
Project 2 Reflection

Inspirations and preparation

On Oct. 31st, we learned something about postmodernism. In my opinion, postmodernists aim to break the boundaries between arts and life, their belief seems to be “everything in life is art, art can be ugly, vulgar and absurd. Artists are just normal people, everyone can be an artist.” Marcel Duchamp’s famous sculpture work



Marcel Duchamp *Fountain*, 1917, photograph by Alfred Stieglitz at 291 (art gallery) following the 1917 Society of Independent Artists exhibit, with entry tag visible. The backdrop is *The Warriors* by Marsden Hartley.^[1]

“Fountain” gives a good example of this idea.

As I concluded during our class, an object always has different meanings when it is put in different situations, and people from different class/religions/nations/cultural backgrounds have their own independent perspectives, then there come thousands of explanations, either positive or negative, towards that object. The object itself never changes, it’s us human beings that give new or extra meanings to it. Whether this

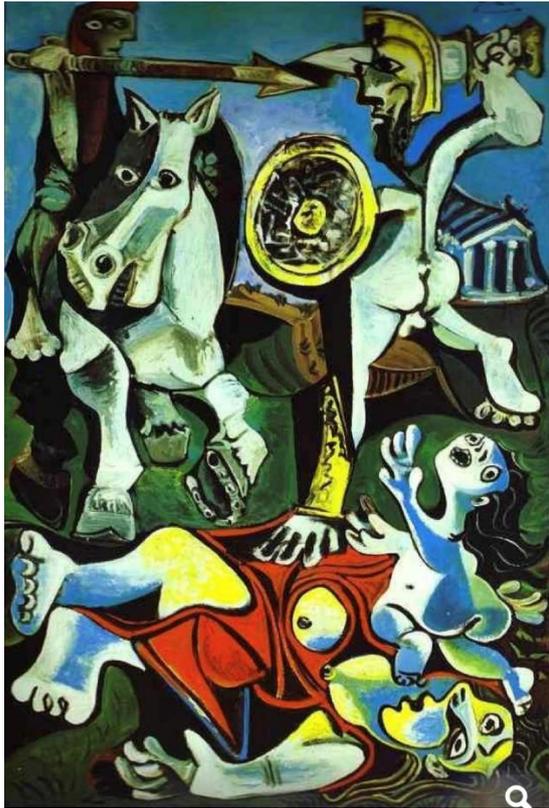
object is an art work depends on whether it's treated as an art work. This seems super counter-cultural, but I think it is kind of the practice of anti-war/ anti-society movement in the art realm. Ostensibly, postmodernists are trying to blur the boundaries between art and life, while actually they are challenging the governments' power dominance, fighting against traditional notions, and freeing the natural humanity. Also, in terms of postmodern theatre, Grotowski's theories indicate that acting happens everywhere at any time; you're living in the world, you're alive, and you are an actor. The authenticity comes from real actions, rather than acting (Hedden and Milling 66). In turn, "art, like life, should become or be made real, should enable or encourage experience rather than contemplation, should be authentic rather than mimetic" (Hedden and Milling 66). This for me is super encouraging. It is all about taking off masks and expose our human nature. We then watched a postmodern dance show in which projection, lighting and dance movements are combined together and working fantastically. I started to think about a broader use of projection into our project, as well as adding more dance elements into it.

On both Oct. 31st and Nov. 5th, Cedric, Belle and I respectively gave some short presentations about our original proposals. Cedric's main idea was live painting. He would like to use projection with digital painting techniques to create a visual show. He is good at digital design and digital painting. Belle pointed out that sexual harassment should be valued because even recently this September in our UFV campus, a male student was just sexually harassed in a men's washroom. This is such

a life-related problem that is super relevant to the security of student life. It's also a warning to me because I am homosexual. As a result, I began to think about integrating Belle's theme and Cedric's technical stuff into my idea. My previous proposal was focused on cyber violence and keyboard warriors. Therefore, Belle and I came to an agreement that we could create a story about gossiping. For example, a girl was sexually harmed, someone posted her story online and she received many negative comments, etc. Later we drew a conclusion that truth is easily distorted online. Then we did some research on Pinterest. In that we were going to make a visual performance show, rather than posters, we purposefully found some paintings, comics and photographs in terms of "distortion, loneliness, black and white" "sticker/painting/writing on bodies, darkness to brightness" "spinning colours, cubism." We then got the preliminary idea about the stage effect of "from dark to bright."



How to Lose Your Job From Sexual Harassment in 33 Easy Steps



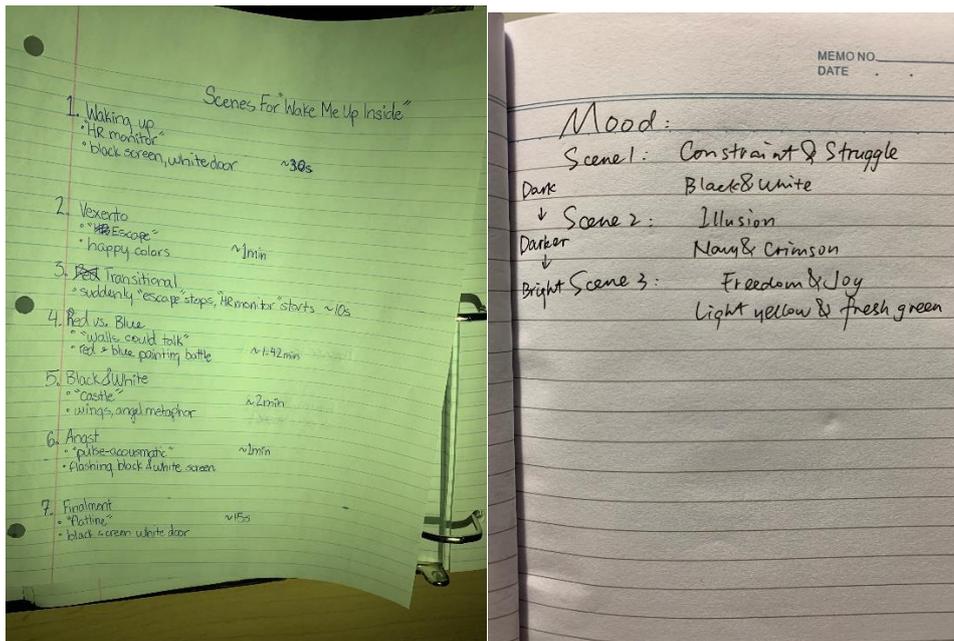
Developing and processing

On Nov. 7th, with watching some postmodern performance examples, we started to build the framework. We saw a piece of Grotesque performance, and I kind of understood that this time, unlike project 1, we don't have to make sense to everything happening in the show. Unlike verbatim theatre, in a postmodern live performance, those actions may not be in a certain order. As Hedden and Milling state the method of "Happening", Happenings are "not structured according to the principles of plot development, narrative, or character." (64) In project 1, we were still almost driven by the script, even though the script was created by ourselves by using devising theories. Also, in project 1 we had clarified characters with determined archetype and detailed plots to promote them. But this time, we need "an awareness of the contingent or 'the accidental', and in particular the effect and potential of chance." (Hedden and Milling 65) As a result, we decided to do live painting and dancing without making a story first for our show. We assumed 3 scenes, whose tunes are dark, bright and neutral, aiming to create the sense of gradation and transition. Cedric is in charge of live digital painting, I'm responsible for choreography and Belle works on collecting/sorting materials(note-taking) and backstage process (soundtracks, sound recording, stage monitoring, etc.).

On Nov. 12th, we did our first rehearsal in the black box (please see recorded examples). In order to make the simplicity and clarity of our scenes, we turned to work on direct emotional points and artistic elements instead of those big themes

which we had discussed before. I brought one piece of acousmatic electronic music and one example of cubism dancing to show in class, then we tried to practice hallucination painting and cubism dancing together with music and projection. During this rehearsal, Belle helped us find more practicable songs to enrich our show. From then on, we got our basic framework. I was so inspired and excited, and it was sort of becoming my solo performance because I seemed to be the only physical performer in this show. Actually, the whole staging was just like a solo dance performance, working along with digital technologies. This was amazing and far beyond my incipient expectation. During this first try, we thought we were going to make a changing stage effect to show the emotional changes of the character. One example was “Bright colours/happy to dark colours/illusion to black&white/neutral”, we aimed to create the sense of layering and depth.

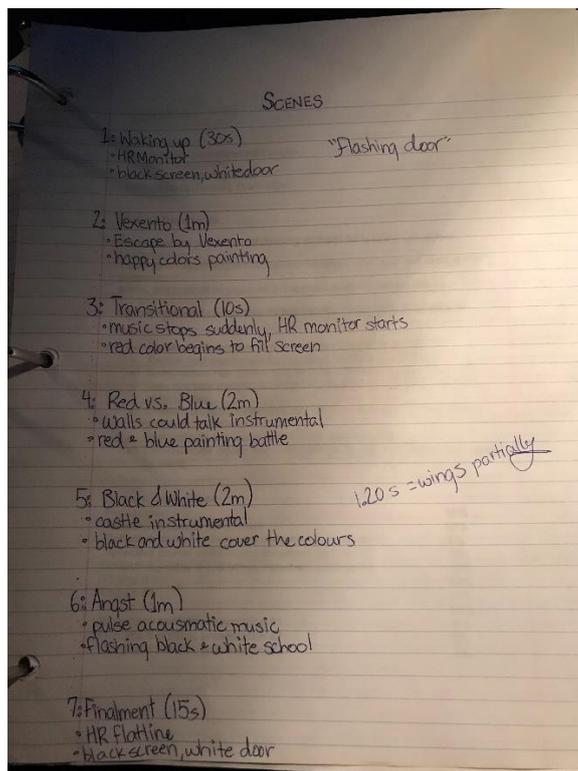
With that structure and performance form in mind, on Nov. 14th, as Belle’s notes demonstrate, we concluded our show’s procedure and titled it with a potential name “Wake me up inside”. Then we got all the preliminary concepts and scenes.



I used to have different ideas towards our scenes, and I thought 3 scenes would be good. While Belle's advice was that we need transitions, meanwhile, simplicity does not mean we have to reduce the total amount of scenes. "Simple and clear" is our goal this time, compared to project 1. Therefore, this time we made great logic coherence to our show with a clarified process. I am so proud of that, because we learned a lesson from the "failure", grew up, and made adjustments and changes.

As a consequence, our project 2 would be super abstract, and we were completely out of the restriction of script. However, it doesn't mean that we didn't have any plots. In fact, we managed to create a complete coherent story which seemed to be far beyond our original ideas (those big topics such as sexual harassment and cyber bullying), and the process of creating a new story just happened in a short week, from Nov.14th to Nov.21st. At the beginning, we used to make the character be innocent

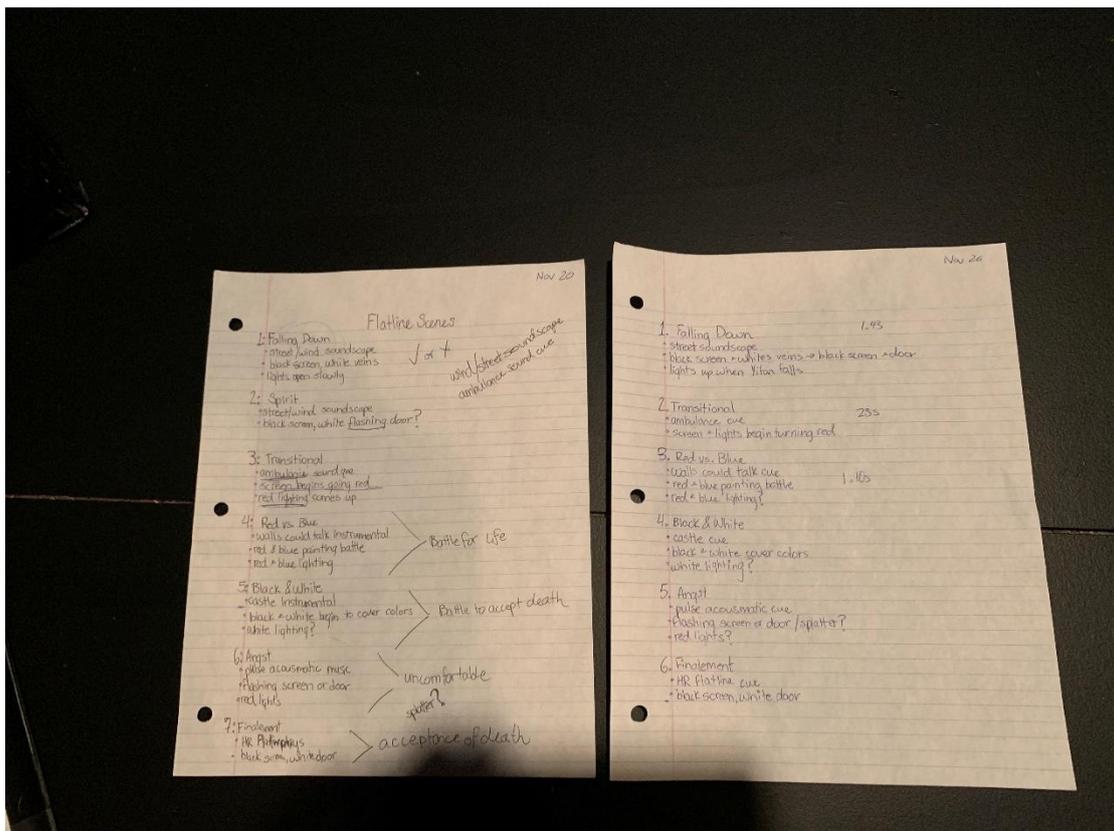
and happy first, then he gets attacked, confused, mentally chaotic, then kind of rests in peace. However, after rehearsing more on Nov. 19th (please see recorded examples), we found the happiness scene was a little bit abrupt and strange, so we quitted it. This is also evidence that we were trying to make our show coherent and simple for the audience to understand.



On Nov. 21st, I brought my new idea to class. Now that the character is wearing a doctor's white coat (our original aim was so that Cedric can paint on my body), what if we just make him a doctor? My interpretation was that "when the doctor was walking in the street after busy work, he suffered an outbreak of disease. He failed to take medicine and fell down. When waiting for the ambulance, his spirit came out of his body and did lots of flashbacks of his life. Some virus invaded his body, heart,

blood vessels and brain, his immune system fought and struggled...During this period, he saw illusions and heard acousma. Then he finally died. The doctor saved thousands of people, but he didn't save himself." This development of thoughts occurred surprisingly natural and intangible, no one was once driving our mind to some directions, instead, we just kept discussing, coming up with new ideas, exchanging advice and modifying our scenes, then the big change happened. Although our aim was to show the liveliness and the magic of "chance" art, it does not mean we cannot have the basic structure or our own version to explain what we have got. I found it interesting that during our experimental rehearsals, for each single part of movements, painting patterns or music, we four members even had different explanations. This means our audience would also have a diversity of interpretations. One famous Chinese proverb says, "there are a thousand ways to interpret Hamlet", I think this is one of the charms of postmodern visual performance theatre. People standing in different viewpoints have various ideas towards one single object, and this thinking process, rather than the object itself, is art. As is said in Chapter 4, "the desire to circumvent the commodification of the art object resulted in a focus on process over product, on participation over consumption, on ephemerality over permanence, and on indeterminacy over certainty" (Hedden and Milling 93). I have found the biggest difference between project 1 and project 2 is this time we spent more time rehearsing in the black box and we enjoyed the working process more, in other words, those rehearsals were regarded as important as the final show. Besides, everything we used for the show was treated equally this time, even the photoshop brush was an

independent character. However, we still lack the audience's participation. In Happenings, the audience is also an equal part in the ensemble, "it was its liveness that held out the promise of 'authenticity', evidenced in the use of chance, of found objects, of one-off performances, and of 'audience' participation." (Hedden&Milling 93) Thus, for next semester, inviting the spectators into the actual performance and creating a real "live show" should be taken into consideration. Actually, joining in and playing the same game with performers make a great subtle angle of observation, meanwhile matching the intention and purpose of postmodernists ——make less and less difference between art and life.



Some additional information

For project 2, we basically applied four techniques: choreography, projection, soundtracks and lighting. Each one of us four was mainly responsible for one technique. During those rehearsals and seminars——devising process actually, we kept exchanging ideas and coordinating with everything. Or crew, the black box itself, those techniques, the character and our concepts were highly integrated as a whole, which is the so-called sense of ensemble, a significant element in the field of postmodern theatre. Although we did not make the audience participants of our performance, we did consider what the audience might think of our scenes. With those comments and suggestions for project 1 in our minds, we aimed to create an easily understandable show that is also thoroughly enjoyable, sensuous and aesthetic. We managed to make the coherence and clarity, and left sufficient open space for imagination. Besides, this time we didn't include any word into the entire show, like "Act without words" (https://youtu.be/Qb_eMMqUjTA) . This not only helped to enlarge the acting tension for performers, but also provided great opportunities for the audience to develop in-depth discovery and insightful understandings. So that the audience tasted the show with a variety of interpretations, as mentioned above. That's our goal, in turn it indicates that we succeeded in elementarily building a live visual performance and we tried to make "Happenings", instead of traditional, script-based and slick theatre performance. Improvisation was another effective weapon for us, but our improvisation was structured, well-considered and fully prepared. We have given meanings to everything we made before serving them to the audience. Even if it

doesn't make sense to the spectators, at least it makes sense to ourselves. This is another charm of postmodernism.

For lighting design and live painting(projection) design, we chose elements such as black&white, blue&red, fluid lines&large masses, flashing lights, door, blood, cells, illusions, virus infection, etc., in order to make strong contrasts and tensions. For choreography, I mainly referred to cubism dance, jazz dance, popping, locking and Grotowski's "The Cat". All these are matching to our soundtracks. On Nov. 26th, before we finalised the eventual version of our show (please see the recorded example), Parjad gave us a good example of dance-projection-lighting 3-in-1 performance created by a professional team. <https://youtu.be/l-2fohZwcWo> (Copper Promises of Push festival) What we were trying to do was just similar to what the video shows. This means we are on the right track and shall go further in the future. I'm looking forward to next semester's new project.

Dance examples:

<http://www.bilibili.com/video/av13425120>

<http://www.bilibili.com/video/av18233965>

<https://youtu.be/PNOBwRDD34>

Works cited

Heddon, Deirdre and Milling, Jane. *Devising performance: critical history*. UK:
Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.