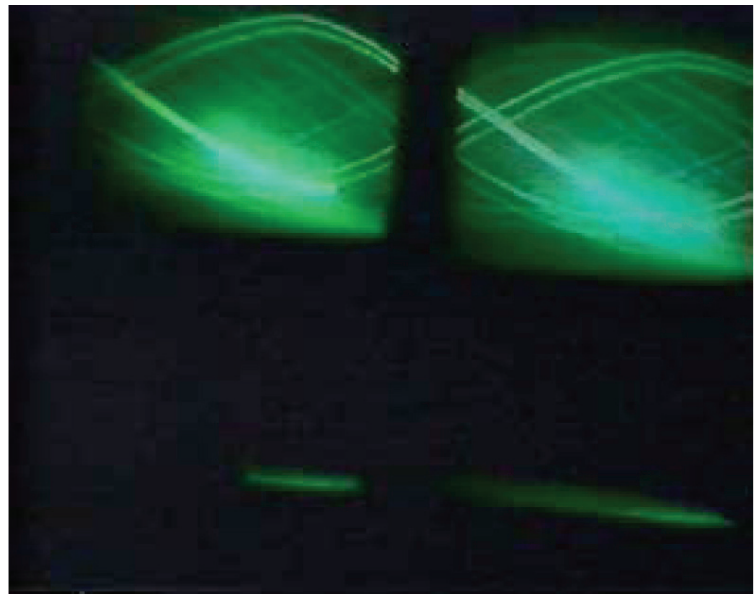


## **THE FLEXIBLE HELIX** *By Francesca Rebecchi*

Thought up and directed once again by Ezio Cuoghi, “The Flexible Helix” was a fundamental stage in the aesthetic research into the relationship between Art and Science, which here in particular deals with the interaction of artistic languages with those of biochemistry and molecular chemistry. Indeed, the fascinating theme dealt with actually concerns DNA, or to be more precise, molecular biology and, once again, it is science which inspires the artistic metaphors of this second intermedial theatrical event

which sees the use of the artistic potential of technical languages together with that of the expressive capacity of artistic means brought into special prominence thanks to video technology. The challenge is to bring to light the areas where two apparently different worlds have a point of contact



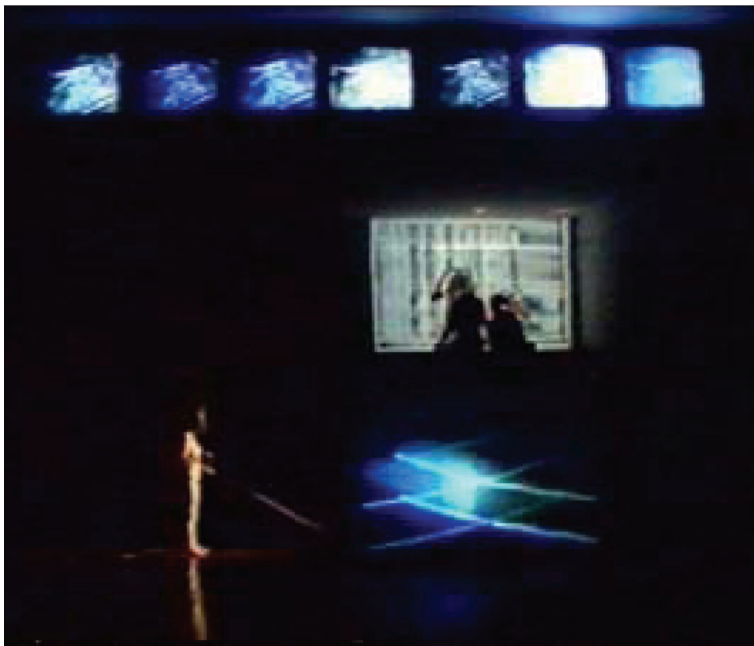
and to see whether there is communicative compatibility between the artistic and scientific fields in an attempt to arrive at a unitary cultural message using different means.

In this attempt Cuoghi was backed up by an operative team which we had in part had the opportunity to appreciate in his previous work and which is, in practice, a permanent group involved in research. The scientific course of the performance, able to grasp the salient aspects of the subject and at the same time offer

stimulus to the artistic side of things, was guided by professor Roberto Gambari, of the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology of the University of Ferrara, assisted by professor Franco Mezzetti, of the Physics Department (who had already collaborated in L'Orizzonte degli Eventi) and by Professor Giorgio Celli, while on the artistic side we find Carlo Ansaloni as a collaborator once again, head of the Video Art Centre in Ferrara at the time, the ideal setting for aesthetic and scientific imagination which was to host one of Cuoghi's productions for the second time.

The Museum of Natural History was also involved, holding an exhibition of the materials used during the realization of the event (for a didactic approach to the subject), as was the "Frescobaldi" Conservatory of Music. The division of this work into frames follows a route which from the mythical big bang and the start of life on earth leads to the hypothesis of possible worlds according to manipulation of the genotype, moving therefore from macro to micro, namely from evolutionistic genetics, represented in a metaphor in the form of a dance in which a dancer,

whose face and hands haven't yet reached the final evolutive state, is seen hanging upside down and wrapped up like a cocoon, to molecular genetics, to DNA.



DNA as chief code and depository of vital processes with its well-known structure, a double helix, is exalted by the non-stop images on the monitor (synthesis of nucleotide sequencing of DNA analysed, replication of DNA etc.),

by the soprano's song and exceptionally well by the "Danza dei Funi"(Dance of the Ropes), a particular reference to its peculiar shape. We are reminded just how far genetics could go by a Human Guinea-Pig who, from a cage, controlled by biomedical instruments, reads out in a harsh voice a number of scientific passages, such as the one entitled



"Progetto Genoma Umano" Human Genome Project- (projected in the form of an explanatory diagram), regarding the problem of the sequencing of DNA in the human genome. A problem which finds its solution in the eighth episode, "Il Genoma Svelato" (The Genome Revealed), in which the singers strike up "The work no longer holds any secrets, The Genome is in sequence, there are chances of reproducing them, multiplying them, cloning them..." and at that point the spectre of Genic Mutation appears, immediately comforted by Genic Therapy, who puts right the aforesaid genic mutation by altering the genome, but "any operation of genic therapy on human germinal cells is banned at present".

This statement made once again by the Human Guinea-Pig introduces the last possible scenarios concerning likely outcomes: The Ideal World, The Mutant World, The Desertified World. As Lola Bonora wrote at the time about the performance: "L'Elica Flessibile (The Flexible Helix) is a complex work which moves on the brink of intermedial communication at times with valuable lightness and immediately after with extreme concreteness, but always in search of universal themes which have become more problematic and have created more involvement because of the interest and desire to know shown by a large section of the public."