Crimp play breaks from tradition

She’s an artist, a writer, a mother and a terrorist. These are but a few descriptions of the elusive main character Anna, who never appears on stage, in Martin Crimp’s experimental play “Attempts on Her Life” performed by the Department of Theater, Dance and Performance studies at the Zellerbach Playhouse. Crimp’s play exposes its audience to 17 nonlinear scenes, each an attempt to describe the unseen protagonist through layers of cryptic, personal portrayals.

Entering the playhouse, I was surprised to see the cast already visible onstage, doing various warm-up stretches, breaking the holy theatrical divide between on and off stage. Before the play even began, it was made apparent that it would follow suit with Crimp’s postmodern style of throwing theater conventions out the window. At the play’s start, there was scarcely a beat skipped between the cello that accompanied the opening scene and the background music that welcomed us into the playhouse (M.I.A.’s “Paper Planes”).

The opening scene began with answering machine that rattled off voice messages including well wishes, a book proposal and even violent threats directed towards Anna, who could have been alive or dead at the time. In this scene, the characters fought for control of a single mic as we transitioned between messages, giving us a visual display of the battling narratives the audience would hear as the play continued with characters struggling with one another to deliver their own depiction of the mysterious Anna.

The cast would at times break from their dueling monologues and offer musical interludes, performing their rendition of “The Girl Next Door,” they sang in unison “She’s a brand of car/ She’s a cheap cigarette/She’s an ecstasy” — almost as if the cast was taunting us with the contradictory images of Anna they knowingly delivered.

At times there was an aggressiveness in the character’s delivery of lines that bordered on militant, a hint at the ongoing tension between Crimp’s post-dramatic thespian camp and traditional forms of theater. The playhouse was predominantly filled with a sense of unease as abrupt transitions, simultaneous juxtaposition of lines delivered in English and foreign languages ranging from French to Farsi, and bewildering monologues hardly left time for the audience to take a breath.

For a play entirely obsessed with the construction of Anna’s image, Director Scott Wallin actually shows the audience surprisingly little in terms of visual theatrics. Instead, we are given a narrative almost completely reliant upon language, as it took center stage as the only consistent aspect of a
fragmented play. This emphasis on words was overbearing at times, as the visually deprived audience attempted to maintain a grasp of their auditory image of Anna while the cast served their hastily mixed word-cocktail.

Ultimately, "Attempts" comes off more as a rebellious political message to the theater community than an actual play — critiquing static conceptions of identity and challenging viewers to look beyond what they see onstage to derive meaning from the art form. The play is a voyeuristic peek into the neurotic mind of a playwright struggling to create the perfect character, as we experience a visual spectacle revolving around the process of construction. By layering dense dialogue atop sharp meta-commentary and a forceful performance from a diverse cast, "Attempts" affords its audience a bewildering yet engaging discussion on identity both on and off the stage.
Crimp play breaks from tradition | The Daily Californian

Attempts on her Life, Dance and Performance Studies, Department of Theater, Martin Crimp, Scott Wallin, Zellerbach Playhouse

RELATED A&E
Sorry, no related stories were found.

MOST RECENT A&E
'Cien años con Juan Rufó' traces son's journey to rediscover his father
UC Berkeley MFA graduates exhibit innovative explorations of identity, change at BAMPPA
Roger Waters retreads familiar societal, political grounds with still-enjoyable release 'Is This the Life We Really Want?'
Bay Area Book Festival engages public with theme of literary activism
'House of Cards' season 5 tense with latent energy

ADVERTISING

NEWS
ASUC
Campus
City
Crime & Courts
Obituary
Research & Ideas
2017 ASUC elections
UC
Notes from the Field

SPORTS
Men's
Baseball
Basketball
Crew
Cross Country
Football
Golf
Gymnastics
Rugby
Soccer
Swim
Tennis
Water Polo

Women's
Basketball
Crew
Field Hockey
Golf
Gymnastics
Lacrosse
Softball
Soccer
Swim
Tennis
Track & Field
Volleyball
Water Polo

A&E
Columns
Film & Television
Literature
Music
Theater
Visual Art
Comedy

OPINION
Editorials
Op-Eds
Letters to the Editor
Columns
Editorial
Cartoons
The Soapbox
Sex on Tuesday

MULTIMEDIA
Arts
Graphics
News
Commentary
Sports

FEATURED
Editor's Pick:
Awards
Special Issue
The Week
Gameday
Best of Berkeley
Daily Cal Arts
Editors' Blog

THE DAILY CALIFORNIAN
WE'RE AN INDEPENDENT, STUDENT-RUN NEWSROOM. MAKE A DONATION TO SUPPORT US

Copyright © 2017 The Daily Californian, The Independent Berkeley Student Publishing Co., Inc. All rights reserved.