

# Blacktino Queer Performance

E. Patrick Johnson and Ramón H. Rivera-Servera, editors

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Cover art: Marsha P. Johnson (left) and Sylvia Rivera (right)  
at the Christopher Street Liberation Day Gay Pride Parade,  
New York City, June 24, 1973. Photo by Leonard Fink, courtesy  
of the LGBT Community Center National History Archive.

To the foremothers,

**Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera**

And to our companions,

**Joel Valentín-Martínez and Stephen J. Lewis**



## Acknowledgments

An anthology such as this has lots of moving parts and therefore takes a collective to bring to fruition. This was particularly true with *Blacktino Queer Performance*. We would first like to thank the artists—Pamela Booker, Sharon Bridgforth, Cedric Brown, Javier Cardona, Jeffrey Q. McCune Jr., Paul Outlaw, Coya Paz, and Charles Rice-González, whose work inspired this project and some of whom performed at our Blacktino Queer Performance festival in 2008 at Northwestern University. We also say thank you to our colleagues who interviewed the artists and who critically engaged their work through the essays collected here.

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# Part I

# The love conjure/blues Text Installation

Sharon Bridgforth

## HISTORY

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*The love conjure/blues Text Installation* was created from a series of experiments based on the *love conjure/blues* performance/novel

Written by Sharon Bridgforth

Published by RedBone Press. Pub. Date: October 2004

## WORKSHOP PRODUCTION

The John L. Warfield Center for African and African American Studies, University of Texas at Austin. 3/2004. Writer Sharon Bridgforth. Featuring: Director/Composer, Helga Davis; Performers: Helga Davis, Florinda Bryant, Daniel Dodd-Ellis, Daniel Alexander Jones, Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, Sonja Perryman, Marlah Fulgham, Sean Tate, and Carsey Walker, Jr.

## WORKSHOP PRODUCTION

The John L. Warfield Center for African and African American Studies, University of Texas at Austin. 9/2004. Writer Sharon Bridgforth. Director/Composer, Helga Davis. Musicians Fred Cash, Jr. & Greg Rickard. Performers: Helga Davis, Florinda Bryant, Daniel Dodd-Ellis, Gina Houston, Daniel Alexander Jones, Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, Sonja Perryman, and Sean Tate.

## ALTER FILM

Producer/Writer Sharon Bridgforth. Producer/Filmmaker/Editor Krissy Mahan. Art Direction, Wura Ogunji. Featuring: Laurie Carlos, Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, Annelize Machado.

## INSTALLATION FILM

Executive Producer/Writer/Director, Sharon Bridgforth. Producer/Director of Photography/Editor/Projection Composer, Jen Simmons. Com-



poser, Helga Davis. Cast: Jafari Sinclair Allen, Phillip Alexander, Florinda Bryant, Wesley Bryant, Alix Andrew Chapman, Helga Davis, Firesong, Jeffery "Da'Shade" Johnson, Daniel Alexander Jones, Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, Renita Martin, Lady Red McGlotten, Courtney Morris, Sonja Perryman, Matt Richardson, Sheree Ross, Damon Stith, Dorcas Sowunmi, 3Jazz Collective (Joao Costa Vargas, Philippe Vieux & Kevin Witt), Rick Glascock—Vibraphone, Tonya Lyles—Drums, Martin Perna—Shakere.

THE LOVE CONJURE/BLUES TEXT INSTALLATION PRODUCTIONS  
(WITH INSTALLATION FILM)

Performer: Sharon Bridgforth Off Center, in Austin, Texas 6/2007.

Performers: Sharon Bridgforth and Florinda Bryant. South Dallas Cultural Center 3/2008.

Performer: Omi Osun Joni L. Jones. Department of Performance Studies, Northwestern University, BlakTino Queer Performance Festival 4/2008.

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The *love conjure/blues Text Installation* considers a range of possibilities of gender expression and sexuality within a rural, Black working class context. It articulates African-American sensibilities, history and oral traditions. Exploring the ways that we have survived; knowing the middle passage, slavery, jim crow and lynching. The piece is a reflection of the ways that Black people have used artistic expression to transmit stories of survival. The *love conjure/blues Text Installation* re-imagines the traditional role of the Griot. Asserts queer as sacred. Claims the blues as ritual—in concert with Ancient practices and new creations. In *The love conjure/blues Text Installation*, the past—the present—the future—the living—and the dead co-exist together weaving dreams/Prayers/Love expressed.

**Set:** The room is a living Altar. The audience is installed in the room. In the round. Three video projectors, three media screens needed. Three **STATIONS:** Sturdy rocking chair, Small platform for performer to stand on (2' x 2'-ish), The Lady-Cloth hanging of Our Lady Of Guadalupe that the performer stands in front of.

**Running Time:** 90 Minutes.

**Cast:** 1W: GRIOT. (Larger cast/live band optional.)

FILM. (THE OCEAN & CIVIL RIGHTS ERA/LAYERED.)  
ENTER DANCING  
DANCE AT CURTAIN FOR A FEW BEATS

DANCE TO CENTER (COVER THE ROOM/YOU ARE SAGING IT)

DANCE TO THE LADY FREEZE (HOLD IT)  
STAND (HOLD IT /WATCH FILM)  
WALK SLOWLY! BEHIND CURTAIN (YOU ARE SAGING AGAIN)  
DANCE OUT  
DANCE TO ROCKER  
WALK SLOWLY BEHIND ROCKER/CURTAIN  
DANCE OUT (YOU ARE SAGING)

DANCE TO DRUM FREEZE (HOLD IT)  
STAND (HOLD IT /WATCH FILM)  
STAND ON DRUM

(Take time Be a Blessing. Do the Blessing. Be in Ceremony.  
The stage is an Altar. Be Intentional. Be Mindful. **BE PRESENT.**  
Celebrate Engage with film/family and the audience.  
be in it. Enjoy. take your time. Remember this is The Prayer ... )

GRIOT. FROM DRUM  
they took his drum.  
he make another.  
they took his drum  
he make another / cut and carve and stretch and lace a little late late  
till it new  
then drum.  
you could hear it cross town and town  
which scare ole marsa who send they to take that drum and that one  
then  
beat him and take drum and beat him and take drum and  
beat him.  
still / he make another and another  
then drum.  
then ole marsa send they to take he thumb      toss in jar  
like for pickling.  
still he drum  
like he daddy he grand and grand and grand before now / before crossing



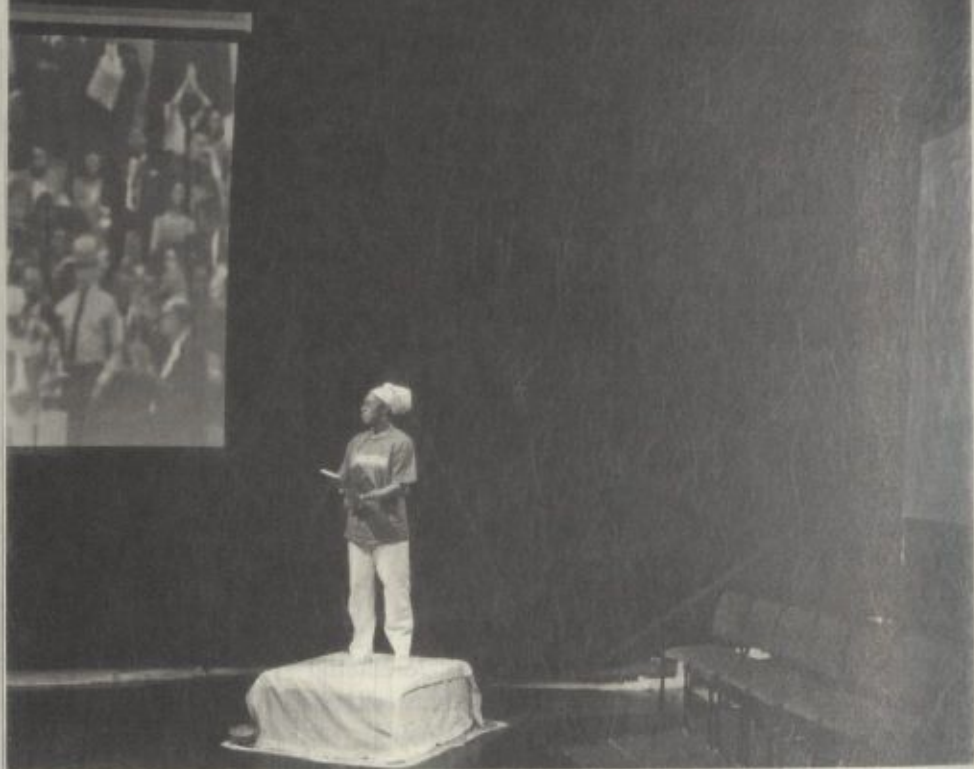


Fig. 1.1. Omi Osun Joni L. Jones rehearses *The love conjure/blues Text Installation*.  
Photo by Sharon Bridgforth.

he still drum so marsa send they take other thumb he still drum they  
take he  
finger he finger he finger every time still drum  
till none left.  
they seal jar place on kitchen table where many have to pass  
remember stay in place.

then all wee hours he sit and rocking back and forth cry soft close eyes  
rocking and rocking till some full moons pass/one night  
he run to dirt trail between back of the big house and field  
jump center  
with feet  
make sound  
with him mouth  
make sound  
low to the ground legs bend feet

he spin  
fast fast stir dirt make dust  
loud and loud  
overseer come but can't get close  
dust and wind raise hit face  
ole marsa run scared  
ole marsa with gun and whip and more overseers  
run through house run in kitchen  
trying to run out the back door to stop that drum  
but can't get out the door/in kitchen by table ole marsa he gun and whip  
and  
more overseers stuck      legs won't move past the table/holding the jar  
very still no smile  
isadora the conjuration woman/head unwrapped  
let thick gray braids stand round face and black eyes on black black skin  
she stand there hold jar no smile  
let ole marsa can't move  
not even curse can't raise fist whip gun  
overseers can't beat  
can't drop draws and act the animal they has been  
can't make no tie and cut and burn and starve and sell and kill like usual  
isadora stand there watch ole marsa eyes get big when he notice she  
holding  
that jar which is empty. she move her eyes to the table where his scraps  
from lunch still scraps and him eyes get big at the plate now empty  
cause he know they done fed him them fingers.  
him eyes roll back in head  
drummer feet too fast to see dust whirl raise the wind wind knock  
kitchen  
door open lift ole marsa up high in the air  
drop him down flat on the floor  
overseers been knocked down  
wind lift marsa high up drop him down  
isodora still  
watch  
lift bam lift bam  
ten times this go on ole marsa been pass out  
overseers too. till  
ole marsa's spirit float around the room  
slam down into his body on the ground  
then ole marsa open his eyes

he ain't ole marsa no more  
he just john harrison  
overseers dead dead dead.  
isadora say they gone *come back slaves next time.*  
we leave.  
every one of us we leave that night. john don't say a thing.  
we just walk off  
ain't no plantation no more never since that time/not on these grounds.  
us  
we come here.  
this been our home  
free  
for a long time now.

WALK BEHIND SCREENS TO ROCKER. WATCH FILM FROM ROCKER

FILM (MR. FIGURMAN & FRIENDS)

slim figurman  
handed a stranger a card what read  
*figure's flavors. the world's finest.*  
*come get a taste.*  
slim like to press them  
hand writ cards  
to folk coming through for the first time.  
he be all dressed lik a fancymann  
talking so many circes /till don't nobody know what the hell  
he talking about.  
the new to it /always stand for it  
nodd here and there  
throw in a word when slim take a breath.  
probably is all slim really want after all  
somebody to listen  
talk for a bit.

anyway

we all know  
slim call heself running a ho house  
but slim ain't running nothing or nobody.  
so the place he call figure's flavors /we calls it  
bettye's.



yessuh / cause slim's sister bettye be the one running that jernt.  
and what it is is the best blues inn in the country.  
first off bettye know how to keep a clean room  
so the stop overs always be happy / feel rested and cared for  
but more important / bettye can cook so goddamngood  
make you want to kick your own ass. i trying to watch  
see if bettye been throwed some powders off in them pots / make  
the cooking so much excitement  
for the tastes.

anyway

chile / musicians from states away haul they music over to bettye's just  
to be up in there get a taste. don't even charge bettye to play / course  
na  
some of them tasting more than good cooking from bettye.  
look like her favorites be extra fed. but they all of them gets tips  
meals  
and a room / long as they willing to work / and play hard.

and do the jernt be packed!  
mens womens some that is both some that is neither / be rolling all up  
and  
between the sounds / laying up in them rent rooms / and dancing off all  
bettye's home cooking.

anyway

it was a hot night after a hot day.  
the peoples was in they finest / fresh pressed and set for whatever  
bettye's  
was about to bring. it was rib night the start of the week-end. folk was  
still eyes bright hearts light pockets packed full of laughter / and on the  
ready.  
that night was a wo'mn named big bill what rose up out of bettye's room.  
big bill had on the finest suit i have seen to this day.  
come in with she suit black / hat low / glasses dark / and shoes so  
shinning make  
your head hurt. big bill walk through  
the crowd part / as she make way to the piano in the corner of the room.  
big bill's long legs reach strong

one powerful in front the other / her unbuttoned jacket open close open  
 close  
 as she walk / pants pull here here  
 here  
 material ripple across she crotch which appear packing a large and  
 heavy  
 surprise i glance over to bettye / see she seeing too / smiling down  
 where big bill pants pull and ripple large / and not so subtle in the crotch.  
 bettye fanning still sweat run all around her face.  
 i ain't got time be looking at bettye / look back  
 big bill taking she jacket off / take she hat off / slowly roll up one crisp  
 sleeve / then the other / loosen she tie / turn her big broad back to the  
 room / sit down / and ever so slightly nod she nappy head.  
 at that guitar sam pull up take a chair next to she. big bill nod  
 again even more slight / and a big ole  
 powerful sample of wo'mness stroll center the room. sway step smile  
 sway  
 step smile sway sway she went till she in place standing center inside a  
 moment of stillness. then suddenly / the three of them hit a note  
 all at the same time / aaaaaaawwwwwhhhhhhh  
 went the sound and i declare some kind of hunger-spirit swept through  
 the  
 room. took everybody's mind in one swoop.  
 after that  
 wasn't nothing but bodies feeding the feeling till sunday sunrise just be-  
 fore  
 first service. shiit. we still rest broken from all that business. big mama  
 sway / singing

i gots geechee lips  
 i gots geechee hips  
 i gots a geechee kiss  
 that'll you'll never forget  
 but you got to  
 show me that you want it  
 show me that you need / so  
 if you can't show me that you want it  
 go on / pack your thangs and go.

chile  
 what a time.

something about they sound almost stop my heart.  
 i knew it weren't the liquor  
 cause wasn't nothing in my cup but that strong ass coffee bettye  
 serve / which could been over work my heart / but i don't think so.  
 see / bettye don't allow no drinking in she jernt.  
 not since she lost her first love lushy boudreax to the gussle.  
 naw / lushy ain't dead  
 that's her yonder holding up the back of the jernt.  
 bettye lost lushy from she bed when she kicked that drunk ass out  
 one last time.  
 been upset about that ever since. mostly at herself / say she got so  
 caught up  
 loving what lushy could have been / she wouldn't see what lushy really  
 was.

anyway

lushy don't drink no more / bettye don't like the smell of the  
 drink / reminding  
 her of the hard times / so we all forced stay in our right minds  
 when we come to bettye's  
 well not all of us / cause you know any fool can find a way to tilt they  
 cup if they want to. but bettye's no liquor rule do cut down on the  
 free flowingness of it  
 which is a relief really  
 because usually with the drinking come the looking and the looking  
 bring  
 the knives / cause folk can't just look at they own peoples they gots to  
 always  
 cast a looking at somebody's somebody else / and the knives bring the  
 cussing and the cussing bring the swoll chest and the swoll chest  
 always  
 interrupt the good time.

but the good time don't hardly get stopped at bettye's  
 so i been happy as a greedy cat in a rat shack.  
 yessuh / i been happy / yeah.

(END OF FILM)

STAY IN ROCKER WATCH FILM FROM ROCKER.



GRIOT TELL PARTS OF THE STORY WITH FILM.  
FILM (ANCESTOR)

aaawwwhhh aaawwwhhh aaawwwhhh  
aaawwwhhh aaawwwhhh aaawwwhhh  
aaawwwhhh aaawwwhhh aaawwwhhh  
aaawwwhhh aaawwwhhh aaawwwhhh

dey used ta hang niggas by dey thumbs aaawwwhhh yessuh if'n a nigga had  
da nerve ta tink dey life wuz worf mo den a dog or cat dey'd strang dat  
nigga up. aaawwwhhh. yessuh dey tookn my own daddy data way saw dey  
take he my own daddy dey kilt he cause he a smart man too smart to be able  
to hide it so dey took he cause he weren't able to mask him brightness and  
aaawwwhhh yessuh

my life it ain't never been de same since dat day i saw dey stringed

my daddy i saw he hanging from de tree by he thumbs.

aaawwwhhh when certain kinda things happen sometimes you jes  
aaawwwhhh

GRIOT

thats my gran-gran-daddy/big paw/my father's father's father. every  
day  
they say he tell that story at sunrise/he tell it like he praying/like he not  
really in the room/like somebody else speaking it for him. they say each  
morning when he tell it/it's as if you just happen to walk into a conver-  
sation  
he having cept ain't nobody there but him.

WALK TO CENTER WALK IN A CIRCLE  
(you are making ceremony/shifting the mood)

FILM (ANCESTOR)

this is home. the place that earthed you. it's a sore/a wound/this  
ground/the place i grew up in.

GRIOT. FROM CENTER

that's uncle daddy/he my father's father. i think he done heard big  
paw's story once too many times/is now a little touched by it  
or something.

WALK TO THE LADY

FILM (ANCESTOR)

i am the cry that won't come out i am the pain stuck i am the me that never  
was sorry now i am for the moments i choked away for the lost touches  
diminished faded like yellow against the sun.  
i was born too early to be allowed to exist i was drowned the day i was born  
of heartache and loss i am

GRIOT. STAY WITH THE LADY

that's big paw's sister ma-dear. they all lives here/big paw uncle daddy  
and ma-dear live here at the home house with my mama the wife of my  
daddy/who dead for some time now. one day my mama called me in the  
city/said chile come home/the ole folk want you. not knowing what  
that mean/but being used to doing what mama say/i got quick down  
to the home house. there i found mama standing on the porch with she  
bag packed. she  
said bye gurl i be back. i thought/well i guess/mama need a time  
off from the home house big paw uncle daddy and ma-dear. bye mama i  
said/from  
the porch waving waving waving till she disappear in the road.

i turn to go in the house and there they were big paw uncle daddy and  
ma-dear/standing around me justa staring/smiling big ole toothless  
love. i hug them each tight tight. go in the house unpack in mama's  
little room/what  
used to be her and daddy's.

FILM (ANCESTOR)

we peoples got made in de way south. i hab been made new papers ova and  
ova forta git em prayers jes right/lay em prayers south of de water and  
dirt/jes under de light of de candle. na. what i needn be a real shoutn so dat  
we bringn plenty wittness from de way south place to guide'n de babies safe  
home.

tell only God and the preacher yo prayers write what you wish on



parchment paper / then hide it from yourself for one year. go back to it / and know the power of God.

with broken teeth and bodies that have gone unchecked for years  
we've been living here through careless times and danger

girl you better listen good. we telling you something / you hear.

#### GRIOT WITH THE LADY

big paw uncle daddy and ma-dear started talking to me. problem is they talking to me in my dreams. in wake time / they just smile they big toothless

smiles hold my hands / taking turns for long walks in the evening / work the garden early morning / clean house mid-day. they be sweeping / brushing the floor with flower water and powder every morning early i wake to one of them staring down at me smiling smiling. till finally i don't know what day

it is no more and i can't separate my thoughts from words words from dreams dreams from prayers said out loud / and lately i'm thinking i'm visiting them in they dreams too.

is you done emptied de water from under de bed / shredded da paper / dumped de dirt / blow'd out de candle / make room for de new dream'n? yes i have done all that / and i cleaned with smoke and powder / placed my prayers on parchment paper surrounded by water / hidden good. now set the candles in the east window / circle earth around the bed

#### DANCE TO DRUM

FREEZE AT DRUM HOLD IT

STRAIGHTEN HOLD IT

GET ON DRUM DANCE WITH FILM / WITH HEELS / STAY LOW

#### FILM (ANCESTOR)

i am he that was king / captured sold and shipped for selling i am she whose tongue they took so as not to tell i am he made to walk chained next to a wagon cross state lines i am she who lived in the woods / leader of the ones that fought i am he that scouted getaway time i am the runner through the corn i am the seer in the night i am the crawler in the light i am the one that got away i am elizabeth daughter of cora the child of sarah i am the one that holds your prayers

shuffle fast clap'n circle smoke praise moan'n shuffle shout'n shuffle fast sing'n shuffle dance'n shuffle fly holla prayers home circle smoke shuffle praise we been learned to dream cause in wake we had to be dead.

#### (STOP DANCING)

you is free cause we was captive

you are the one we been waiting for

gaga gaga gaga / ga gaga gaga gaga / ga gaga gaga gaga / ga  
wake now!

#### GRIOT FROM DRUM

the Houma the swamp the woods yonder  
the Fon the Ibo the Yoruba the Wolof / tied lashed  
lashed / opened  
still fight.

the Houma with Tunica Choctaw Chickasaw  
here before the before

know night and moon hear trees and earth

drumming drumming

hold on

drumming drumming

on the way

drumming drumming

the Houma the swamp the woods yonder the moon they signal with drum

untie the Fon the Ibo the Yoruba the Wolof

clean swab wrap quick here here here

up swamp through woods past yonder fly

not seen.

the Houma the Fon the Ibo the Yoruba the Wolof

free

free more.

sun spoon moon make rain

the Houma the Fon the Ibo the Yoruba the Wolof the swamp the woods

yonder the moon they signal with drum

raise trees kiss earth

open pens break doors use

stones and blades arrows and fists

fight

free more.



and so and so and so again  
moon rise sun sleep  
more here here here  
free.

go back

free more.

over over

they childrens they childrens they

children carry they story

in cloth

in feet

with hair

when laugh

with drum

Praise memory

Praise the people

drum bend holla dance shout laugh free far a way back a woods yonder

free

free more.

drum bend holla dance shout laugh free far a way back a woods yonder

free

free more

drum bend holla dance shout laugh free far a way back a woods yonder

free

free more

free.

drum bend holla dance shout laugh free far a way back a woods yonder

free

free more

free.

(END OF FILM)

GET THE STOOL

TAKE IT CENTER

FILM (FAMILY)

sometime

a whole lot of shit just libal to happen.

(END OF FILM)

GRLOT, FROM STOOL/CENTER STAGE

one day things took a turn / and everything changed

or maybe things that already was just came into focus.

well

you ever seen'd two people that truly love each other / two people that

truly

love each other but done had so much hurt pass between them that the  
old

hurts block the old love but the old love keep a growing anyway / yet they

can't make the old love new because

they can't stand to be around one the other and they can't take being apart

ummmhumm

well

everything was as it had become

till change walked in one night.

she was a gray eyed gap tooth

thick liped

cookie brown woman

with tight light brown curls rumbling all the way down

to a bounce on her behind which set amply high stretching her many

colored thin materialled dress / like a piece of rubber drawed tight.

change had enough curves to make for a long trip and when she

walked

she carried you around and around and around with her.

so when change

walked into bettye's that night

ummmhumm

we all knew some shit was libal to happen.

change come swinging in / swirling a little dust before her as she

head straight for lushy / which is hard to do

cause lushy sit quite far back in bettye's / say

the best table in the jernt be the one bettye don't serve / which would be

any

table lushy libal to be at she just always keep it to the back



well  
 change was moving towards lushy/like it was a natural thing  
 till somebody yell out  
 that's her that's her!  
 j.b. and kokomo look up/seem to know who change was  
 but instead of sending out a welcome  
 they packed themselves up/got on out of bettye's  
 as did about four or five other peoples.  
 na/i didn't have time to give much thought to the leaving      cause i got  
 caught up  
 in change.  
 people started yelling begging for a song/i was watching her  
 take it all in      till all of a sudden  
 right there in the middle of the jernt  
 that woman widened she stance throw'd her head all the way  
 back/dropped  
 down a taste/open she gap tooth big lipped mouth  
 and i declare  
 the sound that came out  
 shook the entire room.  
 shit started flying off the walls/glasses was tumbling from tables and the  
 peoples damn near made a stampede getting to the dance floor.  
 i ain't never experienced nothing like it.  
 that woman unleashed the power of gabrielle with her voice  
 swinging high and low and around the room all at the same time/knock-  
 ing  
 everything  
 to a new place.  
 it took the band quite a few to pick they drool and join in.  
 meantime/change was shaking she hips hard as she was shaking them  
 walls  
 mixing everybody's mind up/till the confusion of so much movement  
 and  
 feeling exploded in the last note of she song.  
 then it got quiet.  
 change turn  
 get back in route to lushy.  
 i says to myself poor j.b. and kokomo was fools to leave before all this got  
 let out.  
 ummhummm  
 well

drool got wiped  
 the band start back normal  
 coffee go to being served  
 flasks get to being opened  
 and the dance floor got back to its usual dip.

thats when i turned  
 saw bettye's face  
 which didn't look friendly at all  
 oh she was smiling  
 like a big ole wild cat tracking its prey.  
 oh lawd/na  
 i shout but can't nobody hear me cause right then  
 bettye let out a yelling as she broke a pop bottle in half/move  
 with the jagged edge face out  
 na/this cause ten things to happened all at the same time  
 change turn round pull something from she titties/couch and smile  
 the dippers pause  
 lushy run up from back the jernt grab bettye rush she out the front door  
 big bill run down from front the jernt pull change out the back door  
 papa ann holla and faint  
 the band switch songs/pause  
 then  
 folk get back to things and whatnot.  
 except me.  
 i roll out front see what going on.  
 there i find bettye and lushy under the  
 figure's flavors.      the world's finest.  
 come get a taste.  
 sign/which we all reads  
 bettye's jernt/and  
 there lushy and bettye talking.  
 lushy say  
 look here bettye  
 it's time you let this thing go.  
 bettye look violent but lushy press on say  
 i am sorry bettye i know sorry don't make it right/but i need to say it to  
 you i owe you that.  
 lushy take a big breath then quick start  
 bettye i was wrong in how i treated you  
 i was wrong for the way i took your love for granted/i was wrong to



think that i could act any ole kind of way and that it was your job to  
take it/i was wrong for the ways i leaned on you but wasn't around  
when you needed to lean/i was wrong for all the nights of making you  
worry with my drinking/for making you guess what was on my  
mind/for blaming you for everything that went wrong/for not taking  
the time to treat you tender/for not holding up my share of making our  
life work/for walking out the door yelling one last time/leaving you our  
home all that we had dreamt and built and still needed to do/for all the  
ways that i acted a fool i know i was wrong/and i was sho nuff wrong  
for fucking change bettye.

i am sorry honey.

i am sorry.

lushy stood real close look bettye deep in the eye.

just stand there breathing soft saying she sorry real low/stare  
till/all the wind and flame and will and walls fell away. and the two of  
them

just clapse into one the other's arms. bettye crying let lushy hold  
she/lushy

crying let bettye hold she. i crying in the corner leaning against the wall  
over around the other side of the

*figure's flavors. the world's finest.*

*come get a taste.*

sign. which we all know is bettye's jernet

STAND. CIRCLE STOOL. TAKE STOOL BEHIND CURTAIN

GRIOT. WITH THE LADY

yes sir/i saw it.

i saw the damn break i saw the love flow i saw the stars sparkle i saw the  
light shift

that night i saw/wasn't nothing the same

all because the dust got stirred/by change.

WITH THE LADY

FILM (SINGERS)

GRIOT INVITE AUDIENCE MEMBERS UP TO DANCE

weather man don't know

how hot it is in here

oh no/he don't know

just how hot it is

says it's ten below  
knee deep in snow  
but oh no i'm so hot  
in here

(END OF FILM. DANCING ENDS/AUDIENCE RETURNS TO THEIR SEATS)

GRIOT. STAND BY THE LADY

duckie smooth was a handsome man.

voice river deep/smile mountain wide/eyes

shiny soft/body rippling hard

and/duckie smooth

was as wonderful to listen to/as to behold.

man always knew just what to say/how to who when

and in what timbre.

that is why bettye felt fine leaving duckie smooth

in charge on buffet night every week

cause bettye knew

that man could talk the hiss out a snake/coax sly out the fox.

yessuh

duckie smooth in charge every week/on buffet night over to bettye's.

so bettye always take that night off/it's the one night

she ain't got to cook/cause

ain't no food on buffet night though anything else you libal to want  
do be served.

na/duckie smooth mama name he john harrison lee.

but we been calling him duckie smooth since that legendary night john  
lost

his cool/at the second ever buffet night/long time ago.

i was there.

in fact/i was the one name he

it just come holla out my mouth.

see

duckie smooth

do female interpretations

on buffet night.

na/as handsome a man as john is/it is surprising

at just how ugly a woman he becomes.



but he so classy / he transform from a eyesore to a beautiful and most  
desirable human being right before your eyes  
till / the mens the womens the both and the neithers  
be batting eyes at himshe.

duckie smooth and his wife cora adam  
sews all through the days  
so that every buffet night  
duckie smooth got a fresh getup  
for each introduction of the evenings headliners.  
duckie smooth fall out fancy shiny sparkley cool  
seven eight nine times a buffet night  
face caked / different wigs flipping in different directions for different  
outfits  
and cora adam / always in color coordination going round and round  
collecting appreciation fees from everybody in the joint  
yessuh everytime duckie smooth swing out  
cora adam right there just a collecting.

anyway  
like i said  
the night duckie smooth got named  
was back on himshe second time doing buffet night at bettye's.  
himshe come out once  
come out twice  
come out three times  
delightful stunning with magnagamous elegance and introducements  
for the peoples.  
we was all settled in for a long good time / ready to ball.  
till  
it did seem  
we was waiting a bit too long for the forth interpretive introduction of  
the  
forth act.  
when all of a sudden  
we hears

mafucka!

then  
bambambam!

out roll onto the stage  
john and fathead sims  
and before we know'd it fat head had  
done yanked the bottom half of john's dress clean off  
which really piss john off / so at that point himshe sho nuff  
commensed to kicking fat head's ass

said

i

will

bust

a

new

hole

in

your

ass.

bas

tard!

john just a whooping fat head's ass till it was over.

john then stand up / all 6 foot of himshe

wig off / face cake caked / titties crooked / and

himshe panties showing just as pink as you please

cause there weren't no dress to cover the bottom half

thats when i find myself yelling

he duck it smooth

he duck it smooth

see john

had done

ducked him manhood so smooth back you

couldn't see not a trace of it

and i knew how much a tucking that take cause / well

anyway

i just knew

so

yessuh

that is how duckie smooth got named

on that famous night himshe loose himshe cool

at the second ever buffet night at bettye's

long time ago.



## WALK BACK OF CURTAIN TO DRUM

### GRIOT, FROM DRUM

big mama sway real name is isadora Africa Jr.  
they been name her  
she mama her mama and her mama after that first African conjuration  
woman/whose real name they don't know or won't say. everybody  
call this one big mama sway cause well/you know  
plus nobody dare speak she birth name/call all them generations of  
power  
down. but we ain't crazy/we know who she is.  
hell all you have to do is feel her sing.  
it's enough to drive you to rip your heart out  
lay it at her feet in offering.  
thats in the wee hours of moonlight.  
sunshine to sunset/ she be in her garden pulling weeds talking to her  
flowers and herbs singing quite the different song with fingers and hips  
and feet in the earth.  
na/i calls her baybay  
cause she my baby brother's second wife sister chile/who i promised i  
would  
always look after the children and though they all grown/they still  
my  
baybays.  
my name is cat but this one calls me aunty.

i comes by baybay's/bring ole slim  
toss him on the hammock under the peach trees let him nap whiles  
i sit on the porch drink them potions baybaby serve to keep my bones  
strong  
which i do think also keep my kitty purring/and tight.  
anyway  
poor slim don't know but he be drinking potion too. thats why he always  
sleep so good through the whole visit wake so sweet  
and virile.  
anyway  
after dinner baybay wrap her head  
hang she sign out/let folk know the conjuration wo'mn is ready.  
but in the sunrise  
she ain't nothing but my lil baybay

playing in she garden  
talking to the baybays to come.

i talk to them too from time to time.  
especially this one little ole gal  
she real sweet. remind me of baybay/except that one drawn to heart-  
break.  
see her conjuration gone be so powerful/it's gonn tip her  
till she figure out how to adjust her impulses.  
yessuh/that one gonn be a isdora Africa jr. a city gurl/too far  
from home.

she ain't coming for a long time. baybay  
gone guide her the whole way.  
and me too.  
we working with her now.  
listen

there go baybay singing with the trees  
planting all that needs be known  
deep and in the breeze.

## WALK BEHIND CURTAIN TO ROCKER

### GRIOT, FROM ROCKER WITH FILM

#### FILM (BOOKER & JOSHUA)

they met over a poem  
a poem they wrote in the fields between the digging of earth/the  
laying of tracks/the crossing of lines. between the pounding of  
steel/and sun  
with battered Spirits/in open spaces  
with no silence they made poetry  
one syllable at a time/they  
conjured themselves/love

this is how booker chang and joshua davis found each other. in  
blistering sun/working days never ending/backs bent in toil/in  
the company of men they claimed each other



declared themselves  
adorned each other with words. united  
in heart/booker chang and joshua davis married one the other  
with a poem.

love  
you  
live  
with  
me  
love  
you  
live  
with  
me  
my  
man  
my  
man

for  
all  
time  
for  
all  
time

i  
am  
yours  
i  
am  
yours.

they quit the rails. opened shop  
selling charms and things right there in they front yard  
they give poetry for free.  
and even us that make our own charms stop by cause  
some days/you just need  
a poem.

FILM (BOOKA & JOSHUA'S SONG)

kiss  
me  
miss  
you  
wish

touch  
me  
hold  
you  
now  
i  
need  
your  
love

will  
you  
be  
my

baby

love  
you  
live  
with  
me

love  
you  
live  
with  
me

my  
man  
my  
man

for  
all  
time  
for  
all  
time  
i  
am  
yours  
i  
am  
yours.

hold  
me  
with  
your  
eyes

make  
me  
know  
i'm  
yours

give  
me  
all  
you  
have

fill  
me  
with  
your  
heart

dear.

(END OF FILM)

## WALK CENTER

GRIT. TURN / PIVOTING SLOWLY

we come in *she* dreams.

tickle

hug tight

stand smile Watch Pray Touch Heal

whisper worries away whisper grief away whisper loneliness away whisper

fears away

whisper sadness away

with sweetgrass sea salt and sage

copal cedar and moonlight/bring Gifts

joy/here

dreams/here

tenderness/here

Blessings/here

Divinity/here

You/here

Spirit/here

family/here

all here

Lift now

Fly now

Free now

Be now

it's okay

not alone

not alone

not alone

not alone

always/We

whisper

Love.

## WALK TO THE LADY

FILM (SONG)

sun

river

you



you  
river  
sit

sun  
heat  
river

river  
move  
slow.

river  
move  
slow.

sun  
moon  
cross

stars  
shine  
soft

you  
river  
gaze

river  
move  
loud

your  
head  
spins

river  
move  
fast

your  
heart  
jumps

river  
change  
shape

your  
eyes  
lock

river  
rain  
down

river  
rain  
down

blood  
rain  
down

fill  
river  
thick

run

you can't.

wind  
cry  
names

trees  
know  
names



wind wail  
river thunder  
trees moan

you

can't

move.

you  
can't  
cry  
you  
can't  
breathe

you  
can't  
see

river  
pulls  
you  
in

rain  
keeps  
you  
under

river  
sweeps  
you  
down

river  
carries  
you  
away

long  
journey.

trees  
wind  
sun  
river  
you.

home.

(END OF FILM)

GRIOT. STAY WITH THE LADY

we calls her miss sunday morning  
but she don't hardly go to church      though she do rock with sweet t  
lashay / pray to god  
every Sabbath.

ms. sunday morning run the jernt  
back of bettye's.

it's a gambling shack

a place standing way past good timing / she

gots folks working dark corners back rooms against the walls

and on a little red lighted stage      be shake dancers / grind so hard

not a string of clothing can hang on      they bump and wiggle

into the night and sunrise / dancers drop so far down

squeeze the last note out any song      rolling

back up.

yessuh

ms. sunday morning gots a little something for anybody / just outside of  
right.

folk stepping in know      all possibilities

gonn come to pass.

they is jimmy slide / he smoke a cigarette with him ass-  
cheeks      suck / tight

whip the mind of many around at the sight of it.

they is sally thick / who move she hips so slow

and low / and deep into the night

till ain't nobody brave enough to do nothing but watch.

her



off in a blue light  
on a table  
smiling and winking and  
riding  
alone.  
they is tucker long who gots a peeter and putter  
open and unroll/let you touch  
for a fee

and they is them that fill the jernt  
so tender/and flush  
so ready  
and ripe  
so full of bursting  
ain't nothing but trouble in sight.

yessuh  
we gives ms. sunday morning plenty room.  
hard as life is around here/much as we gots to forget  
much as we needs to forgive/filled as we is with knowing  
bad as it feel sometime/folks bound to only can find jesus  
over to ms. sunday mornings jernt/some folks  
got to jump in the circle that way  
through the back door.  
late.

ms. sunday morning herself  
come in that way. her and sweet t  
come in from a long road  
late  
and right on time.

see/sweet t was a man last life  
is na woman/feel like a man  
solid and sturdy/stern and silent/pressed and polished  
sweet t  
used to not know why he look like a he  
packed like a she  
sweet t  
used to not understand why things didn't fit/why he didn't make no  
sense

sweet t used to want to return him she body  
early sometimes  
sweet t used to couldn't wait to come back/a he again.  
sweet t used to get tired.  
look like

sweet t was the one everything bad happened to  
the one that never harmed nobody/but always got beat  
since she was a child folk take they evil out on she.  
must have been sweet t was the one that suffered our transgressions  
paid the price  
for our collective sins, didn't know why.  
sweet t had a hard life.  
sweet t had it ruff  
sweet t got scars all over she body.

a man then  
woman now /neither really  
skin peel/heart pull apart  
sweet t journey been long.  
no one to talk to. no one to think about the wrong of it. no one to kiss  
the  
pain. no one  
to see her. no one to care why  
no one

till ms. sunday morning come along.

ms. sunday morning come in with the river  
ms. sunday morning floated down layed up on a rock/stretched out  
sweet t found she

ms. sunday morning had got tired too.

far away  
she flew  
in her mind  
spun open  
will  
running  
from nothing  
running



from everthing  
running  
for no reason/running  
for lots of reasons/running  
because.

she left/her body  
left her mind  
left/floating  
with empty eyes/in silence  
she left  
swept away  
landed in the wrong place/at the right time  
ms. sunday morning opened her eyes saw  
sweet t's face and cried.  
said i'm home now. and  
they didn't need no words. they saw it all in one the other's eyes  
and knew what they knew.

was sweet t brung ms. sunday morning to us  
brung herself too. said they needed a charm  
a chance to make it  
wanted the road to be gentle/to  
open a little more kind

and so now ms. sunday morning and sweet t  
they pray  
in each other's arms  
in each other's mouths  
bodies wrapped/they make holy  
every Sabbath      love

they blossom  
full  
raise up one the other/breathe in tongues  
take in Spirits/swallow  
whole  
shine  
perfect in the light  
of Sabbath

when the jernt is closed  
they lay up  
in one the other  
breasts full  
hips open/and large  
like sunshine/they move  
up and down  
side to side across the sky  
deep penetrating  
and all day/reaching  
higher  
higher  
lift  
smile  
see  
god  
cry  
wail  
sing  
see  
each other  
heat  
rise  
moan  
burst  
make  
love  
holy  
wholy  
make  
love  
every day  
and all of  
Sabbath.  
when the jernt is closed.

sweet t gots a little girl in he/now  
giggle giggle slip out here and there/all the time since  
miss sunday morning got a hold of she.  
sweet t don't understand it/but ain't mad at why.



ms. sunday morning and sweet t run that jernt together na  
make provissions for the peoples.  
keep the back door open

holy wholly everyday  
holy holy they love  
holy holy they love  
holy holy love  
holy  
they . . .

#### STAY WITH THE LADY

##### FILM (SONG)

i never left you  
i been right here  
waiting this whole time  
wrapped in the memory of  
your smile  
your eyes  
the scent of you  
i been dreaming awake/about  
sleeping in the soft of  
your breasts falling  
around my heart  
i been walking in the moonlight  
wishing for your love  
praying God give me one more chance  
to love you right.

#### HAND OUT AFFIRMATIONS

(leave script on stool/end up back with the lady)

##### FILM (FAMILY)

our gurl she  
carry the conjuration her mama she mama she mama she mama  
and that first African woman pass on this scare her from  
time to time/cause there are things she know but don't understand  
things she can do but don't know why/power she got can't control  
like her voice

it contours time in release  
each note / make the Holy Ghost rise in all who feel  
she don't question this  
but it do make her sad. too much too big too often / alone.  
can't wrap words around it / so she don't try. just keep to herself  
except for times when she think she drowning  
feel like a touch / some talking / a smile might save her.  
she keep company then

our gurl  
she hurt from feeling all the the feelings she feel  
which she keep pushed down / cause she think she got to  
can't stop stay sharp turn the check toss the head step on be strong  
don't worry never want can't have don't rest  
smile  
one foot in front the other / heavy  
not dreaming  
whittle words  
day by day  
till  
nothing left

our gurl don't yet understand that the pressure of not feeling / explodes  
poisons the Spirit dims the vision stills the heart cripples the hearing  
sickens the body makes lonely the path  
which libal to make the lesser way seem right at the cross roads  
so  
we told she mama / to send  
our gurl home  
na!

#### STAND NEXT TO THE LADY

##### FILM (SONG)

You are the me i am waiting to be  
deep down / i see your Divinity  
and i know that we are Free.  
free / like the night in flight  
free in God's Delight  
in the Name of  
We are



flesh of the Ocean  
the Sun beaming bright  
Winds crossing  
the Earth's might  
we are  
your smile  
my Heart  
with Sight  
Free.

no more fighting  
i rebuke all fears  
no separation  
cause we are

the Peace we Pray  
the poem we pen  
the bridge we make  
the song  
that dance  
is us  
and we are

free  
free  
Free.  
cause/We are  
Love.

(END OF FILM)

STAY WITH THE LADY

READ

booka chang joshua davis clap speak  
bitty fon/dreaming dream  
big mama sway/sing shake  
peachy soonay/claim her power  
jook jernt/holla dip  
ma dear big paw uncle daddy/pray smile  
drummer/drumming drum

conjunction she  
conjunction she  
conjunction she  
conjunction she  
conjunction she  
conjunction she  
conjunction she



Fig. 1.2. Conjunction scene. The love conjure/blues Text Installation.  
Photo by Jen Simmons, courtesy of Sharon Bridgforth.

African and Indian / fly free conjunction  
she / says our names  
conjunction / she  
keep our stories  
conjunction we

send she back  
hold her hands  
praise she laughter  
pave her path  
open her road  
Bless her heart  
join her Love  
grant she wishes  
give her riches  
stand in Light  
sits in gold

conjunction we  
conjunction we  
conjunction we  
conjunction we  
conjunction we  
conjunction we  
conjunction we  
conjunction we  
conjunction she  
conjunction she



dresses in jewels  
says our names

conjunction she

conjunction

we

give

she

Life

conjunction

we

here

here

here

conjunction

we

here

here

here

conjunction

We

She . . .

CENTER

GRIOT CONDUCTS AUDIENCE

STARTS WITH THE REMEMBER SECTION

READ THROUGH

BRING IN OTHER SECTIONS

END WITH REMEMBER SECTION

i  
am the conjure.  
sacrificial blood made flesh/i am  
sanctified by tears wailing  
deep in the belly/i am that sound  
released. i am  
love remembered  
the promise kept  
the should have been

i  
am the conjure.  
sacrificial blood made flesh/I am  
sanctified by tears wailing  
deep in the belly/i am that sound  
released. i am  
love remembered  
the promise kept  
the should have been

the utterance of hope/i am  
the Life dreamt

i am the answered Prayer  
the manifested Light  
i am my Ancestors  
returned  
i am the dead/and the living  
i will carry on  
i will come back  
i will grow more powerful  
i will remember  
i am the one We are waiting for

i  
am  
the conjure  
come back/to Love.

the utterance of hope/i am  
the Life dreamt

i am the answered Prayer  
the manifested Light  
i am my Ancestors  
returned  
i am the dead/and the living  
i will carry on  
i will come back  
i will grow more powerful  
i will remember  
i am the one We are waiting for

i  
am  
the conjure  
come back/to Love.

remember  
remember  
remember  
remember.

LOVE!

THANK AUDIENCE

JEN

CREW

CAST

FUNDERS

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION

DANCE!!