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INTRODUCTION TO THE THEMED ISSUE ON PERFORMANCE IN ASIA

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"Performance in Asia" is the second of two themed issues of the *International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies* (IJAPS). It follows part one, "Music in Asia," which appeared in IJAPS Volume 9, Issue 1. Like its counterpart, this themed issue brings together articles from various disciplines and regions across Asia, presenting research on Singapore, Taiwan, Pakistan and Japan. The material analysed ranges from live theatre, both avant-garde and popular, to puppet plays, film and television. The articles in this themed issue share a common focus on the experience of the spectator. The productions they analyse demonstrate how cross-cultural and other hybrid elements either make for a jarring spectatorial experience that leads to questions about locality and identity, or encourage audiences that have been hitherto defined by their differences to come together. Several of the articles in this themed issue also trace audiences across time, comparing their responses decades ago to those of today. In this fashion, the articles in "Performance in Asia" address the complex relationship between the global and the local in terms of how artistic productions impact upon both the individual, and the society in which that individual is located, in a rapidly changing world.

In the late 1990s, an important collaboration took place between Singaporean director Ong Keng Sen and Japanese playwright Kishida Rio. The play that resulted from their combined efforts, a reimagined Shakespearean *Lear*, consists of a medley of cross-cultural influences: from Indonesian *gamelan* and *pencak silat* to Chinese opera; from Japanese Nō to Thai courtly dance. James Rhys Edwards' article: "Impossible Properties: Language and Legitimacy in Ong Keng Sen's *Lear*," investigates this production as both a late capitalist spectacle with global significance, and a local, Singaporean political allegory. Ong Keng Sen's unique intercultural production is multilingual: each performer speaks his or her national language. In his analysis, Edwards brings a sense of what it is like to be in the audience witnessing such a spectacle, feeling anxiety as characters vent aggression in multiple languages. Curiously, the sense of dislocation and confusion produced by this unusual staging enhances, rather than blocks, the transmission of emotion and affects. Edwards writes, "One need not

necessarily understand words to sense whether they are being spoken from a position of mastery or submission, or to gauge their weight as summons, threats, rebukes, petitions or pleas."

Edwards maintains that the shock of being a spectator at Ong Keng Sen's production involves an alienation stemming from this anxiety, rather than the cathartic relief that is the goal of traditional theatre. This alienation has a particular purpose: Ong Ken Sen's careful linguistic and thematic fragmentation of the coherent elements of a common language mirrors the Singaporean state's attempt at a workable pastiche of ethnic-racial identities and solidarities. Edwards takes the "impossible properties" of his title from Derrida, who envisioned language itself as comprising the limit point of the concept of property. Ong Ken Sen's unique production of *Lear* forces his audience to confront the limits of language as property, both personal and political.

Blitzkrieg Siraya is a contemporary Taiwanese puppet play that debuted in 2010 to much acclaim. Unlike most of Taiwan's traditional puppet shows, which concentrate on Han Chinese themes, *Blitzkrieg Siraya* tells a story set in the early nineteenth century in which the Siraya people, a lowland Austronesian people from southern Taiwan, come together with descendants of Han Chinese immigrants to defeat an evil spirit: a personification of the very ethnic tensions that have kept the two groups apart until the present day. The titular "blitzkrieg" refers to the dramatic climax, which comprises a swift counterattack between the two allies against their arch-enemy from the spirit realm. In her article: "A Glocalised National Narrative – A Siraya-based Discourse in the Tai-gi Puppet Play *Blitzkrieg Siraya*," Tenn Nga-i explores how this play reconfigures Taiwanese society as multi-ethnic through its dramatic presentation of two divided peoples coming together. According to Ngai-i, *Blitzkrieg Siraya* mirrors the current situation in Taiwan, in which descendants of lowland Austronesian groups such as Hoklo and Hakka are asserting their minority identities. Ngai-i also delineates the limits of the play's radical exploration of difference. Her gendered analysis of the work discerns that, though there are strong roles for women, the position of the female characters in *Blitzkrieg Siraya* ultimately fall short of equality with men. However, Ngai-i concludes that because the story of this puppet play embraces both Siraya and Han Chinese ethnic narratives, and lights the way towards conflict resolution in a cathartic battle against a common enemy, it embodies a new form of Taiwanese identity.

In her article, "Visual Pleasure in Pakistani Cinema (1947–2014)," Wajiha Raza Rizvi presents a class and gender based analysis of Pakistani film spectatorship in the postwar period. Rizvi's article highlights and

discusses a strange paradox: as Pakistani society has grown more outwardly conservative, the portrayal of women in its cinema has become increasingly provocative. From the demure *chhooi-mooi* girls of yesteryear, whose fashion—both covering and revealing the female form—was actively sought after and imitated by women in the audience, cinematic representations of women have become more voluptuous and bold, and less popular with the female audience. Rizvi's analysis focuses on the direct and provocative gaze cast by these female characters, and how it invites, in return, the gaze of a specific male audience.

As Rizvi points out, the popularity these new images have in a society that increasingly polices the public presentation of women indicates both a striking inequality, and a remarkable contradiction. In some areas of Pakistan, members of conservative religious groups regularly deface advertising billboards that depict modern women, whatever their mode of dress. However, cinema billboards featuring images of actresses in seductive poses gazing boldly at the camera are left unharmed by religious adherents. Along with her analysis of the historical changes in Pakistani cinema and its reception, Rizvi also discusses the unpolished work of Kazi, a noted scholar of the visual arts, to explore the evolution that led to such contradictory treatment of women. The tension she explores is between the politics of Islamic ideology and the place of a modern identity, for both men and women, in a conservative country.

From Pakistan, this themed issue ventures next to Japan. Founded in 1913, the Takarazuka Revue has been presenting musical theatre with an all-women cast playing both female and male roles for over one hundred years. Though its lavish productions are the epitome of popular entertainment, Maria Grajdian finds this long running cultural production to be an important venue for the representation and transmission of Japanese culture and society: in particular, late-modern identity. Her article, "'All the World's a Stage': Takarazuka Revue and its Theatralisation of Culture(s)" focuses on the tension between the androgynous *otokoyaku* characters—that is, male roles played by women—and the apparent submission of the *musumeyaku* characters, who are women playing female roles. Grajdian offers a detailed analysis of several key Takarazuka productions, starting with *The Rose of Versailles* in 1974. According to Grajdian, the character of Marie Antoinette was the first female Takarazuka character who was a heroine in her own right, rather than existing merely to support a "male"—that is, *otokoyaku*—character.

Drawing on this example along with analyses of several other Takarazuka productions, Grajdian illuminates the differences between the *shoujo* (girls') culture depicted in manga, and the *musumeyaku* characters of

the Takarazuka Revue. While the former presents a fixed and unchanging childlike femininity, Grajdian finds in the latter a performance of an alternative femininity which, although ideologically ambivalent, could also represent a form of emotional ideal, in which personal feelings become an engine of self-fulfillment. For Grajdian, the Takarazuka Revue embodies a "warm humanism" which, without eliding individual freedom and individual responsibility, celebrates tenderness and warmth as the basis for interpersonal bonds, and as the foundation of a social structure based on love. One hundred years after its foundation, Grajdian finds in the ambivalent, yet fascinating, figure of the *takarasienne* a "unique synthesis of Japanese spirit and Western technology/knowledge" that comprises a self-conscious icon of modern Japan.

Paris Brown's article "Selling Japan in *Mad Men*'s Postmodern America: The Visual Translation of Japanese Icons and Images through a Lens of Western Advertising and Aesthetics" analyses a broad range of texts, from American film, television and literature about Japan, to Japanese products popular in the United States such as toys, manga and anime. In all, Brown's article traces the postwar progression of American impressions of Japan, from wartime propaganda to the current embrace of Japanese popular culture by America's youth. Her titular analysis is of an episode of the popular American television drama *Mad Men*, set in the 1960s, in which wartime memories prompt an anti-Japanese outburst by one of the characters, even as his younger co-workers look forward to a fruitful business relationship with America's former enemy. Brown's article works both backwards and forwards from this point, tracing representations of Japan in American wartime animation and film, to more nuanced and ambivalent postwar representations such as Michael Crighton's *Rising Sun*, Sophia Coppola's *Lost in Translation* and Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill Vol. 1*. In addition, Brown traces the waves of Japanese consumer products that attained popularity in the United States, including character goods such as Hello Kitty, video games, and toys such as Tamagotchi and Pokemon.

In the process, she introduces a new concept: the "familio-exotic," which allows Brown to analyse the particular combination of a pleasant, yet non-Western, aesthetic that informs much of the recent American representations of Japan and consumption of Japanese products. In Brown's analysis, Sophia Coppola's film *Lost in Translation* marks a turning point in America's cultural perception of Japan, since the film includes moments of celebration of Japanese culture in the midst of culture shock as the characters gradually learn to appreciate cultural differences. In the last part of her article, Brown focuses on "cosplay"—the practice of dressing up as one's favourite character—that comprises a new appreciation for, and

homage to, Japanese popular culture by its American fans. Noting that the older stereotypes of traditional Japan, while still present in the American imaginary, now represent an unchanging and familiar landscape, the new trend towards cosplaying characters from Japanese manga and anime reveals an excitement and fascination with an unfamiliar aesthetic in which the non-Western "exotic" is brought towards the self. "Whereas once America's primary *japonisme* focus centred on emphasis of otherness," Brown writes, "now it celebrates and identifies with what was once culturally abject."

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