

THE SYDNEY FRONT

Our work is about excess, about a gesturing and a signifying that goes far beyond that necessary for any 'reasonable' discourse. It is an excess that comes from the performers' bodies, and it has no designs upon the spectator other than the generation of pleasure. This pleasure is provoked by the sheer surprise and generosity of the act, yet paid for by negotiating the bitter asides that are also part of the vision. The semiotic superabundance of our work has the paradoxical aim of releasing the spectator from false complicatedness. We cheerfully ransack the history of the avant-garde, but continually collapse our own rhetoric to bring the focus back to the fleshy organs of the body. By thus returning to where meaning is embodied, we aim to protect ourselves and the spectator from moral demagogy, and the terror of grand abstractions that cannot be lived out.

The work of the Sydney Front is made by the company members. They are Elise Ahamnos, Andrea Aloise, John Baylis, Clare Bucknall, Nigel Kellaway and Christopher Ryan. The company was formed in Sydney in 1986. **THE PORNOGRAPHY OF PERFORMANCE** was first presented at the Adelaide Fringe Festival in March 1988. We have produced three other full-program works: **WALTZ** (April 1987), **JOHN LAWS/SADE** (October 1987) and **PHOTOCOPIES OF GOD** (April 1989). We also produce street performances.

This is our first international tour. We are performing at the Roskilde Festival (29 June-2 July), in Amsterdam (27-30 July), Salzburg (3-5 August), Dusseldorf (17-19 August) and London's Riverside Studios (22 August-2 September).

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THE PORNOGRAPHY OF PERFORMANCE



THE SYDNEY FRONT

A FRENZIED MEDITATION ON THEATRICAL OBSESSION

Who controls a theatrical performance? Is the spectator the passive recipient of the artists' god-like manipulations? Or are the performers desperate whores constantly incited by the spectators' appetites to greater and greater acts of self-abuse?

THE PORNOGRAPHY OF PERFORMANCE runs 100 minutes. There is no interval. The work is in five parts:

I SURVEILLANCE

The spectators interrupt the self-absorption of the enclosed performers. What is permissible? A fool of history puts on his naked body and comes forward. There is control, and our hostess is there to reassure.

II INQUISTIONS

Each performer encounters his or her interrogators. A quest for truth of sorts: true confessions in the withering light of ...what? play-acting? How do we trick out the truth when each confession is a new mask worn to please the latest of our many inquisitors/lovers?

III WALTZ

Let's pretend. Let's turn the torturers's room into a stage. Let's unplug the electrodes and patch in the lights. Let's invent a happy carnival of histrionic suffering, excessive posturing and flapping genitalia.

IV EATING CAKE

And having it too. A darker scene. Alienation destroys the fragile innocence of WALTZ, and the performers begin to take their anguish seriously, for a moment.

Such is the pathos of the expressionist self: alienated, it would be made whole through expression, only to find there another sign of its alienation. For in this sign the subject confronts not its desire but its deferral, not its presence but the recognition that it can never be primary, transcendent, whole.

Hal Foster
Recordings

V RECYCLE

The same data yields different results according to the speed of its processing. The carnival reasserts itself. Happy ending.

THE ARTISTS

THE PORNOGRAPHY OF PERFORMANCE was made by the performers, who are:

| | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Polyxena dancing etc | Elise Ahannos |
| Electra speaking etc | Andrea Aloise |
| Not-Hamlet etc | John Baylis |
| Ophelia on the phone etc | Clare Bucknall |
| Sade in the bath etc | Nigel Kellaway |
| Natural woman etc | Christopher Ryan |

and other Sydney Front members Sue-ellen Kohler, Mickey Furuya and Roz Hervey

| | |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Original composition | Sarah de Jong & Andree Greenwell |
| Lighting design | Simon Wise & Geoff Cobham |
| Production manager | Simon Wise |
| Stage manager | Herb Robertson |

Texts

| | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Heiner Muller | HAMLETMACHINE |
| Peter Weiss | MARAT/SADE |
| Oscar Wilde | DE PROFUNDIS |
| Aeschylus | AGAMEMNON |
| Euripides | THE TROJAN WOMEN |
| Maquis de Sade | 120 DAYS OF SODOM |
| Charles Baudelaire/ | |
| Robert Lowell | TO THE READER |

This tour has been assisted by the Performing Arts Board of the Australia Council, the Australian Government's arts funding and advisory body.

STAFF CREDITS FOR RIVERSIDE STUDIOS

Sandy Amoah
Fiona Callaghan
Dennis Charles
Andrea Chin
Teerth Chugh
Tammy Collins
Christine Cort
Ros Dow
Kevin Evans
Colin Finlay
Jonathan Lamede
Ed Lewis
Louise Lobo
Steve Lewis
Kate Macfarlane
Shira McLeod
Jim Murray
Darryl Noad
Caroline Pinder
Helen Rowe
Lorraine Selby
Zoe Shearman
David Waller
Dolcie Wallcott-Taylor
Joyce Walsh
Konrad Watson
Hannah Wilnot

Finance Assistant
Box Office Manager
Technical Director
Secretary
Programme Co-ordinator
Development Manager
Marketing Officer
Deputy Front of House Manager
Master Carpenter
Deputy Electrician
Director, Riverside Studios
Cinema Director
Press Officer
Deputy Carpenter
Exhibitions Director
Box Office Assistant
Building Officer
Chief Electrician
Community Education
Community Education
Centre Manager
Exhibitions Organiser
Deputy Box Office Manager
Finance Assistant
Deputy Front of House Manager
Electrician
Community Education

COMING SOON

Bookings open from 4 September

3 - 14 October 8pm EDWARD PETHERBRIDGE in THE EIGHT O'CLOCK MUSE.
A pop-up Guide To The Theatrical Imagination. Music, puppetry, Gordon Craig, juggling, Commedia del'Arte, Victorian directions on the art of conveying emotion, and many other aspects of acting and theatre are the subjects of Edward Petheridge's entertaining and idiosyncratic pocket guide.

DANCE UMBRELLA' 89 9 October - 18 November
Dance Umbrella bounds into its second decade with the emphasis in '89 prominently on French dance and choreographers, Dancers at Riverside Studios: ROC IN LICHEN, a new company conquer the challenge of dance on a vertical scale with GERNADIER WEAVER, (20 -21 October). The Royal Ballet Choreography Group present YOUNG CHOREOGRAPHERS OF THE ROYAL BALLET COMPANIES AND SCHOOL, (2 -4 November). COMPAGNIE ANGELIN PRELIOCAJ this year bring LIQUEURS DE CHAIR (Camal Cocktails) to the festival, (26 - 28 October). THE NATIONAL DANCE YOUTH COMPANY perform works by six choreographers; Peter Curtis, Earl Lloyd Hepburn, Shobana Jeyasingh, Jacob Marley, Euan Forbes and Evan Williams. The evening performance will feature THE HAMMERSMITH DANCE GROUP, (28 October). The much admired SIOBHAN DAVIES COMPANY return with two new works, (8 - 12 November). Finally, choreographer Leo Anderson has devised a piece for eight women, four of whom are core members of THE CHOIMONDELEYS, (16 - 18 November).

16 - 22 October Annie Productions present a rehearsed reading of SHYLOCK written and directed by ARNOLD WESKER. Not an adaptation of Shakespeare's play but an original and major work creating a new and unforgettable portrait of a Jewish character who has for centuries been one of the world's favourite villains. Leading Israeli actor Oded Teomi makes his London debut heading a distinguished cast of British actors.

31 October - 25 November TALAWA present THE GODS ARE NOT TO BLAME by Ola Rotimi. Director Yvonne Brewster, designer Ellen Cairns. Rotimi transplants Sophocles' Oedipus Rex to African soil using ancient West African rituals, traditional proverbs and Yoruba songs and dances. This production stars Jeffrey Kisson and Leonie Forbes. Brought to you by the director and designer of Talawa's recent all-Black performance of "The Importance Of Being Earnest".

Other productions to watch out for are: a British production performed alternately in Hindi and English, Tamasha's THE UNTOUCHABLE and THEATRE DE COMPLICITE - both coming in December.

THE PORNOGRAPHY OF PERFORMANCE

Riverside Studios,
Hammersmith

Let us waste no lineage on this appallingly silly Aussie import from an ensemble group calling themselves The Sydney Front. It is a production that gives pretentiousness a whole new meaning. The unedifying spectacle of middle aged men thrusting impatient fingers into curtained steel cylinders for a free grope of the naked body therein, would have brought on a police raid across the borough in Earls Court.

But this, of course, is Art, so presumably it's all right.

A thoroughly tedious and wasted evening and as a local ratepayer, if this is what the Riverside feel is worth promoting, please don't come to me for a shell-out when the next financial crisis hits.

Oh, highlights include two women rhythmically spitting at one another and a charming scene of a chap having cream buns shoved up his arse, courtesy, we were told, of Marks and Spencer.

About the only thing in the show, I imagine, that had passed quality control...

Bill Williamson

Riverside Studios

Betty Caplan

Pornography of Performance

MOIRA Shearer once said that if people had any notion of the agony involved in dancing, they wouldn't want it. This pre-supposes an inherent altruism that the Sydney Front would find most alien, their view being that audiences would watch it all the more avidly. Audience behaviour is as much on show as the "acting" in *The Pornography of Performance*; after all there is no pornography without a voyeur, is there?

Stick up a sign saying theatre, charge people money, and you'll be amazed at what they get up to. In the beginning, we are invited to mill about. A naked hairy leg sticks out of a bath, and people pretend not to be straining their necks to see the rest. An actor calmly eats a tin of dog food whilst making a speech about the mind and body growing distorted. The audience, somewhat bewildered, is encouraged by a 'hostess' to "interrupt the self absorption of the enclosed performer" (even Australia seems not to have been spared the ravages of post-Modernist Speak).

Some pick up a telephone, looking at it anew, as an object of infinite mystery. They seem surprised that it is dead. (The wonders of BT advertising!)

Eventually the audience gives up the search for meaning which is, in any case, endlessly deferred, and is permitted to sit down. What follows is a string of outlandish scenarios yoked together by violence, to use Dr Johnson's phrase. Because violence is what it's about, the performers "desperate whores constantly incited by the spectators' appetites to greater and greater acts of self abuse". They feed off us, we feed off them.

The group take a number of styles and de-construct them, breathlessly, one after the other: the school for opera divas with hysteria and suffering laid on, the declamatory Greek tragedians, surely the greatest sadists of all. Text is merely used as embellishment; words have no use other than to contradict. ("You make me feel like a natural woman", shouts a male actor, dispalying his genitalia beneath the most *outré* feminist dress.)

There is, by the end of the evening, nothing left to subvert. Except of course, the practices of the theatre itself. People confidently applaud set speeches (here at least we know where we are), but when it comes to food being shoved up a backside or two women politely spitting at one another, the response is not quite so clear.

Out of the maelstrom, certain questions emerge about the sadism of audiences and the masochism of actors, about the notion of who controls whom in the space we call theatre, and what exactly pleasure and desire signify. Clearly influenced by Artaud and all that, they nevertheless have an approach of their own. Never was the line between bullshit and fine art more delicately drawn. If you can fight your way past the purple hair, it's worth a look. ● *Riverside Studios until 2 September.*