

The Secret Project - half/angel

Jools Gilson-Ellis

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The Secret Project began its life in a small studio in Amsterdam in 1996. Richard Povall and I had spent the previous two years working on our CD-ROM mouthpiece. This was a process of meeting my text with Richard's music; of making spaces where the visual, the aural, the textual and the sonic could be played with. These were spaces of hemmed-in play – as all interactivity is. In 1996, with *mouthplace* close to being published, Richard and I were invited for two residencies at STEIM (Studio for Electronic and Instrumental Music) in Amsterdam. Our aim in these residencies was to extend the collaborative fluency we had developed during the making of *mouthpiece* back into live performance. We began to use the motion-sensing software BigEye, which was developed at STEIM. BigEye allows users to connect movement with sound. It does this by connecting a simple video camera, which surveys the performance space, to a computer. BigEye can locate movement by using colour as a trigger, or by using motion. In Amsterdam in 1996, with the glee of innocents, we began experimenting with colour. This involved me in all kinds of big-contrast costume changes – red gloves, orange vests, hoops of bright blue telephone piping. What happened with these early experiments was that the movement became overwhelmed by the aim of making a singular colour trigger 'hit' a particular point. The choreography became two-dimensional, and overly concerned with something outside of itself. We switched to using motion, and something interesting seemed possible. This difference is an important one for any digital interactivity. It is the difference between the simple on/off switch (if you go here and click this something happens, and it always happens in the same way) to a more textured, troubled and corporeal relationship between moving bodies, and aural worlds of text and music. For the next few years, Richard and I honed our work with BigEye. Media & Visual Arts at The Banff Centre for the Arts in Canada, began to co-produce this research, and we spent three months in the mountains during 1998 developing our intelligent performance spaces. The work became '**The Secret Project**' during this time. The idea for delving into the personal and cultural resonances of 'secrecy' came out of the processes of our practical research. As the work produced moments of unusual connection, it felt like finding secrets hidden in air.

We performed extracts from ***The Secret Project*** at Banff, and also at festivals in Arizona, California and South Carolina during 1998 and '99. As we moved towards production we invited choreographer\dancers Cindy Cummings and Mary Nunan to work with us. We chose to work with such experienced performers because the challenges of the production were wide ranging – from working with interactive space to using the speaking and singing voice with movement. We worked for six weeks in Banff during September/October 1999. ***The Secret Project*** was first performed at The Eric Harvey Theatre at The Banff Centre in October 1999, and then at Firkin Crane (our other co-producer) in Cork in November 1999. ***The Secret Project*** was also performed at DEAF (Dutch Electronic Arts Festival) in November 2000.

if you're falling
so is the snow
perhaps
you will also
melt
in my palm

Jools Gilson-Ellis (January 2001)