

Playing with XiXi

-Mr Lin (林俊億)

How can I possibly write about my insights into an immersive theatre performance? To me, the difficulty is comparable to recommending an awesome drama series to friends but unable to reveal the plot. Aw, what would happen if I only talk about things that have stirred me, instead of giving away the details? What drove me to the show was ‘XiXi’ but what moved me was the games in its presentation. After his self-introduction, an actor drew the black curtain and guided the audience in. An actress extended her hand and said, ‘it’s very dimmed. Hold my hand. Let me guide you.’ Once I held her hand, a sense of intimacy was created immediately. It’s like a night talk with friends, in which the words spoken disclose deep secrets and the feeling is close and cosy. When the surrounding space was dimmed, the spotlight shed on some preset images, without being fully dominating. This means the audience experienced isolation and collectiveness at once in the dark – you could choose to be invisible or put yourself on display. Certainly, with the director’s design, the viewers would be invited by the actors to participate and become a rather core part of the image. When all the people in the room were playing ‘Red Light, Green Light’, it took me a few seconds to realise what’s happening and my leg injury stopped me from striding forward. When it’s time for hopscotch, (They called it ‘Jumping the Plane’ in Hong Kong? ‘XiXi’ played the game like a girl in skirt), one leg, both legs, one leg... I couldn’t support my body with just one leg, otherwise my leg would be in great pain. But I couldn’t stop. The people behind would bump into me and cause trouble – when the flesh doesn’t move as you please, one needs to have extraordinary willpower to enjoy the game. The sense of restriction imposed by the flesh was extended to a subsequent moment. I was blown away emotionally and mentally by the line ‘the flesh would be destroyed, the spirit could be evaluated (eternalized?)...’ (I recalled it from memory after the show, the actually line may be slightly different) and tears started to well up in my eyes. When the imagery of *Mourn Over the Breasts* appeared later on, a woman was seen lying flat on the floor. No matter how painful she

appeared, it looked more like ‘acting’ and thus unconvincing. Those who hadn’t read that thick volume would be hard to understand that hefty darkness in such as a short depiction. Was the creamy milk sweet in mouth while listening to the patient’s feelings and the association between milk and breast intended by the playwright/ director? With the sweet taste in the mouth, it’s a bit too playful and a bit guilt-inducing to make that association. It was a journey led by games. The sceneries along the way were author XiXi’s words and theatrical imagery. Inside the space, there were broadcasts close by and afar, planes splitting the sky at different distances, the faces of the crowd in To Kwa Wan on the wall

mirror, residents of Merry Building popping their heads out of the windows, the dangerously exciting Kai Tak Airport... passing one after another... When the participants were drawn into the games, they unwittingly (actually intended by the playwright and the director) savoured the different layers of the taste of life. As for light design, the lights switched fluidly, whereas the lightness and dimness were appropriate. At times, their speed caught attention; at times, the faint lights left an impression. Sometimes, when the field of vision was directed to a specific direction, it fitted the ongoing session just right. It's evident that the director was very familiar with the combinations of various theatrical components. The space and the body; joy, sorrow, union and parting; between the lightning and drifting clouds. On returning to the cafe from the basement, it might be impossible to accurately describe the journey you'd just experienced. Yet, you would leave with an indescribable state of mind. Hmm, the perfect time to reread XiXi's books too.