

Ethnicity as Rigid Boundaries and Muted Differences: Japanese Youth Experiences at School

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Young people now more than ever live in a diverse, complicated world. In spite of the qualitative proliferation of differences, however, the current social situation in late-stage capitalism is articulated as superficial multiculturalism. Critically examining how bodies materially experience cultural boundaries is then important for enhancing the discussion on “multicultural co-existence” in Japan. This article explores how Japanese youth experience their senses of self in relation to ethnicity/nationality through looking into drama/theatre classes at a high school.

Regarding school as an important site for youth self-formation, this research is situated within the critical educational research body exploring the interplay between schooling and youth affect. Applying Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts such as “territorialization” and “the education assemblage,” I examine the ways in which young people experience ethnicity/nationality as a singular event.

The analysis is based on seventeen months of ethnographic research with high school students in Tokyo. I specifically look at their practices of mimesis, mimicking “the other” in acting or performance in drama class. Utilizing the tools of feminist poststructural ethnography, I analyze the narratives that emerged from observation in drama classes and in-depth interviews along with journal writing and assignments.

As seen through repeated patterns, the analysis reveals how the identity categories of ethnicity/nationality rigidly function to territorialize youth, blocking possibilities for them to become otherwise. I then address some views that might have produced these experiences: humanistic views of people, formalistic educational aims and discursive practice around ethnicity/nationality.

In conclusion, I refer to points toward oppositional educational practices at school. These points include critical reflection on cultural differences being embedded in educational practices and active engagement with precarious relations. Finally, reframing learning by centring youths’ bodies, I call for more educational research with a Deleuzian approach. By shedding light on the com-

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plexities of the affective experiences of youth, this study will hopefully contribute to promoting the discussion of democracy at schools in Japan.

Keywords: Japanese youth; ethnicity/nationality; territorialization; ethnography; drama/theatre

1. Introduction: Japanese Youths' Self-Formation in a Global Age

Through increased human mobility, as well as the spread of diverse media, young people now live in a more diverse and complicated world than ever before. Exposed to new cultural images and values, young people encounter “the other” more commonly in daily life. In addition, with the rapid increase of global economic competition, various discourses such as *kokusaika* (internationalization) strongly encourage Japanese youth to become “international” people, or *sekai de katsuyaku dekiru Nihonjin* (Japanese people who can make their presence felt in a global world). These current phenomena of cultural inter-relatedness urge young people to construct themselves in more diverse relationships marked by “otherness” and “difference.”

In recent years, their nation of residence has been struggling with multiculturalism or “multicultural coexistence,” and the notion of Japan as a culturally homogenous Japanese ethnic conglomerate has been challenged (Graburn, Ertl & Tierney, 2008). In actuality, Japan’s population has long been diverse. In addition to the Ainu, Okinawan, and Buraku people, who are racialized as “foreign,” there are residents from Japan’s former colonies in Korea, Taiwan, and China who are often referred to as *zainichi*. Immigration reform driven by labor shortages has also induced people from foreign countries to migrate to Japan, so that the number of people with foreign nationality or heritage may become higher in the future.

In spite of the qualitative proliferation of differences within the nation, however, Morris-Suzuki (2002) calls the current situation “cosmetic multiculturalism” or superficial multiculturalism, suggesting that cultural differences are mixed at the level of commercial value but not at the level of integration and transformation of people. Therefore, I suggest that critically examining how bodies materially experience cultural boundaries should be an important question for enhancing discussion on “multicultural co-existence” in Japan, especially in current late-stage capitalism, which claims to be “immaterial” and “flowing.”

In this article, therefore, I explore the ways in which young people in Japan experience the cultural boundaries especially of ethnicity/nationality and what might have produced these experiences. Looking at school, an important site for cultural practices of youth, I specifically examine the practice of mimesis, that is, mimicking “the other,” which emerged in drama class. In this way, I hope to raise some questions of how we as educators and researchers can empower youth as well as marginalized people during the process of growing up, through transforming their relations and expanding their potential for becoming different.

This article consists of six sections. In the next section, I outline the theoretical tools for my investigation of youth self-formation and schooling. I then describe my research methodology and my data collection methods and analytic strategies. In section 4, I summarize the

context of the school, the students and the drama activities. In section 5, I demonstrate the analysis of Japanese youths' territorialization of ethnicity/nationality, and what might have brought about these experiences. Finally, I address some points regarding oppositional educational practices.

2. Theorizing Youths' Self-Formation at School

2.1. Deleuzian Critical Studies of Education

My research is largely situated within critical educational research exploring the relationships between schooling and youth subjectivity. More specifically, it is situated among the studies that analyze the interplay between schooling and youths' affects or "becoming," a concept of the French philosophers Deleuze and Guattari (1987), based on "transcendental empiricism" (e.g., Renold & Ringrose, 2008, 2011; Ringrose, 2011; Youdell & Armstrong, 2011).

Although empirical works that employ Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy are relatively new, a body of distinct research has been steadily growing, especially in the 21st century (Coleman & Ringrose, 2013). What is notable especially on educational research in these works is their focus on "teen femininity" in and around the spaces of schooling (Jackson, 2010; Renold & Ringrose, 2008, 2011; Ringrose, 2011), while other aspects such as ethnicity/nationality and masculinity have been given little notice. In addition, most of this research has focused on schools in Western countries such as the UK (Renold & Ringrose, 2008, 2011; Ringrose, 2011) and the US (Jackson, 2010). In the context of Japan, while empirical studies on youth experiences of self-formation at school within the poststructural framework have started to increase, empirical work employing Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy demands further exploration. Through shedding light on the aspect of ethnicity/nationality as well as the context of Japan, I attempt to contribute to this growing body of Deleuzian educational empirical research.

2.2. Youths' Affective Experiences at School

In Deleuze and Guattari (1987), affect or "becoming" is an important concept. Referring to transforming relations, that is, the very dynamism of change, these Deleuzian concepts try to go beyond the Foucauldian idea that the subject is merely a subsidiary effect of discourse (Blackman et al, 2008). In regard to movement of an affect, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe three types of process: territorialization, deterritorialization and reterritorialization. The notion of territorialization refers to "when energy is captured and striated in specific space/time contexts" (Ringrose, 2011, p. 603). Territorialization is bound up with the process of deterritorialization, that is, "the movement by which 'one' leaves the territory," producing change (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 508), and reterritorialization, which refers to the "processes of recuperation of those ruptures" (Ringrose, 2011, p. 603). The focus on affects allows us to analyze the multidimensional, contextual micropolitics of the experiences of youth, which emerge as a singular event.

From the Deleuzian perspective, then, the school could be conceptualized as an "assemblage," which is "on a plane of immanence of different organs, different moments, different elements and things" (Coleman, 2009, p. 33). Applying this concept of assemblage, Youdell

and Armstrong (2011) regarded “the education assemblage” as being formed by “economy and politics, policy, organizational arrangements, knowledge, subjectivity, pedagogy, everyday practices, and feelings” (p. 145). Young people, teachers and educational practices in drama class are part of these assemblages, in which not only territorialization occurs, influenced by stabilized effects, but also deterritorialization and reterritorialization may emerge.

To sum up, I explore the process of the affective experience of Japanese youth at school, specifically focusing on the categories of ethnicity/nationality. I first identify what kind of processes among territorialization, deterritorialization and reterritorialization occur. Then I examine how these processes are held as singular events. Thirdly, I discuss what educational practices, which are part of “the education assemblage,” might have brought about youths’ experiences.

3. Researching Youths’ Self-Formation at a School

3.1. Research Methodology: Feminist Poststructural Ethnography

To conduct this study, I applied the tools of feminist poststructural ethnography (Lather, 2007; St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000). Emphasizing ethical research practices, this approach is built both upon the wider critique of the conventional humanist and constructivist epistemology and upon the premises of traditional ethnography. Guided by the belief that “truth” is always tentative and provisional, this approach illuminates “truths” that exist in multiple forms in the field, constantly changing and affected by the context.

With this idea in mind, feminist poststructural ethnography calls upon researchers’ reflexivity to examine not only their own subjectivity but also the power relations shaping research practices. For example, shedding light on the interwoven relationality between participants and the researcher, Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody suggest making explicit “which part of me is the subject speaking, which part of me is responding, who I represent for the subject, and who they represent for me” (2001, p. 19). Addressing how I situated myself and was situated in this study is then important due to its indication of how I related to the field and participants.

Arriving back in Japan, where I was born and raised, from Toronto, Canada, after several years spent on my PhD studies, I soon realized that my educational migration from “the West” seemed to have placed me in a privileged position. In Canada, I studied philosophical and theoretical tools on how educational practices and research could shed light on the issues of equality and diversity, and I was excited to apply these to the context of Japan. Introducing me to the students the first day, a teacher emphasized words such as “Canada” and “PhD” and I felt I was seen as a legitimate educator and researcher who must know the newest and best educational practices. Hearing the students’ expressions of excitement, I felt that my changed positionality was unfamiliar. This relationship with the students and the teachers is the context in which the educational practices I examined in the following occurred: that is, being urged to join in with other teachers to assist in teaching and using a text in the class I recommended to them that I had discovered in Canada.

3.2. Places of Drama for Self-Formation: Data Collection and Analysis

To explore the process of youths’ self-formation, I looked at the place of drama/theatre

and its cultural practices there. Following the line of arguments by the scholars who attempt to reconsider student educational experiences through the lens of the arts (e.g., John Dewey and Maxine Greene), I situate the drama classroom as a place that can act as a window to shed light on broader experiences at school and beyond (Gallagher, 2007).

One of the features of the places of drama/theatre is their potential to set students' bodies as the central focus of classroom experiences, due to the inherent connection between drama education and bodily experience (Franks, 1996; Osmond, 2007). Furthermore, places of drama are ideal sites to explore the cultural practices of engaging with difference, since role-playing and acting, the core activities of drama/theatre education, consist of the practices of mimesis, that is, mimicking "the other," embodying "the other" by narrating others' words and mimicking others' behavior and attitude. Here, acting could be characterized as practices of *crossing and moving* along the seemingly rigid symbolic boundary between self and other. Imagining a wide range of "the other" to engage with through the process, youth may experience being positioned differently, ultimately leading to transformations of the idea of normativity about self and other. This is why I look at the places of drama/theatre to explore the affective process of youth self-formation and its possible transformation.

This study utilized four main methods for data collection: 1) participant observation in drama classes; 2) students' journal writing; 3) assignments in the classes (reflection papers); and 4) interviews with youth participants. From October 2009 to February 2011, I visited Asami High School¹ each week to conduct my dissertation research, which explored Japanese youths' experiences of "becoming" in high school drama/theatre classes². Along with "hanging out" with students, through classroom observation, I looked in particular at what the acting and performance were like, and what the reactions from other students and teachers toward the performance were. In doing so, I tried to glean a sense of how competing discourses of identity played out, how students positioned themselves, and when and how students territorialized or deterritorialized those discourses.

In parallel with observation, I analyzed the insights gained by in-depth personal reflections. In journal entries and reflection papers, the students were asked about their experiences of the performance, along with their perceptions of the role and the texts they were acting. Through interviews, which were often infused with emotion, I further attempted to capture the affective processes of these students' perceptions and experiences, grasping their weight and rhythm. Following Deleuzian empirical works employing narrative methods (Renold & Ringrose, 2008; Ringrose, 2011), I paid attention to narrative as an analytical tool to seize how affects move among youths' experiences, attempting to sense the intensities and directions. With these analytic strategies, I analyzed the practices of youth as a singular event in a specific context.

4. Mapping Thresholds: Entering the Field

4.1. The Context of Asami High School

My ethnographic work was conducted at "Asami High School," a public high school in Kita Ward in northern Tokyo. A reorganization of a previous high school, Asami opened in the middle of the 1990s as "a new type of high school" with a general course based on a credit system. While such new schools usually began determining distinctively-defined char-

acteristics, one of the teachers at Asami once mentioned that he has an impression that the drama classes at such high schools tended to start for the purpose of attracting students rather than being based on firm educational philosophy.

Visiting several possible high schools to find a field for my research, I was drawn to Asami as a research site: first, its drama classes include in-depth acting experiences, and second, the classes aim at general education such as communication education rather than mainly at training potential professional actors. In part of the syllabus of the class that I discuss below, the aim is to “deepen the understandings of the self and the other.” In addition, “by experiencing the difficulty of communicating and the pleasure of overcoming this difficulty, students will acquire the technique of leaping into unknown spaces.” Therefore, seeing the class’ purpose, in a sense, as enhancing the students’ self-augmentation through experimenting with relations with the other, I felt that this educational perspective matched my research interests.

Another characteristic of the school, the emphasis on international programs, also induced me to conduct research at this school. While Asami actively accepts so-called “newcomers” with a separate entrance exam, foreign students account for about 10 to 15% of the total number of students, mainly from Asian countries. In addition, some of the school catchment area has densely populated areas of “*Zainichi Kankoku/Chosen-jin* (Koreans in Japan),” so-called “oldcomers.” While these issues were part of the reason that I found it meaningful to bring an analytical view on ethnicity/nationality to the field through research, they were not directly addressed by the drama classes themselves.

4.2. Students and Class Activities

In spite of the percentage of the student population with foreign backgrounds, only one international student (from the US) took drama classes during my visit. One teacher suggested that foreign students have a language barrier as well as being busy studying for the major subjects. While 32 students in total participated in my research, 12 students took the class that this article focuses on. All were born and raised in Japan.

Collaborating with Japanese language subject teachers in the team-teaching style, “artist teachers” teach the drama classes. Each artist teacher mainly decides the class content and pedagogy, exploring them by him/herself through trial and error. While the school has four drama classes as electives, the following analysis is mainly based on activities of one unit of a class. In this unit, students engaged in drama activities based on the drama text *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, written by an American playwright, Anna Deavere Smith. My choice of text was due to the features of the characters, full of the signifiers of race/ethnicity, and this is also the reason I focus on this unit in this article. The play is composed of monologues on the 1992 Los Angeles riots by people of diverse ethnicities, such as African-American, Korean-American, white, and Latina/o. Among these characters, students chose the roles they wanted to act.

In the first class, to enhance understanding of the context of the drama text, we watched parts of the movie *Crash*, which focuses on issues of race, and some movie clips related to the L.A. Riots about which the text was written. In order to focus attention on the issue of race, we then had a class discussion specifically on the issues of inequality and power relations among races in the United States. The discussion then expanded to cover the issue of the Buraku people, who are regarded as of a different “race” from the majority of Japanese

people and still experience discrimination. In the following classes, students engaged in character development by writing character sketches, exploring walking styles, reading through parts in pairs and groups, and presenting solo performances. The following vignettes emerged in this educational context.

5. Japanese Youths' Experiences Regarding Ethnicity/Nationality

5.1. Ways of Territorializing: Ethnicity as Muted Differences

Watching students' performances in class and listening to their narratives through reflection and interviews, I soon realized how rigidly students' territorialization occurred around the identity category of ethnicity/nationality. For instance, I found it in the experience of Maiko who exclusively focused on the emotion of anger in her engagement with her role. Maiko acted the role of Keith Watson, "a former security guard, co-assailant of Reginald Denny, African American, 20s." Reflecting on her perspective toward character development in a paper, she wrote, "For this role, I have been thinking about which part of and how much of this character is angry." In an interview, she stated that she chose the role since "being angry is relatively simple, so I had a feeling that I could act it pretty much naturally." Referring to the word "black" in her description of the character as "black, bandy legs, male" in a character sketch, I asked how she had thought about it during character development. Pausing for a moment, surprised and implying my question was unexpected, she seemed to find it difficult to make sense of my intention. "I didn't deal with it much," she said as if she was groping for confirmation that her answer was "right."

Deterritorialization of ethnicity/nationality was also absent from the experience of Yuka, who regarded the role's mentality as the focal point of character development. She chose the role of Gina Rae, a "community activist, African American, 40s." Elaborately explaining her process of character development, she mentioned that she tried to "straighten [her] back" when walking, "draw in [her] chin" and "give [her]self airs but with a blank expression," attempting to be "like a capable person." She stated, "I tried to stretch myself mentally as much as possible" since the role was an adult and a precise person. Listening to this, I got a sense of her great effort to work into the role, although (or because) she repeatedly mentioned that she felt difficulty in acting the role due to its adult image, which she considered totally different from herself. She stated that the role's mentality, way of speaking and posture were different from hers. Although she seemed to have a clear image of the role and was eager to get close to it, the concepts of ethnicity or race were still absent from her narratives and I could not sense any intention to relate with them. Yuka stated that she had originally chosen the role since it was a woman's part and she found it easy to understand the scene. Referring to her statement, I asked if there were any other factors in choosing the role, explicitly mentioning the example of race. Yuka quickly responded in a clear voice, "No, I never thought about if I wanted to act either white or black."

In another case, not only was race/ethnicity absent, but the image of the role was also unconsciously altered into a different race/ethnicity during the character development process. After I found out that race/ethnicity was not mentioned in Tomo's detailed descriptions of the role and acting experiences, like other students, I checked whether race/ethnicity was considered during his character development process in any way. Seeming to try to remem-

ber any thought related to that, he paused and asked me if the role was a white person. I was surprised by his question and looked at the paper on which the description of each character was written to make sure I correctly understood the role. When I told him that Gina Rae was African American, Tomo asked me in a surprised voice, “Wasn’t it written as white?” “My image was of a white person,” he said in a flat voice. His attitude suggested that this misunderstanding was not a big deal and did not cause him any hesitation or discomfort. Again, the engagement with, and hence deterritorialization of, race/ethnicity was absent.

Additionally, for some cases, race/ethnicity was perversely not embodied even if it was imagined during the character development process. Reflecting on the process of character development of Paul Parker, the “Chairperson, Free the LA Four Plus Defense Committee, African-American, well built, 20s,” Rui stated that he had not searched for any information about the role other than the drama text itself, even though he had been told that he could find out much through a quick search on the internet. He said that this was because he had had an image of the role from the start, explaining:

The image of the character inside me was, you know Bolt, who achieved a new world record at the Summer Olympics. Usain Bolt, I guess. He might have represented Jamaica, maybe. I thought he really seemed most applicable to the role.

“You already had the image of the role from the beginning?” I asked. Rui answered:

Since the image was strong and had already grown large in my mind before I searched, I didn’t want to find out that the person was actually a small guy in a suit by searching for the information. It would have been a nuisance to reimagine the role at that point.

When I asked how he pictured Bolt, Rui stated “very sporty, sturdy.” He continued that “he might speak roughly, but since he has good sportsmanship, his speech is usually polite on the occasions that deserve it, such as when on TV.”

What is further characteristic about his experience was that even with his elaborated image of the black sportsman, specifically Usain Bolt, he decided to act the role merely as a sportsman, who does rugby, is well muscled and has a straight back/upright posture, since he thought that he could not express the image of race well after all. Without hesitation on that strategy, he explained the process of character development with shifted focus by stating in his confident voice that, although it was a bit painful to get his back straight due to his stooped shoulders, he thought that he was able to portray a sportsman well. By hearing Rui’s narrative overall, I was not only struck by the fact that a “black male” was imagined as the stereotype (sporty, sturdy) but also by how even this stereotypical image was altered into one where race was erased in class. Here, race/ethnicity ended up not being embodied again.

As we see, I detected hardly any effort by students to place themselves in relation with any other race/ethnicity/nationality throughout the process of the character development and performance overall. Interestingly, even if they noted the signifier of the race/ethnicity of their roles to describe the role, they seemed to avoid embodying this by focusing on other characteristics of the roles. Considering the characteristics of the text, which focuses on race/ethnicity, and the pedagogical invitation to engage with it in class, I found this absence in students’ narratives rather odd, especially when compared with other transformative experiences through students’ engagement with femininities and masculinities found in the field. Beyond this class lesson, this lack of consideration of race/ethnicity was also consistent in other classes that applied drama texts, including those whose context was outside of Japan

such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Antigone*. In the following, I consider what part of educational assemblage possibly operated to let these territorializations emerge in the class.

5.2. Sources of Territorialization: Educational Assemblage in Drama Class

As the vignettes above illustrate, ethnic boundaries are kept rigid, rather than fluid and transformable. Staying “Japanese,” students did not appear to place themselves in relation to the image of race/ethnicity, so that they never widened their possibilities to become otherwise in this aspect. Among related educational assemblages, one possible factor causing this might be the humanistic view of people, which is the dominant view in several educational discourses: all human beings share a common nature, through which we can connect. For example, Maiko mentioned that she could act the role naturally since she thought a simple emotion, anger, summed up the character. Here, I interpret that Maiko regarded anger or emotion in general as the aspect of the role to which she could automatically relate. In consequence, the social context creating the role's anger, as well as her cultural differences from the role, which might cause her different emotions in the same situation, ended up never being considered.

I also detected this humanistic way of seeing people in Yuka's narratives. While she found herself very different from the role, she explained the difference as their mentality, assuming that it was caused by their age difference. She saw the role as a mature adult and herself as an immature youth, poles apart, and I detected the assumption that the relation was applicable to any other cultural context. Here, she also never considered any social context such as what brought the woman to become a community activist, which might be related to her ethnic positionality.

This humanistic view on people might be partially influenced by the traditional view of acting, that is the realism or naturalistic acting best known as the Stanislavsky method. While students chose their own roles in the class I examine here, in other cases teachers or other students, scriptwriters of the text, often conducted casting. In that case, casting was mainly conducted with the aim of properly representing the world of the drama text, and how close a student was to the image of the role was an important criterion for casting. Here, experimenting with the self in acting and thus interrupting the norm was not set as the primary aim in class. This normative view of educational assemblages may well be one of the possible reasons causing youths' territorialization.

Another possible factor for youths' territorialization may be the formalistic perspective of educational aims, prevalent in drama class. For example, paying attention to the appearance of the role, Yuka put effort toward character development by straightening her back, drawing in her chin and making a blank expression. Rui also devoted his efforts to imitating the posture of the role by adopting a straight back/upright posture. While these physical acts of mimicking the other have potential for self-transformation by stepping out of themselves and drawing the outer world into their inner world, it depends on how youth experience the process: whether the student corporeally experiences the imitation or whether they superficially mimic, regarding the role as a clear-cut split from the self. I argue that by allowing superficial imitation, drama/theatre often remained not a place for self-exploration, physically colliding with the character's body and exploring an alternative way of moving and interacting.

In addition, in the drama class, in which focus is often placed on simply rehearsing the performance toward the final presentation, the quality of the performance tends to be a prime

focus and youth experiences within it are usually not directly addressed in class. These features of drama pedagogy may be largely influenced by the major form of theatre in Japanese educational settings, *gakkō-geki* (school plays). With its own unique form and expression style, different from the characteristics of theatre as an art, the characteristic of *gakkō-geki* are addressed by Ueda and Uema (2013) as “a play without acting.” This form of theatre, characterized by its formalistic expression, such as fixed patterns of expression with overemphasized lines, may have influenced students’ experiences in class. In addition, I argue that this lack of attention to students’ inner experiences should be also paralleled with the currently popular educational aims in general, explained broadly by standardized criteria.

Among related educational assemblages, another important factor causing youth territorialization may be tied to actual discourse around ethnicity/nationality. This discourse lacks a view toward positionality of ethnicity/nationality for the consideration of the self and the other. When I started my fieldwork, I was struck by the fact that students never described themselves utilizing the category of ethnicity/nationality. I found this lack of articulation very odd immediately after coming back from Canada, which was full of ethnic/national signifiers in our daily lives. This seemed to indicate the assumption that “we” are all Japanese so we need not articulate it. Here, this deeply-embedded idea was taken for granted not through actually claiming that identity but through not mentioning it.

In addition, I also found this silence on ethnicity in students’ description of the roles as we saw above, implying that ethnicity is not a prevalent way of recognizing the other for Japanese youth. Tomo’s first lack of attention to and then misunderstanding of the ethnicity of his role especially imply that he did not regard race/ethnicity as an important factor in the understanding of other. Without noticing and critically examining the other, Japanese youth also tend not to put themselves in relation to it, so that deterritorialization of ethnicity/nationality never occurs. Referring to this kind of lack of attention towards difference as well as lack of self-reflection in relation with *others* in Japan, Kang (2001), a Korean-Japanese post-colonial scholar, mentions that this is the reason why discussions about postcolonial issues in Japan did not develop after the Second World War.

I argue that this lack of recognition of cultural factors possibly not only territorializes cultural relations but also perpetuates stereotypical images of ethnicity/nationality in Japan. For instance, Tomo’s altered imagination of the role might have been influenced by the stereotypical image in Japan: a “foreigner” or “American” refers to “white.” Also, Rui’s simplistic imagination of “black” might have been shaped by the stereotypical image of “black” men as sporty and sturdy. What is critical about these stereotypical images should be the fact that they tend to be formed in combination with the idea of normativity of being “Japanese.” Pointing out the phrase, “we Japanese,” Tai (2005) states that it consists of not only the image of foreigners in a binary contrast with Japanese but also in seeing an essential sameness among Japanese. We should be aware that youths’ way of not engaging with different ethnicity/nationality as seen in the field may also further prevent them from acknowledging the existence of differences within the nation state.

6. Conclusion: Toward Oppositional Educational Practices

Considering Japanese youths’ territorialization of ethnicity/nationality, what is poignant

is the fact that these experiences occurred at Asami High School, which consciously promotes international exchange as its unique strength and boasts a certain number of international and immigrant students. As both a researcher and an educator, my question is, then, how we can interrupt the forces regulating young people and invite them to imagine differently. To do so, how can we shift the view of the place of learning at school? To this end, I will address several points toward oppositional educational practices at school.

As the first important point toward oppositional educational practices, it is crucial for educators to shed light on cultural difference embedded in educational practices. While questioning humanistic and formalistic views, which featured in the educational assemblage in drama class, places of drama should now be the places where youth critically reflect on and actively engage with new and precarious relations toward their transformation. By mobilizing the position of an actor through the practices of acting, the previous meanings of identity categories have the potential to be posed, shifted and expanded. In addition, what is especially important in this process is awareness of the power relations of the positions relating the actor and the role; ultimately, whether the power relations are reconstructed or disturbed and whether what constitutes “Japaneseness” (the theme of the special issue of *Intercultural Education* 2005) are transformed through the process.

These educational practices, then, pose another question: what kinds of difference should youth be engaged with at school? In drama class, the images and relations depicted in play scripts directly influence the range and kinds of difference with which students engage for their self-formation. In this study, an imbalance of identity markers related to ethnicity/nationality was obvious in the drama texts solely related to the context of the United States and the West, perpetuated by my choice of an American drama text. It is important to critically consider that the choice of those texts might have reproduced the image of a “progressive West,” while subconsciously excluding other possible relations through educational practices.

In conclusion, I hope that this research provided some insights on the way of learning by putting youths’ bodies in the center. Indeed, drama/theatre pedagogy has been recently taken up as an important participatory learning method toward “active learning” in Japan. However, by setting students’ bodies as the central focus and reconceptualising learning and teaching through it, I suggest that drama pedagogy could have much more to offer to the field of education in general. At the same time, students’ experiences in these educational practices also demand much further exploration. Educational research taking up the Deleuzian approach is especially important due to its focus on the multidimensional, contextual micropolitics of the experiences of youth. Regarding affective experiences as a lived struggle toward liberation, the insights from such research will hopefully promote the discussion of democracy at school in Japan, to which we as educators and researchers have a responsibility.

Notes

1. The names of the school and the students are all pseudonyms.
2. This article is a heavily modified version of part of my dissertation, submitted to Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto in 2017.

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