DIGITAL PERFORMANCE: A HISTORY OF NEW MEDIA IN THEATRE, DANCE, PERFORMANCE ART, AND INSTALLATION. By Steve Dixon with contributions by Barry Smith. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007; pp. 808. $50.00 cloth.

In keeping with this issue's exploration of new paradigms in theatre scholarship, teaching and praxis, Steve Dixon and Barry Smith's provocative and thoughtful book provides an introduction to and solid grounding in the theories, practices and critical perspectives that underlie the emerging field of digital performance studies. The work, published as part of the *Leonardo* series that focuses on the convergence of art, science and technology, forges new ground in documenting and analyzing a vast array of practices involving the use of computer-based technologies in the creation, dissemination, presentation and documentation of performance works. More than merely providing a visual and descriptive investigation of specific projects and key artists, though, the authors offer a comprehensive account of the genesis and impact of new media technologies on diverse performing arts genres, using information culled from *The Digital Performance Archive*, a database that Dixon and Smith established to record technologically-mediated activities. Their extensive and detailed analysis of digital performance includes a review of existing literature in the field, a history of the technical innovations that gave rise to new tools and formats and a genealogy of the discipline's ideological influences.

Early on in the book's introductory section, Dixon and Smith define "digital performance" as "all performance works where computer technologies play a *key* role rather than a subsidiary one in content, techniques, aesthetics, or delivery forms" (3). They argue that digital performance events grew out of avant-garde traditions and that experimentation continues to play an integral role in shaping the content and delivery of new works. In the introduction, the authors also state that the aim of the text is to "trace back the roots of and early experiments in digital performance, and to highlight the often unsung pioneers in the field who might otherwise slip into history without recognition" (31). In so doing, they establish an accessible approach to study and an applied model of research.

The main body of the text is divided into two parts. The first section contains chapters dealing with the histories, theories and contexts of digital performance events and scholarship. In the first four chapters, the authors present an elaborate and meticulously-documented account of the evolution of technology usage in theatre and performance, beginning with the Greeks and continuing to the present day. I found chapter five, examining two pivotal performance events taking place in 1960s and involving multimedia tools and techniques, to be especially useful and engaging. The case studies are presented in a concise and organized fashion, allowing for different artists and practices to be discussed in relation to each other and with reference to their collective contributions to the development of digital performance studies.

Chapters exploring the theoretical underpinnings of the field follow in order. Here, the authors attempt to provide explanations of and contexts for understanding seminal concepts, discourses and lexicons mostly derived from other disciplines.

Complicated and oftentimes controversial precepts such as "liveness," "remediation" and "posthumanism" are given ample consideration by the authors. Yet, the chapters dealing with critical perspectives are the weakest and most problematic portions of the text. Most troubling are the phrases that Dixon and Smith employ to describe complex theories, language that struck me as unnecessarily complicated or altogether obtuse. When the authors refer to "techno-postmodern aesthetic theory," for example, as they do more than once in the book, what, exactly, are they speaking about? Due in large part to awkward phrasing, these chapters struck me as inadvertently pretentious and potentially alienating.

The second section of the book delves into subjects related to digital performance practice, specifically themes, actions and events that concern the body, space and time. In it, the authors position specific projects and practitioners within modernist avant-garde traditions, in keeping with their argument that digital performance represents an art form that is both experimental and entirely new. The sixteen chapters that comprise the section touch upon a plethora of topics, including virtual spaces, robot and cyborg performances, projected scenography, collaboration and interactive audience/performer relations. They are full of intriguing details and colorful accounts of specific projects that allow the reader to experience past events in an immersive and exciting way.

Surprisingly, Dixon and Smith conclude the text on a pessimistic and abrupt note. Rather than providing readers with a cohesive summary of the findings of their research, the authors elect to describe the factors that they attribute to causing a downturn in digital performance activities in recent years, a contention that undermines their main argument that the art form, rooted in avant-garde traditions, will continue to thrive and evolve well into the future. The authors devote the final pages of the chapter to describing their experiences participating in a project that resembles a videogame rendered in a real-world setting. The significance of their recollections and the relationship of their experiences to the research project are unclear to the reader.

Further, as a performance scholar interested in exploring the application of new media technologies to teaching, I was also left to ponder the pedagogical implications of the authors' research. How, for instance, can their model of scholarship and approach to study be adapted to diverse educational situations and different classroom settings? Also, what adjustments need to be made in order for the text (and the subjects discussed within it) to become more palatable to younger or less specialized audiences?

Overall, despite its contradictions, ambiguous ending and linguistic challenges, *Digital Performance* represents a Herculean undertaking and should be considered required reading for scholars, teachers, practitioners and aficionados of contemporary arts praxis. The text is beautifully illustrated, richly documented and copiously researched. I have no doubt that Dixon and Smith's groundbreaking work will occupy a central position in the evolving canon of digital performance literature.

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