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## 'Experiencing' cruelty and its consequences through transparent acting

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By **MURRAY BRAMWELL**

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*La Reprise* (The Repetition), a Belgian-German collaboration developed by director Milo Rau, is the anatomy of a murder. It is also a careful dissection of the business and strategies of theatre. This intriguing essay on human transgression wittily explores its own best ways for making us not just understand but "experience" cruelty and its consequences.

From the outset we are told it is based on a real crime. In 2012, in the Belgian town of Liege, four young men brutally murdered Ihsane Jarfi, a 32-year-old gay man of North African descent.

His naked body was found 10 days later. The men were tried and found guilty.

Even from the opening statements (from actor Sabri Saad el Hamus), Rau's brilliantly inventive production tells us this is theatre performed with new rules. Acting should be transparent and without ego.

It's like delivering a pizza, Sabri says. It's about the pizza, not the delivery person.

To remind us of the tricks of the trade, like Prospero, Sabri summons up a fog machine and delivers a haunting fragment from *Hamlet*, as the prince's father's ghost in Act I.

This is the first of many prefigurings: telling us that tragic theatre enables the dead to speak, and be avenged.

Using a mix of live video feed and stage performance, a panel auditions actors to tell Jarfi's story.

Suzy Cocco, cast as the dead man's mother, is quizzed about her life, her Italian background and whether she would perform nude. Fabian Leeders, chosen as one of the killers, the feckless Wintgens, talks about his music interests (Aphex Twin, which later reappears as the score) and is instructed to kiss a female interviewer and then feign hitting her. Tom Adjibi, who plays Jarfi like a martyred angel, talks about being typecast by ethnicity and his love for the music of Purcell. Every apparently random comment or detail is reincorporated as the events of the crime are re-enacted and evaluated.

The staging is flawlessly assured as the camera moves from bedroom to nightclub to the Volkswagen car where the violence unfolds. The production circles remorselessly closer to the crime itself.

Performed in a miasma of stage fog, with Godard-like black-and-white close-ups on the screen, the murder sequence reprises the audition kissing and the blows to the body with carefully timed sound effects. We are both inside the sickening violence and analysing the dynamics of impulsive behaviour.

*La Reprise* is innovative, intricate, beautifully judged, an unforgettable pizza indeed.

*La Reprise. Histoire(s) du theatre. Adelaide Festival. Space Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre, March 4. Tickets: \$30-\$79. Bookings: online. Duration: 90min, no interval. Until March 7.*