

# THE STAGE REVIEWS

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## Brighton Festival: Perhaps all the Dragons...

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Inspired by the six degrees of separation theory, this UK premiere (full title: Perhaps all the Dragons in our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us act, just once, with beauty and courage) from Belgian company Berlin occupies a coolly compelling hinterland between theatre and film, fiction and fact, a mass act of storytelling and a social science experiment. You take a seat at a round table, facing one of 30 screens, and meet the pre-recorded eyes of a real person with an unusual tale to tell. You switch five times, hearing apparently unrelated stories from around the globe. Gradually things happen to give the illusion that these encounters are live, and the not entirely misleading impression that they are linked.

The stories are appealing. I 'meet' an opera singer who's only ever played Carmen, a mayor of an empty village, a man with an extraordinary memory. Then come the technical and philosophical sleights of hand that distinguished Berlin's 2012 Brighton Festival show Land's End. But this is also devised as a slightly unsettling, and at times oddly slight, experience.

You keep getting distracted. Your eyes flick to your neighbours' subtitles. You find yourself wanting to talk, instead, to the boy with the Simpsons poster who appears to have discovered ancient cave paintings. Bombarded by stories from all sides, you struggle to give each present encounter meaningful attention. It's just like being on the internet.

Crucial to the effect is the precise unit-by-unit sound design: slouch or lean and your video is subsumed in a sea. Beneath the stained glass of St Mark's Chapel, the 30 stories babble simultaneously like trapped prayers. As one prerecorded voice puts it, who is listening to whom?

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