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Review: Performing Environmentalisms: Expressive Culture and Ecological Change

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McDowell, J.H., Borland, K., Dirksen, R., and Tuohy, S., Eds. *Performing Environmentalisms: Expressive Culture and Ecological Change*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2021. 282 pp. ISBN: 978-0-252-086090, paperback, US\$30.00.

The origins of *Performing Environmentalisms* lie in in 2015, when faculty members from Indiana University discussed the value of implementing a unifying theme for collaborative research and teaching. That theme, cultural sustainability, led to the subsequent founding of a Diverse Environmentalisms Research Team. Colleagues from other Universities were brought onto the team, ultimately resulting in a 2017 symposium where submitted essays were refined for incorporation in this edited volume.

Performing Environmentalisms is interdisciplinary in scope with an emphasis on cultural expression and environmental action. Its twelve authors collectively identify themselves as ethnographers and center their contributions on the strategic use of traditional artistic expression—storytelling and songs, crafted objects, and ceremonies and rituals—performed during the social turmoil provoked by environmental degradation and ecological collapse.

Motivated by a common effort to explore *what it means to be human*, particularly in a global sociopolitical environment that has historically valued the separation of humans from nature in a false dichotomy, the contributors center on a common theme: that place and placemaking are central to the human experience. Critically, the authors recognize the role of place (and time) in their readers' own lives: the introduction recognizes the disruption COVID-19 has had not only on everyday life, but also the very notion of 'certainty' when it comes to humanity's present and future.

The collection is divided into three parts: *Perspectives on Diverse Environmentalisms*, *Performing the Sacred*, and *Environmental Attachments*. Together, the three sections

comprehensively articulate the authors' personal struggles with world-changing forces, extrapolating individual's experiences to the bigger picture: the global dialogue on humanity's response to climate change and its associated consequences. The editors make an interesting linguistic choice to describe climate change, labelling it the global 'crisis of the moment.' The implications of this terminology repeatedly surface throughout the volume, as authors both frequently emphasize the *paradigm-shifting* nature of climate change, as well as express hopes that life—if not humanity specifically—will persevere through the crisis.

The general structure of the book leaves readers with the impression of thoughtfulness and deliberation. The division of chapters along the three parts (and each chapter's well-articulated fit with the theme of that section) lends a well-balanced tone to the structure of the book. Moreover, even smaller details, such as the even distribution of images across the book, suggest that the editors gave attention to the book's overall balance. Such balance further lends to a book's value as an interdisciplinary text: different fields feel equally represented even as they complement one another.

The contributors' intentionality can be seen through the incorporation of—and due diligence in explaining—traditional ecological knowledge (TEK). As it is becoming increasingly more common for scholars to consider the role of indigenous and traditional knowledge (ITK) and local community knowledge, the incorporation of Indigenous perspective to the volume not only opens the discussion to consider the spiritual agency of nonhuman entities, but also opens the scope of what is “worthy” of political protest, and whose actions exist at the local sphere versus whose transcend to be widely valued at the global level.

Overall, there are three overarching assertions contained in the volume. The first is that there is value in the strategic use of traditional artistic and expressive culture at the center of humanity's response to crises. The second is that performance is purposeful for individuals' and groups' agency. The third is that expressive culture offers essential resources to individuals and communities as they seek to not only encounter change, but interpret changing environments and resist the harmful consequences of climate change. Each contribution to the volume adds to one (or more) of these assertions in at least one way, comprehensively bringing theoretical, empirical, and reflective support for the value of performance.

Individuals coming to the book with similar backgrounds as the contributing authors—including, but not limited to, folklore, ethnomusicology, Critical Race and Indigeneity, and Activism and Radicalism studies—will find particularly visible links to their own research, instruction, curriculum development, and practice. The application of the book for research, practice, and applied work confirms a general suspicion of the book: it does not seem intended for general public audiences. It is certainly applicable for

graduate students, especially those who are well-versed in qualitative methodology (particularly ethnography and broader phenomenology approaches) and those interested in work that branches theory and practice through practical recommendation and lessons for future application.

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