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## Fringe Review London Fringe Un-Re Strict-ed



Venue:

Arcola Theatre, Create09 Festival

## Low Down

*Un-Re Strict-ed* by PartSuspended draws the audience into its strange world straight from the start. *Un-Re Strict-ed* was performed as part of the Arcola Create 09 Dance and physical theatre festival and previously appeared at Camden People's theatre as part of Scenepool,

*Un-Re Strict-ed* can be commended for its use of the space and the stage, its symmetry, and its geometrical minimalism that contains the imaginative nature of the characters' language and gives it some order.

## Review

In the entrance hall to the Arcola Studio K the audience is soon enough introduced to the play by a woman in a short smart white dress who uses only the words 'sorry... please...no...thank you...'. The same woman leads the audience into the stage space in an orderly and at times forceful manner.

Once in the theatre, the audience are met by a male character oddly holding a bucket of water and see a rope suspended across the stage that divides the space into two, the back and the front.

The pieces seems to present short sections, short enclosed scenes with no apparent link- the programme talks about six episodes, that do not however, come across very distinctly on stage.

The action begins with another female character at the back of the stage. She is confronted by the male character holding the bucket of water. He interrogates her about her entrance to the UK. The smartly dressed woman comes in back on stage and sets up what it looks like a dinner table; she invites people from the audience with her usual minimalist language; in turns she instructs them to sit around the table to hold glasses, to wear hats etc.; then, she abruptly sends them back to stage. She isolates herself and starts chanting what sounds like a middle-eastern song.

The piece develops and gradually grows in intensity with real moments of exquisite imagination. One character clips her body with pegs, while another nervously cuts lemons, eats some slices and attaches whole lemons to her body covering herself with plastic foil. The plastic foil rolls are, then, let free to roll down from the rope across the stage, further dividing the two spaces and creating an interesting effect of containment and fluidity. In the meantime the character holding the bucket of water appears and disappears on stage and becomes a looming presence as well as a sad figure at odd with himself and the space around him.

It is difficult to find a common thread to the different scenes that shine with their own poetry, a poetry that is, however, almost impossible to decipher. As the piece develops, ideas come to mind: isolation, pain, and imprisonment. The programme does not give much away about the piece: it talks of identity, urban environment and imprisonment saying of the piece that 'it explores restrictions upon identity in the urban environment'. It does not, though, fully explain what

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## Un-Re Strict-ed |London Fringe | ...

the performers make of this concept on stage. The show seems to go beyond this idea that was once at the origin of the performers' exploration.

It is not appropriate to look at this piece using the same sort of canons employed by textual theatre. There is no need to find a centre, a plot as such. The intention is to let the audience explore together with the performers the space, feelings and emotions in the space and their relationship with objects. This is a devised theatre piece or what the production calls 'site-specific theatre'. It exploits the physicality of the space and objects using video projections and fragmented movements meaning the theatre becomes a hybrid of poetry, words and pure movements. The performers work well within this medium as an ensemble and as creators.

This is the 'conceptual art' of theatre that is at times too abstract and minimalist, yet is also fascinating and all embracing. This kind of theatre is not, however, merely physical theatre as the latter often uses 'dance' as language- but it can be compared to British experimental theatre of the like of *Forced entertainment*, the Sheffield based company. Unlike the work by *Forced entertainment*, though, this piece is essentially European (by which I mean continental European) - its cast and creative team have worked in countries like Greece, Belgium etc. The abstractness of its conception, the reticence of a language that does not easily give away to meaning reminds of Continental European theatre in the best of its experimentation.

Whereas companies like *Forced entertainment*, soon easily enough resort to the shock, nudity, comedy sketches, PartSuspended language is pure almost 'virgin' in its delicate approach as it explores the possibility of theatrical languages, its physicality, movements the fluidity of objects, the relationship between objects and body etc. It is a sort of language that creates metaphors that stand on their own, concealing as much as it amuses and enchants.

It is hard to find what the piece is really about and if there is a flaw it is in the raw quality of the delivery at times. It is almost as if we were watching the actors still in their devising process. But beyond that, if we accept that what the audience is watching is the actors' experiencing the stage, the objects and accept that the audience is part of it as result, we can start to look at this piece with open eyes. This piece is not pretentious and it pushes the audience's imagination and their senses so it can be said that this piece has succeeded in its intent. For this reason, I welcome more work of this kind by the subtle and intelligent performers from PartSuspended.

Reviewed by Mary Mazzilli 11 July 2009

**Website :**

**[www.partsuspended.com](http://www.partsuspended.com)**