomenon, I thought it could be useful if I could make some notes about the wonders and struggles of teaching with my own child in a group learning context. So I decided to let my daughter Isa join in the research workshops, knowing there could be conflicts against my role as an a/r/tographer. However, I did not expect the conflict would be so uncontrollable.

Isa, a four–year-old girl, was experiencing family traumatic stress, especially the love-hate dilemma towards her long-term separated father. Therefore, she felt uneasy whenever she sees the any of her friend's father and soon she starts wailing. Since the pilot study, it became a *ritual* to her that she had to cry for at least 30 minutes at the beginning of each workshop for missing daddy and so on. As a mother, I had to comfort her and calm her down but, as a researcher, I was frustrated with the time constraint and had to move on with

the activities. There were many times that I was asking myself *what am I doing? Why did I draw her in the research? Maybe I shouldn't bring her next time …* However, after calming down, Isa did enjoy the drama improvisation activities with her friends and all the child participants engaged in aesthetic encounters together. So, time after time, I convinced myself that Isa could stay in the team. The *'miracle'* started in the third workshop of the study.

Even though my supervisor couldn't understand Cantonese (a local dialect of Chinese) still she came to observe the workshop. She is a tall foreign lady with blonde hair. She arrived at the dance studio with Isa and I. Isa knows my supervisor well as Isa joined most of my tutorials. So Isa acted as the ambassador to introduce my supervisor to her friends and also took good care of my supervisor to make sure she was sitting comfortably at the corner with enough candies. As Isa was busy explaining to her friends, who this unexpected visitor was, I told my supervisor that this was the very first time that Isa did not cry in the workshop. I briefly shared with my supervisor how frustrating it was in the past workshops with Isa's never-ending crying and I hated myself for not being a nice mother as I could be. Thus, before my role as a mother, I had to watch out for the time limits and classroom control as the principal a/r/tographer. Surprisingly, after that event, Isa did not cry in the later workshops even though my supervisor did not come. I was wondering why Isa changed dramatically. Honestly, I still do not know the answer. However, this incident drew my attention to Isa's improvisation performances that turned out to be an alternative reading of Isa's behaviours as a mother.

Together with the pilot study, Isa had performed many different characters but all of them were victims, including a dying princess, a seriously injured baby zebra, or a lost sister dinosaur. At first, I thought that she chose to be a victim due to the psychological reflection of her family traumatic stress. I was very upset as a mother who could only watch her daughter suffer and without knowing what to do with her daughter's psychological needs.

These guilty feelings left me weeping over many night prayers. Although I am not advocating any religious belief, I have to say it must be a God's blessing that I was introduced to Deleuze's philosophy which has granted me to see the role of a mother with a new perspective.

> Children never stop talking about what they are doing or trying to do: exploring milieus, by means of dynamic trajectories, and drawing up maps of them. … Parents are themselves a milieu that children travel through: they pass through its qualities and powers and make a map of them. They take on a personal and parental form only as the representatives of one milieu within another. But it is wrong to think that children are limited before all else to their parents, and only had access to milieus *afterward*, by extension or derivation. (Deleuze, 1997d, p. 61–62)

In *What children say,* Deleuze (1997d) claimed that parents are milieus for their children. In these milieus, parents mark trajectories with their saying and doing. Their children will explore these milieus ceaselessly and use the trajectories to make sense of their circumstances. This new understanding of child allowed me to develop an alternative reading of Isa's improvisation performances. At the time of the pilot study she was four years old. She chose to play the character of Cinderella and this character was trapped in a forest fire. Although doctors and firemen were keen to rescue her, Isa the Cinderella did not respond to the rescue that forced the doctors to announce her death (Chapter 4). She explored the milieus of her parents – a divorced relationship that was something big and uncontrollable in her life. It seemed in the mist of this milieu, Isa was unable to respond even to the so-called rescue. Then, after eight months, she turned to five years old. Isa chose to be a baby zebra, which was happily performing in a circus show (W1-02G, Table 4). However, her leg was suddenly injured seriously. This time, she sat quietly on the floor while two doctors attended her wound. Later, she was crawling hard with her arms and dragging her injured leg towards the

side stage. Her performance was praised by the other child actors. They appreciated Baby Zebra's spirit of 'never give up' and, regardless of how painful her leg was; still tried all she could to crawl back home (the side stage). The previous milieu (the divorce that resulted in her being situated-in a single-parent family) seemed still to be bothering her; yet Isa seemed to be getting some unknown will of power to at least make a response – even though still injured, she made her way *home* (symbolic to a resting place).

Lastly, in the exemplary scene (W4-21G, Table 4), Isa chose to be the sister of a baby dinosaur. Both of them were lost in a forest and searching for their parents. In this scene, these two baby dinosaurs experienced Mommy Dinosaur's rejection to reunite, hunting by two fierce crocodiles, and trapped in a forest-fire. Regardless of how heart-breaking and breathtaking these adventures were, Isa though still a victim in this act, never forgot to protect her baby brother dinosaur. She kept holding his hand while wandering in the forest, trying to protect him from the crocodiles, and taking him back to Mommy Dinosaur as they were running away from the fire in the forest. At that time, I was not sure whether the milieu hurt or was still bothering her. But, Isa had made another attempt to explore a brand new approach in a similar tragic scenario. She played the role of not only a victim but also of a responsible care-taker.

In the *Expressionism in philosophy*, Deleuze's philosophy of vitalism (1997c) allows me to take an alternative reading of Isa's improvisation performances. These were not pure drama performances or psychological reflections. As the virtual reality on stage was a *reality* presence to the child actor (Deleuze, 1988a; 1997a), Isa was performing how she explored the milieus with her own efforts by making use of her own understanding (without any adult intervention). My aesthetic encounter as a mother in this research was grounded by this new understanding of *becoming-child*. This new idea empowered me to get rid of the sympathetic guiltiness towards my daughter. Instead, I gasped at her vitality and am proud of her as she

was making an effort to explore and respond to her life. As a mother, this was an invaluable lesson that I had learnt– I need to trust my child who is making every effort by herself to transform herself in the process of becoming-child. This aesthetic encounter allowed me to see Isa as a caterpillar in a cocoon; without any of my interventions, I trust that she can transform herself in becoming a butterfly.

In the process of writing this commentary, I was constantly troubled by the in-between roles that I had taken in the research. My aesthetic encounters of each role were inter- and intra-related. On one hand, I had to demonstrate my professional knowledge and competence in this research. On the other hand, I had to be able to problematise my multi-overlapping roles with a focus on my aesthetic encounters in the research. I should report earnestly about the bias and struggles which I encountered during the investigation. However, all these troubles produced new thinking. This resulted in me developing a new perspective, approach and practice in each of my roles.

My roles of a/r/tographer imbued the research study process with multiplicities and complexities that made the inquiry proceed rhizomatically. It is the practice of reflexivity that brings me back to rewind and review whatever I have learnt and what affect does this doctoral programme had on me. By acknowledging my subjectivities, weaknesses, struggles and biases, I am able to reposition myself as a person (with constantly changing identities) in the *process of becoming* – an eternal space where "the act of reflexivity creates new thoughts and ideas at the same time as going back over old thoughts and ideas … chang[ing] the thinking that is being thought" (Davies et al., 2004, p. 386). Becoming-reflexive, as discussed in various chapters throughout the thesis, operates in/ through the process of the research through my thoughts, minds and acts ceaselessly.

Summary

This chapter was my research reflexivity as the principal a/r/tographer that complicated the research process and results. The reflexive exercises of my own aesthetic encounters in the research granted new insights on my subjectivities and assumptions. They affected my perspectives and practices as an artist, researcher, teacher, as well as a mother. As I reflect upon these Deleuzian understandings, new teaching perspectives, certain meanings and concepts were produced in me. Some of them were such as, gaining new meanings for children's resistance or the fear of losing power in classroom practices. Thinking with Deleuze's philosophy allowed me to be reflexive about my daily practices that has produced a new me who was in the transformation of becoming-a/r/tographer. Realising that I am in a process of becoming-artist-and- researcher-and-teacher (-and-mother) was a valuable lesson of my life. The following chapter serves as a review and prospect of this three years doctoral study on young children's aesthetic encounters. It summaries the study findings, implications and provides recommendations for educators, researchers and policy makers.

Chapter 8: Epilogue – Becoming-Aesthetic Education

This chapter starts with a summary of the study and evaluates its contribution to knowledge. It starts with a discussion on how the findings of the process of young children's aesthetic encounters and intangible environments provide a reconceptualisation and alternative approach to facilitate aesthetics education through aesthetic encounters that specify the affect (Deleuze, 1997a) of the findings within the Hong Kong early childhood education context. Then it presents the contributions that the study brings to the field. Followed by a discussion of research application and transferability, the study will also makes recommendations to educators, researchers and policy makers on further aesthetic encounters which are and can be practiced in early childhood education in Hong Kong.

Summary of the Study

As outlined in Chapter 1 aesthetic education in Hong Kong's early childhood education context was implemented without involving aesthetic encounters. Aesthetic education has become an essential domain in worldwide curricula as aesthetics stimulates children's creativity and imagination. Imitation and art-appreciation through art activities are common strategies in developmentally appropriate approach, yet not all arts activities can create aesthetic experiences. This is partly caused by the insufficient information about aesthetics in relation to Hong Kong's early childhood education context. Partly it also results from the lack of empirical research on aesthetic encounters with young children. Therefore, this study consolidated important information about both Chinese and Western aesthetic encounters, including the backgrounds, schools of thoughts, aesthetic functions, aesthetic encounters and its environments. This information filled in the gap of the *Guide* (Curriculum Development Council, 2006), as well as provided a critical reference to the literature in both Chinese and Western aesthetic contexts for educators and researchers. Although there is "no one 'correct' meaning" (Hick, 2012, p. 85, emphasis in original) in qualitative research, the a/r/tographic

study also contributed to the revelation of how young children experienced and responded to aesthetic encounters with drama improvisation. Along with it also revealed the environments that were required to facilitate such encounters.

This thesis, on a small-scale qualitative research study reported on the result of my investigation about young children's aesthetic experiences. Consequently, it proposed to foster aesthetic education through aesthetic encounters. Taking Piaget's suggestion that the (developmental) stages should not be fixed and variations should be expected (Muller, Carpendale, & Smith, 2009), this study used a postmodern perspective to scaffold the theoretical and methodological frameworks. Thus, the perspective provides for alternative reading of young children's aesthetic experiences beyond the mainstream developmentally appropriate approach. Drama improvisation as the arts medium with Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) and aesthetics of Daoism (Laozi, 551 BCE/2008, 2011; Zhuangzi, 369 BCE/1996) were applied, not for pinning down what aesthetic encounters were but to explore what aesthetic encounters with young children could do. It also enabled me to find out how educators could better facilitate such encounters. In this study, aesthetic encounters were defined as cognitive and sensory exercises (including emotions and feelings) (Bundy, 2003) with a purpose to build young children's ethics of self-consciousness (Chi, 1995). This theoretical definition is aligned with the function of aesthetics about *building better people for a better society* (UNESCO, 2006; Xunzi, 266-255 BCE/2003; Zhuangzi, 369 BCE/1996) by cultivating people with benevolence (Zhuangzi, 369 BCE/1996). Considering children's embodied forms of thinking, communicating and acquiring knowledge, I used qualitative and arts-based forms of research. This enabled me capture young children's aesthetic experiences in ways that were not threatening to their integrity and or causing harm to their self-confidence. For this purpose, I found a/r/tography, especially applicable as an arts-based qualitative methodology. This methodology allows

researchers to integrate young children's subjectivities, desires and beliefs into the research process. Four characteristics of postmodernism were found in relation to Chinese aesthetics and drama improvisation, including *intuition, self-consciousness, inter-subjectivity, multiplicities* (in relation to de-authorship). This was done by identifying how education in Hong Kong neglected humanistic and artistic education (Hui & Shu, 2010), (Chapter 2 the postmodern aspects). Therefore, postmodern perspective underpinned the study, in which Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of rhizome was used to form a rhizomatic theoretical framework along with aesthetics of Daoism and drama improvisation.

Involving these three areas of studies, the investigation examined multiple-layers of data, and reflected on the in-between roles of an a/r/tographer (artist, researcher, and teacher). New insights of common knowledge emerged. This happened when the complexity of overlapping roles of researcher (as an artist, researcher, and teacher) and multi-layers of truths breakthrough conventions were allowed. After conducting a pilot study, the feasibility of the research design was examined and the duration of workshops, data analysis strategy were adjusted and revised. So a/r/tography was used to study the aesthetic processes of a purposefully mixed group. It comprised of six Chinese children with equal number of boys and girls who were aged 3-5 years, as they participated in five, 2-hours Cantonese drama improvisation workshops for two months. Opportunities were provided to the children to use their imagination, connect to their past experiences, and enhance their emotion and sensory awareness from their surroundings. Data were gathered using video recordings, focussed discussions, children's art journals, and reflective journals.

Data analysis adopted was an arto-rhizomatic mapping which aided in identifying how children experienced and responded to aesthetic encounters. The a/r/tographic analytical devices of *contiguity* and *excess* were used together with Deleuze's five concepts from *theatre of multiplicities* (i.e., *becoming, presence, major and minor, power,* and *affects*) to

map the *contiguity* (similarities) and *excess* (surprises) across the 22 maps of lines of flight.

Thereafter nine categories were identified. They were *releasing of creativity and imagination,*

constant decision-making, being bold to express themselves, changing of identities, switching

in and out of characters, lapse of concentration, child's perspectives on ethics, emotional

engagements, and *unsuccessful scenes*. With an exemplary scene of drama improvisation, the

affective journey of the aesthetic encounters was explored as a multiple yet overlapping and

relational event.

Figure 21 shows the summaries of the study, the process of children's aesthetic

encounters. It was illuminated through their exercises of *decisiveness, introspectiveness* and

empathy. Such processes reveal a safe physical environment and an intangible environment.

This environment provides opportunities for children to exercise decisiveness,

introspectiveness and empathy which were essential to facilitate young children's aesthetic

encounters. By applying Deleuze's key concepts of power that can be *subtracted, amputated,*

or *neutralized*, power relations and teacher's perspectives were identified as important

requirements to support the intangible environment. Children's cognitive (through

decisiveness) and sensory exercises (through empathy), ethics of self-consciousness (through

introspectiveness) of the child participants were recorded. The transformations of children

through aesthetic encounters were also recorded and discussed. By recommending Greene's

(1971, 1995, 2001) teaching perspective and Sawyer's (2004) teaching approach, *teaching for*

aesthetic experiences with *teacher as co-improviser* to educators, the research

reconceptualised aesthetic encounters with young children in Hong Kong. The reflexivity

aspects of postmodernism not only contributed to findings and discussion, it also revealed the

meaningfulness of aesthetic encounters towards the child participants (Chapter 5) and myself

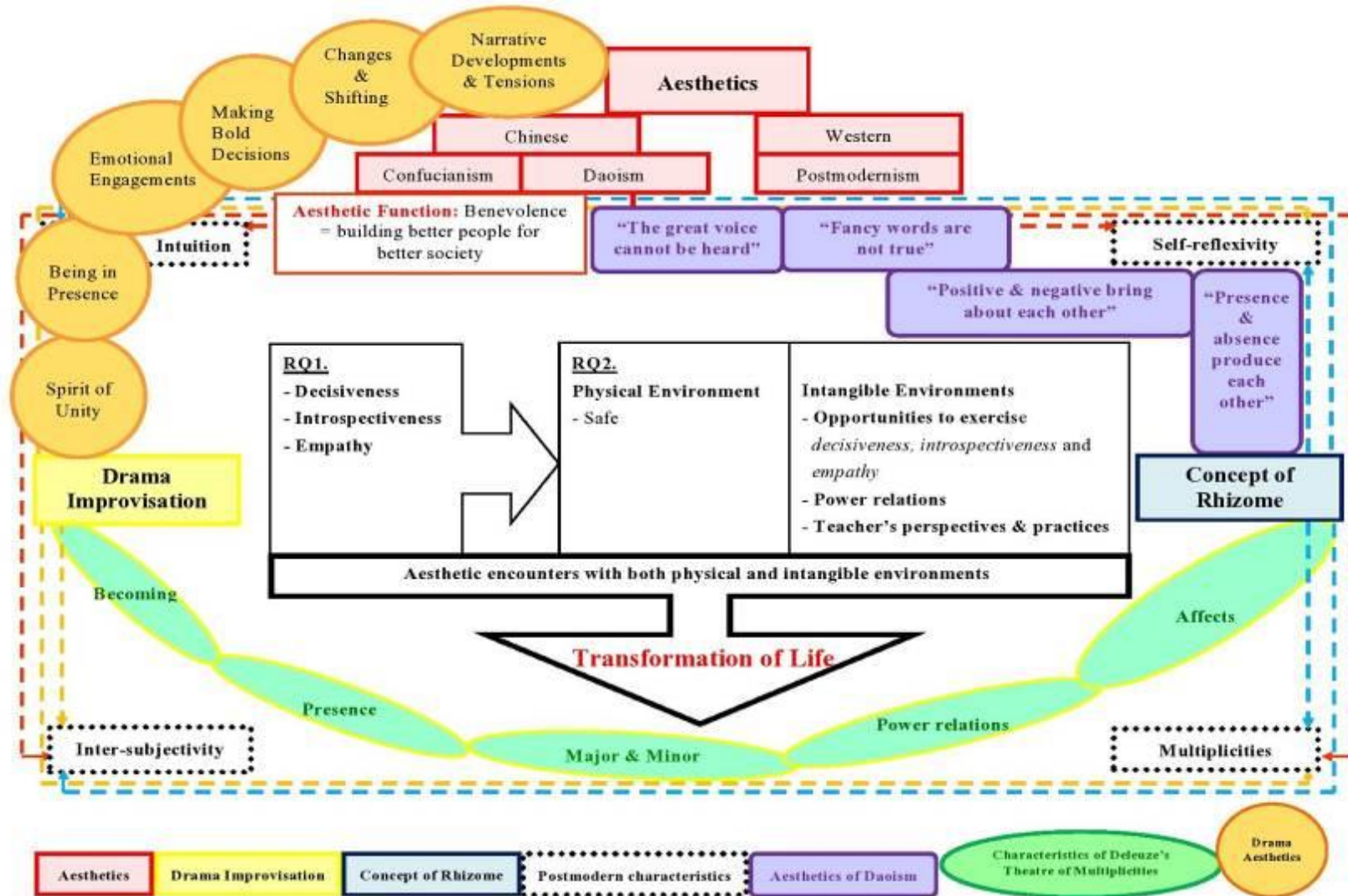(Chapter 7), as well as the rhizomatic validity (Lather, 1993) of the study's trustworthiness.

Figure 21. Young children's aesthetic encounters through both physical and intangible environments enhance transformation of life.

Becoming-Aesthetic Education through Reconceptualising Aesthetic Education in

Hong Kong

The first contribution of the research is to specify the mission of aesthetic education. Although aesthetics can enhance one's ability on arts-making and appreciation, but it is not the fundamental function of aesthetic education to serve as a better arts trainer. By introducing both Chinese and Western aesthetics (Chapter 2), the background of aesthetics bridged the previous knowledge of educators, and built over it new understandings on aesthetic education. Hong Kong takes on the Western education is of a play-based approach (Curriculum Development Council, 2006) whereas Chinese educational philosophy seems not to reflect the same. In this research, I purposefully drew in Chinese aesthetic concepts to emphasise our roots and values that constitute the important ideas of education. The ideas that aesthetics produces transforms life through self-reflexivity. Chinese philosophers (e.g., Confucius, Xunzi, Zhuangzi) believed that by cultivating aesthetics in people they can be made better. This is supported by building one's ethics of self-consciousness (Li, 2010), transformation of a better society can also be seen (Amadio et al., 2006; Confucius, 500 BCE/2000; Xunzi, 266-255 BCE/2003; Zhuangzi, 369 BCE/1996).

> For teachers and researchers this implies starting out from the idea that things are already going on and that one's task is to go in and try to latch on to these things and experiment together with people. This implies being prepared for not knowing and for unexpected surprises, which is quite contrary to any attempt to tame subjectivity and learning through predicting, controlling, supervising or evaluating according to any predefined standards. (Olsson, 2009, p. 181)

This research on aesthetic encounters with drama improvisation had lived out the spirit that Olsson promotes. By performing drama improvisation with the child actors, I situated

myself, the artist-and-researcher-and-teacher, while wondering and *not knowing* the

unexpected surprises. I tried to *control* the scenes unintentionally as a narrator but it proved

to be an effort in vain. Instead, even more *unexpected surprises* occurred, such as the

resistance from the child actors. It worried me when I encountered unpredictable resistance,

the uncontrollable children running around the stage, and also unsupervisable while making

their arts journals (e.g., Foreigner the Brother Dinosaur made a computer with sticks and

stickers that had no connection to any improvisation scenes in Workshop (4). However, this

journey of *not knowing* granted an invaluable opportunity to reflect on and think beyond my

current perspective and practice as an artist, researcher, and teacher. The research findings

showed that aesthetic education could focus on, acknowledge and value the difference

between children. So educators can start aesthetic education by working out and observing

the uniqueness of each and every child. Hence the educators should design their teaching

according to individual capabilities through various means and methods.

> When something new and different is coming about, when the lines of flight are
>
> created and activated in practices, it is never taking place as a relationally planned and
>
> implemented change by specific individuals. Rather, there are from time to time
>
> magic moments where something entirely new and different seems to be coming
>
> about. (Olsson, 2009, p. 63)

The lines of flight in the arto-rhizomatic mapping analysis were discussed in Chapter 5.

They provided an opportunity for creativity and inspiration to take place (Deleuze & Guattari,

1987) beyond the standardization and stratification of aesthetic education in Hong Kong early

childhood education. These lines of flight challenged some of the boundaries and constraints

that limited the conceptualised, designed and implemented of aesthetic education.   In other

words, young children and educators can search for new aesthetic pathways beyond the

curriculum guidelines to explore and expand the aesthetic education curriculum. Since lines of flight can take place at any time and lead us in any direction, educators are encouraged to put fear of *not knowing* aside, and go with experiences that flow rhizomatically and aesthetically with young children. This act may challenge us to think and act beyond conventional paths. In this alternative space, young children can become an affect (influential) (Deleuze, 1997a) towards aesthetic education in early childhood education and thereby "magic moments" (Olsson, 2009, p. 58) might take place. This a/r/tographic study showed that the young children were competent to experience and respond to aesthetic encounters. They responded to these encounters though their embodied interactions with cognitive and emotional engagement through/ in/ with drama improvisation. The required environments for young children's aesthetic encounters through dramatic art activities and the processes involved were presented in Chapter 6.

Spontaneous plays with drama improvisation are seen as extremely valuable contexts for learning and developing one's capacity for aesthetic development. In these plays children can experience verbal, physical and emotional happenings, and apply their creativity and imagination. Inter-subjective relations with a teacher also play an essential role in children engaging in aesthetic encounters. The roles of artist-and-researcher-and-teacher in power relations towards child participants, as well as researching with children, are elaborated in the thesis. The study proposed a specific understanding of learning environments for aesthetic education. The study suggests that young children's aesthetic education is through/ in/ with aesthetic encounters. Children's resistance during drama improvisation activities had highlighted a driving force behind their self-conscious actions for negotiation of meanings. This resistance also led to show my reflexivity towards power relations and the teaching perspectives with children, in routine classroom practice.

Research Application and Transferability

Three applications of this inquiry are identified in relation to aesthetic education in the context of Hong Kong's early childhood education. Firstly, I proposed aesthetic education through aesthetic encounters. Both literature and the research findings agreed that arts activities do not necessarily convey aesthetic experiences and responses but aesthetic encounters do. Since, aesthetic encounters are the essence of aesthetic education, it is appropriate to promote aesthetic education through aesthetic encounters. It doesn't whether the aesthetic education is carried out with or without arts activities by the educators, curriculum designers, researchers and policy makers for further consideration.

Secondly, in response to the research questions, aesthetic education is not only about the process of an aesthetic encounter. It is also related with the ways in which it operates. Unlike the general early childhood classroom practice that is concerned with the physical environment filled with the experience (e.g., classroom decoration or arts materials), aesthetic encounters require an intangible environment that constitutes opportunities to exercise *decisiveness, introspectiveness* and *empathy*. Traditional early childhood classroom conventions, such as teacher-dominated conversation, adults initiating or leading activities, and emotions-free arts and craft experiences, etc., become blockages for young children's aesthetic encounters. The performance of their creativity, imagination, cognition, emotion and self-consciousness in ordinary classroom routines can be classified as behavioural problems, or challenges to adults, that can easily be neglected, ignored and silenced. Therefore, in planning and conducting such environments, a special time and space, for young children's aesthetic encounters is required. Along with it a friendly assurance for children to freely act, react, and enact is equally important for sensible acceptance of children's verbal and non-verbal expression. This assurance and acceptance open up children's mental readiness with sense and sensibility for aesthetic encounters.

Lastly, the intangible environment also suggests alternative teaching perspectives and practices. After learning Deleuze's concept of power, I do not feel offended by resistance from children anymore. I am no longer afraid to lose my power in the daily classroom practice as a teacher (no matter that it is being subtracted, amputated or neutralised) but thinking about it, if my power is shared, what affect (influence) could be made. What is the function of the shared power? What good aspects can emerge from this power relationship? I started to look at the bright side and produced positive effects (Deleuze, 1997a). It is the essence of Deleuze's philosophy to make one think out of the norms (dominated) and act differently. As Sawyer's (2004) advocates on "teaching is improvisational performance" and it is a "creative art" (p. 12), thus educators are encouraged to act as *co-improvisers* putting aside the fear of power struggles. Thus, educators make constant reflexivity on teaching, and carrying an attitude of g*o with the flow* with every child's performative voices (Olsson, 2009).

Recommendations for Future Research

Having limited time and resources in a 3-year doctoral study, the research has touched upon many important issues to be studied further. Some of the issues concern aesthetic education, some concern drama and early childhood education and other concern various research methods.

Little research has been done in aesthetic education in early childhood education in Hong Kong. Especially research concerning aesthetic encounters with drama improvisation and 'the process and environments of aesthetic encounters' has not been researched in depth. However, it is a research with the youngest that can reveal the core of experience, embodiment and aesthetics. I suggest that more research about children's different forms of aesthetic encounters is required. It is so because children may encounter different processes and environments in order to experience and respond to aesthetic encounters with different

forms. For example, different sensory engagements are required for music or dance; different arts materials are required for painting or sculpting; and different forms of participation are required for indoor or outdoor aesthetic encounters. Therefore, not only time and space matters (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987); as Post humanist Karen Barad (2003) suggested 'thing' (e.g., spaces, body, and objects) can also 'matter'. I also recommend further research with children from radically different backgrounds and experiences, such as those with disabilities or belonging to a diverse range of cultures.

> I would want to see one or another art form taught in all pedagogical contexts, because of the way in which aesthetic experiences provide a ground for the questioning that launches sense making and the understanding of what it is to exist in a world. (Greene, 1978, p. 166)

Supporting Greene's advocacy, I propose that more research is needed to explore aesthetic encounters with non-art subjects or cross- or inter-subjects to re-position aesthetics as valuable in relation to all-round early childhood education. This is required to fulfil aesthetics as the suggested developmental objective in the government's curriculum. This research also provides empirical evidence-based research for multiple curriculums and possible policy revision. Such research is necessary to produce more knowledge about how aesthetics and embodied experiences can contribute in the growth of cognition, emotion and self-consciousness. Interest in drama in education for early childhood education learning is currently significant in Hong Kong as drama enhances exercises of creativity, empathy and free expression (Curriculum Development Council, 2000, 2006). However, more studies about drama aesthetics and education are needed. It helps in better understanding of the significance of drama's qualities and resistance in young children's art-making, arts appreciation, and arts criticism (meaning evaluations).

Understanding of complex processes can become possible only when researchers' interpretations are enriched by their personal experiences (Stake, 2006). There is a need for much more research to understand how aesthetics contribute to young children's development of cognition, sensory and ethics for self-consciousness. We, educators, should be aware of not being too comfortable because our "definitions and positions … are not functioning or not available" for children's learning (Olsson, 2009, p. 85). However challenging Olsson's reminder seems to be, we must not stop struggling against the resistance, despite knowing the fact that in which direction we are heading. Lenz Taguchi (2008) claims that it is "possible and desirable" for educators to make ongoing ethical challenges to "what we do and what we believe to be true" (p. 280). Just as she encouraged educators to have constant reflexivity to clarify their beliefs and practices, we have to reflect on what education should be about, what we can do for multiple generations. Bresler (1991) also reminded us how embodied teaching and learning can be fulfilled: "[w]e try to have a glimpse of riches that life has to offer us: to hear more, see more, perceive more, feel more – an aesthetic experience which touches the subtleties and beauty beyond the simple boxes of numbers and other useful categories" (p. 93). In order to reflect on the existing knowledge and be prepared to conceive new knowledge, educators are encouraged to transform their reflexivity into actions.

> …thought and action are inextricably linked, and through a hermeneutic circle of interpretation and understanding, new knowledge affects existing knowledge that in turn affects the freshly conceived existing knowledge. (Irwin, 2004, p. 34)

In searching for an aesthetic pathway, I started this project with confidence that I knew the research from every aspect (i.e., performing as an artist, seeking answers as a researcher, and teaching as a teacher). Yet I stumbled and tumbled along the way as I was overwhelmed

by the overlapping identities as an a/r/tographer; surprised by encountering child's resistance; and frustrated while struggling with different data analysis strategies. However, I was able to rise again by reflexively working on every little incidence that happened during the research journey. As a result of this thesis, I have come to a different understanding about learning and researching, particularly with young children. I benefited from how they inspired me to look beyond adult perceptions of language, behaviours and learning. They taught me to care about performative knowledge of how children perceive the world rhizomatically.

There are many different ways of thinking about aesthetic education in early childhood curriculum. Deleuzo-Guattarian becoming-aesthetic education enabled this research to explore these possibilities. It did this by grafting perspectives of aesthetics, drama improvisation and the rhizome. It also granted an alternative theoretical perspective as a starting point. The contribution of exploring a grafting perspective by reconceptualising aesthetic education through aesthetic encounters within an intangible environment allowed educators, researchers and policy makers to become more open to "new and different ways of seeing the world, having a willingness to question what we come to take for granted" (Giugni, 2012, p. 13). The research study would like to see how further studies on aesthetic encounters transform aesthetic education in Hong Kong's early childhood education context. This take happened because educators witness their students' transformation of becoming-children.

> It is in the ability of aesthetic experiences to transform lived experience, the given of
>
> social interaction and meaning, and the facts of political consciousness that a
>
> revolutionized educational and social life may become possible. (Beyer, 2000, p. 124)

The nature of a/r/tographic research means the data analysis and findings discussions can be endless, but this research reached its ending. Sharing Beyer's vision, this research process altered my perspective and practice as an experienced artist, researcher, and teacher. I

learnt that this doctoral study can be more than merely a communication of the importance of

aesthetic education. It can be one that makes things happen (as a Deleuzian affect) and

life-changing… for example, I have discovered the new insight about my academic life as a

becoming-artist-and-researcher-and-teacher – and that is what ***aesthetics* for** – *a*

transformation of life.

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Appendix A

17 January 2013

Ms. HO Ka Lee Carrie
Doctor of Education Programme
Department of Early Childhood Education

Dear Ms. Ho,

Application for Ethical Review <Ref. no. 2012-2013-0134>

I am pleased to inform you that approval has been given by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) with regard to your application for ethical review related to the following research project for a period from 17 January 2013 to 31 January 2013:

Project title: In Search of an Aesthetic Pathway: Young Children's Encounters with Drama Improvisation (A Pilot Research Study)

Please note that you are responsible for informing the HREC in advance of any changes in the research proposal or procedures which may affect the validity of this ethical approval. You will receive separate notification should a fresh approval be required.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Yours sincerely,

Cherry Ng (Ms)
Secretary
Human Research Ethics Committee

c.c. Prof. Benjamin Tsou, Chairperson, Human Research Ethics Committee
Prof. Sue Grieshaber, Principal Supervisor of the Applicant

10 Lo Ping Road, Tai Po, New Territories, Hong Kong 香港新界大埔露屏路十號
T +852 2948 8888 F +852 2948 6000 www.ied.edu.hk

Appendix B

10 September 2013

Ms HO Ka Lee Carrie
Doctor of Education Programme
Department of Early Childhood Education

Dear Ms Ho,

Application for Ethical Review <Ref. no. 2012-2013-0209>

I am pleased to inform you that approval has been given by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) with regard to your application for ethical review related to the following research project for a period from 10 September 2013 to 31 December 2013:

Project title: In Search of an Aesthetic Pathway: Young Children's Encounters with Drama Improvisation

Please note that you are responsible for informing the HREC in advance of any changes in the research proposal or procedures which may affect the validity of this ethical approval. You will receive separate notification should a fresh approval be required.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Yours sincerely,

Cherry Ng (Ms)
Secretary
Human Research Ethics Committee

c.c. Prof Dennis McInerney, Chairperson, Human Research Ethics Committee
Dr Mindy Blaise, Principal Supervisor of the Applicant

10 Lo Ping Road, Tai Po, New Territories, Hong Kong 香港新界大埔露屏路十號
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Appendix C

The Hong Kong
Institute of Education
香 港 教 育 學 院

INFORMATION SHEET

In search of an aesthetic pathway:
Young children's encounter with drama improvisation

Your child is being invited to participate in a research study as a participant as well as a co-researcher that is supervised by Dr. Mindy BLAISE and conducted by Carrie K.L. HO, from the Department of Early Childhood Education at the Hong Kong Institute of Education as the thesis component of the Doctor of Education Degree (EdD).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
This is a study of my Doctorate of Education (EdD) research on aesthetic education with young children. It will focus on (i) how do young children experience and respond to aesthetic encounters through drama improvisation? (ii) what kind of environment is required to facilitate aesthetic encounters with young children? This is an investigation of how young children encounter the aesthetic, to seek information about what they know about it. This new understanding may lead to alternate approaches to aesthetic education.

PROCEDURES
If you volunteer to have your child participate in this study as a co-researcher, I will ask him/her to do the following things:
Participate with other 5-6 children in five workshops once a week, with drama improvisation activities and focused discussion between September to December 2013. Each workshop will last approximately two hours each. The workshops include acting, appreciation and discussion about the aesthetic experiences and responses through the improvisation activities.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
There are no known or anticipated physical or psychological risks for participants in this study.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY
Children who participate in this study will benefit from the opportunity to participate in dramatic activities. Participation in drama has been shown to increase children's self-esteem, self-concepts, and risk-taking abilities. The improvisation activities will allow children the opportunity to exercise and excel imaginatively and creativity.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION
There is no payment for participation in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with the participants and their parents will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with their permission. Clear explanation will be made to all children in the workshop that they will not be referred to by their given names in written and oral components of the research. With the consent of the child (e.g., the child can give clear reasoning of using his/her real name), pseudonyms will be used of their own choice.

Work in the actual improvisation workshop will be kept confidential. All work will be done in a comfortable, safe activity space. Entered data will be stored on a password-protected computer, while written records, discussion questions, participant's journals, video recordings, photographs, and field notes will be kept in the office of my home until their final disposal after 7 years past publication, which will involve them being shredded. Only I will have access to the data kept in the office of my home.

Appendix C

Drama improvisation workshops will be photo and video recorded. Only the researcher and supervising doctoral committee at the Hong Kong Institute of Education will have access to the photographs and video recordings. The purpose of video recording the drama improvisation workshop is so that the researcher (who will be facilitating the drama improvisation) will have the opportunity to review the workshop when they are completed from an observer's perspective. Permission will also be obtained in advance from participants to video record the workshops, and to use the videos for public dissemination.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether your child participates in this study or not. If you volunteer your child to be in this study, you may withdraw your child at any time without consequences of any kind. Your child may also refuse to answer any questions he or she doesn't want to answer and still remain in the study and participate in the workshops.

FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE PARTICIPANTS & CO-RESEARCHER

Your child will be informed of the results of this study and provided a copy of the written report, in an age-appropriate format. Any parents who would like a copy of the final written report are invited to contact the principal researcher and will be sent a copy.

SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

This data may be used to inform future studies. Video data may be used for public dissemination.

RIGHTS OF THE PARTICIPANTS & CO-RESEARCHER

Your child may withdraw consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty.

If you have any enquiry about the ethics of the research, please contact Ms. Cherry Ng, Secretary of the Human Research Ethics Committee of The Hong Kong Institute of Education n on 2948 6318 or in writing (c/o Research and Development Office in room D4-1/F-21, The Hong Kong Institute of Education, 10 Lo Ping Road, Tai Po, New Territories).

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study.

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

_____   _____
Carrie K.L. HO   Date
Principal Researcher

Appendix C

The Hong Kong
Institute of Education
香港教育學院

有關資料
研究項目名稱
美從何處尋:幼兒透過即興劇的美育經驗和回應

誠邀　貴子女參加由首席監督員畢美廸副教授負責監督,首席研究員何嘉莉負責執行的研究計劃作為研究對象及協作研究員。他們是香港教育學院幼兒教育系教員/博士生。

研究計劃的目的
這是本人博士論文有關香港幼兒美感教育(簡稱 「美育」)的研究。是次將集中研究以下項目:(i)幼兒如何透過即興劇體驗和回應美育?(ii) 怎樣的環境才能促進幼兒的美育經驗?透過對幼兒美育經驗和回應的進深認識,來啓發美感教育的嶄新方法。

程序
如閣下自願讓貴子弟參與這項研究為研究對象及協作研究員, 本人會要求他/她進行以下事宜:

在 2013 年 9-12 月份中與另外 5-6 位幼兒一同參與及計劃為期 5 次, 每次 2 小時的即興劇工作坊內容。透過即興劇表演和欣賞來討論幼兒對美育的經驗和回應。

參與期間有可能面對的風險及不適
這項研究對參與者的身體或心理並無已知的或預期的風險。

有可能對參與者及(或)社會造成的好處
幼兒將獲取參與戲劇活動的機會。參與戲劇會增加幼兒的自信,自我認識和勇於冒險的能力。即興劇活動提供機會讓幼兒練習及發揮想像力和創作力。

參與費用
這項研究並不收取任何費用。

保密
凡有關　貴子女的資料將會保密,一切資料的編碼只有研究人員得悉。首席研究員會在工作坊開始前向幼兒清晰解說研究工作坊的目的和保密原則, 並鼓勵幼兒自選假名作研究之用。除非得到 貴子女明確的反對,否則其真實名字將會保密。

Appendix C

工作坊的資料將會保密。所有工作將在舒適安全的環境進行。由出版日開始計算，所有有關的文字記錄、問題討論、參與者日誌、錄影、相片及現場筆記將存管在本人的家居辦公室七年，直至有關資料可以作最終碎紙處理。本人將是唯一存取及使用這些存管在我家居辦公室研究資料的人。

即興劇工作坊將被拍攝及錄影。只有首席研究員和她在香港教育學院的博士生監督委員會可以使用這些相片和錄影。拍攝及錄影工作坊的目的是為了讓首席研究員可以有機會重溫工作坊的詳情情況。拍攝, 錄影及 播放工作坊活動前, 將會獲得參加者的書面同意作為教育用途。

參與或退出
閣下及 貴子女享有充分的權利在研究開始前或後決定退出這項研究, 而不會受到任何對閣下不正常的待遇或被追究責任。貴子女亦可以拒絕回答任何他/她不願意回應的問題而仍繼續參與此研究。

資料的後續研究使用
這項研究收集的資料會作為後續研究之用。

研究對象及協作研究員的權利
閣下及 貴子女享有充分的權利在研究開始前或後決定退出這項研究, 而不會受到任何對閣下不正常的待遇或被追究責任。

如閣下對這項研究有任何疑問, 可隨時與香港教育學院人類實驗對象操守委員會秘書吳惠霞女士聯絡電話 2948 6318 (地址:香港教育學院研究與發展事務處 D4-1/F-21 室轉交) 。

謝謝閣下有興趣參與這項研究。

首席研究員簽署
本人將按以上所列的條文進行這項導向研究。

_____   _____

何嘉莉   日期
首席研究員

Appendix D

The Hong Kong
Institute of Education
香港教育學院

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
(Parent)

In search of an aesthetic pathway:
Young children's encounter with drama improvisation

I _____ hereby consent to my child participating in the captioned research supervised by Dr. Mindy BLAISE and conducted by Carrie K.L. HO.

I understand that information obtained from this research may be used in future research and may be published. However, our right to privacy will be retained, i.e., the real name of my child will not be revealed.

Please check the appropriate boxes:

☐ I agree to the workshops being video recorded

☐ I agree to let you show the videotapes for educational purposes.

The procedure as set out in the **attached** information sheet has been fully explained. I understand the benefits and risks involved. My child's participation in the project is voluntary.

I acknowledge that we have the right to question any part of the procedure and can withdraw at any time without penalty of any kind.

Name of participant   _____

Signature of participant   _____

Name of Parent or Guardian   _____

Signature of Parent or Guardian   _____

Date   _____

Appendix D

The Hong Kong
Institute of Education
香港教育學院

香港教育學院
幼兒教育學系
參與研究同意書(家長)

研究項目名稱
美從何處尋:幼兒透過即興劇的美育經驗和回應

茲同意敝子弟＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿參加由畢美迪副教授負責監督,何嘉莉執行的研究項目。

本人理解此研究所獲得的資料可用於未來的研究和學術發表。然而本人有權保護敝子弟的隱私,其個人資料(如真實姓名)將不會洩漏。

請選擇適當的空格:

☐ 我同意錄影工作坊活動。

☐ 我同意何嘉莉播放工作坊活動的錄影片作教育用途。

本人對所附資料的有關步驟已經得到充分的解釋並理解可能會出現的風險。本人是自願讓敝子弟參與這項研究。

本人理解本人及敝子弟皆有權在研究過程中提出問題,並在任何時候決定退出研究而不會受到任何不正常的待遇或被追究責任。

參加者姓名: ＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿

參加者簽名: ＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿

父母姓名或監護人姓名: ＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿

父母或監護人簽名: ＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿

日期: ＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿

Appendix E

The Hong Kong
Institute of Education
香 港 教 育 學 院

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
(Child)

In search of an aesthetic pathway:
Young children's encounter with drama improvisation

I _____ hereby consent to participate in the captioned research supervised by

Dr. Mindy BLAISE and conducted by Carrie K.L. Ho.

Content of the Consent / Workshop Date	Please put ☺ if you agree, or mark " X" if you don't agree.				
	Workshop 1	Workshop 2	Workshop 3	Workshop 4	Workshop 5
1. I understand I can join activities with Carrie and other children and that what we do will be photographed and video –recorded for Carrie to write and talk about later in public.					
2. I know some things will be written about these activities in books and that my real name or photo will not be used in any of these.					
3. I know that I can do the activities if I want to and do not have to if I do not want to. I can watch if I want to.					
4. I know I can speak if I want to and can choose not to say anything if I do not want to.					
5. I want to join the activities with Carrie and the other children.					
Signature of participant:					

Play, Learn and Grow... Together!

Appendix E

Appendix F

The Hong Kong
Institute of Education
香港教育學院

In search of an aesthetic pathway:
Young children's encounter with drama improvisation

FOCUSED DISCUSSION SAMPLE QUESTIONS

1. Do you enjoy the improvisation scene?

2. What do / do not you enjoy during the improvisation scene?

3. Do you think it was a good show?

4. If yes, why? What make it good?

5. If no, why? How can it be better?

香港教育學院
幼兒教育學系

研究項目名稱
美從何處尋:幼兒透過即興劇的美育經驗和回應

焦點討論模擬問題

1. 你欣賞(喜愛)剛才的即興劇演嗎?

2. 在即興劇演出時, 有甚麼是你欣賞(喜愛)或不欣賞(不喜愛)的呢?

3. 你認為這是一齣好的表演嗎?

4. 為什麼是好? 是甚麼讓這次表演好?

5. 為什麼不好? 有甚麼可以讓這次表演變好嗎?