Chapter 2
The Sydney Front and Grotesque Realism

During its seven years as an ensemble, The Sydney Front produced seven major productions: \textit{Waltz, John Laws/Sade, The Pornography of Performance, Photocopies of God, Don Juan, First and Last Warning} and \textit{Passion}.\textsuperscript{1} \textit{The Pornography of Performance} was based on and incorporated elements of the two earlier works, \textit{Waltz} and \textit{John Laws/Sade}. In addition to this body of work, the company produced the solo shows \textit{The Nuremberg Recital} performed by Nigel Kellaway and \textit{Woman in the Wall} performed by Clare Grant.\textsuperscript{2} \textit{First and Last Warning} received The Sydney Theatre Critics Prize for Fringe Theatre in 1992.

In 1986 at The Brasserie at the Adelaide Festival, John Baylis and Kellaway concluded in the since oft-cited statement that the “balls had gone out of Avant Garde theatre” and decided to form The Sydney Front (quoted in Broun 1994: 29). Grant, Christopher Ryan, Andrea Aloise and Ros Hervey joined Baylis and Kellaway to create the group. Periodical contributor Mickey Furuya constituted the final member of the original team. Choreographer and dancer Sue-ellen Kohler replaced Hervey in 1989. However, Kohler left the group soon after the Australian performances of \textit{The Pornography of Performance}, due to injury. In his ‘Obituary’ following The Sydney Front’s decision to disband, Alex Broun attributes the initial success of the company partially to the recognition that its members had achieved independently prior to the formation of the company (1994: 29).\textsuperscript{3}

Members of The Sydney Front had diverse performance and training backgrounds, in music, dance and physical theatre, and brought a range of artistic experiences to the company.\textsuperscript{4} Kellaway had studied Butoh with Min Tanaka in Japan and became the first Australian to train with Suzuki Tadashi and his Suzuki Company of Toga (SCOT).\textsuperscript{5} Both Ryan and Aloise had worked with Entr’Acte Theatre, and Grant had been a member of the Kiss Theatre Company.
based in Holland and had worked for One Extra Dance Company. In addition, the company collaborated with a number of other artists including opera singer Annette Tesoriero, composer Raffaele Marcellino and performer Elise Ahamnos on Don Juan in 1990–91.6 The Sydney Front responded to the transformations taking place at the time in the performance scene in Sydney, which included, according to Baylis, the One Extra Company “go[ing] mainstream and los[ing] any experimental edge” (quoted in Olb with Miller 1989: 17). For Baylis, “[t]here seemed to be all this territory which needed to be explored and no one was doing it” (quoted in Olb with Miller 1989: 17). The Sydney Front did not regard itself as a performance art troupe. As Broun points out, the group consistently emphasised the theatrical explorations essential to the company’s work (1994: 29). Up until the mid-1990s, Sydney-based ensembles like Entr’Acte, One Extra and Theatre is Moving, along with The Sydney Front, had “subverted notions of performance” (Wynne-Jones 2000: 94). But in the 1990s, one by one they disbanded and left what Angharad Wynne-Jones calls an “awareness of the emptiness and vacuum of the contemporary performance vista without those groups” (2000: 94).

The Sydney Front’s staging of “unspeakable acts” distinguished the company from other ensembles in the period (Broun 1994: 30). Perhaps notoriety as opposed to critical appraisal, however, marked The Sydney Front’s early years in Sydney and in London. To quote Kellaway, The Sydney Front aimed to do “all those things that were going to make a noise” to generate publicity and ticket sales for the company (quoted in Hamilton 1995). It was not, however, until The Pornography of Performance that the group achieved noticeable recognition and initially there was no Federal and/or State funding.

The Pornography of Performance
The Sydney Front launched the show at the Fringe Festival in Adelaide in 1988, before staging the production at The Performance Space in Sydney and then touring it to Europe in 1989. In Sydney, The Pornography of Performance sparked public controversy following the call from Reverend Fred Nile of the Festival of Light Party for an official investigation into the performance, in the interest of “community standards”, to be conducted by the vice squad under the directive of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services (New South Wales Legislative Council 1988: 3583). In London, Baylis