京@剧卡拉OK

Jing@Ju Karaoke – Interactive Queering of Beijing Opera

TELEMATIC VERSION

τέχνη
“Structures of Digital Feeling”
Technê Institute, Buffalo University
http://techne.buffalo.edu
27 March 2015

Digital Dramaturgy Lab (DDL)
Karaoke 卡拉OK
   *kara 空 "empty" and ōkesutora オーケストラ (orchestra)*

(digital) Queering

Animation/Fragmentation

Participation – Coolness and Pleasure

Jingju (Beijing Opera) 京剧
   Mei Lanfang 梅兰芳
   Sword Dance 剑舞
   Farewell my Concubine 霸王别姬
   Dan 旦
   Embodied learning 学

Interactivity

[Techne](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Techne) is also a part of communication, and affects how human cultures interact. When people speak to one another, they apply their knowledge of social interactions, verbal and nonverbal cues, and their shared language to the skill of speaking. It is both personal and social, everybody has their own personal techne around their speech based on learned experiences and personal ticks, and very social in that communities all communicate amongst each other on the interpersonal and large scale.
Karaoke
Chinese 卡拉OK Japanese kara 空 "empty" and ōkesutora オーケストラ (orchestra)

Electronic sing-along system, multi-purpose, compact machine that incorporates amplifier, speaker, microphone mixer, sound simulations (reverberation and echo).

Invention of the system are claimed by Roberto del Rosario (1993) and the Chinese firm Janito Corporation (Miyata Karaoke machine) in a law suit over copy rights and patents. Rosario won.

Big bucks industry of home/pub/bar interactive amateur entertainment (professionalized through world championships etc.)
Karaoke

Chinese 卡拉OK
Japanese kara 空 "empty" and ōkesutora オーケストラ (orchestra)


Welsh claim to be inventors:
“The Japanese are the ones who invented the Karaoke Machine, but it is the Welsh that invented Karaoke itself, hundreds and hundreds of years ago. ... don’t need the alcoholic stimulants to induce courage to start singing.” (ibid. Loc 202-211)

References to entertaining public singing/Carol singing/ music hall (ibid. Loc 211-251)

Digital Dramaturgy Lab (DDL)
Karaoke
Chinese 卡拉OK  Japanese kara 空 "empty" and ōkesutora オーケストラ (orchestra)

What makes using Karaoke as dramaturgical framework interesting to this project?

- Practice of creative failure
- Vehicle for participatory accessibility to the arts
- Playfulness, learning and entertainment (as a critique of commercialization of such practices)
- Intermedial community-building experience shared with others

Inoue, the Japanese inventor of the first Karaoke machine (8-Juke) in 1971 was awarded the Ig Nobel Peace Prize by Havard University in 2004 for “providing an entirely new way for people to learn to tolerate each other”. (Xun and Tarocco 2007:Loc 178)
(digital) Queering

Feminism, Cyberfeminism, queer theory, posthuman theory

DDL inspired by a definition of *queer* that

“spins the term outward along dimensions that can’t be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all: the ways that race, ethnicity, postcolonial nationality criss-cross with *these and other* identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourses....”, similar to “how intellectuals and artists of color... are using the leverage of ‘queer’ to do a new kind of justice to the fractal intricacies of language, skin, migration, state.”
(Kosofsky Sedgwick, “*Queer and Now*” 2013:8)

Digital Dramaturgy Lab (DDL)
(digital) Queering

Feminism, Cyberfeminism, queer theory, posthuman theory

For the DDL Karaoke actions ECHO prior actions, success is provisional

"If a performative provisionally succeeds (and I will suggest that 'success' is always and only provisional), then it is not because an intention successfully governs the action of speech, but only because that action echoes a prior action, and accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices."

(Judith Butler, "Critically Queer" 2013:20)
(digital) Queering

Feminism, Cyberfeminism, queer theory, posthuman theory

queer roots of theatre (Selenick 2002:21-39),
queer theatre, ambivalence and community building (Dolan 2002:1-8)
relationship between homophobia and anti-theatrical traditions. (Salomon 2002:9-20)


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“The articulated body is a divided body (shenfen). Not only is the Chinese performing body dissected into different corporeal elements of articulation, and reassembled into a new body for the duration of the performance, the articulate(d) body continually redesigns and reassembles itself in different ways throughout one performance. (...) The constant creation and recreation of the articulate(d) body as different kinds of presence has repercussions on the relationship between the actor and his own body, as well as between the actor and an artificial body, such as a marionette. (...) The concept of changing proximity and distance between the performer and the thing performed can be identified clearly in puppet theatre and mortuary rite.“


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Participation – Coolness and Pleasure

Participatory modes of this DDL project are inspired by:

- Marshall McLuhan’s ideas of “cold” media (audiences need to fill in information through deeper and active engagement across media)
- Bertolt Brecht’s ideas around the “pleasures of learning”, theatre and media, and participatory dramaturgy (Lehrstueck).
- Karaoke as participatory cultural “sing-along/move along” social entertainment practice
- Feminist and queer collective community building strategies
Jingju 京剧

Beijing style theatre = Beijing or Peking Opera
Jingju originates from the fusion of four famous theatre companies from Anhui province, which came to Beijing in order to participate in the yearlong celebrations of the 80th birthday of the Manchu Emperor Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty in 1790. Musically, this new performance fusion was strongly influenced by musical traditions originating in Hubei province (namely the sophisticated pihuang modal system), which helped to form the basic structure of Jingju.

• one of the most prominent actors was dan performer Mei Lanfang (梅兰芳)

• Mei Lanfang’s international travels:
  • Japan (1919, 1924),
  • USA (1930),
  • Soviet Union (1935)

He introduced this art form Western artists such as Eisenstein, Meyerhold, Stanislavsky Brecht, Piscator, Chaplin and Paul Robson among others.
Mei Lanfang’s (梅兰芳, 1894-1961) travels to the USA and the USSR
Mei Lanfang had an everlasting impact on innovative theatre and film practices in Europe (Russia and Germany, for example).

This includes the works of:
- Sergej Eisenstein
- Stanislavsky
- Wsewolod Meyerhold
- Erwin Piscator
- Bertolt Brecht

Brecht was inspired to further develop his concept of epic theatre, Gestus and Verfremdungseffekt or the V-effect (making familiar social practices, such as gender relations, strange to better understand them as socio-economic constructs. Example: The Good Person of Sezuan (Der gute Mensch von Sezuan)
Sword Dance 剑舞

Also known as the acrobatic act “Swinging Meteors”

First mentioned in written records of the Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD)

“some describing it as a woman performer in martial attire dancing with a sword (some say with a luminous object) in her hand. Others describe her as dancing with a silk ribbon with two luminous objects, one at each end of the ribbon” (Fu:51)
The source text of inspiration for our project was inspired by Mei Lanfang’s double-sword dance performance in the Jingju (Beijing Opera) play „Farewell my Concubine“

Why is this relevant?

1. For this play Mei Lanfang made a number of innovative interventions/inventions:
   - Shifted focus from importance of male character (Xiang Yu) to the female one (Yuji)
   - Hybridized several sub-categories of the dan-roles into a new one, including martial arts

2. Cross-media reference to Chen Kaige’s 1993 film of „Farewell my Concubine“

3. Entangled relationships of power dynamics of gender and social hierarchy in the context of war, resistance, suicide, sacrifice and deadly failure.
Plot of the play based on a historical event

After the fall of Qin, the country broke into separate spheres of power as a few heroes emerged from the chaos to proclaim themselves kings. Among them, two great military leaders contended for supremacy: Xiang Yu, the King of Chu, and Liu Bang, the King of Han.

In a crucial battle with his rival, Liu Bang, in 202 BC, Xiang Yu is caught in an encirclement. His troops run out of food, and when they hear their native songs sung by the enemy encamped around them, they are convinced that their homeland has been occupied and their countrymen have joined Liu Bang.

Xiang Yu feels that the end is near and drinks with his favorite concubine Yuji for the last time. Yuji performs a sword dance for him. Then she cuts her own throat with his sword. Grief-stricken, Xiang Yu fights his way to the Wujiang River and, when all his men have fallen, takes his own life. “ (web)
Each role type has several sub-categories. The four major ones are:

- **Dan 旦** (female roles)
- **Sheng 生** (male roles)
- **Jing 净** (painted face – powerful men or super-natural forces)
- **Chou 丑** (clown, trickster)

There are four major integrated performance techniques:

- **Chang 唱** (singing)
- **Nian 念** (speaking)
- **Zuo 做** (dancing)
- **Da 打** (acrobatics/martial arts)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>lao dan</strong> (老旦)</td>
<td>dignified old women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>qing yi</strong> (青衣)</td>
<td>virtuous women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>hua dan</strong> (花旦)</td>
<td>coquettish women or vivacious soubrette</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>guimen dan</strong> (闺门旦)</td>
<td>(in-the-chamber-Dan) a young or unmarried women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>daoma dan</strong> (刀马旦)</td>
<td>the military type of women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>chou dan</strong> (丑旦)</td>
<td>comedienne/ clown</td>
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</tbody>
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Mei Lanfang
Mei Lanfang, discussing hand movements with the Hanju (汉剧) performer Chen Bohua 陈伯华.

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Embodied knowledge transmission/female roles

**Male to male** (1790) – orthodox neo-Confucianist practice

**Male to female** (1930s-70s) – China’s national, anti-colonial modernity project

**Female to Female** (ongoing) – national theatre schools

**Female/Virtual to playful, possibly queer, bodies** (i.e. DDL project)

Digital Dramaturgy Lab (DDL)
Interactivity

Software
Hardware
Human-machine-human interaction
Bodies (articulated real and virtual bodies)
Space
Time
Abstraction
Queer modes of reality, virtual and otherwise
Collaborative mode of creation, based on problem-solving and not hierarchy-based

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Go, play!

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Digital Dramaturgy Lab (DDL)
References


**Fu**, Qifeng Chinese Acrobatics Through the Ages. Beijing, Foreign Language Press 1985

MORE TO BE ADDED