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Shooting the past



There appears to be a thread running through Imperica's coverage of creative technology to date: that creatives don't understand the technology, and technologists need to appreciate creativity. It is a deep-rooted issue that manifests itself in many different ways, though is often observed by creatives.

Kate Sicchio is no stranger to these findings. Her performances combine dance with digital media, with the results being a unity that occurs in a single space. Her latest work, *Nayramara*, performed at April's [Digital Stages Festival](#), explored the interaction between human performers and video display. Alongside video screens on wheels, the work featured a semi-transparent mesh to which material could be projected, but retaining visibility of the dancers behind it. Movements of the dancers would be captured and projected in front of them, with the wheeled displays moving around, changing the configuration of both the dancers and the video in real time. The projections are made by filming the performers in real time on a CCTV camera, with video processing undertaken in real time in Isadora prior to projection back into the space.

Both the mesh and the wheeled displays provided visual indicators for the cultural issues that the work addresses. The [Aymarans](#), indigenous to south America, reverse the space-time metaphor when people are speaking: they don't say that the past is behind them - it's in front of them.

They even gesture to the front, so in saying 'that happened yesterday', they make a gesture in front of them. Through *Nayramara*, Sicchio explored that idea of the past being in front of you. The work plays with time and space, and the relationship between time

and space.

The work has a topical underpinning. Our definition of time and space is changing faster than ever. The past is catching up with us (band reunions, hours of YouTube archive footage) and with digital media re-introducing memories through apps and social media, it is even overtaking us. If we want it, our pasts can be projected in front of us at any time, as if we are the dancers in Sicchio's work. Indeed, the Digital Stages Festival featured a work based on iterative loops, as well as [Collective Gulp](#)'s work Errors in logic when faced with uncertainty, on how the future can be predicted through probability of given outcomes.

Since university, Sicchio has divided her attention between dance and media technologies, finding new ways to combine the two through performance and narrative. Her degree started in dance, only to be stopped during study through injury. When her lecturers invited her to find other courses to make up for her inability to proceed with dance, she went to the Multimedia department, gravitating towards video as a medium that could be introduced into her work. Such was her interest in the potential of video, that she graduated with a combined degree in dance and multimedia. However, it wasn't until the attendance of a Troika Ranch workshop in 2001 that she realised that others were already considering the use of video and other digital media within performance, if not using it already. From there, it was understood that there was already a history – a trajectory – that could be followed. "That's when I really started to polish the work that I was doing, and to find a process in order to put it all together."

Although the history is there, there is still a gap of understanding that needs to be filled by curators and producers on both sides (if "sides" is the right word to use here). "I appear in media festivals, because the organisers are excited to see someone do something live. They get really excited by it. However, if there's a discussion afterwards, they get really scared to talk about dance. They just want to talk about the visuals or the technology, not the body or the movement. I know my media audience now;. I know that they're not going to talk about the movement, the dance."

"[Conversely] with a dance audience, they get really upset when the body isn't featured enough. You find yourself stuck in the middle of these two audiences, trying to address them as much as you can, even though there's a history of mediated dance. It can be a bit strange when audiences feel that the visuals are taking over – 'I wasn't watching you, I was watching the screen'. Maybe I wanted them to watch the screen at that moment. They don't think about choreographing all of the elements in a composition."

Part of the dilemma, as Sicchio admits, also occurs because it is still hard to understand the changing nature of technology, within a specific context of dance. The speed of change has the potential of producing a growing gap in knowledge as to the potential of technology of dance. And, if that gap occurs with producers and curators, it will occur with audiences and arts organisations. The last thing that anyone wants to do, or see, is to develop a piece of work that is so advanced in media terms, that there is no potential for it to be understood at all.

However, Sicchio is sanguine about it, reminding herself – and us – of the importance of the body in all of this. "I just think of [digital media] as part of the compositional process. I know that this moment will look really good on screen, so I'm going to start moving so they can watch it – or I'm turning the visual off so they can watch me. Theatre uses lighting

to guide the eye to what you need to see. It's something that the audience already knows."

The sophisticated and intricate weaving of media and dance within Sicchio's work is down to her vision, and polymathematic approach to the work. She choreographs and performs her work, as well as programs and builds the video and any other media that forms part of it. Future work may move away from video into other artistic forms, with Sicchio hinting at sculptural possibilities.

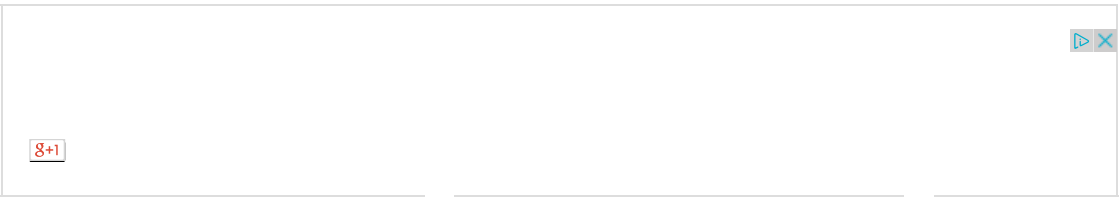
Whatever the artistic form that complement's Sicchio's work, it will be a treat for audiences; they will step into a rich, ever-changing environment that remains directed by the body, but with the human spirit intertwined with its product, its media. "It can't just be the dance, it can't just be the technology. The work has to go across both."

Kate Sicchio is a choreographer, media artist, and performer.

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