

Reviews of *Kafka's Ape* in Beijing

Translated to English by Ge Ning

“Produced by Quebec-based Infinithéâtre, *Kafka's Ape* is a one-man show which identifies the audience as shareholders of a privately owned security company called Greywater (implying Blackwater which is held responsible for the killing of many innocent people in Iraq and Afghanistan through collaborating with the CIA). An ape, which has degraded to the level of human being (through practicing human vices and developing skills to kill), is made to deliver the company's financial report to the shareholders. The story, based on Kafka's *A Report to An Academy*, plays on themes such as the denunciation of colonialism and contemporary capitalism, which accumulates fortune through killing. The actor's portrayal of the ape is quite successful and the script is well written. The director, who seems to be a radical left-winger, pays his own little homage, at the very beginning of the drama, to the 1968 students movement in Paris. All these elements are not unfamiliar to me or to others who have similar academic background. After watching this show I feel a bit powerless, since the act of denunciations on stage will after all be able to do very little to change the status quo. Young students should be encouraged to watch this show in order to get some guidance in developing their own ways of thinking. In addition, at this point it looks pretty hard to bring any artistic creations with a touch of criticism and radicalism to Beijing, a place shrouded in an atmosphere of happiness and harmony. Even if the story takes place somewhere else, it is still difficult to do so...”

“...The drama tells the story of the forced evolution of an ape, named Red Peter. By way of delivering a company's annual report, Red Peter blurs the biological boundary between ape and human being with his speech, his gesticulations and his act of denunciation. Thought-provoking themes are explored in opposition such as civilization vs. savagery, freedom vs. shackles, innocence vs. hypocrisy. These elements remotely echo the warning messages delivered by the movie *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*. During today's performance, the actor tried several times to interact with the audience, with all the lights on... The first row of spectators therefore

seemed to have been quite stressful. It was surprising to watch Red Peter finish an entire bottle of wine during the course of the performance...”

“Kafka’s Ape feels like Canada’s Monkey King (**NOTE:** this is a reference to the main character in *Journey to the West*, a classic of Chinese literature and one of the country’s best-known stories). The drama presents an alternative point of view and explores the difference between cultures. Through this drama, human beings are examined in the eyes of an ape. By watching this drama, eastern audiences can better understand the western world and even people of different ages are trying to understand each other...”

“The mutated form of the First World War inhumanity can still be felt in the 21st century. This is where the satire lies in *Kafka’s Ape*. The object of the ridicule is not only the corporate threat upon freedom in the capitalist system, nor is the aim of the drama only to offer *Surveiller et punir*. Each spectator of the show is witness and participant. It inspires serious thinking and is worth seeing.”

“A metaphoric satire on the threat of corporations, which gives precedence to the principle of capitalism over freedom, the drama is also a continuous discussion on human nature in the 21st century, a discussion started by Kafka in his original work. This discussion still has its contemporary relevance in a time when social media and technology companies pose a threat to the freedom of our society. However, on the one hand Chinese audiences may not be able to feel the same level of involvement (as a western audience), when being identified as company shareholders and this may be explained by our own political systems. On the other hand, the Nazi slogans used in the drama seem to only make vague reference to real life. We are not sure whether the director believes the state/government is another form of corporate entity. In addition, due to the fact that open discussion on these topics in China is still difficult, the political satire, however pertinent it may be in the drama, still seem to need a “special entrance”, through which the Chinese audience can be brought into the context.”