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*War as Performance: Conflicts in Iraq and Political
Theatricality* by Lindsey Mantoan (review)

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and Irish Americans might be useful to understanding more recent events, she rejects any suggestion that their experiences or positions are interchangeable.

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***War as Performance: Conflicts in Iraq and Political Theatricality.* By Lindsey Mantoan. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. Hardcover \$84.99, Paper \$84.99, eBook \$64.99. xii + 236 pages. 16 illustrations.**

Much has been written about the theatricality of war and terrorism, but Lindsey Mantoan's *War as Performance* specifically examines the performative techniques used to promote, resist, and assess the 2003 Iraq War, in the context of the 1991 Gulf War and the rise of Daesh (also known as ISIS or ISIL). Mantoan's thesis is that the extensive political performances framing the Iraq conflict largely deployed established performative techniques rather than formal or aesthetic innovation (8). The book fills a gap in the existing scholarship about performance in war or terrorism by creating a comprehensive picture of theatricality in the Iraq War, the specificity of which has largely been ignored. Each chapter examines a different medium or mode of performance, from the Bush administration and protestors' messaging, to anti-war adaptations of Greek drama, to Iraqi theatre of the real, to satirical news, to post-apocalyptic literature and film. *War as Performance* offers a comprehensive, if not always unified, assessment of performative responses to the Iraq conflict.

The introduction sets the stakes for thinking about theatrical responses to war and provides an overview of military conflict in Iraq since the 1990s. Mantoan argues that the theatricality surrounding the Iraq War reveals "the ways in which twenty-first century warfare is waged, resisted, and understood," and is therefore important for performance studies scholars to examine (3). She defines the term *performative* as: "the actor acts with the intention of drawing the attention of an audience, and to exert influence over the shape of the world" (18), though the book tends to treat *performative* and *theatrical* as relatively interchangeable terms across media. Mantoan's historical overview shows that during the Gulf War, Americans got used to seeing war as spectacle because the conflict was broadcast on live TV, and after the 9/11 attacks, Americans were inundated with militaristic and patriotic performances, setting the stage for the theatricality of the 2003 Iraq War.

The second chapter, "Impresarios and Protestors," shows how the Bush administration stage managed the lead-up to the 2003 invasion and discredited direct protests through appeals to patriotism. Mantoan claims the US government carefully produced a narrative (however full of plot holes) through strategies

borrowed from theatre: casting choice, props, costuming, sets, dramatic tension, and specific dialogue choices. These strategies largely recycled techniques already familiar from Desert Storm and the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Anti-war protesters like Cindy Sheehan also utilized familiar theatrical techniques, but the official media narrative presented protestors as anti-patriotic, disorganized, naïve, and potentially manipulated by powerful, sinister forces.

Mantoan turns her attention to performances or adaptations of Greek myth and tragedy in the third chapter, “Ancient Wars, Endless War.” Lisa Peterson and Denis O’Hare’s *An Iliad* and Ellen McLaughlin’s *Ajax in Iraq* use ancient stories to dramatize how interpersonal connections can support traumatized victims of war and humanize opponents. Building on theories that dehumanizing the “enemy” amplifies the trauma soldiers experience, Mantoan argues that these plays exemplify ancient practices of honoring and respecting an opponent, thereby offering strategies for Iraq War veterans to strengthen humanistic connections. Mantoan claims that these performances look back to the Classical for (debatably) idealized images of noble combat.

The following chapter examines documentary theatre performances, particular those few exploring Iraqi experiences and voices. Mantoan argues that George Packer’s *Betrayed*, Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen’s *Aftermath*, and Heather Raffo’s *9 Parts of Desire* try to connect US audiences with Iraqis by staging complex human experiences. Drawing language directly from real speakers, these dramatists show Iraqis as dynamic individuals with fears, aspirations, and attitudes similar to those of the Americans in the audience. Despite the ethical effectiveness of these plays, they utilized documentary theatre techniques going back decades, and most documentary theatre inspired by the Iraq War focused on either politicians or traumatized coalition soldiers (94).

In the fifth chapter, Mantoan examines *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The Colbert Report* as satiric responses to both political events and the media narrative. While both shows critiqued the Bush administration’s political theatre, Mantoan claims that real anti-war action was hampered by the limit of satire as a genre—it is reactive, rather than proactive. Satire mocks something that has already happened. Stewart and Colbert were not able to inspire forward-looking resistance to the War. Even when they held a well-attended Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear, Mantoan notes that it was not clear exactly what the hosts wanted to come from the gathering.

The final chapter, “War After the End,” argues that post-apocalyptic literature inspired by the Iraq War emphasizes the cyclical or on-going nature of violence—apocalypse as self-sustaining. The chapter looks at Suzanne Collins’s *Hunger Games* (the novels and films), the SyFy channel’s *Battlestar Galactica*, and the CW’s *The 100*. For each, Mantoan shows that violence and even genocide are recurring, maintaining conditions of devastation rather than progressing to more stable, just

societies. This existential loop is inspired by the on-going violence in Iraq, as Collins and the creators of *BSG* directly acknowledge. The shows, books, and movies fail, according to Mantoan, because they cannot imagine a viable alternative to endless destruction—an imaginative failure signaled by recurring collapses and cycles of erupting chaotic violence within the narratives.

Mantoan's *War as Performance* takes a broad view of performance inspired by the Iraq War, analyzing various media with differing relationships with and responses to the War. This broad approach increases the book's utility for scholars working in different fields. Not only will *War as Performance* appeal to performance studies, film, and theatre scholars; it will also prove a useful resource for political scientists, historians, and sociologists or psychologists working with veterans or war-traumatized populations. Mantoan draws on high-level critical theory, but her explanations of complex concepts are consistently clear enough that the book will be comprehensible for those less versed in performance theory. This book does an excellent job filling a critical hole left by existing examinations of the theatricality of terrorism; Mantoan shows that the performative elements of the Iraq War were unique and deserving of critical attention.

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