

## TECHNOLOGY

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CULTURE ZONE

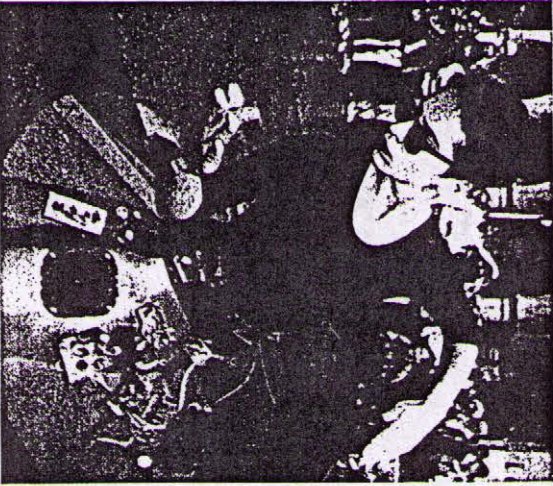
## MIXED MEDIA

## Dancing in the Fast Lane

Art and technology make slightly uneasy partners

**F**ORGET THE STREETS. IN Tempe, Ariz., this winter, they were dancing in the fast lane of the information highway. At the International Dance and Technology Conference (IDAT), hosted by Arizona State University and its Institute for Studies in the Arts, virtual dancers, real dancers and animated life-forms toe-tapped on sensory stages and keyboard-tapped in galleries. They even sent choreography into cyberspace by Webcasting 27 hours of the conference activities, including panel discussions, performances and demonstrations.

Whether they were dancers using technology or technologists experimenting with art, IDAT performers displayed how far digital technology could serve them in extending bodies, motion and audience perception. Throughout the conference, dancers outfitted in audio uniforms, optical suits and holographic cos-



High-tech tutu: A ballerina from Berlin's Die Audio Gruppe turns movement into sound with an array of electronics.

tunes controlled video, sound, projected images and lighting with a flick of a finger or a flex of a knee. After a weekend immersed in demonstrations of how

technology can augment displays of artistic human motion, though, it is apparent that despite some dazzling displays of techno-assisted artistry, the connection between dance and technology is not always made.

Of the score of demonstrations at IDAT, *Songs for the Body Electric* by composer Todd Winkler and dancer Gerry Girouard stood out. The athletic Girouard wittily danced on the walls and ceilings of specially constructed boxes with the aid of a simple rubber-tipped pole. Girouard's space-cutting kinetics—handstands and carving arm motions—triggered signals to vary the music and lighting. His digital collaborator in this process is *Very Nervous System*, created by David Rokeby (see "Dances with Machines," p. 58).

The disconnect in many of these productions stems in part from a mismatch between the artists and the technologists.

Others at the conference more successfully integrated technology with art. In her hallucinatory dance, *Communion*, Montreal dancer/choreographer Isabelle Choiniere explored ancient and contemporary nuances of dance within a tableau-like form. As electronic whispers invoked the goddesses Isis, Diana and Hecate, Choiniere—clad in a sensor-laden, Day-Glo leotard—reproduced her image on the screens in front of and behind her. With majestic movements, she evoked this century's dance goddesses. While sine waves undulated on the screens, she drew a molten voice from her red-lit mouth. In slow dissolves, Choiniere seemed to incarnate the temple dancer, body builder, exotic dancer.

In Troika Ranch's powerhouse *In Plane*, the only livestock was a two-legged creature: Dawn Stoppielo, in electronically augmented gear. The outfit is called a MidDancer sensory suit by its inventor, Mark Coniglio. Coniglio—Troika Ranch's composer and co-artistic director—positioned sensors within the garment that encoded information and sent it to an offstage computer. Stoppielo thus controlled the dynamics and timing of Coniglio's music and video projec-

Consider, for example, choreographer Ellen Bromberg's *Falling to Earth*, a piece that was created on the Intelligent Sage—a sensory space that registers and responds to input through video, audio and curing systems. Artist/technologist Doug Rosenberg projected lyrical imagery and descriptive text on S-curved drapes and the dancer's bodies.

The adolescent narrative (movie-of-the-week stuff about growing up with alcoholic parents) and New Age-y music, however, reminded us that no matter how well the technology is executed, without equal artistic elements, beauty is only screen deep. Not that making technology and artistry equal partners is without its own dangers. In *Inner Spaces of Drifting*, video artist Rogolija Wolf and choreographer Jennifer Predock-Linnel offered mesmerizing aquatic images on the screen and a smart dance trio, which seemed lost in the dark at the bottom of the horizontally divided set. Screen and stage worked here as partners of equal but separate strength, forcing the audience to choose between watching one or the other: a two-ring circus.

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tions. She raced like a speed skater against her own image.

Since 1993, Troika Ranch has been an incubator for posing what was perhaps the main question of the conference: Which comes first, the dancer or the technology? Based on the IDAT showcase, techno-artists are still struggling to solve this riddle.

—Meilyn Jackson

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