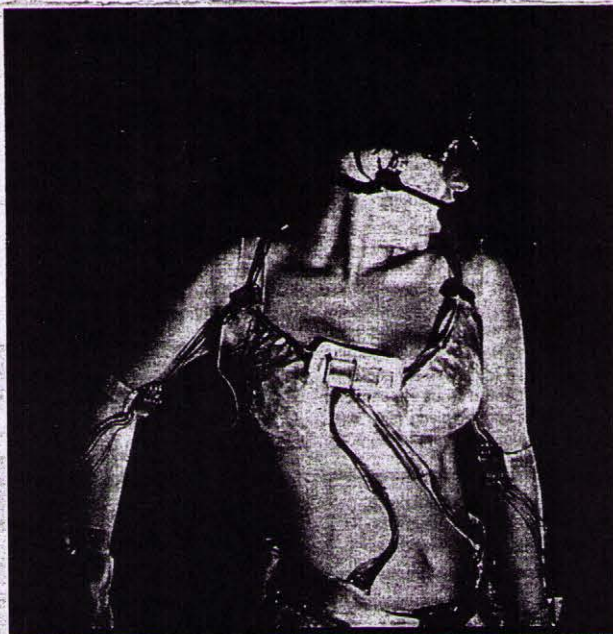


Under the stars on a cool evening in the Arizona desert this past February, local pioneer Isabelle Choinière was receiving the attention and glory normally accorded to the lions of Quebec dance like Lock, Chouinard and Perreault. Choinière was a magnet for the assembled crowd at the International Dance and Technology Conference in Tempe, just outside of Phoenix, where artists, scholars and presenters came to wrestle with ideas of cyber art, particularly the representation of the body through technological amplification.

Since the Arizona event, Choinière and her company, Le Corps indice, have travelled the world as a star attraction on the performance/technology circuit, with gigs in the Canary Islands, France and Denmark. She's currently back on home turf with a rare showing of the first stage of her latest production, *La Mue de l'ange*, an ambitious work for two dancers in different locations.

The dancer and her electronic double will respond long-distance to the virtual image of the other — which sounds like a technological nightmare, as well as a Zen-driven dream.

Much of Choinière's reputation in the field stems from her approach to



DIVIDED SELF
photo Maryse Poulin

SYNCHRONOUS CITIES

TWO DANCERS, TWO TOWNS, ONE SPECTACLE

PHILIP SPZORER

(arts)

dance

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the medium. She isn't just toying around with technology to create interesting effects. Her work is a taste of 21st-century ritual, about sensing body and environment, driven by the computer-generated images, sounds and auras that emanate around her.

Back in 1994, when first approached to work in this emerging art form, Choinière insists she knew nothing, zero, about technology. She found, however, what the conventional dance world was producing unstimulating and the rush to tour was far from motivating. So this Concordia dance grad crossed into a progressive world, where she could play — and interact — with three bodies at the same time: actual, virtual, aural.

"It's like an electronic trance," she says describing her performance state. "Every molecule in your body is activated."

Choinière acknowledges a common fear of technology. "It's seen as a pollution of the body. And people have resistance. It goes against the idea that the body is pure." Finding a bridge between intellectual postulating and the exploration of new dimensions of interactivity is foremost on her mind. Choinière never, she says, considers herself a soloist in the traditional sense. "Because there's a mutation at work, you're always creating with other components. It's meditative — another time, another space. But you're there in another rapport with the world, transforming a sense of the body."

Critics have dismissed a lot of technologically driven dance as being more about gizmos and effects than choreography. "If you don't accept the idea of mutation, then you're just looking at a lovely image or bland decoration," Choinière responds. "But understand that we're at the beginning of this. We don't have 500 years of tradition behind us. It's like the first years of cinema." In essence, don't expect narrative structure or linearity, and leave all expectations at the door. (C)

LA MUE DE L'ANGE

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