

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Bill Hebert

Ceci n'est pas David

by Annie Wilson

The basics: *Timelines*, directed by Lauren Mandillian, is a piece that is concerned with time travel, but perhaps more importantly, is a piece that is concerned with the integration of digital media and live performance. It asks the question that many, many contemporary artists today ask, and with good reason: how do our fleshy selves coexist with our digital selves?

What I saw: A white-clad David Konyk appears between two translucent swaths of cloth that hang all the way across the stage. He is dimly lit by bulbs above, which flicker, for reasons unbeknownst to me, at certain times during the show. A video projection of a white-clad David Konyk appears on the front swath. And then another Konyk appears, on the other side of the stage. And then another. And another. Throughout the piece, real and digital Konyks appear and disappear in this narrow corridor, dancing mostly in unison, sometimes in canon, sometimes in chaos. The score by Jon Shapiro is at turns eerie, playful, cold and robotic, warm and organic. Occasionally I would come out of watching the piece long enough to be impressed with the level of skill necessary in order to pull this off.

Questions I thought about while watching the show, which may or may not be questions the artists intended me to ask:

- Are we always beholden to our past selves? The dancing Konyk we saw projected on the cloth was once a living Konyk, at some point before the show. Past, projected Konyk(s) determined the speed and rhythm of the movement that living Konyk would have to dance if he wanted to dance in unison with his past self(ves). Are we always fitting ourselves into the form that our past self determined with its choices, which may or may not be completely arbitrary?
- What is the digital footprint that stays behind when we go? What shows up when I Google my name? What will show up when I Google my name twenty years from now? Will my grandchildren be able to find the very first picture I was tagged in on Facebook? Will they be able to find that picture after I'm dead?
- Is said digital footprint, over which I have some control, but not entirely, an extension of myself? Or is it something else, something

that is related to me but has a life of its own? I believe Mandillian thinks that our digital selves have a life of their own, as evidenced by a section in which Konyk shared a joke with his digital self about the pole bisecting the stage. I loved the brief humor when digital Konyk instructed living Konyk to move over, because the pole was blocking his dancing. If one half of the stage represented the “future” and the other half the “past,” the pole was conceivably the razor’s edge of the present, slicing through the two, dividing (or connecting) them. So, how much do our future and past selves pull us away from the present, seducing us with some really fun thoughts much the way digital Konyk(s) pulled living Konyk into some really fun-looking dancing? Kind of all the time.

- And, really, each “digital” Konyk wasn’t really Konyk at all, but a digital image that looked a lot like him. It was a two-dimensional projection, but when there were twenty on the screen and the stage was so dimly lit, I often lost the flesh-and-blood Konyk amongst the images. And so how real is the real Konyk if he’s so easy to confuse visually with the “fake” Konyk(s)?

- Does technology wrap us in a dimly-lit echo chamber of our most exterior, least permanent selves, confusing us through tricks of lighting and timing and mimicry as to what is real and what is not? Instead of dancing with others, does technology allow us to just dance with many different versions of our smallest, least dimensional selves? Is that what’s happening?

I appreciated that the show didn’t have an overt political opinion on the role of technology in our life. The skill with which the elements were integrated and the abstract nature of the piece allowed me to wander inside the echo chamber of my own technology-addled head, asking my own questions and grasping at my own answers. I find that so many dances that involve technology draw the viewer away from the live dancing bodies, which I generally dislike. But I could have watched a full hour of this many-Konyk-ed dance.

Timelines, Lauren Mandillian. thefidgetspace. No further performances.

By Annie Wilson

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