



Thinking Tech • Into the 'Future' with Troika's Smart Video Dance

By **SUSAN YUNG** - March 4th, 2003

NEW YORK -- Troika Ranch has further refined the integration of dance with new media in the premiere of "Future of Memory," seen Saturday at the Duke on 42nd Street. Artistic directors Dawn Stoppiello (choreography) and Mark Coniglio (composer and sensory system designer) collaborated on the video design, one of the key elements of the piece. Here, video actually seems to be intelligent, capable of learning and quick to use its newfound material. A periodic montage of images -- a water drop's crater, feet planted in sand washed by a wave, the sea, more feet being dripped with blood -- later includes video feed taken during the performance, giving it a voyeuristic feel. And we watched video of the performance streamed seconds after it was performed. It's a chilling reminder of the world we live in and that pervasive video surveillance makes us invisible to no one.

Aptly titled, the work addresses memory and the act of remembering on a multitude of layers. There are the recollections, simple at the outset, but each one comes with an avalanche of associations of all the senses. Throughout the piece, the performers spoke of their own memories -- a childhood birthday, of being dwarfed and intimidated by school, of personal obsessions. (Obsessiveness is also a recurring theme.) Objects evoke memories; items were treated like treasures -- handled and inspected, and then placed on pedestals. The act of recording took on a prominent role in two onstage video cameras which made both audio and visual documentation of the performance. Long scrolls of paper unfurled across the stage to scribbling noises on the soundtrack. The performers took Polaroids of stage markings, which they later traded like vacation pictures.

The movement itself served as a constant reminder about the active process of memory. On a fundamental level, the choreography must be committed to memory both mentally and physically. In one passage, the four dancers (Stoppiello, plus Danielle Goldman, Michou Szabo, and Sandra Tillett) spun intricate patterns around one another, as

if four people inhabited a revolving door and each executed turns while the door made revolutions, alternating directions. (It seems that dance has always been underrated on an intellectual level, that the sheer skill of memorizing an hour or two of movement is an astonishing feat.)

On another level, Stoppiello fed remembered gestures, actions, and little bits of old dances into the streaming choreography. Her fundamental style is energetic but relaxed, with soft feet and open hands, and snippets of ballet vocabulary with high-octane kicks, leaps, and lunges alternating with more descriptive verses of reflexive or functional movement. Stoppiello ran through a Tourette's-like phrase -- a blue streak of dance positioned parallel to the unfurled scroll. In another section, a pair of dancers, seated on the floor, slid their legs under the other's, rocked back and forth, and parlayed a childlike playfulness into full-blown rage. The performers all displayed individual appeal in addition to internalizing Stoppiello's distinctive vocabulary.

Despite some technical difficulties with the audio and video feed, Coniglio's score for cello, violin, and marimba set a dramatic, film noir tone. The music swelled, sonorous and over-miked, or vaporized us with dream-like passages and evocative noises. Coniglio designed the "MidiDancer Sensory System," worn by the dancers, which permitted interaction between their motions and the feed. The video was projected onto a backdrop of white screens or shutters with a variety of surface finishes, a clever and effective alternative to a plain white screen. Akiko Sato designed the witty costumes, tailored pieces made of a translucent material that allowed the seams to show through -- in a sense, memories of clothing. Susan Hamburger designed the varied, at times breathtaking lighting. Performing Coniglio's score live was the Fireworks Ensemble, featuring Alica Lagger on violin, Julian Molitz on marimba, and Leigh Stuart on cello.