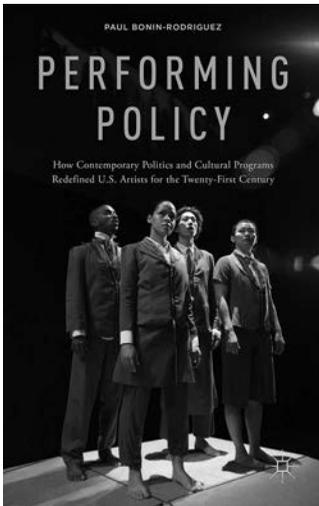*Paige A. McGinley is Associate Professor of Performing Arts at Washington University in St. Louis. Her first book,* Staging the Blues: From Tent Shows to Tourism *received the 2014 Errol Hill Award from the American Society for Theatre Research. She is Coeditor of the Books section of* TDR. *pmcginley@wustl.edu*

Performing Policy: How Contemporary Politics and Cultural Programs Redefined U.S. Artists for the Twenty-First Century. By Paul Bonin-Rodriguez. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015; 208 pp.; $95.00 cloth, $34.99 paper, e-book available.

How might we understand arts and cultural policy as more than a merely administrative agenda for divvying and delegating grant funding? How might performance—as site, method, analytic, even *as* policy—help us to rethink the ways public culture is, or should be, organized in America? What—if any at all—is the performing artist's role at the so-called "policy table"? Paul Bonin-Rodriguez's timely *Performing Policy* engages these questions by charting the development of US cultural policy discourse over the past two decades and indexing the gradual emergence of what he considers to be a new spirit of "grassroots cultural policy" (22) since the culture wars of the 1990s. The volume is a welcome intervention that tracks the complex interdependencies of artistic practice and the infrastructures of its support: public, economic, and social. Most convincingly, the book serves as a vital call to arms for working artists to hone their own infrastructural imaginations and to reimagine their capacities for collaboratively performing policy—indeed, to reimagine "how artists can more effectively become the agents and co-creators of policy's work" (2) on both the local and national level.

Bonin-Rodriguez comes to the policy table with a rich array of experience—as performing artist, arts advocate, teacher, and scholar of performance and policy inside and outside of the academy. In fact, his own career trajectory mirrors the narrative and rhetorical thrust of the book itself: the conservative onslaught of the culture wars provoked a fundamental reevaluation of the "broad public purposes" (19) of arts and culture in America and of artists themselves as essential to the cultural life of the communities in which they live and work. As a queer performance artist from rural Texas who launched his career as an "outcast" (x) in the early 1990s, Bonin-Rodriguez came up amidst and against the material and ideological undoing of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), which in turn necessitated his own personal engagement with policymakers and arts administrators in order to imagine a more sustainable future, both onstage and off. Bonin-Rodriguez's own varied engagements with policy, then, as artist *and* scholar, demonstrate the ways in which he hopes "contemporary artists might articulate their cultural contributions and use that advocacy to collectively and conscientiously create public and private support" (25).

This book is one such attempt to stake claim to that "abundance" (xvi), and the unique and effective structure of Bonin-Rodriguez's argument models the very mediations between "policy" and "performance" for which he advocates. Three of the book's six chapters track the most significant "historical developments" (25) in policy since 1997 through close readings of the policy documents themselves and the proceedings and other performative circumstances that shaped and were shaped by this "immense and densely packed period" (21). By focusing on these foun-

dational policy initiatives—The Arts and the Public Purpose meeting in 1997; the emergence of the Creative Capital Foundation since 1999; and the Leveraging Investments in Creativity program between 2003 and 2013—Bonin-Rodriguez charts a movement away from a more traditional (mid-20th-century) idea of policy as grant-based support for nonprofit institutions as the bastions of culture, towards more heterogeneous and complex systems of support, which include "for-profit and community cultural sectors, and even time-based programs that maximize innovation" (1–2). Interspersed between his analyses of these programs and publications that have "shape[d] policy's interaction with artists" (11), Bonin-Rodriguez presents three contemporary case studies that document selected artists' responses to such developments. In these engaging and more personal chapters—documenting the Strategic Plan collaboratively composed by the Austin New Works Theatre Community, detailing a course of his own devising about policy and the humanities at UT Austin, and analyzing the impact of the NEA's shift toward "creative place-making"—Bonin-Rodriguez substantiates his claim that artists need to be understood not only as the "recipients" of new policy programs, but also as *producers* who embody and enact "best-practices" (16) for "bridging the sectors of art, business, technology, policy, and education" (3) in economically and culturally varied communities.

While Bonin-Rodriguez does usefully consult the likes of Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, and Diana Taylor, among others, to read the archives and repertoires of policy literature as well as the "artist-producer" (25) as a fundamentally *hybrid* figure, I was left wanting a more elaborate theoretical spine to supplement his detailed and compelling discursive analyses. I was somewhat surprised that Bonin-Rodriguez did not take up the substantial archive of theoretical debates about policy as such that unfolded in the arts and critical humanities during the very historical span of his project.[1] While I do understand his seeming hesitation to introduce too much theory in a book addressed to "artists and those who organize on their behalf" (7), I wonder if this omission further reifies the stultifying binary from those very debates about the differences between doing policy and doing theory (or critique).[2]

More fundamentally, I wonder if Bonin-Rodriguez's understanding of his project as an act of "translating" (2) the policy horizon for working artists so that they might "avow" (xiv) their place at the policy table does not theoretically limit his very interrogation of policy's purview. Indeed, in his focus on the ways policy has "redefined" how artists might forge sustainable futures in their communities, it is often not quite clear just how critical Bonin-Rodriguez himself is of these *ways* as they have been redefined. For instance, there are times in which he seems almost sympathetic (or resigned) to a policy platform that has come to understand artists primarily as entrepreneurial value producers. And while advocating for better working conditions and more appropriate rewards within such an austere value sphere is an urgent and necessary pursuit, I was also hungry for a deeper interrogation—even redefinition—of artists' abundant capacity for more critical engagement, or institutional *dis*avowal, *as* the very means by which they might perform policy in and for the 21st century.

—*Brandon Woolf*

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1. For a selected overview, see Cunningham (1992), O'Regan (1992), Miller (1998), Miller and Lewis (2003), Bennett, (2004) and McGuigan (2004).

2. I track some of the critical genealogies and contemporary ramifications of these debates in a recent article (see Woolf 2015).

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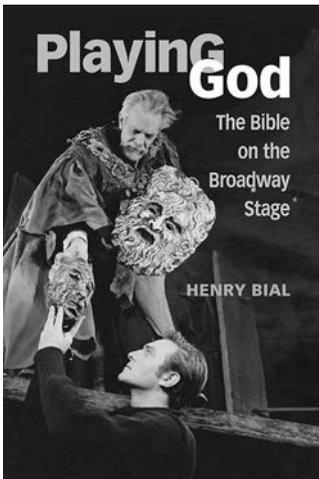
Playing God: The Bible on the Broadway Stage. By Henry Bial. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015; 260 pp.; illustrations. $80.00 cloth, $29.95 paper, e-book available.

Throughout history, stagings of biblical drama have been sites of contestation among artists, audiences, and the faithful, resulting many times in controversies and social change. Scholars in the field of religious performance have analyzed such dynamics, and in *Playing God: The Bible on the Broadway Stage*, Henry Bial moves the conversation to relatively unexplored territory, asking, "What happens when a culture's most sacred text enters its most commercial performance venue?" (4). The answers to this question are found in the historical relationship between New York commercial theatre and its predominantly Judeo-Christian audience. Bial examines four main strategies used by playwrights, directors, actors, designers, producers, and publicists to achieve box office profits while satisfying the needs of religious audiences. He argues that a balanced, artistic application of sincerity, faith, irony, and spectacle were necessary for commercial and critical Broadway success.

Playing God explores the affective and critical responses of audiences, paying particular attention to the dynamic tensions between sacred texts and secular performance. Bial argues that dramas based on religious narratives are not unlike most theatrical experiences, as direct, wholly authentic emotional or spiritual conduits between actors, texts, and spectators are often unattainable. *Playing God* uniquely addresses how familiar problems of representation in Christianity (iconoclasm, antitheatricality, bodily corruption, etc.) were inflected and realigned within the commercial world of Broadway. Bial opines that spectators of faith tolerated dramatizations of biblical narratives as long as the tone of productions was respectful to God and religious practice.

From the 121 Broadway productions of biblical plays since 1890, Bial selects 17 case studies, including well-known commercially and critically successful works, like *Ben-Hur* (1899) and *Godspell* (1976), as well as "a handful of notable 'flops' that highlight the difficulties in adapting the Bible," (10), e.g., the Danny Kaye vehicle *Two by Two* (1970). Eschewing chronological orga-