

PKD Workshow

Written by Daniel O'Shea, Developed by the Performance Collective *A Wake Of Vultures*: Sean Marshall Jr., Conor Wylie, Nancy Tam, and Daniel O'Shea, with video design by Remy Siu

There is always a purist who asks: is that really theatre? Is that really dance? Is that really art? My question is, "Does it artistically move me towards questions in a way that art only can?", and if the answer is yes, it almost doesn't matter if I understand the path the artists took to get me there.

PKD Workshow had me wading through weighty existential no man's land with whimsy and style. First of all, I was given the opportunity to guess whether or not they were being truthful about the nature of their performance. A play about the late dystopian, science fiction writer **Philip K. Dick**, *PKD Workshow* blends the psychological journey down the rabbit hole while blurring our vision of reality and theatre.

The performers started with a speech saying that they were grateful to be sharing the stage with "more polished shows" and that this would be a workshow. There would be pauses to change scenes and whatnot. At first, I genuinely believed this. It put me into a frame of mind that set me up for the rest of the content, which dealt with the perception of reality, drugs, and transformational turning points in a life.

Philip K. Dick, we learn, had one such experience, that is relayed to us through one of the actor's own experiences on drugs, getting lost in the forest and questioning the fundamental way he looked at life. This is an incomplete exploration of one author's mind trip, with bits of information, scenes getting cut off, transitions that are crunchy at best, startlingly uneasy at worst (and best!).

The two actors look the same, so much so we think they are the same and relay to one another in this way. Shadows of their profiles are cast upon a bleak backdrop, overlapping, metamorphosing, and moving together. I learn later (thanks Wikipedia) that PKD had a twin that died at birth and that her absence informed much of his work.



PKD Workshow. Photo by Travers Jeffers, Point Blank Photography

The play does not unfold in any sort of linear fashion. My sense of it then, and how I recall it now, is **a veritable mash of moments**. A scene abruptly stops, one actor leaves the space, and there is some confused banter between the actor, the video designer and the sound designer. It seems decisions are made in the moment, haphazardly but presently.



PKD Workshow. Photo by Travers Jeffers, Point Blank Photography

Here, in the *PKD Workshow*, there is a searching for that which cannot be found with any finality. A line in the play illuminates this never ending desire for true perception: “Pseudo-reality contaminates reality until the lie is undone.” We cling to our perception of reality in a constructed sense, in a sense that can be unconnected to experience, and sometimes stubborn to sit within. **There is self-revelation in the play** — a kind of resignation to the fact that we are relying on sides of ourselves to portray something, some kind of complete image to the world, but **that representation is being continually falsified and reinstated by new perceptions and reflections on what is and what is not.**



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A projection of a never ending series of doorways extends into a cardboard corner. The actor stands. The actor's every cell moves into those doorways before taking the physical step to be met abruptly by the (real?) physical obstruction. The video and sound are reflections of the text and are shaky and hard to settle into. It is as though they are moving towards something, knowing the final score but never being there, never truly providing clarity. This lack of coalescence is purposeful, I think, and is echoed in the quality of performance from the actors. They are being real. Or so we are led to believe. The question is continually thwarted upon us. Our presence is questioned by one of the actors: "If I forget who I am, can I trust the world to tell me?"