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Practical Explorations

I started off by brainstorming possible projection options based on works of Lepage and other works I have encountered such as *Lionboy* by Complicite.



I started off my practical explorations by trying Lepage's works.

All images: Author's Own



Because the story of Cinderella is told like a bed time story, I remembered when I used to create my own blanket fort to read a story. Using this memory, I thought about an imaginary friend telling the story of Cinderella to me and the audience. I first tried having a white lightbulb projection, but the light was too weak to make myself visible, I then tried putting a flashlight behind, but the light was too strong so the projection wasn't visible this time. When I changed the background of the projection to white, both myself and the projection were visible.

Image: Author's Own



This was a happy accident. I had the projection of pumpkin carriage up on the screen accidentally, and when I stepped into the projection light, I saw my silhouette on the pumpkin carriage with size fitting perfectly.



Image: Güner

The idea of pumpkin carriage on the screen is similar to the shadow projections used by Lepage in his performances

Image: Author's Own



This is a picture of me trying one of the ideas from above: dress idea. I noticed that this idea would work out better if I was wearing white pants or skirt. However, because I didn't need a fancy dress in my Cinderella story, I decided to take this idea out.

However, this idea triggered glass slipper projection idea. In this projection, it is the shadow of my foot that is fitting into the glass slipper.

Image: Author's Own



Image: Freedman



Image: Author's Own

This was another happy accident that happened to be similar to Lepage's work. I was stuck during my creative process as to how I should indicate how I got experienced and skilled by myself. Then I figured that I should create another self through projection.

Image: Ex Machina

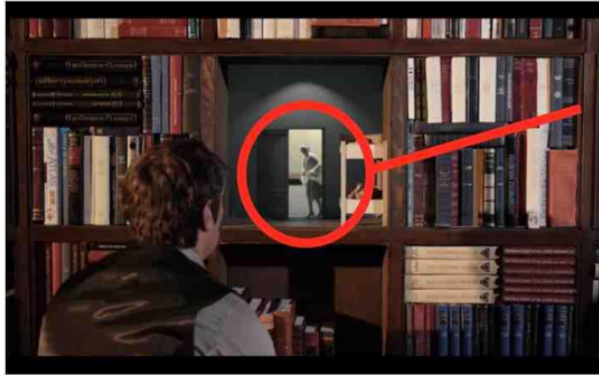


Image: Author's Own



Using dimensions like Lepage, I created different sized people onstage. Projection allowed a small person or a large person to appear onstage. I interacted with them to show comparison between sizes. I used the small person as my guide to finding a glass slipper and the large person to show intimidating, giant people at the ball.

Image: Author's Own



Image: Author's Own



Image: Author's Own

I also weaved memory, one of Lepage's themes, into my performance. In my first solo performance, as well as my first performance in my high school, I started by sitting on a white chair. By sitting on the same white chair, I referred back to my first performance thereby showing my development as a theatre artist.

"The only way theatre can evolve and stay alive, is to embrace the vocabulary of alternative ways of storytelling...Nowadays, stories are told in many different ways. Our narrative vocabulary is highly sophisticated. So if we want theatre to be at least up to speed with the audience, we must adopt those kinds of narrative idioms." (Lepage, ONFB)

One way I tried to keep up with the audience through unique way of storytelling was by having different layers to the story. By telling 3 different stories (Cinderella, Kongji Patji, myself as a theatre artist) in one performance, I intended to offer the audience my personal account of the story, my perspective and my relationship to the story.

SECTION 3: EVALUATION OF THE SOLO THEATRE PIECE AND MY PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

What I learned from Solo Theatre Piece

Theatre is a collaborative art. More than one person must be involved to create a theatrical work. “I always wanted to express myself artistically, but most artistic disciplines were very individual. Whether it was painting, music or writing, it was very exposing. What I liked about theatre is that you could hide behind a group” (Lepage, EdintFest). What I understand from ‘hiding behind a group’ is that because there are many people involved in the process of theatre making, I can complement and rely on others to fix mistakes or get feedback that would develop my work.

In solo theatre piece, because I am working by myself, I thought that I should carry all the weight. I thought I cannot hide behind a group for this piece and that all my mistakes would be exposed to the audience. However, I wasn’t the only one involved in my performance. I had my personal mentor, teacher, technicians, backstage crew, the audience. They were willing to fix my mistakes and make my performance into a better piece. This quote from Lepage summarized my experience in solo theatre piece:

◀ *“I’ve chosen to work in theatre more than any other artistic expression because it doesn’t exist without a community. Even if you do a one-man show, even if you’re alone on-stage, you’re not really alone: there’s a community of people, a group of people, that surrounds you to help you out. I’m interested in that paradox: you feel lonely, you want to express loneliness, but you’re in a crowd, actually. You have a whole crowd of people helping you out, doing it.”* (Lepage, Straight) ▶

Challenge

I faced the biggest challenge when I couldn’t think of any more performance ideas. Then I read Lepage’s comment, “When you’re confronted by problems in a show, the solution can often be found in another project. Not necessarily a theatre project, perhaps a film or an opera. So all these projects mutually inform each other” (ONFB, Robert Lepage). Because my performance is based on Cinderella, I watched Cinderella over and over until I had a new performance ideas. The scene where I danced with Cinderella, who is looking at herself through water, gave me new ideas.



I changed the context of this scene to make it seem like she is looking at me through water. Also, because we were reflection of each other and were dancing the same dance movement, I made it clear to the audience that I was actually Cinderella. By changing the context of a scene from the film, I could make my connection with the main character clear to the audience. This was how I overcame the biggest challenge I faced during the creative process.

Evaluation of My Solo Theatre Piece

I initially thought making a production about myself would bore the audience. I thought, 'Who would care about how I grew as a theatre artist?' The only intention I had while making this performance was to tackle the Korean prejudice towards theatre. I presumed that this performance was not going to interest the audience since I treated this performance as a performance for myself, rather than for the audience. Through my solo theatre piece, I wanted to experience Lepage's view, "It's certainly offered me a personal mirror, that's for sure...theatre constantly reveals myself to myself...the more I know about the world and the more I know about myself" (Lepage, EdintFest). My experience through the solo theatre piece allowed me to know more about the world by knowing more about myself.

I was worried that my performance might be viewed as self-indulgent. However, after the performance, I noticed many people empathizing with me and crying. At first, I wondered, 'Why are they empathizing with me when they are non-theatre people?' Then, I understood that even though they are non-theatre people, they have had times when they felt like their dreams were being looked down on. My performance was like a mirror to their lives; people have experienced hindrance to their own dreams, and they found parts of their lives depicted and reflected in my performance. I noticed although every person's life is unique, somehow they are similar and connected. An audience member said, "I could really see what's going on inside your head. It is a fairytale-like place, but there are hindrances that limit you from your dream, just like everyone else's mind," implying that he saw other people's lives through the depiction of my own mind in my performance. I believe this discovery of human nature through my performance refers back to Lepage's comment, "even if you're alone on-stage, you're not really alone... you feel lonely, you want to express loneliness, but you're in a crowd, actually" (Lepage, Straight).

The part of my show when people emphasized with me the most was the part when the following slide came up:

For me, pursuing Theatre in university is like the dream that
Cinderella had.
My dream has been looked down by Korean society that
prefers other subjects.
No matter what people said about my dream, I followed it and
entered into the palace, or university.
I know there will be giants, more experienced people, who
have the same dream as me.
However, I will trust myself and become bigger than those
giants.

I will put on a glass slipper.
I will follow my dream.

Without this slide, my performance could've been a performance where the audience has to analyze it scene by scene to understand it. However, this was not what Lepage wanted to achieve through theatre as seen in his earlier comment made about theatre not being a medium of education through analysis. Because my target audience was non-theatre people, they could have seen my performance just for entertainment, without figuring out what each symbol represented. As Lepage said, "You must never over-estimate the audience's level of culture," this slide was critical for the audience to receive my intention. Overall, I have achieved more than my intended purpose. I initially wanted to fix Korean non-theatre people's prejudice towards the subject theatre and people who wanted to pursue theatre in future. However, the performance actually created a bigger impact on the audience by reflecting their dreams through the depiction of my dream onstage.

My Learning

1. Value of honest thoughts: Even though thoughts are personal, they can connect with the audience
2. Value of illusion and magic: Can trigger sense of awe from the audience, therefore making the performance very arresting and memorable
3. Anything is possible in terms of creating worlds and space onstage.
4. Communicator: Value of a personal mentor, or a critical friend, in terms of receiving feedback and aiding the creative process by being a valuable outside eye
5. Risk-Taker: Combining possible unconnected stimuli into one show takes risk

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SECTION 1: THE THEORIST, THE THEORY AND THE CONTEXTS



Image: Concordia, Thinking Out Loud: Robert Lepage returns

Theatre practitioner Robert Lepage is a director, playwright, actor, and film director and is most famous for his creative use of multimedia theatrical presentation to create a completely new theatrical spaces. In his work, Lepage “often drew together disparate cultural references and unconventional media” (Way, Encyclopedia Britannica). I chose Robert Lepage as the theatre practitioner I wanted to base my performance on because I wanted to explore changes of space onstage with the use of projection.

Lepage’s Approach in Theatre

“When I first saw people on stage perform, it was a high school play at a girl’s school. They were playing both men and women. It was the most amazing moment in my life, and I thought, I want to do this. This is what I want to do.” (Lepage, EdintFest). After watching this show, Lepage was reminded of how theatre is make-believe. The whole process of putting costume on, putting makeup on seems childish and naive, but when they are sculpted, edited, and performed onstage, theatre becomes something very strong and powerful. I connect with his approach because in theatre the audience suspends their disbelief and is willing to accept.

To Lepage, “theatre is the spectacle of intelligence” (Lepage, EdintFest). Intelligence exists both onstage and in the audience. Theatre is not clear, direct, and literal. Directors, performers, and designers are the ones who have to provide the audience with things to discuss and wonder about, and the audience members are the ones who have to interpret the meaning of the things shown onstage from their own perspective. (Lepage, EdintFest) This intelligence in theatre is what makes theatre powerful to Lepage. I normally create shows without dialogue, however, as Lepage mentioned, we should not underestimate the audience’s intelligence. I want to try creating a show where dialogue leads the story.

Common Themes

Common themes that recur in Lepage’s work are the following: local and global cultural intersection, travel, language, memory, alienation, displacement, definition of art, self-identity, and political and theatre history. The two most important and recurring themes are transformation and connection. Many of his performances have a main character who learns about himself when traveling to another place and finding himself alienated or alone. This sense

of traveling and being in a different culture stems from Lepage's exposure to two different cultures, Canadian and French, when he grew up in Quebec City. His idea of themes connects with my life as I am a Korean student exposed to different cultures through international schooling.

Creative Process

Devising Theatre

“Robert Lepage's creative style rests on intuition and gives actors, designers and technicians the latitude to contribute and to invent the shows together with him” (Ex Machina, Creation). Instead of creating a performance on existing text, Lepage devises most of his work through improvisation and group collaboration. Group collaboration eliminates the common hierarchy model of playwright, director, and performer and requires collaborators to generate their own text by exploring and experimenting with specific stimuli like music, text, objects, images, paintings. Lepage's creative process focuses on using every resources available such as objects, places, stories, events, and memories, and his creative team connects these seemingly unrelated ideas together to develop a performance (Dundjerović 26). He uses the chaotic and spontaneous nature of different events to create playful and childish atmosphere in the theatrical space (Dundjerović 26). I like devising theatre rather than using original text since the performance becomes very personal. When I am performing a devised piece, I feel more connected to the work and therefore am more engaged.

Lepage begins his creative process by exploring and discovering. “Initially, I have a vague idea of what my shows are about. An intuition that a particular show will take me on a certain path. But I really don't know how far it will take me” (ONFB, Robert Lepage). His inspiration strikes Lepage from unexpected times and places. For example, when making one of his most renowned plays *Far Side of the Moon*, he only had a vague idea about why he wanted to create his performance: to depict on stage his feeling of loss and liberation after his mother's death and nightmares about disappearing into space. The inspiration that sparked the creation of *Far Side of the Moon* was “an industrial-washing-machine door that was in a garbage can” (Lepage, Straight). The object reminded Lepage about both his mother and nightmare. Lepage saw his mother from the washing-machine as his mother took Lepage to the laundromat in the '60s, and he also saw space since the machine looked like the porthole lunar module. I wanted to create a performance about connection between two different cultures, which is one of the themes that Lepage often uses in his show, and about myself as a Korean theatre artist. I found Cinderella story to be the inspiration that connects two different cultural aspects together in performance.

Transformative Mise en Scène

Lepage's work is never completely finished. After the performance has been developed, he opens a public rehearsal for the audience to come and watch. The purpose is to collect feedback from the audience. Lepage's openness to change is shown in his transformative mise en scène.

Lepage said he treats a work as written only in the very last performance because his work keeps changing after he received feedback from a performance (Lepage, The Banff Centre). Therefore, a performance is just one of the rehearsals to Lepage. His work is always in the state of ‘work in progress’. I like this way of working always because, in my opinion, there is no such thing as ‘perfect’ or ‘finished’ in theatre.

Common Stylistic Aspects

Multimedia

Lepage is highly acclaimed for his use of multimedia and elaborate stagings. Among different medias, I noticed from Lepage’s work that he uses projection the most.



Image: Howard, The Globe and Mail

Projection being used to show underwater environment where mermaids are living



Image: Nestruck, TheGuardian

Projection being used to show the window and the city outside



Image: Perkovic, TheGuardian

Projection being used to show the world outside the window in three-dimension

“It’s incredible to be able to travel through time and place, to infinity, all on a single stage. It’s the metamorphosis brought about on stage that makes this kind of travel possible... I think that if I remain fully aware of the stage as a place of physical transformation, I make it possible or can try to make it possible for the audience to really feel the direction in which the action and the characters are being hurtled.” (Lepage, Theatricality of Robert Lepage)

For Lepage, the main purpose of using multimedia onstage is to transform the theatrical space into another place and time. If used for this purpose, projection is portrayed life-size like the images above. However, sometimes, Lepage plays with dimensions and make the images onstage appear extremely large or extremely small. He integrates miniature models in his performance with projections to control dimensions. I really liked this aspect of his work and incorporated into my work. It particularly fitted with my desire to communicate ‘not fitting in’ to a cultural different situation.



Image: Pays de la loire

Projection and miniature model used to show family on tour while Lepage is depicted as a giant on the right side



Image: Simon Fraser University, Youtube

Projection and miniature model used to show Giant Lepage peaking inside a room



Image: Fisher, Variety

Model used to show giant Lepage standing next to a building

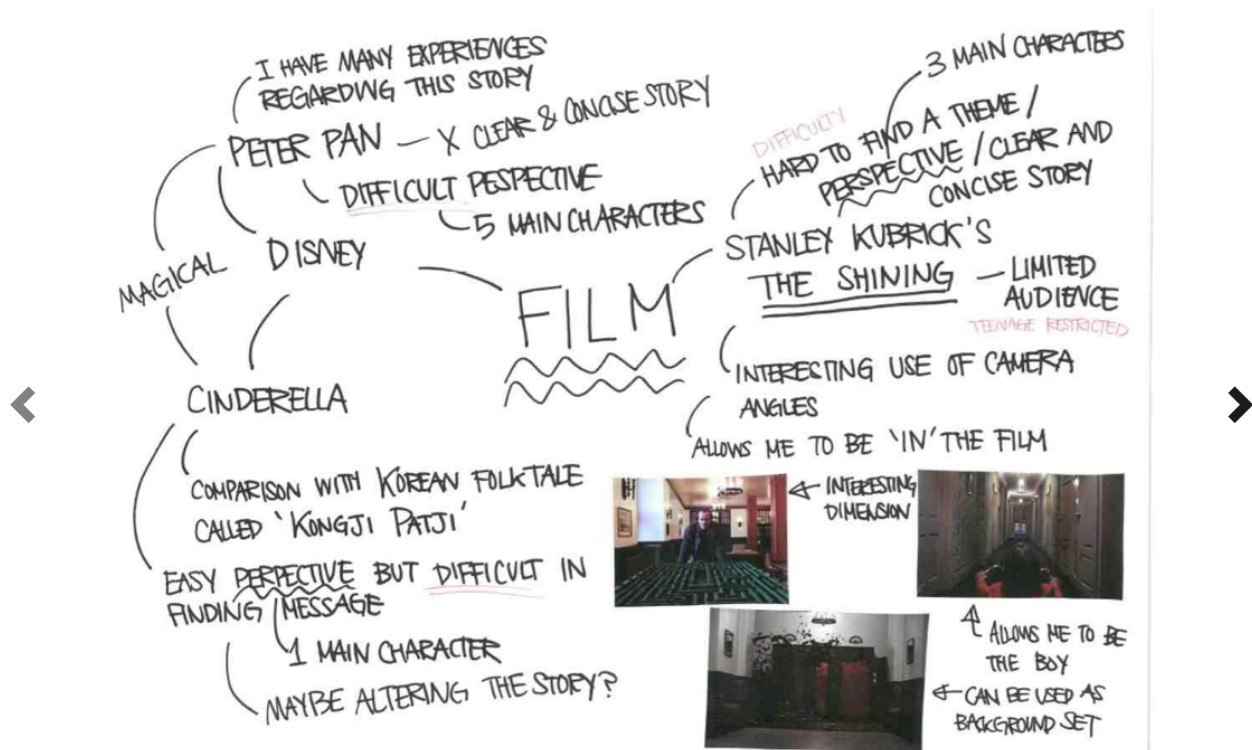
To Lepage, multimedia is a medium of transporting stage into a different space or time in a unique dimension. Using multimedia, Lepage “can do things not usually done in theatre” and “reconcile the language of film and theatre” (Lepage, ONFB). I like this idea of using projection on stage because it gives the stage infinite options. With small amount of resources in my school due to its location on a small island, I have limited options, however, by incorporating projection in my performance, I have unlimited design options for my set.



SECTION 2: PRACTICAL EXPLORATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOLO THEATRE PIECE

Devising Process

I choose to work with film because I already knew I would use projection onstage, and since I am not a film director like Lepage who can create his own projection videos, I needed some video footages that I could use in performance. I brainstormed 3 films that I wanted to create a performance about.



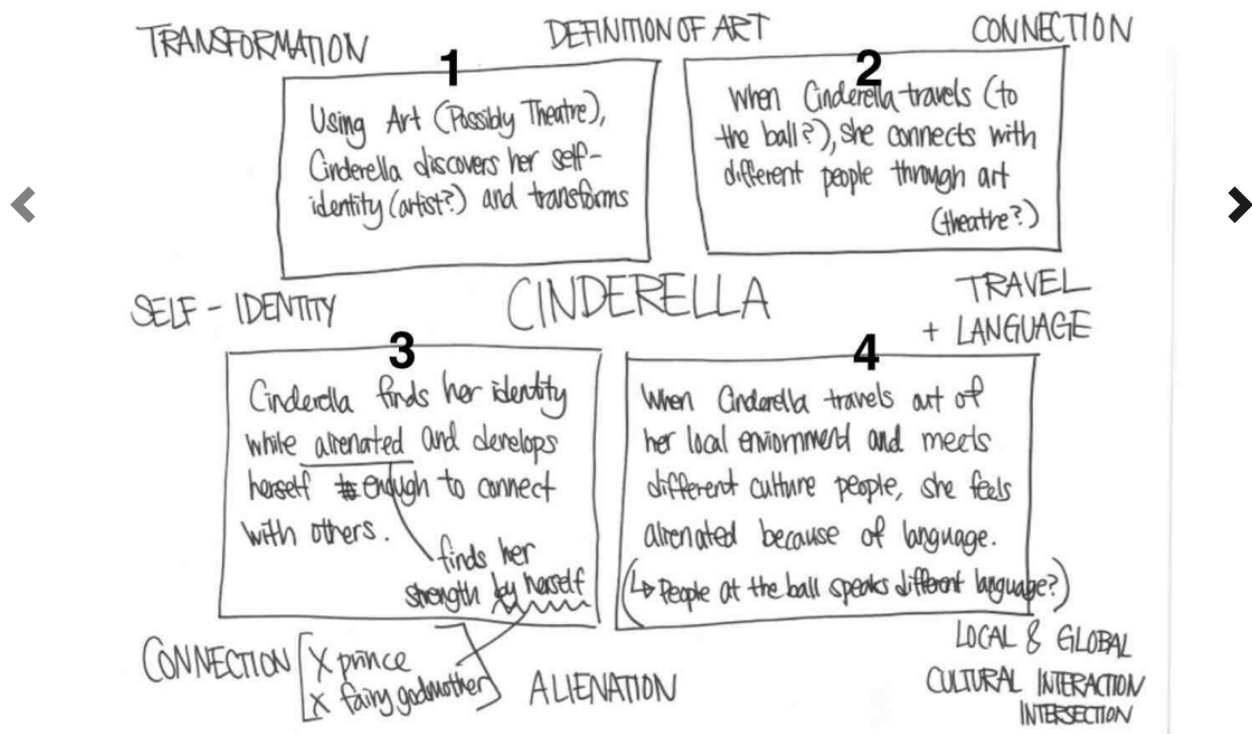
Images: screenshots from Kubrick's The Shining

I thought Cinderella would be the most suitable to perform as a solo theatre piece in the style of Robert Lepage because it had a clear perspective, Cinderella, clear and concise story that can be told in 4 to 8 minutes, and reference to different culture by incorporating Korean traditional story, Kongji Patji, which has a similar plot to Cinderella.

Theme + Intended Purpose + Target Audience

For my intended purpose, I wanted to create a performance about myself as an artist in Korea. The idea of local and global cultural intersection, alienation, and self-identity provided me with an insight about how I, as a theatre artist, am being treated. As this was possibly my last performance in my school, where theatre is considered less important than other subjects, I wanted to depict my experience. I chose a theatre artist as my main character; as Lepage said, "One of my characters always has to be an artist, whether a painter, a sculptor, or an author" (Lepage, ONFB).

I looked at the common themes Lepage used in his work. I chose nine themes that I wanted to include in my performance: transformation, connection, definition of art, travel, language, local and global cultural intersection, alienation, and self-identity. I tried connecting these nine themes to develop a narrative.



By transforming these four connections into a story, I developed a storyline.

In this story, several metaphors exist:

- Cinderella is myself as a theatre artist in Korea.

- The ball is Cinderella’s dream, which is pursuing theatre in a foreign university where theatre is considered more important than in Korea.
- The pumpkin carriage represents the pathway to university, like high school grades or extra-curricular activities.
- People at the ball symbolize talented students in the university.
- The glass slipper represents how I become experienced and skilled in theatre.

By having these metaphors, I intended to tell the audience about the hardships I have faced. I intended to fix the prejudice towards the subject Theatre in Korea and people who wanted to pursue theatre in the future. My target audience is non-theatre Korean people who have a prejudice towards theatre.

Personal Mentor

“My shows are never really finished. I perform them, then the spectator indicates where the show is going, tells you what it’s about. So you have to be attentive to reviewers, to the audience, attentive to your colleagues, the people you work with, the technicians who orbit around you, the crew who tour with you. All those people inform you about exactly what it is you’re saying, and whether that’s really what you want to say... That’s how the show ends up writing itself.”

(Lepage, ONFB)

Solo theatre performance only has one performer onstage. The audience only sees one person throughout the show, but in reality there is more than one person involved. Specifically in Lepage’s work, he is never alone as he always receives feedback from the audience and collaborators. The audience is also his collaborator and mentor. To follow his creative process, I used a personal mentor in the development of my performance. I also received feedback from technicians. For example, for the ball scene, since it is Cinderella’s first time at a ball, I thought I should act shy and move only a little bit. However, my personal mentor and technicians said that because going to a ball was Cinderella’s desperate dream, I should act more excited and curious.

I deliberately used a non-theatre student as my personal mentor because I wanted to make my performance accessible to non-theatre people.