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Photo by: Peter Petralia

Whisper

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By Paul Menard

It only takes a quick ride on the subway to realize how much technology has enabled us to become socially disconnected. With riders choosing the isolating comfort of their iPods over human interaction, it's increasingly clear that we prefer to design our own soundscapes instead of being bothered by the discomfort of conversation.

Perhaps, then, it isn't too surprising to discover a pair of headphones on your seat at *Whisper*, Proto-Type Theater's sonic theatrical experiment running at Performance Space 122. Obscured by a giant white scrim, the splintered silhouettes of three performers narrate a dreamlike tale of isolation and fractured memories. Donning the headphones plugs you into their world, amplifying their emotionally distanced voices and radio-theatre sound effects through live mic feeds. Uncannily, these anonymous performers are talking about you — literally — as they weave a surrealistic and circular tale in the second person. Like an existential *Choose Your Own Adventure* book (minus the choice aspect), *Whisper* places you in the center of its disorienting narrative, recounting your mysterious flight from a nondescript

urban landscape.

Whisper cleverly mines the dramatic tension between "reality" and the seductive power of technology. While the headsets aren't completely necessary to experience the performance (they mostly just amplify the sounds created onstage), their power to modulate and enhance the live soundscape proves irresistible. As we're drawn further into our own private event, the otherwise communal experience of theatre increasingly becomes one of technological isolation.

As interesting as this all is, one keeps waiting for *Whisper* to take its exploration of technological mediation and social disconnection to the next level. Writer-director Peter S. Petralia sets up a profound concept (and technological conceit) with his 45-minute meditation, and yet leaves one wishing it were plumbed more deeply. Still, it's hard to ignore the amplified voices seductively whispering in your ear, especially when they reassure you that, "You like it when emotions loop that way."

Presented by Proto-type Theater

at Performance Space 122, 150 First Ave., NYC.

July 9-13; Wed.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 7 p.m.

(212)352-3101 or www.ps122.org.

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