

Interview CinéWomen 2015

Question 1

Surrealism might be a subjective practice, but by definition it is also a hyperrealist one. Cynthia Domenico's dance film *Insomnia* reveals an incredible effort to desubliminate subconscious urges, rendering the fantastic and the uncanny in clear, precise images. Through an accurate choreography of micro-gestures, Cynthia takes the viewer through a roller coaster of emotions. We are pleased to present Cynthia Domenico for this year's CinéWomen Edition. Cynthia, tell us about your trajectory as a dancer and videomakers. What inspired you to express yourself in this medium?

It was the pleasure of being in movement and the somatic approaches, that led me to the dance praxis. The concept of body awareness was the curricular axis of the Bachelor Degree I did, with the studies of Euthony, Bartenieff Fundamentals, Rudolf von Laban, Body-Mind Centering, Madame Beziers, among others. Therefore, the body's self-sensing, the first impulse that leads to the gesture and the expressive movement, which is a result of an accurate proprioception are of keen interest in my artistic research.

The gestures that interest me in order to create a choreography are usually subtle, small, with few mobility in space. And the video is an excellent medium to create subtle choreographies. Through the edition I can, for example, enlarge small gestures and make it occupy the entire screen. I can play with scales and bring focus to tiny, nearly unnoticeable gestures. In this sense, the choreographies I create on video are hyperrealist.

Furthermore, my creations are inseparable from my life experience and the inspiration comes from my personal imaginery. The same one I cultivate since I was a little child. In fact, I'm the kind of person people call a dreamer. My imagination is truly present and active. In my daily life, I move freely across reality and fantasy. In a moment I realize the facts on which I am immersed and in the next moment I turn them into a psychic film. In this sense, I perceive the world and I resignify it at all times. I make films in my mind while walking, bathing, cooking, riding a horse, playing with the dog, working on computer, and so on. This is from where come the images I organise within a frame. *Insomnia*, for example, was conceived in a period I was experiencing a high anxiety. In that time I was waking up everynight around 3pm and falling asleep again around 6am. This work was then, in first place, a psychic dance film that I conceived in my mind, while trying to fall asleep again. For me to be videomaker means to translate these films I create in my mind into moving images on screen.

Question 2

You opt for the purest form of dance cinema, conceiving choreography that can only exist on the screen. How did that concept develop, and who are some of your chief influences? Can you tell us what attracted you to *Insomnia*?

I've been working intuitively with choreographies that are hyper potentialized on screen since my early works. For example, *Cama de Gato* (Cat's Bed), my first videoart, presents a cat chasing a ladybug on a bed. It is unlikely to set up a structure on stage, where it would be possible to perform this narrative between an animal and an insect again and again. In this particular case, to be on screen enables the work. It was only later when I learned the concept itself, which describes the creation of a choreography that can exist only on screen. I found it on Katrina McPherson's book "Making Videodance", an artist and academic researcher on screendance.

Moreover the influences that inspire me come from different languages within the audiovisual field: the Cinema of Lars von Trier, because of the narrative's subjective point of view; the videomusic of Michel Gondry, because of the strong relationship between moving image and music; the dance films of DV8, because of the virtuosis while creating dance for camera; and finally Pina Bausch, because of her peculiar and elegant way to create a surreal and dreamlike situation on screen.

What attracted me to *Insomnia*, besides making an artwork on the theme Anxiety, which is considered the evil of the century, was the extended time of the body's actions and the possible narratives that emerges from Isabel's unusual body shapes. Isabel Hölzl is the dancer who performed for the camera. While I was editing, my focus was to understand the rhythm of her gestures, and then I started playing with the acceleration and deceleration of the movements, thus creating the virtual choreography.

Question 3

Was it important for you to make a personal film, something you knew a lot about? How has your history influenced the way you produce art?

My relationship with Art began in my body. When I started studying Dance with somatic approaches I had a major goal and it wasn't only professional: I wanted to create new mind patterns in order to overcome an eating disorder. By potencializing my body awareness I was able to create a new body: a body that I now understand as my masterpiece. I like to say I started dancing on the reverse side: instead of using my body as a medium to create a dance, I used the dance as a medium to re-create my body. From this experience follow 3 main questions, which lead my creative process nowadays:

1. where does the dance happen?
2. which is it's medium?
3. who is dancing or what is dancing?

Since the begining my artworks never fitted on stage. Also they needed another bodies than mine to materialise. So I started performing in public spaces and inviting the audience to interact. And I started inviting other dancers to perform my choreographies live and on video. I ended up working with new technologies, building interactive installations on videodance and being a dance film director. I can still feel in my artistic intentions the first impulse I had to create art: a continuous search for new patterns, new shapes and new forms of being.

Question 4

We have been deeply appreciate your peculiar use of micro-gestures. How did you develop this fascinating element of your body language?

To feature the dance film *Insomnia*, I invited the dancer Isabel Hölzl, a friend and collaborator in other projects. I made this choice based on her body research, which focus on the use of micro-gestures. I had already seen a solo of her, in which the choreography was entirely performed using the scapular complex muscles. Having Isabel performing for the camera allowed me to a certain critic distance and a better vision of the frame composition.

What interested me most as using her choreography of micro-gestures was the possibility of exploring on video the unusual body compositions. The movements realized by her muscles awake in the viewer the sensation of tension and release, which in my opinion translate the work intention, i.e to represent the discomfort of an insomne night.

Question 5

The rhythmical element is extremely important in *Insomnia*. By definition cinema is rhythm and movement, gesture and continuity. How do you conceive the rhythm of your works?

Usually the soundtracks for my dance films are created only when the first cut is ready, with the exception of "Alone between Slices", whose storyboard was conceived for a music composition by Rafael Borges Amaral. I set the pace of the work during the edition process and I work it in 3 rhythmic layers: there's the pace of the choreography happening on screen, there's the duration of the scenes and finally there's the pace of the film itself. I organize this three layers while editing.

I think the rhythm of the choreography as a balance between the rhythm of the performance for the camera and the dance happening on video. I first understand the pace of the filmed choreography then I translate it into the audiovisual language by means of cut and the organisation of the shots in a sequence. Then I work the duration of the scenes related to the attention of the viewer. This is a choice I make just intuitively. I watch the scene again and again on the computer's screen observing the exact time my eye distract from screen. This is, in my opinion, the moment that the scene has to end. Simultaneously I work the film's rhythm. This is related to the theme of the work and it depends on the sensation I want to awake in the viewer. In this regard I use a quick or a dilatory pace, alternating dynamics. In fact I set up a counting for the edition. In this sense I use a dance technic to generate dynamics in the videodance.

Question 6

Can you introduce our readers to the multi-disciplinaire nature of your art practice?

When I start a workshop on Videodance I use to quote Douglas Rosenberg, a researcher and artist on this topic. I learned from his theory to look at Screendance as an umbrella term, which contains a vaste range of artistic praxis, such as videodance, videomusic, visual arts, performance, cinema, and so on. Therefore the relation, which one can always find in a videodance work can be visualised as a tensioning line between dance performance and screen.

This relation can be explored both in scenic and live works as also in digital-works. As artist I found myself in a field of artistic language's intersection. I'm between Dance, Performance, Screendance, Videoart, Public intervention and Media-art. But it's everything within the Screendance field. For example when I create a video-scenary I think the video as a dancing body just like the others dancers. I relate it to the other elements on stage and I try to create together with the choreographer a real connection between the real bodies (performers) and the virtual body (the video-projection).

Another example of this tensioning line between dance and screen in my work is the interactive installation for LED panel "Framing Body". In this work it is the interactor's movement made for a frontal camera that generates the projected video on a panel. During the interaction, a camera captures a frame each 5 seconds. These frames go to a databank and afterwards are put randomly in a video sequence, thus generating a stopmotion, which is projected on a LED facade. In this sense, the vibration of the two poles - dance performance and screen - is well balanced. Also in this particular work the tensioning line generates a third work, a choreographic stopmotion.

Question 7

You founded an independent dance agency called Soma Realizações. Do you think it is harder for women directors to have their projects green lit?

Being a woman director has never affected negatively the productions of my art projects. In my professional experience I've never felt a particular difficulty to have a project green lit because of a matter of gender, but rather because of a matter of area. I believe that the real challenge for finding resources to produce a project is that I work with art projects and not with health, agriculture or economic projects. Whether you're a male or female artist, whether you're in Brazil or abroad, the financial resources for Arts are always scarce and lower than for other sectors. I think this is the biggest difficulty to have a project green lit.

And the factor that I work with a new art field like Screendance reinforce this adversity. For example in Brazil, there's only one regular fund, for which one can apply a videodance project. And the financial resource of this fund is tight and has to be divided with the whole dance sector. That's the reason I started a dance agency 9 years ago, because I didn't want to wait for a sponsor or a fund to start my projects and I also didn't want to be in a competition situation with other dance artists in São Paulo. In that time I realized that I could work with and for them. Then I started selling dance projects from different dancers and companies for cultural institutions in São Paulo and I also worked as art manager for different dance companies. So I created a professional situation where I could survive (that means pay all the bills) working only with Dance.

Simultaneously to these activities I developed a sustainable system of art production. Every dance film I made was produced collaboratively and with few financial resources, which came from my own dance agency. I believe this system has been working for so long because I really care about giving space and autonomy for the artist who is collaborating in the work. They are co-creators. At the end of a working day I like to see how the team is happy and satisfied. Maybe that's kind of a way of sponsoring dance films having happiness and creativity as currency?

Question 8

Thanks for sharing your time, Cynthia, we wish you all the best with your dancer and filmmaker career. What's next for you? Have you a particular film in mind?

I'd like to thank a lot the interest for my dance film, *Insomnia*, and for my creative process. It was an opportunity to share knowledge with other people and also for me to reflect about my artistic praxis.

My next project is an interactive installation on Videodance, which I've been conceiving in partnership to the french artist Christian Delecluse.

Saturday Night Fever Everyday proposes an interactive "disco" environment inside a black box, to create a unique space for dancing, where sound and light will respond to the dynamics of the dancer. We base the proposal on thought of Lisa Nelson, that dance is a response to the environment. It will be a tribute to freedom that the disco movement brought to people in the 70s, that enabled them to win freedom of thought through the release of the body.

This interactive installation is the first step towards larger project, which will build a database of people dancing in different cities around the world. This database will also be stored on the network as opensource, where artists, students and interested in general may conduct research on dance, body and its relation with the environment. Besides the installation there's a second object, that will will present a videodance as a collective choreography created from the individual interactions stored in the database. This videodance will be transmitted on a disco ball built by little screens. I hope to have soon the opportunity to invite you all to interact inside our installation!