

TWO BODIES IN TUNE

New technologies are increasingly present in the performing arts. Isabelle Choinière, a choreographer and dancer, has chosen the electronic arts in order to cast a new eye on the world of dance.

To deliver a poignant analysis of the body's presence in computer networks through a performance combining dance, video and electronic art represents a monumental challenge. Isabelle Choinière did not only tackle a complex subject, she also took the risk of venturing into an artistic arena, which is worlds removed from the experience of the ordinary public. The result? A disconcerting performance which puts the spectator into a sometimes difficult, but never innocent position.

The Mue de l'ange is a network performance in which two dancers, situated in separate places, interact: Choinière at the Théâtre Prospero and her acolyte Angela Di Lauro at the locale of the Société des Arts technologiques. The two are linked by an ISDN line which transmits sounds and images by way of sensors which they wear on their bodies. Choinière and Di Lauro were also able to communicate with the mediated forms of their double. "There is an urgent need to reflect more seriously on what kind of identity the internet is forging. What has become of the body in the networks? What kind of physical and psychic relations are emerging out of this wired world? How are these new forms of communication re-configuring our senses of identity?" is how Isabelle Choinière formulated her approach. To illustrate this quest, Isabelle Choinière takes us on a trip through the networks, where she searches for her alter ego, her electronic double. At the outset only sound links the two dancers, then, once this space has been opened, the synthetic body appears on stage and gradually begins to interact with Isabelle Choinière. The finale of the performance is an almost erotic fusion of the two bodies. "This communicative intimacy and interactivity becomes more poignant as the performance progresses. In the final part, we use our sensors to playfully throw electronic and physiological influxes at each other, which in turn influences our movements and our mutual rhythms," is how Isabelle Choinière describes the relationship between two dancers.

To recreate this encounter between a real and an electronic body, Choinière had to work with an impressive array of technical apparatus, which far from being superfluous, cast a new light on the artist's approach

and thematic concerns. In the electronic arts this is another way of saying "mission accomplished".

Art and Technology

With *Communion*, *Le Partage des peaux*, her first work, and now *La Mue de l'ange*, Isabelle Choinière is increasingly establishing herself as one of the most significant Quebecois voices in the electronic and performing arts field. Her involvement with this marriage between new technologies and dance has a large part to play in her success. "In general, people erroneously associates dance with something natural, and science with something cold and artificial. For my part, I perceive a very intimate link between the lived body and science. Science is a means of understanding the world, and performance gives one access to a hyper-consciousness of the world. Thanks to my dual education in the sciences and dance, I have never viewed science as a contaminant. During the renaissance, for instance, many artists were also scientists."

The performing arts, whether it be theatre or dance, are increasingly influenced by new technologies. "Technology refreshes our perception of the world. These technologies are changing the way we experience reality. If, as an artist, you alter your perception of the world, you consequently call into question exactly what kind of representation of the world you are creating." For Choinière, new technologies challenge us to think about themes that didn't exist before in the domain of the performing arts. Themes such as territory, flexible identities, temporality and the limits of the body.. "Furthermore, new technologies give me the opportunity to amplify the body's presence, its direct physical language, and they also allow me to confront questions of space and time in a more innovative and open ended manner. In my performances there are no linear narrative structures, only moments of instantaneous sensorial consciousness."

This pioneer overflowing with energy (her uproarious laughter alone merits a web site), has plenty of projects brewing. Alongside her current ambition to "push the relationship between the two dancers in *La mue de l'ange* to a higher degree of intensity, she is also working with a Finnish collective to create "a meeting space for two bodies on the net."

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