

Digital Performance: A History Of New Media In Theater, Dance, Performance Art, And Installation / Steve Dixon.-- (Leonardo).-- Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, April 2007.-- 809 p.: ill.— ISBN 978-0-8223-3926 (cl., alk. paper): \$50.00.



Author Steve Dixon and Barry Smith, a primary contributor to the development of this work, are accomplished writers, artists, and educators in the field of performance studies. They are significant players in an emerging field of creativity termed “digital performance” wherein, as they define it, computer technology is key in the production of live performance in any venue, including the stage, art galleries, the street, and cyberspace and in many forms including robotics, surveillance, telematics, and interactive gaming.

Dixon postulates that digital performance is a logical outcome of centuries of performance history. One can agree that the intent of performance has always been to immerse the audience in a story or space using any number of sensory effects (e.g., *deus ex machina* in ancient classical theatre). But the effects of technology in this new genre potentially blur audience and identity, time and place to signal what the authors believe is the emergence of a truly new paradigm for performance requiring new critical methods.

It is within this context that the antecedents of digital performance practice are outlined in the first chapters, focusing on Futurism, twentieth-century multimedia theatre and technological performance since the 1960s, with an introduction to some key modern, postmodern, and post-human theories. In the remaining chapters, key digital performance works are described and analyzed through aspects of the body, time, space, and interactivity with a focus on a particularly intense period of activity in the final years of the last millennium when the authors were also developing the web-based Digital Performance Archive, from which the idea for this book developed.

Dixon presents various paradoxes of theory and practice, leaving the reader to ponder outcomes, and offers no conclusions about the future of digital performance. By the author’s admission, the term itself is slippery and, though Dixon refers to the genre as “emergent” he also describes a general “downturn” in quality and intensity of digital performance practice in the twenty-first century. In retrospect, given the precariousness of new paradigms this is to be expected. In all, this book is an important work for advanced students and scholars of performance studies which brings together a rich pool of previously disparate resources and ideas into one volume.

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