GAIJIN

By David Eastgate and Benjamin Knapton

Classroom Resource Materials
Benjamin Knapton and the Brisbane Powerhouse present:

**Gaijin** a collaboratively devised contemporary performance work.

**Creative Development Team**

Creative Producer
Director and Co-writer: Benjamin Knapton
Performer and Co-writer: David Eastgate
Mediated performances by: Nick Stewart, Jimmy Stewart
Lighting Design: Jason Glenwright
Set Design: Jessica Ross

**About the Director/Writer**

As a director Ben has worked for Woodford Folk Festival, Vena Cava Productions, Out of the Box, Queensland University of Technology and Griffith University. As an assistant director he has worked with Omniax Drama and Performance, Queensland Arts Council, La Boite Theatre Company and Brisbane Festival. His approach to performance making and direction is influenced by world renowned director Robert Lepage who has continued to support his development as an independent director by inviting him into his rehearsal room for extended periods of time over a number of years. Presently Ben is undertaking a practice-led PhD in directing at Queensland University of Technology, teaching as a sessional academic at various universities, and producing and directing multiple independent works in various forms of performance.

**About the Performer/Writer**

Dave Eastgate is one of Australia's finest musical comedians & most exciting young talents. Hailing from Australia's "new-music capital" of Brisbane, Dave has performed his unique brand of "Rock N' Roll Comedy" around the world in Japan, America, the UK & Canada. It was in the city of Osaka, where Dave performed at Universal Studios Japan for 4 years, that he learned fluent Japanese, performed Japanese Stand-Up Comedy (Manzai) & featured in a number of Japanese TV comedy/variety shows. As a "straight" musician he has shared the stage with such renowned acts as George, Eskimo Joe & Sophie Monk & as a comedian with Lano & Woodley, Tripod, Arj Barker & Stephen K. Amos. In 2006 he returned to Australia, was placed second in the National Grand Final of the prestigious Green Faces Comedy Competition & was invited to perform at The Melbourne International Comedy Festival Annual Showcase.

**Synopsis**

**GAIJIN** is a visually stunning one-man-show about the journey of an Australian traveller in contemporary Japan.

**GAIJIN** or ‘foreigner’ is an adrenalin pumped, fractured narrative that explores the journey of a young Australian negotiating an unfamiliar culture. The story begins with our protagonist Chris, incarcerated in Tokyo’s Fuchu Prison and oscillates between memory and reality to
reveal the events leading to his arrest and imprisonment. Presented through the eyes of multiple characters, the performance raises questions about our moral and cultural responsibilities in an increasingly globalised world.

The aesthetic integration of technology, staging and live performance captures the instability and strangeness of life in a foreign country as experienced by the Australian gaijin.

The Creation of Gaijin

The following outline details some of the approaches to play making undertaken by the Gaijin creative team. It is important to note, however, that this process is not a linear one as the outline might suggest. The dramatic languages utilised in Gaijin’s development remain dynamic throughout the rehearsal process. This means that new starting points will continue to emerge, lines of enquiry will continue to form and the performance map will be perpetually rewritten.

The Devising and Performing Process

The starting point for devising may come from a range of sources: a conversation, an article or an image which generates a personal interest that invites exploration. From this point, artists use improvisation to investigate further using all available theatrical elements: lighting sound, audio visual, performer etc. The creative team continue to research following lines of interest and ultimately devising a map on which the performance is based. Gaijin was developed through this process of improvisation and no written text exists for the work. Instead the performance is made up of set scenes that rely on ideas, concepts, roles and relationships.

Starting Points

Starting points may include a range of source materials including personal experience, news articles, blogs, images etc.

Lines of enquiry

When source material is investigated, paths of interest emerge, sometimes they will manifest in a scene, sometimes in a staging concept or sometimes information will just remain in the mix of ideas until it finds a place. Extending on emerging content evolves through continued discussion, research and improvisation.

Devising a map

Once the team have a few lines of enquiry and have explored them through a range of dramatic languages, content and aesthetic links between sometimes disparate pieces of information become apparent. It is the director’s task to recognise and enhance these links.

Creating an aesthetic, Integrating technology

Creating an aesthetic refers to the manipulation of dramatic languages.

As consumers of culture we read through multiple languages, so to have these things on stage is not necessarily new but we need to think about how we’re going to use them. We choose to work in a way where everything is being created simultaneously: text, movement, lighting, sound, projection, design and so forth, for example, when we projected the tattoo on Dave’s body is was a practical choice because he didn’t have time between scenes to paint on a tattoo. Because the tattoo was essential to the piece the projection was an inventive solution to a problem as well as an aesthetic choice driven by the needs of the developing narrative” Ben Knapton

Classroom activities
Orientating
Contemporary Performance engages with “changing conditions in the world, in particular new class structures, economies, cultural relationships and the collapse of the monocultures of the past” (syllabus 07).

Role on the wall
In small groups students create “roles on the wall” of “the traveller”. On large pieces of butchers paper they create a human outline which they fill with what they consider an international traveller might need, both externally and internally. Internal qualities are placed on the inside of the frame: curiosity, independence etc while external needs are placed on the outside: information, luggage.

Students are asked to consider how these requirements might differ depending on the place of travel.

As a group, students decide on a destination for their collective traveller. They brainstorm the places a traveller might go for information (smartraveller.gov.au, travel agent, friends etc) and what they might need to consider - do you expect to have to change the way you do things? Students carry out research to discover important facts (laws, customs, festivals, transport) for travellers visiting their chosen part of the world and use the information gained to develop a role: a travel agent, foreign job agency, friend, government department or parent etc. The class is divided in two. Half of the class play the traveller while the rest play their chosen roles. Chairs are set around the room in pairs so that the students playing the traveller can move from role to role at given intervals gaining information and advice about their travel plans. After a short time the roles are reversed. The teacher should aim for diversity in the students’ chosen roles, public and private, practical and emotive.

Students revisit the “role on the wall” and add new thoughts and ideas.

Group Discussion?
Gaijin
Using the Gaijin poster image as stimulus, students consider the main issues and themes in the play.
How does Gaijin engage with changing conditions in the world?
How are cultural relationships depicted in Gaijin?
How are these relevant to contemporary Australians?
What is the meaning of Gaijin and how does it affect the way we view culture?

Enhancing
As far as possible the teacher should bring theatrical resources to the classroom: rostra, lights, screens, instruments, recorded music, OHP and data projection. Have these available for students to use in their explorations.

Improvisation
Students bring to class, images (on USB or OHT for projection), music, objects etc, which depict the culture of the traveller’s chosen destination. This can be added to information from the earlier exercise along with provocative teacher sourced materials. The resources are placed around the room for students to observe. In small groups students choose one resource to examine further.

Groups create a concrete world for their resource. They develop roles, relationships and a situation and improvise a scene. The scene may take any form: a news report, private conversation, a family phone call, or comedy routine but it must reflect their interest in the resource.
Students are asked to recreate the scene a second time, this time, integrating their personal skills and or, the technical resources available in the room: music; projection, speaking a second language, singing.

**Group discussion**
- What was interesting about the presentations?
- What aspects would we pursue if we were to continue to develop the performance? Why?
- How did the integration of performance skills and technology enhance the piece particularly in terms of mood and symbol?
- What meaning was being made?
- What judgements or assumptions were we making about culture?

**Improvisation**
Students create the scene a third time in an attempt to pare away superfluous action and enhance what the group found interesting in their performance.

- What aesthetic and content links can be made between the scenes?

**Gaijin**
- In what ways did Gaijin utilise dramatic languages to reflect contemporary culture?
- What techniques replicated familiar contemporary cultural forms? Eg film clips, cinema, advertising, digital photos, etc.
- How did the director’s use of these techniques create meaning?

**Synthesising**

**Group discussion**
Reflecting on the meanings inherent in Gaijin students recall the events leading to Chris’s imprisonment. With the teacher playing the role of provocateur, students question “our moral and cultural responsibilities in an increasingly globalised world” (Gaijin synopsis)

Students revisit the “role on the wall” and add their new understandings.

**Demonstration**
One student is chosen to be Chris (Gaijin) and is asked to leave the room, the student is asked to deeply consider how he would feel upon returning home to Australia. The rest of the class form 2 groups: those who empathise with Chris and those who don’t. These groups are not dependent on students’ personal perspectives but should be an even split of the class. On butcher’s paper, each group brainstorms, from their given perspective, reasons to support or condemn Chris, they create placards as if for a demonstration.

The student enrolled as Chris is briefed that he has been released from Fuchu prison and is returning home, as he enters the room the class begin shouting and chanting slogans.

**Teacher in role**
The teacher, in role hushes the crowd and ushers Chris to the hot seat. The teacher may choose a range of contexts for the hot seat: press conference, public forum, TV interview, or leave the context undefined.

**Hot seat**
Chris sits in front of the class as they interrogate him. Each class member takes on a particular role with a defined perspective as they try to discover how he feels about his choices and how he views cultural relationships. Some roles may be more interested in putting forward their own opinions and perspectives.
Some words from the director:

What does it mean to create an aesthetic?

Aesthetic for me is the composition of all the theatrical elements on stage. Developing this aesthetic is a long process of content development and creative play inside a theatrical space. Importantly, all the people working on the performance are in the room at the same time and we are all developing our different 'parts' at the same time - finding a cohesive aesthetic is the job of the director, who keeps their eye on the performance as a whole - this includes the elements of performance, the skills being utilised in the performance and the text and context.

For example at one point in rehearsal we were discussing a character who was a cultural liaison officer at a fun park in Japan. The context we came up with for the first improvisation was this man talking to a group of new performers at their orientation meeting. As soon as this improvisation was up on stage we had: a strong context, a developing text, direct address to the audience, use of lighting and voice amplification - this became the aesthetic for the scene. After creating this scene, I would look out for other opportunities to use these elements in other scenes - this is how you start to find aesthetic cohesion in the piece as a whole.

What dramatic languages (elements of drama, skills of performance, styles and their conventions, text and context) are prioritised in Gaijin and why?

As this is a new devised work, the performance uses a wide range of dramatic languages that have been re-developed to serve the emerging show. We prioritise the use of performance technologies as well as the elements of drama. Because of the devised collaborative process strategies including, non-linear narrative, multiple roles, intertextuality and direct address have also been key to the performance.

The reason these languages are prioritised is a direct result of the process, and what we needed to do on stage to communicate what we were talking about. An example of this is multiple roles: this was not a conscious choice, rather because of the restrictions of a one-person-show it was an obvious consequence.

What is the primary reason for utilising technological mediums in your performance work?

We live in a time that engages so many different ways of communicating: mobile phones, internet, TV, the cinema etc. I think as artists we need to use these tools in our craft so we have the potential to explore contemporary ways of communicating and thinking about things.

Also, by using technology we can do things that would otherwise be much harder or more expensive – an example of this is the use of projected walls throughout the performance, if we did not project this we would have to build them and somehow move them around on stage…projection was a better option for us in this show.

How does Gaijin engage with our current social and political context?

In a time of unprecedented development in human existence people are engaging with things that are foreign to them more and more – this may be travelling to a different country or meeting people who think differently to themselves. This is an exciting thing as people realise more and more that the world is a complex web of ideologies and beliefs. I think GAIJIN tells the story of a man who is dealing with how he interacts in this complex web, and the consequences of misjudging these interactions.
The form of the performance also engages with contemporary contexts with its blending of technology and live performance. This blending is important to me as it allows artists to explore and communicate in new ways – ways that have the possibility for us to see something completely different for the first time.

Does Gaijin have a message for us to take away?

I don't think it has one message, rather I think people engage with it in different ways. Everyone has a different engagement with the concept of GAIJIN, or different experiences of travel - because of this people seem to find different things in the performance that they can connect with – I like this more than having one message.

Why do you hold public rehearsals of your work?

The concept of a public rehearsal is important because it forces you to make choices as an artist, otherwise we would stay lost in chaos. The second reason is that the audience can help you identify what is interesting about the piece. In this way they become co-writers in the devising of the map.

Resources

In print:

Charest, Remy and Lepage, Robert. CONNECTING FLIGHTS

Aleksandar Saša Dundjerović. THE THEATRICALITY OF ROBERT LEPAGE

On the Web:

Robert Lepage and Ex Machina Webiste: www.lacaserne.net

Knapton, Benjamin. ACTICATING SIMULTANIETY IN PERFORMANCE: EXPLORING ROBERT LEPAGE’S WORKING PRINCIPLES IN THE MAKING OF GAIJIN – found at www.benjaminknapton.com.au