

Australia's free national arts tabloid's intimate response to the 1996 Adelaide Festival. In this issue: Fura dels Baus, COMPOST, Scriabin Piano Sonatas, DV8's *Enter Achilles*, Hotel Pro Forma's *Orfeo*, Annie Sprinkle, Molecular Theatre's *Facade Firm*

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Editorial: includes Betontanc, Scott Theatre, March 13, Molecular Theatre, The Space, March 13, COMPOST, and Hotel ProForma's *Orfeo*, Festival Theatre, March 12

In the final, escalating stages of the 1996 Adelaide Festival, the eye is opened (wider), space re-written, the body scrutinised ever more closely. This festival drives curiosity, to look (at art in) other people's houses, at lives (Bernhard, McClaren, Sprinkle) and, always, bodies—acting, dancing, dangerous (Fura dels Baus, Betontanc, DV8), playing (Bang on a Can), masturbating and open (-legged to a camera wielding audience—Annie Sprinkle).

It's also the stage at which a dialectic of reflection and debate is at its most strangely potent. In the Red Square bar someone says to me, "I didn't like the Maly at the time, but the images stay with me and stay with me and now I think the work is important for me ... but I wouldn't want to go through it again in real time". Others find themselves seduced by Maly and by the Slovenian dance company Betontanc but, like Richard Murphet in *RealTime Adelaide Festival#3* worry at the place of female artists in their works. Betontanc's wild, risky, naturalistic, sexy physicality in *Know Your Enemy*, the second of their shows, is predicated on male competition for the female body. These women are physically and emotionally strong and sometimes determine the narrative, but it is male threat which keeps you (and clearly the women) constantly nervous. While the threat of violence governs this work, the 'reality' of it against a woman in Betontanc's first, less naturalistic, physically percussive show (the pummelled set is wired for sound) is deeply disturbing. Even some passionate lovers of DV8 thought the narrow bandwidth of masculinity represented in *Enter Achilles* dated. The mix of admiration for and interrogation of these companies is one of the dynamics of the festival.

Annie Sprinkle has provoked predictable and valuable debate, but one of the angriest arguments encountered has been over the visual arts COMPOST exhibition of art works in private suburban homes. The objections include: the works have been inappropriately installed, the artists' intentions ignored; owners of the homes are being laughed at and exploited; the works have not been commissioned to respond to these very specific sites; too many paintings, not enough sculptures and installations representative of current trends. Curator David O'Halloran responds: the event is an innovative extension of standard curatorial practice (homes not galleries); that purchased art works 'disappear' into private homes (no artist control over where the works are hung); and that the works take on different connotations in their new contexts. As you'll see in Linda Marie Walker's coverage of COMPOST in this issue, the event can be amusing, intriguing and insightful. It's an event that grows as the home-owners respond in turn—one woman won't change a table cloth because it goes with the picture, a girl rearranges her dolls every day, a consul puts some books out on his country's culture, owners talk to you about the work ... and having so many interesting guests. Art as social anthropology one observed, and why not, given that the arts in the late 20th Century have so determinedly grasped the everyday and its alarming underside (the Biennial). That I enjoyed COMPOST cannot belie the deep discomfort many artists felt. Some argued that the only successful work was the one that an artist did install, in a rectory. While I liked it a lot, it felt like a takeover, the everyday functioning of the room had been erased—you couldn't pick up books, for example, they were laced with razor blades. More fascinating was the experience where you had to find the artwork (not always easy) and then balance it against the very real and competing demands of the home-owner's collections (some with a Victorian bric a brac density).

Similar questions of intent and appropriacy have been raised about the Whirling Dervishes (what were we really watching?) and the absence of genuine crosscultural discussion—forums focussed essentially on forms and not their contents. Our relationship with the 'other' haunts us in this festival and I mean haunt.s. You only have to step back for a moment from the physical and visual seductiveness of this festival to see what a dark image of the world has been realised—the pain in Meg Stuart, the fear of scarcity in Image Aigue's *Nits*, the fatalistic cultural traps and despair in Maly Theatre, the sexual irresolution in Betontanc's driven world—the idealised near naked heterosexual couple in harmony, each lifting the other democratically and with great strength, hovering as if in a dream, must descend into a world of murderous jealousy and infidelities.

Molecular Theatre's *Facade Firm*, sometimes short on finesse and visually cramped in The Space, ironically and darkly conveys a portrait of individual oppression, the writer with his feather pen perpetually denied the very act of writing, reduced to not even reaching the page, or scrawling, or jabbing at his own mirror image. The appeal of early century Witkiewicz's near surreal vision to the contemporary Japanese artist up against social and economic pressures is evident. For the audience, the fourth wall is recurrently filled in and time becomes an appalling ticking away of opportunity, oppression made beautiful with kabuki-influenced screen-play and, finally, gift-wrapped.

Loss and oppression are made beautiful again in Hotel ProForma's *Orfeo*, the ultimate sensual example of this dynamic and the Festival's best work. Again denial is at work—as

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with *Facade Firm*, the audience is compelled utterly into the time frame of the work. For a very long time you peer into the dark at dimly lit figures. You can only listen. You learn to look with your ears and you begin to hear the pattern and groupings of voices shift across the space. Once you have learned and relished that, then you are given light and you look at a staircase reframed and reframed by light and the movement of identically clothed and crowned courtly singers ... and a lone dancer descending, ascending, descending into the underworld, sometimes appearing to float, sometimes dragged.

Perspective is everything in *Orfeo*, a world closed, opened, flattened, beautiful, a frightening chasm, a stairway to heaven, and finally, one that reaches out to take you—a barely voiced sigh sobs with pleasure and alarm through the theatre. This is not Gluck's *Orfeo*, it resonates with that work but its vision is a darker less redemptive contemporary one. (Meryl Tankard's choreography and co-direction for the AO's version used a physically extreme and risky wall-scaling to achieve a similar tension though in an utterly different manner.) *Orfeo* is the Festival's most complete synthesis of the architectural and the euphoric. Once again though, this is no easy ecstasy. To sustain the pleasures of *Orfeo* read Ib Michael's disturbing and richly imagistic libretto (in the printed program) again and again. Like the sound and music compositions by John Cage and Bo Holten, the design and the lighting, it creates an otherworldly sense of right now and an alien then.

Within a few days from its conclusion, it's clear that Barrie Kosky has created the festival he envisioned and set a benchmark for future Australian arts festivals. Some have argued that there is a paucity of truly great works in the festival (equivalents, say, to the Frankfurt Ballet in the otherwise lacklustre 1994 festival), however *Orfeo* at least should put that concern aside and so should the thematic intensity of the festival, the power of art form collisions and collaborations, the willingness to look pain in the face, the achievements *Excavation* and *The Black Sequin Dress*, the inspiration drunk by many, many artists from Meg Stuart, the Maly Theatre and Handspring's *Woyzeck on the High Veld*, and the constant debate over shows and issues.

We are taking home a theatre of images in our minds and bodies, ecstatic and pained movement, images like the magnet and the spanner in the sky charcoaled on film and into us as *Woyzeck*'s grimly apocalyptic vision possesses him, or the valley of the soul is entered via film in Jenny Kemp's *The Black Sequin Dress* and via sound, a breathing that becomes ours in Elizabeth Drake's sound design. This a reminder how significant a role a kind of 'return to sound' has played in this festival, from *The Listening Room* in the Rotunda, to Art Zoyd and Pierre Henry and *The Ethereal Eye* and *Excavation* and in the boldest of the festival's considerable musical pleasures, the Bang on a Can All Stars, a rich, engaging embrace of the sonics of contemporary music a generation on, it seems, from the adventure initiated by the Kronos Quartet.

Keith Gallasch

La Fura dels Baus, M.T.M., Ridley Pavilion, Wayville Showgrounds, March 12

"For all 'facts', all 'truths' are relative, everything depends on what is told and how it is told." (from the brochure)

The pavilion is a great venue. The ferris wheel glowing white in the hot light. The doors of other pavilions open, and teams of people building elaborate temporary patios, feneries, pools, and rockeries for a Gardening Show opening Thursday. This is a gently surreal entry and exit.

The trouble with a performance like this, is this: it 'is' trouble. Terrible trouble and trauma, that's its premise. And so is the imaged portrayal of that trouble, the impossibility of that. The audience is witness to, and subjected to, this feverish impossibility. And one becomes feverish. This is trouble with a huge cardboard capital 'T'. Trouble light enough to carry, and solid enough to be contained.

M.T.M is about, is a bout of, power and terror, and everyone horribly doing and being done to. It's probably about everything that humans do to one another in the name of 'cause', 'ideology', 'territory'. It is frenzy, frenzy from fever, and all that wasted energy, or, the extraordinary energy that waits in abeyance to be tapped by frenzy (and wasted anyway).

This frenzy is spectacle from go to woe, and moment to moment. And a litany/liturg of voice. The screaming of abuse, the flood of polemics. And this is more than language as meaning. It's the tone and tension of order(s), beyond understanding. So, the end of the millennium, the end of our 'time', apocalypse: a re-run of all that we imagine to fear: the tongue pulled out (finally), a bullet in the mouth. The 'idea' of living hell. This narrative is common, popular, incorporated. A given, even while being critiqued. What is left: the spectacle of spectacle. This we know too. And here it is big, fast, frank.

One is on the floor, in the crowd, as the actors are pulled, pushed, or carried passed or over. And this quickly establishes a slightly wary relationship between a self which wants to, and does, forget itself and watch, and a self that has to watch itself, watch out for itself, move, so that the performance can move. And one is up against other bodies in a charged environment, with the techno-beat, the constant yelling, in other words loud conflicting pulses. We are the 'crowd scene'. We are their 'extras'. We are parted by them, at their mercy. One soon knows to watch the videographer as he watches his 'images'. To seriously attend to the video-ing, to judge harshly what is shown (seen by your own eyes). And to watch behind and sideways, to read, I suppose, multiple media simultaneously. The seamless construction of gross and accumulating lies is a highlight. The large screen playing sometimes three parallel films, is the site for both specific detail and the bigger picture. Here one 'sees' the body killed, the exact way of the killing. A 'B Grade' movie. And one sees too the male figure slowly drowning in static, static almost the metaphor for spectacle, as if spectacle now is breakdown.

M.T.M. is a violent use of space, of the cutting and breaking of space, into corners and lines and borders, and through layers and planes, vertical and horizontal. It forms and deforms continually ideas of platform and focus. The space itself is the violence, object of, and object for, rhetoric, and the practices of rhetorical intent, as if space sanctions or harbours or hides madnesses. The last word spoken in the show was "NO".

Linda Marie Walker

La Fura Dels Baus, M.T.M., Wayville Showgrounds, March 12

The audience was held together, made to wait in the front foyer, drinking and talking in groups so close to one another, expectant and excited and curious and surprisingly very happy and pleased with this arrangement and their proximity.

Entering the arena of La Fura Dels Baus, the feel of major event art opening was altered by a confusion of rock concert format and structuring of the audience, and a nightclub setting. The audience was directed to the other end of the entrances and stood before a wall of cardboard cartons with a video projection area above it. On the impromptu screen were the only words in English for the entirety of the evening. (The text informed people to move closer to the screen so that more could fit in, and produced a slightly uncertain surge for the stage—the uncertainty resulted from the mix of nightclub and concert environments.) For the rest of the evening communication was via visual language, sound, thematically patterned/structured modes of behaviour, and M.T.M.'s physical intersection of the audience.

The performance began shockingly. A person moved through the audience with a camera, inflicting terror twice over with a flood light on the end of the camera—it blinded those it was directed at, inflicting the terror of being singled out and captured on video, visible to everyone watching the video screen. And then the fear of being singled out was increased, made desperate, as members of the audience were violently shoved about, pushed to the ground, their clothes pulled off, and then carried above the audience, aka crowd surfing, and stood on top of the walls bordering the audience. It was only then the audience realised that these victims were the performers. From this point on the acts of violence were able to be stood back from, and at times enjoyed. Throughout the rest of the performance, M.T.M challenged the pleasure of viewing performed/unreal violence which film culture has recently made permissible, through a flawless interspersing of pre recorded sequences and real time recordings.

Digital technology—prevalent in the sound, the distortion of the performers' voices, manipulated renderings of the body, and the real time pre-recorded video component—was here vital to the potency and effectiveness of *La Fura dels Baus*. The ability of technology to test the limits of real and unreal was capitalised on. The integration of concepts of the future with contemporary technologies enabled a physical and literal extension of the twentieth century apocalyptic narrative theme. **Anne Robertson.**

Jonathan Shin'ar, Scriabin Piano Sonatas, Elder Hall, March 12

It would take courage even to consider presenting five Scriabin piano sonatas in one concert. I guess it was Barrie Kosky's idea, but Jonathan Shin'ar is to be warmly congratulated for accepting the challenge. He played them from memory, and it was abundantly clear that they are all intrinsically complex stand-alone works, diverse in duration, content and structure, and fiendishly difficult. No. 4 (the shortest of a tall order) has been described as 'eight minutes of agony'. If you didn't know them before, you would almost certainly want to hear them again, and given time you'd probably succumb to Nos. 2, 6, 7, 8 and 10 as well. That's what good festivals are about. But it was one of those concerts where you sensed that the audience would not necessarily wish to re-live this particular musical experience any more than the artist would relish a repeat performance.

So what went wrong? Piano playing is not just an art, it's a way of life. There are those who make careers simply by writing about pianists, the way they play, the way they practise, the way they think they are. In Munich 1969 I attended three piano recitals in the space of one week by Martha Argerich, Maurizio Pollini and Bruno Leonard Gelber (remember him?), all in their late twenties at the time: spectacular, stunning and superb respectively. Couldn't understand why there were no reviews, but then on Saturday the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* published an enormously elaborate, half-page comparative essay by the renowned Joachim Kaiser headed 'Sternstunde für Pollini' in 120pt type. On another occasion the same writer reported on the accuracy of Friedrich Gulda's rhythm (or did he mean tempo?) by observing that his performance of Beethoven's Op.10 No. 3 was just two seconds longer (or was it shorter?) than it had been at the Salzburg Festival six weeks earlier. And then there's Dean Elder, whose legendary interviews are collected in that wonderful book *Pianists at Play*. In one of his 'conversations' he quotes Garrick Ohlsson: 'Once when I was 18 and playing a whole bunch of Scriabin in a master-class of Gorodnizky's I pulled something in my left forearm and wrist. I had to be taken to a hospital emergency room to be given a shot to relax the nerve and be bandaged up.'

Which brings me back to what went wrong. There was no need to have an ambulance on stand-by at Jonathan Shin'ar's concert. Nothing was ever going to snap, seize up, or even twinge. This man is so relaxed, so cool, so facile that if you weren't listening or watching his hands (or his mouth, which does twitch occasionally) you'd think he was just meditating. Of course, most of the great artists are noticeably stable on the stool. I once watched Oscar Peterson through the lid of the piano and if you'd put a sixpence on each of his broad shoulders when the show started they'd have still been there at the end. Same with Michaelangeli. But with Shin'ar I felt uncomfortable, as if he were disengaged, physically remote from the instrument's innate characteristics and tonal extremities. Depths were not plumbed nor dizzy heights attained. Reversal reigned, a deceptively curious phenomenon (as when I was a kid and the more my piano teacher bullied the more terrified I felt and the more I giggled). Reflex action. The more nervous Shin'ar became the more he relaxed and suddenly we're in a mine-field, a performance-threatening danger zone where a final chord sustained by the pedal is fudged by a finger as it exits the key. Even more hazardous when terror begins to tamper with time so that rests are reduced and pauses abbreviated and agogic accents terminated quick let's get on with the next bit and that climax didn't really work and blast that bloody bass note again and 'hell-why-am-I-doing-this' sets in.

Interruption. Rang a friend at the Festival to check whether Shin'ar had actually recorded all of the Scriabin Sonatas (he has). I was thinking what a vast difference there is between the two projects, and how much of the art of performance lies in 'reading' the acoustic of the hall, being brave enough to finger-pedal, take time, prepare space, play silence. By default I discovered that, owing to a sudden serious illness in the family, Jonathan has had to return to London ahead of schedule. Clearly distracted on this occasion, he was unable to master the art-turned-artifice-turned-artificiality of Scriabin's manic-depressive emotional outpourings. We are probably lucky he played the concert at all. Since it was a learning experience all round, we have a lot to be thankful for. After all is said and done, real piano playing is not just an art and a way of life; it is a reflection of the human condition.

Di Weekes

COMPOST: 15 artists in private homes in the suburb of Norwood, March 7-15

Co-curators: David O'Halloran, John Barbour, Paul Hewson; Installers: Craig Andrae, Paul Hewson

COMPOST is a terrific exhibition. Fifteen houses in Norwood, and fifteen artists, and numerous art works. Going from house to house on a hot Sunday, usually an art day-off. But this show is completely enjoyable, every moment, and not easy in any sense. In fact complex and subtle and funny.

The exhibition is the journey and the houses and the work, combined. It's seeing inside a variety of people's homes. Looking at their things. Spotting the works amongst the furniture and objects and pictures and books. Having an excuse to stare at strangers' walls. To wonder about the whip over the door knob, and the little burry print next to Suzy Treister's painting 'Study', across from the Maria Kozic cut-out women, 'Bitch'.

The precise context and lighting (domestic and natural) in which to view the artwork is as fascinating as any 'performance' I have seen. The Anna Platten painting ('Puppets') at Gertrude Street, in very bright natural light was so dramatic, luminous, that it was possible, in fact, simple and surprising, to focus on bits and pieces, as if the scene could be isolated into fragments, because of the light. And then later, at Scott Street, in a renovated church, another Platten ('Hula hoop') in soft light, beneath high coloured-glass windows. The painting somehow a 'fit' with the windows. The painting a 'window' too. And both of them opaque. Themselves, by themselves, and not views onto something else. And someone was making a sandwich, and someone else was reading a story to two children. And the front yard was intriguing: what was under the steamy piece of glass (compost?), and what were all those seedlings, lined-up (waiting for compost?).

The placement of the Howard Arkley painting ('Ultra Kleen') of the kitchen in the kitchen at Beulah Road was intensely resonant, not just for the painting, but for the kitchen, equally. The blurred parts of the painting demonstrating how one sees the actual kitchen. Things come in and out of focus. The curve of the real chair, echoing the painted one. The clocks having similar black hands. The householder said the kitchen used to have lino on the floor just like Arkley's. The kitchen was not overwhelmed by the painting, and the painting did not dissolve into the kitchen. They stayed apart, yet entertained each other.

COMPOST beats seeing art in the gallery (for a moment), it enlivens, re-organises, the readings of pieces to such an extent that another logic begins to play. Something complementary, and exquisite even, a logic that can't be binary. Suddenly, one is there, through the door, curious, is that 'it', is that a Stephen Bram, yes of course, but it looks like it's always been there. Same with the Zikos bedspread/hanging. A huge covering, over the bed, in a small room. And one notices the buttons and the glittering silver underside. And just standing there at the door having a brief think about sleeping and mirrors and where the old wedding photo came from. And in the dining-room another couple of Stephen Bram's. The minder pointing them out. This is quite something, weird and wonderful for a regular gallery visitor, and welcome too, in a small relieving way, the presence of the minder, their instruction, their stories of other visitors. Like the argument about why the two parallel wooden bars (by Tony Schwensen, Alexandra Street) didn't intersect, and that they didn't mean they were (therefore) 'nothing'. And how the minder was totally enchanted by them, as they were so like a Japanese garden (and I agreed), "except for the metal stands" ...

And now and then a householder told us a story of another house, gossip has begun: apparently one of the Bram paintings was hung upside down. At another place the householder had made a 'piece' of art, "just last night", and hung it very close to the neon (Regina Walter), "inspired" by the Bram drawings, which he'd mistaken for some sort of installing diagram for the artwork yet to arrive.

Accumulating, gradually, during this journey, were fragments, precarious, voyeuristic, images, words, lives, the stuff of having 'home', of being human, of absorbing, of surfacing, of a space for strangers. For comings and goings, a few minutes here, a few there. And the breathless moment as one realizes the enormity of the doll collection (Portrush Road). An impossible moment because there on the floor were a dozen or more small grey concrete elephants (Christopher Snee, 'We are all elephants'). A collection, too. They looked so sweet and precious surrounded by every imaginable doll. The elephants all together, not consumed, which one might have thought, but made distinct and spacious through incongruity. And in a house with no street presence, even though 'on' a busy road.

Across the intersection, and still on Portrush Road, the vicar's study, with hundreds of razor blades attached to the walls and shelves, and razors too of all ages, and Steve Wigg photographed in various male guises (Steve Wigg, 'Shaving rituals'). The books were tempting, a little look into one of those slim volumes, with the risk of being cut.

Helen Fuller's glowing raincoat and work-lights hovering low over small painted boards, like paint and oil stains, in the shed at Moulden Street contrasted with the chromed rubbish bin in the lounge. All the shed-work comes to 'this'. The care for rubbish, a ritual, the polishing of a badge, a certain pride.

Back at Alexandra Street are the 'Post Office Paintings', nine of them, by Stephen Bush. These are about 'rubbish'. Huge narratives about the smallness of 'post' office, of the office of passage. About what is left, afterwards, stacked one on another.

COMPOST is a must, it's quiet, considered, rich, moving, witty. It has a joy which is decidedly generative and generous, it engages at such ordinary and vulnerable and dispersed levels, that no piece can single itself out, can act out an art rhetoric beyond its physical and imaginative site. COMPOST has taken its name seriously, in the way of composition, combination, and the making of something humid and dense.

Linda Marie Walker

DV8 Enter Achilles Playhouse, March 12

Death is a point where one crosses states from life as we know it to what we don't know. (Sometimes being vulnerable makes you feel like dying...)

The Greek Achilles could eat a haired horse without indigestion: invulnerable, apart from at the heel, where his mother, dipping him in the great river Styx for protection, had to hold him. It is a story of loyalty and betrayal, of a man coming to the revenge of his mate—yet it is a story of war and action *within* war: the violable point, which connects him with his mother, is the warrior's undoing but is also the very sign of his humanity and ungodliness.

So, *Enter Achilles*: this spectacular dance piece by Lloyd Newson about, we are told, the "labyrinth of male rituals", is set in the ideal location for head (butting), ear (holding), shoulder (shoving), chest (puffing), bellies (sleeking), thighs (crunching, mocking, smooching), knees (jiving), ankles (flicking), soles (crushing). A pub, of course: the territory of collusion in industry, of post down-the-mine camaraderie. *But where's the heel?*

This is a sculpted work of incredible and ferocious physical skill. It also exemplifies every reason you might have ever stayed away from the pub. Vomit, brawn, competitiveness, the demeaning of women, hyperbolic Superman fantasies—and just plain showing off. These guys are heroes with great arses, as much as objects of repulsion. We have to watch from the sides of the football field, and cheer on.

The dancers execute everything so well, from punch-ups to push-ups, from piss-ups/piss-pints to a red-hot rope act and to fucking orgasm-painted rubber dolls until the doll is slaughtered and the men shed crocodile tears.

Where is the *dealing with* failure, the *going through* failure to find the unknown that's on the other side?

For all its extraordinary physical skill and truthful observation of certain male rituals, this piece and its world of men remains safe. The audience loves it. "Just like real life" they say, when the final's over, and they begin their personal replays.

So many pieces in the festival reflect a masculine and/or mechanical re-production of a culture that thrives on its order and doesn't want to change. *Facade Firm* by Molecular Theatre is a bizarre and relentless piece about Japanese cultural conformity with men in suits and women pretending to be men in suits re-arranging view-frames by order of The Firm. In a Kafkaesque way, The Firm is both an incorporation, and a prescription for behaviour, of what above all costs must be maintained.

The Maly Theatre demonstrates how closely bound are autocracy/oligarchy, conformity and misogyny across Russian history. Where is the attempt to show the alternative? how things might be otherwise? This is a young company: it is bleak and unimaginative for them not to explore the *hope* for another possible world. The difference with Jenny Kemp's work for example is that, whilst remaining within a heterosexually preclusive definition of female-as-object of the gaze, *The Black Sequin Dress* yet struggles with this and attempts to give voice to the falterings of doubt amidst the quotidian struggle to continue. The ways men miss the point here are poignant, sympathetic, but very clear.

BthD&B Enter Achilles (what is it that exits, apart from exactly what has entered?) Superman's moments are affectionately satirised but nonetheless survive as a means of protecting male culture from being pierced. Nothing is displaced in the realm. Split-stage episodes (yobs on a building site rig highstage whilst a man fucks a rubber dolly lowstage; pub brawlies soccerrooing lowstage synchronised with Superman spinning a jig highstage) are theatrically effective, but the split does not go deep enough: the staging exemplifies how far men will go to cope and protect each other from being pierced, and changing something of what shows itself to the world.

Try turning, not just mirroring and whimpering the heel, try *turning* the heel...

Zsuzsanna Soboslay

Annie Sprinkle. Post Porn Modernist, Royalty Theatre, March 12

We very much hope that the privacy of the residents who have so generously offered their houses will be respected—in order that they too will be able to enjoy the experience. The form of the exhibition makes it impossible to respect the conventional boundaries separating private and public. This transgression of boundaries will operate as a conflict for viewers (and residents) between the desire to uncover something of another's life and the risk of voyeurism. We ask you to be sensitive to your surrounds and to the demands of courtesy.

David O'Halloran, Principal Curator, Compost

Annie is running a little late but finally greets us wearing flower print flanelette nightie and headset radio microphone. This vision completes the stage picture—a carnival bedroom, lingerie and sex tools attached to the wall like a coconut shy. Carnie music. A dressing table with wigs, boas, a big mirror. Slide one. Annie begins the story of that part of her life she has made public. Her bodily transformation from shy, boring and friendless Ellen to loveable prostitute and porn star Annie.

She doesn't tell us much about how this transformation occurred. It simply did as we see later in photos of other converts (Meet secretary Sue-Ann Saunders. Slide change. Now meet Sa-man-tha!) The tone of voice reminds me of that old lech Clive James. A little gasp from the audience at the transformation of a middle aged professional woman to Hustler pinup. Annie's is a good story. She has led a pretty interesting life. She has felled the height of the Empire State (minus the spire) and swallowed several pints of cum, a teaspoon at a time (a little groan from the audience this time as Annie steps close to the line). She has tried merchandising. Small business persons in the audience note that soiled panties starting out at \$20 a pair still sell at \$150. She parodies the porn industry and then poses for some touchingly shy amateur photographers in the audience.

There are some dark moments. Annie has encountered, she thinks, about a hundred horrible people in her life of grime. And a little trouble with the law. The pain of these encounters she quickly exorcises in a display of *Melrose Place* style acting. Taking out a piece of four by two with a dozen dildoes glued to it. (like something from Mr. Fuller's shed, COMPOST) she proceeds to suck and wildly stroke the dildoes to a soundtrack of sirens and screams. Again, I think of those carnival clown faces that move side to side with their mouths open spitting ping pong balls. Annie limps to the mirror, choking and spitting. She dabs her eyes. Drama dispensed with, we return to the more interesting part of the story—the variety of sex you can have and pictures of the people who indulge. It's like William Yang without the tasteful remove of the professional photographer. The Adelaide Festival audience (a mix of middle-aged couples, leather girls and backpackers) is introduced to fist fucking, amputee sex, penis piercing and golden showers (I just got it—Sprinkle!). At one point she empties out a basket of goodies and is squirted in the eye by a plastic pussy.

Which way to the art? It's taken a while for Australia to admit to the possibility of Postmodern Performance so Post Porn Modernist seems a bit of a museum piece now. Like seeing Karen Finley in Sydney last year, well after her work had lost its bite. We have been reading about Annie Sprinkle since the 80s when she became a performance artist—it seems when Linda Montano ordained her disciple and Richard Shechner and the NYU Performance Studies department took on the anthropology of the everyday.

She's an engaging enough story teller though her sing-song voice left me feeling that nothing much in this show touches her any more. Except maybe her new love life and her new persona Anya, but that's another story. She does have a strong desire to tell her story. When her microphone stopped working at one stage, she said 'Oh, pooh!'. But some of the interesting parts she glossed over. She tells us why she went about transforming herself to Annie Sprinkle (money, love and attention and because she didn't really know what else she wanted to do) but how? And more recently, after dealing with the deaths of a string of lovers from AIDS and a breast lump scare and gum disease (the price of giving pleasure), she gave up smoking, put on weight, grew her body hair, cut off her fingernails and changed her life. But where did Anya come from? And why on earth would Sue-Anne want to look like Sa-man-tha? In a festival light on feminist analysis, Annie seems a bit of an oddball.

Anyway here she is proudly at the 1996 Adelaide Festival (the program makes an appearance on slide) and it hardly seems up to the minute except for the amount of Annie we get to see. Only two festivals ago a couple of French performers covered in body paint were arrested for showing their breasts. And Annie reveals all—and at the Royalty no less! And I must say I have never seen an orgasm on stage before. Doing her bit for the Festival theme, Annie lights candles and incense and greases up for her everyday Ritual as the audience shakes little rattles to assist her in calling up sexual energy. (Afterwards ushers collect the rattles in plastic garbage bags).

Annie's story is well arranged. It has pace and wit. Its power is in the way it still transgresses boundaries. As Annie hands her Aphrodite Award to a 'real' Adelaide sex worker, she pays homage to the life she has escaped and now parades for an audience who would more usually avoid looking at it. For some this performance is a voyeuristic experience. A freak show. Some will come to gawp at Annie, controversial feminist. Her recent conversion to tantric sex goddess has found her a new feminist audience. (Her manager has been running workshops with Adelaide women for some time now). And Anya has relinquished masochism for nature. A new docuporn industry emerges in movies like *Sacred Sex* (made by Australians Ron and Samudra Tanner). She's a lesbian now and a nature lover who pre-orgasm, lights a candle for a manageable mortgage and a little house by the sea.

For me the strangest moment comes when a man in my row goes up at the interval for *Tits On the Head* in which Annie offers for \$15 a hit to pose for polaroids with her tits on your head. ("Come on up, folks. We need the money".) He went up to the stage, paid his \$15 to Annie's Manager/lover, draped a feather boa around his neck and sat in the red chair as Annie plopped her tits on his head.

Many people kissed her on the cheek as they approached but he turned and asked for the private pleasure of touching her breasts. For an instant she stopped and then she turned to him and said that would be OK. He smiles for the camera. Annie tilts her head sideways. The smile leaves his face as he leaves the stage. He returns to his seat with the polaroid and I try not to let him see me looking at the photograph as it slowly fixes.

Virginia Baxter

Molecular Theatre, *Facade Firm*, The Space, March 12

The customer must be satisfied. Misunderstandings are ruled out.

0777. The meter begins to tick over the first of six countdowns. We stare at a grid of twenty four tangerine canvasses at the stage's edge, a wall of textured impermutability. A male voice begins to count, then another—female—recites. The regulations of the S.I. Witkiewicz Portrait Painting Firm. We discover this with the third voice entry—English speaking, male, cultivated, recorded—in translation. Or is it?

The firm reserves the right to paint without any witnesses if that is possible.

Figures in grey suits and hats, po-faced. A rhythmic almost robotic sequence of removals and replacements of the canvasses. The passage between the foreground grid and another identical one at the rear of the stage. But can it be identical given the passage between? The voices continue to interject, translate and recite the rules. Female Japanese live voices control the recorded male English speaker. We strain to hear the latter, sense moving in and out of hearing.

Asking the firm for its opinion of a finished portrait is not permissible, nor is any discussion about a work in progress.

Images appear: A figure walks from one side of the stage to the other, carrying an umbrella of handle and top only. She disappears and reappears as the canvasses are placed on the grid beside her. Two men, white-gloved, respond with contorted movements to the attempts at inscription by two women. A funnel-faced figure tries and retries to bridge the gap between experience and expression. This is Surrealist terrain. This is a department store. This is the (non-)accidental meeting of an umbrella and a sewing machine table.

Customers are obliged to appear punctually for the sittings, since waiting has a bad effect on the firm's mood and may have an adverse effect on the execution of the product.

As the sequence continues, more images jar and collide. The space between, around and beside the two grids doesn't allow straightforward transmission. Communication—from perception to idea—is constantly thwarted. We could almost be watching the crazy dance of neurones, tracing old paths of memory and habit, short circuiting. Or defying the 'laws' of causality and instead finding other paths. There is a search for meaning; that's clear. What is unclear is meaning itself.

The basic novelty offered by the firm as compared to the usual practice is the customer's option of rejecting a portrait if it does not suit him either because of the execution or because of the degree of likeness.

The meter falls silent at the fifth countdown, still turning over. Stillness and even now the suits continue to fill the interstices. Four figures carrying tangerine umbrellas tipped with tangerine pens make another attempt to write in a sequence of awkward pauses and ineffectual gestures. This is the moment when one lifter can throw artistic intent out the window. We are quiet but beginning to stir; uncomfortable with the unevenness.

And there are incidents: (a) a hat is lost; (b) a frame falls from a wall. (In this tightly choreographed piece of the Accidental, there is no room for the unexpected. The performers tense.)

The firm urges a careful perusal of the rules.

But are there rules? Yes and no. The audible counting recommences; the voices recite, the figures move back and forth, to and fro, the foremost grid is 'filled' again: this time with the underside of the canvases—a sculpted twist and knot of cloth. Folds, pleats and more texture. The meter ticks down to zero hour. Another 'lie'. 6 x 0777. *Facade Firm* takes exactly seventy-seven minutes to perform.

Maryanne Lynch.

In *RealTime* #12, April-May, 25,000 copies, forty pages, distributed free across Australia, we'll be presenting more detailed responses and broad overviews of the festival including Bang on a Can, the final Scriabin concert, more on Betontanc, Meryl Tankard's *Rasa*, Gershwin and Bernstein, IRAA's *Blue Hour*, another view of DV8's *Enter Achilles*, the visual arts Biennial, *Faustus in Africa*, *Red Sun-Red Earth*, Robyn Archer and *Ruins of the Future*. To subscribe, \$24 a year for 6 bi-monthly issues, write to RealTime Manager, PO Box 847 Potts Point NSW 2011

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