

Postdramatic Dramaturgies: Resonances between Asia and Europe

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Postdramatic Dramaturgies: Resonances between Asia and Europe, edited by Kai Tuchmann, satisfies those curious readers who wish to learn more about contemporary Chinese and Korean theatre aside from more publicized artists such as Meng Jinghui or Gao Xingjian. At the core of this edited volume is a continuous conversation among five artists—two Chinese, one Korean, and two European—whose works Tuchmann frames as “postdramatic . . . in their specific theatre landscapes” (3). The conversation began when Tuchmann and Li Yinan, his codirector at the Faculty of Dramaturgy and Applied Theatre at the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing, invited these artists to deliver a series of lectures and workshops to their B.A. Dramaturgy students. As a result, this volume not only archives each artist’s creative conviction and work, but also the faculty’s pedagogical approaches. Although the list of artists presented in no way represents the entire landscape of contemporary theatre in their respective countries, the volume is informative and innovative in its own right. The script of each artist’s work is contextualized by meticulously documented talks and accompanied by a QR code that directs the readers to a short video excerpt, which offers educators abundant ways to use this volume in classes on postdramatic theatre, dramaturgy, or experimental East Asian theatre.

The late Hans-Thies Lehmann is the invisible giant who provides the theoretical framework for this book. Part I includes an Introduction by Tuchmann, a panel discussion, and an article by Li, who translated Lehmann’s seminal *Postdramatic Theatre* into Chinese. All three pieces aim to articulate the concept of postdramatic theatre and its reverberation among theatre artists, especially Chinese artists. For Tuchmann, postdramatic theatre abandons “the focus on drama/action/imitation” and thus leads to “a dehierarchization of the theatrical means” (33). To a degree, the focal point of the dominant dramaturgy in modern theatre, especially in mainland China, has been dramatic structure and characters. The alternative approaches to theatre presented in this volume, however, rebel against these doctrines by developing “performance situations” that confirm Tuchmann’s conception of how dramaturgical practices expand “the possibilities of theatre” (4). One of the most difficult concepts raised in this volume is the Chinese term *juchang*, which emphasizes the “performative and spatial dimension” of theatre (50) and opposes more established terms such as *huaju* (spoken drama) and *xiju* (theatre) (34). It is worth noting that *juchang*, in which *chang* means “site, space,” is a term that usually interchanges with *xiju* among theatre artists, especially for those who work in the experimental orbit. In Li’s translation, she differentiates *juchang* and *xiju* “to emphasize the

performative and spatial dimension” (50) over dramatic narrative and textuality in theatre, thus making *juchang* a tentative equivalent to the “performance” in performance studies. *Juchang*, therefore, is less a genre with shared conventions and codified characteristics than a performance practice yet to be named; nor is there a consensus among Chinese scholars as to what the term signifies, specifically in the postdramatic theatre or theatrical arts in general. Tuchmann’s categorization of these artists as “postdramatic” and Li’s nomenclature might be a convenient grouping, but it is not one without contentions.

Ten chapters, with two chapters for each artist—their lectures as one of them and scripts of their works for another—make up Part II of this volume. The order of appearance alternates between Asian and European artists, beginning with Zhao Chuan, the first of the two Chinese artists presented and the leader of the Shanghai-based Grass Stage, one of China’s most important theatre collectives of the past decade. His lecture places Grass Stage’s works firmly in contemporary China’s socialist-neoliberal situation; *World Factory* (2014), a collage of song, circus, and narration, represents this effort, reexamining the migrant worker’s living conditions and questioning China’s ruling ideology. One of the two German-speaking artists present at the event, Hans-Werner Kroesinger, provided a short talk about his approach to documentary theatre, accompanied by a script of *Stolpersteine Staatstheater* (2015) that was featured in the 2016 edition of the Berliner Festspiele *Theatertreffen*. The second Chinese artist, Wen Hui, is one of China’s leading contemporary choreographers. Her work *RED* (2015) interviews performers who danced in *The Red Detachment of Women* and critically interrogates this canonical model ballet, one of the state-sanctioned and rigidly codified performances from the Cultural Revolution. A postscript by dramaturg Zhuang Jiayun, ruminating on the creation process and afterlife of the piece, follows. Next, Boris Nikitin challenges the alleged “representation of real” in documentary theatre (187). He exhibits how a theatrical space is created as an unstable and unreliable reality that opens up room for doubt, for example, the porous border between the constructed and the authentic in *Hamlet* (2016), cocreated with Julia*n Meding. Finally, South Korean director Lee Kyung-Sung’s contribution is his work *Love Story* (2018), in which three South Korean actors imagine North Korean workers in the Kaesong Industrial Complex after the South pulled their business out due to the intensity of the political climate. All these works are published here for the first time. The full-length introductions in English to the works of Zhao Chuan and Wen Hui have been long awaited in Western academia. Part III transcribes a roundtable conversation between Tuchmann and these artists that reflects on the changes and continuities in their critical thought three years after the talks took place.

As Tuchmann helpfully explains, “resonance” in physics refers to the relationship between two bodies where “one excites the other to vibrate” (23). In the theatrical resonance captured in this volume, there is clearly an initiator and a recipient. Although the subtitle of this volume is “Resonance *between* Asia and Europe,” it lacks the mutual amplification of the two-way vibration, particularly in the direction from Asia to Europe. This volume is better understood as the presentation of an ongoing process in which Chinese and other Asian artists and theorists try to articulate their practices through European, mainly German, concepts. Tuchmann, as an avid observer and keen advocate, offers his dramaturgical

interpretation of a process that is still rapidly unfolding and reshaping itself. The value of this volume lies in its reciprocal resonance—not as an ultimate verdict where exchange ceases but as a starting point where future conversations ensue.

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A Kiss across the Ocean: Transatlantic Intimacies of British Post-Punk & US Latinidad

By Richard T. Rodríguez. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022; pp. xv + 264, 28 illustrations. \$99.95 cloth, \$25.95 paper, \$25.95 e-book.

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On a Saturday morning in Santa Ana, California, a young Chicano boy sees Boy George singing “Karma Chameleon” on television, and his life is changed forever. This is the catalytic moment that opens Richard T. Rodríguez’s engagingly personal and lively *A Kiss across the Ocean: Transatlantic Intimacies of British Post-Punk & US Latinidad*, which examines the intersectional relationship between British postpunk music and US Latinidad and queer identity formations. Threading the needle between cultural and sociological performances of gender and shape-shifting theatricality while tracking the methods by which a self can become another in the quest for a different kind of nonessentialized authenticity, *A Kiss across the Ocean* serves as a welcome and provocative addition to academic discussions on pop culture and how pop music wears itself on the bodies and minds of listeners as both political liberation and affective disguise. However, what makes Rodríguez’s book unique is his ability to consider how queer emancipation can be inflected as well by cross-cultural and intercultural registers, pitches, cadences, and valences that cut across expected norms within a community. The tired academic and wider cultural take that seeks to define and inscribe Chicanoness and/or US Latinidad through a handful of ready-made signifiers and tropes—mariachi music, narco culture, and Frida Kahlo’s visual appropriation of indigeneity, to name just a few—is one that this book rebels against continually and productively. As such, it amplifies the boundaries of possibility to consider, reflect upon, and view US Latinx subjects within the greater social fabric. As Rodríguez states, “[a]lthough the 1980s categorically fomented a chilling moment of notorious conservatism, it was also a time of queer-subversive possibility” (19).

Citing Karen Tongson’s *Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries* and Laura U. Marks’s *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, among others, Rodríguez notes how connectedness and belonging for queer youth of color, especially, can be inhabited in ways that are symbiotic and expansive: communities that