

# The New York Times

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## 'Pullman, WA'

P.S. 122, through March 27  
150 First Avenue, at Ninth Street, East Village  
(212) 477-5288

The advertisements for Young Jean Lee's minimalist meditation "Pullman, WA" should come with a warning: Potentially hazardous to audience members with low self-esteem.

That's because if you buy a ticket, there is a chance an actor will approach you, lock eyes and let you have it: "You are incompetent. The whole premise behind what you're doing sucks. You've made a series of incredibly bad decisions."

The point is not to make you feel bad, unless, that is, you like theater with plot, well-developed characters and actors who talk with each other more than the audience. "Pullman" is something else entirely. At its best it summons up the vague confusion of a person adrift.

Ms. Lee, a young experimentalist who grew up in Pullman, Wash., has studied with Mac Wellman and directed plays at SoHo Rep and Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysteric Theater. Her new work has the deadpan simplicity of the plays of Richard Maxwell and the awkward, secretly suffering angst of a teenage diarist working through an identity crisis.

The play begins when Pete Simpson, a dead-eyed and strangely hypnotic actor, walks on stage and tells the audience that he knows how to live.

Don't get your hopes up. The entire play could be seen as a send-up of the self-help industry, a dry comment on its tough love and easy answers. Most of the script is declarative sentences spoken by three characters



Paula Court

Pete Simpson, right, and Tory Vazquez in "Pullman, WA."

named Helper (Thomas Bradshaw and Tory Vazquez are the other performers).

"I have never felt like I was me," Mr. Simpson says. "There was always something wrong with who I was so that I was always thinking of myself as some future-existing person, someone who is like an outline of someone."

Later on, he prescribes a litany of banal solutions. The meaning of life, apparently, boils down to getting your sleep and treating your body well.

Ms. Lee litters her script with references to unicorns and an interlude of nonsense words, which makes the show often quite precious. It will not win over many who are already skeptical about experimental theater. But while this is not a major work, it is an honest one that takes itself seriously, and that is refreshing.

JASON ZINOMAN