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a typical product of Hong Kong rather than a mainland yueju. The Youth Edition of the play (2007), under disguise of preserving a Hong Kong classic, intriguingly reflects and questions Hong Kong’s return to the mainland.

In her third chapter, Lei investigates a transnational production of the kunqu Peony Pavilion – Young Lover’s Edition. Using its paratheatrical activities in California (2006), Lei critiques the ideology of ‘brand’ advocated by Pai Hsien-yung, a celebrated Taiwanese writer, the producer, fund-raiser and one of the script-adapters of the production. To what extent can an entrepreneurial mission to be ‘cost-effective’ work alongside quality control for the oral and intangible heritage of humanity? It is a pity that Lei does not contextualize Pai’s Peony by considering his later Jade Hairpin, another transnational stage work, and other people’s transnational kun productions. The comparison of the artistic work, organization and audiences’ reception would have offered more insight into issues of cultural heritage, transnational cooperation and entrepreneurship in the twenty-first century.

Orlando (2009), a collaboration between the American avant-garde director Robert Wilson and Wei Hai-ming, a famous Taiwanese jingju performer, is the focus of Chapter 4. I admire the author’s courage in including ‘a failed example’. Lei points out that the incomplete deconstruction of jingju made the presentation ‘awkward and confusing’ (p. 21). Theatre history that tends to record only the greatest triumphs often blurs our vision of the more complex reality. Lei’s examination helps readers see the tendency of international collaboration in the global village and the importance of equalities involving intercultural theatre.

As fascinating as Lei’s discussion is, I found the theory of ‘zero’ difficult to follow. Chinese opera – although the author claims the term ‘rather a mistranslation of a Western categorization of performing arts’ (p. 9) – is indeed never static and develops all the time, yet it is not an ‘empty structure’ (p. 7). To me the essence of the ‘alternative opera’ of Lei’s research well exemplifies the intriguing relationship between performers’ great creativity and the genre’s strict conventions (certain genres may be less conventionalized than others). It is a great pity that the book does not include a glossary, which I feel is a must for academic works that use non-English terms and expressions.

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How can an act marked by absence, passivity and disappearance effectively draw eager audiences, fuel resistance and even effect political change? Anderson attempts to answer this question by examining the disturbing yet alluring practice of self-starvation as a performance of the ‘politics of morbidity’, or the active act of refusing to consume and the public show of moving towards death (p. 2). Drawing on the work of Peggy Phelan and Louis Althusser, and especially Michel Foucault’s theory of subjectivation,
Anderson constructs a framework for interpreting the economy of bodily consumption as an ‘institutional economy of the spectacle’ (p. 83).

Anderson’s study of self-starvation as performance is staged in three different spaces: the clinic, the gallery and the prison. Chapter 1 proposes that the naming and diagnosing of anorexia nervosa is a clinical and cultural performance that ‘requires its own continuous reproduction’ to exist as a disorder (p. 38). Chapters 2 and 3 discuss the spectacle surrounding the historical and contemporary endurance or hunger shows of Henry S. Tanner, Chris Burden, Ana Mendieta and Marina Abramović. Interestingly, the exhibitions of early twentieth-century medical professionals who advocated the health benefits of consumptive abstinence are weighed against the conceptual and experiential fasts staged by late twentieth-century performance artists. Most compelling and disturbing is Anderson’s fourth chapter, a detailed analysis of Turkey’s violent response to hunger-striking prisoners. In the year 2000, the Turkish government sent death squads into its own prisons to break a hunger strike that was protesting state abuses of penal power. One of the most powerful images that emerged from this incident was of non-striking prisoners throwing themselves over hunger strikers to protect them from imminent death. The author argues that, while hunger strikers essentially starve themselves to death, their control over their own morbidity can be understood as a public act of produced and embodied resistance. In response to the government’s brutality, the hunger strike grew past prison walls as thousands lay ‘down to death for days’ in a performance of agency and solidarity (p. 110). Analysing the media coverage on the strike’s lack of ‘success’, Anderson reiterates a crucial theme: the public meaning of self-starvation will always be mediated by the ‘audience’s’ read of the ‘performer’s’ gender, ethnicity, citizenship and class. Anderson’s position from the start is that self-starvation is not the inward, private or gendered disorder that it has often been labelled. But a likewise comprehensive focus on factors such as gender, class and race in his chapters on anorexia nervosa and hunger artists would have furthered the claim that self-starvation is an effective strategy of resistance for marginalized populations.

Some of the most timely and poignant examples of self-starvation – the public debate surrounding Terri Schiavo’s feeding tube, the force-feeding of prisoners at Guantánamo Bay – are relegated to a short afterward. A more fleshed-out analysis of these examples would have superbly supported the author’s overarching theory that self-starvation is indeed a performance and, like all performance, requires constant rearticulation and a receptive audience to witness it.


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In Transfigured Stages: Major Practitioners and Theatre Aesthetics in Australia, Margaret Hamilton traces the emergence of a postdramatic performance aesthetic in Australian