

For this opinion piece, DANZ has invited dance and film writer Christopher Connolly to share his views on digital innovation in dance.

WILL DIGITAL INNOVATION EVOLVE DANCE OR DETRACT FROM THE PURITY OF COMMUNICATING THROUGH MOVEMENT?

BY CHRISTOPHER CONNOLLY



Why do you love dance? It's a question all of us have been asked. My answer has always boiled down to one specific reason: purity. In literature, you have words to construct a narrative. In film, you have tools to manipulate the viewer. In visual art, images are used to tell a story. Only in dance do you have so little and have to work so hard to connect to an audience. Mere movement of your body, this *vehicle* for the mind.

Having worked in dance and film production, I've seen the similarities and differences between the two. Filming hour upon hour of footage to use a few seconds of this take, and a few seconds of that, is equivalent to your Research and Development stage. Next, the hours spent in the edit suite, pulling apart what you have and carefully sewing it back together into something meaningful – this is your choreography. Once the blood, sweat and tears are over, you're ready for the premiere. In film you've done everything you need to do. The film will play – every scene meticulously crafted, sound mixed and colour graded for perfection. But dance? The opening night is a continuation of the journey. Therein lies the difference.

As we move further into an advanced technological era, art is beginning to incorporate digital innovation. From the opposing corners of the creative world, dance is the one that has mostly resisted the urge to plug into the matrix. But does digital innovation have a case for accelerating the evolution of dance or will it spoil the purity of it at its foundational core?

The problem with this introduction would be the fear of a shift to digital dependency. At first it may add 5 or 10% to the production, but what if in the future it accounts for 50% and suddenly the art is compromised. Hollywood hit this stage years ago when *Avatar* breached the perceived human limits of cinema and now, we're stuck with *Avengers* for our sins. It may only be visual effects today, but who's to say it doesn't end up computer generated dance, holograms and exoskeletons tomorrow?

Without sounding too Arthur C. Clarke, exoskeletons are a possible future of the industry. The physicality of the world's best ever performers would become achievable for all. Couple this with digital animation and interactive aspects, and before you know it the heart and soul are no longer intact.

The romantic in me screams 'dance must be protected!' It is genuine and essentially simple at its core. It's created by human thought, intuition and emotions. Is there room for digital innovation? Yes, but don't let it diminish the value of your art or we may never get it back. ■

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