ARTNEWS

At Performa, Xavier Cha Debuts a Work About Relationships, Videos, and the Internet
BY *Alex Greenberger*
POSTED **11/03/17 3:43 PM**

Performance view of Xavier Cha, *Buffer*, 2017, at Brooklyn Academy of Music, a commission for Performa 17.REBECCA SMEYNE

There is nothing that irks internet users more than a video that won't load—a GIF that won't move or a YouTube clip that stops midway through, stutters, perhaps even repeats without ever finishing, thanks to a poor wifi connection. At the Brooklyn Academy of Music last night, Xavier Cha debuted a Performa-commissioned about just that jilting phenomenon. Titled *Buffer*, the work, which will be performed again on Friday and Saturday night, is typical for Cha in the sense that it was abstract yet specific, engrossing yet difficult. Like most of her work, *Buffer* really must be seen for full effect.

Buffer is minimal, at least in the beginning. The only props in it are an L-shaped sofa, two folding partitions, and a laptop, and it's the last object that proves most important. At its start, a woman sits on the smaller part of the couch, her feet stretched out, her fingers busily typing away. All we hear for what feels like about a minute are the clicks and clacks of her keystrokes. She's interrupted by a suit-jacketed man— her lover, as we later find out—who asks her if she's still working. She says yes, and then proceeds to tell him about a dream. But every so often, their
movements repeat or loop into their past motions. Bits of dialogue are uttered more than once; a tender kiss is interrupted.

What we realize, gradually, is that we're witnessing a break-up, or at the very least the beginning stages of a relationship coming apart. The hour-long performance's title refers, of course, to buffering videos, pictures, and webpages on the internet—the act of loading. But it also refers to the boundaries that

separate us from the outside world. With this couple, it's a laptop, which sits on the woman's lap and at her feet, that seems to distance the couple from everyday anxieties and the larger problems of the world.

Performance view of Xavier Cha, *Buffer*, 2017, at Brooklyn Academy of Music, a commission for Performa 17.REBECCA SMEYNE

At four different points, their conversation is broken up by dance segments. Some are violent, with figures dashing across the stage, like carnivorous animals in a nature
documentary; others are more balletic, with smooth, harmonious movements. A singer presides over these sequences, operatically intoning lyrics written by the artist and poet Juliana Huxtable. (It's a bit hard to understand those lyrics, but, thankfully, they're reprinted in a booklet that is handed out.) And then there are other sequences featuring graphic (simulated) sex performed by none other than two real porn stars.

There's often a *sang froid* to works about the internet and digital culture, and Cha's performances and videos often rises above art in a similar vein by way of its emotional honesty. *Buffer* is no different from her past works in that respect. It ends on a melancholy note, with the woman's lover saying, "I love you," and then staring off. She never responds—it's a relationship stuck midway through loading.