



Reckless Sleepers: Schrödinger – Contact, Manchester

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Artistic Director: Mole Wetherell

Reviewer: Peter Jacobs

UK-Belgian company Reckless Sleepers was formed in 1988, taking its name from a painting by the Belgian surrealist Rene Magritte. The company was partially formed in reaction to the contradiction of theatre attempting to portray realism in an environment that is fundamentally unrealistic: a desire to escape the conventions of theatre and to create something entirely other. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Mole Wetherell they create original theatre pieces, installations and interventions for theatres, galleries and site-specific projects that seek to entertain and challenge.

Schrödinger sees the company recreating one of their earlier performances. The title references the

(thanks to The Big Bang Theory) now relatively well-known (if not understood) thought experiment which illustrates the Copenhagen theory of quantum mechanics applied to everyday objects – specifically a cat in a box, which, with the introduction of radioactive material implies that after a while the cat may be perceived as simultaneously alive and dead. Something to do with the collision of quantum supposition and reality. In any case, the show does indeed take place in a large room-sized box. The box is open on one side and has hatches and doors of various sizes on the other three walls and ceiling. There is no cat. It would appear.

The box is randomly populated by five performers – experimenters/artists – attempting to conduct research into ‘immeasurable theories’. The space around the box is visible and used. Other than that, the show is hard to explain. At times it could be a family, or a place of work, or an institution of some kind. Five people who are simultaneously connected and disconnected appear and disappear through different doors and hatches. Someone runs out of the room only for their face to appear through a small hatch on the other side. A body drops repeatedly through a hatch in the top. People are chased, grabbed, intimidated, ignored. Objects are listed and appear on cue cards which are read out and drawn in chalk on the blackboard wall on the box, crossed out, erased: tables, chairs, glasses, a book, a briefcase, a mountain, a snowstorm, apples. Objects are introduced into the room, shifted around and removed by silent and audible command.

Schrödinger is about thought experiments, Rene Magritte, numbers, mathematics, codes, alcohol, social control, behaviour, futility and helplessness. Somehow it achieves this with minimal narrative through repetition, the considered staging of people and objects and through the incredibly precise and complex choreography of the performance. The versatile set almost acts as a sixth character, sucking in and spitting out people and objects, progressively covered with chalk drawings and symbols, its shape changed with lighting and the clever use of doors and portals that appear and sometimes remain open or hanging in a way that is ominous and sculptural.

The intense and clever control of the company is well-disguised within the finely-crafted performances, although by the end the soaked and chalk-marked clothes and physical exhaustion are real. The sense of unreality and loss and loss of control also seem real. Which makes this some powerful theatre: completely artificial but without the artifice of drama. Connecting on a deeper level. Funny and disturbing and symptomatic of the boxes we all inhabit, where control and individual choice are an illusion – or may be.