

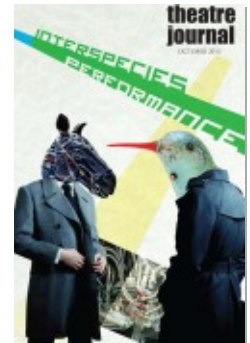


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ACTS OF GAIETY: LGBT PERFORMANCE AND THE POLITICS OF PLEASURE. By

Sara Warner. *Triangulations: Lesbian/Gay/Queer Theater/Drama/Performance* series. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012; pp. 296.

Sara Warner's *Acts of Gaiety: LGBT Performance and the Politics of Pleasure* is a game-changer. In opposition to queer theorists who insistently characterize lesbian feminism as dour, essentialist, and anti-sex, Warner uses a set of lesbian performances, dating from the 1960s through the early twenty-first century, to expose a lesbian-feminist aesthetic and political strategy that she calls "gaiety." Warner recovers acts of gaiety—those "embodied practices that are imbued with and generative of affective experiences of joy and jubilation, wishing and longing, felicity and good cheer" (xv)—so as to restore to queer studies a sense of lavender menace and lesbian pleasure. Acts of gaiety, she argues persuasively, have the potential to resist the stultifying effects of both homonormativity and queer negativity (that is, the emphasis within queer theory on negative affects, backward feeling, and a refusal of futurity). In short, Warner recovers past lesbian performances so as to inspire and potentially transform future LGBT activism; in so doing, she deftly places performance studies and theatre history at the center of LGBT studies. *Acts of Gaiety* will find a place not only in courses on US theatre history and LGBT theatre, but also in courses on queer theory, women's studies, and LGBT history.

The bulk of Warner's book consists of five case studies of acts of gaiety, the merry mergings of pain and pleasure within ludic performances of resistance. Warner's first case study, Valerie Solanas's "scummy acts," is a knockout. Through deep archival research and interviews with people who knew Solanas, Warner proves definitively that Solanas wrote her famous *SCUM Manifesto* as a scenario for a performance. This major discovery relocates a foundational feminist and lesbian text from the realm of print to that of orality, of performance. Warner made this discovery because she noticed that Solanas had included a copyright sign on her early printing of the *SCUM Manifesto*, and reasoned that the symbol might indicate that she had registered the text legally with the US Copyright Office. The symbol had been easily visible to previous scholars, but none before Warner had followed the breadcrumbs. When Warner investigated the copyrights of both the *SCUM Manifesto* and Solanas's play *Up Your Ass*, she proved that the play preceded the manifesto, and that the manifesto was a variation upon the play—rather than vice versa, as scholars had previously presumed. The mani-

festos was, in fact, a scenario for a "scummy act"—a performance—Warner confirms, revealing through further discoveries that Solanas had submitted it as a playscript for possible production to the Directors' Theater and Judson Poets' Theatre.

Warner made these discoveries because she did not discount the possibility that Solanas, an anarchist, would seek governmental assistance in protecting her intellectual property. Such counter-intuitive, generative insights appear throughout *Acts of Gaiety* and make the book a continual pleasure to read. Warner also corrects the historical record on many points—decisively proving, for example, that Andy Warhol did not lose the only copy of Solanas's play *Up Your Ass*, and that she therefore had other motives for attempting to murder him. Furthermore, Warner produces a respectful and compassionate portrait of a woman often dismissed as a deranged criminal. And most important, Warner shows over and over why Solanas matters. For example, she documents that Solanas's stagings of gaiety predated the essentialist productions that are usually identified as the origins of feminist theatre; thus Warner simultaneously redraws the history of feminist theatre, and shows how radical feminism is rooted in theatre. This is Warner's hallmark: the startling, illuminating double-move that rewrites the history of theatre and, simultaneously, the histories of feminism and lesbianism.

The second case study—of early lesbian feminist critiques of marriage—is timely, to say the least. In a moment in which same-sex marriage has come to stand in for justice, activism, and civil rights, Warner reminds us of a complicated performance history of anti- and pro-marriage activism. She contrasts the 1969 anti-marriage "zaps" of WITCH (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell) with the pro-marriage, "husbandly" activism of the Gay Activist Alliance (GAA) in 1971 (an event in which not one lesbian participated). Warner locates contemporary activism in support of same-sex marriage in a performance genealogy of the GAA, arguing chillingly that "the push for marriage equality zaps history, occluding lesbian and feminist opposition to matrimony in order to make the past consistent with today's conservative, integrationist mission" (77). In short, she shows how contemporary mainstream LGBT politics *depend on* an erasure of lesbian history, and in particular an erasure of lesbian activist performances.

Warner continues her discussion of same-sex marriage through the next chapter, a study of Jill Johnston's "joker citizenship," or spectacular performances of sedition and militant eroticism. Here, Warner shows with particular clarity how gaiety incites critical reflection not through empathetic pain

(as is the case with activism based in sentimentalism), but through contagious though uncomfortable laughter. She analyzes Johnston's 1993 civil union, in Denmark, with her partner Ingrid Nyeboe as a "gesture of joker citizenship" and an "expatriate act" (132, 137); deflecting and lampooning tradition, the ceremony fused with a Fluxus retrospective performance by Geoffrey Hendricks and incorporated elements of iconoclasm, "counterculture costume drama," and queer temporality (137).

The fourth case study focuses on Animal Prufrock's 2004 musical adaptation of Diane DiMassa's comic 'zine *Hothead Paisan*, which failed onstage in a post-9/11 context to deploy gaiety effectively. Warner argues that the theatrical adaptation, in contradiction to the theatre practitioners' stated intentions, reified neoliberal homonormativity: whereas DiMassa's 'zine "acknowledges and explores the ways in which feminist fury participates in an affective economy of terror," the musical adaptation by Animal Prufrock "disavows" violence, replacing Hothead's violent acts with a love song to a cat. By "[e]ncouraging audiences to root for a fictional lesbian terrorist [whose violent acts go unrepresented onstage] without acknowledging the fact that real dykes are torturing real Iraqi men in the name of freedom makes *Hothead* the musical party to troubling forms of homonationalism" (159). Warner's point is not to condemn the show's creators, however, but instead to indicate "just how difficult it is to resist [the] multi-headed hydra" of queer neoliberalism (290). Whereas many queer theorists imagine separate camps of queer radicals and gay and lesbian neoliberalism, Warner argues persuasively for the dangerous intersection of these poles, the tendency of avowed queer radicals to contribute, despite their best efforts, to a neoliberal agenda. Thus Warner expands understanding of the power and draw of neoliberalism itself.

Warner's brilliant closing chapter reads the Five Lesbian Brothers' *Oedipus at Palm Springs* not as a capitulation to realism (as others have read the play), but instead as an urgent warning against the dangers of abandoning gaiety in a rush to embrace homonormativity. In other words, Warner reads the Five Lesbian Brothers not so much as representing lesbian domesticity as performing it in the slyest of quotation marks—and thus exposing it as the ultimate horror. It is in this chapter that the use-value of Warner's central concept of gaiety—those "comical and cunning interventions that make a mockery of discrimination and the experience of social exclusion" (xi)—emerges especially vividly.

Because Warner's main players are white (she notes that Solanas, whose father immigrated from Spain, was "of Hispanic descent" [31]) and per-

formers of color receive only brief mention in the preface and introduction, the book implicitly raises a question: Is gaiety a predominantly white practice of performance? She leaves that question for us to answer. In time, the concept of gaiety may prove exceptionally useful in analyses of the work of performers of color, from Moms Mabley, to Muriel Miguel, to Marga Gomez.

By identifying and naming gaiety and by showing us why it matters, Warner has done a great service to the fields of theatre and performance studies, queer studies, and lesbian and feminist studies. Gaiety may well become a keyword in these fields—a term as useful and widely applicable as José Esteban Muñoz's "disidentification" or Jill Dolan's "utopian performative." Like these terms, Warner's "act of gaiety" helps us to understand performance as embodied thought, as theory in action. Thus her book, like some of the best books in our field, helps us to understand how performance and theatre are political, and how politics, when most powerful, is always performative.

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LIVES IN PLAY: AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND BIOGRAPHY ON THE FEMINIST STAGE.

By Ryan Claycomb. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012; pp. 272.

Ryan Claycomb's *Lives in Play: Autobiography and Biography on the Feminist Stage* draws together two approaches to staging feminist histories: autobiography (which he defines as a "first-person autodi-gegetic narrative of one's own life experiences") and biography ("the narration of another's life experiences"). Noting that both have constituted a rich fount of source material from which feminist theatre artists have drawn, he crafts a study that explores how and why feminist performers and writers in the late twentieth century so frequently took the material of real life as their subject (16). He finds a partial answer in Judith Butler's theory of performativity, observing that "feminist theater artists are frequently performing real life precisely to reveal real life as performative" (2; emphasis in original).

Aptly, Claycomb threads his own autobiography into the book's preface. In a gentle defense of his position as a man writing about women who write about women's lives, he describes a formative experience when, between 1995 and 2001, he worked with Washington, D.C.'s The Theatre Conspiracy (TTC), serving as the literary manager for its Emerging Women Playwrights series. There, he first en-