Reflection of *Fall*

I have a passion for the performance making method called devising. Performances created by such methodology are supposed to be purely original, highly interdisciplinary, rich in innovation, non-script based, improvisation-leaded, experimental and collaborative. Within the devising knowledge in my mind, I made this short dance-based film named "Fall". I wrote an instrumental song of the same name "Fall" and made it as the accompanying music for the film. The story begins with me drowning in the bath, unfolds in multiple struggling dreams, and ends up with me suddenly waking up under the water. This short film, along with the soundtracks, is thus highly experimental and melancholy. I created this short almost on my own. My roles span director, producer, choreographer, dancer, actor, dramaturge, sound designer, costume and set designer, editor and poster designer. Since this was the very first time I made a "film", without any previous learning or working experience of filming, there are many aspects worth giving critical reflections. Devising as the leading methodology, techniques of moving images, challenges of film directing /producing and graphic design are all important points while causing problems to my short film project.

I used to create many live devised performances in black box theatres, however, this was the first time I implemented its essentials into filmmaking. As mentioned previously, devising is an effective performance making approach to creating concept-driven, highly collaborative and improvisational performing arts. It is referenced in many art forms and genres. For instance, for filmmaking, there is a typical genre called Mumblecore, whose contents and dialogues are often improvised by the actors rather than being pre-scripted by the director or playwright. I have found the making process of my short film does have some similarities with the mumblecore genre. For example, I made it with a low budget, cheap equipment and a small crew. Instead of a script with many lines or details, my script merely provides structures and directions. Most of my acting was improvised, even part of the choreography was improvised once and recorded by the camera. This was also because I lack filmmaking

experience, and I just followed the general instructions as I was doing a devised theatre performance. Nonetheless, unlike mumblecore, which focuses on young people's urban life with tremendous amounts of dialogues based on the natural reality, my project only has one line and the whole piece is experimental, dreaming, supernatural, abstract, implicit and multi-layered. In my opinion, when a performance is emotion-based, the best way to engage the audience is to "act without words." From the perspective of general artistry, my project is abundant in dramatic conflicts and flows, and this benefits from the devising method, but I did not realize the significance of makeup. The production crew only consisted of three people including myself, I, as the only performer, was performing without any makeup in 6 scenes. Even if in that scene I had slight makeup, there was still conspicuous blemishes on my face, which more or less ruined the integral aesthetics. Film is unlike theatre in this area; in theatres, the audience watches the performers at a distance; in films, close-ups are the most intense shots while revealing any blemish or flaws of the performers or within the shot itself. Now I have realized I cannot directly make films as I imagine how I would do it in theatres. There is a close relationship but also a big gap between the two art forms. With the first-time experience in my mind, even though the budget is still low, I will definitely hire a complete filming crew working with me in the future, including professional dressers who deal with both makeup and haircut.

I have taken systematic photography training so far, but I did not recognize the huge difference between photography and moving-image photography — cinematography. As it was a low-budget project, I only hired one cameraman and an assistant (who was also one of the choreographers). All the shorts were captured by Canon 70D with a regular lens and a GoPro 4. The only additional lighting equipment was just an LED flashlight. As a result, the whole shooting process went against the three-point lighting technique. This caused a notable problem that most of the scenes were shot underexposed so that the image noise became irreversible and outstanding. There were even no sound recording facilities, so the original soundtracks recorded by the cameras were of inferior quality and I had to add and edit sounds all by postproduction. Another mistake I made was, as the director, I failed to double-check

each finished shot after the cameraman. The workload was too heavy to manage to keep tracking every detail all by myself. Next time when I take the role of the director, I will never "trust" my cameramen but review any shots carefully before moving to postproduction. There is a common-sense that if we can make something happen in preproduction, then never leave it until postproduction. If we fail to make a specific effect in preproduction, compared to photography, cinematography makes a much higher workload to postproduction as one piece of moving image consisting of thousands of frames. I felt regretful many times when I was editing the raw footages, then I realized this is so true. In the future when I participate in any film productions, I will find multiple skilled cameramen who operate different types of cameras and set up camera placement from diverse shooting angles.

Because this short film is a highly independent project and it was also the first time I took both the role of the director and producer, some essential filming techniques were missing during the production. Generally, filmmakers express their professionalism through the delicate storyboards they draw, while I skipped this phase without consciousness. I merely took notes of the dramaturgy and I directed the entire piece just following the notes and on-site improvisation. In the theatre-making process, the storyboard is unnecessary; the play, the script or the dramaturgy, is considered predominant. I lacked professional filmmaking experience, therefore, I did both the directing and producing works as if I was doing a theatre performance. The biggest problem caused by this was the shooting randomness. Prepared storyboards are shooting plans, guidelines and realistic instructions for both in-progress filming production and postproduction. It was a waste of time and effort when both the cameraman and I were consulting with each other about cinematography, and we had to take extra unplanned shots in case of potential editing needs. Similarly, I had trouble discussing with the editors. Without a storyboard, no one knew what I was talking about — what the imagery looked like in my mind. From then on, I acknowledged the significance of the storyboard in the performance-making process. Even if I direct and produce theatre shows in the future, I will try to make storyboards as well.

Another thing worth mentioning is the graphic design appeared within my project. I designed the logo of "Fall" and the promotional posters. The whole process of original logo design only took 10 minutes, and I thought the digital conversion would take longer. The fact was the graphic designer that I hired spent another 10-minutes on the digitalization of the logo using Adobe Illustrator. The price was beyond my expectation compared with the time the graphic designer expended on it. I thus realized the decisive competitiveness of the ability to use Adobe Illustrator proficiently. The logo of "Fall" is not graphically complicated, if I was able to utilize Adobe Illustrator basically, the budget would be reduced. I thus plan to learn operating Adobe programs at Vancouver Film School as much as possible.

Consequently, my first-time short film project "Fall" is still competitive for its bold attempt. Although as a first-time filmmaker's project there were many underdeveloped aspects, the overall experimental concepts still had innovative tendencies and aesthetic significance. The application of devising into film production, cinematography, film directing and film-related graphic design are worth further investigation and discussions for me. Personally, how I can successfully transfer from a theatre-maker to a professional filmmaker is critical and challenging, but I am looking forward to my prospective development.