

Peer Review

Reckless Sleepers: *Schrödinger* | The Lowry, Salford Quays | July 2011

Dr. Andrew Westerside, August 2011.

It's very easy, when confronted with *Schrödinger's* powerful mise-en-scène, to be transported away: into a world of hard scientific lines softened by dapples of chalk-dust and the meandering paths of running water; to find transport in the image as it shifts and mutates, as spatial formulae are born and die; as rules and logics are proven and disproven, particle and wave.

But there's a great deal more to this piece than a series of scenographic slight-of-hands, the popping of trap-doors and impossible surfaces. Resurrected from their circa-1999 work *Schrödinger's Box*, *Schrödinger* uses its powerful visual language in a way that is both unique, and absolutely vital. Indeed, it's a piece which demonstrates, at once, both the unmatched power and the heartbreaking frailty of the human mind.

In many ways, there's a snug analogy between Erwin Schrödinger's thought experiment and the unwritten rule of experimental performance work. For Erwin, the box in which his hypothetical-cat sits is a non-space, an in-between space, with time and without. While the door is closed, the cat isn't even a cat; it's a possible-cat, a maybe-cat, or even an ex-cat. But it's not the simplicity of the binary – *dead or alive* – that's important, it's rather that while it's in the box, and we can't see it, it has to be both. And because of the rules of the game, it's not limited to just that, either. It could be a bird, a snail, a Persian rug, a *Churro* seller in Columbia, a mountain, a pebble, a frog, a dream, a songbird or a rat. And so we loose the imagination into a space with boundless possibility, with endings where beginnings are and middles where middles shouldn't rightfully be found.

And this is exactly what we're supposed to be doing as performance makers that think about what performance can and might be. The performance space is unknown until we engage with it, until we put properties inside it and see how they react. We don't know until we look. But don't be fooled into thinking that Reckless were free-riding on the back of cute concept, because it's simply not the case. Here is a work of exquisite skill, precision, compositional and rhythmical craft, coupled with a self-awareness that keeps it planted firmly on the ground. Near the beginning of the piece, a performer imparts the following, crucial, information:

“It may seem to you that we've done this for the first time [...] even the mistakes have been repeated over and over to get them exactly right. She looks like she doesn't know what to do next. Of course she knows what she'll do next, it is never different. Nothing is left to chance; nothing can go wrong, we've thought of every eventuality”.

(Wetherell, 2011: 3)

And it's that sentiment, and its basis in the craft of this piece, that sets it aside as a truly remarkable work. What we're ultimately presented with, across the visual composition, the text, the performance style and the musical score is gateway to dreaming, to an experience where I can compose and re-compose elements of the work as guided by the performers: “This is a pipe. This is a hat stand. This is a house on a hill in Belgium. This is a dead cat rotting” (ibid). Exploiting the writerly freedom of the post-dramatic, *Schrödinger* becomes a sensuous and playful adventure into the scope of my own imagination. Yet it is at the same time artfully tethered by a lingering and bubbling sense of tragedy, painfully aware that “The machine that you want to maintain is failing, but you insist on keeping it going as if it was working” (ibid). I'm here, I'm alive, and it's beautiful. What a shame that I'm going to die.

This is contemporary performance at its absolute best. If you don't agree, you're mistaken. Ingenuity, craft, and experimentation held together by skill, love, and the kind of belief the Pope himself would be proud of. As a performance maker, it's the kind of work you see and think: ‘I wish I made this’, or ‘I want to do that’. In some sense, that's the highest accolade I can give.