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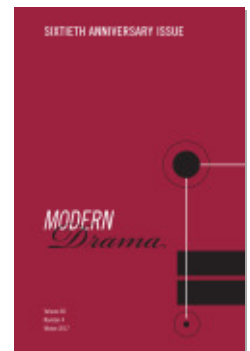
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*Performing Whiteness in the Postcolony: Afrikaners in South African Theatrical and Public Life* by Megan Lewis (review)

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which are collected in the 2009 volume of *Polityka literaturoznawcza* [*Politics of Literature*], published by Krytyka Polityczna, the main think tank of the Polish emancipatory offensive, despite their many clear convergences with his study. Even with allowances made for the fact that Lease writes for a western audience, and this is where his theoretical and methodological inspirations lie, the specifically Polish context of the debate in which his book partakes raises the expectation that Polish voices will be acknowledged, if not engaged directly, in his analysis.

*After '89: Polish Theatre and the Political* is, in many ways, a paradoxical book. It offers a wealth of insights and detailed observations about identity politics in Polish theatre of the last twenty-five years, even though its frequent generalizations could be easily applied to other genres of cultural production (literature, film, and fine arts). Its ambition is to provide an analytical and theoretical grasp of the subject, but its actual practice is to synthesize it. The book testifies to Lease's strong political convictions and expertise, yet it frequently gives more weight to other theoreticians and theatre critics than to the author's own voice. It embraces the emancipatory narratives that react to exclusionary practices while remaining unaware of its own exclusionary impulses. It celebrates emancipation as if emancipation did not share with the avant-garde its suicidal, and at times nihilistic, horizon. Finally, it makes a strong case for radical pluralism but offers a rather rigid view of it. Quite possibly, giving a balanced overview of the political in Polish theatre during the last quarter-century is a paradoxical task in itself, one that requires more temporal distance from the material at hand. For now, Lease's informative, if at times contradictory, book will serve us all well.



MEGAN LEWIS. *Performing Whiteness in the Postcolony: Afrikaners in South African Theatrical and Public Life*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2016. Pp. xv + 246, illustrated. \$55.00 (Pb).

*Reviewed by Loren Kruger, University of Chicago*

Megan Lewis begins her book with the reminder that South Africa and the United States share a racist history that neither has overcome: "in both my home and adopted countries are systems of white supremacy that privilege portions of the population over others [ . . . ] and allow white authorities to enact violence on black and brown bodies" (xii). In South Africa today, however, Afrikaners – members of the exclusive group within the white minority that once enjoyed economic, political, and cultural privileges – protest their

marginalization in performances that hark back to the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902) and other scenes of heroic defeat. While some Afrikaners, notably dissident Max du Preez, dispute this marginalization, and others, such as hip-hop group Die Antwoord and performance artist Peter van Heerden, treat this image-repertoire with mordant irony, the spectacles of heroic victimhood that occupy part of Lewis's study have drawn crowds to the State Theatre in Pretoria.

Before evaluating Afrikaners' place in "theatrical and public life," however, we must acknowledge the violence of Afrikaner power. Lewis notes the racist underpinnings of the "ethnomythology" (23) of a righteous *volk* battling "uncivilized hordes" (15) in pageants staged before Afrikaners came to power – especially the much-analysed Voortrekker Centenary of 1938 and the accompanying film *Die Bou van 'n Nasie* [*Building a Nation*] (chapter one). Her analysis, in chapter two, of the Boer War Circus at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair, which featured former general Piet Cronjé attempting to "enlighten the Americans about [his] persecuted people" (55), illuminates a significant event that has received little attention. But she tips her hand toward what John Fletcher has called "avowed sympathy" (qtd. in Lewis 5) by omitting performances produced by Afrikaners in power, especially the Van Riebeeck Tercentenary (1952) and the Republic Festival (1966). Both promoted the ideology of apartheid architect Hendrik Verwoerd, who, despite his "gentlemanly appeal" (15), forged the juggernaut that uprooted three million South Africans from their homes and created a ruthless police system to persecute black and white opponents. The National Party also attacked Afrikaner dissidents, although these, including major poet–playwright N.P. van Wyk Louw in the 1960s and anti-apartheid satirist Pieter-Dirk Uys in the 1970s and 1980s (the star of chapter four), never suffered the levels of censorship and violence inflicted on black critics.

These omissions matter because Afrikaners' perception of powerlessness before or after the apartheid era obscures their abuse of power from 1948 to 1994. To revise Lewis's telling formulation, understanding how Afrikaners "perform themselves *into, around, and out of power*" (18; emphasis in original) requires knowing how they performed whiteness *in* power. Apartheid privileged all whites, but the state subsidized Afrikaner economic advancement [*volkskapitalisme*] as well as cultural hegemony by favouring Afrikaans over other languages. Historians who critique this Afrikanerization might have modified Lewis's reliance on Herman Giliomee, whom Du Preez describes not as "one of the foremost historians on Afrikaners" (Lewis 17) but as an apologist for "race-based solutions to post-apartheid South Africa" (Du Preez 152). Dan O'Meara's analysis in *Forty Lost Years* of the system supporting Afrikaner privilege makes current laments of marginalization dubious: Afrikaners today enjoy the same rights to language and culture guaranteed under

the Constitution. As Du Preez writes (and Lewis cites [168]), Afrikaans has thrived even though some regret the loss of Afrikaner supremacy.

Nonetheless, the contradictions of nostalgia can produce rich drama. The subject of Lewis's third chapter is Deon Opperman's five-hour epic *Donkerland* (1996). The performance traces Afrikaner history from the *trekboer's* claim to Zulu land – and Zulu women – in 1838, through the documented suffering of Boer families (shadowed by unsung black retainers) in the British army's concentration camps around 1900, to Boer migrants competing with black workers in the 1930s, and on to the Afrikaner ascendancy from the 1950s and fears of its decline in the 1990s. Lewis compares this complex story to Opperman's more recent combative play *Tree Aan [Join Up]* (2010), which argues that the compulsory service of white draftees in the apartheid army should be honoured along with black guerrillas at Freedom Park. She highlights how Afrikaner modes of “performing whitely” – unlike white English-speaking South Africans, who maintain a more discreet profile – do not rhyme with “quietly” but, on the contrary, take the State Theatre stage to claim national attention at full throttle.

In contrast to these vociferous re-occupiers of a former apartheid bastion, the subjects of Lewis's last two chapters tackle the legacy of shame – and tenacity – that shapes Afrikaner identities today. Watkin “Ninja” Jones and Anri du Toit “Yo-Landi Vi\$\$er” of “white kaffir” rap group Die Antwoord [The Answer] do more than upend Calvinist claims to pure white probity with sexually explicit shows and the language and tattoos of brown and black delinquents. Digging deeper than skin, their videos flash shameful images from the dark past, including incest among white migrants, documented by Roger Ballen's photographs of disturbing offspring, while imagining a future with all identities “fucked into one” (169). While Die Antwoord reaches a global audience online, Van Heerden's enactments draw their force from site-responsive encounters at the annual Afrikaner-fest, the Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees (KKNK). Van Heerden and company use potent symbols such as ox-wagons, Boer republic flags, and their own embodiment of pioneer patriarchs as “strategic lures” (143) seemingly celebrating *volkstrots* [“ethnic pride”]. Inside the *laager* [“protective encampment”], however, spectators face performances of abjection, such as Van Heerden on a cross with *Wit Kaffer* [“White Nigger”] scrawled across his chest, or the milder but for some die-hard still shocking spectacle of his colleague cooking for local brown children. While some spectators were moved despite their discomfort, others treated the performers as race-traitors, as Lewis suggests (151). Lewis might have made more mention of other local ordeal artists whose work could have provided useful context and comparison, especially Steven Cohen, who appears only once in a footnote (206n2) but whose performances since the

1990s queering the history of Jewish abjection at home and abroad might have illuminated Van Heerden's – and also Uys's – deconstruction of the Afrikaner claim to be “God's chosen people,” since, as Lewis notes, Uys's mother was Jewish (104). Nonetheless, Lewis's analysis of the unsettled interactions at KKNK articulates her own ambivalence toward her dual inheritance and enables her to mediate between the white tribe and new observers of these South African cases of “performing whitely,” who have much to learn from this book.

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DAVID IAN RABEY. *Theatre, Time and Temporality: Melting Clocks and Snapped Elastics*. Chicago: Intellect Books, 2016. Pp. 280. £70.00 / \$100.00 (Hb).

*Reviewed by Matthew Wagner, University of Surrey*

As is perhaps evident in its title, there is quite a lot on offer in David Ian Rabey's *Theatre, Time and Temporality: Melting Clocks and Snapped Elastics*. I found this a rich and highly enjoyable book, steeped in an impressive knowledge of multiple fields of inquiry and offering an array of contributions to the ways in which we might think about time, performance, and the relationships between the two. I open by pointing to my own pleasure in reading the book not without reason: one of the key features of Rabey's book is a clear and marked articulation of his own subjectivity. This subjectivity comes across in the voice of the writing, the theoretical approach, and (inevitably, as Rabey points out) in the choice of case studies. It also seems to have some impact on the structure of the book, which offers less of a singular and driven argument about time and theatre and more of a provocative and productive roaming through the matrices of these complex fields.

This is not to say that the book eschews new, contributory claims or perspectives (such as his focus on time as consequence, or time and aging). And one of the project's real strengths is Rabey's insistence on how nearly all modes of temporality are inherently political (see, for example, his nomination of “Rabey's Law,” wherein “any version of the providential is also political” [29]). For the most part, however, the politics of time are, for Rabey,