

Book Review

THE SENSE OF BROWN. By Jose Esteban Muñoz. Durham, Duke University Press, 2020.

In *The Sense of Brown*, Muñoz articulates brownness as “brown people...who are rendered brown by their personal and familial participations in South-to-North migrations patterns” (p. 3) and as everyday gestures of people who are brown by their performativity that challenges whiteness as a majoritarian cultural logic. Throughout the book, the reader is able to feel the intimacy of Muñoz’s thinking in the renderings presented that challenge one to think beyond identitarian subject positions of brownness and to engage the affect tied to a way of being brown. Furthermore, each of the chapters intimately ties the concept of brownness to queerness as both affective excessiveness of racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual performativities of *Latinidad*. As an example, Muñoz invites us to understand the limitations of terms such as *Latino/a*, similar to *Hispanic*, that have historically been used to present a communal group identity within the social and political constructs of the United States. Similarly, the editor’s note the shift in group identity discourses since Muñoz’s departure from *Latino/a*, and/or *Hispanic*, to most recent identity terms such as *Latinx* and *Latine* that are marked with an assumed inclusion of racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual subject positions. What Muñoz’s work does in this book, similar to his 2009 text *Cruising Utopia*, is to imagine the possibilities in brown and queer world makings that center the social political realities of queer people of color?

Each chapter in the book is able to stand on its own in relation to what Muñoz constitutes as an affect of brownness, rather than a feeling, that is both historically situated and “that a subject feels in [themselves] or recognizes in others (p. 40). I also find it important to highlight some of the chapters to capture the way this affect of brownness is taken up in several artistic performances by challenging the U.S. nationalistic affect rooted

in whiteness. In chapters three and nine, we are brought into the world of Cuban memory and affect through *cubania*, what Muñoz defines as “of Cubanness as a way of being in the world” (p. 24) in the performances of Nilo Cruz’s *Two Sisters and a Piano* and Tania Bruguera’s *The Burden of Guilt*. In these two chapters Muñoz attempts to have the reader feel the tensions, contradictions, and dichotomies of the Cuban binary of those within the U.S. landscape and those on the island of Cuba, and more specifically, understand the desires and longings that exist with each other in imagining a different world alongside those who are invested in maintaining the state and its existing system. Similarly, this affect of memory and imagining is read and felt in chapter seven through Luis Alfaro’s *Cuerpo Politizado* and the reverberance of a dream not achieved in each of the segments of this performance as it relates to Latino affect, more specifically, Los Angeles Chicano affect. Throughout the book, there is a consistent reimagining of agency that artist’s embody in their performances and use to render white affect as inconspicuous to the sense of brown.

As a Jotería Studies scholar, I find myself reflecting on the ways Muñoz builds on Chicana/Latina and Black Feminisms as the foundation of his interpretations of the many performances that he takes us with throughout the book. The vivid descriptions of acts of excessiveness and details that one might miss in the performances that challenge the social and political constructs of imperialism and capitalism in the artist’s assertion of brownness and queerness is thoughtfully constructed in the critique. Additionally, there is an agentic practice that Muñoz inserts into his critique and interpretation of the artist and their performance/s. Simultaneously, as the reader, one feels the multiple forms of affect that Muñoz describes such as guilt, shame, freedom, and liberation while at the same time remembering that this is not disconnected from the realities of harm and violence experienced by queers of color, and people of color, broadly, at the hands of racism, queer and trans antagonism, and capitalism. Ultimately, *The Sense of Brown* captures Muñoz’s call to think about brownness and queerness as “*una manera de ser*”, a way of being, and as importantly, *una manera de sentir*, a way of feeling.

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