



## **The Eleventh Capital**

Until Mar 10 [Royal Court Theatre](#), Sloane Square London, SW1W 8AS

Rating: ★★★★★

In a nameless country, a totalitarian leader is moving his bureaucracy to a new city. We don't need the floor-to-ceiling banner, or the Tiananmen-green uniforms, to know that we're in a communist dystopia. It's apparent from the strained conversations, like the one between a cleaner and her neighbour which opens Alexandra Wood's play. 'You want to be careful,' says Rebekah Staton's cleaner. The neighbour looks terrified, until we realise she is talking about the plants.

Natalie Abrahami is staging this play – part of the Young Writers Festival – as a promenade performance, and her fluid direction is a good match for a progression of scenes which combine to tell the story of a civil servant forced to help establish the new capital in a rural 'rat-hole'. Suitably, we never meet our faceless bureaucrat, but follow his narrative through the folk whose lives he influences, from the thieves with their eye on his abandoned family, to an entrepreneur, desperate for his official approval for a new tea shop.

Powerful ensemble acting and James Cotterill's design amplify Wood's bitter blend of suspicion and sorrow. As Karl Collins's entrepreneur admits, under neon strip lighting, that he has offered his wife in return for preferment, you can almost see life bleaching out of him. And while it's our civil servant, a once-good man, who is polluted by the system he works for, everyone here has a tragedy, and we the audience, herded back behind barbed wire, are left guiltily staring at each other as we see them acted out.

Emma John, Mon Mar 5