



NEW WORLD CHOREOGRAPHIES

Heat and Alterity in
Contemporary Dance
South-South Choreographies

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ARE YOU ENTERTAINED? BLACK POPULAR CULTURE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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Takiyah Nur Amin's citation of Alice Walker directly speaks to the need for this volume. Alice Walker once said, "People are known by the records they keep. If it's not in the records, it will be said that it did not happen" (237). *Are You Entertained? Black Popular Culture in the Twenty-First Century*, an anthology edited by Simone C. Drake and Dwan K. Henderson, creates a reflective record of a wide range of Black art and popular culture in the twenty-first century. The methodologies of this text work across genres, including fiction, professional sports, cartoons, cabaret performances, and beyond, to highlight, examine, and theorize the "Black" in Black popular culture. Various mediums are analyzed, encompassing social media, radio, television, cartoons, professional athletics, theater, dance, and more. Significant cultural milestones include Grammy performances, the first Black US president, and big-box movies that feature Blackness and Black people to create and perpetuate the popular culture. From this eclectic Africanist matrix, the authors probe how Black entertainment can be a tool of resistance, embodiment, and performance.

Michael Omi and Howard Winant's racial formation theory foregrounds the book's analysis of race generally and the ways in which Blackness specifically is socially constructed and lived out daily by Black people. The authors confirm a race-conscious framework and a rejection of a post-racial ideology. Since Blackness has been mass-produced, commodified, and consumed to accommodate the increased desire for information and profit of non-Black people, the contributions investigate various ways Blackness has transcended Black bodies and entered American culture. Due to the long history of erasure and invisibility of

the contributions of Black people in the entertainment industry, scholarship and records focused on critically engaging Blackness become crucial. Interdisciplinary explorations of agency and power within Black bodies and Black art have been undervalued in the academy. This book builds on existing Black dance scholarship that situates dance disciplinarily as both arts and humanities and goes further to parse the ways in which Black dance holds significant meaning and importance for these disciplines. Thus, texts like this create an avenue to document and analyze Blackness contemporaneously and provide insights for the future. *Are You Entertained?* situates Blackness as a contemporary affirmation of Black life and subjectivity. The book also provides a nuanced relationship between Black dehumanization and subjugation throughout history, contributing to the records that reveal Black people and their contributions were here and mattered. In addition, the contributors assess and evaluate the power and agency within Black bodies, Black performance, and Black culture.

Laying the theoretical groundwork for the collection, the introduction, "More Than Entertainment: Black Culture and Subject Making," clearly articulates the anthology's responses to Blackness in twenty-first-century popular culture, foreshadowing the ongoing relationship between commodification, consumerism, appropriation, and capitalism. Drake draws upon major cultural events, such as Beyoncé's Coachella performance (2018) and the movie *Black Panther* (2018), and cultural theorists, such as Angela Davis and Alain LeRoy Locke, to analyze Blackness as both lived experience and theory. Space is provided for ample nuance throughout the chapters, embracing the contrast between theory and practice, and juxtaposing examples of resistance and pleasure within the Black community. Furthermore, these contradictions are interlaced throughout the chapters as Blackness becomes both an embodied descriptor and a philosophical ideology that translates into a cultural identity that some authors claim can be accessed without the presence of Black bodies. The section "Performing Blackness" discusses racial jokes, radio, cabaret, television, and fine art as it investigates the theory of performativity of Blackness in popular culture. Section 2,

“Politicizing Blackness,” scrutinizes the intentional politicization of Blackness through newspapers, cartoons, vlogs, web series, and professional sports. “Owning Blackness,” section 3, critiques the problems of capitalistic ownership of Blackness through discussions of Black Twitter, branding, trademarks, hip-hop dance, and theater. In the last section, “Loving Blackness,” Black social dance, mainstream movies, and urban fiction books become sites of exploration for Black love of self, love of a partner, and love of the community. Interviews with artists-scholars end each section, including discussions with Patricia Hill Collins, Mark Anthony Neal, Tracy Sharpley-Whiting, and Lisa B. Thompson who explore performance, the African diaspora, Black women’s studies, and Black culture as intellectual theory.

In the section “Owning Blackness,” the ways in which capitalism is enacted within the body and between bodies is the central topic. In chapter 12, “Black Culture without Black People: Hip-Hop Dance beyond Appropriation Discourse,” Imani Kai Johnson’s key argument calls for discourses to expand beyond discussions about appropriation to more accurately describe the cultural exploration of hip-hop by non-Black people. Johnson claims that appropriation only covers one type of cross-cultural exchange in which colonialism and consumption are engaged. She calls for a distinction between people taking claim to forms that they do not have cultural capital in and people claimed by the culture, advocating for a more dynamic spectrum for cross-cultural exchange. Johnson argues that appreciating and engaging in a deep cultural investment of hip-hop is not merely exploitive. She even goes on to say the embodiment of African diasporic aesthetics that can be utilized to make someone outside of the African diaspora “become black’ ... is achievable not in biology but in practice” (199). Although the author runs the risk of claiming that anyone can become Black by embodying Black aesthetics, the chapter provides an emerging opportunity for racial rhetoric to continue to evolve beyond capitalistic ideas of ownership. Despite the omission of an exact alternative or addendum to appropriation frameworks, Johnson introduces an exciting conversation that questions the politics of embodiment and the limits in the transmission of Blackness.

In the section “Loving Blackness,” Black love becomes a tool of resistance and empowerment. Takiyah Nur Amin’s chapter, “The Booty Don’t Lie: Pleasure, Agency, and Resistance in Black Popular Dance,” is one of the most successful chapters in the book. In it, she analyzes twerking, the Harlem Shake, and j-setting. Using performance theory, she provides a deep reading of each style to persuasively retheorize their execution as an embodied portrayal of community empowerment instead of the deviant immoral act seen by some. Amin argues that performing these dances allows Black people to access a collective meaning that stems from having authority and autonomy over the movement, which was previously denied. Although emphasizing the booty, analysis develops beyond the simple taxonomy of Black bodies to see the dancing body as a site of knowledge and resistance. By moving the booty in ways that defy what is recognized as appropriate or acceptable, Black people not only access to the joy that comes from dancing and connecting to the African diaspora but engage in community defiance to dominant whiteness that attempts to control Black bodies. Amin articulates how Black vernacular dance serves as a subversive counternarrative that uses the body as an archive to counter practices of erasure and control, situating Black social dance in the African diaspora and establishing Black dancing bodies as important sites of resistance.

Are You Entertained? Black Popular Culture in the Twenty-First Century situates dance as a central element of Blackness that has been usurped by popular culture, advancing scholarship within dance studies. The authors push the field through a multifaceted conversation in which dancing becomes a key component in understanding our current culture. Both chapters spotlight the power of dance for people inside the Black community or those who utilize Black aesthetics. Amin is correct to name the lack of critical engagement as a cause of continued abuse of Black bodies; therefore, sustained inquiry into how Black popular dance embodies ideas and concepts will allow dancers to access knowledge and propel dance studies as a field.

In all, *Are You Entertained? Black Popular Culture in the Twenty-First Century* does an excellent job placing Blackness at the center of inquiry without supporting an essentialist idea

of what twenty-first-century Blackness is, but by offering multiple options of what could be. This text is a valuable resource for scholars interested in analyzing pop culture. The in-depth analysis and contemporary conversations are also great for students seeking to understand better the culture they are experiencing. The discussion of pop culture and memorable events make the advanced theoretical conversations relevant and approachable. By writing Black people and their contributions into the written record, this text helps to correct the whitewashed Blackness that fuels popular culture.

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HEAT AND ALTERITY IN CONTEMPORARY DANCE: SOUTH-SOUTH CHOREOGRAPHIES

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In many ways, dance is closely associated with the concept of time. On a microscopic scale, time forms the basis for rhythm in movement. On a macroscopic scale, dance is very much a product of the era in which it is produced and performed. Moreover, in this unprecedented period, artists are finding new meaning in their practices. COVID-19 has revealed existing and new inequalities seen in dance practices, funding structures, and governmental policies, shifting the ways that artists perceive their practices. Crediting yet expanding on the concept of time, Ananya Chatterjea's *Heat and Alterity in Contemporary Dance: South-South Choreographies* explosively redefines the "contemporary."

While the term intrinsically seems to imply a relationship with time, Chatterjea perceives time as one of many considerations in contemporary dance today, explaining, "Periodizing structures . . . do not live as water-tight compartments: they are always contingent upon an overlapping series of factors" (114). Expanding on the environments that inspire innovation and referring to them as conditions of alterity, her text first defines the conditions of

"unbelonging" and then sees the physicality of heat as a thread through which movement responds to adversity. The contemporary carries the expectation of responding to the moment, particularly in its multiplicity across various populations. Chatterjea's text is a reflection of her long-term experience as a scholar and an interdisciplinary artist and director of Ananya Dancer Theatre and the Shawngram Institute for Performance and Social Justice. In *Heat and Alterity*, she draws from both decolonial theories and practice/performance analysis of artists. The first three chapters provide a retheorization of contemporary and difference as they relate to dance. In the five chapters following, specific contemporary approaches and contexts are analyzed in relation to heat and alterity.

First, Chatterjea addresses the contemporary label with regard to geographically based aesthetics in particular. Drawing on Walter Mignolo's approach to decoloniality in reference to the global South, she argues, "The self-reflexivity that characterizes contemporary experimental dance-making in the Euro-North, then, is limited: it does not investigate all positionalities and governing practices affiliated with its circuitry" (13). By framing her text as "South-South," she underscores the importance of choreography through a decolonial lens of the "South" while also traversing multiple intersections of unbelonging such as feminism, race, and class. Chatterjea's gesture to Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality is particularly relevant in these times, when it must be noted that British colonialism, for example, is decidedly different from what is currently being experienced by Native people in North America for many reasons (24). Rather than coopting the concept of intersections, Chatterjea asks how they come together to define alterity.

In stating the link between contemporary and Eurocentrism, Chatterjea points out blind spots in choreography and positionality. She talks of the "blatant appropriation" in contemporary dance from dancers and artists of color. Taking a direct tone, this text contrasts "just-world-making" and "place-making," whereby world-making is seen as "futurity untrammelled by historic and systemic violences and equipped with collective strategies for addressing them should they recur" (93). On the other hand, place-making appears