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Theater of State: A Dramaturgy of the United Nations by
James R. Ball III (review)

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Fire Dance, as discussed in chapter 2, which used technological advancements to project an other-than-human ghosting of Oscar Wilde's *Salome*.

Farfan sets out to demonstrate an inextricable link between modernism and queerness, but at times, this link is not fully substantiated within her textual analysis; and while Farfan's critical and historical understanding of modernism comport authority, her renderings of queerness do not always interrogate gender performativity as thoroughly as her investigations seem to demand. More effective is how Farfan uses her performance examples to demonstrate an outright rebellion against the type of storytelling that is often required by the dominant paradigm. In almost each performative example, Farfan extensively discusses how critics and artistic contemporaries hated these works for their inability to present propriety, tidy storytelling, and heterosexual ideology as paramount. Considering contemporary queer theory's recognition of the notion of deviance as always already queer, Farfan's assertions take on critical weight in her ability to showcase how the so-called deviant inspired alternate choreographies, multimedia performativities, and alternative heterosexual relationships that were heavily coded as queer in order to be acceptably presented.

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***Theater of State: A Dramaturgy of the United Nations.* By James R. Ball III. Northwestern University Press, 2019. Paper \$34.95, eBook \$34.95, Hardcover \$99.95. 224 pages. 8 illustrations.**

Listen carefully next time a cable news pundit dismisses a politician's speech as "political theatre" or "just a performance": the next sounds will be groans of scholars and the launching of a thousand Twitter threads arguing that theatre and performance achieve real-world effects. This is a tough sell beyond humanities departments. Scholars invest intellectual energy in work by people like J.L. Austin, Judith Butler, and Shoshana Felman, but everyday people groan right back once philosophy enters the discourse.

James R. Ball III's *Theater of State: A Dramaturgy of the United Nations* attempts to span this gap. The book offers an accessible analysis of how the United Nations and International Criminal Court perform theatrically toward diplomatic ends. The volume's primary concern is how the theatrical execution of diplomacy shapes the work of international institutions for their many diverse spectators. Spending four chapters on the UN and two on the ICC, Ball concentrates on particular events where performance proved consequential in diplomatic spaces, and examines how performativity might shape a public reading of the institutions. By

decoding the UN's and ICC's theatricality, Ball argues convincingly that dramaturgy is constitutive of their work, and by avoiding a deep tread into the weeds of theory, he does so in such a way that could connect with a broad audience.

Ball's chapters stress the shared constitutive aspects of theatre and diplomacy. Plays and television dramas enter the book even though it does not strictly need them: *Theater of State* could have advanced its thesis effectively through its analyses of diplomatic spectacles alone. But Ball's decision to unite his discussion of international institutions with scripted dramas (and one unscripted, dog-centered performance) makes the claim that "theater is political and politics is theatrical" more vivid and persuasive.

The book's opening chapter focuses first on a 2014 *Hamlet* staged at the UN after some heated diplomatic jostling. Ball argues that the multicultural Shakespeare's Globe production, directed by Dominic Dromgoole, performed memories of colonization that some members of the UN would prefer not to conjure so publicly: "theater remembers performance," says Ball, "it is a structure that refuses to allow performance to forget or be forgotten" (27). The chapter closes with a paired analysis of Colin Powell's 2003 vial-of-anthrax performance that sought justification for a US invasion of Iraq with David Hare's *Stuff Happens*, a docudrama featuring the same event. "Hare's poetic license pales in comparison to Powell's," insists Ball, arguing that theatre's capacity to remember calls spectatorship to account by challenging politics' urge to move ever forward (35).

Chapter 2 examines UN peacekeeping, which Ball insists "is a performance practice [...] predicated on theatrical spectatorship" (46). The chapter discusses two theatre events: a thwarted attempt to stage Karen Sunde's *In a Kingdom by the Sea*—the story of a murdered UN peacekeeper—at the UN, and an evening shared by two UN officials with Lynn Nottage at a performance of *Ruined*, Nottage's play where blue-helmeted peacekeepers appear briefly off stage. Ball argues that these episodes exemplify the necessity of spectatorship to global power, and demonstrates how the intricate choreography of peacekeeping shapes narratives and, in turn, places ethical responsibility on world citizens to be critical spectators.

Over the next two chapters, Ball closes his primary discussion of the UN with attention to infelicity. First, he takes up what he calls "insurrectionary speech," challenges mounted against tidy, reiterative diplomatic performance (80). Discussing Muammar Qaddafi's 2009 performance of a blustery UN speech that culminated in his ripping a copy of the UN Charter, Ball argues, "Qaddafi performs the infelicity of the UN's promise of equality and peace" (84). Ball suggests that insurrectionary speech seeks to disrupt diplomatic theater's narratives, revealing the irreducibility of the spectator to global diplomacy. Next, in chapter 4, Ball examines failed diplomatic efforts to use popular music to produce lightheartedness, suggesting that these are examples of spectators refusing "to be organized according to the designs of states and institutions" (95). The chapter proceeds with skepticism

toward international attempts to generate and measure happiness, treating such efforts as oppressive attempts to mold publics. Here, Ball advances his thesis about tensions between performances and spectator by demonstrating how performative infelicities underscore the limits of diplomatic choreography and the extent of audience agency.

Moving from Turtle Bay to the Hague, chapter 5 argues that the International Criminal Court's "power is a function of its theatricality" (126). Ball details the court's reliance upon and intricate coordination of its spectatorship, and insists that that this "theatricality claims a world-making power" (127). To explore the less pronounced affective spaces of the ICC, the chapter offers a reading of *Crossing Lines*, a television drama set in and around the court that sensationalizes the ICC. Ball argues that the show contributes to the amorphous interface between the court and its spectators, enhancing what the chapter treats as a productive tension between institutions and their audiences.

In the book's final chapter, Ball examines the great drama attendant upon transcripts of UN and ICC proceedings. Through case studies of contentious debates over the contents of transcripts, Ball insists that verbatim transcripts are "a central component of the ongoing performance event" of diplomacy (136). Through careful analysis of transcripts' development processes, Ball argues that international institutions' inherent theatricality relies on interfaces with spectators. The chapter does fine work to excavate the tension and performativity at the heart of verbatim transcripts.

A brief epilogue examines the hardline rhetoric deployed upon arrival by Nikki Haley, representative of Donald Trump's administration to the UN. Ball cautions against dismissing her performances as bluster, using Haley as a final example of the UN's essential stagecraft. In closing, Ball reiterates that diplomatic theatre's reliance upon spectatorship empowers global audiences toward dramaturgical insurrection, allowing for the refusal to be interpellated.

Theater of State impresses in insight and execution. It is nuanced performance studies scholarship. The work of Butler, Joseph Roach, Felman, and especially Austin permeates Ball's argument, but the book is effectively light on direct engagement with theorists. Instead, Ball operates from a presumed comfort in the idioms of performance studies shared by readers, freeing the book to take the discourse in enlightening directions. Theatre scholars might therefore find the book's greatest value in Ball's methodology, a useful model of expanding fields of inquiry and considering how theatricality and performativity shape consequential interactions of everyday life.

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