



VARIOUS SMALL FIRES
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Carter, Tom, "A Satirical TED Talk, Inspired by Dostoevsky and Given by a 10-year-old ," *TedBlog*, February 26, 2015. Page 2 of 3.

So how did a bright-eyed, dimpled 10-year-old come to grasp the gloom of his monologue? "We had some challenging conversations early on," says Laser. "But as we worked together, Alex came to an understanding of the ideas at hand." It's true — his delivery of Dostoevsky's bleakest ideas is both knowing and spot-on.

To film this mock-talk, Laser invited actors, friends and former students to gather in a theater in Kickstarter's Brooklyn office. The atmosphere was festive at first, but after five numbing hours of shooting, the audience settled into palpable boredom. Despite the faithful echo of TED camerawork by cinematographers Chris Heinrich and Tom Richmond, the long dolly shots over rows of impassive faces only enhance "The Thought Leader's" sinister aura.

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Then there's the editing. Laser removes audience reactions from their contexts, re-inserting their laughter and silence in inappropriate places, and creating "a representation of public apathy that is aggressive rather than passive," as she puts it. Overall, it creates an atmosphere of menace.

But perhaps the most mysterious element of "The Thought Leader" is the enigmatic parentheses painted on the carpet — the focus of the opening and closing shots of the video. In part, they mirror the last line of Ammerman's talk: "Perhaps I'm only imagining an audience in order to feel more dignified as I stand here in parenthesis." It's also a comment on the diminished, secondary nature of the individual standing in a forum before an indifferent and hostile audience. It adds a bleak veneer.

The Los Angeles Times' review of Laser's show reads, "[TED Talks] are meant to motivate and inspire. Speakers don't typically ponder 'the dark chasm of meaninglessness.'" And while this reflects a common misconception of TED Talks — they are meant to share ideas both hopeful and challenging — "The Thought Leader" reminds viewers that critical thinking is very much an idea worth spreading.