

NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND. Oraculos, Enrique Vargas, Taller de Investigacion de la Imagen Dramatica, June 10.

"Down with the museum-kitchen" [Marinetti, 1931].

I feel trapped in my hotel. The door swings shut on a small foggy room, a false fire alarm raises shackles every morning. Reviewing a Festival programme is an overflow of input--talks, walks, undergrounds, the worry of brollies, babbles, the infliction of endless arts and the confines of London squares. A gaggle of Australians holding the fort makes me feel Australian, in that I never ever felt at home there. And in this land of TS Eliot, the sweet Thames is indeed sweet, cleaner than when he wrote, absent of empty bottles, dead bodies, and the decay of European civilisation. To the traveller, the water is safe here. London is vibrant, swinging, hard to contemplate leaving, even for a daytrip; it seems to know itself and like itself (bar North-South divides): post-election euphoria, or anaesthesia? (In ten days, no-one has mentioned Tony Blair.) London theatres are being restored and rearranged. The Wasteland is only within.

Yestermorning, I was overflowing with words--a sense of body charged and charging over cobbles, into landscapes, fed with colours and what Virginia blithely calls Ideas in Every Window. But by the evening, wordless. What has happened to me here?

Is it my tete-a-Tate: the red room of Rothkos, maroons and blacks on red, reds on red, hints of window bars, a quiet scream. I am seeping, no I will not go down, will not go gentle, the quietness of disappearing squares. There is no vertical hold.... . I leave the room.

Baselitz' amorphous green angsts hold diagonals over me; elsewhere, Fabro's tall fluted marble, a heavenly aspiration, cool like an unsinging lute, looks for answers in the stars. I reach horizontal: my breasts, my tastebuds, the serpentine (re)calls.... .

But this is not unwording me. What saves me from the edge is my own corporeality--the choice to leave, feel similarities and edges, depart, or stay and assess and feel. Keifer's ash paintings confront and harrow but show me their edge. They do not \*disappear\* me.

Enter ZS to Oraculos, where I am invited to a sensual assault into mystery. I emerge from St Pancras station, enter another underground.

Trust, we are told by Enrique; the first guide sweetly smiles. I begin to absent more senses than are exercised. Many hands in soft darkness guide me. It is clear the text is set, the Devil's tango fixed, an actor confounded when I touch him. Rendered childish, I play, half-numbed to questions, impulses, associations. My partner is "corrected" in the labyrinth, "failing" in a task for which, logically, sensually, there should be many options. By this, I am horrified.

As I shuffle from cell to cell, sands underfoot, I realise how narrowed the landscape has become.

My associations cannot go where they need; I begin to feel what in this labyrinth is wrong.

For years, I lived beachside, north of a New South Wales industrial town. The trees screamed the murder of peoples, mountains wept and prayed, singing like the Thames did to Eliot, demographic witnesses to life's battles and scarrings/passings. Sand underfoot meant quietness speaking to toes; rock

undulations talked. My land, shoring and assuring me. And enacting me, making me sense the referents of balance and imbalance in my perceptions.

It is a quiet space (apart from the roar of oceans and leaves)--no-one smiles at me, no hands prevent me falling, aloneness is the state I learn. I am woven in a fabric so webbed to the wounds of the world that a butterfly fluttering flutters me. (And yet, crucially, in that sharing of flutterings, I would not presume to dance anyone else's tune.)

Theatre is work. Seeing is work, life is work. A piecing of patterns to make meaning, to have them shattered, to repattern, reshatter, until the shattering loses its glassiness and becomes more like water running softly within the song .

Oraculos is not my story. It is theirs. I am part of their research and know I don't fit in.

The claims made for this work are enormous, supposedly supported by psychoanalysts. Save us, now and at the hour.

Although pleasant enough, that too is difficult. In all mythologies, the labyrinth, the underground, is an arduous journey, the element of struggle in one's ascent/descent crucial to knowing the question you need ask when you arrive. When we arrive, we are plonked at the door and asked to ask a question. (No matter how harrowing the underground, it's never that bad).

IT IS THE tube, afterwards, the underground at violet hour: a man without verbal boundaries sings, welcoming all visitors, telling us the sights--a running commentary of where are the museums, the schools, the Thames, where the ladies may swim without costumes. He should be payed. He reminds us Holborn's Picadilly line is closed, admonishes us all to walk more anyway, and offers a complimentary imaginary glass of champagne. Welcome, welcome welcome he says, in a voice high-pitched like Edna Everage's, but better, to anyone who will receive the welcome. No-one sings along with him.

He grates and works on us. He is neither quaint nor disruptive; people try to react with offense, or ridicule, but it doesn't quite work. He is too true, what he says too poignant and accurate to be dismissed, and yet his proximity is not so much invasive, as paints my skin. He is real to himself and real to me: the fake sweet smiles of Oraculos begin to cloy.

Zsuzsanna Soboslay