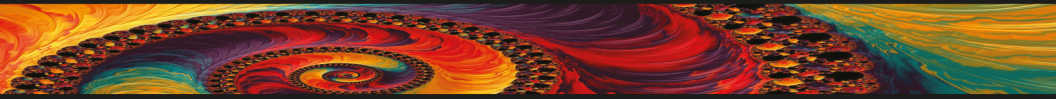


ROUTLEDGE FOCUS



PERFORMANCE, ART, AND POLITICS IN THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

Necropolitics and the Black Body

Myron M. Beasley

Foreword by Jane Anna Gordon

Afterword by Lewis R. Gordon

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Performance, Art, and Politics in the African Diaspora

This book examines necropolitics and performance art, with a particular focus on the black body and the African diaspora.

In this book, Myron M. Beasley situates artists as cultural workers and theorists who illuminate the political linkages between their own and others' specific locales. The focus is an interrogation of the political systems that dictate and determine the value of lives (and decide which lives matter) through a lens of performance and art. Beasley highlights how the performances of rupture, which are of artistic and historical significance, reveal both strategies of survival and promises of possibility. Artists and curators examined include Jelili Atiku, Giscard Bouchette, Nona Faustine, Vanessa German, Simone Leigh, Nathalie Anguezomo Mba Bikoro, Ebony G. Patterson, and Dianne Smith.

The volume is an ideal research and reference book for students and scholars of Contemporary Art, African Studies, and Performance Theory.

Myron M. Beasley is Associate Professor of American Studies and Gender and Sexuality Studies at Bates College.

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Necropolitics and the Black Body

Myron M. Beasley

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To Martha. I am here because of you.



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Foreword

What does art offer to communities beset by unrelenting tragedies? Nothing less than a resounding affirmation of a distinctively human creative resilience; an echoing insistence to live and to live with a dignity that is regal.

With his characteristic attention to when the beautiful and the powerful meet, in the text that follows, Myron M. Beasley invites you to journey with him.

From processionals of the Sisterhood of Our Lady of Good Death in annual celebration in the cobbled streets of Cachoeira, Brazil ... to refurbished cargo boxes in Jacmel that challenge Haiti as “open for business” with it instead welcoming dreaming ... to the parade of caskets through Port of Spain, Trinidad, accompanied by Pita Pata and eulogies of the recently deceased... to artist Nona Faustine, wearing only white shoes, as she stands on a wooden block erected at the central intersection on Wall Street where enslaved Africans were sold ... to a bare, living body buried beneath stones on a mountain in Chihuahua, Mexico, where victims of femicide frequently remain ... to a Victorian house painted sky-blue in Pittsburgh and rehabbed as an open space for intergenerational creativity for BIPOC children, adults, and artists ...

Centering art as *doing*, as *generating agitation* in pursuit of a greater good, Beasley celebrates when creative performances actively erode conventions that would sever the physical and the spiritual, the secular and the sacred, the functional and the aesthetic, the African Diaspora and the African, the present and the past, and the still living and the no longer. Replete with rich portraits of artists who activate our environments, pressing us to ponder the relationship between concealment and revelation, revilement and celebration, collective forgetting, and candid remembering, not hearing and really listening, graveyards and gardens, Beasley shows how communal creative productions enable us to feel the persistent lingering of what has come before so that we can make known to ourselves and to others the

unmarked, unseen, and unsaid. Such dynamic truth-telling enables us to face our ghosts and to ingest what howls and haunts so that our response to the brutalities that birthed our worlds is not continued amnesia.

Stitched through is a meditation on the meaning of a fitting burial, of how to usher bodies emptied of spirit honorably to what is next; of how communities marked by a ubiquity of untimely, brutal loss assure that such transitions are holy. After all, if uncared for, even in death the horrors of life will persist.

Beasley knows that *becoming* is no easy process. In Black and Indigenous contexts where violent death is more regularized than dialogue and human bodies are reduced to corpses as they are left on hills and streets and floors by deliberate withholding of care, rituals, at their best, reach to the realm of ancestral guides with art serving as an intermediary. Preparing the eye with what sparkles and allures, the work that is Beasley's focus creates radically hospitable places for people made home—and land-less, who still, in their accent, gait, and voice enact a stubborn “yes, still.”

In a work of scholarship that helps us to hear what is near and still unfamiliar, Beasley offers succor we sorely need: Performances of possibility; refusals to surrender to narratives or fates of debasement, a yearning expressed in deeds for what can and will be. Such are the theaters through which we actively bury monuments to the murderous mayhem that erected Euro modernity and its long shadows that we still inhabit. Such are the theaters that cultivate the sacredness of daily existence where art is lived in and as rest, resistance, and renewal.

—Jane Anna Gordon