

Arch (the Politics of Fragmentation).

Scene

On the convict work colony and ex-naval base of Cockatoo Island, in an industrial building, previously the mould loft- a military workshop for cutting the metal patterns and drafting the moulds of ships in full scale.

Setting

Four free-standing paintings that work like large screens, delineate the space to create three areas of action for the performance. As they move from one area to the next, the actors become less archetypal and more familiar. The play continues on a loop between the three spaces, the audience follows the action.

The characters, A, B and P, wear costumes similar to the paintings' surface- remnants from a decadent past. A is the director, B her second and P, the Peacock.

Area One

[Enter A, from behind a large screen, she pauses with her back to the smaller adjacent screen staring straight ahead. A then walks across the area marking the space of the stage. B and P remain behind the painting. P is seated on a long piece of black cardboard. B, standing, peeks through a hole in the canvas, looking to A for direction. B holds a plum wrapped in a cloth behind his back.]

Biography

Alexis Teplin's practice is rooted in painting and performance that extends to include sculpture and large scale installation. Concerned with the language of abstraction, Teplin constructs performative installations based in seduction, artificiality and cultural signification.

Exhibitions and performances include *Drag, Push HOOT*, Mary Mary, Glasgow; *HE and HO for O*, Rise Projects, Silvie Fleming Collection, London, *Sacre 101* - An exhibition based on the Rite of Spring, P and C, Migros Museum, Zurich; San Marino Calling, Museo D'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, San Marino; *sss T !!*, Hayward Gallery, Project Space, London; *The Party*, performances at Tramway for Glasgow International, Glasgow and the Serpentine Gallery, SANAA Pavilion, London.

Arch (the Politics of Fragmentation) was created for the 20th Biennale of Sydney in 2016.



Alexis Teplin Arch (*the Politics of Fragmentation*) 2016

A: Go on-

B: Where?

A: Around the corner and back again.

[B walks the length of the screen dragging the piece of cardboard with P seated on it. He pulls her out into the first arena crossing in front of the painting. P gazes around the space.]

B: A good night to be abroad and looking for game.

A: *[to B]*. Are you comfortable?

B: *[drops the cardboard, leaving P centre stage and takes a step to his left]*. Sure, I'm comfortable *[dusting off his hands]*. Is anything worth this struggle?

A: *[circling in front of P, she stops opposite B and speaks directly to him]*. Seated and not surrounded might be very well inclined to be settled.

B: Seated and not surrounded.

A: Who settles a private life?

P: *[aloofly]*. She ran....

B: *[takes a step towards A]*. They saw that she had to, there was no choice.

A: No one has to run. Roll your hoop, thump your tub.... mobilize, mobilize and plan.

[A moves diagonally to P, still seated on her sled.]

B: A partridge and a peacock both sink their tails are too heavy.

[Now behind P, A links her arms through P's and helps her to stand up.]

P: Up like a sun down like a pancake.

[Walking over to them, B unwraps the plum and places the plum into P's mouth].

B: I like a digestive, they're very delicious.

A: *[moving away]*. A woman with salt on her tongue.

B: Cozy. [He tucks the cloth into the front of P's dress.] What's the matter don't you like to talk anymore?

A: She's a joiner. She gives up and goes elsewhere. *[Still moving she stops downstage].*

B: *[taking a step backwards]*. Ladies are polite to everyone.

A: I'd give anything to be like you, people respect you.

B: Why should I talk about it, it's quiet, it's silent.

[P takes a bite out of the plum, removes it from her mouth and holds it away from her body.]

P: An open palm.

A: I can't resist dropping something into it.

B: The workers lie still while the Humors hoot and the peacock throws silver coins from her chair.

P: The actions of the performers are not illustrating the text.

B: The star maker is cold and indifferent, [A crosses in front of P.] transparent with measured abstraction.

A: *[stopping opposite B.]* I make my own luck.

P: I can never get a zipper to close.

[P gestures, swinging her arms back and forth using arm movements from Virgil Thomson and Gertrude Stein's the Four Saints, 1934.]

B: The Sea, the sea!

A: Can you hear the sea?

B: Keats favorite Shakespeare quote, according to Iris Murdoch.

A: As Elizabeth Taylor would say, quoting Bette Davis.

[P puts the plum back in her mouth. A and B continue to comment.]

A: The calendula was flat like an old rag.

B: That terrible dying duck look. I think it's her nature.

A: A garden inside and outside of the old wall. *[to P]*. Put your hands up, up.

[P raises her arms.]

A: The calendula was flat like an old rag.

B: That terrible dying duck look. I think it's her nature.

A: A garden inside and outside of the old wall. *[to P]*. Put your hands up, up.

[P raises her arms.]

B: My sister has long arms. A machine for exploring experience....

A: Up, up. *[P shakes her hands]*. As long as that? *[A nods her head, understanding.]* Positions of the workers! GOOD, good.

[P spits the stone at B. It bounces, then rolls by his feet.]

A: Keep your shirt on.

B: You are right this is a machine. I wish it to talk.

P: She'd forbidden him to speak his own language and then hers, so what was he to speak? *[To A]*. If you enjoy it, you understand it.

A: It start's already.

B: What's that?

A: Tact. *[To B]*. Get working.

[B crosses behind P and places his right hand over Ps mouth, with the thumb resting on the larynx, first finger on the lips second finger on the nose. P makes a sound kh-kh-kh-kh-kh-kh.]

B: Is it safe?

A: We gotta get a full day's work outta that woman.

B: I drop my Ts sometimes.

A: From the throat, *[P makes the sound again]*. she feels. From the neck, she arches.

B: The body is thought of as a processor.

[B removes his hand, wiping it on his trousers.]

A: I see no functional advantage in a marvelous mouth.

P: A riddle for those that watch it, a companion for those that use it.

A: Don't talk to me about politics. Rearranging information is the main way of changing experience.

P: la la di, la la di. What bliss it was not to have to shut up.

B: *[whispers as if speaking for P, he takes a step backwards]*. I wasn't to talk with my mouth.

P: *[making another gesture with her hands from the movement of the Four Saints]*. I do what I do for a living it has to do with supply and demand.

A: That's what it will become. Narrative as experience equals action.

P: *[looking down at her hands]*. It started at 21 now it's 34.

B: 34 what?

P: *[drops her arms]*. Limbs and legs. I'm no longer.

A: Which self for materialism? We're going to have trouble she's a thinker.

P: Accepting such a frame means the end of humanism.

B: As well as a talker. A most faithful obedient friend, *[Taking another step back]*. It is silent when I wish it to be silent it talks when....

P: *[extending both arms away from her body]*. They have soiled everything, even the vomit of bones.

B: Handsome is as handsome does.

P: *[giggles]*. His suits are so tight he can't run.

A: Go.

[B shuffles over to P and pulls the cloth from the front of her dress. He picks the plum up off the ground and shuffles behind the screen to the large painting in the second arena. P joins B.]

A: *[looking through the screen at B and P].* I wanted to go back and see them *[she crosses right.]* together with me not watching.

[A looks out to the Audience. She nods at them to follow her to the next arena for the second scene.]

Area two

[P and B stand next to each other in front of the second large screen. B is moving his arms up and down in a gesture from the Jan Mayta Manch clock. P has the plum in her mouth.]

A: When there's nothing original the temptation is to take what there is and give it a new name.

B: *[to P].* Do you imagine yourself an old woman?

P: *[takes the plum out of her mouth and places it on the ground].* I don't think we're going to live to be very old. I don't think it matters very much, you understand.

B: To see I at the centre of the world is a modern feeling.

P: I'm afraid of distorting things. My mind is blank.

B: Sleep, that other country.

A: Ha ha Ha! *[A crosses right, P moves down to the centre of the stage].*
Enemies are you tired or don't you recognise me?

P: I don't know what I would do without dreaming.

A: *[speaking to the Audience].* My work is very pleasant the pay is excellent.

[B picks up the plum placing it back into the cloth, moving left.]

B: Some very precarious patterns of civilization are going to dissolve.
[B stops and places on the plum and cloth on the ground]. Which is why I feel all the time so unreal.

[All three are now positioned on a diagonal.]

P: When you talk like that I just want to cuddle.

A: I do what I do for a living it has to do with supply and demand.
[Walking towards the large painting, she stops opposite B.]

P: Supply and demand? What are you supplying? What are you demanding.

B: They started on you honey boy.

A: Tea and bread, tea and bread. A steering group, politics stops for no one.

P: I don't owe you anything fresh monkey.

A: Tea and bread, tea and bread. A database for people, organise the wards!

P: I want to know where we're going.

A: The world of flowers is no longer.

B: I didn't know socialism existed till I met Doris.

P: There is something wrong with my mouth, I can't scream.

A: What does Princess say? *[A crosses left to join B]*. I quite agree with her. *[P moves to her right, looking at her hands]*. Clock who those people are.

B: She was always made up with thick powder.

A: And a pair of long sharp fingernails *[to P]*. You're so cute with your haircut.

[P begins the dance of Gilda (Rita Hayworth). A and B watch.]

A: The right to perform. Hit it, hold it, very good. *[muttering]*. The will of the popular movement....as far as I can see everything is falling apart.

B: Can women have wishes?

A: We live with them and use them. Psyche and Soma.

P: *[still dancing]*. I like to wear black, dark skirts, turtleneck sweaters.

A: We're very interesting, not very important. I stand outside.

B: Did your will affect the situation? Are you decent?

P: Me, sure I'm decent. I live the life I like to lead.

A: This is where the canary is Johnny. Loving is a silly word.

B: *[confused]*. Can she sing? Why would the funny man in your life have the same name as a bird in a song?

[P stops dancing].

A: *[for P]*. Put the blame on me boys, put the blame on me.

P: *[turns to face A]*. Don't make me a joke. I've never had a long period of being happy, do you think anybody has?

A: I think you can be peaceful for a long-time but to be happy is different.

B: Ah, I have searched for a little piece of sea foam.

P: *[walks downstage]*. I start like this.

[A steps into the centre so that the three are again in a diagonal, A crosses her hands over her chest and flutters her fingers.]

A: Her survival depended on me being her.

[A's hands stop fluttering but remain on her chest.]

B: She's a dark horse. *[to P]*. Just say it.

P: *[facing the audience]*. What? I feel weird. I slept with this man.

A: He pushed the cycle along with one foot. She caught up, he fell over. She held out her hand.

B: They stay together, hand in hand, *[taking a tentative step towards A]*. hand in hand.

P: With all that kicking I lost who I am.

A: A star of fortune.

B: Hand in hand, *[crossing right, very slowly behind A]*. hand in hand.

P: I only get kicked around. *[looking at A]*. Don't you know that I'm the laundry?

A: You annoy me.

P: If I do *[starting to walk backwards]* it isn't intentional.

B: *[B crosses left, behind A].* Boy, it's cool here. *[Pause, looking at the screens.]* What about these pictures? They're putting them in containers.

P: *[stops walking and faces B, they are now parallel].* Leave the bones alone.

A: *[drops her hands].* In place of situations, there is logic in it.

P: I keep searching in the devil. If the matter halts liberation will lose steam.

B: Tea, bread, tea, bread. Do not break my heart.

A: Oh let it be the matter is a bit deep.

[P begins to dance again].

B: Once broken never mended?

A: Oh dance a bit, skip a bit, the matter is broken. Pity is not my profession.

P: *[stops dancing and walks downstage].* Do you look down on all women, or just the ones you know?

[P crosses left in front of A, B crosses right, behind A. They stop on the diagonal.]

B: Don't bother he's a nobody.

A: She's right. Get going.

B: He took a picture,

[A backs up diagonally towards the plum on the ground.]

P: She smiles, flips her hair and sips her coffee. It's a royal flush.

B: I took a picture,

P: Yesterday morning was a frost. Look at it now it's come to life.

B: He took a picture,

P: *[turns to face the audience].* Yes daddy, I'm listening.

A: I'd rather say I have director approval.

B: I took a picture.

A: A picture of what?

P: Kisses are the least of it.

A: Put your hands up, up.

[B brings his arms up and starts a second Jan Mayta Manch movement from side to side.]

A: *[moves forward and changes places with P while speaking]*. I left because I couldn't stand that life, it was horrible, it was sun down parties and tea parties. Leaving I would break some chain of repetition.

[As A meets her, P begins to back up diagonally into the centre of the stage.]

P: There isn't much to be said for sincerity itself.

B: *[dropping his arms]*. We understand why you left but we don't forgive you.

B: Do think it's important, it's important to me.

P: Shall we have a drink before I start to cry?

A: Oh, baby, don't you cry.

B: Hand in hand, hand in hand.

A: It makes all the difference tasteful and pleasant surroundings.

[B leads P and A out of the second Area to the back of the third where three costume stands are set up. P removes her hat, B and A remove their placard vests. They place them onto the costume stands. A goes to stand by a window to the left, looking out to the sea. B sits down on one of the three short benches positioned in the rehearsal area. Scripts and water bottles have been left on the floor. P stands near the back of a small screen and starts to rehearse her Martha Graham exercises.]

Area 3

[In their rehearsal space the banter of the actors is relaxed and familiar. They use scripts from previous performances as everyday language.]

A: *[gazing out the window]*. He wrote me a letter, it was difficult to understand. How could I understand the emphasis without the voice? *[to B]*. It was like the first time I saw you, sitting with your back slumped. You said that the first swim of the year always makes you tired. Then you read it to me from the book in your lap. I found it overly poetic.

B: *[looking at P]*. All those lovely feathers, looking out, falling in.

P: *[walks away from the screen towards A, A moves to sit next to B on one of the benches]*. Face first, smack, tumble.

A: You saw them. You watched. Exceptional.

P: I kept up, swimming alongside the boat, I saw them.

B: SMACK.

P: I watched them sink and did nothing.

A: So elegant, so wrong. Where are your sticks now?

P: If I wrote a book there would be a lot of chapters of tears.

A: Perhaps.

B: *[leans on his seat towards A]*. U, U, you Yoooo.

[P comes to join the others].

A: *[to B]*. I knew beige was a thing when the woman next to me asked for her hair to be dyed beige.

[P now stands near the third pew.]

B: Pathetic.

P: Yes, he says terrible things about her.

B: *[Looking at P]*. It is better to say nothing and appear a fool than to open your mouth and prove it.

P: Ma, oui, c'est vrai.

B: Quite. Quite.

A: Beige a thing, that's funny isn't it. Or maybe it was Khaki, yes yes it was Khaki- But I wasn't sitting next to her. I read it in a magazine. She wanted to dye her hair Khaki. An artist they said.

B: *[standing up]*. Suck in.

P: *[directing B who raises his arms and lowers them, breathing in and out]*. Suck in Greed, suck out. Suck in Greed, suck out.

A: *[to B]*. Move those sticks around.

P: *[still directing B's movement]*. Suck in Greed, suck out. Suck in Greed, suck out.

B: Hold on, hold out your hand.

[P extends her hand].

A: Sea Saw. *[A stands up and walks over to the screen.]* He slammed the door I stood in the rain.

[P tilts her head to the left and goes from standing to her knees to standing again, a gesture from Dreyer's Jeanne d'Arc, while the other two converse.]

B: Was it my fault or yours?

A: I was never sure so I waited.

P: *[stands up and walks over to A's bench]*. It's clean, no dirt on it.

A: *[begins a gesture taken from one of Sonia Delanuey's promotion films]*. Don't tell me I'll tell you. You expect to be criticized?

P: *[sitting down]*. Perhaps. You told me....

B: I don't belong here, I don't belong there.

A: You don't approve of criticism then. Go to the wall.

P: *[whispers]*. I do not understand.

A: I believe it is before you. *[with force]*. Go to the wall.

B: I thought, at first, that you were using a term that you are accustomed to yourself.

A: Go to the wall.

P: I see.

[A drops her arms and turns to look at P. B stands up, he looks out the window, crossing his arms.]

P: *[to A]*. Il n'y a pas de bruit, je n'attende rien.

[A and P watch B.]

B: There are days when I'm fed up with everything and would like to get out.

A: *[to B]*. I'm really sorry to see you go. Non voglio, veramente, non voglio che tutto cambi.

B: *[looking over his shoulder at A]*. It is dull. I do not want to be dull. But it is dull. *[B looks out the window again and uncrossing his arms.]* My eyes, my eyes a little boy shouts, he's looking for his goggles.

A: *[looking over B's shoulder]*. A woman runs, from the stern to the bow, in her pink bikini- holding a coiled black rope. Where are their manners now?

B: Eloquence alone shall guide them.

P: *[whispers]*. Tic tac toe.

B: *[whispers]*. Oh no.

[B turns around and kneels leaning on his bench. P and B mock A.]

B: You're funny.

P: Laquelle vous préférez?

B: Which what?

P: Cette si

A: *[turns her back on B and P and sits on the floor]*. I can't be bothered.

B: There are days when I'm fed up and I'd like to get out.

[B stands up and walks back over to the costume stand. He puts his vest back on. P and A follow him. They walk back across the Area three, then two and set the scene to begin the performance again, P moving her sled back behind the screen, B picks up the plum and A takes her place in Area One.]



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