Article Title: Dance Theatre in the Digital Age: The Relationship Between Interactive Technologies, Virtual Spaces and Bodies in Motion

Background

Since its formation in 1993, the Troika Ranch Dance Theatre of New York has been offering live performances that combine dance, music, theater and interactive digital media. Through fierce choreography, dense musical scores and an evocative use of media and theater, they explore how to physicalize human attributes (such as emotions, passions and inner truths) in a time of accelerating change and growing physical disconnection. The uneasy relationship between the organic and the electronic is key to this exploration, and is manifest on stage by the movements of the dancers to interactively controlled video, sound or light. It is the company’s hope that by bringing these elements together into a unified expressive whole that they will leave their audiences both delighted and challenged.

Troika Ranch artists use digital software tools to create the visual and aural material for their performances. They consider media and technology an essential component in the performance itself. Believing the media elements in their performances to have the same sense of liveness as the human performers it accompanies, they impose the chaos of the human body on the media in hope of bringing it to life. Typically, they utilize sensory devices to allow the movements or vocalizations of a performer to manipulate some aspect of the media's presentation in real time.

Article Description

The article will explore the ways in which dance has expanded traditional notions of theatrical performance. It also will discuss how experimental dance troupes like Troika Ranch are expropriating theatre as an art form, pedagogy and artistic practice, and, in so doing have stretched the boundaries between traditional “theatre” and "non-theatre" activities.
The article attempts to provide an overview of the ways in which Troika Ranch utilizes computers, software applications, digitized video, fine art and Internet interfaces to re-imagine theatre in the 21st century. It begins with the history and mission of Troika Ranch and discusses the challenges of producing this type of dance theatre for contemporary audiences. Next, I will demonstrate (visually) the specific media/technologies employed by Troika Ranch and discuss performances and projects currently underway. This visual demonstration will focus on what is meant by “digital dance performance” and describe how such productions have been conceived, designed and staged by Troika Ranch artists. The article will also examine how the use of technology shapes each facet of theatrical dance production, most especially the process of creating and executing movement-based narrative on stage. The article will also highlight what research on groups like Troika Ranch offers the academic community in terms of interdisciplinary opportunities and cross-school incentives. Finally, I will discuss the future directions of digital dance theatre and analyze how new technologies are impacting teaching, learning and artistic practices in the millennium.

Author
This article proposal is submitted by Kathryn Farley, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Performance Studies at Northwestern University. Kathryn has spent that past four years conducting extensive research on contemporary Irish cultural life, focusing on how issues of national identity are being both expressed and contested within the context of theatrical performance. At Northwestern she teaches performance courses which explore contemporary drama and the adaptation of fiction. An accomplished stage
director, performer and producer, Kathryn began experimenting with video and interactive technologies in her production, *Away with the Fairies*—an examination of the dramatic possibilities of utilizing a historic event (and historical narrative) as the basis of a performance text. Please refer to the show’s Web site at: [www.awaywiththefairies.org](http://www.awaywiththefairies.org) for more information. Kathryn can be contacted by e-mail at kafarley67@hotmail.com, by mail at: 1416 Hinman Ave, Apt. 9, Evanston, IL  60201, or by phone at: (847) 475-3187.