

Abstract PhD Project: Morel, Lucie

Memories and legacies of Cultural revolution (*wenhua da geming*) on Chinese Contemporary Stages

The objective of this research project is to examine the ways in which the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and the scenic art of propaganda specifically produced during this period are present in contemporary Chinese theatre and dance. The Maoist “model theatre” (*yangbanxi* 样板戏), which refers to some fifteen plays produced under the control and artistic direction of the party-state cadres from the 1960s onwards, served as official theatre for nearly a decade within the People's Republic of China. The “model works”, distinguished by their original generic and aesthetic characteristics (“modern and revolutionary” ballet and Peking Opera), constitute a unique phenomenon with regard to the intersection of performing arts and political propaganda, theatre, ideology and popular culture. These works attracted the most accomplished artists of their era, leaving a durable mark, positively or negatively, on the experience and imagination of a generation of spectators. After the end of the Cultural Revolution, *yangbanxi* disappeared from the stage for approximately twenty years, before re-emerging in different forms in the 2000s: on the one hand, with revivals on official stages, and on the other, with the emergence of independent pieces taking *yangbanxi* as their topic or examining them, on theatre and dance stages.

The aim of this research is therefore to observe the remanences and updating of this corpus of “model works”, as well as the references, reinterpretations, appropriations, reappropriations and re-examinations that certain 21st-century pieces produce in their regard – the *yangbanxi* being approached by stage artists as more or less cumbersome, more or less significant, more or less operative legacies.

The scenic corpus of the dissertation encompasses both “model works” from the 1960s and 1970s in their “original” versions and in their contemporary revivals (for example, *The Red Detachment of Women* or *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*) by State companies, as well as contemporary pieces such as *Red* by choreographer Wen Hui, and *Yangbanxi 2.0* by director Wang Chong – works that question, from the stage and by using theatrical means, the history of *yangbanxi*.

The following research questions will be investigated through an analysis of this corpus and the associated primary sources (interviews with the artists, recordings and texts of the works, iconographic documents, press reviews): what memory do Chinese artists of the 'post-socialist' era cultivate of the Cultural Revolution and the *yangbanxi* – whether they are artists creating in official theatres, for commercial productions or for independent structures? And how does this memory affect contemporary works? Where can we locate a survival of the model plays, and what form is it likely to take on stage? Is it an updating of the edifying character of this State theatre? In summary, what theatrical and formal appropriations are being generated today by this “model” corpus (e.g. replay, reenactment, revival, quotation, parody, reconstitution, etc.) ?

To answer these questions, we will combine a historical approach to *yangbanxi* – considering each performance as a “séance” (C. Biet) with social and imaginary implications that go beyond the stage – with an aesthetic approach based on a formal analysis of the performances using their iconographic, sound and video archives.