

Manchester Salon

Negative Space by Reckless Sleepers at Contact Theatre, Manchester
Reviewed by Stephen Bowler March 2016



The star of this performance is a large white boxy space, with plasterboard walls on three sides and a floor containing three trap-doors and two wooden chairs. Four men and two women come into and exit this space. They have no names and no roles. No words are spoken and there is no music.

Over the course of an hour the six performers come and go in no particular order.

An early sequence of moves suggest confinement and tension within the box and between the players, but this is soon displaced by a more porous agenda in which the boxy space begins to seem like a play structure, to be clambered upon and overcome. Things pick up when hammers are brought to bear upon the plasterboard walls. Before long the air is thick with plaster and flying debris, and the mood uglier as the boundaries of the box are repeatedly transgressed. By the end, it looks like Baader-Meinhof have gone berserk in B&Q.

Intensely physical, there is a circus-like quality to this performance. It isn't theatre. It is the opposite of theatre, a protest against character, plot and message. Think Laurel and Hardy as Situationist 'happening' and you're half way there. The other half, of course, is entirely up to you. Pick a reading, any reading; it's yours.

My reading is of violence as the key motif, as more or less legitimate response to limitations imposed by the 'negative space' of the box. Tensions and contradictions abound, but this, it seems to me, is the logic of the piece. A destructive process, bordering on rage, breaks down a negativity.

Something positive is supposed to arise out of the all-too physical deconstruction of the 'negative space' that was a white boxy plasterboard structure. The putatively positive consists in the puncturing of a boundary as means to a transformed mode of spatial and emotional awareness.

Either that, or they really are just jesting.

If you don't mind a lot of dust and no dialogue, this may well be the 'happening' for you.