

Degrees of pathos: Sydney performance

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in us in language. The play itself is no longer revolutionary, that moment has passed, but its strangeness still acts on us and its moral is felt. The experience is not of seeing a museum piece, though at times Broad's refusal to pervasively contemporise it made me feel at times that we were supposed to be admiring a classic. In an utterly different way, Urban Theatre Projects' *Manufacturing Dissent* evokes and reproduces classic manifestos and performances from the 20th century history of the theatre of opposition while returning again and again, with grim contemporaneity, to the plight of the refugee. This is theatre as essay, a discursive, chatty talkshow of a performance at a very long desk (with microphones and texts a la the Wooster Group) where performers can drop in and out of various personae, address us directly, turn inward, histrionic, comic, pathetic. They read manifestos aloud, turn jury, enquiry, newsreaders, singers, slipping deftly in an out of roles that occasionally evoke characters who might return later (or not)—like the woman who, alone at a microphone, struggles across the evening to sing a song (is it Vietnamese?) full of pathos...and finally does. I don't know what she's singing, but it sounds nostalgic, full of yearning and, finally, release.

A friend, who knows about these things, tells me a few days later that nostalgia is a serious business. It was once recognised in 19th century Europe as a psychological condition that could kill—people died of nostalgia. It was common to soldiers and invariably it was tied to the loss of homeland.

For those in the know, Mayakovsky, Brecht, the Living Theatre, Boal, Community Theatre, Müller, all make their appearances one way or another in the course of the show, sometimes facetly (the sorry evocation of the Living Theatre), sometimes cheaply (a nonetheless hilarious litany of the buzz words of 80s community theatre), sometimes painfully (the revolutionary

theatre company with their wooden guns who can't spill blood when it comes to the crunch). The show's multimedia dimension includes Philip Ruddock's favorite—video footage of Australian wildlife and deserts sent out as a deterrent to would-be refugees. (Brenda I. Croft, at a PICA-Perth Festival forum, apparently said she wished Indigenous people had had that tape 200 years ago.) And there are moments of provocation (familiar to some, a surprise to most): a woman performer asks, begs, demands someone from the audience spit on her (no takers this night, but some on others). Throughout, a man (Woody Chamron) in a wire cage with a potted palm (evoking Australia's refugee detention centres), has been sitting with his back to us watching the Olympics on television. At the end he introduces himself and tells the story of his escape from Cambodia. He says we can leave at any time. But it's hard; even though his story seems interminable (if finely delivered), it would be like spitting on him. What is interesting is that he is presented as real, he plays himself. And that he's not an unhappy refugee. He's home, though it's no longer Cambodia. There's hope. Well, there was once for refugees to this country.

Manufacturing Dissent sets itself a tough task, one which sometimes sets it teetering on the edge of impotence and cynicism when rattling superficially through the history of radical theatre; the performers don't always seem at home with their material; and the show occasionally loses its shape and momentum (the potential of the team at the desk hasn't been realised). But *Manufacturing Dissent* has stayed with me because of its insistent questioning about how to make performance as protest and how it manages to walk the fine line between accessibility and challenge, embracing an audience largely unaware of a (predominantly Western) tradition of resistance in the theatre. But it was the topicality of the refugee issue in Australia, the directness, humour

and anger with which it was addressed that kept open the possibility of theatre as protest. *Made by the UTP Performance Ensemble with John Baylis and Paul Dwyer. Director, John Baylis. Performance Space, Nov 30- Dec 10.*

De Quincey Etc: *Walking Species 1*

Three women in raincoats walk the perimeters of the room, each at her own pace, in her own time, until we absorb their rhythms, glimpse images and texts on small video monitors in corners, a landscape projection on a wall (finally an electrical storm), absorb sounds—from the swish of coats, feet, Wade Marynowsky's score. Rhythms change, the trio intersect, speed becomes collective, the bodies almost in competition to hold the space. The raincoats, worn reversed, are now right way about and open, the bodies naked, self-contained, the journey as insistent as ever, even if it goes nowhere but in and out of itself—or is it a space being claimed, and we, the audience, intruders. The facility of performance to evoke states of being (in contemplation, under physical duress, both here it seems) is nowhere more evident than in this kind of work. Although as yet lacking the definition and certainty of their director's famed movement (De Quincey doesn't appear in this show), the performers (Tina Harrison, Victoria Hunt, Marnie Georgiette Orr) move with such purpose and focus that their quest is convincing. Emerging from the second instalment of her Triple Alice project, De Quincey connects the performance in the end with the Irati Wanti campaign by Indigenous women to prevent their land being maintained as a radioactive dump (a legacy of the Maralinga bombs). Then other meanings flood back across our memory of the performance. *Artspace Offsite Event, Imperial Stacks, Sydney, Jan 5-7.*



Guillermo Gómez-Peña will be in residence at Performance Space to produce a multi-disciplinary performance with an "ephemeral troupe" of eight Australian artists. Gómez-Peña creates what critics have called "Chicano cyber-punk performances" characterised by transgressive aesthetics and radical politics. Internationally renowned for developing multi-centric narratives created from a border perspective, his work explores the labyrinths of identity and the precipices of nationality.

We are seeking an artistically and culturally diverse team of four emerging artists to collaborate on this project. We welcome expressions of interest from emerging performers, writers, choreographers, screen based or sound artists. You need to be available to work full time during the five week residency from June 11 to July 15 in Sydney.

Expressions of interest should be received by March 5.

For more information on: the project, eligibility, selection criteria and remuneration—please email admin@performancespace.com.au or call 02 9698 7235