CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Popular Visual Culture in Film, Theatre and TV Drama

INTRODUCTION

Facing the pandemic thread of COVID-19 in 2020, most people in the world nowadays since March are asked by their governments to stay at home being locked down. How do people, while trying to survive, keep healthy and safe, find something meaningful to do, and make progress without feeling bored to death? Without the burden and pressure of the sophisticated advanced scholarly complex theories in the higher education, more and more people choose to enjoy Shakespeare, history, religion, literature and philosophy through seeing films, theater performances, and TV drama. This interdisciplinary monograph, walking out from the academic Ivory Tower, leads you to the fascinating and intriguing world of popular film, (musical) theatre, and TV Drama.

This interdisciplinary, well-crafted monograph leads you to the fascinating and intriguing world of popular film, (musical) theatre, and TV Drama. This monograph is in the international field of Performance Studies and Film Studies, in arenas ranging from theatre, film, literature, TV drama, and AI, to theories of culture, humanities and media, inspiring the readers to know the scholarly exchange between the East and the West and bring the populace critical thought. Each chapter contains its issues, and all connects with the common thematic vein of performance practice in life represented via theatre and films. You’ll find contemporary and classical literature works, Eastern and Western, adapted, represented and
transformed into interesting artistic media in films, performances, TV dramas, musicals, Robot theatre and AI films.

SYNOPSIS OF EACH CHAPTER

Featuring examples as well as the insightful perspectives, you will be enriched with the useful theoretical knowledge in Chap. 1 of the methodology and theories of Popular Culture, Visual Culture, Shakespearean research, Performance Studies, Feminism, and Film Studies. Chapter 2 entices you to compare the famous films adapted from Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Chapter 3 lets you enjoy the spectacles of the Korean film *Along with the Gods*. Chapter 4 applies Anthropology (Myth and Levi-Strauss) within the mythological structure to interpreting the original musical in Taiwan and the Chinese film *The Monkey King: Kingdom of Women*. Chapter 5 explores the arousal by face and identity transformation in the analysis of *Miss Saigon* dispute and the five cases, including Asian American play *Yellow Face*, the musicals *Cats*, *The Lion King*, *War Paint*, and the Japanese stage performance *Jekyll & Hyde & So On* (2018) staged in TIFA in Taiwan.

In Chap. 6, let’s see the sexy cast dance Tango and women sing for revenge in the musical film *Chicago* and the musical *The Visit*. Chapter 7 attracts you to watch the popular Chinese TV Drama to understand how to struggle to fight to win in the end as the heroine Wei, Yin-Lo in *Story of Yanxi Palace* (2018). Chapter 8 examines the colonial and postcolonial history via Taiwan *Hakka Theatre: Roseki* TV Drama. Chapter 9 comments on Japanese Director Oriza Hirata’s two robot theatre performances (produced by Seinendan Theater Company collaborated with Japanese Professor Hirosi Ishiguro whose expertise in Robotics at Osaka University) and the eleven popular AI films. Chapter 10 makes a conclusion to illustrate the international appeal of popular visual culture in film, TV drama, and theatre manifested by human and AI.

THEORIES AND METHODOLOGY

Theories of Popular Culture and Visual Culture

For the academia theory lovers, this monograph also provides you with plentiful theories and criticisms as methodology for you to get addicted to it. “Performing Shakespeare in Digital Culture” as W. B. Worthen indicates in the chapter of the book *Shakespeare and Popular Culture* edited by Robert Shaughnessy:
“Not only is our access to Shakespearean mediated by digital technology (even in live performance, where computers operate most theatre systems), our imagination of Shakespearean drama is shaped by the forms and moods of digital culture: the “penny dreadfuls” of Julie Taymor’s Titus, Ethan Hawke’s editing and re-editing of his pixelated experience in Michael Almereyda’s Hamlet, the animated clouds in the storm scene of Baz Luhrmann’s William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet, to say nothing of the thoroughgoing impact of digital editing in all three films” (2007: 228).

Not just Shakespearean drama is mediated by digital technology to be imagined, but also performing arts knowledge and history can be absorbed via theater, films and TV drama, especially manifested in popular culture. This monograph applies the theories of Popular Culture, Performance Studies, Film Studies, Shakespearean Research, Visual Culture, Modern Culture, Media Studies as methodologies to exploring Miss Saigon Disputes and the total 31 cases. There are 10 chapters arranged in the three parts in this monograph—Part I Literature, Film, and Theatre, Part II Asian American Play, Asian Theatre, and Musical Theater, and Part III TV Drama, Robot Theatre and AI Films.

In Chap. 2 Shakespeare and Popular Culture: Romeo and Juliet in Film and Pop Music

Shakespeare’s drama Romeo and Juliet is represented in the popular modern and postmodern four films and the adaptation lyrics is heard in the pop songs two music cases in Chap. 2. In Chap. 2, applying the ideas of Raymond Williams’ book article “The Analysis of Culture,” Angela McRobbie’s book Postmodernism and Popular Culture, Marjorie Garber’s book Shakespeare and Modern Culture, Douglas Lanier’s Shakespeare & Modern Popular Culture, Julie Sanders’ Shakespeare and Music, etc. to interpreting Shakespeare’s play Romeo and Juliet in the popular four films, Taylor Swift’s MV song “Love Story,” and The “Late Show with James Corden” performing the soundtrack with Emily Blunt.

In Chap. 3 Represent Afterlife and Replay Habitus: Performance via Spectacle in the Korean Film Along with the Gods: The Two Worlds

Theories of Guy Debord. The Spectacle of the Society, Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of “habitus” in “Structures and the Habitus” in Outline of a Theory of Practice, Suk-Young Kim’s Illusive Utopia about public spectacle, film, and visual media in the Korean context, Ju Yon Kim’s concept of “everyday mundane” in The Racial Mundane, etc. are applied to interpreting this Korean film on the theme of spectacle and habitus.

In Chap. 4 Myth and Levi-Strauss: Taiwan Musical Classic of Mountains and Seas & Chinese Film The Monkey King: Kingdom of Women
Claude Lévi-Strauss’ discourse on the aboriginal’s primitive way of life and the related myth thinking logic in *Myth and Meaning* are applied to the interpretation of Film Director Soi Cheang’s film *The Monkey King: Kingdom of Women* (2018) and Theater Director Liang, Chi-Ming’s musical *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* (2017). The latter is inspired from the Nobel Prize winner Gao Xingjian’s the same title novel *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*.

**In Chap. 5 Face, Race, and Performance: Arousal by Face and Identity Transformation**

This chapter is complex to cover the 3 areas, 6 topics.

1. *Miss Saigon* Dispute and *Yellow Face*
2. *The Lion King,* *Cats,* and *War Paint*
3. *Jekyll & Hyde & So On*

I argue that makeup breaks the liminal space to link from the real performers’ face to show the identity in *Yellow Face* and make the animals life alive and vivid in *Cats* by makeup and *The Lion King* by masks with theatricality. Supporting literature reviews and the related theoretical ideas in face makeup as Hana Worthen indicates that “(t)racing the posthuman turn in the humanities” (2018: 187) in the book review *Performing Animality: Animals in Performance Practices*. Moreover, Jennifer Parker-Starbuck’s analysis of taxidermy as “the liminal space between the animal’s life and death” (2015: 151) also shits from “theatrical” to “performative taxidermy” (2018: 186).

In Asia, *Jekyll & Hyde & So On*, Japanese Director Koki Mitani and his Japanese cast successfully transform the western tragic thrill novel to be a comedy stage intercultural performance. I argue that face makeup can show the arousal and identity transformation. The chapter on *Jekyll & Hyde* in Daphne Brooks’s *Bodies in Dissent*, and Mel Chen’s *Animacies* can be referenced. Mansfield’s Hyde evokes the dark deviant, freak, grotesque body is corporeal deformity contorted into animality. However, *Jekyll & Hyde & So On* is bizarre and hilarious by way of makeup to have the identity transformation.

**In Chap. 6 Dance Tango and Sing for Revenge in *Chicago* and *The Visit***

This chapter examines the musical film *Chicago* (2002, Miramax Motion Picture) and the musical *The Visit* (2015), collaboratively done by Composer John Kander and Lyrist Fred Ebb. In *Chicago*, after the women committing homicide of the men for their lies, cheating and betrayals, the
women ask for not guilty, expressed by the sexy Tango dance song “Cell Block Tango.” In *The Visit*, the song “I Would Never Leave You & One Legged Tango” sung and danced by the character Chaire Zachanassian’s entourage, her Butler and two Eunuchs and danced together by Claire also shows the same spirit of female revenge.

As Michael Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality* points out pleasure and power, K&E’s marvelous melodic musicals *Chicago* and *The Visit* use unconventional controversial themes to represent anti-heroic *femmes fatales* and women avengers. They have the ability in undermining the superficial law and fake order. All of these express American society’s and the public’s attitude change from morality and conservatism in the 1970s to worship celebrity and fortune since 1990s up to the present.

Concerning of TV Drama, in Chap. 7 *Theatre, Performance, and Popular Story of Yanxi Palace* and Chap. 8 *Taiwan Hakka Theatre: Roseki TV Drama*, the concept of Christine Geraghty’s book chapter “Soap Opera and Utopia” provides the lens for exploring the hit popular TV Chinese soap opera *Story of Yanxi Palace* (70 episodes, 2018) and Taiwan *Hakka Theatre: Roseki TV Drama* (14 episodes, 2018). Although Utopia imagination from the rural to urban, from the past to the present, is similar yet changing.

By the training of Feminism, you can see the influence of Feminism on interpreting and doing critique on these cases. For example, the female protagonist Wei, Yin-Luo’s candid and brave (post)feminist fighting spirit in *Story of Yanxi Palace*. In Hakka Theatre *Roseki*, the Hakka women’s piteous marginal situation of “The Other” and “the abject” is scrutinized in the perspective of Post-colonial feminism. Julia Kristeva’s Psychoanalysis and Feminist theory of “abjection,” Hakka women are “abjected” by the ethnicity discrimination as “The Other.” Taiwanese people are oppressed by politics under colonialization and post-colonialization.

In the perspective of Performance Studies, (Post)-Feminism, and Popular Culture, Chap. 7 employs the popular Chinese TV drama soap opera *Story of Yanxi Palace* to explore Chinese Beijing opera and ritual dance. Theoretical ideas also include Angela McRobbie’s book *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*, and so on. The two TV drama adaptations are both compared with historical documents. Jean Baudrillard’s article “The Precession of Simulacra,” Michel de Certeau’s book chapter “The Practice of Everyday Life,” and Ien Ang’s “Feminism Desire and Female Pleasure” also offer the insights in the politics of popular culture.

Besides, in Chap. 8 *Hakka Theatre: Roseki TV Drama*, Homi Bhabha’s post-colonial theory is suitable to be applied to interpreting Taiwanese
Writer Lyuu’s daily lives and literature works under Japanese colonization in the 1940s and Chinese General Chen-Yi’s corruption rule in Taiwan from 1945 to 1950, especially the controversy 228 Event in 1947. Lyuu, with the intellectual’s political ideal of trying to improve Taiwanese poor people’s lives in the society under Japanese colonialization, World War II, and Chinese Chen Yi government’s corruption, he attended the revolution to be a victim of Luku Incident\(^1\) in 1951. All of these can see the ambiguity of national identity and the difficulty of Taiwan’s political situation.

In Chap. 9 on Robot Theater and AI Films, there are the 2 robot theater and the 11 fantastic popular films interpreted by theories. For instance, the theory of “Simulation” and “Simulacra” in Jean Baudrillard’s article “The Precession of Simulacra” is applied for elaboration the case studies. Moreover, Michel de Certeau’s book chapter “The Practice of Everyday Life,” and “Theory of Uncanny Valley,” and many scholars’ theories and related concepts offer the insights for probing into the fascinating films, theaters, and TV drama in this monograph. Chapter 10 draws the conclusion.

Hope you, my dear readers, enjoy reading this monograph, including the valuable 65 images (of the films, musicals, theatre performances, TV drama programs) all in color. Let’s start the reading journey together.

NOTES
1. On Dec. 28th, 1952, in the largest political event in Taiwan during the White Terror Era, while trying to remove the communists, in the Luku village of Shiding District, hundreds of innocent people were arrested, and many people were falsely imprisoned and executed.

WORKS CITED
Parker-Starbuck, J. 2015. Animal Pasts and Presents: Taxidermied Time Travellers. Performing Animality: Animals in Performance Practices. Ed./Lourdes Orozco. Palgrave Macmillan, 150–167.
Worthen, H. 2018. Book Review “Performing Animality: Animals in Performance Practices.” In Theatre Topics, ed. Lourdes Orozco and Jennifer Parker-Starbuck, 28 (2): 186–187.
Worthen, W.B. 2007. Performing Shakespeare in Digital Culture. In Shakespeare and Popular Culture, ed. Robert Shaughnessy. New York: Cambridge University Press.