

ON NUDE PERFORMANCE

(DALE and JEFF are onstage. JEFF stands center. DALE is down right. He moves about the stage as he speaks.)

(DALE silently removes his shoes and socks, then stands.)

DALE:

The epistemology of nude performance is fraught with vagueness no matter the angle of study.

(removes pants)

Performers refer to the artistic "validity" or "integrity" of scenes requiring them to disrobe, but to those for whom the issue is a moral one, such shibboleths are meaningless. They do not cut the mustard, they do not ring true, they do not sway. The very fact of the actor's nakedness is such an overwhelming moral affront that any attempt by the artist to connect the audience to a greater understanding of themselves or the universe is rendered null, void.

(removes t-shirt)

And for those whose hope is that baring their junk onstage is not some meaningless titillation, what is the nature of that "integrity"? How is the visibility of their pudenda integral to the meaning of their transaction with the audience?

(stands behind JEFF)

Indeed, can we as audience actually look at anything other than the nude performer's genitals?

(removes boxers, holds them)

Or if we do look away from them, can we then still see them? Or rather, do we not censor our own retinas and see eve-

rything except the performer's naughty bits? Can we truly see a "nude performer"? Can we witness a "nude performance"?

Or is it in fact the case that we have a moral issue with the nudity ourselves? That we are embarrassed to acknowledge that we can see another person's most private parts, even though we cannot, as "legitimate theatre goers," confess to looking away?

As we *look*, can we keep ourselves from *gazing*? Can we keep ourselves from noticing the size of a woman's breasts, or of a man's penis or his scrotum, or whether the actor trims his pubic hair, or shaves it altogether?

Or whether the actor's stomach is flat and taut or flabby and fat? Without his clothing, are we shocked to see that he has no shoulders, no chest to speak of, no upper arm development? Are his nipples small? Does he have a hairy chest? A hairy back? Is his ass less than perfect?

Is he in fact less than we believe human beauty requires? Is this part of our judgment of the artistic integrity of his audacity in stripping naked before us? Are we affronted?

(He stands motionless behind JEFF. JEFF silently, slowly, moves to pick up DALE'S pants and t-shirt. He goes and stands behind DALE. There is a silence as DALE regards the audience.)

CURTAIN