

DANCE

In "Flummoxed," the final haiku presented at Dance Theater Workshop, Cathy Weis lip-synched a country and western song as her TV head accompanied her.

A Multiplicity of Perspectives

Cathy Weis reprises "Electric Haiku," coming to terms with media

By BRIAN MCCORMICK AND MARY DONOVAN

Cameras, projectors, TVs and screens. These are the simple technologies that Cathy Weis uses to make her mediated, meditative dances. With wires and cables clearly visible, she is not interested in making the interface transparent, but asking what they otherwise make apparent.

"Electric Haiku: Calm as Custard" performed at Dance Theater Workshop in late February, continued her exploration into blending technology with the live. Unlike many artists who use media, Weis is interested in more than just the visual effect, but "the act of seeing itself." In "Haiku 1," a reprise from the first "Electric Haiku" series, Scott Heron in a kind of white jester suit created tension between the audience and his foot by way of camera that ended with a classic tele-visual trick of perspective that made it look as if he were falling in slow motion. The action seemed absurd when watching it being carried out on stage. On screen, it was funny because the audience was in on the joke. Weis has compared her work to Cubism.

Like the Cubists, she offers different viewpoints simultaneously, and not just from a physical perspective, but also in her use of the idea of public (the full, costumed performer) and private (the back of his heel) as well.

In “Fluid Heads to Death,” Weis and Jennifer Miller wheeled a covered monitor around the stage in a formalized manner that evoked Japanese and ancient Greek theater. The lighting was beautiful, and their red garments, which had a ceremonial quality, seemed to glow in the placid, twilight atmosphere. They were interrupted by a television with Weis’ talking head, which was passed into the audience. Weis remained on stage pleading for the lights and to be able to move on to the next dance, but the TV head was asking for a better view.

“Haiku 3” was a delicate solo for Weis, in which she danced with her double exposure while talking about what it means to have Multiple Sclerosis. She was calculating in her movements, knowing her image would be split and flipped. There was no quirkiness there and it was moving and meaningful in both Lacanian and lay terminology. “Haiku 5” is similarly pure. Diane Madden danced, and that was enough. A dancer was completely in her body, every movement clear and connected from head to heel. What the camera revealed, as Madden moved her hand, her face, her foot to the lens was that she is mature, not as youthful as her fluid dancing might suggest, and that her toes are short. Like Weis’ own solo, it was incredibly humanizing.

Weis’ eccentric persona is integral to her work, and she seems determined to keep things from getting too serious. This is just art after all. In the final haiku, “Flummoxed,” she lip-synched a country and western song with the cast. Her TV head rested atop a seated dummy next to her, as if, for the time being, she’d made peace with her media-self.

Steve Hamilton provided the live sound from on stage where he could view the performers. Jennifer Tipton designed the moody lighting. The program also included Jenny Liu and Heron in the kaleidoscopic “A Bad Spot Hurts Like Mad,” from 2001.