

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Cass Meehan

Classified Texting

by Whitney Weinstein

I've noticed an increase in theatergoers spending more time fixated on their phones than on the show itself. Productions surely benefit when that attention goes toward social media promotion. *SPIES!!: Even More Spying* went further, embracing the unavoidable by building a performance around it.

At the box office, I entered Future Summit, an “un-conference” located in the fictional country of Smol, swarming with undercover spies. I received a name tag and a “Top Secret” envelope with instructions on texting my spy handler.

The ongoing stream of directions was a bit overwhelming, and I feared I would fail at my interactive role. We were given secret signals to communicate to others and directed to “mingle and eavesdrop on influencers.” The influencers led the summit, identifying themselves largely by their Ph.D. studies. Academic excellence signaled worth. I stepped closer to listen in on whispered conversations.

Through puzzles, exclusive meetings, and insight into character relationships, the audience was meant to identify a deadly threat. We came face-to-face with YOUbots, artificial intelligence robots designed to execute the mundane parts of life, so that we could “live the life [we] always dreamed of.” Efficient, functional, and obsessed with posting online, the YOUbots nearly perfectly replicated individual human beings. As The Hacker pointed out, though, “The right innovation in the wrong hands can be a very bad thing.” With each opportunity to learn, the bots grew more dangerous.

There were some technical difficulties. I checked my phone incessantly, waiting on delayed prompts from the cast and panicking that I'd misread a text. A few lulls between scripted dialogue and impromptu mingling had me awkwardly bumping into others. I appreciated the

inclusion of the audience, but needed more guidance about navigating the space.

One thing was very clear. We were instructed not to open any closed doors for reasons of safety and respect. But that spoke to the content of the show: exploring secrets was not welcome.

I love the idea of *SPIES!!: Even More Spying*, with its abundant political and social references and connections. Further test audiences and simplification—of the script and its multiple pathways—will aid its evolution into a more masterful production.

[*SPIES!!: Even More Spying*](#), The Agency Bureau LLC, Immersive HQ, 2019 Fringe Festival, September 10, 12, 14, 17, 19, 21.

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