

Developing an Idea on Directing the Suitcase

by Kōbō Abe

By Saina Seraj

Kōbō Abe, pen name of Kimifusa Abe, wrote three interconnected plays that he considered to be a symbol of birth, life, and death, and the link between these three literary works was an actor who played the three roles of "Suitcase", "The Box man" and "The Man Who Turned into A Stick". Among these three plays, I have developed a genuine connection with "Suitcase".

The first factor that impressed me was the author's suggestions for the director. It is evident that he wrote the script with a director's vision, which is not surprising because he spent a lot of time performing his plays. It should be noted that the images suggested by Kōbō Abe are remarkably close to my mental space, and I would like to follow the same rule to create this work.

Furthermore, I'm inspired by my own mental images based on the text I'm reading, and this time my mental images are perfectly aligned with the author; Empty space on the stage, use of black cloth in a white space, and simple table and chairs in a black box theatre. I assume using too many luxuries and props will spoil the message of the dialogue. The focus of the audience should be on receiving dialogues and visual clutter will disrupt the viewer's engagement.

One of the reasons to perform this text is the Abe's attention to objects. The object's place in the performance has always been, and is, important to me. I prefer to use an actress for the role of "suitcase" and simulate all the sounds using technology. Something similar to chatter and unfamiliar sounds that confuse the audience a little. With the help of this trick, they can draw their attention to some real phrases coming out of the suitcase. Just imagine hearing some important sentences in English from among gibberish phrases! Definitely, due to the contrast between the fake language that is not understandable to the audience, their ear becomes more sensitive to identifying a word or a sentence. And right at that moment, the English language is used, and the words or sentences in the text penetrate the audience as important content.

The woman and her guest should avoid "luxury" or "special" clothes not to represent a particular class, nationality, or religion. All the elements should be free of any direct message to open the space for the "suitcase", so the attention will be directed towards it; Clothes in neutral colors and simple accessories in pale brown.

I prefer the type of performance of the two actors who are facing each other at the table to go a little toward the realistic performance. But sometimes, with the help of expressionistic lighting (long and drawn shadows), an attempt is made to reveal the doubts and suspicions of the woman and the guest. Of course, it's worth mentioning that the lighting should not make the suitcase invisible on stage. A few times, voices come from outside the stage, which is a poem about Mona Lisa's smile. It is precisely at such moments that long shadows of the woman and the guest are created with a expressionistic lights to represent they are far from each other, depicting the

annoyance, turbidity, fear, and curiosity of the two of them from the suitcase. It may be a bit in contrast with the poem that comes from outside the scene, but this poem somewhere places Mona Lisa's smile next to a phenomenon like war, and this contrast is exactly what the woman and her guest have. Two friends who don't seem to be friends anymore!

Regarding the voice that comes from outside the stage, I prefer it to be the voice of an old man who sometimes reads a poem and sometimes says sentences. I like that this sound is somehow representative of the same "ancestors"; this time not from the suitcase but from the outer space of the stage because they are everywhere.

This play is mainly dialogues between two people about a suitcase, and thanks to technology, it is possible to use all kinds of effects and voices so that the audience's sense of hearing is more stimulated and not bored. For example, when the guest tries to unlock the suitcase with a hairpin or the moment when the woman brings the suitcase with her on the stage.

Most of Abe's plays have scenes that make it difficult for the audience to understand. These ambiguities in the moment-by-moment progress of the work and dialogues are completely clear. Whether the audience is looking for the ultimate goal and meaning, they are drawn and immersed in the work. For example, what are the "ancestors" who scare and offend the woman with making noises in the Suitcase? What is the reason for this woman's decision not to reveal the story's secret when it seems that this secret is about to be revealed? Such questions do not seem critical to the audience who immediately understands what Abe is implying. It is vain to explain decoding this text, so in this part, I will perceive it myself, and I would like to reflect it in the performance.

The presence of ancestors in the Suitcase is like the achievements of the predecessors' actions in society. In fact, people live in conditions that result from the actions and decisions of their predecessors. These conditions may be good or bad enough to lead people to change them. In any case, the main issue is the contrast between the past and the present, and it leads to the birth of a new consequence. Maybe that's why Abe introduced this play as "birth" along with the other two works which are life and death.

This is precisely the reason why I want to skip any sign of a particular society or country and present this "confrontation between the past and the present" as a universal issue. This contrast must be shown in any way. Sometimes with the movement and physical conflict of the actors with the props on the stage, and sometimes by showing their conflict and mental doubt with the suitcase or each other with lighting.

The woman knows their ancestors are in the suitcase as her husband told her. Now it's her turn to decide whether to open the suitcase to make sure or accept that their ancestors are living in the same suitcase with them and the best thing to do is ignore them. The two of them should meet at the end of the show, when other sounds come out of the suitcase, so that the moment of confrontation when the eyes of the woman and the suitcase are tied together, is the last thing seen on the stage. And everything with this question comes to an end.