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BOOK REVIEW

Santino, Jack, ed. *Public Performances: Studies in the Carnavalesque and Ritualesque*. Ritual, Festival, and Celebration Series. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2017. 27 illustrations. 312 pp. \$45.00 (hardcover), ISBN 978-1-60732-634-2; \$35.00 (Ebook), EISBN 978-1-60732-635-9.

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This volume on *Public Performances* comprises fourteen articles by authors belonging to a variety of academic disciplines ranging from cultural anthropology, folklore studies, and popular culture studies to musicology, English, history, and theater studies. All of them are based on papers given at the Annual Conference on Holidays, Ritual, Festival, Celebration, and Public Display initiated by Jack Santino, a long-time scholar of folklore and popular culture, in 1997.

In his framing chapter, "From Carnavalesque to Ritualesque: Public Ritual and the Theater of the Street," Santino introduces the concepts of "the carnivalesque" and "the ritualesque" through which he hopes to unify the collection:

The essays in this book range in topic from traditional carnival to formal ritual, with many chapters examining events that fall outside that binary, dealing with both carnivalesque and ritualesque actions. [...] It is hoped that the ensemble collection will help point the way, if not to a unified theory, then to a unified field of public display as emergent political popular culture, and to an understanding of public performance events as expressions of politics, of grief, of grievance, of laughter, and of protest—often all at the same time. (p. xiii)

While carnival is defined as "celebrations of great abandon, social inversion, public excess, sensuality, and the temporary establishment of an alternate society, one free of or even in opposition to the norm," ritual is said to be "about constructing and reinforcing social categories" (p. 4). Using examples such as love locks and (roadside) shrines, Santino argues that, while some celebrations might be described as carnivalesque or ritualesque, most festivities combine aspects from both concepts. The carnivalesque and the ritualesque should thus be viewed as the two ends of a continuum.

Anthropologist Laurent Sébastien Fournier (who has [an essay](#) in this issue of *Journal of Festive Studies* as well) also approaches the volume's theme theoretically and discusses the gradual emergence of an anthropology of festivals over the past half-century and the methodological questions this has spurred. The remaining contributions discuss public performances in various regions and times. Historian Samuel Kinser, folklorist Roger D. Abrahams (now deceased), and musicologist David Harnish all focus on carnivals and carnivalesque performances. Kinser compares carnivals in Renaissance Nuremberg (Germany) and modern Trinidad and analyzes the role of outside influences, for which he employs "the metaphor of a porous-like membrane that lets in some but not too many outside influences and does not let out, dilute, or dissolve much of a festive tradition's enduring features" (p. 39). In his discussion of carnival celebrations in the "Black Atlantic" over several centuries, Abrahams demonstrates how those were often

reenactments of conflicts between colonized and colonizers. As for Harnish, he studies processions of Hindus and Muslims in Bali and Lombok, Indonesia, over the last few decades and argues that processions illustrate “socioreligious and political change” (p. 135) in Indonesia.

The contributions by folklorist and anthropologist Beverly J. Stoeltje and folklorist Lisa Gilman focus on the politics of performance. Drawing mostly on contemporary examples from around the world, Stoeltje shows how rituals and politics are essentially intertwined. Gilman studies how the creation of a new festival in Malawi has allowed organizers and politicians to establish (or reestablish) power hierarchies, while also considering the economic and cultural dimensions of the celebration. Anthropologist Dorothy L. Zinn and theater scholar Scott Magelssen both examine the ritualesque qualities of protest, be it an antinuclear protest in southern Italy or environmental protests performed on a theater stage or in a theatrical fashion in Europe and the Americas. Other authors look at the development of popular ritualesque performances of grief and social protest communicated through art: anthropologist Barbara Graham discusses roadside memorials in Ireland and English scholar and folklorist Daniel Wojcik illustrates the impact of large-scale art created by artists without a formal education in the arts.

Three contributions particularly stand out in this collection: “Political Percussions: Cork Brass Bands and the Irish Revolution, 1914–1922” by John Borgonovo; “¡Que Bonita Bandera! Place, Space, and Identity as Expressed with the Puerto Rican Flag” by Elena Martínez; and “Music as Activist Spectacle: AIDS, Breast Cancer, and LGBT Choral Singing” by Pamela Moro. Borgonovo, a historian at University College Cork, describes Irish band culture in the nineteenth century before turning to Cork’s late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century brass band tradition. Most of the bands he mentions supported political parties in the Irish Home Rule movement and the Irish Volunteers (later Irish Republican Army) before and after the partition of Ireland. The author concludes that “parades, processions, public rituals, and other forms of public performance have been active agents in situations of social conflict” (p. 110). Borgonovo successfully demonstrates the significance of music to such performances, even to readers not acquainted with Irish brass band tradition. His beautiful prose turns a well-researched academic text into an interesting, enjoyable story.

At the beginning of her article, Martínez, a folklorist at New York’s City Lore (a center for urban folk culture), transports her readers to the National Puerto Rican Day Parade in Manhattan, with its countless flags and other cultural symbols. She illustrates how Puerto Ricans and Nuyoricans (born or raised in New York) display the flag or turn it into art. She discusses the historical importance of the flag, which serves as a symbol of Puerto Rican cultural identity but is also used to mark and create Puerto Rican places, spaces, and identity. Martínez skillfully intertwines her ethnographic data with historical sources and her analysis of the flag’s symbolism and meaning. Her appealing biography of the Puerto Rican flag demonstrates that a single object has manifold meanings and uses for the people employing it.

Moro, an anthropologist at Willamette University in Salem, Oregon, approaches the volume’s theme from the notion of the spectacle, which has, as she argues, similarities to rituals and festivals. She focuses on areas less examined by scholars of festivity, combining sound studies and LGBT studies in her examination of ritualized spectacles related to AIDS and breast cancer. As an example, she considers the participation of one LGBT chorus from Salem in a

performance by twenty-two LGBT choruses at Carnegie Hall in New York to raise awareness for AIDS and breast cancer. For many singers, the concert was a very emotional experience—most participants had lost loved ones to one of the diseases. Moro effectively communicates these emotions and explains that participants “sang to raise awareness, but through singing constructed their own understandings, resonant with memories and new meanings” (p. 200). With her study, she highlights that music does not only have an (emotional) effect on audiences, but also—or perhaps even more so, as suggested by her example—on the performers themselves.

This volume, particularly Santino’s introductory piece, offers a theoretical framework to study carnivals, festivals, processions, and similar cultural expressions. Readers can find a steadily growing number of publications on such public performances, but often these are approached with theoretical considerations from other (sub)fields such as ritual and performance studies, (ritual) economy, or history. The authors in Santino’s collection, in contrast, study performances from various times and regions for their ritualesque and carnivalesque characteristics and thereby work toward a unified theory of festive events, even if the connection between individual contributions and with the theoretical framework is not always expressed as such (as in most collections that try to organize scholarly pieces around a single theme, the connection is clearly articulated in some, but only implicitly in others).

In sum, the volume makes a valuable contribution to the field of festive studies. Scholars and students of anthropology, religion, history, and folklore, in particular, will gain important insights into the theoretical concepts that drive this emerging specialty as well as into a broad variety of ritualesque and carnivalesque phenomena.

AUTHOR BIO

Cora Gaebel is a cultural anthropologist at the University of Cologne. Her doctoral research focused on two Hindu festivals celebrated in East India through which she examined the relationship between ritual and economy.

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