

Anita Fricke

Strip Tease

Plastic strip curtains, wood, acrylic
1997

YZ Space

University of Western Sydney Nepean, Sydney

Teasing out the Nature of Participation

...Earlier in the year I had seen an installation by Austrian artist, Anita Fricke, entitled **Strip Tease** in Space YZ at UWS Nepean. Space YZ has two skylights, through which very beautiful cloud formations can often be seen. **Strip Tease** consisted of two white cuboid platforms with steps leading up to them, positioned directly underneath the two skylight ducts. Hanging from the ducts to the edge of the platforms were old-fashioned flyscreens (the multicoloured plastic strips which are occasionally found in doorways of milkbars). These strips formed a flexible screen or a curtain, so that anyone standing on the platforms would be partially concealed from other people in the gallery.

In a way, Fricke had created an ideal viewing platform from which to inspect the heavens. The platforms, however, like stands for medal winners at the Olympic Games, were 'stages' for performing: any viewer who ventured up the steps would be vulnerable, on show to the rest of the people in the room- but only partially, due to the flystrips.

Standing in Space YZ, I felt I was in a double-bind: in order to assume the position of the viewer, I had to mount the pedestal, and thus put myself on display. On the other hand, if I chose not to mount the pedestal, I could still become a voyeur, spying on others who did put themselves on show.

In **Strip Tease**, my non-participation was just as much an active choice as participation. It seemed that Fricke had activated this self-consciousness in the audience without needing to use language. In her case the viewer required some kind of *visual* or *bodily* literacy in order to participate. That is, instead of being able to read words, Fricke's viewers needed to be able to 'read' and interpret the objects in the room: first of all to realise that these cuboid shapes comprised 'steps' and 'platforms', and then to decipher the bodily function of the objects - steps invite you to walk up to them, platforms invite you to stand on them. These 'bodily invitations' are of course confused by the gallery context. Is a set of stairs in a gallery still just a set of stairs? Can I still use them as stairs? The basic ability to name these objects as steps and platforms is one I imagine most of Fricke's viewers would have possessed.

What I found intriguing in **Strip Tease** was a kind of meta-literacy in operation - the potential to 'read' the entire installation as enacting tensions of participation/non-participation....a kind of Candid Camera feeling which emerges when, as a viewer, I realise that the ball is in my court.

Lucas Ihlein, Postwest # 13, Sydney 1997