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Performing Utopia ed. by Rachel Bowditch and Pegge Vissicaro
(review)

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would lead to the Second Great Awakening. Here, Freeman reads the sermons and pamphlets through which Evangelicals responded to the deadly fire for the rhetorical conventions of the gothic and of stage melodrama. Through this reading, she shows these conventions to be instrumental in composing a Christian body public, couched in “an eschatological framework in which they could adeptly play the dilations of sympathy against the restrictions of repentance” (238).

In her final chapter, Freeman takes the reader forward in time to the controversy surrounding the “NEA 4” in the 1990s: Karen Finley, Holly Hughes, Tim Miller, and John Fleck. When NEA chairman John Frohnmayer overruled the organization’s internal process to deny a grant to these four artists, he set off a very public controversy that culminated eight years later in a Supreme Court decision. This leap forward in time may strike some readers as unsettling, but this chapter is more than just a coda. The Culture Wars of the late twentieth century are an unavoidable subtext when discussing antitheatricalism among religious fundamentalists. By extending the book’s concerns into living memory, Freeman underlines the urgency of her arguments.

Antitheatricality and the Body Public will be invaluable to any reader looking to deepen their understanding of Anglo-American theatre history’s “usual suspects,” especially William Prynne, Jeremy Collier, and the NEA 4. But the book will also be especially useful to those readers who are concerned with the ways in which embodied performance complicates political theories of sovereignty and representation. This book might productively be read alongside Elizabeth Maddock Dillon’s *New World Drama*, not only as two recent examples of deft and rich historiography, but as important new ways of looking rigorously at the politics of performance.

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***Performing Utopia*. Edited by Rachel Bowditch and Pegge Vissicaro. Seagull Books, 2017. Paper \$35.00. 334 pages.**

Rachel Bowditch and Pegge Vissicaro’s edited collection *Performing Utopia* adds to the literature of utopian performance by building upon a triumvirate of scholars—José Esteban Muñoz, Jill Dolan, and Ernst Bloch—through case studies exemplifying the *doing* of utopia. Constructed in three parts—“Embodied Utopias,” “Utopian Laughter from Minstrelsy to Burlesque,” and “Heterotopias and Dystopias as Contemporary Spaces of Healing”—contributors represent disciplinary perspectives from fields including theatre, dance, media studies, and

cultural geography. The international scope of the book, addressing geopolitical sites such as New Zealand, Chile, and Brazil, is balanced by detailed accounts of small moments that initially might not appear political, consequential, or even utopian. Cases from the global south provide a refreshing and much-needed dimension to the corpus of critical writing on utopian performance. In fact, while Luis Alvarez's essay "Learning from Ngātahi: Rapumentary Film, the Utopian Imagination and Politics of the Possible" centers on Maori filmmaker Dean Hapeta and his docu/rapumentary film series *Ngātahi: Know the Links*, the real star of the piece is the global rhizomatic network of activist performers which Alvarez identifies as "a 'diaspora of dignity'" (35). Most importantly, the collection demonstrates the use of utopia as a lens through which performances on and off stage, on film and in person, can be studied. In so doing, it makes a compelling case for utopian performance as more than the somatic experience first described by Jill Dolan, but also a framework through which the quotidian can be mobilized to construct and/or embody utopia, dystopia, and heterotopia.

For example, contributors Lisa Doolittle and Anne Flynn interpret the archive through a utopian performative lens in order to reveal utopic intentions as well as the dystopian results. Acknowledging Canada as "our home, not our native land," they explore Canada's nation building (1870s–1970s) through photographs of orchestrated encounters between First Nations, settlers, and colonizers at celebrations and spectacles (54). Their analytical approach is a "choreographic interpretation of a complex history of staging colonial expansion into the vast landscape of southern Alberta" (57). It is hard to imagine finding utopia in scenes of indigenous children donning native "costumes" (supplied by their residential school) to perform otherwise forbidden dances at the 1939 Banff Indian Days. But Doolittle and Flynn's choreographic interpretation include interviews with Black Feet elders and the context of the images' production. The additional information highlights how encounters with the "exotic" and the "untamed," are weaponized to offer the utopian experience of taming, transforming, and forging society anew, truly a "no place." These utopian performatives are also an attempt to shield spectators from the dystopian realities experienced by First Nations peoples.

Most of the case studies take place in the backdrop of festival culture; therefore many authors engage with Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque as a site where utopia, dystopia, and heterotopias may exist simultaneously. In Christian DuComb's essay "The Wenches of the Philadelphia Mummers Parade: A Performance Genealogy," the Mummers Parade is a vehicle for utopian free expression, the dystopian history of blackface minstrelsy, and heterotopian gender play. These festivals are also temporal heterotopias offering a break in time and the opportunity to recover a time. Men marching in the Mummers parade, particularly those insisting on appearing in blackface (now functionally prohibited by parade rules and culturally condemned) choose to break from the current moment to enact

what they perceive as a utopian recovery or replication of the past. A Mummies parade participant wearing blackface articulated this notion by stating, “I’m not trying to put nobody down. It’s just tradition, it’s the way my father paraded” (183).

Performing Utopia’s unique contribution is the manner in which almost every case study grapples with utopia and dystopia. While the first two sections of the book only glancingly address dystopia and heterotopia, the final section is where the collection distinguishes itself by identifying utopic moments of hope within the dystopia of post-Katrina New Orleans and the lives of Chilean citizens. The utopias enacted in the Mardi Gras festivities, only months after the hurricane, offered hope and a mode of resistance that could be televised to the rest of the country. By investigating the intersection of three heterotopic sites in Chile the author was able to obtain a more complex understanding of the reality of Chilean life—one that contrasts with government-endorsed images. As a scholar working in the field of utopian performance, I found *Performing Utopia* an insightful reminder of the broad range of activities that can be analyzed through a utopian lens and the responsibility to address the dystopias and heterotopias that are often unintended byproducts of utopia.

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***The Drama and Theatre of Sarah Ruhl.* By Amy Muse. Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2018. Cloth \$91.80, eBook \$73.44. xv + 215 pages.**

In the conclusion to *The Drama and Theatre of Sarah Ruhl*, Amy Muse notes that it’s perhaps too early for a critical volume assessing Ruhl’s work to come out. The playwright is, as Muse puts it, “essentially mid-career, with surely many more years and likely many theatrical revelations ahead of her” (175). Although this is undoubtedly true, Ruhl has made such an impact on contemporary US theatre that Muse’s volume is an important contribution to the scholarship on Ruhl’s dramaturgy. As part of Methuen’s Critical Companions series, *The Drama and Theatre of Sarah Ruhl* provides a great introduction to and overview of Ruhl as an artist, tracing the dramaturgical, political, and ethical techniques that make her body of work coherent and unique.

Muse divides the main analysis of Ruhl’s plays into four sections focused on distinct aspects of Ruhl’s evolving aesthetics. Between them, the first four chapters discuss each of Ruhl’s eighteen plays (to date) organized by the dramatist’s artistic and ethical concerns. The first chapter analyzes plays where Ruhl both engages with her intellectual/theatrical influences—Virginia Woolf, Anton Chekhov, and