

exeunt

Review: Negative Space at Contact

CONTACT THEATRE · 1ST - 3RD MARCH 2016

Pseudo-defensively connive an impenetrable form to write your review in...

JAMES VARNEY



Negative Space by Reckless Sleepers at Contact, Manchester.

When watching a piece of theatre with a mind towards writing a review it is important to remain mindful of your role as reviewer. You are the mediator between stage and potential audience member and must combat any sense of total annihilation of signification you may encounter, for the benefit of your readership. Try to maintain a balance between creative and objective description when discussing the plain white plasterboard box about fifteen feet wide open at the front to the audience as if a literal transfiguration of the three walls which aren't the fourth.

Your readership will likely be interested by the performance's beginning with clambering over the ten-odd foot high walls and emerging through trapdoors in the base of the structure, the performers appearing one by one in snatches, like curious animals. It is perhaps ten or even twenty minutes into the hypnotic language of *Negative Space* that you can be certain of the number of performers (two women, four men) and long past the end when you might still wrestle with what to make of it.

Perhaps take a notebook and note down choice bits of dialogue that can help you emphasise your opinion when *Negative Space* contains not a single word but a dense concentration of language, all the language that we began to understand years before we could read and write.

Your audience will need you to tell them you reached the conclusion that this is some sort of clowning you are watching. They will not have reached the conclusion that there was a tension between liveness and spontaneity, and the need for safety and structure in the show – tell them. Tell them you think these elements opposed each other and meant the end result was neither totally play nor choreography.

As you reach the centre of your review, highlight choice moments from the show that felt indicative of the wider sense of joy and exploration that was really the bleeding heart of the birth of *Negative Space* in the first place. The empty box that began the performance blank as an empty word document becomes punched with holes, with hammers becoming as good as a paintbrush, the plasterboard perforates and people burst unexpectedly through. The box weakens, but stays standing – drag a metaphor for form out of that, push the boundaries but make sure your footing remains. If everything does fall in, it's difficult to prove it was there to begin with, follow the line of progress and ensure your review – a historical record if ever there was one – is both informative and easy to follow.

In your ultimate or penultimate paragraph, ensure (you are creating a record) you enforce concepts of legacy and lasting impact (negative, positive, or neutral). Perhaps assert that the experiment of *Negative Space* is, though not as fully realised as you might have hoped, beautiful. Note that there is a sense of place within a wider body of work, and a continuing practice. Remember that chat you had before the show about experimentation going largely unrewarded and imagine that if the company had spent the time and money making the show you think this could be, everyone would have lost attention by now. Sit back in the current as you plant your meagre stake.

Pseudo-defensively connive an impenetrable form to write your review in if you think the impenetrability of the show Reckless Sleepers have created is a large part of what makes it both so charming and exciting. Reprise the idea that the threads passing through this show are infinite and infinitely fine, you might pluck anything from them; gender politics, domestic violence, the Eurozone, the Spanish Civil War. Remind your readers that it's the nature of most things humans muddy their hands with to be ineffable so it's hardly your fault if you fail to pin it down in 600-800 words.

Know that once a show is over all you can drag from it is wreckage.