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*Mainstream Aids Theatre, The Media, and Gay Civil Rights:
Making the Radical Palatable* by Jacob Juntunen (review)

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ship), which may no longer resemble the original production (past worlds) or the text itself.

Bennett illustrates the philosophical argument of possible worlds by drawing attention to off-stage characters as they relate to possible worlds. Beckett's Godot exemplifies the conundrum of the off-stage character's ambiguity through his relationship between certainty and uncertainty: who he is and what possible worlds he might inhabit. As a "penumbra," Bennett contends, Godot stresses the predicament: "how can certain details that are not present" onstage, but are "extensions of what is present in the counterfactual conditional statement" (Godot's existence as reported by the messenger boy), "affect the meaning of the details that are specified in the statement while not actually affecting/ changing any of those specified details?" (117).

Bennett's book combines depth with theoretical sophistication. One might quibble that the book's argument is stacked in its favor: plays present multiple worlds based on creative imagination. Like fiction generally, imagination is theatre's driving force, and imagination is restricted only by the limits of the artist-creator. Who could argue otherwise? More importantly, who *has* argued otherwise? The analysis runs the risk of tendentiousness; the reader waits in vain for the author to provide substantive counter-arguments (if for no other reason than to provide dramatic tension). This caveat aside, the work confidently animates a template of analytic philosophy on drama with engaging examples and thoughtful application. In the end, Bennett contends, the audience "recreates the meaning [of the production] from the reality in front of them" (127), a reality dependent on subjective and subjunctive possibilities. The book is ultimately an invigorating and probative examination of theatre and philosophy.

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MAINSTREAM AIDS THEATRE, THE MEDIA, AND GAY CIVIL RIGHTS: MAKING THE RADICAL PALATABLE. By Jacob Juntunen. Routledge Advances in Theatre and Performance Studies series. New York: Routledge, 2016; pp. 202.

Jacob Juntunen's *Mainstream AIDS Theatre, the Media, and Gay Civil Rights* begins with *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the Supreme Court case legalizing same-sex marriage, as an anecdotal example of the progress of the LGBT civil rights movement over the past fifty years. Juntunen argues that the original productions of *The Normal Heart*, *Angels in America*, *Rent*, and

The Laramie Project contributed to this movement by sympathetically depicting LGBT people and thus shifting the dominant culture's perspective on LGBT civil rights, making those rights palatable to audiences in mainstream theatres. Dismissing conventional wisdom that mainstream audiences are intractably conservative, Juntunen argues that artists must appeal to that conservative mainstream and subtly reorient its sensibility in order to successfully assimilate LGBT identities into dominant ideology.

Juntunen suggests his methodology in the first chapter: these mainstream productions should be understood as multifaceted political objects, constructed by a context beyond the playwright's words or the onstage action organized by a director, and interpreted by audiences in many different ways. To this end he uses advertisements, program notes, and journalistic reviews to reveal how these theatrical productions became "mainstream." In the succeeding four chapters Juntunen uses his methodology to analyze the success of the original Broadway productions of *The Normal Heart*, *Angels in America*, *Rent*, and *The Laramie Project* and their relation to "the elite, conservative culture industry" (4). He then examines how the success of these productions impacted representations of LGBT people and people with HIV/AIDS. Juntunen argues that the creative teams behind these shows only surreptitiously introduced their assimilationist politics into dominant discourse by either presenting the piece as high art (*Angels*), emphasizing the production's commercial value in order to argue for its production over attempts to censor it (*Rent*), or foregrounding the plot's Christian discourse of forgiveness (*Laramie*).

In chapter 2 Juntunen frames *The Normal Heart* as more overtly political than the other plays he considers throughout the book. *The Normal Heart* was able to amplify the emergent ideology already expressed in avant-garde HIV/AIDS plays produced before it opened at the Public Theater in 1985. Analyzing reviews and events organized around the production, as well as how the show fashioned spectators into activists, Juntunen argues that the play had effects on everyday politics and media reporting on HIV/AIDS in the mid-1980s. In the wake of the play's antagonistic critique, the *New York Times* started writing openly about HIV/AIDS, and New York City mayor Ed Koch expanded city services for local patients. Juntunen attempts to illustrate the immediate connection between *The Normal Heart* and its societal effects by detailing how Joseph Papp and the Public Theater laid the groundwork in the weeks leading up to opening night by telephoning both the mayor's office and the editor of the *New York Times*. Of course, there was a tremendous amount of broader activism during the spring and summer of 1985, which makes it hard to isolate cause and effect,

but on the whole Juntunen's retelling of the events poignantly illustrates theatre's political potential.

In the third and strongest chapter he scrutinizes the commercial viability of the Broadway production of *Angels in America* through an in-depth materialist analysis of the universalist discourse, found in its ads, program notes, theatre architecture, consumerist-Brechtian aesthetic, and its countless awards. Ultimately, the production used messages similar to Bill Clinton's assimilationist promises during his first presidential campaign about a united national community. Juntunen illustrates how the scope of Clinton's campaign "to save the United States of America" is mirrored in the play's subtitle: "A Gay Fantasia on National Themes." Juntunen's approach to the assimilationist discourse surrounding this play is particularly complex and nuanced: he lays bare the play's underlying misogyny and racism and shows how these structures, together with its assimilation of middle-class, white gay men, likely contributed to its canonization.

In his chapter on *Rent* Juntunen argues that while the musical has a happy ending for the straight, white male protagonist at the expense of the queer "other," the success of the musical's Broadway production in 1996 was a sign that the dominant ideology was changing; in part through previous HIV/AIDS plays, the mainstream had been prepared to assimilate people with HIV/AIDS beyond the middle-class, white gay man. Importantly, the production had repercussions far beyond Broadway. Because of its commercial success, Juntunen argues, *Rent* was "allowed to thrive in even conservative U.S. theatre ecologies" (118). He discusses the musical's political potency in Charlotte, North Carolina, where arguments for the production's commercial value lent a perhaps unexpected helping hand to LGBT civil rights: Conservative politicians attempted to close an engagement of a touring production of *Rent*, but the city's chamber of commerce argued for its importance on the grounds of its popular and commercial success. During the following year most of these conservative politicians were not reelected, which Juntunen argues was a consequence, at least partially, of the debacle around *Rent*.

In the final chapter he shows how the reviews of the original Broadway production of *The Laramie Project* understood the play's protagonist as the town of Laramie, Wyoming. Juntunen reads the town as a synecdoche for the nation in its subsequent rejection of the gay panic defense and normalization of HIV/AIDS. He argues that the production, presented as a docudrama that ideologically and aesthetically appealed to its mainstream audiences, was able to introduce its politics by relying upon a heavily Catholic symbolism and ideology, which emphasized forgiveness over condemnation.

The chapters function as good primers on the plays' original productions. Over the course of the book Juntunen convincingly demonstrates how mainstream theatre can bring about liberal political change through its power as a negotiating force between emergent and dominant ideologies, making ostensibly radical political projects (such as visibility of LGBT people) palatable to heteronormative mainstream audiences. He accepts that the increasing visibility of gay men is an important first step towards recognition—a view that could have been productively challenged and complicated by engaging a range of scholarly work that focuses on how performance engages in dissensual politics (for example, that of José Esteban Muñoz, Tavia Nyong'o, or Jack Halberstam). It is also important to mention that Juntunen's book contains an incredibly hopeful, almost utopian sense of optimism and progress, written before the current US presidency. His arguments about continual progress must overlook that the crisis of HIV/AIDS in both the United States and globally is still ongoing, with disproportionately declining numbers of infection due to poverty, lack of access to care, and lack of information in certain communities and countries.

These issues aside, artists, activists, and academics interested in the theatre's ability to change dominant ideologies may find here an important reminder: that we should not be so quick to dismiss the influence of the mainstream on societal changes and dominant ideologies. Often in our field, there is an urgency to write about, critically examine, or laud the most avant-garde or radical performance artist. Juntunen prompts us to stay with those performances that we intentionally or unintentionally describe as "pandering to the elite." That "powerful elite of this country" (7) makes up the dominant culture, and in his estimation fills the seats of mainstream theatres. Changing their beliefs about who makes up this nation's imagined community has ultimately contributed to how gay men have become increasingly included into the nation's rule of law. Juntunen helps us to understand the importance of continually expanding that imagined community in theatre and performance.

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GROTOWSKI'S BRIDGE MADE OF MEMORY: EMBODIED MEMORY, WITNESSING AND TRANSMISSION IN THE GROTOWSKI WORK. By Dominika Laster. Enactments series. Chicago: Seagull Books, 2016; pp. 212.

Each of the four chapters of Dominika Laster's *Grotowski's Bridge Made of Memory* is dedicated to