

**“Introduction” for *Blacktino Queer Performance* by E. Patrick Johnson and Ramón Rivera-Servera (Northwestern University Press, 2016)  
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As E. Patrick Johnson and Ramón Rivera-Servera articulate in their play anthology’s introduction, each of the title’s three worldmaking keywords, “Blacktino,” “Queer,” and “Performance,”—what the co-editor, scholar/artists ludically yet also seriously call a “titular triumvirate,” an “‘unholy’ trinity”<sup>1</sup>—each of these words orient and define the intentions and contentions of their collection. Most importantly, the potency of this shimmering trifecta intends to decimate thoroughly, in the words of José Muñoz, the “structuring logic of white normativity.”<sup>2</sup> With this horizon line of urgent, transformative activity in sight, the nine playtexts collected assiduously describe the terms and power of “affective belongings between people of color.”<sup>3</sup>

First, this new volume gathers a collection of performance works by both emergent and venerated performance makers who identify as queer in terms of sexual identity. Yet equally as importantly, Johnson and Rivera-Servera desire to privilege the idea of insurgent politics the word queer signifies, in order to, in their words, “recoup its radical potentiality and futurity.”<sup>4</sup> Their pointed use of the word “recoup” suggests that “queer” as either identity marker or as politic requires reclamation, if not redress. Therefore—as demonstrated by each black and brown queer performance documented—Johnson and Rivera-Servera seek to animate the term’s resistant and transcendent capaciousness against restrictive, prescriptive, and regressive conceptions of both sexuality *and* race. With these plays, the co-editors seek to ignite the term’s radical liberatory politic.

As Johnson and Rivera-Servera also contend in their introduction, the keyword performance—and most particularly its manifestations in queer black and brown expressive

cultures—is crucial for, as they argue, performance does the difficult but integral work of “mak[ing] material the discursive condition of life at the margins.”<sup>5</sup>

However, it is the keyword Blacktino that I suspect garners the least familiarity. On the one hand, Blacktino describes someone of African American and Latinx mixed racial heritage, someone who might also name themselves Afro-Latina/o, or as Johnson and Rivera-Servera trace, Latina/os with “Afro-diasporic ancestry outside the U.S.”<sup>6</sup> However, this anthology also deploys Blacktino to address and mark “contemporaneous social and cultural exchanges *between* U.S. African American and U.S. Latina/o communities.”<sup>7</sup> Thus Blacktino not only marks ethnoracial identity, but invocation of the term enunciates a wide range of nourishing, indeed, formative social, political, and cultural alliances and intersections forged between African Americans and Latina/os. These black and brown paradigm-shifting alliances can be located in spheres of queer culture and politics, in women of color feminism of the 1980s, as well as in dance clubs, in artistic collaborations, and, indeed, in gay porn.

Perhaps most importantly, for these co-editors—one African American, one Latino, both queer—the term Blacktino marks “a history of cohabitation between” black and brown communities that “animates...sexual and social intimacies in the present, and centers cultural and political desires that might yield more solidary futures.”<sup>9</sup> In this ideation, I offer that this collection works with and through a fulgent philosophy of hope.

Many of the works collected in the volume were presented in 2008 at the BlakTino Queer Performance Festival convened at Northwestern, a visionary performance event that privileged performance works by black and brown queer creators. Devoting this type of performance space in academia, much less a whole festival exclusively to minoritarian performance makers queer or otherwise—is—shockingly—almost unheard of. Yet this idea not only yielded this worthy publication but also models how to manifest inclusionary practices that reach beyond the lip

service of mission statements' oftentimes empty diversity rhetoric or the cultural imperialism often instigated by color-blind casting.

In the collection's nine scripts we gain pungent testimonies about the vicissitudes of living as black, brown, and queer U.S. citizen-subjects. The volume includes works by Sharon Bridgforth, Coya Paz, and Pamela Booker. It also includes works by Javier Cardona, Jeffrey McCune Jr., Cedric Brown, Paul Outlaw, Charles Rice-González, and E. Patrick Johnson. Notably, a good number of the pieces are solo works, bespeaking this genre's long tradition in queer and people of color performance. To its credit, this volume also takes on the ambitious task of presenting works steeped in dance or movement, an inclusion that foregrounds how gesture and movement form integral elements of meaning making in performance by people of color.

If this were solely an anthology that collects and publishes, side by side, the performance works of queer African American, Blacktino, and Latina/o performance makers, it would already constitute a visionary contribution to play publishing activities in the U.S. However, the anthology executes two further moves that deepen its contributions.

The co-editors have commissioned culturally competent scholars to write critical analyses that explicate prominent themes in each work. These essays will offer critical traction for undergraduates and provocative theoretical optics for graduate students. This strategy of play publication surmounts the challenge of pedagogues' desire for critical considerations that engage new works by people of color.

The second set of materials are interviews with each performance maker, again, conducted by culturally competent interlocutors. Questions posed move beyond softball queries about race or sexuality or performance making and, instead, probe the algebra of intersectionality. Questions also slip the yoke of simply defining black and brown queer artists'

work in relation to whiteness. In the best of these interviews, we gain the interanimations between theories of the flesh and material practice.

*Blacktino Queer Performance* constantly made me recall José Muñoz's theoretical formulation of "feeling brown." In a 2000 essay, Muñoz thinks through playwright Ricardo Bracho's play about a queer, multiracial, and multigendered community to identify "a new moment in minoritarian performance and cultural work in which the strict confines of identitarian politics are *superseded by other logics* of group identification."<sup>14</sup> He theorizes "affective belonging," that is, an articulation of relationality and interconnectedness among queers of color.<sup>15</sup> It's this "brown world of feeling" that not only confounds the U.S.'s black/white racial binarism, and not only refutes subjugation devices of white heteronormativity, but also, once articulated, enfranchises a powerful way of "being in the world" for people of color that, most importantly, validates and unites their shared structures of feeling for political action.<sup>16</sup> With this anthology Johnson and Rivera-Servera manifest this radiant idea.

Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> E. Patrick Johnson and Ramón H. Rivera-Servera, *Blacktino Queer Performance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 7.

<sup>2</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, “Feeling Brown: Ethnicity and Affect in Ricardo Bracho’s *The Sweetest Hangover (and Other STDs)*,” *Theatre Journal* 52, no. 1 (Mar 01, 2000): 76, <http://dartmouth.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.dartmouth.idm.oclc.org/docview/1290190690?accountid=10422>.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 7

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 3. Emphasis added.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>14</sup> Muñoz, “Feeling Brown,” 76.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 76, 79.