Top Class Theatre Studies

Sophie Bolton monologue transcript

*Hoods* by Angela Betzien.

Prescribed edition: Currency Press Pty Ltd, Strawberry Hills (NSW), 2017. ISBN   
978-0-86819-800-2  
Monologue from pp. 29-39.

‘Hoods’, written by Angela Betzien is a portrayal of one of many of the writers works focusing on social and cultural stories, specifically the unjust treatment of particular marginalised groups in society. Its themes are poverty, domestic violence and neglect.

An example of another Betzien play with similar thematic focus is “Children of the Black Skirt” which is a story about three lost children who stumble across an abandoned orphanage in the bush, discovering stories of convict children and children of the stolen generation. Betzien’s recurring thematic ideas were explored and workshopped through the collaborative work with the Real TV project, finding a new way to communicate news to young audiences, alerting them to the inequities of the Australian experience.

The title of the play ‘Hoods’ is loaded with imagery and functions both literally and symbolically throughout the playscript. Literally, the young people of the neighbourhood wearing iconic hoodies, trying to stay warm and symbolically the images that come with this - the images of hiding, of avoiding connection with others.

The challenge of the playscript lies in its constant transformation of character and place, with settings transitioning between the wrecking yard, the car, the mothers house, the supermarket. The monologue is symbolic of the flowing imagery of the playscript and the constant transformations between characters. My design is attempting to bring the young audiences for whom the play was written, along for the ride into the different worlds and in a way that allows them to follow the ever-changing action.

My two design areas are costume and set. My intention has two motivations - to symbolically suggest the wrecking yard, and secondly to convey Betzien’s intended meaning to communicate the impact of the children’s homelessness and poverty and the way they can play and imagine amongst the wreckage.

A minimalistic set was essential for ease of motion for the actor as they transition to different places. The two items you see here are examples of what the children may find in the wrecking yard, their safe place and the actor can interact with them throughout the monologue. For example; “Heaps her life into a Crazy Clark’s bag throws it into the car slams the door.” The old tyre also ultimately helps to reference the pieces of wrecked cars that lie around the yard.

The central piece is two chairs, chosen for their old fashioned, abandoned look. They have been ripped and stained, reinforcing their rejection, and so the audience can perhaps visualise the family of mice hiding in the seats as referenced in the playscript. The truck on which the chairs are placed has lockable wheels which allows the actor to safely climb on and off and climb sturdy set at particular moments.

The elements of theatre composition that I applied to my interpretation are cohesion, variation and variation to enhance the constant transformations of time, place and character.

The wheels allow for it to be moved and rotated in the space, instilling a cohesive relationship between the heightened language of the text and motion, connecting to the pausing, replaying and fast forwarding of the play to which the characters base their imaginative games on. While delivering the previous lines the actor could unlock the back wheel like this, and then come around and flick the front wheel on the word “Pause. Insert special feature. Replay. 7am yesterday.” This action will help punctuate the moment, drawing the audience into the mechanics.

The motion of the wheels also allows for the chairs to be transformed into many different places, utilising the space with surprising shifts in energy and rhythm, transforming into a car, a couch, a BP counter, a park bench or a mattress.

The eclectic theatrical styles present in ‘Hoods’ allow for much directorial and design creativity. Conventions of epic theatre, naturalism and magic realism are present in the script. An aspect of my design applies conventions of magic realism and the possibility to bring the audience into the imaginative space of the story. Secured to the back of the chairs I have painted the dark night sky onto a piece of ply wood. The monologue would commence with the sky facing the front, aiming to enhance the moments of flying, bringing magic into the fractured fairy tale that ‘Hoods’ produces.

The set facilitates a variation of levels, allowing the actor to fully develop this childish idea of playing a videogame as the hood. On each ‘flying’ moment the actor could shift their position and focus showing a strong variation of heights in the space, using imagery and physicality in the movement, supported by the painting of the sky. For example, “Flying, flying, flying over the park where kids are spinning bingeing goon under a tree”. By using the levels facilitated by the set, the actor flies through the sky above the literal and metaphorical wreckages on the ground.

My black costume design symbolises that the hoods are ghosts that can travel between the past, present and future. The darkness of the black intends to infer that the Hood is like a shadow that moves through the cemetery of stories, discovering the past of the neglected cars and rubbish in the wrecking yard.

The black Dunlop volleys connect to the first phrase of the monologue as Kyle dreams of Nikes, however the pressing poverty and neglect in his life means that his reality is a pair of dunlops. The comfortable runners assist the actor in moving through the space at their full potential. “He runs dunlops flailing failing stripping him of speed imagining nikes like winged heels on heroes flying free.” In an attempt to embody the urban, homeless appearance of a child, the tracksuit pants have been stained and ripped. The poverty restricts the Hood from maintaining the standard of the once clean pants due to a lack of home and belongings. The final aspect of the design is a black hooded jumper - also stained and ripped. During the monologue the actor would have the hood on their head to communicate that they are portraying the hood character in these scenes. In the entirety of the play, the hood allows for easy transformation of character as the actor can move the hood off and on when transitioning from the hood into other characters like Jesse or Kyle.

The stains, rips and the black colour palate work cohesively with the set design, together conveying the key issues and themes of the performance. The material of the tracksuit and hooded jumper is stretchy, flexible and allows for the actor to execute a full range of motion, fully utilising the childlike playfulness and imagery of the monologue.

[Interpretation Statement]

My dramaturgical research revealed that fairy tales have had a significant impact on Angela Betzien’s work and have formed the foundation for her understanding of how to use words and images to symbolise beauty, suffering and injustice in the world. Structurally this is an unusual script that is written without acts, scene divisions, little punctuation and stage directions such as “The Hoods morph back into Jesse and Kyle asleep in the car.” This stage direction happens just prior to the actual monologue which clearly indicates that cohesive and fluid motion is important, using rhythm facilitated by the heightened and poetic language to tell a story. Betzien uses many devices to tell this story in surprising ways for audiences and readers. Epic theatre conventions for example are present in the writing -narration, episodic and didactic structure, transformation of time, place and character.

The story centres around confronting circumstances like homeless children for example, naturally drawing feelings of empathy from the audience. There are great moments of pathos in the monologue, however the constant transformations in true epic style, applying the Brechtian “distancing effect”, interrupts the action, reinforcing that this is a play. Through my carefully chosen design choices, the focus of the audience is constantly manipulated so that they do not become emotionally invested for too long in a particular moment.

The wheels both practically facilitate and drive the symbolic and episodic structure of the script and the performance of the monologue. Each new position of the set communicates that the story has moved to a new place in the timeline, intending to make it easier for the audience follow the harsh physical and emotional journey of the children and the mother as a result of the domestic violence they have experienced.

Youthful play and commercial imagery are evidently combined to create a sense of pop culture, attempting to emphasise the specific effect of these issues on children. The playful and childlike aspect of an Xbox and the nike brand contrast to the unfortunate lives of central characters Jesse, Toby and Kyle with these items just out of reach.

Conventions of naturalism are also present in the script – the notion of easily recognisable characters, realistic recreation of who they are and their circumstances. My costume design drives the recognisable teenagers in the story, making them easily accessible to the young audience for whom the play was written.