

Bodies Meet Bytes

CHOREOGRAPHY STUDENT HARNESSSES
TECHNOLOGY TO DANCE

EARLY IN CHOREOGRAPHER Kathleya Afanador's most recent dance, five young women run across the stage. Seconds later, luminous lines streak the darkness above them, mimicking their speed and direction. It's one of the few moments where it's clear the electronic scribbles, dots, and starbursts that sparkle above their heads are coming from the women themselves. Otherwise, the dance and the illuminated graphics are of a piece—which is exactly

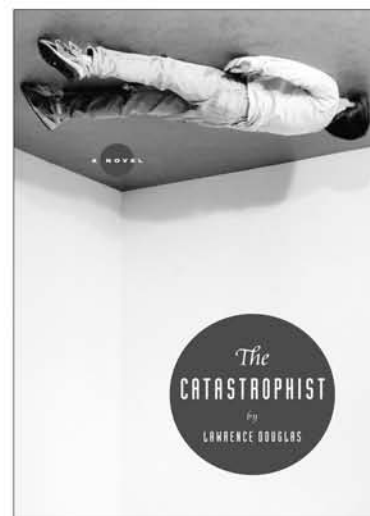
what Afanador '06 had in mind. "That, to me, is interesting: to see what movement can generate in another medium, and that it can be done without making the multimedia aspect the focus."

With the performance of *Perimeter of a Parameter* in March at the Schwartz Center, Afanador and her two collaborators joined a growing group of international artists working with technology that interacts in real time with performers onstage. While well-funded dance companies can



ANDREW GILLIS

Computer savvy: Kathleya Afanador '06 (at left, with Galen D'Amato '06) integrates dancers, interactive software, and video cameras in her choreography.



The Catastrophist

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From an idyllic New England campus to the rarefied art worlds of Berlin and London, *The Catastrophist* charts the course of one ordinary man's hilarious kamikaze mission toward self-sabotage. With sophisticated and irreverent wit, Douglas pokes holes of black humor through all the things we're supposed to take seriously: academia, parenthood, art, infidelity, sexual harassment, and even atrocity.

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afford high-end motion sensors and other sophisticated equipment, artists like Afanador have embraced low-end versions that require not much more than a laptop or two. Their work spans fields from music and the DJ/VJ scene to installation art and dance, fed by listservs where they trade tips on manipulating the most popular software and hardware. Afanador says interactive technology offers another tool in her choreographer's toolbox. "When you just have movement and music, you can see the contrast between them," she

says. "When you have another medium, you have a whole other contrast with either the music or the movement."

Afanador, a College Scholar who was a dance major, and the dance program's candidate for Undergraduate Artist of the Year, has a talent for exploring movement with a fresh and inventive approach, says Joyce Morgenroth '66, a member of Cornell's dance faculty for twenty-nine years. "For me, it's a fantastic adventure if students are able to start to explore movement possibilities on their own," she says. "That's some-

thing Kathleya did from day one."

Choreographers have been experimenting with interactive technologies since the 1960s. Merce Cunningham had dancers in his 1965 piece *Variations V* approach vertical antennae on stage, tripping sensors that emitted the electronic bleeps of John Cage's musical score. Decades later, the advent of personal computers set off a wave of digital technology, especially in the United States. The field's center has since shifted to Europe. At the University of Genoa, Afanador studied for

Of Mice and Metal

GRADUATE ART STUDENT WINS GERMAN FELLOWSHIP



nathan Bennett, MFA '06, has earned one of the art world's most prestigious fellowships by making sculpture from humble materials: salt, rust, thread, and the carcasses of several unfortunate mice. Thanks to Bennett's ability to rework mundane objects, he was awarded a coveted scholarship by the Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst, or German Academic Exchange Service. It will fund a year of study with the avant-garde sculptor Rebecca Horn at the Universität der Künste in Berlin.

For his MFA thesis, Bennett created a series of installations titled "Caprice: Jouissance and the Mute" in the Tjaden Gallery that reflect his interest in philosophy, science, linguistics, and systems of interpretation. The series includes stacks of metal-framed glass boxes speckled with rust and encrusted with salt. Inside one hangs an intricate webbing of thread; another holds six rusty wire balls. Each of them also houses at least one decaying mouse. (The mice, he says, were

humanely euthanized.) In a corner of the gallery, he used the room itself as another, larger box (perhaps with the viewer taking the rodent's role) by piling 1,500 pounds of salt into an eleven-foot mound.

"I like artwork that's difficult," Bennett says, and his own is inspired by such notoriously abstruse writers and theorists as Georges Bataille and Jacques Lacan, as well as the artist Joseph Kosuth's concept of "anthropologized art." In Berlin, Bennett says, he'll take the outsider view of an anthropologist to transform common objects and other elements into art.

So far his sculpture has generated an array of responses—and that's fine with him. "Even if it's a complete dismissal of the work and someone says, 'Eww, a dead mouse,' that's better than people getting glazed over and walking out without saying anything."

— Matt Berical

a summer with the creator of EyesWeb, one of the more popular software programs. But it wasn't until Afanador saw a dance by American choreographer Trisha Brown, titled *how long does the subject linger on the edge of the volume*, that she knew technology could offer more than a gimmick. "The video was like calligraphy; it complemented the choreography just beautifully," Afanador says. "Seeing that made me think, 'Yes, OK, I can do this.'"

She began talking about *Perimeter* with Allen Fogelsanger, PhD '88, the dance program's coordinator and music director, last spring. Initially they were inspired by the mobiles of artist Lee Bontecou and the delicate lines that stream from the mobiles' cores. Then they inspired each other. "It started with me, doing a chunk of movement," Afanador says. "Then Allen started composing. After that, we just kept making chunks and showing each other what we had made." Fogelsanger eventually wrote two movements of grinding industrial music split by a crystalline piano interlude. Afanador created a similar structure: two jagged, fragmented sections that sandwich a unified one.

Meanwhile, Ryan Spicer '06 worked on the computer programming and graphics. He devised a system in which a video camera tracks three aspects of each dancer: the color of her costume and the speed and size of the "bounding box"—the rectangle made by her extremities. The EyesWeb program analyzes that data. A second software program then translates it into graphics that indicate each dancer's movement, speed, and placement on stage. The graphics are projected within seconds onto a transparent screen (a "scrim" in theater parlance) in front of the dancers. The trick was keeping the graphics from overwhelming the piece, Afanador says. "We kept saying, 'Sparse, sparse.'"

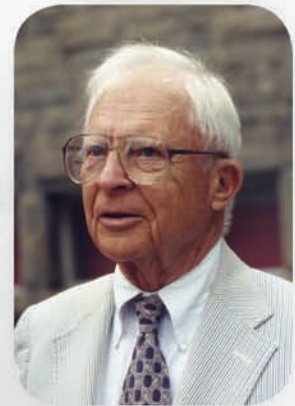
Afanador is pleased with the results, but sees ways to expand on their work. She'll continue to explore the possibilities this fall at Arizona State University, not only as a choreographer but as a PhD student in cognitive psychology. Working in the Arts, Media, and Engineering Program, she'll research how viewers perceive the links between dance and interactive technology. "The connections aren't always obvious," Afanador says. "But they are there."

— Susan Kelley

Building a Legacy for Cornell

"Cornell's influence on me and my life has been profound. I have only returned in a small measure what I have received."

William E. "Whitey" Mullestein '32
(1911 – 2005)



William E. "Whitey" Mullestein graduated from Cornell 70+ years ago. Whitey will long be remembered as someone who has given countless people much pleasure and enjoyment and whose legacy at Cornell will continue to do that.

Whitey measurably strengthened many areas of Cornell, including Cornell Crew, Cornell Plantations, Engineering scholarships, and Cornell United Religious Works, to mention only a few. His confidence in the University will long continue to have a significant impact on current and future generations at Cornell.

Whitey worked with the Office of Trusts, Estates, and Gift Planning to realize his plans for the University. Through the use of the Cornell Foundation, a charitable remainder annuity trust, a bequest, and outright gifts of cash his thoughtful commitments were achieved.

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