

E. Patrick Johnson and Ramón H. Rivera-Servera, *Blacktino Queer Performance*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016). pp. 573.

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What is at stake when scholars and artists frame theatrical stages as queer-conscious spaces? E. Patrick Johnson and Ramón H. Rivera-Servera propose their answers in their edited collection of plays, *Blacktino Queer Performance*. The collection explores the convergences and divergences of Black and Latina/o communities and how they occupy spaces of queer theatrical and social performance. For the editors, the stakes of raising the curtain on Blacktino queer performance “may inaugurate a troublesome collapse of difference in the eyes of a consuming homonormative public that simply homogenizes racial otherness as fetishistic ahistorical subject.”<sup>1</sup> The complex utility of performance defies the bounds of entertainment and emotional catharsis to actively subvert and dismantle damaging social constructs such as race and gender. The work engages in ethnographic comparison to illustrate how Others can meet at the border of difference and find commonality in their struggle to reconcile identity, home, and place in society.

The editors apply interdisciplinary, intersectional, and intercultural methodologies. They merge the disciplines of queer theory, performance theory, and Blacktino theory, which they refer to as the “unholy” trinity of intersectional analysis.<sup>2</sup> Johnson and Rivera-Servera define their central identifier, Blacktino, as a term referring to interracial individuals as well as social relations between the two groups.<sup>3</sup> Though identity is key here, and individualism is celebrated, the editors effectively break down identity barriers for the good of the culture and the power of the collective across racial, gender, sexuality, and class lines. Veering away from notions of essentialism, the anthology dramatizes the broad potential of queer identity, especially when it intersects with race.

The volume comprises nine parts, treating nine plays that address a myriad of queer Blacktino themes. Parts I, III, VI, and VII include scripts that challenge their audience’s identity politics by calling into question the definitiveness of gender, race, and sexuality constructs in Sharon Bridgforth’s *The love conjure/blues Text Installation*, E. Patrick Johnson’s *Strange Fruit*, Cedric

Brown's *Cuban Hustle*, and Pamela Booker's *Seens from the Unexpectedness of Love*. Parts II, IV, and V explore the toxic nature of racialized masculinity through Coya Paz's *Machos*, Javier Cardona's *Ah mén*, and Jeffery Q. McCune Jr.'s *Dancin' the Down Low*. Fetishizing the racial Other is the central theme in parts VIII and IX, with Paul Outlaw's *Berserker* and Charles Rice-González's *I Just Love Andy Gibb*. Each script is accompanied by an interview with the playwright and a scholarly essay, putting artists and academics in direct conversation. Because theatre is collaborative, ownership of an artistic piece is collective rather than individualistic. Therefore, performance scholars are given an active role in this volume to signify the meaning of the text alongside its author. Beyond the scripts themselves, which offer intertextual reflection, the playwright interviews provide direct delineation as to context and intention of their piece. However, it is made clear that these scripts belong to the communities they represent, and they participate in meaning-making. Each playwright stimulates "Blacktino," not through identity, but through cultural practice and production, and audience reception.<sup>4</sup>

*Blacktino* decolonizes queer performance, emancipating it from the homonormative whiteness of mainstream queer theory. The work of Johnson and Rivera-Servera interjects a critical intervention into the fields of racial and queer performance studies. Though queer theory has managed to breach seminal performance studies in recent decades, few scholars have yet to tread over the contentious landscape of race and its role at the crossroads of these two fields. The editors follow in the footsteps of Audre Lord, Tavia Nyong'o, Harry Elam, Anita Gonzalez, and Thomas DeFrantz, who decolonized gender and racial performance theory through non-Eurocentric, non-white lenses.<sup>5</sup> Many works remain untethered to intersectionality, while Johnson and Rivera-Servera effectively argue for its necessary position in subaltern performance studies.

The editors assembled an ambitiously diverse collection to provide a broad assessment of the field with generations of artists, traditional versus more experimental theatre styles, and texts that explore the diasporic and American experience. However, the anthology at times falls short of the radically inclusive strides they prescribe for their readers. Despite engaging with a broad range of themes and pieces, their definition of theatricality itself is

limited. An image of Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera graces the book's cover, and a description of their legacy as foremothers of Blacktino queer performance graces the introduction. Locked out of mainstream spaces, Johnson and Rivera utilized any stage they could, including drag shows, street theatre, and political demonstrations.<sup>6</sup> The editors of *Blacktino* limit their volume to conventional theatrical performance. Though this approach allows for the accessibility of underrepresented scripts, they perhaps missed an opportunity to expand the definition of performance, just as Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera occupied more democratic spaces than the often-inaccessible theatre. Furthermore, the selection of plays is a bit unbalanced in terms of intersectionality, with only one-third of the plays written by women, and only one-third being Latina/o plays.

Despite several shortcomings, this impressive volume treads boldly into the no man's land of lower-class queer of color lives and performance. Johnson and Rivera-Servera offer an in-depth cultural critique that engages a vast array of artists and scholars, and they challenge their readers to seek out queer performance outside of the pages of their volume. *Blacktino* sets the stage for future scholarship to investigate where these pieces should play where they could best culturally and materially benefit the underserved — and too often invisible — communities they represent in performance.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> E. Patrick Johnson and Ramón H. Rivera-Servera, *Blacktino Queer Performance* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 231-232.

<sup>5</sup> Audre Lord, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984); Tavia Nyong'o, *Afro-Fabulations: The Queer Drama of Black Life* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2018); Harry J. Elam, *Taking It to the Streets: The Social Protest Theater of Luis Valdez and Amiri Baraka* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997); Anita Gonzalez and Thomas DeFrantz, *Black Performance Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Johnson and Rivera-Servera, *Blacktino Queer Performance*, 1.