



RAVI DEEPRES

Tree of Codes

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A pop-electronica score by Jamie xx, a system of mirrors by artist Olafur Eliasson, and Wayne McGregor's choreography: this is dance like you've never seen it

**HOW DO YOU** choreograph a book? If you're British choreographer Wayne McGregor, you ask for the entire book to be printed in A4. Then, you stack the pages one on top of the other, so the pile of paper measures close to a metre and a half. You take each page, read it, mull it over, and transform the words into a choreographic language comprehensible to a dancer (and gibberish to anyone else). The book in question was no ordinary novel – Jonathan Safran Foer's 2010 *Tree of Codes*, comprised of layered snippets of Foer's favourite novel, *The Street of Crocodiles* by Bruno Schulz, and designed in such a way that people are literally forced to read between the lines. "Jonathan's words are poetic vignettes that over time unfold in a beautiful way," says McGregor, using his hands to demonstrate the unravelling. It's summer in the UK and rain is tapping at the windows of the Studio Wayne McGregor in east London, where McGregor and his company rehearse, create and cohabitate in a series of studios and open-plan areas. "As I worked through the book, I experimented with loads of different strategies," he says. "Somedays I'd translate the literal meanings of the words Jonathan wrote. Other days, I'd translate it emotionally; how I felt about what I was reading. And other days I'd translate the holes, the words that weren't there." McGregor

read *Tree of Codes* not long after it was published; it sparked an idea and he tucked it away for safekeeping. When Manchester Festival came calling a few years later with a commission, top of his mind was a project with Olafur Eliasson, the Danish-Icelandic artist internationally renowned for his monumental installations that marry light, vision and movement. "I mentioned *Tree of Codes* to Olafur and turns out he knew Jonathan. He was intrigued to see how a book that he'd written based on another book would be translated for the stage." Enter Jamie xx: acclaimed remixer, producer to pop royalty and one third of the xx. "It was a funny group, because we all have such different personalities... Jamie's super quiet. And Olafur's quite gregarious. He used to be a breakdance champion. He's ready to kick off his shoes and get in there." Next came the dancers. McGregor recruited some from his own company, some from the Paris Opera Ballet and set aside ten weeks for collaboration and creation. "Every day we would come in with a different approach," he says. "I'd be working with my pages and Olafur was working on the lighting, and Jamie was writing music and we were all making stuff." *Vanessa Keys* → Arts Centre Melbourne, 100 St Kilda Rd, Melbourne 3004. 03 9662 4242 [www.festival.melbourne/2017/](http://www.festival.melbourne/2017/). \$30-\$199. Oct 17-21.