

The Virtual Sharing of the Body

"Communion" A performance by and with Isabelle Choinière

The spectator is greeted with discreet electronic chirping and splashing, mysterious murmurs emerge from all corners of the room, darkness and tension reigned, a well sustained tension for Isabelle Choinière's performance at the Youth centre created a magical intensity before which one had no choice but to be captivated.

This performance, presented as part of the European Media Art Festival, made it quite clear that the increasing virtualization of daily life makes the human body neither obsolete nor superfluous. Although our minds and bodies are becoming increasingly familiar with virtual spaces, endless data flows and digital avatars, the manifestation of the real human being will always remain at the centre of our concerns.

This multimedia dance by the Canadian performance team is an impressive demonstration that electronic media can augment and heighten the sensual experience and expressiveness of a dance, as well as leading the art into new spatial and temporal dimensions. The virtual sharing of the body was the theme of the performance. The stage elements were made up of pre-recorded dance sequences that were electronically filtered and reduced to moveable patterns and then projected onto transparent screens. The live dancer, painted with fluorescent colors and lit accordingly, joined with these images in a dematerialized choreography.

Using sensors and switches Choinière was able to modulate and control spotlights, wavelength projections and digital colour effects. Despite these effects she always managed to center the performance around her ambivalent presence: an actor who controls the technology and will not let it usurp her position at the centre of the event. She also demonstrated considerable talent as a dancer, executing trance-like moves, convoluted contractions and light aerial steps which eloquently expressed fundamentally human concerns.

What was, perhaps, missing in the overwhelming atmosphere was an expression of force, violence, stress and speed, factors with which we have to cope with on a daily basis. The performance provided a quiet counterpoint to this reality. The only times one was startled out of the hypnotic ambiance was on the rare occasions when Choinière let loose a primal scream which was digitally filtered and distorted and integrated into the crescendo of the electronic soundtrack.

"The next step will be to mount the whole performance live and in real-time, if that is technically feasible," Isabelle said while commenting on the planned expansion of the performance, that she created with Jimmy Lakatos, Alexandre Burton and Michael David Smith.

Tom Buffmann