

THE SECRET PROJECT - half/angel

Michael Seaver

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The Project in Dublin in February 2001]

Are we losing our senses the more we engage with technology? If television has ruined the art of conversation will the present internet generation lose the art of small-talk with a bank teller? As we become less personable and communicate with our minds alone (save the small movement of our fingers clacking on a keyboard) we lose sense of our bodies. Its wilful spirit must be broken, worked hard in gyms or half-starved until it looks how we imagine it should. Drugs will keep us going when our bodies fail us – paracetamol, Viagra, or anabolic steroids.

Dance and Technology would seem to be at odds, one basking in the senses the other denying those senses and elevating the mind. Up to now dance has lost out. Performances showed a moving body framed by lasers and video monitors, grasped by electrodes and confined in an artificial space policed by floor pads. We lost sight of the body but were infatuated by the technology. This was the future.

When I saw *The Secret Project* premiered in Cork it reaffirmed for me what dance represents and how its ability to awaken our senses need not be diminished should it choose to present itself in a different way. It also highlighted the need for the technology to be sensitive enough to capture not only the movement, but the sense of movement.

Jools' strangely dislocated breath in the beginning shows this correspondence between technology and movement. The technique as Richard describes it is interesting: 'We recorded a sequence of breathing sounds from the quietest, calmest breathing to the almost hysterical gasps. From this source, I pulled out around 150 separate breath sounds, and classified them into 5 layers, again from the quietest to the most troubled or loudest. In the final piece, the way Jools moves determines what level of sound we are listening to. If she is moving gently, we hear the gentler layers, if she is moving (at the other extreme) in an almost hysterical way, we are hearing the most agitated layers.'

But the effect is to at once bring the internal out to the bare unreal stage. An inner breath becomes an outer commentary. And the minute level of dialogue between body and computer allows a depth not possible in yesterday's raw on-off switch sensors.

Although I attended just one performance I can still sense moments in the performance. Not just remember but actually sense. This is probably because the audience are given the space to feel. We aren't bombarded by slick images and video sequences. The bare stage means we don't get distracted in a game of 'spot the motion sensor' and obsess about what is pre-recorded and what is triggered by the dancers. But we are given an uncluttered palette and allowed to feel, with our eyes, our ears and our bodies. That's not going to happen to you too often this week