

thINKIngDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Heather McBride

Teenage Life in the Digital Age

by Preeti Pathak

I enter the venue [Yes! And... Collaborative Arts](#) and the performance begins at the door. I'm handed a scantron sheet and number two pencil. The stage contains two large cell phone screens, behind a row of black pedestals, each labeled with letters "a" through "e." The 16 artists line up on stage. A monotone voice instructs the audience on how to take the test. A question appears on one of the screens, and five performers step up on pedestals, while holding signs with their Instagram handles.

"Who has a single parent?"

"Who is a virgin?"

"Who thinks virginity is an archaic concept meant to shame people?"

"Who feels different?"

"Who feels judged?"

We're asked to pick which individual answers the question. I feel a sense of confusion in the audience, and watch as some members awkwardly fill in the bubbles on their scantron sheet. The performers rotate with each new question, dressed in black, their bodies and expressions slumped and somber. There's a visceral tension between our role as judge and theirs as judged. Pencils begin to drop as we see the irrationality of this test, like the many tests that students are subjected to in the school system.

The Miseducation of Generation Never cycles through multiple vignettes focused on the realities of teenage life in the digital age. There is a frenetic and disjointed quality to the transitions between scenes and the use of various mediums. We move through scripted

dialogue, film, spoken word, text message, and dance. The rapid pacing makes my head spin, yet it feels familiar. It's the pace of emails, text messages, social media, 24-hour news cycles, and all the life in between.

A film starts playing, where the performers are interviewed on life within the [cancel culture](#), where judgement and technology lead to global shaming. My heart is heavy as these children articulate their struggle to survive as astutely as any adult. But before I can fully process my pain, I'm jolted into laughter through the "Joy of Cancelling" game show parody. Our host, rising star Miles Jones-Patton, educates us on being the most woke. Three contestants compete to prove their level of commitment to being woke and cancelling others. One contestant portrays a self-righteous white woman who has based her identity on the adoption of her black daughter. Again, there's a tension – we want to laugh at these jokes, but should we? Or will we be cancelled?

The show's vacillation from the existential to the absurd culminates in a villainous Bob Ross character, named Rob Boss, being chased through the woods by a cancel culture support group. It's scenes like this that keep me compelled throughout the show. *Miseducation* leaves me wanting to watch it again, so I can further dissect the layers of this complicated and powerful story.

[The Miseducation of Generation Never](#), Yes! And..Collaborative Arts Shadow Company, 2019 Fringe Festival, September 6-14.

By Preeti Pathak
September 14, 2019