

***Gao Xingjian and Transmedia Aesthetics*. Eds. Mabel Lee and Liu Jianmei.
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In his contribution to *Gao Xingjian and Transmedia Aesthetics*, Liu Zaifu begins, “When I said some twenty years ago that Gao Xingjian was not just a writer but a great writer, people were dubious; then when I next said he was also a thinker, people again were dubious” (43). Despite Gao’s tepid reception within Chinese literary studies, this volume establishes Gao Xingjian as one of the key multimedia artists of our day—an innovator in all mediums he chooses to explore, pushing boundaries in all aspects of his work. *Gao Xingjian and Transmedia Aesthetics* is the first of its kind in dedicating attention to the entire breadth of Gao Xingjian’s output—from fiction and drama to painting, screenplays, and film—solidifying Gao Xingjian studies as its own subfield of transcultural research.

The most recent addition to the Cambria Sinophone World Series, this volume is the most comprehensive study of Gao’s work to date. Just over fifteen years after the publication of Kwok-kan Tam’s *Soul of Chaos*, *Transmedia Aesthetics* moves beyond the better studied realm of Gao’s theatre and fiction, offering a detailed overview of Gao’s creative and critical output. Editors Mabel Lee and Liu Jianmei provide an introduction to Gao’s life and biography, complete with previously unpublished details that will serve as a valuable supplement for Gao scholars as well as those looking to familiarize themselves with his life and legacy for the first time.

The book is divided into four sections, each dedicated to a different aspect of Gao’s oeuvre: *Philosophical Inquiry*; *Transdiscipline*, *Transgenre*, *Transmedia and Transculture*; *Cine-Poems with Paintings, Dance and Music*; and *Identifying and*

Defining the Self. Of these four sections, *Cine-Poems* stands out as a highlight, bringing together research on Gao's most recent and least discussed work. Gao's venture into film is perhaps the most inaccessible of all his creative explorations, and for this reason the contributions by Megan Evans, Fiona Sze-Lorrain, Wah Guan Lim and Yue Huanyu are invaluable in their examination of Gao's newest foray into a truly transmedial format. Gao's films (termed here *cine-poems* to emphasize the intermediality of his new art form) have mostly found an audience as part of museum exhibitions and retrospectives alongside his painting, and lack the commercial distribution necessary to make his work available, even to the scholarly community at large. While much productive work has been done on Gao's drama based on his scripts, his venture into film has proved even more inaccessible than his theatre. As the exhibition of Gao's cinema has been largely restricted to galleries and museum settings, we can rely only on those who have had the chance to see the films firsthand to share this part of Gao's work.

One of the highlights of this volume is Noël Dutrait's contribution "Gao Xingjian: Autobiography, Auto-Fiction, and Poetry." While the section heading *Identifying and Defining the Self* may initially appear as familiar grounds for Gao scholars, Dutrait's nuanced approach to Gao's biography and life's output is both fresh and a necessary counterpoint to a large body of scholarship that heavily relies on Gao's own novelistic and theoretical writing to explain his fiction. Gao's extensive critical and theoretical writing has been a great source of productivity for scholars, but the sheer volume of his output means that navigating the line between being well-informed and over-dependent is often a fraught activity. Dutrait negotiates this beautifully, writing with a distance and precision that lends a fresh perspective on Gao's oeuvre, despite his close friendship with Gao over the years. Dutrait takes a truly transmedia approach to Gao's work, reading his fiction and poetry against each other to enrich our understanding of his creative process and legacy as an artist.

Stephen Conlon's contribution "The Art of Gao Xingjian" is another stand-out piece, drawing attention to language as a medium, drawing comparisons with Dante and Rabelais in exploring Gao's use of heteroglossia, diglossia, and code-mixing. The focus afforded by this Bakhtinian reading beautifully complements the rich body of scholarship on the transcultural elements of Gao's work. This is a subject that deserves further attention, and this article should pave the path for more in-depth analysis along similar lines. Mary Mazzilli's analysis of Gao's most recent play, *Song of the Night* is also notable. *Song of the Night* is the most understudied of Gao's plays, and Mazzilli brings attention to its pivotal position between his earlier plays and later excursion into cinema. The chapter is in conversation with important

work on Gao's theatre by Claire Conceison and Todd J. Coulter, and its exploration of hallucination will be valuable for scholars working on Gao's drama and his incursions into cinema alike.

Transmedia Aesthetics marks a major step in making Gao's rich oeuvre accessible to scholars outside of the spheres of theatre studies and Chinese literary studies. This volume takes pains to reframe Gao's work within a larger comparative context, building his reputation as an important contemporary thinker as well as a writer and artist. Liu Zaifu lauds Gao as a contemporary Renaissance man, pushing boundaries and making important contributions to whatever medium he experiments with. Renaissance man is a reoccurring label that contributors use to discuss the richness and breadth of Gao's work, and while it is justified, it often seemed to be competing or even conflicting with the transmedia elements of his work suggested in the title. There is a tendency within the book to place Gao within a legacy of Western humanistic tradition rather than to search for his place within the growing body of research on intermediality, where there is undoubtedly room for him to make an important contribution. The volume could have benefited from a chapter that engaged more explicitly with the theoretical possibilities suggested in the title, as there is huge potential for critical engagement with a growing body of scholarship on authors who engage with multiple media in the broadest sense. At a time when terms and conceptions like transmediality, intermediality and remediation remain heavily contested, Gao deserves an important place within this conversation.

The key questions that preoccupy scholars of intermediality underlie the vast majority of contributions to this volume. Gao's creative practice often involves a reworking of his earlier pieces, whether conscious or not. His bold exploration with a vast range of mediums and genres from fiction, drama, screenplays, poetry, painting and cinema and his penchant for technical innovation, crossing medial boundaries and self-referentiality invoke familiar terms like adaptation, filmic writing, *ekphrasis*, and the musicalization of literature, while his opera and cine-poems are explicitly intermedial in the most literal sense of the term. Irina Rajewsky's distinctions between medial transposition (taking an 'original' product in one media and transforming it into a product in a second media), media combination (the integration of two media forms into a single product as with film, theater, and opera) and intermedial references (as with the imitation of filmic form in writing or the invocation of photography in painting) may be useful in defining the extent of Gao's transmedial experimentation (Rajewsky 50-52). For an artist who works both in multiple media and engages in multi-media projects, not setting a fixed definition of transmedia aesthetics is a missed opportunity. Without defining the boundary between trans-

media and intermedia, and without interrogating the relationship between transmedia and intertextuality that underlies many of the contributions, the term remains predominantly a descriptive one, referring to a comprehensive examination of Gao's output rather than focusing on transmedia's potential as a discursive concept.

This volume should be commended for its efforts to make scholarship on the entire range of Gao's creative output accessible in such a comprehensive and convenient format. Bringing together both new work and scholarship previously unavailable in English translation, *Gao Xingjian and Transmedia Aesthetics* charts ambitious new territory. It will prove an important resource for students and teachers of comparative literature, and is a valuable reference companion for anyone researching Gao Xingjian's creative legacy.

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