Robert Lepage's Stravinsky:

Rhyming Imagery on Stage

by

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Abstract

Québécois Director/Writer/Performer/Filmmaker Robert Lepage is internationally recognized for his striking multimedia productions and transformative mise-en-scène. This thesis specifically explores Lepage's staging of two Igor Stravinsky operas: *The Rake's* Progress (2007), and *The Nightingale and Other Short* Fables (2009). This is not a musicological study, rather it is an analysis of the mise-en-scène Lepage devised for these productions. Lepage employs a specific method of seeking commonalities between disparate stage imagery, and orchestrating radical transformations of the stage picture around those reoccurring elements, using them as reference points for his audience. These reference points are to his stage picture what homonyms and rhymes are to poetry; they change meaning based on context, and resonate with the spectator on more than one level. Using tools described in Erving Goffman's *Frame Analysis* (1976), and Marvin Carlson's The *Haunted Stage* (2003), I approach Lepage's mise-en-scène as a layering of intersecting frames. Secondly, a close reading and analysis approaches the mise-en-scène of Lepage's *The Rake's Progress* (2007) as a form of adaptation, drawing from Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2013). Finally, I examine *The Nightingale* (2009) with a libretto based on the Hans Christian Andersen tale of the same name, on its emulation of 19th century *chinoiserie*, using principles from Edward Said's *Orientalisim* (1978).

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Introduction

Robert Lepage is world renown for his multidisciplinary approach to theatre, opera, and film. This thesis specifically explores the *mise-en-scène* of Lepage's productions of Igor Stravinsky's operas *The Rake's Progress* (2007)*,* and *The Nightingale* (2009)*.* This is not a musicological study of Stravinsky, nor does it focus strongly on the libretto of either piece. Discussion will pertain to close readings of the *mise-en-scène* of these two operas, and employs critical theory to better understand Lepage's methodology in devising these two productions.

Lepage is a collaborative artist; devising performance scores in conjunction with actors, dancers, designers, and a variety of technicians, through a creative process descended from Anna Halprin's RSVP cycles, a creation methodology that involves extended exploration, presentation, and revision. In most circumstances, text or narrative for a piece is created as part of this process. However, when working with opera, Lepage is constrained to following the score and libretto; forcing a strict rigidity that separates Lepage the director from Lepage the writer. Furthermore, as both these operas are Stravinsky pieces, it provides a stronger basis for comparison between the two productions, and a clearer picture of Lepage's unconventional methods.

While most other artistic professionals are known for their work as an actor, director, or writer, reporters and critics struggle to list the plethora of artistic job titles that Lepage has held at a professional level; they refer to him as being an accomplished world-class actor/writer/director/filmmaker/producer. Lepage's vocation can best be described as an artistic editor; he collects, codifies, and refines artistic fragments into successions of cohesive and iconic pictures, be it on stage, on film, or a seamless overlapping of the two mediums.

Indeed, overlap is where Lepage excels, not just in grafting projection onto theatre, but in finding the commonality between two seemingly disparate elements. Lepage explained this approach in his program notes for *The Far Side of the Moon* (2000):

> What fascinates me about the act of creation is that you fill a space with objects that have no relation to each other, and because they are there, 'all piled up in the same box,' there is a secret logic, a way of organizing them. Each piece of the puzzle ends up finding its place. (*Theatricality of Robert Lepage 28*)

This instinct to arrange and link elements is also featured prominently in Rémy Charest's *Robert Lepage: Connecting Flights* (1997); a collection of interviews Charest conducted with Lepage. The title refers to Jean Cocteau's *Lettre aux américains* (1949), written over the course of a flight from New York to Paris; a text which featured prominently in Lepage's solo show *Needles and Opium* (1991). Lepage was fascinated with the ideas Cocteau presented about being suspended between borders; an extended liminal experience that was definitively not in one place or the other, yet clearly connected to both.

For that matter, *Needles and Opium* came about because Lepage noticed an intriguing coincidence; that at the same time that Cocteau had been visiting New York, Miles Davis had been visiting Paris. This tenuous connection drew Lepage to further research and compare the two revolutionary artists; he found parallels between the pair that seemed to resonate with a recent heartbreak of his own. The intermingling of these ideas formed the foundations for what would become *Needles and Opium*.

These tenuous connections between disparate things are a key component to Lepage's impressive body of work. They allow for breathtaking transitions and amazing transformations to occur. They resonate with the audience because they offer a second look, a second perspective

on something that was thought to be known and understood. This principle goes back as far as Lepage's involvement with Quebec-based Théâtre Repère and their acclaimed production of *Circulations* (1984). The title of the work is a homograph in French – a homonym with the same spelling for separate meanings – that can be translated as either "traffic" or "vascular circulation." This cunning duality came about as a result of the creation team noting the visual similarities a road map had to the blood vessels and veins in the human body. The specific duality of the road map/circulatory map is a clear demonstration of Lepage using the similarity between stage images to create a resonant connection for an audience. In the same way that rhyming in verse, alliteration, homonyms or puns are textual methods of creating overlaps that resonate with a reader, Lepage uses visual commonalities between objects as a method of connecting them meaningfully for his viewing audience.

Lepage's interest in Stravinsky stems from researching Jacques Cocteau while writing *Needles and Opium.* Stravinsky and Cocteau were well acquainted. "Le compositeur russe et le poète français se sont connus dans les années 1910, et Stravinsky a fait appel à l'écrivain, dans la décennie suivante, pour le livret de l'opéra-oratorio *Œdipes Rex* (1927)" (Gilbert 18). In 1992, Lepage made his operatic directorial debut with a pair of short modernist operas produced by Canadian Opera Company: Béla Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* and Arnold Schoenberg's *Erwartung.* The production was a tremendous success, and Lepage has gone on to direct several other operas: Hector Berlioz's *La Damnation de Faust* (1999), Loren Maazel's *1984* (2005), Igor Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* (2007) and *The Nightingale and Other Short Fables* (2009), Richard Wagner's Ring cycle (2010-12), Thomas Adès' *The Tempest* (2012), and Kaija Saariaho's *L'Amour de Loin* (2015).

Opera singing by its very nature places a number of physical restraints on the singer, this has led to a standard practice of sets and blocking designed to let the singer stand unmoving at the centre of attention; in this way, traditional opera has almost become a series of static tableaus set to music, though recent directorial interventions have notoriously upset this convention. Robert Lepage's operatic work features prominently in a gallery of contemporary directors including Peter Sellars, Robert Wilson, Guy Cassiers, Jan Fabre, and Luc Bondy. Lepage's directing style is rooted in identifying theatrical rules and conventions and exploring their antithesis; he questions the premise of the unmoving singer; asking his singers what movement is possible, and how can they push their physicality without risking injury? Lepage views problems as opportunities to defy convention, and for most of his career he's had the reputation and technical team to back him up. He looks upon the opera score and libretto as a springboard to creating a new and exciting world on stage. Lepage recognizes that opera is about the expression of extreme emotion, and the vivid and striking *mise-en-scène* of his productions reflect this approach.

When I first began to study Lepage, I was intrigued by his blend of performative transformation and complex technical elements. I have a professional background as a theatre technician, and the transformations Lepage was creating on stage were perplexing to me. I could decode the technological methods he used to achieve specific effects, but I couldn't articulate the process by which they were affecting the viewer so profoundly. It is one thing to watch a magician and figure out how the illusions are physically crafted, but it is another thing entirely to understand the artistry that makes the moment breathtaking. Trying to better understand how Lepage uses transformation on stage lead me to a deeper understanding of how simple categorization shapes meaning every day, and the beauty of deliberately sustained ambiguity.

I was first introduced to Lepage's *The Rakes Progress* as part of a graduate seminar at the University of Alberta's Drama department on contemporary western *mise-en-scène*. Researching the production for a class presentation, I was surprised at the multitude of intertextual layers and research that went into the piece, the intricacy of the technical elements, and the vivid imagery and innovative use of projection. Later, I found out that Lepage had directed another Stravinsky opera, *The Nightingale*, which made extensive use of puppets, one of my favorite live performance mediums. (Working peripherally with the Calgary-based Old Trout Puppet Workshop has instilled an appreciation for puppets in me that I am still indebted to them for.)

The timing of this writing and the study of Lepage's work on Stravinsky is particularly topical, as the COC is remounting *The Nightingale and Other Short Fables* late in its 2017/2018 season. Yet, the unfortunate reality of studying live performance is the transitory nature of our research subject. Neither of Lepage's productions of *The Rake's Progress* or *The Nightingale and Other Short Fables* have had remounts since 2011; this meant I had to resort to video media to research the performance aspects of these shows. Fortunately, there is a published DVD of the 2009 Brussels production of *The Rake's Progress*, which proved to be an excellent resource. A video recording of *The Nightingale and Other Short Fables* proved somewhat more difficult to procure; there was no public video release of the performance, however I was able to acquire from the archives at Ex Machina an archival video of a dress rehearsal from the 2009 Toronto production. While the fixed position video was not of the highest resolution, it did provide a solid basis for observing the major components of the performance. Further to this, I acquired two important Ex Machina Publications — Patrick Caux & Bernard Gilbert's *Ex Machina: Creating for the Stage* (2007), and Bernard Gilbert's *Le Rossignol, Renard, et autres fables: Une chinoiserie pour le XXIe siècle...* (2011). Both document behind-the-scenes creation and

development processes for *The Rake's Progress* and *The Nightingale,* including a number of high quality photographs of both productions at various stages. I've also sourced a number of newspaper reviews of both productions, and found several radio, television, and conference interviews with Lepage, where he discusses his process, his background, and his experiences working in theatre and opera. Rémy Charest's *Robert Lepage: Connecting Flights* (1998) has also been a valuable resource for understanding Lepage's creation and thought processes. Aleksandar Saša Dunđerović's books – *The Cinema of Robert Lepage* (2003) and *The theatricality of Robert Lepage* provide extensive documentation of Lepage's personal history and broad body of work prior to *The Rake's Progress.*

While both Lepage's productions of *The Rake's Progress* and *The Nightingale and other Short Fables* have had notable press coverage and performance reviews, neither has gotten much attention in terms of critical analysis. *The Rake's Progress* met with lukewarm reviews, critics found the 1950's Hollywood/Texas iconography Lepage used incongruous with the original 18th century London setting, felt the premise a little forced, and the pacing subdued. In contrast, *The Nightingale* was enormously successful during its short run at The Four Seasons Centre in Toronto, and while critics expressed some doubts about the performance after the initial press releases had gone out, once the show opened, they lavished it with praise.

In my critical analysis of Lepage's *mise-en-scène* for these two operas, I'll be drawing significantly on the following theorists and texts: Roland Barthes' *Image/Music/Text* (1977) for discussions on connotative and denotative channels of communication. Erving Goffman's *Frame Analysis* (1976) has been useful as it pertains to primary frameworks, keyings and fabrications. Marvin Carlson's *The Haunted Stage* (2003) is a source for his principles of ghosting, which will be contrasted with a similar but different phenomena form Andrew Quick's article "The Stay of

Illusion" (2009). Linda. Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2013) allows me to explore

ghosting as it pertains to adaptation and the concept of fidelity as it relates to quality of signals.

Chapter 1 discusses these theories and theorists in greater detail, and connects these

theories to specific examples taken from Lepage's larger body of work. I also demonstrate how

the theories of ghosting and frame analysis are in fact quite complimentary, and how that is

significant in understanding Lepage's transformative *mise-en-scène*. Chapter 2 questions if

Lepage's approach to the *mise-en-scène* in *The Rake's Progress* could be construed as a new

adaptation. It features a close reading of the production, and the wide array of references Lepage

incorporated into the production. Chapter 3 looks at Lepage's *chinoiserie* approach to *The

Nightingale,* how its unified production design led to overwhelmingly favorable audience

reception, and why the research and creation processes can be considered problematic because of

orientalist implications.

The ongoing thread between these chapters is not simply about understanding Robert

Lepage's methodology or creative process, but elucidating why his productions, especially his

operas, have such a magical quality to them. As I look into Lepage's response to the operatic

genre using these two Stravinsky samples, I hope to illuminate how the combination of music

and narrative impact on Lepage's process of imagination and scenic realization. What fascinates

me in all this is the question: what makes a performance magical for an audience? And once

achieved, what exactly is conveyed through that remarkable connection?

Chapter 1: Frames, Ghosting, and the Theatre of Robert Lepage

Lepage's composition and editing process is most readily understood by applying the principles of Irving Goffman's *frame analysis*, and Marvin Carlson's *ghosting*. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (1974) explores how we mentally filter and organize information in order to interpret our surroundings and make sense of the events we experience. *The Haunted Stage* (2001) is Carlson's discussion of a form of thematic recycling he calls "ghosting" – the specific use of recognizable elements referenced from a source outside the current context. Thus, ghosting deals with the interactions that occur when different frames intersect.

I will start the chapter by providing a working understanding of frame analysis using the underlying principles of phenomenology, defamiliarization, and Roland Barthes' denotative and connotative channels of communication. Subsequently, I will discuss the elusive nature of ghosting and address Carlson and Quick's diverging interpretations of it. I will use examples from several Lepage productions to demonstrate the pervasiveness of ghosting and frame manipulation in Lepage's work.

Frames are a way for us to filter and process information. Without filters, we would experience the entirety of the world simultaneously, and meaning would be lost in sensory overload. Frames are constraints we consciously, subconsciously, or ideologically put in place in order to hierarchize what will have our attention. Like the borders of a country, the boundaries of a soccer field, or the fourth wall of a theatre, frames are mental constructs that we graft on to the world to categorize and sub-divide stimuli into something with meaning. When someone tells you to think outside the box, they are asking you to recognize that your focus is too narrow, and suggesting you look past the boundaries of your current frame of reference.

Frame manipulation is an essential component to Lepage's process, and facilitates the dreamlike transformations that take place in his works. His process begins with choosing a unifying theme, which becomes the basis for his collaborators to improvise around. In Patrick Caux and Bernard Gilbert's *Ex Machina* (2007) – a book documenting the behind-the-scenes operation of his company – Lepage discusses how manipulating the frame is a key component of the development of a new production:

> During the creative process, we try to stay in contact with chaos. Over time we find solutions to problems and choices become clearer. […] We must try not to take anything for granted, and a good way of doing so is to toy with undermining our systems. When we find something that works, we immediately ask, 'What would happen if we did the opposite, if we switched perspectives, if the character wanted something else?' That leads to undreamt-of avenues of research (35).

While we typically think of frames as narrative structures that are manipulated and impact on a particular interpretation, it is in Lepage's personal life that the notion of shifting perspectives through different frames found a biographical root. This experience has provided him with significant insight into the nature of frames, and how they can be used to alter our perceptions. Growing up as a Francophone in Montreal, with an adopted Anglophone brother, Lepage frequently experienced conflict that arose from two different cultural frames trying to occupy the same space. In a speech at the 2014 LaFontaine-Baldwin Symposium, Lepage described how as children, both he and Dave loved to watch hockey on television; however they used to fight over which station to watch it on. Dave wanted to watch it in English on CBC, and Robert wanted to watch it in French on Radio Canada. They both wanted to watch the game, but their respective linguistic frameworks made the experience more appealing when it was presented in the language they better identified with.

Lepage was also aware of the contradictions and struggles his brother went through, and the difficulty Dave had fitting in because of his linguistic background. In an interview with Sansa Dundjerović, Lepage talked about how his brother was frequently treated as an outsider, because the people he went to school with paid attention to what made him different, rather than seeing what they had in common:

> My older brother, whose name is Dave Lepage, had an English first name and a French surname. When he went to school, he went to an Irish Catholic School. Of course, everybody would beat him up because he was considered by the French Canadians to be an English Canadian. Then, when he went to New Brunswick to continue studying English, he had a French name and a French girlfriend and was considered to be French Canadian. Now he lives in Ottawa, the only official bilingual city in the country because it's the capital and their civil servants have to speak both languages. It's the only place where his life is really possible (Dundjerović, *Cinema* 147-148).

This is a prime example of how manipulating the frame can have a transformative effect on the subject. Dave is the same person in all three locals, but is labeled as English when he's in Quebec, French when he's in New Brunswick, and completely typical when he's in Ottawa. In each case, Dave is still an Anglophone from Quebec, but the viewer's perspective changes. In each local, the people categorize Dave differently. This kind of re-categorization is an essential component to the transformations in Robert Lepage's work, and is a principal aspect of phenomenology – in which the viewer's interpretation of a current event is shaped by their experience with prior events they classify as being of a similar nature. As Dave is an Anglophone from Quebec, Anglophones see him as a Quebecois, and Quebecois see him as an Anglophone; the cultural context in which Dave is seen changes which of his qualities are foregrounded. Robert Lepage takes advantage of this kind of duality in his stage productions to create subtle and stunning transitions between scenes. Lepage looks for common elements

between two different scenes, and uses that as a focal point for the transition. In this manner, a table fan can be reframed as an airplane propeller, and act as the logical link between a living room and an airplane; two overlapping frames share the same space, but only one is foregrounded at any given time. Lighting, sound, video, costume, and set changes can all assist in the shift, but the common element provides an anchor, a reference point to sustain the audience's logical understanding through the shift. The table fan remains physically unchanged, but the frames are shifted around it, and our perception of it is altered by foregrounding a different frame. The change in frame is a change in context, and the new context causes us to mentally reclassify the fan as a propeller, creating the illusion of transforming. The table fan has not changed, but our way of seeing it has. This is a rhyming image; pointing out the similar shapes or motions that happen in two entirely different circumstances, and putting them side by side to highlight the point of similarity.

There's an old parable from the Indian Subcontinent about six blind men who encounter an elephant for the first time. In 1873, John Godfrey Saxe adapted it into a poem titled "The Blind Men and the Elephant." The blind men surround the elephant, each feeling a different part of the creature. The first feels its side, and thinks it's a wall. The second finds a tusk, and thinks it's a spear. The third finds the trunk, and thinks it's a snake. The fourth feels a leg, and thinks it's a tree. The fifth feels an ear, and thinks it's a fan. The sixth feels the tail, and thinks it's a rope. The men get into a heated argument, not realizing they are all sensing different parts of the same creature: "…though each was partly in the right, and all were in the wrong!" (Saxe 136).

The premise of the original parable was that different religions could hold completely different perceptions of the divine, without any one of their individual beliefs being incorrect. The parable of the elephant also demonstrates the underlying principles of phenomenology and

apperception: we create an internal map of reality based on our perceptions; and when encountering new stimuli, we try to understand it within the framework of our previous experiences. Upon touching the elephant, each of the blind men compares the portion he touches to an object or experience recalled from memory that bears similar properties. In effect, when we encounter a new experience, our consciousness grapples with it until we can label it, and codify it within our own frame of understanding; at which point it is filed away in the catalogue of our memory waiting to be cross-referenced when we encounter a sufficiently similar circumstance.

The term apperception can be used to describe the process of how we use memory to categorize a new experience. When perceiving something new, we compare it to our existing body of knowledge and look for points of correlation; these points allow us to contextualize the new information within our existing frame of reference. Our ability to perceive and understand the new object is limited by what criteria our personal frameworks are tuned to observe. Once a new perception has been categorized, the observer uses bracketing to box and label the experience, and its meaning becomes cemented in the observer's mind. Once meaning has been set, we are inclined to skim over an object we consider familiar, because referring to our memory of it takes less time and effort than actively examining it. In his 1919 essay "Art, as Device" Viktor Shklovsky calls this process automatization, and likens it to learning a new skill until it can be done without conscious effort.

> Considering the laws of perception, we see that routine actions become automatic. All our skills retreat into the unconscious-automatic domain; you will agree with this if you remember the feeling you had when holding a quill in your hand for the first time or speaking a foreign language for the first time and compare it to the feeling you have when doing it for the ten thousandth time. It is the automatization process which explains the

laws of our prosaic speech, its understructured [sic] phrases and its half-pronounced words (Shklovsky 161).

Apperception is the first step of automatization. When we recognize a signal or situation similar to one we have encountered before, we categorize the new experience under the established label from the previous instance, and instinctively base our reaction on the already learned and rehearsed behavior. Shklovsky proposes that the role of art is to combat automatization, to crack open the phenomenological brackets, examine the contents of the box, vividly expose what lies beneath the label, and make the audience engage with familiar experiences in an explicit way. The Russian word Shklovsky used to describe this act of renegotiating a familiar experience is *ostranenie*; though the term is most frequently referred to in English as *defamiliarization.* In Alexandra Berlinait's recent translation of Shklovsky's *Art as Device*, she offers the term *enstrangement* (as opposed to the more conventionally accepted term estrangement) to describe the act of making something strange.

> And so this thing we call art exists in order to restore the sensation of life, in order to make us feel things, in order to make a stone [seem] stony. The goal of art is to create the sensation of seeing, and not merely recognizing, [sic] things; the device of art is the "enstrangement" [sic] of things and the complication of the form, which increases the duration and complexity of perception, as the process of perception is, in art, an end in itself and must be prolonged (Shklovsky 162).

Frames can insulate the observer from engaging in an experience, creating a barrier that protects the viewer from the uncomfortable mess on the other side; defamiliarization breaks the barrier by offering the viewer a new perspective, and forces them to deal with the resulting turmoil. The role of art in defamiliarization is to lead the viewer through a three-stage process; first by destabilizing the label that categorizes the object and makes it familiar to the viewer,

followed by the viewer struggling to process and reclassify the experience; and finally, the viewer builds a new and more complex framework that better models their experience.

Shklovsky proposes that the function of art is to challenge the simple frames that make an experience comfortable, compartmentalized, and straightforward, and dig in to the viscera beneath the skin, so that the viewer gets a more vivid and complete experience, and establishes a more intricate frame that encompasses a deeper understanding.

In *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (1974), Irving Goffman examines the extensive nature of our frameworks of understanding. In it, Goffman presents a phenomenological approach to charting the process by which an observer perceives an experience, brackets portions of it, and creates a framework of meaning around those events to answer the question "what is it that's going on here?" (8). In effect, Goffman is performing an act of defamiliarization upon the very processes we use to organize meaning to form our understanding of the world. Goffman refers to the basis of these organizational structures as primary frameworks, which he divides into categories of natural frameworks – which model undirected forces such as gravity and the weather – and social frameworks – which encompass hierarchies and behaviors established through the direct action of living beings; things like animal behaviours, family units, or societal structures.

To apply the principles frame analysis, Goffman states it is necessary to isolate a particular event or pattern of behavior, containing it within a frame for study; Goffman denotes the contents of one of these frames as a *strip*. Within the context of performance, a strip could be a scene, a monologue, an act, or an entire performance; the duration of the strip is less important than establishing the boundary of what is to be analyzed, but the strip needs to be continuous;

once you splice together non-sequential events, you impose a narrative by connecting two separate strips together, thus manipulating the possible frames. In order to analyze the structure of an event or behavior, Goffman states we must define where it begins and ends – a process that bears a striking similarity to phenomenological bracketing — in that we are excluding information of what came before and after the strip — in order to be able to study the content of the strip itself.

Goffman uses the term *lamination* to describe a condition that changes the observer's perception of the frame. He identifies two types of laminations; *keyings*, which change the perception of a frame in the same way that shifting a piece of music to a major or minor key will change the atmosphere of a piece; and *fabrications*, which are attempts to deliberately mislead the observer into misinterpreting the frame.

A keying is a lamination that suspends the normal operation of the framework, providing more information about the conditions of the frame, and changing how people perceive and interact with the frame. A keying operates similarly to a street with a One Way sign; the standard two-direction mode of operation for the street is suspended because the instructions indicated by the sign override the standard framework. Sarcasm is a form of linguistic keying, in which tone of voice or a statement blatantly contradictory to the obvious circumstance indicates the speaker means the opposite of what they say; though this tone of speech also carries connotations of humour and condescension, it is not a deliberate attempt to mislead the listener.

Conversely, fabrications include telling outright lies, lying by omission, or encouraging a misinterpretation or oversimplification of events. The purpose of a fabrication is to create an inaccurate reading of a particular strip of events in order to mislead the observer into a false

interpretation of a framework. Most fabrications can only hold together when viewed from a limited number of perspectives; they will eventually collapse under scrutiny due to a lack of corroborating evidence.

Theatre as a medium relies on both keyings and fabrications. Keyings help the audience recognize the theatrical activity is contained in a frame separate from everyday reality, categorizing the performative behaviour as representational, thereby extending the boundaries of permissable behavior — because the action on stage is understood by the audience to be simulated action. In some cases, however, it is desirable to actively mislead the audience rather than having their consent to suspend disbelief. For example, Schlingensief's *Austlander Raus* (2000) in which actors portraying immigrants to Austria competed in a fake reality TV show to be allowed to stay in the country. It was a very complex fabrication that provoked a genuine activist response from the citizenry. People were unsure whether the show was *real* or not, and it resulted in a number of genuine protests and an attempted civilian rescue of the actors from the area they were secured in.

In *Image, Music, Text* (1977), Roland Barthes discusses denotative and connotative channels of communication. He presents this argument by analyzing a newspaper page. On this page, there is a photograph of a news event, below that photograph is a caption. The caption tells us what's in the picture, who's present, when and where it was taken, who took it, and a brief summary of the events that took place surrounding the photo. The photograph itself is a channel of communication that is supplemented and corroborated by the caption. Without the caption, we cannot be certain of the action captured by the photograph. In this manner, the caption is a denotative channel of communication, and the photograph is a connotative channel. The photo is filled with information: colours, time of day, people, faces, but without the caption the

information is uncategorized and unfiltered, and the observer must make assumptions as to the events transpiring.

The photograph and the caption are not the only channels present; the article surrounding the photo, the title of the article, the byline of the author, the date and the masthead of the paper are all channels of communication, offering supplemental information to the reader. A news story that appears in the National Post would be given much greater credibility than if it were to be published in the National Enquirer. Likewise, a piece on the front page is given more significance than a piece buried in the used car advertisements. The point of this is that while we rely on denotative channels for clarity and precision of communication, we use connotative channels to corroborate authenticity.

Keyings are frequently communicated through connotative channels. Most emotional statements are accompanied by facial expressions and changes in vocal tone. Sarcasm without an acerbic tone is confusing to the listener (hence its difficulty in being communicated through text messages). Satire is a less subtle keying, as it involves gradually exploring an idea to an extreme, but relies entirely upon connotative cues to signal that it actually means the opposite of what it says; in effect, satire constructs fabrications that are meant to be so unbelievable that they become funny, and expresses meaning through absence by the excessive denotation of the opposite viewpoint.

Connotative channels of communication heavily influence how we process and interpret information. We trust denotative sources that are accompanied by connotative channels that support them. But we are also prone to interpreting data through connotative channels, leading us

to infer authenticity based on prior personal experience. This is where confirmation bias makes us fallible; and why we frequently mistake correlation for causation.

In *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993) Pierre Bourdieu introduces the concept of *habitus*, which he explains as the innate gut-response understanding an expert in a field has for identifying art that will meet the standards of quality of his colleagues. Bourdieu likens this understanding to a football talent scout observing a high-school team; though the scout may not be able to specifically articulate why a certain player is good enough to be recruited, he knows exactly who on that field has what it takes to go to the next level. Arguably, Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* is actually an informed expert's subconscious reading of connotative signals, honed over years of observing subjects of quality. If this is the case, then *habitus* could be thought of as our ability to appraise how well a subject meets the *horizon of expectation* (Jauss 3-45) in a given field.

Without clear quantitative data or denotative criteria to assess a situation, we rely on our habitus to inform our interpretation of events, and form an opinion of what is true. A fabrication is an attempt to mimic authentic signals in a way that resonates with our habitus, but does so in order to mislead or obfuscate.

In theatre, fabrications are used as set-ups for later revelations – intended to cause surprise or awe in the audience – or as a method of instigating *irruptions of the real* (Lehmann 99-104) – making the audience question if the events unfolding are real or a planned part of the performance. Either way, the audience is operating with insufficient denotative information, and thus is relying on their *habitus* to accumulate connotative signs and formulate a 'gut feeling' as to what's happening, without actually being able to articulate why.

When theatre is created with the intention of keying; the audience understand that the events onstage are meant to be representational, and that understanding changes how they interpret the events that take place on stage. Of course, some forms of theatre specialize in manipulating this boundary between the theatrical and the real; theatre of cruelty, theatre of provocation, and post-dramatic theatre all push the boundaries of the implied social contract that asserts the theatre as a representational and safe space. These theatrical models employ fabrications to experiment with the boundary between the theatrical and the real, creating tension in their audience through ambiguity and doubt as to what action is just part of the performance and what is actual reality smashing through the theatrical frame.

Theatre makes extensive use of connotative channels to evoke particular emotional responses from the audience. While not fabrications *per se*, the use of set, lighting, sound, costumes, and make-up all contribute to the atmosphere of the piece, and send signals that prime the audience's habitus in order to heighten the theatrical experience. These elements help create a more immersive environment, and provide corroborating signals to the more denotative aspects of the production.

A fabrication can only maintain its integrity through a limited number of observed perspectives; it cannot forge authenticity through every conceivable channel or frame without leaving some trace of its faulty origins. If a fabrication could remain valid from all possible perspectives, and sustain that validity, it would be real. Fabrications are revealed through the accumulation of evidence that contradicts the false framework perpetuated by the falsehood.

Goffman describes the natural human response to being confronted with a falsehood by saying that "in the face of ambiguities or incongruities, the puzzled or suspicious individual

himself will sharply orient to his surround and maintain vigilance until matters become clear […]" (339). Note the correlation between this process Goffman describes, and how it coincides with elements of Shklovsky's *defamiliarization*. Goffman identifies the human drive to fix gaps in our understanding, and Shklovsky puts forward that the role of art is to point out the gaps broad categorizations have caused us to overlook, and discover more accurate and intricate ways of looking at the world.

Goffman states that people are not interested in determining an accurate model of a situation; rather they seek to establish sufficient understanding to be able to comprehend their role in a given situation. Once that role has been decided, and the person has a functional solution, the experience becomes bracketed, and they disengage from it.

Presumably, a 'definition of the situation' is always to be found, but those who are in the situation ordinarily do not create this definition, even though their society often can be said to do so; ordinarily, all they do is assess correctly what the situation ought to be for them and then act accordingly. True, we personally negotiate aspects of all the arrangements under which we live, but often once these are negotiated, we continue on mechanically as though the matter had always been settled (Goffman 1-2).

This is exactly the kind of behavior that defamiliarization tries to destabilize, and phenomenology wants us to examine more closely. Another way to look at it is to say we are constantly mapping reality in our own minds by creating a series of fabrications that provide a close enough approximation of the world for us to be able to navigate daily life, without actually it being a fair and accurate representation. By applying phenomenology and critical thinking, we can destabilize our bracketed expectations through the use of defamiliarization, and create a more accurate and vivid understanding of reality. Frame analysis helps us realize that we are not perceiving all of reality simultaneously, and that it is possible to shift modes of perception in

order to better understand our circumstances. Barthes' denotative and connotative channels of communication help us deconstruct and assess the information we take in, and examine it for validity. The commonalities between frames – the points of overlap – become meaningful connections to us through apperception; and this forms the basis for the phenomenon Marvin Carlson calls *ghosting*.

Carlson coined the term ghosting in his book *The Haunted Stage* (2001) to describe the phenomena of apperception as it relates to a repetition or reappearance of a specific object, person, or event that the observer has first seen in another context. "Ghosting presents the identical thing [audience members] have encountered before, although now in a somewhat different context. Thus, a recognition not of similarity, as in genre, but of identity becomes a part of the reception process, with results that can complicate this process considerably" (Carlson 7).

An example of Carlson's ghosting would be a patron observing that a set piece that appeared in the first show of a company's season has been recycled and incorporated into the last show of that company's season. The recognition of the specific piece in a new context draws parallels in the viewer's mind between the original context and the current iteration. In the viewer's mind, the set piece becomes a bridge connecting the current production with the first show of the season, and that reminder provides the opportunity to create meaning through similarity or contrast. For Carlson's ghosting to function, the bridging element needs to be specific, intact, and fully present; by his definition, it would seem that a replica, representation, or photograph would fall short of meeting the criteria. Furthermore, the viewer must be aware of a prior context in which the original object appeared, though they need not have observed that earlier iteration firsthand.

Andrew Quick, who discusses ghosting in his article "The Stay of Illusion," takes its interpretation much further. Quick frequently makes allusions to haunting and ghosting when describing signs incidentally bleeding through a frame – this differs from Carlson's approach to ghosting, which emphasizes the importance of deliberate and specific references. For Quick, the sounds of a rehearsal occurring in an adjacent room, or reviewing director's notes from a production that occurred twenty years before also constitutes ghosting. Based on this experience, any encroachment on the current frame that the viewer recognizes as an outside influence qualifies as ghosting.

Quick embraces the idea of using fragmented elements as a method of creating new and fresh material that remains rich with references and history; that ghosting in art allows artists to experiment in new and unconventional directions while staying connected to established material. In this interpretation of ghosting it is not necessary for the viewer to have encountered the outside element in a prior iteration, rather the importance of the outside element is how it negotiates the frame it encroaches upon. The function of this form of ghosting is not to remind the viewer of a specific prior iteration, rather it emphasizes that the frameworks and definitions we use to compartmentalize the world are both arbitrary and illusory; that we treat them as solid barriers when they are in fact quite permeable, and that the world itself is constantly ghosting through the illusionary frames we create in order to categorize our own experiences.

Furthermore, Quick sees theatre as a machine for organizing experience: "Theatre relies on its capacity to institute limits and divisions to re-create reality. It produces a series of frames, through which everything it selects is transformed into objects that can be seen, known and categorized" (Quick 32).

Marvin Carlson aims to use ghosting as an anchoring element, creating a line that a viewer can follow between two separate and specific frameworks to show how they relate to each other. For Andrew Quick ghosting demonstrates that there is no such thing as a completely sterile and self-contained framework, that meaning from other places is constantly seeping in through the cracks, or pouring in through the windows, which adds richness and depth to our experience. Inevitably, for Quick, there is no single message in theatre, but rather a collection of sensations that the viewer sorts through and pieces together to produce meaning.

In her book *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon uses the term "fidelity" to describe how faithful an adapted work stays to its source material. The term also carries similar meaning in audio recording terminology; referring to how closely the recording resembles the original sound source. The chief difference between Carlson's ghosting and Quick's interpretation of the same phenomenon could be described as the degree of fidelity demonstrated by each. Carlson's ghosting corresponds to high fidelity because it expects the origin of the referenced material to be quite evident, and for it to refer to something very specific. Quick's ghosting can be considered low fidelity because it is not nearly as tangible, the information it provides may be incomplete or fragmented, allowing for greater ambiguity and obscuring the original reference.

Both high fidelity and low fidelity ghosting have their advantages and their faults. Carlson's interpretation is very clear and specific: the exact element must re-appear completely before a viewer who then in turn can recognize it, and he dismisses the use of variations or fragmented elements. Quick's interpretation allows for meaningful connections to be forged between completely dissimilar things in all kinds of interesting and exciting ways, but this lack of restriction means that a tenuous connection can be drawn between any two random things; this devalues the term because if the effect is ubiquitous, it becomes ordinary.

Carlson's ghosting describes a bridge across a chasm, creating a clear link between two specific frameworks. It is intended to be a straightforward referencing and recycling; it is very semiotic in nature. Quick's ghosting describes water leaking through a levee, with reality constantly applying pressure to the permeable barrier of perceptual frameworks we have created, perpetually seeping through the cracks. It acknowledges the inherent messiness of the world, and how any one thing shares a connection to any other thing no matter how much we would like to keep them in separate categories; it is a phenomenological model. However, both Carlson and Quick's ghosting can exist within the same model, because they are focusing on different aspects of the same world. Quick foregrounds the lack of containment and the imperfections in our categorical frameworks, while Carlson observes how two categorical frames can be specifically linked without compromising the integrity of either. Figuratively, Quick talks about how submarines try to keep water out, while Carlson discusses safe passage between two submarines. Both approaches deal with similar material in the same environment, but two different processes that share similar aspects. To extend the metaphor to Robert Lepage, the Quebec theatre maker punches a hole in his submarine, to make it leak faster, but in a controlled and directed manner.

Let us look at ghosting from the perspective of frame analysis. In this model, we have two or more distinct frames that have some overlapping components. For example, it is possible for one woman to simultaneously meet the conditions required to be a daughter, a wife, and a mother. Though each one of these labels can be considered a different role – or framework, if you will – they are by no means mutually exclusive, and the experience an individual has in one capacity will invariably affect their behavior in another role. This use of apperception to transfer learned skills and behavior from one framework to another is a manifestation of ghosting.

The places where frameworks overlap are the places where ghosting occurs; it is the act of one frame intruding on another. It is possible for these frames to be equally tangible, for one to take precedence by being foregrounded over the other, or for one to crossfade into the foreground while the other retreats. All of these effects are used extensively in the cinematography of film, where the frame of every scene is planned out meticulously and then subjected to an editing process that composes them into a narrative.

From his early work onwards, Lepage has used framing and ghosting like no other theatre maker. Both Carlson's and Quick's notions of ghosting are present in the opening scene of Lepage & Brassard's *Polygraph* (1988), in which two actors, one in a lecture theatre, discussing the rise and fall of the Berlin Wall, and the other at a coroner's inquest giving a report on a murdered woman, have their interspersed monologues dovetail in a manner that demonstrates the parallels between the two completely different events. Carlson's ghosting comes from the very specific referencing of the Berlin Wall and the social psychology that influenced Berlin during that period. It is a reference to a very specific framework of time and place and expects that the audience has some prior understanding of the situation, bearing in mind the production premiered only a year before the Wall came down in 1989. Viewed from the present day, with the benefit of hindsight, the ghosting of that very same scene spirals in even more complex ways. Staying with the original production, Quick's ghosting manifests through the syncopation of the two scenes that highlights the parallels between how the Berlin Wall cut "right through the heart […] of the city" (Lepage & Brassard 297), and the victim being stabbed in the heart. This ghosting thins the barriers between the two scenes, appositioning the two frameworks, and blurring the lines between them. Carlson's ghosting maintains the separation between frameworks – the distance between the lecturer and the Berlin he is lecturing about, the

separation between the morgue and the crime scene – while letting one framework nest within another through very specific and direct references.

By discussing how the Berlin Wall was constructed in 1961 in response to a mass exodus of Germans from East Berlin to West Berlin, the first scene depicts how filters permit the permeation of boundaries. In order to prevent this East to West migration, the Russians built a physical barrier that was a manifestation of the ideological border that marked the two opposing spheres of influence that manifested at the height of the Cold War. In other words, by crossing the wall, you moved into a new ideological frame. The Wall was also built to allow Westerners to pass back and forth across the barrier in a controlled manner, while preventing Easterners from leaving. Lepage draws a parallel here to the chambers of the heart, bisected by the septum, allowing oxygenated blood to pass through, while restricting de-oxygenated blood. Furthermore, the overlapping scene — that takes place in the morgue — describes the victim's cause of death as a stab wound to the heart that ruptured the septum. Taken into the context of frames, this juxtaposition demonstrates how a frame becomes unstable and unviable when its filters are broken through. Given that the development of the play coincides with the early signs of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, there are certainly topical parallels foreshadowing the real world fall of Russian Communism. The murder weapon breeching the victim's septum and ending her life corresponds to the Berlin Wall being torn down and the framework of Communist ideology collapsing as its citizens embraced the freedom of the Iron Curtain being torn away.

Polygraph is itself a play about frameworks, fabrications, and the creation of meaning. The central plot point of the play revolves around Francois, an actor and waiter, who took a polygraph test in order to be eliminated as a suspect in the murder of his friend Marie-Claude. In

the play, David, the polygraph operator, discloses how submitting to a lie-detector test makes a person feel vulnerable:

> The fear and mystique which surrounds the polygraph machine makes it a useful pressure tactic in obtaining a confession. But such strategies, I believe should be used only with great care and compassion. Sometimes the psychological response we trigger is so violent as to effect a lasting disorder in the mind of a totally innocent suspect (*Polygraph* 313).

Although the polygraph indicates Francois is innocent of the murder, the police lie to him in order to gauge his response to the accusation. Though they are satisfied with Francois' startled and vehement denial, the police never disclose the actual results of the polygraph to him; as a result, Francois begins to doubt his own memory of events. He tries to resolve the paradox between his memory and the false polygraph results, but it just keeps eating away at him. Finally, in turmoil, Francois throws himself in front of a subway train to put his doubts to rest.

Polygraph explores how we know what is true, and what makes us find a lie convincing. It shows the audience a series of simultaneous and overlapping frames, transitioning back and forth between different settings using dialogue that ties the two locations together with a single theme. Tracking that theme is what allows the audience to follow the jump cuts between juxtaposed scenes, and the use of parallel meaning across different communication channels is highly engaging and stimulating — like having a string of epiphanies one after another. In the circumstance of the first scene, neither character is aware of the other's presence or dialogue, and neither character makes a direct reference to the other local, but because there are themes common to both pieces of text, the audience is able to splice together the thematic line, and follow it as one ongoing stream of consciousness. The audience is getting a single thematic story by amalgamating data from two syncopated viewpoints. This is an example of Carlson's

ghosting, in that the intention of the scene is to bridge together the dialogue; this interaction is neither subtle nor accidental, rather it is very specific and intentional.

Carlson's ghosting manifests even more strongly in Lepage's *Lipsynch* (2007), where the audience follows the story of several characters by foregrounding one ensemble member at a time. *Lipsynch* is not so much one play with several scenes, rather it is more of a series of short plays interspersed with each other. Each of the actors has a featured character who is the chief protagonist for their section of the play, but who also appears as a supporting character during another featured character's scene. This creates an ongoing loop of connections between the characters and the scenes, as the audience recognizes the reoccurrence of a major character in a background role, and background characters being moved to the forefront. This is a prime example of a phenomenological chain of experience, wherein the viewer recognizes a new phenomenon that relates to a prior experience, and draws on the meaning from that prior experience to form meaning in the current situation. The phenomenological chain of experience employs apperception, "the process of understanding something perceived in terms of previous experience" (Miriam-Webster), to link together a number of separate encounters with similar phenomena in order to construct a more layered and meaningful impression of that category of phenomenon. In theatrical terms, this means that the more we see of a character or theme in a production, the more we recognise that character or theme as being significant. Lepage takes advantage of apperception in *Lipsynch* by recycling all the major characters into the minor roles in a different major character's story arc, creating layers of nuance and intrigue for the audience to recognize and connect together. In this manner, Lepage creates productions that are collections of frames, and engages his audience with clever ghostings that connect and transition between them.

Lepage's work is well renowned for its incredible transformations, many of which are not physical; rather they are phantasmagorical. Objects, settings, and people do not necessarily physically transform in his plays; instead, the frame shifts to change their appearance. Lepage's transformations rely upon manipulating the frames he has placed around a subject. In this manner, Lepage is able to subtly persuade his audience to re-categorize the transforming subject; removing one label and applying another by changing the hierarchy of frames that the subject is presented within. This kind of multiplicity of representation using a single object has been a trademark of Lepage's work. Lepage's *Vinci* (1986) made extensive use of a tape measure, bending its pliant metal tape into a "U" to become the slide of a trombone, or bending it into a triangle to represent the Great Pyramid of Giza.

In an episode of CBC Radio's *The Arts Tonight* titled "Robert Lepage on His New Play Needles and Opium," Lepage explains that he doesn't start with the intent of telling a particular story. He begins with an object, which the REPERE method refers to as a reference point. "I don't have a specific story, and the guidelines of what the story will be are these different coincidences... and I usually let them — I allow them- into the show". Rather than deciding on a theme and developing it, Lepage engages with objects on a playful and personal level, and lets the overall theme emerge from those interactions. It is as though he has a box of clues, and uses them in any way he sees fit to write a mystery.

In *Far Side of the Moon* (2000), this playful re-categorization is the means by which the window in a front-loading washing machine comes to represent the porthole in the side of the Apollo space capsule, and also serves as the fishbowl for a projection of a goldfish. This production also plays with the phenomenological aspect of facing – that you can only observe things from one side at a time – by placing a camera facing the interior of the washing machine

window. When the performer turns his back to the audience to reach into the side-loading washing machine, the camera captures his face and arms retrieving his laundry, and projects that image onto the same wall he's reaching through. This creates a vivid dynamic, where you can see the performer reaching into the hole in the wall, but the projection on the wall shows an enlarged version of him reaching towards you.

 Lepage's extensive use of projections is easily understood once you recognize a projection as an intangible framework overlaid on a physical structure. The projection must be projected onto something; and in so doing, two frameworks occupy the same space simultaneously, providing the opportunity for either one to be foregrounded. Usually, the physical structure has been constructed with the projection in mind, meaning that any doors and windows in the set are positioned for optimum projection angles, and the projections are designed and calibrated to map precisely onto the physical set.

This projection mapping is used exceptionally well in *Needles and Opium* (2013), where the set – three planes of a 10 foot cube set at an angle and on a horizontally rotating axis – acts as a screen for three projectors, creating an environment that shifts physically with the rotation, and visually with changes in the projected images. Here we have two distinct frameworks operating as separate connotative channels that operate in sync in order to reinforce each other. This is a prime example of frame manipulation; both the cube and the projections shift, moving the performers radically through space and time. In spite of this constant jumping from local to local, the audience can follow the action of the play very easily, because the performers ghost through from scene to scene, providing the audience with a consistent point of reference. The background can be as disjointed or unstable as Lepage wants, because the actor provides an anchor for the audience, and acts as the bridging element between scenes.

Lepage's production of *The Rake's Progress* (2007) uses ghosting to draw parallels between the Stravinsky's homonymous opera and several 1950's Hollywood movies. While the ghosting is quite fragmented, it also references very specific films. In this way Lepage rides the line between Quick and Carlson, demonstrating that ghosting exists on a spectrum rather than dealing in absolutes.

In *The Nightingale* (2009) Lepage uses multiple physical representations to depict the same cast of characters: there are small scale puppets for the first scene, larger scale set of puppets for the second scene, and a cast of live performers in the third scene. The characters are easy to keep track of, as the puppets and their live performer counterpart maintain continuity of character with similar face-paint and costumes. In effect, the audience is watching three different frameworks lined up one after another, but using a unity of style to connect all three very precisely in order to represent a single story.

As *The Nightingale* demonstrates, ghosting can make use of the audience's apperception to create more believable symbols and to quickly establish frameworks. Once the audience has learned to use a particular framework, ghosting provides opportunities for implementing parallels and metaphors that can crack open and defamiliarize the audience's preconceived notions about a topic. Ghosting allows parallel perspectives to be presented to an audience, showing different phenomenological viewpoints of the same event, and can be used to create a sense of awe when a heretofore categorized object is called into question, and gets relabeled as something quite different. We interpret recategorization as the functional equivalent of physical transformation, so a process which causes us to relabel something has (to our minds) effectively moving it from one category into another. To us, it ceases to be what it was, and transforms into something new.

Ghosting is still a form of representation, but adds another layer through intertextuality. Its use is a double-entendre, adding meaning not only as an element within a singular frame, but also by referencing elements from outside that frame. Ghosting forms a connection between the current context and an external context by drawing a parallel between them. While Marvin Carlson may have coined the term to specifically refer to the recycling or referencing of out-of-frame elements on stage, the underlying function it is used to describe — that of connecting the current frame to another outside reference — is a fundamental element of semiotics. Both the isolation and interconnectedness of signs are powerful contributors to meaning.

> The verbal symbol of "cat" is a group of black marks on a page representing a sequence of noises representing an animal that says meow. Symbols so understood may here be called *signs*, verbal units which, conventionally and arbitrarily, stand for and point to things outside the place where they occur. When we are trying to grasp the context of words, however, the word "cat" is an element of a larger body of meaning. It is not primarily a symbol "of" anything, for in this aspect it does not represent, but connects. (Frye 73).

In order to better differentiate between Carlson's and Quick's notions of ghosting, let's make use of the term "*permeation*" — which incorporates both the aspects of pervasiveness and penetration that Quick's interpretation encompasses. Permeation aptly describes the encroachment on the frame Quick remarks on, and is distinctly different from Carlson's ghosting, which occurs when a specific reference is made within the frame to a source outside of that frame.

Once that distinction is made between ghosting and permeation, it becomes apparent that the purpose of frames is in fact to reduce permeation. A frame can be built to insulate against unwanted permeations — though permeations come in an infinite array of shapes, sizes and

types, so it is practically impossible to insulate against them all. Frames act as a tool for creating focus, allowing us to block out non-specific information in order to more clearly concentrate on a particular element. Frames act as filters, helping to keep out extraneous data or information that could distract us or obscure the very thing we are trying to observe. For example, the modern black box theatre is designed to insulate against a variety of permeations: no windows to let in outside light, black curtains to conceal the backstage area; soundproofing in the walls and floor to reduce outside noise; light locks and sound locks to prevent light and sound from spilling onto the stage.

Another example comes from shortwave radio operation. The signal-to-noise ratio describes how loud a transmitted signal is in relation to the background static. Squelch is a circuit that supresses noise below a set volume threshold, but allows signal with a volume above that threshold to pass through. In this manner, squelch acts as a filter to eliminate radio static and interference, and permits a clearer signal to be received. The principles of ghosting, permeation, and framing graft on to this model quite efficiently; permeation is the noise, framing is the squelch, and ghosting is the transmitted signal.

The paragon theatrical text for ghosting is most certainly *Hamlet*. The title character arranging for the play-within-the-play to mirror the circumstances of his father's death is a ghosting disguised as a permeation. Hamlet intends to provoke emotions and memories of his Father's assassination in a way that will appear coincidental to Claudius. Thus Hamlet is permeating into the frame of the play within the play, to create a ghosting of the murder of his father, which Claudius will think is a coincidental permeation. If this doesn't seem complex enough, remember that Hamlet is prompted to action through the intervention of his father's ghost; who, being dead, exists outside of the frame of the living. This means that the Ghost

influenced Hamlet through permeation, Hamlet then permeated the players by asking them to change their performance, the players unknowingly ghost a retelling of Hamlet's father's murder to Claudius, and Claudius thinks it an unnerving coincidence (permeation) that the play mirrors him killing his brother. To top it all off, Claudius kills his brother before the action of the play, which means that the Ghost revealing the murder to Hamlet is also literally a ghosting.

The Wooster Group production of *House/Lights* (1997) mentioned in Quick's "The Stay of Illusion" included a scene with a number of dancers looking at the ceiling and dancing erratically around the stage. They were in fact watching a television monitor playing the sexploitation film *Olga's House of Shame* (1964) using specific movements that were codified so that the dancers were using the films' close-ups, long shots, and edits as stage directions, and the film itself as a dance score. In spite of the fact that the audience was unable to see the monitor, this was not a permeation; the performance was using the film as a direct reference, but it was mediated so heavily that it was impossible for the audience to recognize the source. This would better be described as extremely low-fidelity ghosting used to generate new material.

It is quite possible for a permeation of sufficient force to override a frame, particularly if that frame has not been designed to insulate against that particular permeation. In theatre, there is always a degree of permeation from the outside world (both the world outside of the play, and the world outside of the theatre… frames within frames.); however, when an unmediated permutation encroaches on a performance in a moment that synchs well with that performance (for instance real police sirens being heard moving past a theatre just as an actor delivers a scripted line "Help! Police!"), it creates a tremendous sense of resonance for the observing audience. Imagine an outdoor production of *King Lear* that has a thunderstorm brewing above it

as Lear steps on to the heath and rages for the storm to "smite flat the thick rotundity o' the world!" (Act 3, Scene 2).

The importance or degree of meaning to which a signal is received by an observer can be referred to as resonance. This pertains both to how moved an observer is by the content of a signal, but also the increase in perceived meaning when more than one channel of communication corroborates the same message. Signals that agree with our pre-existing beliefs carry a high degree of resonance, as do multiple signals from what we consider reliable sources that agree on the same fact. Unfortunately, most people feel greater resonance from unsupported data that agree with their worldview than they do from a multitude of evidence provided by experts with a theory dissonant to their worldview.

A more concise way of differentiating ghosting from permeation is to say that ghosting happens when something from outside of the frame is invited into the frame, and permeation occurs when something from outside of the frame makes an uninvited incursion through the frame — or pre-existed in the space that the frame is trying to cordon off. Figuratively, ghosting is bringing an invited guest into your home, while permeation is having a party crasher wander in. That party crasher may ruin your party, or he may wind up being the best thing that could have happened to it.

The distinction between ghosting and permeation is important, as it allows for a greater variety and complexity of interactions with the frame, and demonstrates both are capable of happening simultaneously within the same event. For example, Lepage's production of *The Rake's Progress* very specifically ghosts imagery from the film *Giant* (1956), featuring James Dean. In so doing, it opens the door for the audience to recall James Dean's iconic rebelliousness

and impulsive behavior, which thematically parallels the opera's main character Tom Rakewell. This encroachment of James Dean is in fact a permeation; the ghosting Lepage uses never specifically referenced James Dean, and only people who have seen the movie *Giant* would make the connection. In this manner, Lepage uses a ghosting to open a door in the frame that a permeation could pass through.

This example from *The Rake's Progress* is actually an inversion of Lepage's usual model, in which he looks for permeation that resonates between two frames — where the same person, motion, object, or event appears in two different situations — and uses that convergence as a transition between the two frames. He uses editing and frame manipulation to strengthen the connection, layering two or more scenes over top of each other, moving back and forth between them, using the commonalities as reference points to fade one world in and the other out. He seeks out the common permeations in both frames and turns them into references to the other framework — in other words, he takes permeations and makes them into ghostings. Lepage discusses this in his radio interview with *The Arts Tonight:* Robert Lepage on His New Play Needles and Opium:

> As you go on, you discover all these different coincidences, and you use them, because you know that they're just waiting for you to discover them and to have their place. And I know; I don't want to sound like a crackpot or a crazy guy, but I believe that the work has a life of its own. It has something to say on its own, and you have to have the humility to step away and let it grow, and let it say what it has to say.

Later in the same interview, Lepage likens this process to an Inuit sculpture technique, where the sculptor finds a piece of stone and waits until the stone shows him a hint of what it contains. The sculptor does a bit of carving, then leaves the stone alone for six months. The

sculptor continues this cycle of waiting, discovering, carving, and waiting, until one day the shape of an animal emerges from the stone. By so doing, Lepage says the sculptor doesn't impose his vision on the stone, rather he just helps the stone release the animal it contained.

In *The Rake's Progress* (2007), Lepage does stretch this idea of letting the shape emerge from the stone. By displacing Stravinsky's opera from 18th century London to 1950's Hollywood, he superimposes a number of iconic archetypes of a young scoundrel who finds sudden wealth and fame at the expense of his morals. Here Lepage is using ghosting to illuminate a pervasive, reoccurring archetype that permeated not only the films of Hollywood from the 1950's, but also pertained to the real lives of the actors playing those roles.

Chapter 2: *The Rake's Progress:* Adaptation as Ghosting

By examining the *mise-en-scène* of Robert Lepage's 2007 production of Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* (1951) this chapter addresses the concepts of ghosting and permeation as they relate to the act of creating new adaptations from existing works.

As was established in the previous chapter, ghosting is the process by which something from outside of the current frame is referenced in order to invite it into the frame. The various forms of adaptation (which will be discussed later in this chapter) all operate on a foundation of taking an existing intellectual property and building a new frame around it. This means an adapted work is an entirely new construct that has been built to not only incorporate old material, but to feature previously used elements in new and interesting ways. This means that ghosting is the underlying principle of adaptation; to recycle an idea and present it in a new context. Furthermore, adaptation is always coloured by permeation, as the creator of the adaptation will be drawing on their own contemporary experience in order to construct the new frame. Thus, different adaptations of the same work are each a product of the time, place, and culture in which they were created; looking at how different eras try to tell the same story offers a glimpse of the ideologies present in those periods and locales. That is to say, the current fashion will influence the shape of the frame created around more traditional aspects of the adaptation.

Robert Lepage's *The Rake's Progress* (2007) incorporated staggering modular scenery designed by Carl Fillion, iconic costuming designed by François Barbeau, and haunting lighting by Etienne Boucher. Though rich in visual imagery and elaborate stage effects, the coproduction between Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie (Brussels, Belgium), Opéra de Lyon (France), the San Francisco Opera (US), the Royal Opera House (London, UK), and Teatro Real (Madrid, Spain) received mixed reviews from opera critics, particularly in London and San Francisco. The reason

for this criticism chiefly had to do with Lepage's reimagining of the opera's traditional setting, and an emphasis on visual effects over philosophical depth. Peter Conrad of the London *Observer* said: "is this 'hyper theatre', I wonder, or just theatrical hype, diverting the eye while defrauding the mind?" Rupert Christiansen of *The Telegraph* was less than impressed, saying:

> Picking up on these allusions may be fun for film buffs, but the atmosphere they collectively evoke just doesn't play off the neo-classicism of the score and text in any illuminating or interesting way. Nothing Lepage does is ever vulgar or arrogant, but there's something unusually timid and uninventive about this show.

Rather than the conventional interpretation that places the action of *The Rake's Progress* in 18th century England, Lepage transposed the setting into a fictionalized version of 1950's America and filled it with imagery from major Hollywood films of that era. This radical shift in setting, combined with substantial use of video projection onstage, creates a hybrid of film and theatre. Lepage's direction – though inspired by the music – had little influence on the singing or score; his primary focus was manipulating the visual elements on stage. Lepage's *mise-en-scène* has moved beyond the traditional scope of the score and libretto so extensively, he has not staged *The Rake's Progress* so much as he has created a new adaptation of Igor Stravinsky's opera, using the *mise-en-scène* as his medium.

In his 2009 book: *Robert Lepage*, Aleksandar Dunđerović states: "In the course of the 20th century, the *mise-en-scène* became redefined as an independent artistic element, a vehicle of theatricality rather than simply an extension of the text. The director became author of the *mise-en-scène*, and the *mise-en-scène* a separate artistic expression from the written text" (26). While the *mise-en-scène* is undeniably tied to its source text, the ways it can be moulded are countless, affording the director room to imbue it with layered meaning using their own distinctive style.

For his production of *The Rake's Progress*, Lepage has taken Stravinsky's music as a leaping off point and has crafted a *mise-en-scène* that is a complex collage of images and themes that have been stitched together to form a phantasmagorical landscape that shifts in phase with the music. In order to explore how Lepage responded to Stravinsky, it is important to understand the story behind *The Rake's Progress.*

Late in the year 1946, the Art Institute of Chicago put on an exhibit titled *Masterpieces of English Painting* which featured a series of eight sequential paintings by William Hogarth.

> The series, called *A Rake's Progress* [1732-33], told the story of a young man who abandons his pregnant fiancée, squanders his inheritance on high living, gambling, and prostitution, marries a rich old woman, and ends up first in debtor's prison, and then in Bedlam (Bethlehem Hospital), London's famous mental asylum. (Woodall)

Stravinsky saw the exhibit while visiting Chicago and decided to write an opera based on Hogarth's *Rake*. Noted author Aldous Huxley was a neighbour of Stravinsky's in Los Angeles. "In the late 1940s and the 1950s they met weekly, for lunch at the Town and Country Market and in each other's homes for evenings of food, conversation, and music" (Outhier 10). It was Huxley who suggested the poet W.H. Alden as a librettist. Alden was recruited and brought Chester Kallman to the project. Working as co-librettists, the pair incorporated several new elements into Hogarth's original progression. Hogarth's old woman became Baba the Turk, a bearded lady from a circus sideshow. Tom Rakewell's poor impulse control became embodied in the devilish Nick Shadow, who grants Tom three wishes. Each wish leaves Tom feeling less fulfilled, allowing Nick Shadow to lead him further down the path of temptation, culminating in a graveyard card game for Tom's soul. These deviations were made to heighten the story and give it a more operatic tone.

Stravinsky's musical score is eclectic, though he consistently emulates a Baroque period opera. His early career generated the ground-breaking ballet *The Rite of Spring* (1913), with discordant oppositional melodies that pushed the orchestra's limits. It is well documented how the first performance, on 29 May 1913 in Paris started a riot in the brand new Théâtre des Champs-Élysées (Kelly). As he became more seasoned, Stravinsky pioneered neoclassicism, revisiting 18th century works for inspiration and drawing extensively from the Baroque period for his new compositions. *The Rake's Progress* was written at the end of Stravinsky's neoclassical period and demonstrates his mastery of the form.

> The overture of the opera recalls Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, the opening scene echoes Mozart's *Cosi fan tutte*, and the dazzling cabaletta at the end of the act is an homage to "Sempre libera" from Verdi's *La Traviata*. Here Stravinsky demonstrated his genius for speaking through the mannerisms of other composers while always sounding like himself (Schiff 137).

Within this baroque structure, Stravinsky concealed a great deal of contemporary musical experimentation, perhaps born out of a desire to compose music for the new medium of television. It was this eclectic quality of the music that drew Lepage's attention.

> There are places in the opera, where you'll hear a Mozart set of bars followed by something that sounds out of the *Taxi Driver* soundtrack. This kind of jazzy, bluesy thing that comes out in the last scene, in the asylum […] it's total 1950-ish New York experimental, jazz and blues. It's quite amazing. If the harpsichord and if some of these instruments didn't remind you that you were hearing a Baroque pastiche, you would think that you are in some kind of 1950's New York club (Lepage 2007).

Though enticed by the score, it was Stravinsky's fascination with Hollywood that really caught Lepage's attention. Lepage saw a connection between the themes in *The Rake's Progress* and the life Stravinsky was leading. He discusses this connection in an interview with Adam Wasserman of *Opera News* magazine:

> [Stravinsky] wrote [*The Rake's Progress*] in the days when he was living in LA, and he was fascinated by the invention of television. He really fancied the idea of writing an opera for television, because he thought TV was going to save the world. […] So we've tried to take that reality and [use it] to figure out what kind of life he was leading in L.A. and Hollywood during the early television years. [...] What if *Rake's Progress* — which was written more or less in that time — was about that? About Hollywood, and about television? (Lepage 2007).

This question formed the foundation of Lepage's new production and shaped the elaborate *mise-en-scène* radically enough that his production could be considered an adaptation into a new medium. An examination of the multi-faceted nature of adaptation will clarify why this is the case.

In her book *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon states that adaptation refers to both "the process and the product" (7) and thus is difficult to define concisely. She uses three intermingling approaches to describe adaptation as a phenomenon:

First, adaptation is an "extensive transposition" (Hutcheon 7) of an existing work and specifically references itself (through the use of surtitles or some variety of author's notes) as being based on a source work. That transposition may be done in several ways. It could be a new set of given circumstances, as in the film *O Brother, Where Art Thou* (2000), where Homer's *Odyssey* is transposed into the depression-era Southern Unites States. It could be watching an old story from a new perspective, like in Tom Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are*

Dead (1966) where he approaches Shakespeare's *Hamlet* from the viewpoint of two minor

characters re-living events in the afterlife. A transposition could be as fundamental as moving a

story into a new medium, like when the 1967 movie *The Producers* was adapted into *The*

Producers musical in 2001, and then the musical was made into *The Producers* (2005) movie;

with each adaptation shifting its focus with each new iteration.

Second, "the act of adaptation always involves (re-)interpretation and (re-)creation"

(Hutcheon 8). Referred to as *salvaging* (or in its negative connotation: *appropriating*), the

adapter looks for source materials that they can interpret and use as the foundation for their own

creative work. Disney's animated feature *The Lion King* (1994) is an example of such salvaging;

many of its elements are based on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and the biblical story of Moses, while

making no direct reference to either source. Julie Taymor's musical adaptation of the movie goes

one step further, mirroring elements of traditional African culture, but not clarifying that the

tribal practices in *The Lion King* (1997) are unauthentic fictionalizations of a singular and

blended African culture created solely for the musical.

Third, "adaptation is a form of […] extended intertextual engagement with the adapted

work" (8). This pertains to source material that has already had its scope expanded by a body of

adapted work, so any new iteration is compared to the various incarnations that already exist.

For example, two fast-paced, pseudo-period Sherlock Holmes feature-length films have

been released since 2009, the BBC has aired three seasons of their *Sherlock Holmes* (2010)

television program, set in modern London; and CBS has announced a sixth season of *Elementary*

(2012), a crime drama set in modern day New York, featuring contemporary versions of the

characters from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's writings. Comparing any two of these adaptations will

reveal several common points of reference and divergences, and each of these four iterations will also show some resemblances to the preceding century of books, plays, films, comics, video games, and radio and television programs that have directly referenced the greatest detective. This "repetition with variation" (Hutcheon 8) gives the viewer a sense of pleasure – the recognition of something familiar, but with new flavour.

Lepage's *The Rake's Progress* fits all three of Hutcheon's criteria. Lepage has transposed Stravinsky's opera, taking it away from 18th century Britain and placing it in an iconic 1950's America. "The minute the curtain rises — on a vast, flat Texas landscape with a cinemascope screen and large, bobbing oil pump — it's clear that we're nowhere near the bustling streets and parlors of William Hogarth's 18th century London" (Hurwitt). Lepage set out to depict *The Rake's Progress* against a backdrop of an iconic Holywood-esque 1950's America. In a review for the San Francisco Cornicle, Robert Hurwitt describes the remarkable relocation of the piece:

> By the end of the opera, Lepage and his crew of designers have transported the action
> from the Texas plains to a studio backlot, the highways of Los Angeles, the ruins of a
> derelict Las Vegas casino and Hollywood […] swimming pools (Hurwitt).

The title, music, and lyrics may remain the same, but the visual elements Lepage introduced to the production are a distinctive shift from a primarily musical narrative to a chiefly visual medium. Lepage interpreted the opera's score and paired it with Stravinsky's fascination with Hollywood, using them as a point of departure for creating the production's *mise-en-scène*. He used the score as a foundation to inspire the visual elements, his interest did not lie in refining how the opera would sound, rather his focus was on re-conceiving how it would look. Though Lepage finds opera compelling for its heightened emotion and theatricality, he strives to bring that larger than live aspect to the *mise-en-scène*. He states:

In opera, it's so fantastic because you walk in and the music contains all the subtext, all the emotional motivations of the piece, the coup de theatre, the psychology, the frictions between what it is that the character is saying and what it is that he is actually thinking of — it's all in the music. So you just listen to the music that is there, and you serve the music, or you use the music to say even more complex ideas (Lepage 2007).

Dundjerović, in his book *Robert Lepage* (2009), expands on how Lepage approaches a new piece:

His creative process starts from intuition, and through free associations allows the group of collaborators to look for, and make, poetic connections. Lepage discovered his creative context in collective performance, working simultaneously as an actor and director and devising material by looking into and borrowing from different cultures, media and art forms to express his own position (25).

Drawing upon the television he watched as a child, and remembering reruns of Hollywood films from the 1950's, Lepage sourced iconic images of America and found ways to emulate them on stage. In the first Act, he relocated the Truelove family estate from rural 1730 England to the Texas oilfields from the movie *Giant* (1956) directed by George Stevens. The second Act exchanged the dull exterior of Tom Rakewell's London home for a red carpet premier outside the Hollywood theatre straight out of the opening sequence from *Singin' in the Rain*, directed in 1952 by Stanley Donen). The newlyweds' fight at the top of Act III is relocated from what traditionally would be Tom's apartment to the private outdoor swimming pool from Billy Wilder's 1950 *Sunset Boulevard*.

In the process of researching Stravinsky's opera, Lepage engaged in an intertextual study of the Rake. He looked back to the works of Hogarth and observed that while Stravinsky mostly followed the progression of the paintings, many of the details from the images were omitted or changed to suit a more operatic aesthetic: "With Hogarth it was all about details — you could

spend complete days just looking at the details of these engravings. But Stravinsky transforms the old lady that Rakewell marries into Baba the Turk. Stravinsky was very much into his own era, into modern-day America" (Lepage 2007).

While previous productions of *The Rake's Progress* had drawn visual inspiration from the aesthetic elements of Hogarth's paintings and prints, Lepage decided to move in a different direction. He noted the strong moral lessons Hogarth was trying to articulate, and realized that it paralleled the stereotypes and values depicted in American post-war movies (Lepage 2007). The theme of "the proper way to live one's life" provided a common thread that solidified how relevant the 1950's filmic iconography was to Hogarth's artwork as well as Stravinsky's opera.

Traditionally, adaptations that cross into a new medium (i.e., a novel adapted into a film) have been judged based on their proximity to the source text. Hutcheon refers to this quality of replication as fidelity and responds that adaptations are self-sustaining works of art in their own right (Hutcheon 6). "Adaptation is repetition, but without replication" (7). While fidelity to the source text is one of the criteria by which an adaptation might be evaluated, because "recognition and remembrance are part of the pleasure (and risk) of experiencing an adaptation; so too is change" (Hutcheon 4). Variety not only provides the viewer with a new (and hopefully pleasurable) experience with familiar material, it also acts as a cultural marker. The ways in which an adaptation strays from the source material can offer insight into the time in which the adaptation was developed. Comparing adaptations to their source material in order to observe their deviation has the potential to add significant layers of meaning.

Like a geological stratum, an adaptation is indicative of the time and place that produced it. By using the source work as a baseline reading, it becomes possible to inductively reason the

rationale behind the variance in the adaptation, and recognise the artist's meaning within the context of the time and place they were writing from. Viewed from this perspective, adaptations are not simply a response to the source text; contained within them is the artist's commentary on their own society. By observing the elements Stravinsky selected from Hogarth, Lepage made note of the elements of the opera that did not stem from the paintings, and was able to identify their origins within the broader cultural context in which the opera was written:

> There is something about Stravinsky's music that is very televisual and it makes perfect sense because these guys who wrote the scores to these wacky TV shows [such as *Bewitched*, *Batman*, and *Gilligan's Island,* which] were very influenced by this wave of East European [immigrants]. Stravinsky was in Hollywood at the end of the Forties and believed that television was going to be the democratic way of expressing radical new ideas, just as [in *The Rake's Progress*] Tom Rakewell believes that the magical bread machine is going to feed the world (Rees).

 This form of comparative dramaturgy illuminates valuable lines of inquiry. Adaptations are eminently dependent on context. Examining how an artist choses to interact with a source text reveals something about what is considered pertinent to the time and place in which the adaptation is developed. The adapting artist signals the presence of a cultural trend through his divergence from the source material. The adaptation provides one clear snapshot in a progression, with the source text acting as a basis for comparison. This creates a record of cultural shifts that can be identified by their contrast against the original source work. Taking this longitudinal view into consideration, *absolute* fidelity to a source becomes less imperative; though an adaptation must contain a certain degree of fidelity to be recognised as a derivation of the work it is based on.

Most theories of adaptation assume […] that the story is the common denominator, the core of what is transposed across different media and genres, each of which deals with that story in formally different ways and […] through different modes of engagement – narrating, performing, or interacting (Hutcheon 10).

Adaptations in different mediums emphasize different elements of the source material. Hutcheon explains that the way a story is presented uses a combination of expositive, exhibitive, and interactive methods to engage its audience (22-27). Expositive methods tell the story through written (or aural) text that invokes the scene in the reader's imagination – this is the chief method used in novels, poems, radio, and by storytellers. Exhibitive methods present the story demonstratively, through specific images, sounds, or performances intended for the viewer to observe – naturalistic painting, photography, music, film, television, and theatre predominantly make use of this method. Interactive methods ask the viewer to engage with the work through problem solving, or by taking action that impacts their perception of the story – for example: pulling a tab in a pop-up book, completing quests in a video game, or including a volunteer from the audience in a live performance.

The primary method of audience engagement changes when a text is adapted into a new medium. When a novel is adapted to film, the story changes from a primarily expositive method to a primarily visual method. Hogarth's *A Rake's Progress* is primarily visual, but it also engages the viewer interactively by letting them infer the narrative by observing the series of paintings in sequence; like the different panels of a comic strip. Furthermore, Hogarth invited further interaction by placing a plethora of codified details in each painting (the woman handing off Tom's watch to an accomplice in *The Brothel*; the ominous smoke in *The Gambling House* implying the building has caught fire), waiting for the keen viewer to spot them and interpret their alluded meaning.

Stravinsky's adaptation of Hogarth's *Rake* was focused primarily on the exhibitive method. The musical score and the operatic voice used as an instrument are a powerful combination, and Stravinsky wields them to their greatest effect in the third act. Composer and conductor Thomas Adès describes preparing for the 2008 staging of Lepage's *Rake's Progress* in London: "It has been like peeling a flower: you realise how many layers there are in it. The heart of the piece, the bits that are the most open emotionally, are the final couple of scenes, when Tom — the Rake — is in Bedlam. That's like the inside of the flower, and all the rest of the piece is leading towards it, layer by layer" (Adès). Furthermore, the expository method is evident in the libretto – where characters narratively declare their every thought, feeling, and intention. This becomes a little trite in the second act (by nature of Tom's persistent complaints of boredom) but recovers admirably for the third act – first in Tom's redemption when he gambles for his soul and realizes how much Anne means to him – and again when Anne visits Tom in Bedlam. Prompted by Tom's delusion, the two share a final fleeting moment together as the divine Venus and her lover Adonis.

Due to the iconic nature of his Hollywood-based *mise-en-scène*, Lepage's adaptation of Stravinsky's *Rake* is primarily visual. The production has a filmic quality that stems not just from the scenic references to 1950's movies, but also in the use of wide screen projection that is reminiscent of cinemascope, and the implementation of scene changes and stage effects that emulate wipes, fades, and camera panning. In the transition from the Truelove Estate to Mother Gooses' brothel, a 10' swath of the downstage floor hinges up in a manner that resembles a camera wipe, revealing an old west saloon, complete with a bar and mirror that run almost the entire width of the stage.

Figure 2.1a-2.1d. Clockwise from top left: Nick Shadow raises his arms, motioning for the floor to hinge up, transforming into a movie set of a saloon bar. The Rake's Progress *(2008).*
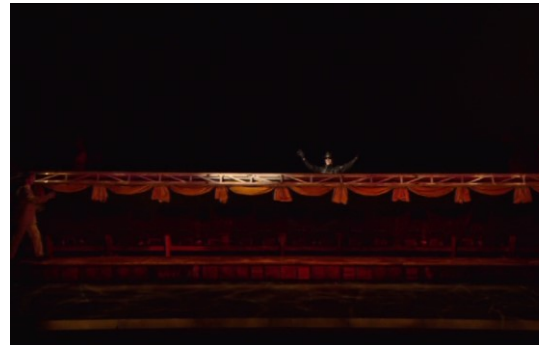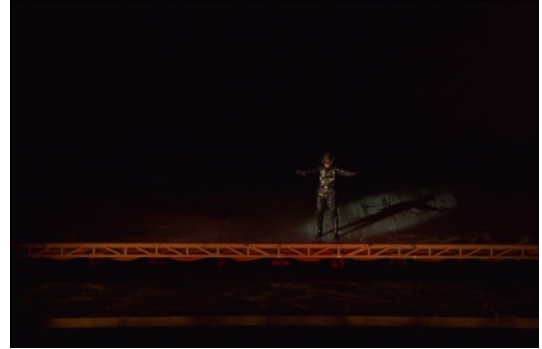
After the chorus scene, the bar wall folds down again (another wipe) to reveal Mother Gooses' boudoir. Later, Anne Truelove is driving her little red convertible to the city to find Tom Rakewell. The convertible is on castors, and is sitting on a pivot point coming up from the floor. Blurred images of city streets at night are projected behind the car, creating an illusion of movement, which is enhanced by the car turning slightly on its pivot, and a concealed puppeteer waving the back of her scarf as though it was billowing in the wind (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2: Anne Truelove driving to the city to find Tom Rakewell. The Rake's Progress (2008*).*

After Anne finds Tom, and he turns her away so that he may rejoin his new wife, Anne gets back into her car (which is stationary because of the pivot) and everything else in the scene moves offstage to the stage left wing simultaneously, creating the illusion that Anne's little red car is driving off, and the camera is tracking it, letting the rest of the world pan out of frame.

Lepage's choice of images has also added interactive layers of meaning, as a viewer familiar with more traditional staging becomes engaged with trying to decode meaning from the complex aesthetic visual framework. Everything Lepage puts on stage is there for a reason, as befits good theatre. He does not attempt to create realism, rather the iconic quality of Lepage's shows is achieved by mythologicalizing: something very well suited to the grand proportions of the operatic form.

Lepage looked for iconic moments in 1950's Hollywood films that had some thematic overlap with Stravinsky's *Rake*, casting aside the 18th century setting. These iconic moments, it turns out, are all from films that are now considered classics. By emulating these films, Lepage is also mirroring Stravinsky, creating a neoclassical filmic style that echoed the methods of specific masters of the genre without copying them outright. Furthermore, a close reading of the *mise-en-*

scène reveals a number of direct and oblique references to famous 1950's Hollywood personalities.

The first scene at the Trulove's manor has been overlaid with references to James Dean's last film, *Giant* (1965). Lepage took the film's wide skies and open fields for his backdrop, with an oil pump (of the "nodding donkey" variety) placed upstage, reminiscent of the oil drilling rig from *Giant*. When Nick Shadow emerges from the shaft of the oil well, he's covered from head to toe in black crude – something that happens to James Dean's character in *Giant*: Jett Rink is a surly ranch hand who strikes it rich with an oil well everyone thought was dry; by the end of the film he's drunk and friendless, with only his money to keep him company. Just before filming concluded, James Dean was killed while driving his sports car recklessly. Nick Shadow's oily emergence simultaneously represents Tom striking it rich, while obliquely referencing the roguish character Jett Rink and the famously rebellious actor James Dean, and in so doing, foreshadowing Tom's doom twice over.

In the next scene, Mother Goose`s brothel has been transformed into the saloon from the movie *Destry* (1954) (directed by George Marshall – a remake of *Destry Rides Again* (1939) which he also directed). Though ostensibly movie adaptations of Max Brand's *Destry Rides Again* (1930) a magazine-serial-turned-novel, the films bear almost no resemblance to the book other than the title and the last name of the main character. The novel features Harrison Destry, a down on his luck gambling cowboy, who gets framed for murder when nefarious businessman Chester Bent stacks the jury against Destry. When Destry gets out of prison, he swears vengeance against the jury that convicted him, but is determined to do it within the bounds of the law.

In the 1939 film adaptation of *Destry Rides Again,* Tom Destry (played by Jimmy Stewart) arrives in the wild town of Bottleneck after Kent, the unscrupulous saloon owner who's got a stranglehold on the town, shoots the Sherriff and appoints the town drunk to replace him. Though renowned as a gunfighter, Tom carries no gun, and uses his good manners and a firm moral code to bring lawfulness back to the town. Marlene Dietrich plays the role of Frenchy, the iconic dance hall queen and Kent's girlfriend. Frenchy and Destry start out at odds, but his honesty and integrity gradually win her over. The role marked Dietrich's Hollywood comeback, and her portrayal of Frenchy formed the basis for Madeline Kahn's character Lili Von Shtüpp in the Mel Brooks western film parody *Blazing Saddles* (1974).

The 1954 iteration of *Destry* was a Technicolor remake of the 1939 film, and though it revised the dialogue, the major plot points and much of the cinematography remain very similar to the earlier film. The title role is played by Audi Murphy (the most decorated war-hero of all time) against a backdrop of colourful sets and costumes, in what amounts to a post-war idolization of the Wild West; where evil was a problem that could be solved by a single hero.

Lepage tries to evoke that Hollywood optimism, portraying a cinematic and highly choreographed bar fight between cowboys and dance-hall girls, all dressed in bright colours and moving to the music. Nick Shadow sits with a 1950's movie camera atop a camera jib that bears a striking resemblance to the oil pump from the first scene. Lepage has taken Stravinsky's already extravagant chorus number, and made it even more ostentatious by reframing it as a Hollywood film shoot. In this case the scene Lepage is emulating is from the movie *Destry* (1954) when the town saloon is a perpetual uproarious hotbed of violence and vice in the days before the title character arrives.

In the scene that follows, Mother Goose guides Tom through his loss of innocence creating parallels to the Destry character – who Frenchie attempts to seduce in both the 1939 and 1959 film versions. This also reflects the real-life romance that occurred between Marlene Dietrich and Jimmy Stewart during the filming of *Destry Rides Again* (1939).

But Marlene was not the only person whose actual life synched up with one of the characters from Stravinsky's *Rake.* The 1954 role of Destry was played by Audie Murphy, who was very much a real-life rake himself. The most decorated combat soldier in WWII, Murphy received medals from the U.S., French, and Belgian Governments. Murphy also played the title role in the screen adaptation of his autobiography *To Hell and Back* (1955) which was an enormous hit, and made him a movie star.

Murphy possessed an audacity on the battlefield that should have gotten him killed time and time again. Journalist David McClure (co-author of Murphy's autobiography) once said of him: "Audie seduced more girls than any man I ever knew with the possible exception of Errol Flynn" (Huntington). Murphy was also diagnosed with "combat fatigue" (what is now known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder).

> He suffered from terrible nightmares, slept with the lights on and a gun under his pillow, [and] gambled heavily. [...] "Seems as though nothing can get me excited any more—you know, enthused?" he told director John Huston after being cast in The Red Badge of Courage (Huntington).

Murphy died in 1971 when the private plane he was aboard crashed into a mountain in Virginia. The link to Murphy is too good a fit to be coincidental; the reference is there, though Lepage never points to it directly. He does use more indirect methods to link Tom to the character of Destry. In the second part of the scene when Nick Shadow pans his camera over to

Mother Goose's boudoir, Mother Goose lounges on a heart-shaped bed in an outfit reminiscent of Frenchie the dance hall queen from the 1939 *Destry Rides Again*– and Tom appears in a make-up chair dressed like Deputy Destry from that same film.

Moving on to Act II, Lepage has replaced the street outside Tom's house with the exterior of a Hollywood theatre, where the red carpet premiere of Tom and Baba's new movie is about to take place. The image is from the opening sequence of *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), at the premiere of *The Royal Rascal* (a swashbuckler movie set in the same era as Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress)*. In the scene, a radio announcer lists off the guests as they arrive: "Here comes that exotic star, Olga Mara! And her new husband, the Baron de la Bonnet de la Toulon. They've been married two months already, but still as happy as newlyweds."

Making the parallel between Baba and Olga and their respective new husbands is a clever match on Lepage's part. He replaced the traditional convention of Baba entering in a sedan chair with her being driven onstage in a 1920's sedan automobile, not only paralleling the sedan from the opening scene from *Singin' in the Rain*, but also referencing Norma Desmond's car from the movie *Sunset Boulevard* (1950). Lepage is weaving a web of references in a process he calls working horizontally. He takes several disparate scenes and finds the thread of an idea that connects them. In this case, it is the "exotic star" that permeates all three layers: Baba the Turk is equated with Olga Maria and Norma Desmond. This is reinforced through subtle but deliberate signals, such as the sedan, or fact that Baba, Olga, and Norma all wear head wraps with feathers.

Singin' in the Rain also bears a connection to a real-life rake. Donald O'Connor wasn't the first choice for the role of Cosmo Brown. The role was originally written for Oscar Levant, and the character was rumoured to be loosely based on him. Levant was a multi-talented

performer; primarily a singer-songwriter, he had studied classical piano and composition and acted in several films. He wrote movie scores and authored three autobiographies. Famous for his caustic wit and remarkable musical talents, Levant was an unusual mixture of low brow and high culture. Allegedly, when asked what advice he had for aspiring musicians, he replied, "Marry a rich woman." (Oscar Levant A10). This ties into the fifth of the original *Rake* paintings by Hogarth, in which Tom Rakewell marries an old widow for her fortune; and that specific painting provided the inspiration for Baba the Turk in Stravinsky's opera.

Levant also found work as a performer on live radio and television, frequently referencing his own many physical ailments and mental health issues in a self-deprecating humour: "There is a thin line between genius and insanity. […] I have erased that line." (Oscar Levant A10). Levant's struggle with mental illness parallels how Tom Rakewell goes insane in Hogarth's eighth painting and the last Act of Stravinsky's opera.

Levant`s marriage to actress June Gale was characterized with a cycle of domestic abuse and reconciliation. According to his obituary published in the *Palm Beach Post*, "Police once broke into the couple's Beverly Hills home after Levant said his wife was attacking him with scissors" (A10).

Lepage depicts a similarly violent marriage between Tom Rakewell and Baba the Turk in his production of *The Rake's Progress*; specifically when Baba throws a cup and saucer at Tom during Act II, and Tom retaliates by drowning her in the swimming pool that is prominently featured in the second act.

For the second scene of Act II, rather than opening to Tom's chambers, Lepage has moved Tom and Baba poolside at their mansion, which bears a remarkable likeness to the pool

from the movie *Sunset Boulevard* (1950). Not only is the pool a lovely piece of spectacle (having suddenly appeared in the floor during intermission) it also provides a more plausible solution to one of the staging problems ingrained in Stravinsky's *Rake*.

Figure 2.3: The pool in Lepage's production is a cunning combination of a hole in the floor with a projection screen inset into it. A watery surface is projected onto the screen, and there is a gap for the performers to move across it along the downstage edge of the pool. The Rake's Progress *(2008).*

Figure 2.4: The opening scene from Sunset Boulevard (1950). Note the square swimming pool, the diving board, the balustrade, and the pool ladder are very similar to the pool scene in Lepage's video recording of The Rake's Progress *(2008).*

In the stage directions, it is written that Tom, tired of Baba's incessant speech, somehow magically freezes her by placing his wig on her head (it is never explained how or why he is able to do this). Lepage comes up with a more plausible solution by having Baba go for a swim, then Tom pushing her head below the water until she's rendered unconscious (she's resuscitated in a

later scene by using the comical "out goes the bad air, in goes the good air" style of back-press arm-lift method taught by the boy-scouts until 1960.) The inspiration for having Tom drown her was almost certainly *Sunset Boulevard*'s image of a dead body floating in the pool.

Figure 2.5: Police retrieving Joe Gillis' body from the pool in Sunset Boulevard (1950).

Figure 2.6: Tom Rakewell about to drown Baba the Turk. The Rake's Progress (2008).

The parallels between Baba and the has-been starlet Norma Desmond are quite clear, both are ageing stars who become involved with younger men who use the relationship to further their own ulterior motives. Here the characters of Tom Rakewell and Joe Gillis (the hack

screenwriter who becomes the object of Norma's affections) start to come into alignment. Joe is involved with Norma in order to advance his career, while Tom is marrying Baba (a bearded lady) to merely prove he is free to do whatever he pleases, regardless of others opinions. Joe Gillis, desperate for money, cons Norma Desmond into hiring him to rewrite her amateurish and bloated screenplay for *Salome*. Norah persuades Joe to move in to her sprawling mansion while he works on the project, and after a few months falls in love with him. Joe rebuffs her initially, but gives in out of pity when Norma attempts suicide after his rebuff. Norma becomes more and more possessive of Joe, who, unbeknownst to Norma, has started to fall in love with Betty Schaefer (a young script reader at the studio) while collaborating on a new script. Played by actress Nancy Olsen, Betty Schaefer is an idealistic young woman who falls in love with Joe Gillis, and can't understand why he pushes her away when it's so clear he loves her too. This description of love requited but refused mirrors the relationship between Tom Rakewell and Anne Truelove in Stravinsky's *Rake*, and it resonates with Lepage's staging of the first scene of Act II, when Anne encounters Tom outside the movie premiere.

Not only do the characters form *The Rake's Progress* find their counterparts in *Sunset Boulevard*, there are also parallels to be found between the film's cast and Stravinsky's Rake. William Holden got his big break playing the role of Joe Gillis in *Sunset Boulevard*. Though he began his career playing charming and friendly characters, Holden earned a reputation for his stoic, hard-bitten performances on screen as he became more seasoned. In a film career that spanned 42 years, he appeared in over 70 films, including *Bridge Over the River Kwai (1957), The Wild Bunch* (1969), as well as an Academy Award winning performance in *Network* (1976). While on a 1956 hunting safari in Africa, he developed an interest in wildlife conservation and founded a game reserve.

Holden struggled with alcoholism for most of his life, and it was a factor in both of his failed marriages. While visiting Italy in 1966, Holden was speeding when his Ferrari collided with another vehicle. He was convicted of manslaughter but received a suspended sentence. (Simms). Holden died in 1981 as a result of a head injury he sustained while intoxicated alone in his apartment.

William Holden is a solid thematic match for this Tom: they both attained money and fame, but it left them dissatisfied and with nothing to aspire to. By the second scene of Act II, Tom Rakewell is a Rake past his prime, he has nowhere to go but down. Tom's investment in a machine that turns stones into bread is an act performed merely to reassert his own ego and parallels Holden establishing a game reserve in Africa. Both men became jaded with the world, and decided to take action that would make them feel important again.

Thematically, the graveyard scene in Act III marks Tom hitting rock bottom; he's lost his fortune, his wife, his love, and his dreams of a better world, yet he still follows Nick Shadow to this desolate place at the ends of the earth. By transposing the final reckoning with Nick Shadow into a dump site for old neon casino signs, Lepage signals that the magical glamour has worn off. All the glitz is gone and only the rubble remains. Tom is about to gamble for his soul and Las Vegas is certainly the most fitting place for it to happen. In the moments after Tom wins the wager, the enraged Nick Shadow places a curse of insanity on Tom. The neon signs that cover the stage begin to light up and flash, flickering hauntingly around Nick Shadow and Tom Rakewell.

Figure 2.7: The Neon Graveyard. Nick Shadow reveals his true identity to Tom. The Rake's Progress *(2008).*

Here, Lepage references a specific sequence from *Singin' in the Rain* in which a superimposed Gene Kelly sings the "Broadway Melody" finale while a background of flashing signs (the most prominent of which says "Casino") pulls out to an extremely wide shot.

Figure 2.8: "Broadway Melody" from Singin' in the Rain *(1952).*

The neon graveyard transitions into Tom Rakewell being admitted into an asylum. Lepage's re-interpretation of Bedlam is an amalgamation of *Shock Corridor* (1963), *The Snake*

Pit (1948), and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975). The entrance to the ward is through a narrow passageway (or corridor) upstage, and the section of the stage floor that was the swimming pool in Act II has now been outfitted with a set of institutional beds. The beds in the ward are lined up against the walls on either side, in a configuration almost identical to the main ward from *Shock Corridor.* The patients, wearing long hospital gowns, and vacantly shuffling through the ward are reminiscent of the endlessly shifting and circling patients in *The Snake Pit.* Finally, there is a television on a raised platform, protected by a wire cage, and the upstage wall is covered in white tile reminiscent of the hydrotherapy room from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest.*

A realization occurs when looking at the references to *Giant, Destry, Singin' in the Rain,* and *Sunset Boulevard*, and taking stock of the personal histories of James Dean, Audie Murphy, Oscar Levant, and William Holden as a whole. Lepage presents Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* by following the score, but he also presents us with visual references to a progression of rakish actors from Hollywood's Golden Age. These were not only famous personalities who lived extraordinary lives, but they were also genuine people whose great success was haunted by their own personal dark shadows. By following their stories, and grafting them onto Stravinsky's music, Lepage has given us snapshots of the archetypical rake using real world people as models. James Dean, who had the power of youthful rebellion and unlimited potential, but little sense of direction or self-control is the essence of young Tom Rakewell, fresh from the country and seeking his fortune in a city that's ready to swallow him. Audie Murphy, the valiant hero turned movie star, whose life held no excitement that could match the thrill of combat is Tom Rakewell at the beginning of Act II, numb to the extraordinary life he is living, and looking for his next hit of excitement. The neurotic Oscar Levant was the troubled artistic genius, who found fame for

his sensationalism when what he wanted was recognition for his talent; he is the model for Tom on the red carpet – his thoughts lingering over the love that he gave up and naming himself the victim, all the while lashing out against the circumstances he chose. William Holden was the man resigned to his fate, who felt that life had given him everything, and now there was nothing left worth doing. Tom by the pool follows Holden's example, he feels caged by his own success, he prowls his enclosure, eating, sleeping and asserting his dominance over Baba by drowning her without remorse. His excitement over the bread machine is a taste of nostalgia, it reminds him of when the whole world was before him, and he pursues the dream it promises not because he believes in it, but because it gives him a sense of purpose that lets him keep dreaming instead of confronting reality.

Thematically, the graveyard scene marks the end of the road for "the rake"- the archetype has burned out, and has nowhere to go. Tom has hit rock bottom, and the prospect of losing his soul shakes him out of his ennui. The rake has no choice but to transform, either he loses his soul and dies, or he repents and changes his life; Tom might continue to live, but either way, "the rake" will be no more.

In conclusion, opera is by its very nature fantastical; it operates entirely in a state of heightened theatricality. Lepage finds working in opera an immense pleasure, saying: "It's this extraordinary thing. This is why I got so addicted to doing opera. The music is full of ideas, of images" (Hurwitt). Lepage's work on *The Rake's Progress* would not have happened without Stravinsky's score, but the manner in which he used it changes the experience for the opera spectator profoundly. Lepage uses a plethora of references to his advantage, layering meanings organically onto an object or character so that they are simultaneously concise and multi-faceted.

His theatre is not one based on a singular vision, clear aestheticism or an interpretation of grand narratives, but on a multi-layered and polyvalent theatrical vocabulary where theatre performance is an outcome of the totality of theatrical expression. It uses performance text rather than written text – an equal measure of actor, design, space, visual and audio images, projections and audience – to create the total theatre (Dundjerović 53).

Lepage has taken Stravinsky's score, and used it to create a performance text that incorporates Hollywood's imagery, intertextual characters and legendary film personalities, and woven them together into the complex and layered tapestry of the total theatre. Without question, the mise-en-scene of *The Rake's Progress* under Lepage's direction enters a medium that extends beyond the visual elements of traditional opera, and therefore should be considered a new adaptation.

Chapter 3: *The Nightingale*: **Fulfilling and Defying Expectations**

Robert Lepage's production of *The Nightingale and Other Short Fables* (2009) for the

Canadian Opera Company (COC) was a unique program that presented several short Igor

Stravinsky pieces featuring a visually stunning array of dancers, shadow puppets, and acrobats

on stage. Singers poised on raised platforms to either side of the proscenium, the orchestra was

placed centre stage in order to accommodate the pool of waist-deep water that occupied the

orchestra pit in Carl Fillion's unconventional set design. The highlight of the evening was

Stravinsky's short opera, *The Nightingale* (libretto by Stepan Mitussov), in which the lead

operatic singers waded through the pool of water. In addition, the singers were operating 20-inch

puppets inspired by Japanese bunraku puppetry and designed by the notable American puppeteer

Michael Curry.

Stravinsky's original production of *The Nightingale* premiered in 1914, and was

presented by Les Ballets Russes at the Palais Garnier in Paris. The performance featured dancers

portraying the characters onstage while the singers stayed concealed with the orchestra in the pit.

The short opera was based on the Hans Christian Andersen fable set in 18th or 19th century

China, and mostly revolves around a childish and demanding Emperor. Stravinsky and

Mitussov's adaptation of the narrative places more focus on the Nightingale as the protagonist.

Its plot is a straightforward *conte lyrique*. Near the imperial palace, along the seashore

where the trees stretch over the water, a Fisherman sails his boat. As he plies his trade, the

Fisherman sings of his appreciation for the beauty of the nightingale's song; much to his delight,

the Nightingale appears and sings its haunting melody. Elsewhere along the water, the Imperial

Cook leads an expedition of courtiers, hoping to hear the marvel of the Nightingale's song. Upon

hearing it, they are awed, and invite the Nightingale to sing before the Emperor at the Imperial Palace.

The second act begins with the Emperor's arrival at court. The Nightingale is introduced to the Emperor. Delighted with its song, the Emperor appoints the Nightingale to the position of First Singer. An envoy from Japan arrives, and presents the Emperor with a marvelous singing mechanical nightingale. The real Nightingale flies away without a sound. Insulted, the Emperor proclaims the real Nightingale banished, and appoints the mechanical nightingale to the position of First Singer instead.

Much later, in the imperial bedchamber, we find the Emperor has fallen ill and is being visited by Death. Just as the spectre is about to take the Emperor's life, the Nightingale flies into the room and sings a song so beautiful, it causes Death to take pause. The Nightingale finishes its song, but Death, enamoured of the music, pleads for it to sing on. The Nightingale strikes a deal with Death, promising to sing again if Death spares the Emperor's life. The Nightingale finishes her song, Death departs, and the Emperor is restored to health. Crying in gratitude, the Emperor offers the Nightingale anything it desires; the Nightingale answers that the emperors' joyful tears are thanks enough.

Lepage's inventive production of *The Nightingale and Other Short Fables* is a phantasmagorical exploration of Stravinsky's work from the early 20th Century; its striking imagery, ingenious use of space, and remarkable blend of opera and puppetry align in a deceptively simple and cohesive *mise-en-scène* that conceals a tremendous amount of research, exploration, and technical skill. While the production is quite striking, there remain some questions regarding the representation of Eastern cultural practices that have been heavily drawn

from to create "une chinoiserie pour le XXIe siècle…" (Gilbert). Lepage asserted that while his

production team may initially have been influenced by Chinese culture, they shifted their

research to "what (Andersen's) image of what Chinese was" (Floating a Wild Idea).

This chapter explores Lepage's *Nightingale* using concepts of Barthes' connotative and

denotative channels of communication described in *Image Music Text* (1977); the principle of

Marvin Carlson's ghosting, detailed in *The Haunted Stage* (2001), and the idea of permeation

discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis. Aleksandar Sasa Dundjerović's *The Cinema of Robert

Lepage: The poetics of Memory* (2003) and *The Theatricality of Robert Lepage* (2007) will also

be referenced in regards to Lepage's methodology in crafting visuals that ignite the imagination,

and will help explain why the stage pictures in *The Nightingale* resonate so fiercely with

audiences. I will also use Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) in my analysis of the amalgamation

and representation of Eastern influences Lepage has brought forward in this production. The

primary focus of this analysis is *The Nightingale* portion of the production, as it formed the

foundation upon which the other short fables were later attached to round out the program; it was

also the most complex and fully developed aspect of the production.

Stravinsky and Lepage are both well known for a predilection to eschew established

artistic conventions in order to explore the limits of the performance. In the case of *The

Nightingale*, Stravinsky and Lepage both made radical choices in their *mise-en-scène* in order to

clear the stage to accommodate a visual element that was more compelling than traditional

operatic staging. In Stravinsky's case, his singers were positioned in the orchestra pit, yielding

the stage to the dancers of Les Ballets Russes to embody the narrative. For Lepage, the decision

to flood the orchestra pit (emulating traditional Vietnamese water puppet theatres) triggered a

cascade of staging decisions; the orchestra would have to be moved on stage, the acrobats for the

fable of "The Fox" would need to be on a raised platform so the orchestra wouldn't impede the sightlines for the audience. Lighting Designer Etienne Boucher needed to devise ways to reduce reflection on the water and limit light spilling onto the shadow puppet screen (resulting in watery shimmers that danced across the auditorium instead of the stage). Mara Gottler, the Costume, Wig and Make-up Designer had to research materials that wouldn't be ruined by prolonged water exposure. Puppetry Choreographer Martin Genest had to teach opera singers to bring puppets to life with an economy of movement so that puppeteering action wouldn't impact their vocal performance as they waded through the pool of water.

Given the logistical nightmare of a large volume of water on stage, and the huge number of concessions made to other aspects of the performance in order to accommodate it, why would Lepage be so attached to an idea so difficult to stage? Indeed, Lepage has a long history of using water as a theme in his productions; *Tectonic Plates* (1988) had a pool of water bisecting the stage. The original production of *Needles and Opium* (1991) had a striking multimedia water illusion where an underwater video of a swimmer coming up for air is augmented by a performer's head emerging from the top of the screen in synch with the video. *Bluebeard's Castle/Erwartung* (1993) had a pool of water from which the three brides in the Béla Bartók opera made a spectacular entrance, and the water surface was used as a mirror for the moon, in which reflection the main character disappears at the end of the Schoenberg opera. *The Rake's Progress* featured a faux swimming pool with a video of water being projected onto a near-horizontal screen with a gap at the downstage edge that allowed performers to not only climb – but dive – into the pool.

Water on stage has a distinct presence; it is an easily recognised boundary, yet it is eminently permeable. Moving in or out of water holds provocative connotations on stage; we all

have trepidation about the consequences of getting wet – the chill of first stepping in, the discomfort of damp clothes and the trouble of drying them, the splashed water that needs to be sopped up, the possibility of a leak escalating into a flood, and of course the possibility (no matter how remote) of drowning. Water on stage happens rarely because it is an enormous amount of trouble, but that also makes its appearance so special. Water on stage is awesome. Lepage recognises water as a tool for separating his stage into distinctive zones for his audience, and creating a sense of transcendence when a performer moves into or out of the water (be it illusory or actual). Water also provides a method of truncating the performers; in *The Nightingale* Lepage uses the water for cover, to help conceal the singers and black-clad puppeteers and give more focus to the puppets on stage.

The water conceals what lies beneath its surface, effectively cutting off the opera singers from below the waist, and allows the world of the puppets to be raised up to a comfortable working height in a believable manner. For a puppet to appear alive for the audience they must perceive it to have desire and autonomy; a puppet that appears to have its feet on the ground has the illusion of being independently mobile. The puppets in Lepage's *Nightingale* are thus perceived as more alive because they are not being carried, they ride in boats, stand on platforms, or glide across the water.

When Robert Lepage held a press conference on October 1, 2009 to promote *The Nightingale and Other Short Fables* for the Canadian Opera Company, several Toronto reviewers had their doubts about the success of the production. In response to Lepage's announcement that the opera would feature puppets extensively, and the orchestra pit would be flooded with water with the musicians placed on stage, John Coulbourne authored a column for the *Toronto Sun* titled "Floating a Wild Idea," in which he wrote: "after a career of redefining

theatre and things theatrical, Robert Lepage yesterday found himself poised to really go off the deep end. And he's taking the Canadian Opera Company with him." John Terauds, the classical music critic for the *Toronto Star*, wrote an article titled: "The Opera ain't Over Till the Fat Lady Sinks," and spent the majority of it discussing the logistical challenges the production faced with its unconventional staging. He concluded by writing: "but we'll have to wait until opening night to see if this Nightingale can float our operatic boat." Nick Patch of the Canadian Press was more optimistic in titling his article "Quebec's Robert Lepage Pulls Back the Curtain on Ambitious New Opera," though he still even-handedly reported on the sense of uncertainty around the production: "even Lepage's collaborators sounded apprehensive about the lofty ambitions of the program, but the Quebec showman said he was undaunted."

The Nightingale was only Lepage's second production working with the COC; his first was the much acclaimed 1993 double bill of Béla Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* and Arnold Schoenberg's *Erwartung*, with which he had made his operatic directorial debut. It is remarkable that already in that early double-bill, water was a prominent feature of his operatic *mise-en-scène*. As we have seen, water has come a feature in many of his theatre productions. By 2009, Lepage's reputation for overseeing productions that were both visually arresting and technically complex was well established, yet the staging he was proposing for *The Nightingale* was so unconventional that most of the critics were dubious of the production's potential success.

The COC produced *The Nightingale* at the Four Seasons Centre in repertory, alternating with a more conventional staging of Giacomo Puccini's *Madam Butterfly*, meaning that the pool of water occupying the orchestra pit would have to be relocated every night. The opera singers would have to wear wetsuits, and would be operating puppets while singing. The water would need to be heated to a comfortable temperature without oversaturating the air in the theatre. So

much of what was discussed at the press conference had to do with technical aspects that seemed less than reliable. John Terauds' preview article details COC Technical Director David Feheley's description of draining the water from the 67,000 litre pool to a heated holding tank on the loading dock (warming that volume of water to the proper temperature was a three day process, so there was insufficient time between shows), because the lift in the orchestra pit wasn't strong enough to raise the pool structure when it was full. The pool was built on wheels, so that it could be wheeled offstage once the lift was raised, leaving the orchestra pit clear for *Madam Butterfly*'s musicians the following night.

On October 17th, two and a half weeks after the press conference, *The Nightingale and other Short Fables* opened. Coulbourne and Terauds were among the reviewers present in the audience, and they were both spellbound. Under the title "The Nightingale Soars" in the *Toronto Sun*, Coulbourn wrote: "New-wave opera met old-world puppetry at the Four Seasons Centre yesterday and carried everyone away on a veritable sea of delight." Thrilled with the production, Coulbourne went on to say "when the Nightingale starts to sing, Lepage and his creative team go into overdrive, creating a miniature world of wonder," and concluded with "the Nightingale not only has a memorable song, but it soars on the magical wings that Lepage and his creative team have given it." Terauds was likewise entranced by the production; in his review in the October 19th *Toronto Star*, titled "Awash in Theatre Magic" he wrote:

> The results are breathtaking, both theatrically and musically. This has to be the most enchanting work for the musical stage to hit Toronto in years. […] Lepage's brainchild, developed by his Ex Machina company in Quebec City, combines orchestra, voices, and several genres of movement and puppetry into a conjuring of fairy-tale worlds that are at once familiar and novel.

Other Toronto critics joined in the chorus of praise for *The Nightingale*; John Keillor of the *National Post* wrote "Stravinsky Spectacle is Dazzling;" Tamara Bernstein of the *Globe and Mail* said watching it "was like being transported into the heart of a child." Heidi Waleson of the *Wall Street Journal* wrote "The triumph of this "Nightingale" production is the way in which all the visual arts illuminate the music in an emotional rather than purely plot- and character-centered manner while remaining firmly grounded in storytelling." The opening night reviews were so overwhelmingly positive that the entire 8 show run was sold out before the curtain lifted on the second evening, prompting the COC to extend the run.

Common to all the praise for Lepage's *Nightingale* is the notion of being drawn into the magical world onstage. The elements of music, voice, lights, costumes, sets, puppets, and performers are woven tightly together, creating a singularity of connotative and denotative signals that draws the viewer in. Stravinsky wrote the music for the fairy tale, but Lepage brings it to life not only on stage but in the imagination of his audience. This happens through a phenomenon that Dundjerović refers to as Lepage's poetics of memory:

> Lepage relies heavily on his own recurring themes in communicating through 'universal' images that relate to the spectator in the manner of Jungian archetypes. Trusting the work to show itself, looking for hidden connections and similarities, using personal and collective memories and playing with them, following intuition and freely associating ideas – these are the essential aspects of Lepage's poetics of memory (Cinema 6).

In his conversations with Charest, Lepage discusses this creative process in terms of mythologizing "You have to be able to amplify the stories you hear, give a large dimension to the stories you invent. This is how you transform them into legends and myths" (Charest 15). Lepage looks for pre-existing connotative channels that resonate with his audience and arranges them as a foundation upon which to lay the denotative signals of text (or in the case of opera,

libretto); this layering of direct signals over more subtle ones creates a sense of richness to his stage pictures. Using stark backgrounds to contrast a convergence of signals makes his *mise-en-scène* easier for his audience to process and aggrandize; things either stand out against the emptiness of the background, or an image can be projected onto the background to enhance an object or performer on stage. The remount of *Needles and Opium* (2013) is a prime example of this; the main set piece is three sides of a stark white 10' by 10' by 10' cube that's set askew with the floor at a 30 degree angle, with the interior corner facing the audience. Three projectors are aligned right, left, and centre in the house so as to cast images on each wall of the cube's interior. Over the course of the performance, the actors stand against the bare walls, have an immersive environment projected around them, or even have projections superimposed onto their costumes and faces.

Lepage does not simply create a spectacle on stage, rather he actively engages his viewers by presenting them with iconic archetypes, like the Fisherman and the Emperor, or vivid signals, whether of the Orient or the transformation of everyday objects, which may not be entirely accurate in their depictions, but succeed in stoking the fires of the audience's imagination. Viewed from this perspective, the poetics of memory is a form of instant nostalgia; the performance satisfies the viewer's longing for a world that feels more true, more magical, and larger than life; providing an illusion of authenticity that takes precedent above the need for factual representation. Lepage explains this as the artist distorting the lens – ostensibly to blur the finer details and streamline the narrative, but also to shift the audience's perspective and focus.

> Poetry and art depend on our ability to recount events through the imperfections of our memories. If we rely on records, written texts, and photographs, we re-experience events essentially as they happened. This kind of truth is interesting to archivists and historians, but mythology has been largely eliminated from the process. It's not so important if a

fishing story is true or not. What really counts is how we transform events through the distorting lens of memory. It's the blurred, invented aspects of story-telling that give it its beauty and greatness (Charest 16).

According to Goffman (*Presentation of Self* 67) mystification is the process of inhibiting societally unacceptable qualities and accentuating others in order to create a public face that better corresponds to a pre-existing socially accepted archetype. Thus mystification describes the act of tailoring signification (one's appearance or behavior) to facilitate passage across the frame of societal expectation in order to achieve social acceptance. Mystification could also be described as the act of minimizing the socially incongruent qualities of something in order to better accentuate its desirable properties. While not entirely an act of misrepresentation, mystification does encompass an element of misdirection; it is a tight spotlight in a dark theatre, telling you exactly what to look at.

For example, Stravinsky's *Nightingale* features a mechanical nightingale brought by Japanese emissaries to the royal court of the Emperor of China. This replica bird is a reference to Japanese Karakuri puppets — clockwork figures that were animated through carefully calibrated spring, gear, and counterweight mechanisms. The intricate machinery was concealed beneath elaborate cloth robes or carved wooden casings.

> Karakuri were surrounded by a passionate secrecy and none were permitted to look inside or see how they were assembled. Trade secrets were vital, and the Karakuri master was a guarded and solitary worker. The logic of the parts had to remain a mystery if the real point of the device — the discrepancy between inside and outside, input and motion — were to be enjoyed (Screech 67).

Lepage uses mystification in order to mythologize the narratives, characters, and settings presented in his *mise-en-scène*. Dundjerović explains this through the poetics of memory: our

minds latch on to the most vivid and straightforward memories, letting unimportant details slip away forgotten, leaving only the clearest platonic archetype behind. We remember things as we'd like to remember them, and over time they become more economical, more refined, more nostalgic and thus more mythologised.

Figure 3.1: The envoy from Japan presents the Emperor with a mechanical nightingale.

Photo by Stofleth, Opéra de Lyon, Oct. 2010 (Gilbert 44).

In *The Nightingale* Lepage employs a variety of mystification to make characters and narratives appear larger than life. The highly stylized full-face make-up (a whiteface base with bright red and black highlights to emphasize the eyes, nose, and mouth) makes the performers a little less human, a little more uniform, and is very similar to the painted white faces of the puppets they operate. The black-clad bunraku-inspired puppeteers are concealed by their dark clothing and hoods, rendering them shadows in a world filled with bright colours. The pool of water offers cover for the puppeteers and singers, allowing the puppets to be foregrounded and emphasized.

A prime example of mystification giving way to a larger than life experience happened at the beginning of the third act of Lepage's production; by this point the small puppets portraying the human characters were set aside, and the singers themselves were embodying the Emperor and his servants and courtiers. The Emperor lies tossing and turning, ill in his canopied bed that overhangs the water. As the music swells, the fabric of the canopy is pulled back, and the posts of the bed become the arms and legs of an enormous skeleton puppet lying on its back, with the Emperor laying prone upon its chest. The singer portraying Death stands just upstage of the Emperor, wearing an enormous skull headpiece that forms the head of the puppet. The placement of the Emperor not only suits the thematic message of the scene, it also serves to obscure where the torso of the puppet should be, tying together the four limbs and floating head that make up the giant puppet. This transformation of bed to skeleton also carries a number of significant resonances; first there is a mirroring of the earlier acts, when the singers appeared as giants behind their puppets, now the skeletal form of Death towers over the singer in a parallel, but grander scale; Death is as large in relation to the singer as the singer was to the puppet in earlier acts. Secondly, Lepage has made a visual pun on a textual reference; recognizing that the ill Emperor in the story was on a figurative death-bed, Lepage places Death on stage as a literal bed for the Emperor. Lepage regularly incorporates these kinds of literalizations into his *mise-en-scène*, as allegorical archetypes that add to the poetry of his stage pictures.

Figure 3.2: The Emperor laying on Death's torso, as the Nightingale bargains for his life.

Photo by Peter J. Thompson, published in The National Post, Dec. 29, 2009 (Cushman).

The use of archetypes in storytelling demonstrates the role ghosting plays in mythologizing. In *The Nightingale*, the characters are identified solely by their professional archetype – the Fisherman, the Cook, the Emperor, etc. – no further depth is given to them; they have no names, no wives, no hobbies, no parents, yet they are distinct within the context of the narrative, and we recognise their occupations and social status because they are ghosting familiar archetypes we've encountered in other contexts. In *Anatomy of Criticism* Northrop Frye explains how archetypes function in literature as "a typical or reoccurring image (or) a symbol which connects one poem with another and thereby helps to unify and integrate our literary experience" (Frye 99).

The archetype provides a rapid categorization of a character, while still leaving much of the personality, history, and specifics of that character undefined. This makes archetypes an excellent tool for mythologizing, because the viewer's memory references past examples of that archetype and their imagination fills in the missing information. Furthermore, whatever the

viewer imagines is going to feel more genuine to them than whatever specific details are exposited about the archetype depicted in a specific production.

In this way, it is less important for the audience to recognize a character as an individual and more important for that character to be recognized as a member of an easily categorized type. This provides the audience with an instant understanding of that character, and also provides a foundation for the fulfillment of the audience's expectation of that archetype. That character is also poised to defy expectations by going against the anticipated nature. In *The Nightingale*, the character of Death is an excellent example of an archetype that is instantly recognizable, yet deviates from conventional expectation. Death takes pause to listen to the Nightingale sing, then, enraptured, pleads that it might hear more.

Puppets and archetypes are well suited to each other; both excel in conveying simple concepts quickly and easily to the viewer. Used in conjunction, they amplify each other, creating the potential for a strong viewer response. Opera singing is similarly profound in its ability to convey simple emotional concepts quickly and powerfully. Thus, the convergence of puppets, archetypes, and opera makes for an especially moving performance when all three elements are properly aligned.

According to Bernard Gilbert's book *Le Rossignol, Renard, et autres fables* – a book published by Ex Machina to document the creative and technical processes behind the production – Lepage first learned about puppets in the early 1980's from Josée Campanale, the head of les Marionettes du Grand Théâtre. She taught him about the poetry and versatility of puppets, how they were unconstrained by the same physical limits as a performer. Puppets could

easily be made to defy gravity or suffer extremes no performer could. He saw tremendous

potential for their use in theatre, dance, and opera (Gilbert 19).

Lepage's insight about puppets and opera was affirmed when he saw a video of Julie

Taymor's innovative puppet production of *Oedipus Rex* (1993) – another Stravinsky opera,

whose original French libretto was written by author and filmmaker Jean Cocteau (1889-1963)

(the same Cocteau central to Lepage's *Needles and Opium*), though the Taymor version of the

opera used the Latin translation of Cocteau's libretto by Abbé Jean Daniélou (1905-1974). The

Taymor production was staged as part of the 1992 Saito Kinen Festival in Matsumoto Japan, and

featured a number of giant puppets designed and built by Michael Curry. Lepage later befriended

Curry while working on *KÀ* (2005) for Cirque du Soleil. The pair started looking for another

project to collaborate on, and Lepage suggested *The Nightingale.* Based on his earlier experience

with puppets, Lepage knew that they were the perfect way to bypass some of the physical

constraints an opera singer must work under. Furthermore, he recognized that puppets were not

restricted to human shapes, stating: "it occurred to me that puppetry is a solution to the problem

of making animals sing" (Kaplan).

Michael Curry said water emerged as a key concept almost immediately after they

decided on *The Nightingale:* "D'emblée, Robert et moi avons été intrigués par un détail dans le

livret du *Rossignol:* on y parle d'un royaume situé sur le bord de l'eau. Cette simple phrase a

orienté notre concept vers l'eau" (Gilbert 23). This idea of a "kingdom on the edge of water"

caught both their attention, and led Curry to suggest researching Vietnamese water puppets. A

performance tradition that originated with Vietnamese rice farmers more than 900 years ago.

Vietnamese Puppeteers stand in hip-deep water, concealed from the audience by woven screens,

and use long bamboo poles to operate puppets that float in the pool of water that makes up the performance area.

In January of 2007, Curry and Lepage embarked on a trip to Vietnam, accompanied by puppet choreographer Martin Genest, who gave a brief account of their experiences touring the country and learning about water puppetry from the locals.

> En deux semaines là-bas, nous avons vu des spectacles, visité des théâtres, rencontré des maîtres, pour nous initier aux mystères et secrets de ce métier. Nous avons découvert que cette tradition bénéficie d'un tel statut – c'est un art sacré, pour eux – que personne n'ose vraiment sortir de la tradition, explorer hors de ce contexte ancien, protégé, rigide. Ce théâtre est devenu très touristique. Peu de compagnies sont en activité, parmi lesquelles encore moins modifient la tradition. Une d'entre elles ose sortir le montreur de sa chambre isolée. On le voit dans l'eau, hors du castelet. C'est presque une révolution… (Gilbert 30).

Here, Genest clearly articulates how important water puppetry is to the Vietnamese, that its practitioners are highly regarded, and considers it an almost sacred art. He's astonished both at how controlled the tradition is, and how it has become subservient to the tourist industry. Genest goes on to say that being Westerners, Lepage, Curry, and he felt unconstrained by the restrictions placed on the Vietnamese practitioners. His statement of this fact is an almost textbook definition of cultural appropriation:

> Étant occidentaux, nous nous sommes sentis autorisés à extraire cette technique de son cadre historique, á utiliser son vocabulaire pour arriver à nos propres fins. Résultat, nous avons créé un hybride avec plusieurs traditions et techniques (Gilbert 30).

In his book, *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said articulates the imbalance of power inherent to the relationship between the East and West. "The West is the actor, the Orient a passive

reactor. The West is the spectator, the judge and jury, of every facet of Oriental behavior" (Said 108-9). Lepage's *Nightingale* certainly subscribes to this model; he and his colleagues actively sought out Vietnamese puppet masters, spent two weeks learning about a tradition that dates back some nine hundred years, adapted the parts they liked to their own artistic practice, blended it with elements of other Asian puppetry traditions, then claimed it was all right because they were actually following in the footsteps of other Europeans who had done the same thing with even less direct cultural contact more than a century ago.

Curry was quoted as saying: "*le Rossignol et autres fables* est une création hybride, qui me donne l'impression d'une « world theatre », comme il y a la «world music»" (Gilbert 21). This simplistic view overlooks the fact that for a work to function as an intercultural exchange, there needs to be an ongoing dialogue between all cultural parties represented in the production. Without the ongoing participation and guidance of a member of the source culture, an artistic work is likely to drift away from intercultural exchange and respectful homage, and move into the realm of appropriation. Someone from the source culture needs to be present to act as a steward and ensure that the nuances are followed, so that due respect is paid to the traditions and beliefs that underlie the beauty and pageantry of a particular cultural practice.

While Lepage and his production team say they were aiming for a modern interpretation of *chinoiserie*, Orientalism remains a problematic aspect of Lepage's *Nightingale* for several reasons. First, as has already been identified, there is the problem of cultural appropriation – the unmediated borrowing from another culture for purposes of artistic novelty. As there was a deficiency of feedback from the cultural source (be it ongoing consultation, or presenting the finished work in front of the sourced community) the production fell short of creating a dialogue or intercultural exchange.

Secondly, there is an issue of cultural misrepresentation and amalgamation – Lepage draws from a number of Eastern and Western cultural influences in putting together the *mise-en-scène* for *the Nightingale,* and the final product is a homogenized blend of pseudo-traditions and faux cultural practices that makes it difficult for Western audiences to see where the mythologicalization of culture begins and the accurate representation of specific cultural traditions end. The regional distinctions between cultural practices are not only distorted, they are stripped of their distinctiveness and origins. Lepage presents a blending of Eastern traditions, first viewing them through the lens of 19th century *chinoiserie*, then further refining them to be more palatable to a contemporary Western audience.

Furthermore, because the artistic product has been created with Occidental audiences in mind; the result caters specifically to the Western ideological myth of the exotic East. There remains a pre-existing notion in the West of the East being a place of legends and mysticism; Lepage's mise-en-scene specifically exploits the audience's horizon of expectation for a mythologised East. Although the audience has been warned that what they are watching is a world of pure fantasy, the *mise-en-scène* contains a number of ghostings that still resonate powerfully with the original Asian sources. For example, Vietnamese water puppetry has clearly dominated the discussion of the production, however, the water puppets used appear only briefly in the performance, and are all background characters or part of the imperial parade in the second act. The bulk of the puppets used for the primary characters are actually based off of Japanese bunraku puppets, and those used by members of the chorus are modeled after Indonesian glove puppets. The strong emphasis on water puppets actually relates to the pool of water on stage. The inspiration for filling the orchestra pit with water was unquestionably drawn from Vietnamese

water puppet theatres. Set Designer Carl Fillion briefly explained the process of designing the set for *The Nightingale*:

> Sans vouloir reproduire la tradition vietnamienne, j'ai cherché à trouver le sens que nous, aujourd'hui, gens du théâtre occidentaux, pouvons donner à cette tradition. Dans ma scénographie, on retrouve certains aspects de l'installation typique d'un théâtre vietnamien de marionnettes. Le bassin, bien sûr, en est l'élément central. Il y [a] aussi la plateforme à jardin, où sont les musiciens. Puis l'arbre est habituellement intégré au bassin. Il se trouve dans l'eau. …Au Vietnam, les musiciens sont situés sur le côté, alors que, pour nous, il était important que l'orchestre soit sur scène. Nous n'avions d'ailleurs pas tellement le choix… Nous avons une interprétation moderne de ce théâtre-là, inspirée de ce théâtre-là (Gilbert 30).

While not wanting to completely replicate the traditional Vietnamese water puppet theatre, Fillion's design is still strongly reminiscent of one. The platforms to either side of the stage have become playing areas, and the entrances to the pool of water are on either side of the stage instead of along the upstage wall; but the water, the tree, the visible musicians are all elements that call back to the original source. Visually, Fillion's major addition was a short platform at centre stage that extended over the water; this is where the conductor stood for the first half of the program (the entire orchestra relocated further upstage after intermission). For *The Nightingale,* the platform serves as the Emperor's court for the second act, and the base of the Emperor's bed in the third act.

Fillion also faced a number of challenges with this production, most of which pertained to logistical problems: finding space to store costumes and props, figuring out the challenging logistics of the pool, calculating and adjusting sightlines for the unusual staging, and making sure performers had suitable places to stand by offstage in order to make it to their onstage positions on time. Fillion bore the brunt of the problems created by the flooded orchestra pit, as well as

figuring out how to make the set (which was ostensibly minimalist, but was actually quite cluttered behind the scenes) meet their physical requirements.

Even if we look past the procurement of the stage aesthetic, and allow for this under the justification of 'modernizing' of the *chinoiserie* from Andersen's day, Lepage is still producing an artificially processed version of an already distilled memory of the source material. Unlike other instances of the copying of a copy, where the reproduction becomes less vivid and the specific details fade, when dealing with the poetics of memory the image becomes more vivid in the viewer's imagination due to the lack of detail. What information makes it through the second filtering is given disproportional significance, forming the basis for extrapolating the whole of the original. This is certainly reminiscent of the story of the Six Blind Men and the Elephant discussed in the first chapter of this thesis.

Lepage's announcement that *the Nightingale* references *chinoiserie,* and not the original Asian traditions that it distorts, is a blatant attempt to sidestep allegations of cultural appropriation, while simultaneously conceding that the work falls short of cultural authenticity. This is an ongoing point of contention between theatre artists and academics; the artist aims for a product that will have the most profound impact on an audience, and the academic pursues accuracy in depiction of cultural practices and the attribution of sources to confirm their validity.

This struggle stems from the artist fictionalizing or abbreviating their account of the source cultural products, using mystification to make those products more palatable to their target audience; but by so doing, they promote an incomplete, if not outright false, interpretation of those cultural practices that highlight exotic spectacle over cultural significance and history. This sensationalized and stripped-down version of the cultural practice invariably transmits

faster and further through domestic culture than its authentic source material, and thus dominates public perception of the exoticized and often eroticized culture. Furthermore, the fabrication may become the first point of contact for researching the original cultural practice; the further the sensational fabrication has spread, the more diluted and scarce accurate research pertaining to the authentic cultural material becomes.

This debate between artistic impact and academic rigour is not easily resolved, but looking at the problem from this perspective does provide a specific piece of insight: this is why dramaturges exist; to negotiate the chasm between artistic licence and reality, and strive to bring the two sides closer together. While the role of the director is to decide what to place in the frame of his *mise-en-scène*, it is the dramaturge's job to research and question how a theatrical frame can be more in tune with the outside world and with fair practice.

Fundamentally, the critical success of *The Nightingale* can be attributed to a combination of presenting the audience with a familiar fairy tale world that fulfilled their expectations of a *chinoiserie* fantasy, and defying their preconceptions by pushing the boundaries of what can be done on the opera stage and making it look easy.

Lepage's production of *The Nightingale and Other Fables* is much like the mechanical nightingale, the karakuri creation, full of complex and challenging mechanisms that are concealed behind a simple and elegant cover; easy for the viewer to recognize, and amazing for its verisimilitude to an idealized archetype. And it convincingly sings as beautiful as its original model. It captures the imagination, and makes the impossible seem achievable, while disguising the intense skill and craftsmanship that went into something that appears so eminently simple from the outside.

Conclusion

Lepage's talent for scenic editing makes him a remarkable director. His *mise-en-scène* for *The Rake's Progress* demonstrates a complex and well researched intertextuality of film sources layered onto Stravinsky's last opera; and the COC production of *The Nightingale* manifests an incredibly vivid dream inspired by some of Stravinsky's earliest works. In both cases, Lepage sought and found strong connections to these works and the historical context and cultural environments in which they were created. Lepage is not only conscientious of how an element fits within his poetics of memory; he also looks for similarity of form, shape, or language that he can use to create parallels and resonance between things that we would otherwise never connect. In the same way a poet creates symmetry from one line of a poem to the next, Lepage looks for visual rhymes and alliterations on stage that will surprize and delight his audience with little epiphanies and grand spectacles.

Understanding how Lepage uses frames, ghosting, and permeation provides insight into what makes other operas he's directed so remarkable. In the cases of The Ring Cycle and *Bluebeard*/*Erwartung* Lepage creates magic on stage by defying the ever-present permeation of gravity, creating sets and staging that has performers travelling across a horizontal spiral staircase in the former, and in the latter, creatively positioning singers to create a striking illusion that a wall has become the floor. Lepage looks for frames that can be overlapped, stepped out of, or turned on their head. The transformations he is so well known for are often the result of moving from one frame to another using an element common to both frames as a reference point; like the oil derrick that turns into a camera crane during the transition from the first scene into the brothel in *the Rake's Progress (2007).*

The fluid transitions and transformations Lepage incorporates into his shows provide a stunning example of a phenomenological chain – where one memory of an experience triggers a train of thought that connects to yet another memory, and so on; creating the basis for leaps in logic that will only make sense to someone who has knowledge of the major stepping stones in the chain. Lepage's rhyming stage images are the connections between disparate thoughts – the links in the phenomenological chain; the ghostings – that enable his narratives to make enormous leaps in time and space that are relatively straightforward for his audience to follow, and delightful for the ripples of recognition and epiphanies that wash across the imaginations of his viewers.

In *The Nightingale,* Lepage's thematic unity and simplicity of message instills a highly stylized stage picture that engages the audience's imagination. Connotative and denotative signals converge harmoniously; music, lights, sets, costumes, singing and puppets all create a resonance that colours every note and action on stage in such a way that the real is outpaced by the imagination. This kind of performance goes beyond the suspension of disbelief, instead fulfilling the viewer's pre-existing expectations and mythologizing the world presented within the confines of the theatrical frame. This is the kind of performance that subsumes the viewers, giving them a story and setting they can lose themselves in.

The complexity of references in *The Rake's Progress* requires a higher level of cognitive involvement to process. The audience needs to be acquainted with a number of Hollywood movies from a particular era in order to recognize the comparisons being made. In order to fully appreciate Lepage's interpretation, one must both be aware of more traditional productions of *The Rake* and simultaneously superimpose the references to the Hollywood films being emulated; without that knowledge, the phenomenological chain is broken, and the viewer is left

with significant logical gaps to cross. If this were a more satirical approach, the overlaying of Hollywood films would add a layer of humor through recognition or incongruity, but instead, Lepage tries to give us a glimpse of 1950's pop iconography that may have been influencing Stravinsky's writings. The end result is a show that is artful rather than artistic; it is especially clever, rather than being especially beautiful or particularly moving.

Simply put, the ghosting in *The Nightingale* is always moving inward — making the world on stage more harmonized and in tune with the audience's preconceptions of *chinoiserie* — while *The Rake's Progress* repeatedly directs the audience to look outward, demonstrating how prevalent the archetype of the Rake is, and inviting the audience to overlay a multitude of different movies over the action happening on stage. *The Nightingale and Other Short Fables* shows us a multitude of stories, but each takes place one at a time in a single and unified world. *The Rake's Progress* shows us a single world and single narrative, but is constantly overlapping with other worlds, to demonstrate the multitude of films it intersects with. These other worlds do not necessarily reinforce themes, on the contrary, they often undermine attempts to create a congruent and resonant world on stage. The difference between the two is perhaps best described as the difference between a mosaic and a collage. The mosaic is easy to interpret and delightful for its simplicity; it is a multitude of tiles that carry very little individual meaning, but when viewed in combination, they blend together to form a single unified image. The individual tile is an extremely low fidelity ghosting, but as more of them are assembled and the image becomes complete and the ghosted subject becomes clear (albeit perhaps quite geometrical and stylized). In contrast, the collage is composed of more complex ideas that require greater consideration. Each component image in a collage is meant to be considered both individually and in relationship to the whole work.

In this manner, ghosting occurs both at the component level (in that the particular image may have been selected for thematic reasons) and when viewing the entire work (in that further meaning may be present in the relative placement of particular elements, or a singular image formed from the amalgamation of elements). However, the collage is much less concise in its ghosting than the mosaic because of the scavenged nature of its components, each image selected for the collage has been repurposed from its original context. This means that a number of potential permeations may unintentionally accompany the elements the artist intended to ghost from a component image. Furthermore, while the artist may not have considered the ramifications of these permeations, a critical audience may interpret those permeations as intentional references by the artist, and try to process deeper meaning from them. Lepage has assembled a collage of 1950's Hollywood iconography and celebrity references and used Stravinsky's score as the underlying spine upon which he formed the shape of *The Rake's Progress*; and while *The Nightingale and Other Short Fables* is also an amalgamation of influences, Lepage has painted them all with the same brush of *chinoiserie* before assembling them into a unified mosaic.

In terms of permeation and ghosting, Lepage has assembled *The Rake's Progress* as a frame that references a vast multitude of external sources, and in so doing imposes the iconography of those outside sources overtop of Stravinsky's music. In effect, in his *mise en scène* Lepage has created a live mash-up music video for Stravinsky's opera, filled with allusions to movies from the 1950's. If the audience isn't familiar with those 50's movie references, it's still possible to see that something specific has been encoded into the set and costume choices, but the production comes across as a displacement of the opera into the 1950's, not a grand intertextual collage of iconic movie imagery. This iteration of the mise-en-scène thus requires the

audience to have a comprehensive understanding of context from outside the frame, and purposefully draws their attention to it; in effect, it is ghosting so significantly that there are few boundaries in place to insulate the production from the permeation of an individual audience member's experience of those 1950's films. Thus familiar audiences are under constant barrage of external references, and uninitiated audiences see a nonsensical opera about making a cowboy movie in the 50's. Lepage's *The Rake's Progress* is as visually rich and loaded with references as the original paintings by Hogarth that first inspired it, but the plethora of allusions also makes it more challenging for the viewer to process, and even those who catch the many references struggle to find a point being made, other than "these things are similar."

In contrast, much of the sources Lepage ghosts for *The Nightingale* feel more homogeneous because of how Western ideology perceives an aura of exoticism around the East, and has less discerning taste when it comes to differentiating the cultural exports of one Asian country from another. The blending of traditions feels unified to the western audience because all the signals are dressed in the same style of *chinoiserie;* making them strange, but in a way that felt familiar. Furthermore, Lepage's efforts in staging were much more concerned with overcoming the technical challenges; arranging for the removable water tank in the orchestra pit, figuring out how to position the orchestra, the chorus, and the principle singers in order to create an effective and functional stage picture. The labour he invested on coordinating the mechanisms of the production kept him busy, and resulted in a much simpler thematic presentation and a more elegant and unified production.

Lepage's *Nightingale* uses a less permeable frame than *The Rake*, only ghosting in those references that support the orientalist themes of the piece. Lepage justifies the blending of Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese, and Taiwanese influences in the production by presenting the

show as a commentary on the orientalism that was popular in Europe when Hans Christian Andersen first wrote the piece. However, Lepage's position vis à vis these cultures as a visitor, with his own interpretations of those cultural practices, prevents him from giving them proper representation. To his credit, Lepage's amalgamation of cultures results in a stylized, mythologized, and gorgeous production, which awed both audiences and critics. He makes no claim that *The Nightingale* is an authentic representation of Asian culture, but the number of references he makes in press releases and program notes to the cultural practices he borrows from still grants a misplaced aura of validity to his artistic interpretations of those traditions.

Permeation and ghosting are some of the most powerful tools at Lepage's disposal. With them, he can make coincidence look like destiny, and turn the most ordinary object into an embodiment of myth, or a revelatory experience. This transmutation of the ordinary into the extraordinary does come at a price: Lepage's delightful visual rhymes often take precedence over any deliberate expression of meaning. For Lepage, the connection is more important than the message; he aims to give his audience a dreamlike experience, but he leaves it up to them to interpret that dream; or as he says in *Connecting Flights:* "we shouldn't have to make sure our audience feels and thinks a certain way at a certain moment. We have to create a coherent world, a coherent environment from which the audience takes what it wants" (Charest 163).

Lepage's stage productions of both *The Rake's Progress* and *The Nightingale and Other Short Fables* have moments when they are positively stunning. Lepage not only defies stage conventions, he surpasses our expectation of reality. He resorts to extreme technical measures to make his coherent world on stage supersede our understanding of the laws of physics. This is where the magic in his work comes from, making something happen on stage that you wouldn't have dreamed were possible. Lepage has a gift for turning the mundane into the miraculous; oil

derricks that become camera jibs, an actor diving headfirst into a projected pool, a deathbed that unfolds into the embodiment of death itself, and puppets who come to life with song. Lepage states that "opera entails fewer constraints in terms of subtext and the writer's intentions, for in opera the intentions are apparent in the music" (Caux 77). In regards to puppets, he believes "même si les marionnettes sont petites, ce qu'elles racontent, ce qu'elles vivent, leurs émotions, leurs idées, sont plus grandes que nature" (Gilbert 35). The magic of puppets is not that they appear to have feelings, but that we have feelings on their behalf. The remarkable thing about opera is how the voice can transcend language and strike us with raw emotion. These two art forms, used in conjunction resonate powerfully with audiences. Lepage speaks of this pairing as though it was the most natural of matches: "la marionnette crée son propre univers, pétri de conventions, loin du réalisme. L'opéra ne fonctionne pas autrement" (Gilbert 19). That, perhaps most of all, is why *The Nightingale* was so overwhelmingly appreciated; it gave the audience exactly what they wanted: it spoke straight to the heart with stunning spectacle.

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