American Dionysia

Violence and tragedy riddle democracy – ironically because of its very design and success. To articulate this troubling claim, Steven Johnston explores the crimes of democratic founding, the brutal use democracies make of citizens and animals during wartime, the inevitable repercussions of majority rule, and the militant practices of citizenship required to deal with democracy’s enemies. Democracy must take responsibility for the consequences of its success; politics that denies violence merely replicates it. Johnston thus calls for the development of a tragic democratic politics and proposes institutional and civic responses to democracy’s reign, including the reinvention of tragic festivals and holidays, a new breed of public memorials, and mandatory legislative reparations sessions. Theorizing the violent puzzle of democracy, Johnston addresses classic and contemporary political theory, films, little-known monuments and memorials, the subversive music of Bruce Springsteen, and the potential of democratic violence by the people themselves.

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For Judy, always
American Dionysia

Violence, Tragedy, and Democratic Politics

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