

Editorial

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‘Radical bodies’, to borrow from Diana Looser’s title, emerge as a central concern in this general issue of *TRI*, where five articles explore the politicizing possibilities of theatre in relation to multifaceted questions of gender, cultural hybridity, identity and social democracy, in a rich and diverse range of performances and geographical locations.

Looser’s ‘radical bodies’ are three ‘dangerous ladies’ who practised and performed the Japanese martial arts of jujutsu and judo in the early twentieth century: Fude Hamashita (United States), Edith Garrud (Britain) and Florence Le Mar (New Zealand). Offering a historical survey of these three figures, Looser traces and analyses how they ‘combined pedagogy, feminist philosophy and performance, creating transgressive bodies that defied Western expectations of women’s physical abilities and concomitant cultural identities’. Her critical excavation of these women practitioner–performers involves looking across the divide of political activism and popular theatre, serving as an important reminder to theatre and performance scholarship that ‘transgressive bodies’ are not always and necessarily to be found in the counter-cultural margins. As Looser’s article exemplifies, a critical practice that ‘entertains’ the popular can facilitate new insights into the mainstreaming of ‘radical bodies’ as politically charged sites of performance.

Peilin Liang’s ‘dangerous lady’ is the eponymous heroine of *The Lady Knight-Errant of Taiwan – Peh-sio-lan*. Peh-sio-lan is a fictional action heroine (based on Taiwan’s real-life Robin Hood, Liau Thiam-teng) who ‘handles her sword with the élan of a *samurai*’ and with a ‘mere kick of the leg and a swish of the sword . . . can single-handedly overcome a mob of gangsters without being short of breath or disarranging her hair’. To analyse the spectacular and popular performances of the Lady Knight-Errant’s adventures by Taiwan’s Golden Bough Performance Society, and mirroring the philosophy, process and practice of the company, Liang draws on a theoretical framework of cultural hybridity. For this theatre group, as her article details, socially aware performance-making is rooted in local, popular theatre traditions, playfully revived and rearticulated to give aesthetic and political expression to Taiwan’s history of colonization.

Cultural hybridity is returned to in Ashley Thorpe’s analysis of how the tradition of *Jingju* (‘Beijing Opera’) is transformed when it is staged outside mainland China. Circulating new knowledge about two undocumented traditional Chinese theatre companies based in Britain – the UK Beijing Opera Society and the London Jing Kun Opera Association – Thorpe draws on Judith Butler and Homi Bhabha to theorize the ‘performativity of ethnic identities’ as highly ‘significant in diasporic performance

contexts'. At the same time, Thorpe resists the idea that performative acts of ethnicity are in any way straightforward, questioning, for instance, the extent to which a white, Western performer of *Jingju* appears as a radical body, productively unsettling 'markers of ethnic identity', or merely serves to orientalize or to 'other'. And when it is a British actor who performs the *dan* (female) role, then the performativity of both ethnicity and gender, as Thorpe carefully demonstrates, requires critical attention.

Destabilizing identity is taken up in Steve Wilmer's article, where he explores the fascinating, intriguing, if not puzzling, case of three artists who all changed their names to that of Janez Janša, the right-wing former prime minister of Slovenia. In an 'act of renaming' that involves socially aware artists choosing to identify or to associate with right-wing politics, the political stakes are hard to fathom. Balancing the ambiguities in this 'act of renaming' – acknowledging the views of those who saw this as nothing more than a media stunt and exploring the politicizing possibilities of renaming – Wilmer shows how the artists' project opens up a discussion of the relationship between art and politics. Surrendering their individual identities as artists engaged in critical-cultural practices, the Janez Janšas arguably gesture to the idea that art does not offer 'ready-made' solutions to changing oppressive social structures such as capitalism, but rather must constantly negotiate and renegotiate in what ways and on what terms it can be politically effective.

A failure on the part of the Jamaican women's theatre company, Sistren, to renegotiate its collective model of organization and collaborative forms of theatre-making, is the subject of Karina Smith's article. Formed in 1977, this nationally and internationally important women's theatre collective has been centrally and unambiguously concerned with contesting the unequal social relations of Jamaican society and attending to gender, race and class oppressions. Smith's article explores, on the one hand, how the company's collective organization and creative practice functioned as an important site of sociopolitical resistance to the neoliberal politics of Jamaica in the 1980s, and details, on the other, how collectivity masked rather than enabled the company's negotiation of racial and class-based differences.

A practitioner's investment in the production of 'radical bodies' needs always, therefore, to be viewed and reviewed in relation to social, cultural and political contexts of production. Equally, scholars also are charged with the task of renewing their critical frameworks, rather than coming to rely on these as 'ready-made'. I hope that this issue encourages further, future submissions to *TRI* which serve to enhance the knowledge of 'radical bodies' in different theatre cultures and geographies in ways that also serve to radicalize the critical and theoretical frameworks through which we see and interpret them.