

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Die-Cast

Travel Beyond Our Boundaries

by Kristen Shahverdian

If we cannot physically travel, can we find enjoyment in peeking into other people's lives? Die-Cast's *Temporary Occupancy* responds with an online theater work in the Fringe Festival where the audience is a voyeur at a hotel.

After I click on my ticket, I am brought to a website that states that I am about to have a "Vicurious" experience and a chance to "travel beyond your boundaries." A bot named Ethan asks me questions: what is my favorite color, are we alone in the universe, have I cut my own hair, all so that he can place me in the best possible experience. While I converse with Ethan, meditative music plays and paintings flash on the screen, mostly swirls of color, but occasionally figures with masks. There is a lot happening and I have trouble focusing on my chat with Ethan. It feels unnerving, but I am also curious.

Ethan places me in a Philadelphia hotel where there are four rooms. The audience enters the rooms through the Facetime screen, a Zoom call, or a camera placed across the room. In each hotel room there is a nugget of drama. A dad on a Facetime call, trying to talk in sign language with his son, is both sweet and tragic in his distress. I feel nostalgic watching a woman on a Zoom call with her boss, who desperately wants to get home from a conference but has been grounded because of COVID-19.

After I finish the Philly rooms, I click on the "member's only" link to see what will happen. Here I enter another set of rooms but what occurs in them is quite different. The stories are less concrete. My bot, now named Jude, references LSD and the characters use more movement and imagery: a woman's memory of falling asleep in the tub on top of her lover, two men disappearing and reappearing on the screen, a dance that ends with a hand reaching out to cover the screen. The shift into this world is jarring and harder to focus than in the Philly segment. But there is a delightful--and trippy--twist about to happen if one makes it this far.

There are a lot of layers to the experience in *Temporary Occupancy* and what starts as voyeurism in a Philly hotel, ends up being a possible mental breakdown when the Vicurious experience goes awry. It was complicated, but fun to watch the drama of someone else's life for a short while. Not exactly travel, but an escape none the less.

[Temporary Occupancy](#), Die-Cast, Sept. 10-Oct. 4, 2020 Fringe Festival.

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