<hr id="null" /> <h2> On the couch at Contact Theatre, Manchester</h2> <h3>Reviewed by Stephen Bowler March 2016</h3> &#65533; On the couch was a one day event comprising three round-table discussions and debates under the general umbrella of &#65533;Sick Lab: A collaborative exploration of identity and trauma&#65533;. A variety of speakers, from the arts, academia and medicine, explored themes including &#65533;the other&#65533;, loneliness, the self, neighbourliness and gender, as well as identity and trauma. &#65533; Little was concluded but much covered in a day where knotty topics were generously addressed and I look forward to more of the same in 2017, when the team will be staging a three-week long festival of debate and theatre in Manchester and Brighton on &#65533;the shit that happens in everyday life and how we survive it.&#65533; &#65533; Interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral debates willing to tackle difficult and sensitive issues are not easily achieved and asking the right questions is, for now, more important than getting the right answers. I applaud the organisers&#65533; energy and imagination in terms of speakers and methods that go beyond the normal talking heads format and hope this is but a taste of what a larger event might offer. &#65533; When that time comes it might be useful to dig deeper into some key, taken-for-granted categories, such as identity. Pretty much everyone acknowledges the slipperiness of the concept and yet it continues to thrive, not least of all because it furnishes the moral vocabulary of recognition &#65533; the claim for public affirmation of private lifestyle. &#65533; But precisely because an identity means whatever an individual wants it to mean, the demand to have it affirmed by others is also a step away from others. Trauma and identity really do go together, because the reef of solipsism is no less solipsistic in the wake of a makeover. &#65533; An enlarged and engaged self-hood &#65533; citizenship, for example &#65533; might be one way out of the hall of mirrors that is identity. If freedom is the core of the self, as one speaker said, it may help to acknowledge when and how this came to be, where it went awry and what might be done to reconstitute it. Freedom might then affirm a common humanity rather than superficial differences.