

Master Thesis Review:

Ran Jiao

The Making: A Directing Diary on the Process of Creating a Performance

Ms. Ran Jiao presents to defence her master thesis entitled *The Making: A Directing Diary on the Process of Creating a Performance*. The work is divided into five chapters that follow, more or less chronologically, the birth of the performances she has realised during her studies of theatre directing at DAMU: scenes from *The Memorandum* by Václav Havel, *La Ronde* by Arthur Schnitzler and *Serve the people*, adapted from Yan Lianke's eponymous novel. The first chapter is entitled "My Reality" and relates the search of Ms. Jiao for the theme that winds through all of her works, a sort of urge to create that she feels: she finds it in the questioning of her identity as a woman of Chinese origin. The second chapter relates her work on and with the different texts, including the reflection of the work of the translation and its intelligibility to Czech spectators. Ms. Jiao pays special attention here to the propagandistic use and misuse of language, a theme that successfully links the second chapter with the first, autobiographical one. The next part discusses the premises of a director's work in rehearsals: what position does s/he adopt in relation to the crew, how do different contexts (spatial, temporal etc.) influence the work during a repetition, what does the director need to prepare etc. The fourth chapter is the main core of Ms. Jiao's work. It describes and analyses her performances of *The Memo* and *Serve the People*, her work with the actors and other collaborators, her aesthetic and ideological choices and the way she has transposed them onto the stage. The focus on the corporeality as both a means and an impact of propaganda is very well defined and argued. The last part entitled "Rehearsals II" discusses concrete work of a director during rehearsals, examines the potential and difficulties of various exercises and methods, from the very first sessions until the final rehearsals and the feedback notes given to the actors. In the conclusion, Ms. Jiao reminds the problematics of the spectators' reception of a performance, a problematics a director should always keep in mind without however subordinating all his efforts to it, because he should mainly trust in the audience's abilities. The work is complemented by a good number of photographs that illustrate well Ms. Jiao's descriptions, and by a furnished bibliography.

The work is very well written, it is pleasant to read and the reader always clearly understands Ms. Jiao's point. In a certain way, it perfectly meets the formal requirements for a master thesis: Ms. Jiao describes the birth of her works, while searching retrospectively for a uniting theme of her urge to create, she analyses the development of the rehearsals, the

difficulties that arouse before her and the way she faced them, she draws conclusions of both her successes and failures. What could be reproached, though, is that in this study of “my theatre”, Ms. Jiao focuses more on “my” than on “theatre”. The text thus resembles in certain passages too much to a personal confession or even auto-therapy. This dimension of the text is however claimed and assumed by the author and one must recognise that it seems of real value for her future artistic course and efforts. We also need to remark that the two major topics of this auto-therapy, i. e. body and language, bear a strong scenic potential.

Among other formal deficiencies, we regret the absence of a clear conclusion that would really draw from the author’s previous reflections (to submit oneself to the audience is the easy way out), the lack of confrontation with bibliographic sources (they are quoted, but not really explored) and the lack of hierarchy within the statements (equal attention is paid to important and less important topics).

At the end of the day, the work can also be helpful for us, teachers: the diary Ms. Jiao announces in the title concerns actually not only her work of creation, but also the process of her studies, her expectations, her needs, her satisfactions and unsatisfactions – all these can bring us precious feedback.

I propose to evaluate this thesis by the grade B.

Prague, 14th September 2020

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