

# *Dance, Interactive Technology, and the Device Paradigm*

By Eric Mullis (2013)

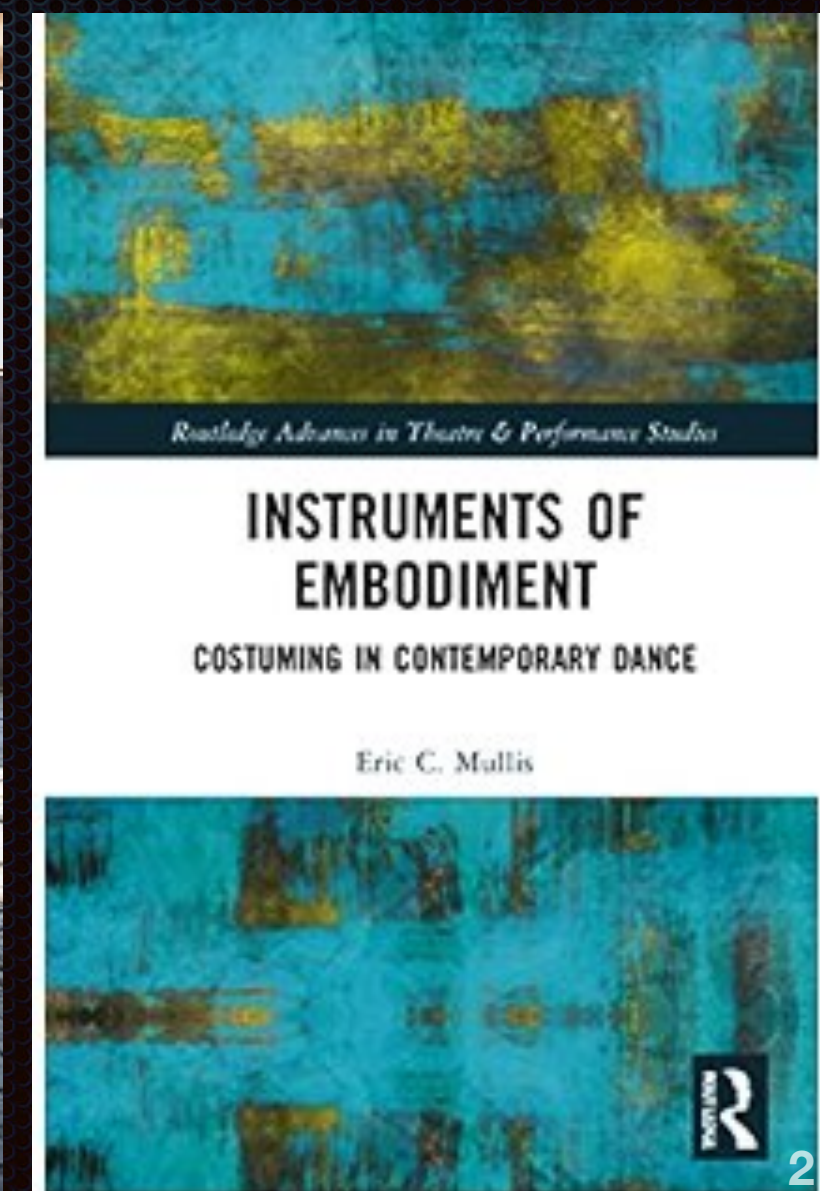
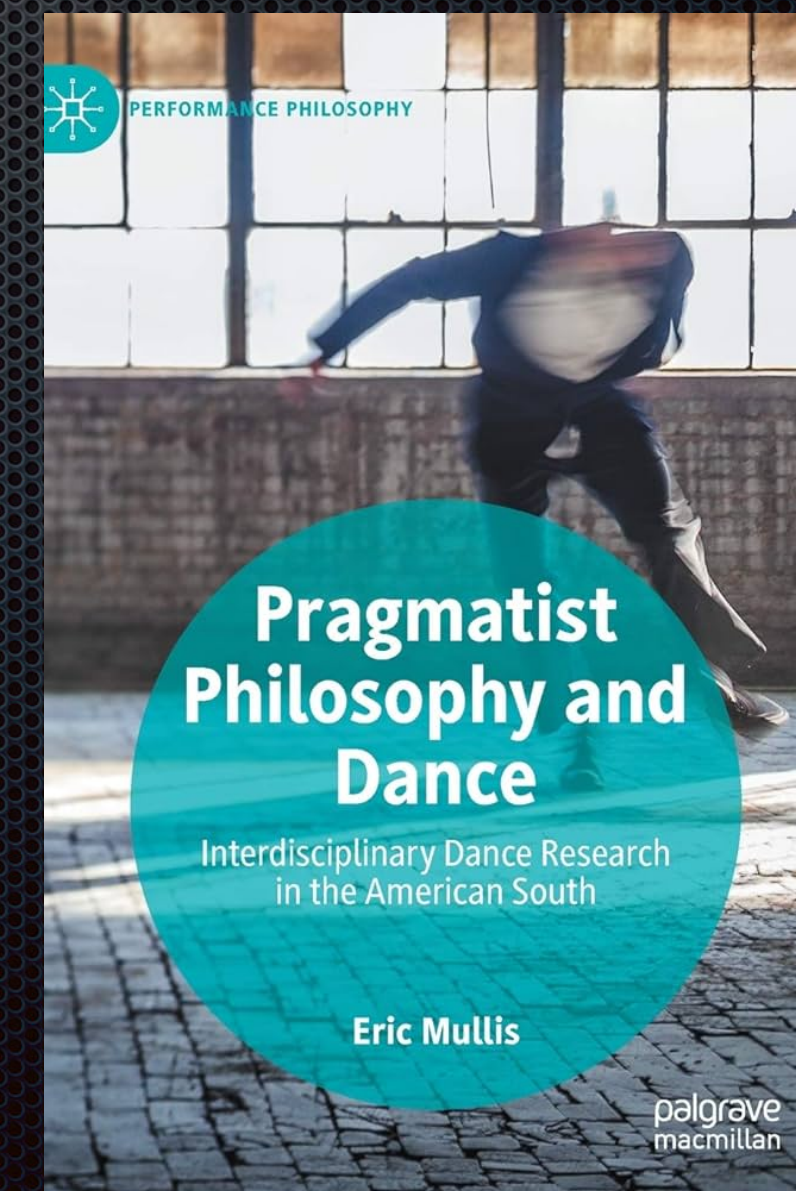
*Dance Research Journal*, 45(3), 111-123

Individual Dance Project - Chiara Bellich

# Eric Mullis

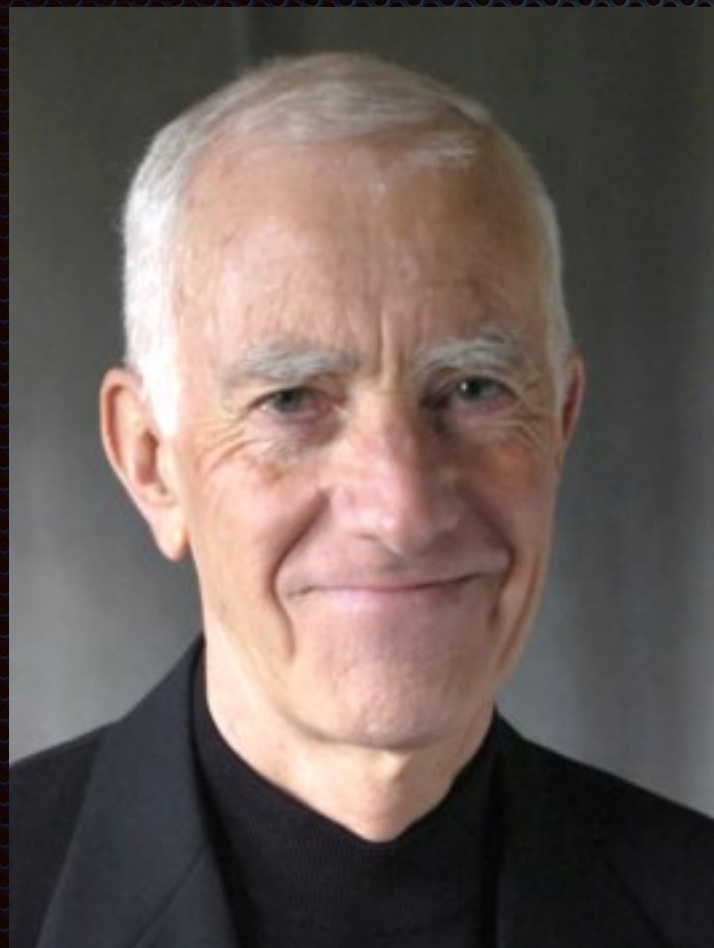
– choreographer, dancer and philosopher

- ✦ is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Queens University of Charlotte, USA
- ✦ is the author of *Pragmatist Philosophy and Dance* (2019), *Instruments of Embodiment: Costuming in Contemporary Dance* (2022) as well as several articles published on *Dance Research Journal*, *Performance Philosophy*, *Dance Research*, *Dance Chronicle*, and the *Journal of Performing Arts and Digital Media*.
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# Key concepts

- The relationship between the dancer's body and interactive technology in performance (conversation and mediation)
- Forms of interactive performance (derived, immersive and networked)
- Albert Borgmann's philosophy of technology
- *Glow* (2006) a contemporary solo dance performance choreographed by Gideon Obarzanek and the software creator Frieder Weiss
- Bi-directionality



Albert Borgmann  
(1937-2023)

Contemporary Dance: Chunky Move | GLOW (Official, Full, HD)



# Forms of Interactive Technology

## DERIVED PERFORMANCES

e.g. *BIPED* (1999)

*'A sense of interactivity may arise when live dancers move with the projected images on stage, but this sense is ultimately illusory since the images cannot respond to the live dancer's movement in real time.'* (Mullis 2013:112)

***BIPED* (1999)**

***BIPED***

Chorégraphie Merce Cunningham  
Musique Gavin Bryars  
Reconstruction Robert Swinston

## IMMERSIVE PERFORMANCES

e.g. *Dancing with the Virtual Dervish*  
(1994)

*Draw on technologies that allows one to participate in virtual reality environment.'* (Mullis 2013: 112)

## NETWORKED PERFORMANCES

e.g. *An Adjacent Exposure* (1991)

*'The ability to use cameras and microphones to transmit movement images to locations where dancers and audiences can observe and respond to them.'* (Mullis 2013: 113)

***Dancing with the Virtual Dervish* (1994)**

*Dancing with the Virtual Dervish*  
*virtual bodies*



Albert Borgmann was an American philosopher, specialized in the philosophy of technology

# Albert Borgmann's philosophy of technology

1. explores the relationship between technology and consumption  
(For instance, in *Glow* images interact with the dancer but we don't know exactly how the program works.)
2. examines two terms:
  - “**device paradigm**” is a theory that describes how we perceive technological devices nowadays. We use the devices without knowing how they are made [Inner workings are a mystery to the users]. The devices are getting COMPLEX and EFFICIENT. They are easy to use but harder to figure out.
  - “**focal thing**” is the focus of people's attention (e.g. the dancer's body)



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# Albert Borgmann's philosophy of technology

3. Mediation 'The technology acts as a medium of expression that fosters a unique relationship between dancer and scenic environment.' (Mullis 2013: 119)

The interactive platform mediate the dancers movement.

Birringer, Kozel and Wilson-Bokowiec suggest that the mediation is positive. While Borgmann affirms that modern devices are characterized by a particular relationship between means and ends.

How the interactivity is  
perceived by the dancer?

# The experience of BI-DIRECTIONALITY

Bi-directionality = responsive interaction = kinetic dialogue  
2 distinct creative forces equally contribute to the conversation/work

DANCING BODY



INTERACTIVE PLATFORM

- Contextualized dancer (= focal thing)
- Manipulates but it is also manipulated by the images

- A-contextual device - non contextual entity (it does not speak of its place origin)
- Partner
- Affects dancer's performance: it responds to dancer's movement
- Allows dance to extend its reach

The body and digital technology are kinetically intertwined

# Conclusion

- \* Working with interactive technology in dance allows performers to be aware of how their movements affect the performance environment, but it also raises questions about the impact of technology on the dancer's performance and the context in which it is used.
- \* Dance artists and theorists who experiment with interactive technologies often stress that their work encourages viewers to consider the relationship between technology and human beings.
- \* The article demonstrates that much of the work done on this topic emphasizes the dancer's phenomenological experience of interactivity but does not sufficiently consider the nature of the devices and platforms that make such experiences possible.

# References

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