

# *Shade*

Maia Conran

The more I've looked at Maia Conran's *Shade*, the more its multiple oppositions, its dualities, reveal themselves as fundamental to the piece.

The very act of dividing the exhibition space at Motorcade/Flashparade in two is the most literal, and the most physically immediate of these. We, the audience of this uncanny, mechanised performance, can end up being on one side or the other when the divide is in place - the high-celinged light side where (at certain times of day and during an unlikely break in the Bristol cloud) the sun gifts *Shade* a calm resonance, or at night the strip light lends it a flatter and more industrial quality; or the dimmer one which allows us to view either the transient sun filtered through the semi-opaque curtain or the electric light glowing through it, and to watch the blurry outlines of those 'trapped' on the other side.

There is another duality here in the pleasing confusion as to what constitutes 'front and back', 'inside and outside'. When the curtain is closed, are we on the outside looking in, or the inside looking out?

The curtain itself, the only addition to the space, is both anthropomorphic – when it sits, feminine and veil-like, bunched at the far end of the rail, and inherently clinical – when it has completed its journey back to the other side. It is also, being a semi-opaque, non-domestic thing – that is either in consistent, motorised movement or almost perfect stillness – unavoidably reminiscent of the seminal white shower curtain in Hitchcock's *Psycho*, with all its connotations of the ultimate division - between life and death.

There is an opposition, too, between humour and solemnity. There is a certain comedy to the automatic curtain opener's increasingly frantic whirring as it works ever harder to hold its load, only to reveal the empty half of the space (the joke, we feel, is on us. Or on minimalism?)

Helena Haimes