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 fleshly 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 Ahammam, Andrea Alese, John Bayly, Clare Bicknell, 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/SADR (October 1987) and PHOTOGROUPS OF GOD (April 1988). We also produce street performances.

This is our first international tour. We are performing at the Rockhild Festival (29 June-3 July), in Amsterdam (27-30 July), Salzburg (3-6 August), Dusseldorf (17-19 August) and London's Riverside Studios (22 August-2 September).

THE SYDNEY FRONT INC
PO Box 330
Strawberry Hills NSW 2012
Australia
(02) 211 0835

EUROPEAN CONTACT
Kinesis
Korte Leidschendemstraat 12
1017 RC Amsterdam
(020) 27 7466
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 whose constantly inclusively by the spectators’ appetites to greater and greater sets of self-abuse?

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

I SURVEILLANCE

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

II INQUISTIONS

Each performer encounters his or her interrogator, a quest for truth of sorts; true confession 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/knowers?

III WALZ

Let’s pretend. Let’s turn the torture’s room into a stage. Let’s unplug the electrodes and patch in the lights. Let’s invent a happy carnival of hacknoic suffering, excessive posturing and flapping genitals.

IV EATING CAKE

And having it too. A darker scene. Alienation destroys the fragile innocence of WALZ, 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.

Mal Foster
Bookings

V RECYCLE

The same data yields different results according to the speed of its processing. The carnival reasserts itself. Happy ending.
STAFF CREDITS FOR RIVERSIDE STUDIOS

Sandy Almech
Pia Colledge
Dennis Charles
Andrew Chin
Teeth Chung
Tynney Collins
Christine Cort
Ron Dow
Kevin Evans
Colin Finlay
Jonathan Lawde
SI Lewis
Louise Lobo
Steve Lewis
Kate Macfarlane
Shira Melody
Jim Murray
Darryl Nead
Caroline Zinder
Halie Rowe
Lorraine Selby
Joe Shepard
David Walker
Colin Wills
Joyce Walsh
Ronald Watson
Hannah Wilnet

Finance Assistant
Box Office Manager
Technical Director
Secretary
Programme Co-ordinator
Development Manager
Marketing Officer
Deputy Front of House Manager
Master Carpenter
Deputy Electrical
Director, Riverside Studios
Chimera 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

COMING SOON

Bookings open from 4 September

3 - 14 October 8pm EDWARD PENDRIDGE in THE RIGHT O’CLOCK MAN, A pop-up Guide to The Theatrical Delineation. Music, puppetry, Gordon Craig, juggling, commedia dell’Arte, Victorian directions on the art of conveying emotion, and many other aspects of acting and theatre are the subjects of Edward Pendridge’s entertaining and idiosyncratic pocket guide.

DANCE UMBRELLA 89 9 October - 18 November

Dance Umbrella begins its second decade with the emphasis in ’89 predominately on French dance and choreographers. Dancers at Riverside Studios: ROC IN LONDON, a new company exploring the challenges of dance on a vertical scale with GERARD TESSIER, (9 - 21 October). The Royal Ballet Choreography Group present VONO CHOREOGRAPHERS OF THE ROYAL BALLET COMPANI AND SCHOOL, (12 - 23 November), COMEDIE ANGLIEN FRANCOIS this year bring L'ENSEMBLE DE COLOMB (Colombia Cocktails) to the Festival. (26 - 28 October). THE BAYANING DANCE YOUTH COMPANY perform works by six choreographers: Peter Curtis, Karl Lloyd-Hughes, Sheena Jeyasingh, Jacob Harley, Race Poche and Brian Williams. The evening performance will feature THE HAMBURGER DANCE GROUP, (28 October). The much admired ISRAELI DANCE COMPANY return with two new works, (5 - 12 November). Finally, choreographer Leo Anderson has devised a work for eight women, four of whom are core members of THE CHILDREN, (16 - 18 November).

16 - 22 October Annie Productions present a rehearsed reading of SYLLOX 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 Irish actor Ciaran Hinds makes his London debut heading a distinguished cast of British actors.

31 October - 25 November TALANA present THE DREADS ARE NOT TO BLAME by Ola Rotimi. Director Yorume Brewer, designer Ken Collins. Rotimi transplants Sophocles’ Oedipus Rex to African soil using ancient West African rituals, traditional proverbs and Yoruba songs and dances. This production stars Jeffery Rimmer and Leonie Poches. Brought to you by the director and designer of Talana’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, TANSHI’S THE UNFORGIVING and THEATRE OF CONFLICT – both opening 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, dispyaling his genitalia beneath the most opposite 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.