



第七天 THE SEVENTH DAY

INTERVIEW WITH MENG JINGHUI

What existential questions does Yu Hua's *The Seventh Day* ask? What choices did you focus on for this adaptation?

Meng Jinghui: *The Seventh Day* seems to have been written by Yu Hua as a prose poem, at once powerless and desperate, and in which many things are left unsaid. It's the story of a dead man. And over the seven days that follow his death, this man looks for things, digs, reminisces, deals with his regrets, talks with fate, takes an honest look at himself, and looks at the world with gentleness. It's a soothing story. Like a child who'd like to go on a long journey but has no choice but to go home, the main character is made to see, in the hereafter, the shadows of his ex-wife, of his father, and of his erstwhile friends. Is what he hears, sees, and thinks his real past, or what he aspires to? Is it a memory or a reconstitution of time? I chose a simple, linear logic, there's a world of memory, a world of fog, and a world of illusions.

The novel follows beings suspended on "the other side," but is also punctuated by actual events. Do you see yourself in this tension, in this bridge between opposites?

The world the audience sees is a collection of foggy and contrasted fragments put together. I wanted the wandering souls of that other world to speak to those of ours, for them to move around, socialise, make love, lose themselves, and descend into madness. Between the aesthetics highlighted by the author of the novel and my own artistic research, I see similar, closely-linked progressions, whether it's about the love for ordinary people, the hope doubts carry, or the respect for the vanquished. Dream is the only reality.

The scenography features skeletons, a shredder, and strange dark spheres of various sizes. When your actors speak, they address the audience directly. There's a frontal questioning of the audience.

The dark spheres represent the energy of the universe, the skeletons are residues of matter, and the shredder turns to dust anything that goes into it, including the mind. The scenography is an unfinished product, where everything is uncertain and shifting, from the narrative to the resolution, from the characters to the atmosphere and the emotions. The actors and myself are taking our time to observe and experiment step by step, and when we get to the end, there's like a sweet shiver of uncertainty. But everything aspires to be real in existence. Abstract artistic impressions and figurative shouts and whispers which contemporary theatre highlights have to be addressed to the audience directly, so that they can feel the quickness of a bared thought.

Through the use of actual events, including the story of the rat-girl, and through the quest of the main character, do you feel like reality is catching up or even overcoming fiction?

Look at how the absurd, confusing, and chaotic world that surrounds us awakens in us such a powerless anger and lassitude. Stendhal used to say: "Reality, cruel reality." I could answer: "Yes, we're the lucky few, and we gift ourselves theatre."

Between official representations and avant-garde artists, western spectators can have a wrong idea of Chinese cultural life. What do you see as your place in your country, and how do you see theatre in China, where you direct several festivals?

Chinese artists have a complex position and role that are part of a specific cultural context. Some have locked themselves in their ivory towers, others look to the world, some are opportunists while others flout decorum, some kowtow to the powers that be while others are open and generous. It's true that Chinese art is the object of much speculation and fantasising in the West, but if you go beyond the parasitic idea of "Chinese exoticism" and of the "Chinese national narrative," you'll find many artists with their own unique outlooks and always looking for a new light. I truly believe in a number of young independent Chinese artists, full of vitality and looking towards the whole world, and who have both the strength of ambition and the desire to experiment to find a free form of expression.

Your shows are referred to as avant-garde. One can find in them incongruous elements reminiscent of Dadaist art. What other influences can one find in them, from the past to the present?

Dadaism is a licentious and irresponsible aesthetics, free from restrictions. My relationship with those crazy Dadaists is at once distant and very close, sometimes we'll laugh together and sometimes we'll beat each other up. I like to project onto the stage passion and imagination, sound and fury, the profane and the sacred which don't exist in everyday life. Chaplin, Godard, Fellini, and the German Impressionists are some of my obvious influences.

Interview conducted by Marc Blanchet