

# Exploring the improvisation mechanism of Robert Lepage's works, inspired by features of interactive Theater Mahjong (a Chinese game)

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## Abstract

Robert Lepage is widely regarded as one of the most influential living practitioners of theatre. His theatrical form and its visual qualities, which according to the Guardian have earned him the status of "an alchemist in modern imaginative theatre", are recognizable. Lepage's approach to making theater is described as freewheeling, looking for alternative forms of storytelling for those dissatisfied with linear and repetitive narratives. The key features of Lepage's works can be mentioned as follows: personal histories and journeys of characters to discover themselves in the past and present, non-linear and fragmented narratives, creation of multilingual dialogues, multi-disciplinary staging and transformation of devices, which means that any device on the stage can instantly play a role. All of these features can be seen in the Dragon Trilogy by Robert Lepage; Because there is no pre-written text in this work and all the events during the performance are improvised. Also, in the interactive theater, the play is the primary source for research and discovery of images and virtual spaces, and the play's story is completed by improvising the actors and creating new images. Another element that is affected by the interactive theater is the audience, who constantly encounters a new topic during the performance due to improvisations and enters a continuous experience between a virtual and real event and may participate in the performance as well. It seems that improvisation is also seen in games; Among the games in which the role of improvisation is prominent is the Chinese Mahjong game, which is discussed in this research. This research has been done descriptively and analytically and the collection of information and data is a library.

**Keywords:** Robert Lepage, interactive theater, improvisation, Mahjong game

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## Introduction:

Interactive theater is one of the contemporary and modern styles in experimental theater that seeks a completely abstract and metaphorical performance form. The word interactive literally means an action that occurs between two or more mutually related works. In interactive theater, the play is the first source of research and discovery of new events images, and virtual spaces, and the story of the play is completed scene by scene with the improvisation of the actors and each performance will be a different performance. (Ismaili, 1388)

Interactive theater is a theater that integrates different mediums; Basically, the purpose of this theater is to communicate between all the actors and accessories; In this way, there is no coherent and pre-written text and everything proceeds in line with each other in an improvised way. Another

element that is affected by the interactive theater is the audience, who constantly encounters a new subject during the performance due to improvisations and enters a continuous experience between a virtual and real event. It seems that improvisation is also seen strongly in some games; Among the games in which the role of improvisation is prominent is the Chinese Mahjong game, which will be discussed in detail in this research. Mahjong is a four-player game with 144 tiles grouped into two main sets. This game is a traditional oriental game that has thousands of different modes to play. In this game, each person needs a background of memories to continue the game. This research will discuss Robert Lepage and the connection of some of his works with mahjong and interactive theater. Robert Lepage is a postmodern director whose Dragon Trilogy made him world famous; The Dragon Trilogy was a project where the text of the actors was written by improvising and the actors' actions on stage, in front of the audience. This means that there was a different story in each performance. One of Lepage's main goals was not to share a directorial idea with the actors before starting work. Instead, he wants to let the show build and take shape through the actor's spontaneous acting and improvisation. During the execution process of this work, each actor is a researcher and an improviser. It should be noted that the Dragon Trilogy show, was inspired by the Mahjong game and even the name of this show is derived from the three main cards of this game. This research is generally focused on this work of Lepage, and it seems that the rules of the Mahjong game have been followed in this work. In this way, in the following, we will see how interactive theater, the Mahjong game, and the Dragon Trilogy show by Robert Lepage are connected.

### **Background of the research:**

Saber Aqeli (2012) in his article on the approach to Eastern theater with an emphasis on the ideas of Wesold Meerhold, Edward Gordon Craig, and Bertold Brecht, gives a brief description of the performance method of Eastern plays and its difference from Western plays, and at the end, he discussed the effectiveness of the play from Epic style pays.

Alireza Qodsieh (2012) in his dissertation on stylization in theater directing in the first half of the 20th century, looked at the works of Weswald Meerhold while discussing the definition and specification of the scope and main definition of stylization or stylization, which was created under the influence of Eastern theater, especially Chinese and Japanese theater. He also discussed the elements and some features of the symbolist or symbolist theater, but at the end of the article, he was inspired only by the works of Mirhold and did not mention the influential history.

Negar Khanbeigi (2013) in Etemad Bakhsh Teatar newspaper, has only briefly introduced the biography of Robert Lepage and some of his works.

Hossein Shakeri (2007) in his article on burning and informing, mentioned the translation of Robert Lepage's ideas, and the main part of the article is dedicated to the general theme of theater from Lepage's point of view.

Mehrdad Rayani (1400) in his article on the quality of the impact of Robert Lepage as a director on the audience/spectator in the shaping of mise-en-scène, only mentioned how Lepage was influenced by the audience or audience and discussed Lepage's mise-en-scène in general.

In Iran, many articles and theses have been written about interactive theater, improvisation, and to some extent Robert Lepage; Both in the field of actors' work and in the field of directing actors. However according to the research conducted in Iranian studies, brief explanations have been given in this regard, which have not addressed the issue of the relationship between interactive theater and traditional games; Also, little information is available about Canadian director Robert Lepage. Several articles have been written separately in the field of these topics: (Mahjong game and interactive theater), but there is very little information about the relationship between games and the show. According to the available foreign articles and documents and the translations done in this regard, using abstracts of the most important materials and personal research and existing book studies to an eloquent and comprehensible summary of the relationship between interactive theater and some traditional games and investigating improvisation in them. According to some shows I have achieved that I will describe in the main description.

### **Interactive theater:**

Interactive theater is defined as a performance or theatrical work that breaks the "fourth wall" and separates only the actor physically and verbally from the audience. In conventional theater performances, the performance is confined to a specific area of the stage and the actions of the play occur before the eyes of audience members, who act as observers. "In contrast, in interactive theatre, performance may take place among audience members, often involving the audience in more active roles. They may be asked to provide their props and performative suggestions (as in improvisational theatre), the actual setting of the action, share (non-theatrical) ideas, or unexpected characters perform. In addition, the audience may be asked to participate by changing the overall performance by participating in a collective vote to help steer the plot in a new direction, such as group theatre. Augusto Boal (in this type of theater, the audience as the main component plays the biggest role in the performance of the theater)." (Drinko, 2020:19)

The search to find an interactive symbol or form is done without boundaries and limitations; Sometimes it is inspired by documentary pictures of reality and sometimes by a pre-prepared picture or form, and changes are applied to it by using some computer software. The use of computer images and videos is aimed at finding a poetic and minimalist representational form. Because of this, a fluid flow is created between the audience and the play. In this type of video presentation, it does not come close to the stage of the theater but becomes a part of it. It is also said that sound effects, music, and sounds are the main elements of interactive theater. (Ismaili, 1388: 63)

### **Improvisation:**

Improvisation is probably the easiest way to recall memories and events, yet the hardest way to execute them. The beauty of performing in this type of play is when the actors receive completely random ideas from the audience and try to tell a story for the bystanders. Improvisation enables the actor to perform a part of his role beyond self-awareness with the help of imagination and intuition. In fact, without the intervention of the actor himself, he performs a lasting role by combining his feelings, emotions, and memories, which is a kind of training for the development of the actor. In this way, if the actor stops judging and frees himself, he can expand the depth of his performance. (Britannica, 2016:11)

The actor should not plan how he wants the improvisation to go; Just go with the flow! The next rule is that the actor should not think. If he goes into an improv and has already decided on the story and how he wants it to go, the idea won't work. The actor must compromise and go along with the opinions of others. The actor must remember that the best improvisations are not planned. One last thing to remember in improvisation is that silence can be amazing. (Colbert, 2006:22)

In an impromptu performance, the actors try to find new movements, gestures, and even a new type of play by improvising, without emphasizing the formalized forms of acting, based on combining gestures, movements, expression, and type of dialogue; The important emphasis of actors and directors in this method is to finally reach a new dramatic language. Taking help from body language is a stage that brings the originality of speech in the show to the direction of language lessness in expression and sharing in the image due to the multiplicity of dialects, accents, cultures, and different languages ruling in the world. (Farokhi, 1400: 2)

As defined by Shekner, performance is the widest area of the hypothetical realm of drama, and the smallest area is drama or play, and in between, text and theater are present. To achieve performance, one must go beyond the realm of drama, text, and theater respectively. It can be said that the drama (play) is the smallest circle, the text is the main code and the basis of the events, and the theater is an event performed by a special group of performers; What the performers do during the performance is usually to reproduce the play/text. (Shakner, 2009: 142)

"For improvisation, the actor must learn skills and techniques that are both individual and group. It can be said that theater cannot be formed without acquiring these skills. Learning them is necessary and necessary for all the factors that contribute to the production of theater; Whether the theater is based on a predetermined text or not, in the group of improvisational actors, it is proven that a coherent and attractive performance can be achieved and performed without a prepared text. A performance whose components are improvised from movements to stage design, lighting, and music." (Haj Molla Ali, 2013:23)

By examining Persian sources, it is said that most artists use their tools, traditions, and characteristics in creating their art; In my opinion, it doesn't matter what word the actor uses during the improvisation, but the important principle is how to take a play from that word or how to narrate it. However, I think that the audience establishes a deep connection with the narrative performance, and this shows the success of this procedure.

### **The relationship between interactive theater and improvisation:**

It is clear that there are differences between interactive theater and improvisation, but what is important is the common path that both follow; Both do not follow a ready and pre-written text and do not look for a linear story; Both of them seek to free the mind of the actor and the audience from a repetitive narrative and clear images and provide conditions for the mind of the audience or the actor to be immersed in the past; And in my opinion, it is interesting that both of them agree on sharing the audience in advancing the performance, and the goal is to share everything that can happen, without any limits or framework. Finally, "The actor must be aware of the techniques of interactive drama, improvisation, and role-playing in the moment and at the same time be able to use the potential of his body, voice, and creative imagination." (Halpern, Lobert, 2003:14)

## **Introduction of Robert Lepage:**

Robert Lepage was born in Quebec, Canada in 1957 and soon became interested in geography. Later, when he got acquainted with different arts, the theater attracted his attention. At the age of 17, he went to the Conservatory of Performing Arts of Quebec. After studying in Paris in 1978, he returned to Quebec and participated in many creative projects, and gained experience as an actor, writer, and director. Two years later, he joined the prominent theater group. In 1984, his play *Excursions* was performed on tour in Canada. The following year, the *Dragon Trilogy* brought him worldwide fame.

From 1989 to 1993, he was the artistic director of the National Arts Center in Ottawa and continued to perform. In 1994, Lepage founded the multidisciplinary company "X Machine" and organized many tours around the world, and was admired by people and critics, then established communication networks and formed different websites. In 1994, he was invited to Sweden to stage *A Dream by August Strindberg* in Stockholm. His latest show, *The Andersen Project*, which was inspired by the life and works of Hans Christian Andersen and his story "The Jungle Bride", has had a long and successful run, performed in more than 10 countries. (Dundjerović, 2009)

Among the films or TV shows in which Lepage has played a role, we can mention *Captain and Commander*, *The End of the World*, and *The Hidden Side of the Moon*. Lepage's *Seven Streams of the Ota River* was the first project developed with X Machine over three years between 1993 and 1996. (Charlebois, 2021)

In 1997, Lepage created a contemplative work on the works of Frank Lloyd Wright entitled *The Geometry of Miracles*, which toured internationally. Lepage, an artist fluent in several languages, has started receiving many awards and honors in Canada and abroad since 1984, Gemini Award for Best Actor in *Improv Night*, and the American Continental Theater Festival Award for *The Dragon Trilogy* 1987. In 2001, he was inducted into Canada's Hall of Fame for his influence on sharing Canadian culture abroad, and in 2002 he was inducted into the French Legion of Honor. In 2013, the Glenn Gould Foundation named LePage the winner of the 10th Glenn Gould Award; But still, in this successful path, it has received many other awards, and only a few of its important awards were mentioned (Spier, 2003:2).

The framework of Lepage's plays, especially the *Dragon* trilogy, is based on three themes: memory, family, and political awakening; One of the memory tricks he turns to remember his own memories or family memories is to visualize a "memory palace" to put a poem, story, or memory in different expressions. Because the physical and emotional details of it are etched into his mind, which is the White House, and that's true of the crazy fact that as we age, our long-term memory is far greater than our short-term. (Dundjerovich, 2009:1)

Since Lepage believed that the audience and the audience are active and not passive participants, he suggests that the directors should reconcile with the audience and the audience and gradually change and update their *mise-en-scènes*. He explains that: "If there is no live connection between the audience with the audience and actors, then there is no theater." (Lepage, 2000:310)

During the rehearsals of his shows, Lepage encourages the actors to improvise and constantly asks them to follow the theme by reviewing their memories; It means that without text, they follow the narrative that they have imagined in their mind or imagination. In his trilogy of dragons, he has focused exactly on the personal narratives of each person, and with this procedure, he has been able to present different and diverse performances. By specifying a topic, Lepage immerses his actors in an imaginary space without text, and everyone starts rehearsing and expressing them based on the memories they had in the past. In Lepage's performance, the presence of the audience as an actor has also been seen; As this feature was mentioned in the interactive theater. Therefore, according to these similarities, I am of the opinion that the performance of this work by Lepage is an attractive combination of improvisation, narrations, fantasy, and participation of all, which is inspired by the characteristics of the game of mahjong.

### **Mahjong game introduction:**

Mahjong, mah-jongg, or MahJong is a Chinese game and is usually played by four people. A mahjong player needs skill, calculation, strategy, and a bit of luck.

In East Asia, this game is also used as a kind of gambling game. The game has 136 (or more commonly 144) equal-sized pieces with shapes centered around Chinese characters and symbols engraved on them. This game is actually a traditional Eastern game that has thousands of modes and maybe millions of different modes to play. According to a Chinese legend, the Chinese philosopher Confucius developed this game in 500 BC. Of course, the main creator of this game is not known correctly and there are guesses for it. (Butler, 1996)

One hypothesis is that Chinese army officers created this game to pass the time during the Taiping riots. Another hypothesis says that a nobleman from Shanghai created this game from 1870 to 1875. On the other hand, the richly decorated mahjong sets show that the game was a favorite of all levels of society, and although few sources provide specific details about how and when mahjong developed, there is a clear connection to the painful years of the Opium Wars and the Taiping Rebellion. (Emeric, 1999:38)

Mahjong is a four-player game with 144 tiles grouped into two main sets: "numbered" tiles and "honor" tiles. The numbered tiles are divided into three suit-like shapes, each representing a different denomination than traditional coins. Each suit consists of numbered tiles from one to nine, and the honor tiles are unnumbered and divided into four directional "winds" and three "dragons". Both honorary and numbered tiles total 136 tiles. The remaining 8 tiles are divided into two groups of 4 and each group corresponds to honor tiles or numbers. Finally, sets include eight unique and optional tiles called "flower tiles", often decorated in a fancy way. (Gibson, 2013:7-8)

People (initially ordinary people, and after the game reached the peak of its popularity, the majority of society) started talking about cards. Some said it's like a family where the father is the king, someone else will see the difference between black and white, some will see death, and some will see danger. These are feelings, not ideas. You can't have a fixed opinion about that number of cards or tiles, and you can't argue about a sense. In this game, each person starts to explain improvisation based on his personal impression, and basically, the impression, feelings, or memory that is unique and people identify with him, gets more points; Basically, for the winner of this

game, according to the discussion of all four participants, an amount, something, or whatever they agree on is considered, and finally, the person who gets more points from the game wins. The scoring of the tiles (important tiles) is based on this: all three bamboo cards = 6 points / all four circle cards = 2 points / all three Chinese character cards = 2 points all three dragon cards = 6 points / all three flower cards = 1 score



The tiles of the winds (Picture 1)



Dragon tiles (Picture 2)



Suit tiles (Picture 3)

In ancient times, at the beginning of the appearance of this game, the prize must be given to the winner after the end of the game, otherwise, the war would start. Today, traditional games have become a system, and feelings, the live noises of the cards, and the discussions of several players can not be seen as much as in that time. This positive point of the game is worth mentioning that the mahjong tiles made a satisfying noise, and this sound kept the player alert. With the systemization, traditional games are easily played individually, and part of the game is played by an automatic system without real participants.

Mahjong also requires skill, cleverness, and quick thinking. At the beginning of this game, a group of poor people in Chinese society got addicted to this game to bet and get more profit, and these groupings and games continued so much that people gradually stopped their work and activities to participate in this game and win the bet. However, the women of the community were not allowed to play in this betting and were only busy with cooking and taking care of their children at home. (Chen, 2009:145)

### **Dragon Trilogy:**

This work was shown in two versions and lasted more than two decades of Lepage's work; The first version was produced between 1988 and 1987, while Lepage was still a prominent member of the theater. At that time, the second version (in X-Machine) was made in 2003. An internationally renowned director of theatre, film, and opera, and a solo performance artist, Lepage took the second version of the previous Dragon Trilogy as a source for another mystery cycle, turning it into a text and then printing the play in 2005. The Dragon Trilogy is the longest run of Lepage's original productions. Due to the variety of perceptions and results of the games, the development time of the Dragon Trilogy changed from a ninety-minute production to three hours and finally to a six-hour work.

The original six-hour version premiered on June 6, 1987, at the 12th Annual Theater Festival of the Americas (de Théâtre's des Ameriques (FTA)). This version won the award for the best director of the show and Lepage won his first major position as a director. This work won several prestigious theater awards and critics began to theorize Lepage's theater according to the approach

of Peter Brook's works. A second version was made again in 2003 for the same festival (FTA) and toured internationally until 2007. (Dundjerovich, 2009:15)

### **Synopsis of Dragon Trilogy:**

Lepage representation is cyclical and must change and develop. Our approach will be to see how Lepage designed this outstanding show and what techniques he used. The initial idea for the production of Dragon Trilogy came from touring Quebec City, Toronto, and Vancouver; where there was an audience and a society very interested in theater. That is why this group wanted to set up the show in these three cities and perform a special show for each of them. The initial idea was to create a group of individual shows with seven actors, organized in the same theme and similar space, and its performance as a special event in each place and connecting with communities across Canada was developing. (Dundjerovich, 2009)

The Dragon Trilogy is a collective collection where the writing of the actors' text is taken from improvisation and the actor's action on the stage in front of the audience. In each episode, there is a different life story in each text of the show. The scene is rectangular; It is covered with sand and delineated by a wooden walkway. Audiences meet each other at the crossing stage. They are clearly present as travelers or observers of the journey embarked upon by the characters. During the performance, the parking lot transforms into different positions and locations. However, sand remains as an element or an accessory connecting the scenes. The sandy parking lot, which includes the remains of Quebec's old Chinatown, is the starting point for a journey into different communities. Through these events, we follow the lives of two Quebecer daughters, Jeanne and Françoise. Their children; were English Crawford, Chinese Wong, and his son Lee; and three generations of Japanese women, all named Okali (Indian); However, these are events in the lives of Janine and Francois. From childhood to adulthood and finally death, which connects all three parts of the Dragon Trilogy.

The opening and prologue of the play begin in the dark with voices saying, "I've never been to China," repeated in French, English, and Chinese (Cantonese) respectively. First with low light and then gradually increasing the bright shadow lights, we observe the contour of an old parking lot lit by a lamp with a slight halo of sand and the actor searching for the audience. "When I was young, there were houses here," the off-stage voices continue. In English, French, and Chinese. Meanwhile, the trilingual narration continues to describe, describe, and introduce the play as if revealing a mystery: Look at the old parking lot warden. He seems to be a dragon. A dragon looking through the portals towards immortality. He is a dragon, and this is the dragon trilogy. Then the passenger of the parking lot enters a cabin, inside which the light is turned on with great intensity (Picture 4). Other characters slowly appear with their hands stuck to the cabin window. The journey through time begins by passing through the life cycle of individuals and societies. (Dundjerovich, 2005:58)



The final scene of the draft (first draft) of the Dragon Trilogy.  
Photo by Claudel Hovet. (Picture 4)



## Green Dragon:

The first part of the "Dragon Trilogy", "The Green Dragon" is set between 1932 and 1935 in Quebec City. This episode takes the viewer to an adequately outdated neighborhood of Quebec in the 1930s. These performances are executed in indoor spaces; (house laundry, hair salon, room, and basement). The characters constantly refer to a cold and wet environment; This is a sign of the environment of a society involved with high racial and religious prejudices. The space is fragmented through dim lights and shadows. The environment is intentionally small, suffocating, and narrow. This part of the performance begins with Jean and Francois playing in the sand (Picture 5).



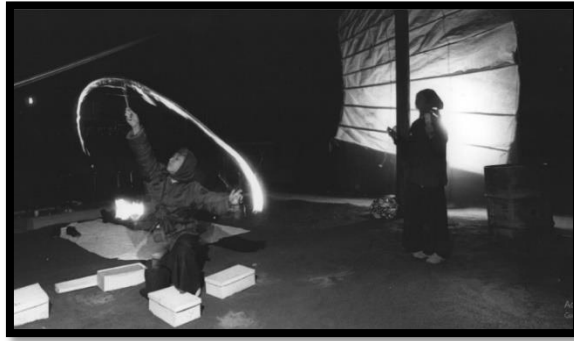
One of the early stages of the Dragon Trilogy was in 1986. Marie Brassard plays with sand and a toy car on St. Joseph Street. (Picture 5)

Using piles of shoe boxes, they recreate shops on rue Saint-Joseph, one of Quebec City's main shopping streets. Every shoebox is a store. One of the girls knocks on the box and the other lifts the door as if to open it, playing the role of the customer and the merchant. Through this game, the audience gets to know the social and cultural contexts of Quebec City in the 1930s.

During the play, the main character, Crawford, appears on the stage and is on Joseph Street as if it were part of their play (Pictures 5 and 6). He walks in front of the shoe box, which represents the Chinese laundry man. When Crawford knocks on the door, this situation changes to reality. He is an English shoe salesman who was born in Hong Kong and recently came to Quebec City to start his business. She meets a male laundry worker and makes a bet on something; Crawford and Wong are also united by their positions as the Other (characters other than themselves). Crawford teaches Wong to play poker, and in return, Wong encourages him to smoke opium (Picture 7). They set up gambling sessions with the locals, the committed Leppin, and a drunken hairdresser Maureen (who is Jean's father). Jean has a Bedard (some kind of Chinese) boyfriend, who is not approved by her father; But she gets pregnant by him. At the end of Green Dragon, Maureen loses all her money in gambling and poker, her hair salon, and finally, her pregnant daughter, who is now forced to marry Won's son, Lee.



Crawford (Robert LePage, in the first version of "The Dragon Trilogy") appears as a real character in the children's (Marie Brassard and Marie Guinac) play with shoe boxes. Photo by Claudel Hovet. (Picture 6)



A scene from the first edition of the Dragon Trilogy. Visions of China are seen in the collective dream of Crawford and Wong in a teriyaki dress inside a laundromat. Photo by Claudel Hovet. (Picture 7)

### **Red Dragon:**

In this section, he uses scattered events simultaneously in the scene where different times and places overlap and show parallel narratives. "Red Dragon" continues to follow the life events of Jean, Li Wong, Francois, and Crawford and is structured in two parts. The first part is between 1935 and 1945. In the introduction, we hear voiceovers in French and English that set the scene in 1935 Toronto. In the continuation of this section, a wordless and silent scene begins, depicting the inner life of Jean and Lee. Jean is listening to music on the radio and is singing the lyrics to Tango Ukulele. The sound changes the space, and it starts a new narrative. Françoise, who had joined the Canadian Women's Corps, heads to Toronto to find Jean (who now lives there with her daughter Stella and her husband Lee). François meets Crawford on the train. He now owns a shoe store in Toronto where Jane works. The episode ends in 1945 at an army show in London; Where Francois sings a Christmas carol to celebrate the end of World War II. Meanwhile, Stella has meningitis and Lee goes to Crawford to inform him that Jean no longer has to work at the shoe store, because he has to take care of Stella. This part ends with the design of the skating ring in the whole scene.



The skate ring is made of sand and shoes, at the end of "The Red Dragon" (version 1), the second and third parts of the Dragon Trilogy. Photo by Claudel Hovet. (Picture 8)

### **White Dragon:**

The third and final installment, "White Dragon," was set in Vancouver in 1985; Modern life represents the mixing of cultures, travel, comfort, and anonymity. In this section, the life cycle of our main characters ends. In the draft and the introduction, the sound is heard every moment, for ten seconds in French, German, Japanese, and English, and reaches twelve announcements. During each of these announcements, we see twelve body images. We see all the characters have short movements that last for ten seconds. Then the third part begins in the waiting room at the Vancouver airport (Picture 9).



"White Dragon" (2nd version) at the airport, the third part of the three-part Dragon trilogy. A wooden cabin of a store. (Picture 9)

François returns to Quebec City after visiting his son Pierre, who owns an art gallery in Vancouver. Pierre meets the third Yukali, who is a painter, at the airport. They start a relationship. Crawford, now entirely addicted to opium, made a film about his addictive habits (Picture 10). During Holly's follow-up narration, Crawford, sitting in a wheelchair, sets himself on fire and dies. (Picture 11)



Crawford (Tony Guilfoyle) in "The White Dragon" (2nd Edition), the third part of the three-part Dragon Trilogy. A video can be seen live on the back screen. (Picture 10)



Crawford's death in "The White Dragon" (2nd Edition), the third of the three-part Dragon Trilogy, is symbolized by the burning of the wheelchair. Photo: Eric Lebi (Picture 11)

There are more abstract and neutral spaces: airport, art gallery, cinema, mountain, hospital, and plane. From the airport scene, the space turns into artistic discoveries (shown through the lights installed by one of the characters). It indeed turns into space and then back into the parking lot. The scenes in this part are shorter or longer and the computer images occupy the entire space of the scene; (referring to Lepage's use of multimedia). This episode comes with an ending that completes the cycle and brings us back to the introduction. The show ends when the old parking lot attendant returns with a music box shaped like a glass ball in his hands, possibly a sign of a new beginning (referring to the yin and yang principle of beginnings and endings). We hear the voices of the Chinese, Crawford, and Francois, repeating the line from the beginning of the play: "I've never been to China." There is no end or conclusion. (Dundjerovich, 2005:63)

### **Objects in the Dragon Trilogy and the use of physical expression:**

The pilot enters the scene with a big black suitcase that he puts on the sand. He lies on his stomach on a wooden bed and stretches his arms and legs. A rotating fan above him evokes the image of an airplane engine running and Christmas lights in the sand. The airplane image changes to an aerial view of Vancouver. Actors' bodies are used to create silhouettes in skyscrapers. The event of the fall made in the theatrical space, through the integration of material objects and actors' bodies, indicates a basic principle in Lepage's thinking; That is, communication with the audience is maintained through a combination of visual images (physical or media) and verbal language.

After various improvisations with the required text and information, Lepage found another solution using verbal language, with the symbolic and metaphorical use of objects, space, and the actor's body to convey the concept and communicate these events. At the end of one section, there was only one table that represented an interior space (the kitchen where Lee and Jean were). At the end of the other section, there were four chairs representing Crawford's shoe store. Lee's character wanted his wife to stay home and take care of their sick daughter. Lepage instructed his actor Lee to cross the stage to inform Crawford that his wife could no longer work for him and that he would be staying at home. Lee then takes all four chairs from the shoe store and places them around the kitchen table. The last seat to be taken is the one Crawford was sitting on. Lee pulls the chair from under Crawford's feet and pushes Jean's back onto it to temporarily lock him to the table. With this physical movement, he was metaphorically imprisoned in the house and lost his connection with the outside world, and his life changed forever. (Dundjerovich, 2005:73)

### **Practice process:**

The text of *Dragon Trilogy* is the result of a handwritten, step-by-step, collective process. Although the six main texts of the *Dragon Trilogy* are the result of a process designed according to card games and simultaneous writing on the stage, and all six primary texts were published in the form of a play in 2005 and are credited as such, this work has always been referred to as Lepage's *Dragon Trilogy*. In my opinion, the understanding that exists in Lepage's direction is not separate from his texts; The design and writing of the *Dragon Trilogy* are combined with the games of the actor who also plays the role of the author, in addition to the visual and multimedia images he uses in the work and even the *mise-en-scenes*, inspired by the uncertain outcome of the Mahjong card game.

Lepage says that as a director, I help the narrator to tell the story easily and at the same time be interesting, and finally the actor-narrator decides how to tell the story. (Lepage, 2002:67)

We have seen how Lepage centralizes his directorial approach to his creative process by creating a connection between the actor and the sources. Resources can be physical (material objects), emotional (stories, anecdotes, or memories), or philosophical (card games). For Lepage, a resource must be the motivation to begin; (A resource is a meaningful stimulus that can motivate a group to engage in an individual process.) Above all else, resources must be specific. If, for example, too many cards are used as a group resource, there will be different reactions. As Lepage explains: "You play with a deck of cards. You look at them; you explore them the way you want. People start talking about the cards. Some say it's like a family where the father is king, someone else will see the difference between black and white, some see death, and some see danger. You can't have a firm opinion on that volume of cards. "If someone tells me that when they play poker, they see cards bleeding, I can't tell him it doesn't feel truthful"

The starting point of the *Dragon Trilogy* show was a parking lot in Quebec City, which, according to Lepage's mythology, was used by the old Chinatown in the 20th century. The work started from Quebec City to Toronto and ended in Vancouver. Since *The Dragon Trilogy* was originally intended to be a series of six individual performances on the same theme, it was initially an attempt to integrate the actors' material and their research work. Thus, the prompts allowed each author-actor to make their interpretations and connections to see how these sources were in their own

experience. Remy Charset observes that Chinatown in Quebec City was not a central area that became a parking lot, but rather an area that was located under an elevated highway. (Charest, 2006:68)

For Lepage, the parking lot is a resource with which the actor-writer can create different personal milestones and use it according to his needs: in the Dragon Trilogy, China fit what we wanted to say in the production; And even the country itself suited our imaginations. But there were many cases; China has smells, textures, laws, and feelings that we are not aware of. It doesn't matter if we are geographically precise. These explanations are for our use of the like what matters is what fits and fits the show. (Charest, 1997:99)

As in Lepage's other major productions, numbers were an important sign and dramatic thought. The significance of the number three in this project comes from the name of the dragon in the Chinese card game "Mahjong". The cards of this game are used as a metaphor for the three parts of the green, red, and white dragons. In addition, the rules of mahjong reflect the overall dramaturgy of the play, which we will refer to below. Among the mahjong game cards, there are white, green, and red dragons, each of which appears with meanings according to the player's luck or belief. The presentation of the thoughts of each actor varies according to the division of the show; That is, a person who is an actor in the White Dragon section, based on the meaning of the White Dragon card and his personal perception, should perform an incident from his life that is similar to the concept of the card in front of the audience.

Structurally, the show becomes a trilogy; It consists not only of three parts, but also of three places, three times, and three narratives. Although most of the options were chosen arbitrarily when we started researching those cities (Quebec, Toronto, and Vancouver), the fits began to reveal themselves, Lepage acknowledges. The Chinese community was more active in Quebec City at the turn of the century, Toronto gained importance during World War II, and now Vancouver is becoming one of the largest Chinatowns in North America. These coincided with the idea of placing the Green Dragon in Quebec, the Red Dragon in Toronto, and the White Dragon in Vancouver.

Lepage acknowledges that he has to listen to those he works with to match events: I have to let all kinds of exploration happen. I need to release and inspire the passion of the people I work with. I was working with six people and they trusted me enough to share their dreams and ideas and they could say things that had no inevitable connection to what we were doing; Apart from creating a basic spatial image for the design process, it was essential to discover the emotional resources that could help enhance the concept. Emotional sources do not need grand narratives or "classical" grand stories and were unconsciously constructed according to their personal beliefs and the background of Chinese games. (Dundjerović, 2009)

Marie Guinac, one of Lepage's main collaborators and one of the creators of the project, explains: "When she was young, her mother lived in the Saint-Roch neighborhood of Quebec City, next to Chinatown. She witnessed that her father had played a lot of cards with a Chinese man and owed him a lot of money. This Chinese man wanted to get married; so the man offered her father this bet: "If I win, I will marry your daughter and clear all your debts. If I lose, you don't owe me anything." He won the game and married her daughter. This woman's daughter got meningitis at

the age of five and had to be placed in a specialized institution at the age of twelve. After a long time, at the age of forty, he was raped and killed by another patient there and died. (Gignac, 2011)

This personal story was an emotional resource upon which the group could collectively respond. Similarly, the lyrics of the song "Yukali Tango" became a source for inventing a complete narrative that includes three generations of Japanese women named Yukali. The story of these three women was the main narrative of "White Dragon".

One of the main goals of Lepage's creative process is not to share directorial ideas with the actors before they start working with them. Instead, he wants to let the stories build and take shape through the actors' spontaneous acting and improvisation. Lepage learned the process of characterization by writing his texts in Alain Knapp's actor creation workshops. In The Dragon Trilogy, each actor-writer first created a personal milestone close to their own experience and related to the group's sources, the yin and yang and mahjong games. The stories were from their life background, and they were all very familiar with it.

In this way, the actor doesn't have to prepare his body memory to play the character he constructed. It is natural for him to create the live acts simultaneously because he is the creator of that scene. The performance and acting of this actor are not fixed and have not been marked in advance. Because the emotions come from such a natural, synchronic place, each night of performance they come from the same place originally depicted, Blankenship explains. "You don't have to be obsessed with becoming your true self; If you wrote it yourself, you're always there". (Blankenship, 1996:74)

### **The similarity between the objectives of the Mahjong game and execution:**

First, we pay attention to this matter what is the relationship between this game and the show? Creating opportunity and collective interaction is one of the important features of the Mahjong game, which was used as a creative principle in Dragon Trilogy. The background and narratives of each part of this trilogy are related to the symbols of Mahjong. Natalie Riva explained how the stage images and the narrative of Jean and Francois's life were developed, considering the similarity between the show and mahjong: The green dragon, from an ideal similar to water and a fountain, was presented theatrically to the naivety and freedom of childhood. The red dragon was a symbol of fire and summer and represented the conflicts of adult life, including wars. white dragon The symbol of air and autumn was depicted as middle-aged peace and spirituality of art (Riva, 2003)

The principles of mahjong were also important for this period; Changing the sandy parking lot and discovering what was hidden during the show was considered according to the logic of the card game. At the beginning of the play, the parking lot hides all the secrets that will be revealed to the audience and the actors later. The game is seen as a magical event in which personal superstition plays an important role. Players must determine their position relative to other players, and the progress of the game depends on how the players read each other's strategy. Indeed, the process of Lepage's exercises is like a game that provides an environment and rules in which actors or creators can play and explore the space of the characters. (Festa, 2007: 99)

However, using the principles of mahjong and assigning them to a play indicates a common approach in Lepage's theater. He often turns other arts and cultures into plays as theatrical resources (from which he makes objects for play) for performance. Lepage openly uses cultural stereotypes, especially Eastern traditions and characters, as sources.

### **The ratio of three dragons, interactive theater, and mahjong game:**

In the land that had been turned into a parking lot, imagination and memory began to dig a hole to find distant memories. Three Chinatowns followed: one in Quebec City in the 1930s, which served as the backdrop for Green Dragon, Green Like Spring, and Clear Like Water. One affluent, mid-century Toronto, in red dragon decor like earth and fire, and one 1980s Vancouver, where a white dragon, symbolizing autumn, spread its wings. Then they showed that Francois and Jean were twelve-year-old friends and inseparable. (Gignac, 2011:3)

Like mahjong, the dramaturgy of the Dragon Trilogy depends on the connection between the different parts, which is fully realized as soon as all three dragons are placed together. Each player in this game represents one side of the world, and their seating and deployment locations are set according to different cardinal points (east, south, west, and north). East starts the game and is believed to be in the best position; While the West gets the worst situation. The mahjong cycle is completed after four periods when all four sides of the world have had a turn to start the game at this stage. Three dragons (green, red, and white) are considered the best cards because they give more points when they are collected, the player does not have to worry about which side of the world he is on. (Dundjerović, 2009)

To justify this development, a new story was invented with a brand new set of symbols and signs by using objects or proposals to expand the expressive vocabulary of the show. This group created comprehensive questions around this movement and reached a new ritual where, for example, the nun's hat became a symbol for the mind, and the wide white robe of the priests became a symbol for the heart, etc. Then, this approach was used in other scenes where the simultaneous change was performed live in front of the audience. At the same time, a new scene was introduced that turned one event into another. Lepage integrates scene changes and transitions into this dramatic performance, creating an aesthetic expression from simple transactions such as costume changes. (Hébert, 2011: 6)

As it appears in the Dragon Trilogy, movement is cyclical, part of a complex dynamic that destroys the logic of binary oppositions between myth and reality, between body and mind, intuition and reason, interiority and exteriority, and sublime or banal spirituality. Tragedy or comedy, the whole composition proceeds with motives, suggestive impressions, and thematic and metaphorical density. Dance, movement, dialogue, objects, and actions are one, and this poetic conspiracy of languages, idioms, codes, references, and quotations drives the intimate breathing of the living beings that live and die in the actors' bodies. Scenes take place simultaneously in real time and space, with locations including Quebec City, Toronto, Tokyo, and a military base in England. Metaphors are woven through a storyline that each actor has memories of in the past. Robert Lepage brings his dual world to the stage to present his saga of life, death, and endless transformation in a prism of light that transports the characters and the audience to China in the imagination; A mythical land hidden deep in our hearts.

## **Free interpretation:**

The key question that Barker wants to answer is how do actors achieve self-improvement. Conscious actions (playing for an observer) become a non-reflexive mechanism of the body, synchronized with thought. Lepage believes that actors should be freed from the shackles of professionalism and theater based on ready-made texts and allow them to be spontaneous and free. Barker sees theater games as a means of releasing emotional energy and social inhibition. It helps the actor replace the pain of learning with the joy of rediscovery. The purpose of this theory is that play is like children's games in a framework that is easily accessible and seemingly acceptable for releasing physical and emotional energy. The pressure is released and the person is freed to some extent in a framework that is not susceptible to social criticism. (Barker, 1989; 64)

## **Similarities between Mahjong game, Interactive Theater, and Dragon Trilogy:**

According to the obtained information, similarities can be seen between the Mahjong game, interactive theater, and Dragon Trilogy. Because all three have common features that are important during the performance process. As mentioned earlier, improvisation is the main one that is taken into consideration and repeated like a rule in all three. If I want to look more closely, there was no special rule for describing the playing cards in the game of mahjong, just as there is no limit for characterizing the subject in the interactive theater and the Dragon Trilogy, and maybe this was welcomed by the audience or the directors.

Lepage explains: "When you travel you discover the essence of a country or a city, understand what makes it unique, what its soul is made of. Plays are travel narratives. Perhaps the successes of a show can be measured in the same way we measure and evaluate a trip. We are either travelers or tourists. "A successful production conveys the experience of a traveler". (Lepage, 1997:37)

As it was said at the beginning about the features of interactive theater, the search for a form or a symbol is done without any restrictions (the audience and the actor freely visualize to find meaning), even though sometimes in interactive theater, images prepared in advance by computer software are used. Therefore, I believe that this may be similar to the multimedia that Lepage sometimes implements live (broadcasting the image of the actor who is acting at the same time) during the play; Although the images performed in the interactive theater are completely abstract and designed, the goal is almost the same.

## **Result:**

Lepage Theater is a combination of multimedia shows, cinematic visual images, and a multiplicity of art and culture. He mixes different media and technologies in *mise-en-scène*. Alongside improvisations with media and technology, Lepage also plays with resources borrowed from other cultures, especially Eastern traditions such as playing cards (mahjong), bunraku puppetry, neo-theatre, Javanese shadow puppetry, and tai chi. These forms are not directly involved in the original text or as a result of anthropological studies but rather as resources, stimuli, a game, or a way of telling a story whose meaning can inspire the actors.



The representation of any land, like its culture, is constantly flowing in the context of an influential journey, and in the process of this transfer, wherever it reaches, it transforms the views directed at it, and in turn, it undergoes transformations in various ways by mixing with the culture of the land that has received it. And there will be changes. Perhaps it can be said that the entire history of the theater has been marked by these subversions, returns, and settlements.

What is certain is that the international journeys of actors and various theater groups to this and that side of the world have always opened many unknown and thought-provoking paths for its travelers, which itself has led to the emergence of new trends. Anyway, if a director intends to experience such a theater, by looking at Lepage's work patterns he can think about how many other lands, different cultures, histories, and pure and undiscovered memories exist that can be used to record a new experience.

In my opinion, these intersections create an artistic encounter between several different and foreign cultures, which influence each other in a double way, as if one is the source and the other is the destination, one is a sign and the other is an inspiration. Like the translation from one language to another language, the transfer and translation of an original theatrical culture are capable of being attracted or repulsed in dealing with the culture that has been translated. Its roots and identity should be strengthened or weakened, added or reduced. Since the beginning of the 20th century and even a little earlier, these awakening multicultural movements have deeply felt, to the extent that they create a myth of the richness of the exchange of theatrical culture, an exchange born of movement from one point to another and in this journey transforming, however, the representational forms do not stay still in any way but are constantly changing and exchanging.

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