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Wednesday, November 6, 2013

### Review: (Montreal) Dreaming Now



#### Digital Surrealism dances across the stage

*in the technological-trip Dreaming Now presented by Youthatre.*

by Jesse Stong

DREAMING NOW (devised by Michel Lefebvre and Guillaume Lévesque) is a 40 minute theatre-for-young-audience piece that creates a dreamscape with no words or set, just one actor (Jeremy Segal) and an unbelievable series of projection designs using only white light.

As audiences enter the theatre there is nothing but the simple silhouette of the performer standing behind an empty screen. The show begins with an electric shock that rattles the crowd, demanding attention using both interrogating digital sounds and fierce flashing lights. The performer steps forward, pressing a button that says Enter and thrusts us into a world that mixes humanity with technology.

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Novel by Christian Baines, associate editor, Toronto



Senior Editor-at-Large Richard Burnett's Three Dollar Bill



The series of short scenes float us through a universe of white lights, much like staring into the static of a television screen; the effect is both hypnotic and a sensory-overload.

The showcase of digital imagery is captivating, so much so that the youth/children in the audience were wide-eyed and silent for the entire show (the adults as well); mesmerized by the magical images that flowed seamlessly into each other.

Director Michel Lefebvre followed his instincts, developing this new work out of his current preoccupation with the integration of new media on the stage, and his hope of making theatre for young audiences that is relevant and contemporary. It was especially interesting to see theatre that explores, appreciates and plays with technological advancements without preaching directly on their negative effects on youth, though the images of the play evoke feelings of being lost, being overwhelmed, and eventually being stolen by technology.

Computer programming and sound editing wizard Guillaume Lévesque brings to the show his expertise by creating a computer application that explores interactive and generative processes, allowing the performer to literally dance with the white lights/images on the projection screen.

Because of this dramatic projection/performer interface every performance is different. The show is innovative in that it constantly evolves and can never be the same dance between computer and actor twice.

Lévesque created the projections as a means of exploring the ever-evolving dialogue between humans and the machine, and does so beautifully and successfully as we watch Segal become a spinning pixelated face on screen, grow orbs of light and fractals like flowers, chase emoticons in a pong-like war game, and magically grow a ball of light between his bare hands.

Jeremy Segal (graduate of Dawson College and co-founder of Title 66 Productions) not only juggles and manipulates light in this digital playground, but also brings to the table a powerful presence. He maintains intensity, stamina, and precision to keep up with his computerized co-star.

As the omnipresent master of the dream world Segal disappears and reappears throughout each scene, at times in complete control of the light and then later (as the play reaches a dramatic climax) being engulfed into the digital nightmare and becoming himself nothing more than a wave of fragmented light.

Though there is more innovative imagery than clear storyline the simple nature of the projections, and their high quality and design, mixed with an excellent soundscape (music from Alva Noto, Ryoji Ikeda, Emeralds, Kangding Ray, Riyuchi Sakamoto, Oval, Mika Vainio and Oneorthis Point Never) evoke powerful emotions of both exhilaration and despair.

The design and journey is clean and effective, and the show carries with it a feeling of true theatrical achievement through technological feat. It will be interesting to see Youtheatre continue with these digital advancements, mixing their passion for projections with their ongoing commitment to Canadian plays.