



Public Performances

Edited by Jack Santino. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2017. 298 pp.
Illus. \$45.00 (hbk). ISBN 978-1-60732-634-2

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Book Review

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Public Performances is the fourth volume in a series, 'Ritual Festival and Celebration', and is the first to provide an overview of public performances. Its chapters are written by contributors to the 2011 Annual Conference on Holidays, Ritual, Festival, Celebration, and Public Display, for which Santino has been the driving force since 1997. Santino recognizes that the Conference title 'while unwieldy, is intentionally inclusive' (ix), and given the expansive interests of the writers, who are mostly folklorists or cultural anthropologists, it is a useful summary of the variety of activities which are now considered public performances. They include historical and current activities, formal and informal, those directly engaging particular communities and the wider public. None of this will surprise those familiar with Santino's work, but may be an eye-opener to those less engaged with the breadth of the approach.

The significance of both material and expressive forms is central throughout. Santino's introductory chapter provides examples of material culture such as love-locks and roadside crosses, carnivals of grief including the 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* killings, and processions. He aims to 'tease out shared qualities' between carnival and ritual (3), and employs 'ritualesque' (6) to define activities with the intention of social, rather than spiritual or personal change. While useful, this usage might suggest a lack of recognition of the symbolically recognizable and relevant within the event.

Although there is no attempt to provide an overarching or coordinating theoretical basis for the selection, there are two papers which address theory in the broad context of the approach that informs these Annual Conferences; these would have been better as introductory chapters, and re-reading of earlier essays could clarify and enhance understanding. Beverly J. Stoeltje writes on 'Protesting and Grieving: Ritual, Politics, and the Effects of Scale' (66–92), concentrating on contemporary contexts. She accepts that ritual aims to effect social change, usually temporary in communal contexts, but permanent in some personal contexts such as marriage or graduation. However, she also stresses the political influences and necessities which inform the need for, and often the structure of, a ritual. Her considerations of the ritual framework of time and space, and symbols and communication, provide an introduction to issues of authority, and its multiple levels are straightforward. She mentions or illustrates institutional and popular rituals as political acts. President Obama retaking his first Oath of Office, due to a misreading of the text at the Inauguration, illustrates the necessity of ensuring legitimacy of the action and the validity of the transformation. Other examples include the increased use of traditional Georgian religious iconography beyond the Orthodox Church, following the fall of the Soviet Union; popular grieving rituals in Northern Ireland, London (Princess Diana), and Liberia (Ebola); and Turkish and various African football fans as protesters within and without the sporting context.

Laurent Sébastien Fournier's 'Anthropology of Festivals' (151–63) comments on the codification and commodification of festivals as heritage events, and issues around the balance of institutional and popular ownership and who benefits, whether financially, socially, or politically. He proposes that festivals aimed at visitors allow more freedom to both organizers and participants; as such, the latter are not restricted by a popular tradition, but can use or misuse it as a basis. The emergence, in recent years, of personal rites of passage, rather than those communally established and authorized, is given as a further example of freedom to choose. However, Fournier suggest that this could lead to the acceptance of new,

contemporary rites of passage, based on commonalities within popular approaches. There is limited reference to theory in the empirical studies, which can be read in terms of performance or practice theory, or whatever the reader's preference.

Samuel Kinser presents a comparison of Carnival traditions in Renaissance Nuremburg and modern Trinidad. He emphasizes the role of established groups in the organizing and enacting of Carnival, stressing that many are linked to existing non-Carnival roles: for example, trades in Nuremburg and specific ethnicities in Trinidad. In both cases, the group activity and the individual roles become established and formalized; within this, the performance of the individual is the fundamental folkloric role, as this is the level at which most introductions and developments take place. The clear comparability of material and expressive forms within two distinct cultural contexts, in terms of when and where, and support for a status quo in the earlier and opposition in the later, illustrates the value of historical and cross-cultural comparison.

Several later chapters confirm the same underlying points; that is, that communal festivals draw on existing identities, and while developing and formalizing, allow individuals to adopt and adapt their own roles, with those acceptable to the whole being retained. Further, comparable types of expressive and material forms are employed whatever the nature and purpose of the event, and whatever the political, social, and economic power of those engaged. Particular examples include Roger D. Abrahams on 'Conflict Displays in the Black Atlantic' (49–65), which adds usefully to Kinser's material on Trinidad; Jon Borgonovo on 'Cork Brass Bands and the Irish Revolution 1914–1922' (93–112); and Lisa Gilman's 'Politics of Cultural Promotion; The Umthetho Festival of Malawi's Northern Region' (164–88).

The significance of material forms other than the dress and personal decoration associated with festive events per se, and the degree of opposition or unease that these may engender are dealt with by Elena Martinez's study of 'Space and Identity as Expressed by the Puerto Rican Flag' (113–32), Barbara Graham on 'Roadside Memorials as Contested Places' in Ireland (239–52), and Daniel Wojcik's essay on public art in the 'Heidelberg Project in Detroit' (254–77). While often enacted within a broad context, such as Romantic Nationalism in Puerto Rico, or the relatively recently established conventions on roadside memorials, the degree to which the impetus is popular rather than institutional is central. This is the case when there is an antagonistic institutional 'other', whether state authority or deviance from the popular norm; for example, roadside shrines and unconventional public art.

Popular impetus does not mean lack of organization, a point stressed by Pamela Moro's study of AIDS, breast cancer, and LGBT activists and choral singing (189–204), Dorothy L. Zinn's 'Ritualesque in an Antinuclear Protest' (205–21), and Scott Magelssen's essay on 'Protest Theater and Environmental Activism' (222–38). While some may not consider these as cognate with 'conventional' carnivalesque and ritualesque activities, the authors illustrate the extent to which these elements are inbuilt, or emerge, within popular communal contexts.

Overall, *Public Performances* is a useful volume, and its content is enhanced by references to relatively recent papers and books, on both general and particular topics within each chapter.

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