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Dance Criticism in the Light of Digital Dance
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(1) Introduction

(1.1) Although many of you will know me as a dance scholar and one-time critic¹, I am going to talk to you today from the perspective of a practitioner who is engaged in a genuinely cross-disciplinary practice – not merely cross-disciplinary in the context of the arts, but also in the context of the disciplines of science, software programming and art. However, perhaps because of my background in criticism, as a practitioner I am fully aware of the implications my practice raises for critics. It is this I will be discussing today.

(1.2) Since 1995 my practice as an artist has taken precedence over my practice as a commentator on dance. As an artist I am primarily engaged in an emerging form of arts practice which integrates computer technologies with choreographic practice. For the sake of clarity I will be calling this “Digital Dance” in this paper², on the understanding that there is as yet no standard verbal designation for the mode of choreographic practice in which I engage. My own practice, for example, tends to take the form of digital installations. There are no dancers in these installations. However, they are deeply informed by choreographic concepts, with some specifically designed to generate informal performance events. For this reason they fit within the aegis of choreographic practice, and digital dance, not merely installation art.

(2) Critics and cross-disciplinary arts practices

(2.1) Cross-disciplinary art such as this raises issues for critics who emerge from individual disciplines. Whether it be multimedia events, which prioritise the interplay between music, theatre and dance, or work which is simply a cross-fertilisation between one artistic form and another³ each has implications for both artists and critics. As artists, particularly if we collaborate with artists from other disciplines, we have to grapple with, and accommodate into our practice, other ways of thinking about and making art. We also have to familiarise ourselves with other artistic parameters, and other artistic concerns. As critics we have to get to grips not only with the above, but also with other ways of viewing, listening, and understanding art – and finding a way of integrating this with our own assumptions concerning what makes art this or that, be of good quality, or aesthetically interesting.

(2.2) In the 21st century these leaps of critical acumen have been made by the majority of critics who deal with contemporary theatre practice, for cross-disciplinary practice has been at the forefront of experimental developments in the performing arts since at least the 1960s (Sandford 1995). Over a period of some forty years, generic criteria for critiquing this form of performance practice have been formulated, been modified as different strands of the work emerge, and diverged when appropriate as the theatrical emphasis veers more towards, say, music, theatre, or dance. Theatre companies such as Forkbeard Fantasy, Forced Entertainment, Goat Island, and Robert Wilson⁴ are direct descendants of this mode of cross-disciplinary practice, as is the work of ‘dance’ companies such as DV8 and Ian Spink’s Second Stride⁵. The latter both

¹ I have written extensively for Dance Theatre Journal since 1980, and been published in academic books. (see www.sensedigital.co.uk for full list of publications)

² This is, however, by no means a standard term, indeed a generic name for the kind of work I make has not yet been agreed upon. In some quarters it is called digital dance, in others it is called dance and new media, in others it has not been given an independent name. I am reminded of the controversy which reigned in the late 1980s/early 1990s concerning the label Post-modern dance for the work which came out of Judson Church. (Banes, S (1987) Levin, D (1990))

³ e.g. performance art, which integrates concepts derived from both visual art and performance

⁴ URLs for these companies are as follows: www.forkbeardfantasy.co.uk, www.forced.co.uk, <http://www.goatlandperformance.org/home.htm>, <http://www.robertwilson.com/>

⁵ www.dv8.co.uk, Second Stride no longer exists as a company. A search on Google under either “Second Stride” or “Ian Spink” will provide information on this company. See also Rubidge (1992), Jordan, S (1992)

emerged from a dance context, but deviated from the norm to such an extent that they were re-categorised as physical theatre⁶.

(2.3) It has been some time since critics have been put on the defensive in the way achieved by these companies.

(2.31) With the emergence of the integration of new media into the work of some dance artists, however, many critics are finding themselves having to re-evaluate their generic criteria once more in the light of some of the output of this emerging form of practice. Here both critic and artist have to grapple with a range of issues which are generated by the new concepts which have been introduced into dance by technology. These include notions concerning the realm of the virtual, and its relationship to the 'presence' of performance, the renegotiation of the relationship between viewer and work, the reconfiguration of linear conceptions of time, space and dynamic flow in the context of non-linear structures, and even more radically, a reconfiguration of the concept of the performance event.

(2.4) Additionally the critic has to grapple with concepts associated with the 'aesthetics' of this new mode of practice. It is taken as a 'given' that dance is about the human body and movement. Yet Yolande Snaithe and David Hinton won a major award for a videodance work which featured only birds⁷. It is also taken as a given that technology is about machines, bytes, programming, maths. How can the two sit easily together coming as they do from such radically different conceptual frameworks? If dance is primarily to do with the human body in movement, in what way can a virtual computer generated image, which may not even entail a recognisable image of a human body, count as dance? Is the digitised image in Carol Brown's *The Changing Room*⁸ dancing? These and other questions must be addressed by the critic who is confronted with performances enhanced by high-tech images and systems, or by digital installations created with and/or by choreographers.

(2.5) Now dance which uses new technologies is not a univocal form, any more than dance itself is. It covers a variety of arenas, including interactive performance. In this paper I will be concentrating primarily on issues raised for critics by interactive dance works which use new technologies. It must be stressed that not all digital dance is interactive. However, this strand of the genre raises a multitude of issues for the critic and viewer alike. I will be using one of the more extreme of the works in my portfolio to illustrate the ideas I will be exploring, as it brings to the fore a multitude of issues faced by both artist and critic in this emerging field of practice

(3) Contexts for digital dance

Before I go on to discuss the issues presented by my work, I should perhaps put it in to context for those who are not familiar with the field.

(3.1) Some 20 years or so ago choreographers appropriated the medium of video as a means of extending the potential of the choreographic art⁹. In much the same way, during the last ten years choreographers have begun to infiltrate the world of digital art, appropriating its concepts and principles in pursuit of their own artistic ends. Digital artists use various forms of digital media to create art images. These may be sonic or visual images, still images, or moving images. Their work may be displayed on the computer screen (using CDROM/DVD or internet technologies) or projected into physical installation spaces.

(3.2) Choreographers who make use of digital technologies draw extensively on the working practices of digital artists, whether this be in the generation of digital imagery, in the appropriation of software devised to generate such imagery, or in the display modes used. And it is at this juncture that the cross-disciplinary nature of digital dance becomes explicit. At present, only a few choreographers working in the digital domain create the imagery and/or programme the software, for their work. Rather most choose to work

⁶ Although some of Spink's works, such as "Heaven's Ablaze in His Breast" (1989, with composer Judith Weir) and "Lives of the Great Poisoners" with composer Orlando Gough and playwright Caryl Churchill with Second Stride, verged on contemporary music-theatre. (Rubidge 1992)

⁷ Snaithe, Y (chor.) and Hinton, D (dir.) *Birds*, 2000, This piece will be included in the Forward Motion presentation on Friday 30th July at TNUA

⁸ Brown C (chor.), Mette Ramsgard Thomsen (architect) *The Changing Room* 2004 www.carolbrowndances.com

⁹ Jordan and Allen (1992)

with digital artists and computer programmers in the development of their work in this field.¹⁰ This makes digital dance at present predominantly a collaborative art form, with artists from different disciplines contributing not merely their technical skills, but also compositional ideas which, in combination, give the work a particular kind of artistic richness.

(3.3) Many forms of digital dance have emerged over the last ten years as individual dance artists pursue their own artistic concerns. Some focus on the creation of live performances which incorporate the use of digital media, which are designed to be viewed on a stage. Random Dance Company and Igloo from the UK ¹¹**SHOW MOVIE**, Merce Cunningham, and Troika Ranch from the USA, Palindrome from Germany ¹²**SHOW MOVIE** Company in Space from Australia **SHOW MOVIE**, Ku Dancers from Taipei¹³, create works for performance of this kind. Some create live performances permeated by electronically generated images and sound which take place in non-conventional environments. Susan Kozel and Kirk Woolford, Carole Brown and Mette Ramsgaard Thomsen (UK), and Company in Space (Australia) create performance works in non-conventional spaces using digital technologies. In these pieces digital images are projected into the performance space. The images may be selected from a pre-existing database of images, to create ever-changing backgrounds, or new dancing partners. Or they may be generated in situ using live video-capture technology and projected onto the stage. Or live recordings of dancers performing in one place may be transmitted to another performance environment to create a telematic performance. Or digital images may be generated by the computer in real-time in response to the way the performer is moving on the stage. In telematic performances a composite dance image made up of live and virtual dancers and created through the intervention of digital media, overcomes the constraints imposed by geographical space. In such performances, live performers in Taiwan may find themselves performing a duet in Taipei with performers who are dancing in London and vice versa, the images of the each performer being sent telematically across thousands of miles and projected into the environment in which the live dancer is performing. **SHOW MOVIE** Shobana Jeyasingh's "(h)interland" (2002)¹⁴, Susan Kozel and Kirk Woolford's "Lift", and many of Company in Space's works are examples of telematic performance¹⁵.

(4) Critiquing digital dance (i)

(4.1) Although innovative, both in terms of technology and theatre practice, at base none of these forms of digital dance is radically new, being rather an extension of more conventional modes of dance. New technologies here are integrated into well-established performance practices (performance works for the stage and site specific performance). Additionally the choreographic styles used by artists working in this medium are grounded in established choreographic and movement styles, from ballet, through modern, to 'postmodern' dance, and even to traditional non-theatrical dance forms.

(4.2) The jump for viewers and for critics commenting on and critiquing these works is therefore not so much a radical conceptual jump, than a lateral shift in perception and conception within a familiar practice. However, this does not mean to say that viewers and critics do not need to re-examine their critical armoury when confronted with this work. When addressing this kind of work they need to reorient their perceptual attention so that they can perceive ways in which the new media elements and live elements of the performance relate, – not merely as figure and ground, but as equal partners in the choreographic endeavour. They may also need to critically examine the dialogue between the technology and the live performance in the piece, and form some idea of the respective contribution of each to the performance event. This may mean interrogating the place technology plays in such performances. Is the technology integral to the work as an artistic work? In other words, could it not be done without it? Is the new technology being used in service to the piece, or does the exploration of the possibilities offered by a new technology appear to be favoured over the artistic content of the piece. Or is the technology itself the artistic concern? Such questions begin to expose the intricacies of the dialogue between performance and technology.

¹⁰ This situation is gradually changing, with many choreographers beginning to learn how to programme so that they can exert full control over their work.

¹¹ www.randomdance.org, www.igloo.org.uk

¹² www.merce.org, www.troikaranch.org, www.palindrome.de

¹³ www.companyinspace.com

¹⁴ www.shobanajeyasingh.co.uk,

¹⁵ You will notice that some artists appear in both categories

(4.3) Many of the artists cited above create interactive performances¹⁶. Here the performers generate the environment in which they are dancing in real-time, using a series of invisible electronic triggers to generate and modulate imagery and/or sound.¹⁷ When interactive technology is used in such performances the question may be raised as to whether it is, or indeed should it be, legible to the audience, or whether it should be seamlessly integrated into the work as a whole so that the audience is not aware of precisely what is generated by an interactive relationship between performers and the interactive environment. If the latter is the case the question might be asked: why use interactive technology if the audience does not know it is there? These questions already exercise the minds of the artists involved in making this kind of work. That answers are not easy to come by, for either artist or critic, should not detract from their importance. An emerging practice such as digital dance performance can only benefit from their asking.

(5) Digital dance: out of the theatre, into the space of interactivity

(5.1) However, in addition to the extension of established performance practices, digital dance has moved into domains which are not a normal habitat for dance. Some artists create interactive dance CDRoms, DVDs and Webdances which are predicated on dance concepts and imagery. (Igloo and Richard Lord¹⁸ from the UK are prime examples of this practice). These artists exploit the principles underlying interactive non-linear media to make dance works which can be viewed and experienced in the home. These works have no stable linear form. Rather they constitute a database of images, a non-linear network of potential connections between them and an interface which allows the viewer to call up images and/or to modify the image in real time. Here the authoring of the 'work-event' is in the hands of the audience, that is the work-event is viewer-rather than performer-directed. In any one 'reading' or engagement with an interactive CDRom dance work, the entire database of images, and all possible relations between them are unlikely to be revealed in their entirety, indeed may not be fully revealed even after several engagements with the CDRom. (I have been playing with Igloo's *Windowsninetyeight*¹⁹ for at least five years now – and still find elements in it which I had not found before.)

(5.2) The issues become a little more complex here for the critic. There are several strands of questions critics must address if they are to be in a position to give an intelligent critique of such works, a critique comparable with those they give of live dance performances. Critics must first establish where to 'place' the CDRom dance work. Are dance CDRoms more akin to visual arts practice than dance? Or does it sit somewhere between the two? Then they must ask whether the criteria one uses to evaluate live performance, or even videodance works are relevant to CDRom dance works? If not what criteria might be needed to take their place? Critics unfamiliar with the structures of the CD dance work – which they inevitably will be on the first introduction to the work – must also ask themselves whether their personal 'rendering' of the work is akin to seeing a performance of an improvised dance work by inexperienced improvisers. If it is how does one critique a dance work, the in situ presentation of which is entirely dependent on your own, potentially inexpert, navigation through a non-linear network of images, sounds, events? Further, how can you critique a work which you may never see in its entirety – and/or how do you know whether you have seen enough of the piece to forward an informed judgement on it?

(5.3) Other dance artists working with interactive media create large-scale viewer-activated interactive installations²⁰. As with those who generate interactive CDRoms, this mode of practice leads them toward a meeting of the concepts and principles underpinning on the one hand visual art and on the other dance. In a large-scale interactive installation, the installation space is permeated with various technologies which allow the viewer to trigger sound or image, and modulate them in real-time. The viewer's actions might be tracked by a camera, for example, or there may be pressure pads embedded in the floor covering. The viewers enter the installation environment, just as dancers enter a stage, and explore the images and sounds which are triggered by their presence, and their movement within the space. In these works the viewers become responsible for generating the environment they are inhabiting, and for generating the specificities of the work-event they are experiencing. That is, the viewers are responsible for bringing the work to presence, and for the shape and qualities of the work-event which critics later evaluate as the 'work'.

¹⁶ see Rubidge (2000b & 2001) for further discussion of interactive digital dance

¹⁷ Some useful articles on the technology of interactive performance spaces can be found on www.intelligentstage.com

¹⁸ www.bigroom.co.uk

¹⁹ *Windowsninetyeight* can be accessed from www.igloo.org.uk

²⁰ <http://www.trajets.net>, www.sensedigital.co.uk, www.bhaptic.net/contours_proj.html

(5.4) The criteria for evaluating art of this kind includes not only a critical evaluation of the aesthetic surface of these works (for example, the quality, pertinence and comprehensibility of the sonic and visual imagery, and the nature of the potential connections between images in the database), it also draws on notions concerning the legibility of the interactive interface, for if it is illegible the work cannot be brought to presence. These include the ease with which the player/viewer can enter into and navigate through the interactive environment, shift from one region, or scene, to another during their exploration, and find their way out of the world/s they are inhabiting when they feel the need to move on²¹. In environments as unfamiliar as these, a simple first-time aesthetic response is not a sufficient criterion for critical evaluation, for that response may depend on a number of factors of which a viewer or critic might not be aware. It is incumbent on the critic to come to know the installation, if they are to evaluate it effectively. This places great demands on critics who wish to elucidate this form of choreographic practice. These demands are analogous to those faced by dance critics in New York in the 1960s when confronted with the work of experimental dance artists such as Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton and Trisha Brown..

(6) Sensuous Geographies: An Interactive Choreographic Installation

(6.1) It is within this strand of digital dance (that is large-scale digital installations) that I work, but even within that field I sit on the edge of the mode of practice. I make what are beginning to be called choreographic installations. These installations are driven by digital media, and are generally interactive. They are imbued, however, with the choreographic concepts which are part of a choreographer's artistic background. Many of my installations have the capacity to generate spontaneous choreographic forms as they are being used, and all are intended to be understood through the kinaesthetic senses, rather than solely through the visual sense.

(6.2) Sensuous Geographies, my most recent installation, is an example of this kind of work. However, it is a strange 'choreographic' work. It offers a challenge to the critic, for it flouts conventional environments, conventional understandings of what dance is, and even conventional expectations of interactive installation environments.

SHOW AS I SPEAK

(6.3) Sensuous Geographies is a viewer-directed interactive audiovisual installation for multiple players. It comprises an active (that is interactive) inner space, and a non-interactive outer space. **SHOW MOVIE** Before they enter the inner space, audience members are clothed in richly coloured robes which allow the computer to track their movement through the space. They thus implicitly take on the role of 'performer' as well as participant. Their sight is obscured to ensure that their attention is on the sound, and not on the visual environment. Each member of the 'audience' who enters the active (inner) space triggers a sound, and then modulates the quality of that sound as they move through the space. **SHOW MOVIE** Viewers of the installation and participants who are waiting to enter the space inhabit the outer environment, weaving between the translucent banners, as they watch, becoming extras in the environment itself.

(6.4) Sensuous Geographies is driven by several artistic concerns. It is on the one hand intended to be primarily experiential - a 'machine', if you like, for refocusing participants' attention on the subtle feelings through which we negotiate our environment. The latter are derived from a multiplicity of sensory systems²² and the deeper physiological systems which underpin our sense of being in the world. (Neuroscientists such as Antonio (Damasio 2000),(Edelman 2001) and (Claxton 1998) incorporate these physiological systems into their concepts of "core consciousness" (Damasio), "primary consciousness" (Edelman), the "undermind" (Claxton).)

(6.5) One of the means through which the installation is accessed as a work is through being in the installation, both experiencing and modulating the flow of forces which philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1981) refers to as 'intensities'²³. **SHOW MOVIE** In Sensuous Geographies these forces, which are very familiar

²¹ These are similar to the criteria applied to computer games

²² It is designed to be accessed not merely through the eyes, but also through the haptic perceptual system (which incorporates the kinaesthetic sense, and the pro-prioceptive system, etc. See (Gibson (1966) Rodoway, P (1994)

²³ Intensities are the invisible forces to which a work of art gives rise. In a painting those forces are implicit, apparent tensions between parts of the painting, between lines, shapes and colour (see Deleuze 1984) Significantly Deleuze also refers to these intensities as 'sensation', by which he means not the sensation generated by muscular activity, but the deeper sensations which permeate the body, the milieu of 'feeling' which underpins our behaviours (Damasio (2000) Edelman (2001))

to the dancer, are made explicit, and both act upon, and are acted upon by the participants in the interactive space. The participants' engagement with the installation is intended to invoke the experience of the dancer²⁴, and to elicit the activation of the detailed attention dancers pay to those nuances of sensation in their bodies which go beyond the muscular. How is this done? This is achieved in part through the vibrations generated by the constantly changing sonic environment, They permeate the participants' body and sense of being, creating an overt interplay within and between the environment and the deeper physiological systems.

(6.6) However, the installation is not solely a solipsistic [inward] experience, for it is also designed to generate co-operative interactivity, a collective, group response from participants to the environment. Here again, my choreographic sensibility has been brought to bear. It is rare that interactive installations deliberately try to elicit collective interactivity from a group of users, or are intended to generate emergent choreographic forms in the behaviour of the participants. For this to happen in *Sensuous Geographies* participants must not merely be aware of the flow of intensities in their bodies elicited by the environment, but must also become aware that the installation is an intricate sound environment which can be 'played' by participants to create a multitude of shifting moods and atmospheres – in other words take on the sensibility not only of the dancer, but also of the musician.

(6.7) In *Sensuous Geographies* each participant's sound strand follows them around the installation space, from centre to periphery, across and around the space, changing its tone, quality, volume, pitch as they move. The interweaving of these individual voices in concert (as one) generates the changing qualities, texture and spatial characteristics of the sonic environment. It also elicits a spontaneous choreographic form as participants move around the space. From time to time the participants' attention shifts from their personalised flow of physiological intensities to the more externalised details of the sonic environment²⁵. Gradually some participants become aware of the expansion and contraction, changes in intensity and density of the sound environment as they and their companions move through the space. Participants may become aware that a sound moving towards them constitutes a signal that another person is moving towards them. They may then begin to play with notions of advancing and retreating, leading and following a simple choreographic form begins to emerge. The installation has become a kind of "performance-generator". When viewed from outside of the central interactive space, the behaviour of the participants becomes a choreographic event in its own right.

(6.8) Here the installation is exploring the very notions of performer, performance and 'performance event'. Closely linked to this exploration of the notion of performance is an interrogation of the standard roles of performer and audience. Rather the 'performers' being watched by the 'audience' are themselves members of that audience. Many of the participants are not aware that they are engaging in what amounts to a group improvisation as they respond individually to the installation, much less aware that their behaviours are leading to an emergent choreographic event. However, such an event is materialised, and on two levels. On the one hand the quality of the participants' physical responses to the environment creates a quality of movement which is akin to simple 'dance' movement - delicate, graceful, with a clear awareness of space. **SHOW MOVIE** On the other hand their motion through the space **SHOW MOVIE** creates shifting proximities between participants, generating a spatial choreography which exhibits coherence, and what appears to the viewers as an almost deliberate generation of group patterns. In *Sensuous Geographies* the two roles of performer and audience are interchangeable, participants shifting easily between being observers of the emergent performance event, and being the performers within that event²⁶.

(7) Critiquing digital dance (ii)

(7.1) What is the critic to do with a piece like this? Do they succumb to a description of what the installation felt like to them, or critique it as an informal, yet inevitably amateur, performance event. Or should they critique it with respect to its success or failure as a generator of informal performance events? Or should they attempt to interpret it? Or to examine its significance in the wider world of dance? These installations are not without context. On the one hand their compositional principles range across those

²⁴ Particularly the dancer versed in release-based movement styles

²⁵ This constitutes a shift from the domination of the haptic to the domination of the aural sensory system.

²⁶ Any participant can become a virtuosic player if they spend enough time in the space. These virtuosic players can be identified on the one hand through a consistency between their quality of movement and the sound environment they are inhabiting, and on the other their ability to modulate the sound environment both in terms of its spatial organisation, and its sonic texture.

developed in relation to 'postmodern' dance, contemporary music, interactive art, visual art, and software programming, on the other they are challenging conceptions of choreographic practice. It is this that the critic must address.

(7.2) Newspaper critics of the first showing of *Sensuous Geographies* used several strategies to critique this work.

(7.3) The review written by Mark Brown (theatre critic from the Guardian, 6/2/03) was taken from the conventional perspective of the critic as viewer.

"British artists Alistair MacDonald and Sarah Rubidge puncture the barrier between artwork and audience. Their Sensuous Geographies is a fascinating concoction of sound, light, colour and costume, which is altered by our very presence. An installation-cum-performance, the piece invites us to be viewers and players. A black, multi-textured ground cloth is the stage for up to nine performers (including cast and audience members) dressed in muslin blindfolds and coloured garments that look like a cross between medieval gowns and burkas. A video camera above the performance area is hooked up to composer MacDonald's computers, which generate intriguing, disquieting and humorous sounds as they respond to the combinations of colours. Watching, you feel like an uninitiated participant in an intricate mythological role-playing game. But the piece is so inventive and original that you surrender easily to its infinite possibilities."

(7.4) Mary Brennan, dance critic from the Scottish newspaper, The Herald (6/02/03) made comparisons between two works shown in tandem at the first showing of *Sensuous Geographies*. Her review was taken from the perspective of both viewer and participant.

"[Helen] Herbertson is seen throughout within a small wooden box frame, distant at first until suddenly we find ourselves trucking forward, thrust into close proximity with her final image, a primal nakedness fretting and digging for past truths in invisible sand. Thereafter darkness, and bird-song, a calming coda to a work that is exquisite and full of resonance."

Which leads us nicely on to Sensuous Geographies, an interactive installation by Sarah Rubidge and Alistair MacDonald in which colour (the costumes) and movement (from participants) trigger an ad hoc soundscape of chimes, gongings, boomings. You can either watch, or join in. Either way, what emerges is a personal/group signature tune that constantly shifts and cannot be repeated. On one level it is happy play, on another it taps into notions of wordless communication and issues of identity."

(7.5) Ellie Carr of the Sunday Herald contextualised the piece in relation to its challenge to conventional theatre practice, but also reflects on the effect of the installation on the participant.

"For a festival that prides itself on peeling away the labels usually applied to art-forms (dance, theatre, visual art: you know the kind of thing), this year's New Territories has already managed to invent some new ones of its own. Normally when the press are led into a darkened room and blindfolded you suspect foul play. But Sensuous Geographies, we were told, was an 'immersive' interactive installation; a perfectly innocent 'performative' piece where we, the audience would 'explore and control rich sensual worlds of sound and colour' courtesy of Scottish composer Alistair MacDonald and choreographer Sarah Rubidge."

... this is an event where the audience become the show, donning jewel-coloured cloaks and hats and milling about in a marked-off inner circle where the various colours trigger off a range of sounds and images Once you get past the fear over entering the inner circle (especially when you are handed a 'green novice cloak') this is a funfair ride that dispenses with all the usual rules of theatre and gives a powerful sense of what this increasingly genre-melting festival is all about."

My only regret is I have to dash back through the looking-glass to another show before I can really explore my sound (a merry chinking noise), and -- just as interestingly -- the way this game with its elaborate rituals causes spectator/performers to behave in the space."

(8) Interrogating digital dance practice

(8.1) However, although all three critics clearly had an insight that there was something more than a mere spectacle taking place in this installation space, they did not elaborate on what this implied for theatre art forms. Nor was there an evaluation of the work as a work, only a description of the experience of that work. This is unsurprising as the criteria for the evaluation of works such as this have not yet been formed. In many ways it is the business of the critic to begin to formulate criteria appropriate to this kind of event, which is neither performance nor pure participatory installation, but something which sits between the two.

(8.2) From my perspective as an artist I would wish to hear responses to the following questions:

Did the piece in drawing attention to the haptic systems, or appear to generate an emergent choreographic form?

How successful was it in cultivating a developing understanding of the interactive system, which would enable the casual player to become a virtuosic player?

Did the work have content or was it merely a display of technological virtuosity?

Was the piece accessible? If so how did the artists achieve this? If not, why not?

How successfully did the piece blur the boundaries between the roles of performance and audience?

In what senses, if any, could it be said to be choreographic?

(9) Concluding

(9.1) Deborah Jowitt my fellow keynote speaker might at this point be getting a slight sense of *deja vu*, for during the 1960s and 70s she had the experience of evaluating a radically new form of choreographic practice²⁷. Deborah was a critic in New York when artists such as Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs, Steve Paxton, creator of Contact Improvisation, and Yvonne Rainer were radically questioning the givens of modern dance practice. Their work was so experimental that critics could not depend on tried and tested criteria, but were forced to develop new ones. We have Jill Johnson, Sally Banes and Deborah herself to thank for the criteria which gradually evolved as they watched, listened, began to develop an approach to this 'formless' 'technique-less', non-virtuosic mode of dance practice.

(9.2) The work I and my fellow choreographers who work with interactive installations are creating builds on some of the ideas propounded by these artists – ideas such as the non-virtuosic performer, participatory artistic events, the blurring of the boundaries between performer and audience – and takes them further. Like those artists, we demand a lot from our audiences. We ask them to become responsible for the specificities of the work which gives rise to their artistic experience. We ask them to step beyond the bounds of comfort. We ask them to take time to explore our work.

(9.3) And just as we demand this of our audiences, we demand it of critics. We ask critics to exhibit the same kind of patience and professional integrity shown by the New York critics in the 1960s, for we want our work to be adequately, and intelligently, critiqued by those who understand the foundations of the practice. This has not yet taken place to any great extent. However, I am confident that this kind of criticism will soon emerge in those dance environments where digital dance is gradually being accepted. And I venture to predict that it will not be too long before Taiwanese critics find themselves confronted by digital dance of many forms. I am confident that you will rise to the challenge as critics, and hope that my presentation may have helped to prepare the ground for this eventuality.

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²⁷ I had a similar experience in the mid to late 1970s in the UK when I was writing about 'New Dance', which bore many resemblances to the New York postmodern dance of the 1960s.

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