December 3rd, 2015 - Performa 15: Writing Live

There are Certain Facts that can not be Disputed by
Juliana Huxtable, Response

by Ayanna Dozier
Upon entering MoMA's Titus Theater 2 for Juliana Huxtable's performance, the viewer is greeted with a rush of visual eye candy in what I can best describe the setting as underground noise club meets theater production of the antebellum era.

*There are Certain Facts that can not be Disputed* is arranged in three spoken word acts with live music and video interludes between them. Projected on a screen above the stage, clips from Hollywood “historical” dramas including *Titanic* (1997), *10,000 B.C.* (2015), and *Marie Antoinette* (2006) appeared on the screen. There are photographs and written text referring to Egyptian lost artifacts plastered along the walls, which shine particularly bright underneath the subdued black light. I manage to extrapolate some of the highlighted text from the enlarged ripped pages, “The Vanishing Evidence of Classical African Civilizations: A 2001 Update.” As I begin to read, Juliana struts pass my right wearing early 19th century white pantaloons, a simple white chemise, black knee-high boots, and a ribbon delicately intertwined in a long braid. She regally approaches the microphones onstage and with that, it begins. A distorted two microphone system modulates her timbre and expands her pitch to deafening levels that screech from the obelisk shaped speakers. Huxtable begins to recite a new philosophical beginning with her, a Black femme, at its center. This speech is immediately followed by a fevered live musical “noise” interlude by Sadaf Ha and Joseph Heffernan, playing the violin and drums respectively, that left me feeling excited and the attendee to my left with her fingers in her ears.

Huxtable then returns to stage to lament the loss of her “Geo,” a nod to the popular web hosting service GeoCities, which erased millions of web pages in 2009 when Yahoo shut the service down. Huxtable leaves several stream of consciousness messages to his voicemail that mirror a jilted ex-lover; all she wants are her “texts back.” It is clear, here, that Huxtable’s lament is greater than Geo, she is lamenting history. “I found lost subjects in the presence of artifacts,” she says. But as Huxtable begins to exercise her imagination of finding beginnings amongst the
ruins mainstream pervasive ideology continues to interrupt her. “I knew it was Hegel, watching me, manipulating me,” she says and again, “Hegel haunts me in my dreams.”

Huxtable is haunted by Hegel’s formulation of history. For Hegel, Black existence is incapable of culture, imagination, art, and is thus not worthy to be included within the existence of humanity. In Philosophy of History, Hegel concludes his brief discussion on African history with the following, “At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit” (p. 117). Hegel’s ontology is inevitably built upon the belief that humanity and history is only achievable for white individuals. Huxtable uses performance to confront Hegel’s epistemology. It is through performance that Huxtable is able to present a counter-narrative to the dominant Hegelian one that silences the lives and art of Black individuals.

The last video-interlude features a playful loop of Huxtable’s fellow performers, including Sadaf and Heffernan, posing for what could only be described as post-bellum glamour portraits. This sentiment is evoked when we hear Juliana command an actor to pose like “a slave who’s just been set free and she’s feeling her look.” This video, the spoken texts, and noise music combined produce subject formation for both the viewer and the performers. We are given the task to fill in the gaps to make meaning of the seemingly incomprehensible or tangential elements of the performance. “Bound in body. Gagged by the Present,” Huxtable’s words remind us that we, like her, are affected by the whitewashing of history and it serves all of our interests to confront that history head on.

Juliana Huxtable’s There are Certain Facts that can not be Disputed was organized by Adrienne Edwards, Curator, Performa, and Stuart Comer, Chief Curator, Department of Media and Performance Art, The Museum of Modern Art, with Martha Joseph, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Media and Performance Art, The Museum of Modern Art.
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