

DOUBLE VISION: To Futurism and Back Again

By Sean Clute & Pauline Jennings

If you dare visit our apartment in Oakland, CA you will undoubtedly have to watch your step. Inside is a mess of cables, hard drives, computer parts, Pilates balls, yoga mats, and bowls of leftover oatmeal covering the floor. Besides our hodgepodge of tools for creative use there is no furniture or decoration. The one exception can be found on the kitchen wall where hangs an enigmatic black and white photograph of two men dancing in robot tin-can outfits. Until a month ago, we knew very little of the image's history, meaning, or impact the dancing robot people would have on our intermedia group DOUBLE VISION. Now, the past and future seem to converge as we look for our missing VGA adaptor.

After investigating the photograph, we discovered that it was from a 1924 Futurist dance by F.T. Marinetti entitled *Macchina del 3000*, or quite possibly later called *The Love of Two Locomotives for the Station Master* (1925). While researching this dance, the Italian Futurists, and their vision of a world during the birth of film, airplanes and automobiles, it became clear that the past and present share many artistic similarities. Over a century ago Marinetti declared, "Time and space died yesterday." Today through the utilization of technologies and scientific theories in performance, it is becoming easier to see how his declaration can fully come to life.

DOUBLE VISION's interest is not in dance alone. Rather, we are concerned with contemporary culture as it ebbs and flows. The group, founded in 2003, has created a large collection of choreography, events, video, music, and other works glued together by an urge to live, experience and express the now. However, it is through dance that we are able to brush closely against one of our favorite subjects: what it is to be human. The definition and redefinition of human-ness seems to be shifting at an increasing rate. Are we still understood to be like the corpses Leonardo da Vinci dissected hundreds of years ago? Would a modern day painter express the anatomical depiction of an arm without consulting the Google image database first?

The Futurists' tin can robot dancers worked for their time. Artists then observed a shift in what it meant to be human in a society becoming intertwined with the machine. From these observations, some Futurists created *sintesi* (short works for stage) that attempted to map the motion of pulleys, cogwheels, cranks, and shafts onto the dancers through stylized, machine-like movements. For example, in Giacomo Balla's 1914 work *Macchina Tipografica*, twelve performers depicted wheels and pistons of the printing press through repetitive arm movements. Today, the task of mapping the machine to the stage presents a different challenge. How does one translate the movement of electrons, assembly language and cyberspace into dance? Unlike the machines of the Futurists' time, the complexity embedded in current technology has vastly increased, while becoming more transparent. To our naked eye, the path of a million simultaneous neurons is perplexing when trying to realize them on six dancers at a Wednesday night rehearsal.

However, our goal is not merely to map codes and algorithms into a dance, but to illuminate their meaning. Humans may line up to get medical upgrades, to design their children, to outlast the norm, but what does this progress imply about ourselves? Questions such as these occupy our artistic brains while working day jobs and replying to emails. As co-artistic directors we usually share the same concepts, beliefs, and intuitions about our work. It is during the manifestation of the work that we don't always see eye to eye. For example, while creating our new work *Three Canons and Mise en Scènes* it became apparent that the choreography implied different meanings for both of us. While one of us saw the dancers fighting for physical control, the other perceived the dancers exhibiting total control. The root of the discrepancy is that we were both trying to depict an age that is in a constant state of becoming. The time of the cogwheel is long dead. True to the age we live in, DOUBLE VISION is constantly upgrading, adapting, and moving. We accept the fact that we don't really know what will come next but strive to move forward, regardless. Along the journey, we may find evidence of who we are as artists, dancers, music-makers or humans. Just as the photograph of the Futurists' metal-clad dancers reminds us of who we were, we too will leave artifacts along the way depicting who we have become.