



## Coloring Whiteness: Acts of Critique in Black Performance

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To cite this article: Kellen Hoxworth (2018) Coloring Whiteness: Acts of Critique in Black Performance, Contemporary Theatre Review, 28:1, 137-138, DOI: [10.1080/10486801.2018.1426906](https://doi.org/10.1080/10486801.2018.1426906)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10486801.2018.1426906>



Published online: 29 Mar 2018.



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from the critical to the practical, but for the most part the book's primary contribution lies in a robust theorisation and underpinning of atmospheres. Nevertheless, the book opens the door to numerous ways through which we might consider and approach atmospheres. Drawing from many pools of knowledge and addressing various fields and disciplines, *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres* offers a rich and interdisciplinary account, which renders it a useful touchstone for practitioners and scholars alike.

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*Coloring Whiteness: Acts of Critique in Black Performance* by Faedra Chatard Carpenter

Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014, 312 pp, ISBN 9780472052363 (paperback)

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*Coloring Whiteness* is a well-deserving recipient of honorable mentions for the American Theatre and Drama Society's 2015 John W. Frick Award and the American Society for Theatre Research's 2015 Errol Hill Award for outstanding scholarship on African American performance. It has much to offer anyone interested in performances that cross colour lines in theatre and everyday life. Faedra Chatard Carpenter's astute study examines 'trans-racial performances' enacted by self-identified African American artists from 1964 to 2008 (11). Yet, the historical arguments and analyses it encompasses have quickly proven prescient, anticipating events that followed its publication such as the theatrical success of Branden Jacobs-Jenkins's mobilization of whiteface in *An Octoroon* (2014). Drawing from Carpenter's impressive dramaturgical résumé, *Coloring Whiteness* presents deft analyses of similar transracial enactments through the lenses of theatrical practice, thereby offering a valuable model for approaching difficult and provocative performances both onstage and in the classroom.

Across an introduction, five chapters and a coda, Carpenter offers a capacious archive of performance practices that animate 'how African American artists resist the presentation of whiteness as normative and, in the process, expose the fallacies associated with racial designations' (3). The book covers an expansive range of critical objects – including theatre, television, visual art, installation art, and everyday life – illuminating several political and aesthetic articulations of whiteface performance. Drawing extensively from

original artist interviews as well as reception theory and rigorous historiographical research, Carpenter's approach emphasizes reflexivity, critical generosity, and circumspection from the positions of artists and audiences. Through this 'dramaturgical sensibility', the book animates the often-overlooked ligaments binding theory and practice, apprehending racial enactments as emerging between intention and reception and, therefore, as necessarily intersubjective and complex (14).

Crucially, Carpenter intervenes in critical discourse on contemporary North American performance and its racial projects. In the past two decades, performance has emerged as a central site for analyses of both whiteness and blackness. For instance, Mary F. Brewer and Richard Dyer have examined the performative fashioning of whiteness in mainstream television, film, and theatre; similarly, Kimberly W. Benston, Daphne A. Brooks, E. Patrick Johnson, Harvey Young, and many others have traced the imbrications between blackness and performance.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, recent scholarship on transracial performance – such as that of Michele Elam, Nadine George-Graves, David Krasner, and Marvin McAllister – present an emerging canon of research on whiteface practices by people of colour.<sup>2</sup> Carpenter engages such literature generatively while displacing blackface minstrelsy as the tacit paradigm for considerations of transracial enactments. Instead, she turns her critical attention towards 'dramaturgies of whiteness in contemporary African American performance' that do not necessarily refer to – nor derive from – blackface practices (237). Thus, Carpenter draws critical focus onto the performance of 'blackness through whiteness' (5). Two images frame this study, both of which animate the relationality between blackness and whiteness in performance: the first, a photograph of a young black man

1. Mary F. Brewer, *Staging Whiteness* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2005); Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997); Kimberly W. Benston, *Performing Blackness: Enactments of African-American Modernism* (London: Routledge, 2000); Daphne A. Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850–1910* (Durham, NJ: Duke University Press, 2006); E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham, NJ: Duke University Press, 2003); Harvey Young, *Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory, and the Black Body* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).
2. Michele Elam, *The Souls of Mixed Folk: Race, Politics, and Aesthetics in the New Millennium* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); Nadine George-Graves, *The Royalty of Negro Vaudeville: The Whitman Sisters and the Negotiation of Race, Gender, and Class in African American Theater, 1900–1940* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000); David Krasner, *Resistance, Parody, and Double Consciousness in African American Theater, 1895–1910* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1997); Marvin McAllister, *Whiting Up: Whiteface Minstrels and Stage Europeans in African American Performance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

marching in Selma, Alabama, in March 1965, adorned in white face paint with the word VOTE written on his forehead; the second, the volume's cover image of Jefferson Pinder in Butoh-inspired, full-body whiteface. These images illuminate the intricacies of the locution 'blackness through whiteness', wherein corporeal blackness peeks through whiteface masks while the performers simultaneously make new political and aesthetic claims on both blackness and whiteness through their whiteface enactments (5).

Within this rich and layered theoretical framing, the book offers a compelling performance genealogy of black racial commentary through the apparatus of whiteface. *Coloring Whiteness* follows a roughly chronological progression, opening with analyses of the theatrical whiteness staged in Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro* (1964) and Douglas Turner Ward's *A Day of Absence* (1965), and proceeding to a consideration of the theatrical effects of white (in)visibility in Lydia R. Diamond's stage adaptation of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (2006). The second half departs from theatre proper while maintaining a theatrical frame to apprehend resonances of whiteface in other media: Daniel Tisdale's visual and performance art; Michael Jackson's pop and music video canon; comic sketches from Dave Chappelle's television programme *Chappelle's Show*; the racially marked voiceover work of Rayme Cornell and other vocal artists; and Jefferson Pinder's video installation *Afro-Cosmonaut/Alien (White Noise)* (2008). Across these case studies, *Coloring Whiteness* animates the theatrical in everyday racial projects as well as the performative work effected through mediated racial enactments.

Carpenter's astute dramaturgy of transracial performance across multiple media facilitates a signal contribution of the book: its critical vocabulary for the variegations of whiteface performance, both visual and aural. For instance, the uncanny 'tinted whiteface' of *Funnyhouse of a Negro* is contrasted with the theatrical, alienating 'optic whiteface' of *A Day of Absence* (24). Similarly, practices of 'non-conforming whiteface' – whereby a performer signifies whiteness through codified objects, such as theatrical props and sartorial items – differ markedly from enactments of 'naturalized whiteface', wherein performers alter their physical bodies to appear according to the dominant codes of whiteness (24). Lastly, on the phonic register, speakers and listeners animate the interconnected phenomena of 'linguistic whiteface' – an intentional vocal performance of so-called 'white' speech – and the 'presumed aural whiteness' that an auditor may ascribe to a speaker who 'sound[s] white' (24–5). Carpenter's rich descriptive language facilitates careful attention to the political and aesthetic specificity of such distinct and disparate whiteface performances.

More broadly, Carpenter's nuanced anti-essentialist analyses of transracial performance make evident the necessity of further scholarly inquiries into the vagaries of racializing enactments. Amidst the recent controversies surrounding Rebecca Tuvel's article 'In Defense of Transracialism' in *Hypatia*, Carpenter presents pedagogues with rich material for classroom investigations into transracial performance in all its complexes and complexities.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the book facilitates and invites further research into transnational modes of transracial performance. While laying the groundwork for such future studies, *Coloring Whiteness* compellingly asserts that, in transracial performance, 'nothing is simply black or white' (224). Rather, in her rich and clear writing, Carpenter eloquently traces the tight interconnections among performances of blackness, whiteness, and all the 'mixedness' in between (161.).

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*Performance Art in Eastern Europe since 1960*  
by Amy Bryzgel

Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2017, 384 pp., ISBN 9781784994228 (hardback)

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In *Performance Art in Eastern Europe since 1960*, Amy Bryzgel gives a compelling account of the origins, recurrent themes, and functions of performance art in the former communist, socialist, and Soviet countries of Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe since the 1960s. The book, which constitutes the first extensive academic study of its kind to date and examines a range of practices from actions and happenings to body art and performance, aims to historicize the developments in performance art in the region of Eastern Europe (during and after Communism) through a rich narrative of its most prominent artists and works. By doing so, Bryzgel attempts to shed light on the performance practices that emerged in the so-called Eastern European countries that have mostly been excluded from the frequently West-focused discourses of art history and performance studies. At the same time, she demonstrates that although the Iron Curtain significantly hindered cultural

3. Rebecca Tuvel, 'In Defense of Transracialism', *Hypatia* 32, no 2 (2017): 263–78.