



Dancing with your virtual sister

BY MARIA LUNDIN

In an explosion of sensory input, Isabelle Choinière moves in the small gallery space along with her video image screened on the far wall, and her virtual image projected on a transparent screen in the middle of the room. *La Partage des Peaux* (The Sharing of Skins) is a combination of choreography and computer imaging that is unique in performance art; it's an exciting act, both ominous and hopeful.

The piece is the result of Choinière's cooperation with computer graphist and visual artist Lucie Marchand, video artist Jimmy Lakatos (whose company Synergie took part in the rave-project Neksus), and sound designer Michael David Smith. The group has been working on this project for two years, and now it's being presented at Galerie La Centrale as part of their "Du mois de la performance".

Although it's definitely a stunning visual spectacle, this is not just techno art where the artists are playing with new technological tools to create fun effects. The concept at the centre of the performance is what these technologies do to our sense of our bodies. In an abstract sense, the dancer shares her skin with her virtual sister and her reproduction on the wall. The screen, the major focal point of contemporary culture, represents these

"artificial skins" that the dancer shares.

Choinière's unique choreographic language has such varied sources as Bali dancing, classical ballet and the Roy Hart Method (primal screaming vocal

performance at Galerie La Centrale

technique). In *La Partage des Peaux*, her movements are organic, but they are at the same time driven by the computerized sounds, lights and images that envelop her. This sets up the contradiction between the way that technology erases our rational sense of bodily reality, while simultaneously amplifying the corporeal—by creating the hyper-real.

What makes Choinière's dance such an intense visual experience is the combination of all these different mediums. Her make-up is warrior-like; her body has strands of wires running along it; her head is encased in a metal head-set; and a small light shines on her face from above. Watching the act, I saw the dancer emerge as a cyborg: a being that is half animal, half machine.

The image of the cyborg is key to understanding this piece: the dancer is a powerful figure, very primitive, elemental and raw; yet, she is "plugged in" to the

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technology of today and tomorrow. The dance clearly taps into a positive way of thinking about cutting-edge computer and visual technologies, but acknowledges that there is a necessary loss involved in the encounter between these and avant-garde culture.

Maybe this loss is one of security: watching this performance is dizzying, almost frightening. There are fluorescent lights flashing. At one moment the dancer's electronically altered voice and the accompanying computer generated techno sounds reached a climax, sounding like

a train heading straight for the audience. I had the impression that she, the cyborg figure, had managed to move outside herself, and in the end I was sharing her movements with her. When it was over most of the audience looked slightly shocked. To find oneself involuntarily connected to, and affected by these technologies was a disturbing feeling, but one that seems necessary in the face of emerging technologies.

All performances are free, but you have to call to reserve a spot. *Le Partage des Peaux* plays at Galerie La Centrale at 8 p.m. until Sept 24. For information or reservations call 844-3489.