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Embracing One's Virtual Double

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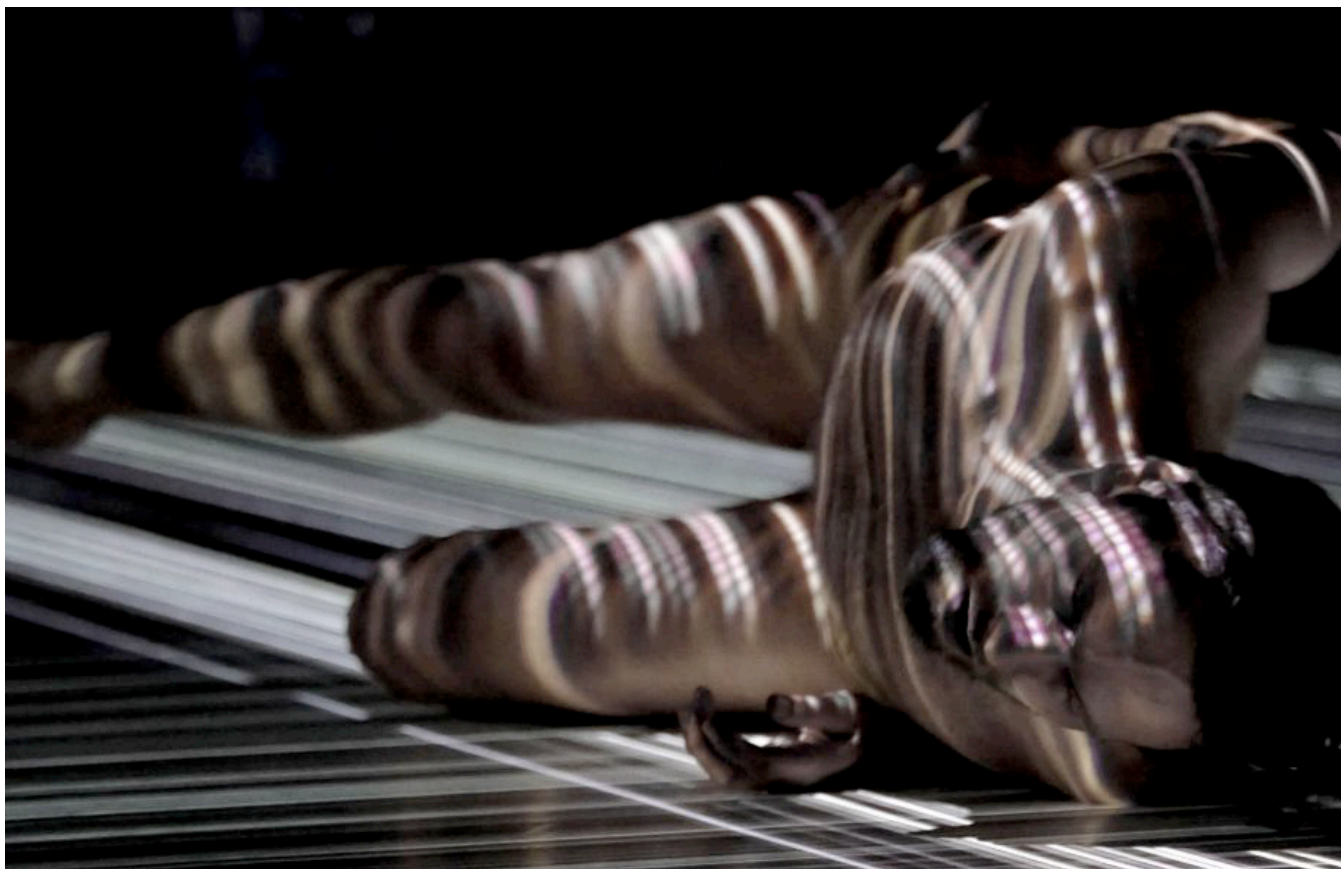


Photo : Jérôme Delapierre

Isabelle Van Grimde made a lasting impression in 2013 with *Les Gestes* and its musician-bodies. In her new creation, which interweaves digital arts, dance and music, Marie-Ève Lafontaine, Georges-Nicolas Tremblay, Samaël Maurice (age 12), Maya Robitaille (age 14), initiate dialogues, through movement, with their virtual doubles and interactive visual environment. A reflection on the identities we create in our virtual adventures, *Symphony 5.1* is both moving and fascinating. Not to be missed.

On a dark and unadorned stage, long pieces of black cloth hang from the ceiling. Marie-Ève Lafontaine, in flesh-coloured tights and underclothes, begins with a kind of military march to the sound of a stirring piece of concrete music, composed and performed live by Tim Brady and Thom Gossage.

Guitars and percussion are combined with electronic textures, while the dancer moves her hips in a circular motion, lifts her legs high, and makes sinuous curves in a shimmering second skin. Her athletic body resonates with an ever-changing visual grid on the floor. In serpentine fashion, with abrupt halts and changes of direction, she triggers pulsations and jolts within the grid, which never stops mutating. Moving about on the floor, she generates a black sphere around her, not unlike a black hole swallowing the light.

Practically all our senses are summoned. The experience, visual and dreamlike, is also sensorial and hypnotic. At the back of the stage, behind one of the black curtains, the body of a young girl can be glimpsed, like a ghost in a Japanese film.

Silence sets in, the lights go out. Another being, an adult this time, appears. As the body sways playfully, a faint light illuminates certain parts of his body, which turns out to be that of a male.

Georges-Nicolas Tremblay enters into a dialogue with Marie-Ève Lafontaine. The choreography is strikingly inventive. Formal at the beginning, *Symphony 5.1* becomes increasingly protean, shaped by the conversations between bodies.

In this work, which seems to evoke the barriers in contemporary communication, the hands are of paramount importance. In turn, they clutch a part of the body, move compulsively, tenderly trace out the contours of the space, become seized with dyslexia, they seem to want to agitate the air... These hands do not clutch or grab; they flutter in the air, enframing the body of the other. When they caress a face, it is invariably with the back of the hand. No real contact is ever made, only the slightest brush.

Dancing with one's avatar

Tremblay's immaterial double appears on a black curtain. The dancer approaches, positions himself behind his clone. Cleaving to one another, they move their arms. Lafontaine, for her part, moves along the floor, gripped by the image of her avatar.

Like our digital identities, which resemble us but are never identical (each is an image that we would like to project in a particular context), the dancers' avatars differentiate themselves through their gestural language. They become gigantic and intimidating, appearing on the two curtains at the front of the stage.

From the back of the stage, we catch glimpses of the immaterial doubles of an adolescent male and female—two students from the École supérieure de ballet du Québec. A mysterious and intriguing vision. Are they real? Are they from the past or future?

They are very much real. Maya Robitaille approaches the giant avatar of Tremblay and tries to touch it. She and Samaël Maurice then engage in a poignant and poetic conversation, midway between play and questioning.

The four dancers finally appear in flesh and blood, as a change in the lighting allows us to see the musicians behind their instruments. The images intermingle before vanishing into a few pixels, evoking the organic and tribal image of a dying fire.

A brilliant work, at once visual, synaesthetic and experiential, *Symphony 5.1* proves that it is possible to create a sensorial, dreamlike and deeply human work with the help of the new technologies. Provided they are subservient to it, and not the reverse.