

Martin Lütke. *Color-Line and Crossing-Over: Motown and Performances of Blackness in 1960s American Culture*. Cultures in America in Transition 3. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2011. 230 pp.

The significance of the Motown phenomenon for American (popular) culture in and beyond the 1960s has been the topic of both scholarly and non-scholarly accounts. Craig Werner has tellingly labeled Motown's history the "most compelling version of the American dream ever released in blackface."¹ Martin Lütke critically situates his research within the diverse literature on Motown, which he categorizes into three groups: the descriptive approaches of memoirs, (pseudo-)autobiographies, and bio-graphies, the "racially conservative" approach of e.g. Nelson George, and more recent works that view Motown "with a specific theoretical or methodological prism" and "critically reevaluate" readings of its success story (3-7). As part of the latter group of texts, Lütke's dissertation examines an aspect of Motown that has mainly been marginalized in scholarly discourses: the role of the artists' bodies and their performances of black physicality.

The analyses of Motown's performances of blackness are framed by a survey of publications on the topic, a brief elaboration on the study's theoretical premises, and a concise overview of relevant cultural contexts, tropes, and traditions. Lütke discusses two American popular cultural forms relevant to the (re)negotiations of black physicality in the 1960s: minstrel shows and the blues tradition. He also introduces rock 'n' roll as the main musical and cultural ancestor of Motown in the 1950s. While his book might not offer a "conclusive history of the construction of bodies in popular cultural discourse," as Lütke claims (7), it is still a valuable addition to the scholarship on American popular culture and the constructions of black bodies as well as an essential read for anyone interested in the cultural impact of the Motown phenomenon and its cross-over appeal. It is a well-researched and, for the most part, convincingly argued study that covers an impressive range of materials: magazines and newspapers (including *TIME Magazine*, *The Washington Post*, *The Michigan Chronicle*, *Vogue*, and *Ebony*), artist sheets, photographs, televised performances, and, of course, songs and lyrics.

Lütke's readings of Motown's performances of blackness are, by and large, detailed and incisive. The analyses are organized in loose chronological order and delineate the developments and negotiations of blackness (understood as an intersectional category) in Motown's body politics throughout the 1960s. Lütke first focuses on Motown's early years and its first national success: The Miracles. He also includes Mary Wells and The Marvelettes among others to reveal the construction of black femininity in this context. These case studies already expose some of the complexities of Motown's constructions of blackness: the almost literal absence of the black body from album covers, the adherence of artists' performances to (white) middle-class aesthetics as well as the ambivalent (and ironic) engagement with black stereotypes and sexuality. In a second step, Lütke critically examines the mid-1960s, when Motown had its major commercial successes and its "body [...] literally emerged as a site of construction and contestation" (97). While the performance style of the artists' and the presentation of their bodies had so far been "very adapted and well-behaved," Diana Ross and The Supremes marked a turning point with their performance of "Somewhere" because they revealed an unprecedented level of energy and emotion-ality (112). The Temptations contributed to a construction of black masculinity (neither emasculated nor asexual) that could cross over into mainstream popular culture, and Marvin Gaye emerged as a "black balladeer" whose subsequent career reflected and partially furthered the transition into Motown's post-classic period (128). Consequently, he also appears alongside Diana Ross, (Little) Stevie Wonder, and the Jackson 5 in the following chapter on the late 1960s and those black bodies which deviated or developed from the mainstream and constituted an "other Motown," as Lütke calls it. Wonder introduced a "new kind of black, performative body with an obvious political message and function ascribed to it" (159). Gaye began to re-invent himself as an artist and to break with the Motown mainstream regarding style, music, lyrics, and performance; and Diana Ross and The Supremes were the primary exponents of Motown sound and style. Ross's "star body" negotiated 'authenticity' as it performed the in-stability of cultural and racial identities (190). Finally, the Jackson 5 provided an "updated, rejuvenated version of Motown's success formula" (201). As Lütke holds, Motown developed a set of body types that have significantly shaped American popular culture and resonate well beyond the 1960s. In this regard, his book might prove useful to readers interested in the Motown phenomenon and to those with an interest in American popular culture's negotiations of blackness and particularly black bodies.

Erlangen

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1 Craig Werner. *A Change Is Gonna Come: Music, Race, and the Soul of America*. Rev. and Updated Ed. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006: 16.