

(re)Actor: The First International Conference on Digital Live Art

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Digital Live Art is the intersection of human-computer interaction (HCI), live art and computing. This conference seeks to bring together practitioners and academics from these diverse backgrounds for a lively debate and interactive event which will explore this emerging field. Our specific context focuses on club cultures as a living context for Digital Live Arts practices. Our expected outcomes are to create a community of Digital Live Artists and to present the first strategies for designing, developing and evaluating Digital Live Art. Such an event provides an opportunity to open up conversations between digital art and live performance and will allow us to explore how it is used to increase our understanding of human-computer interaction in general.

Digital live art, playful arenas, human-computer interaction, performance art, non-task-based computing, ubiquitous and pervasive environments, club culture

1. WHAT IS DIGITAL LIVE ART?

New technologies enable new types of interaction. While existing human-computer interaction (HCI) focuses on usability, functionality and efficiency, new technologies offer a unique approach to HCI and are different in terms of not only their goal, but also their purpose and evaluation style. Current research in HCI is beginning to look at the interaction that takes place at the intersection of live art and computing [1, 2, 3]. We call this intersection Digital Live Art.

Digital Live Art is the intersection of live art, HCI and computing. *Live Art* is a term that is often understood in relation to its more popular parent Performance Art which emerged as an “unconventional” art form after Allan Kaprow coined the term *happenings* in the 1960s. It focuses on presence or liveness: the live artist, her body and her bodily actions rather than on material objects [4], as well as the relationship between the artist and audience. In Live Art, the performer *is* the artist [5] and often the artwork itself. Current performance research suggests that Live Art is a complex weave of the live, immersive and interactive [6] that reconnects art and life [4] not simply through the everyday, but from a magnification and reconfiguring of the everyday [7].

There is a seeming contradiction that exists between that which is digital and that which is live. In many cases, Digital Art is not 'performed' in the traditional sense of the word and is often communicated, made or received via the machine rather than through living human-human encounters. On the other hand, more and more artists are utilising digital media as a way of conceiving, producing and mediating performed art works. It is our view that instigating the possible conversations that might exist between the digital and live modes is critical.

Digital Live Art is a hybrid art form which focuses on presence and presupposes the digital as a way of making live engagements. This liveness is mediated by technical dependency so that the performance becomes a hyper-real exploration of the mundane - an orchestrated, temporal event occurring for any length of time and in any place using technological means. This technical relationship is negotiated within a malleable yet identifiable performance frame [8, 9] and context.

Our particular interest is in exploring the relationship that develops between performers, participants and observers and how Digital Live Art moves people to performative interaction and communal engagement. Whilst the types of ubiquitous and pervasive environments being explored in Digital Live Art are multiple and varied, our particular interest is in the increasingly popular but extremely challenging ubiquitous environment called a *playful arena* [2].

2. CLUB CULTURE AS LIVING CONTEXT

Playful arenas such as nightclubs and festivals, are spaces that already bristle with technology - computers, decks, mixers, projectors, lights, webcams and so on. The technology is utilized to fulfil a basic commitment to providing physical, sensory and human communication, interaction and experience for groups of people pursuing pleasure. As such it is a particularly rich environment for positioning Digital Live Art that seeks to explore the shifting binaries of performer/audience, human/machine, creator/collaborator.

The bringing together of the seemingly disparate strands of interactive performance, club culture and sensor technology reflects our own working practice that has developed over the past four years. Our collaborative research comes variously from the world of theatre and performance and from the world of computing. Whilst these very distinctive fields have particular methodologies, fields of reference and specific vocabularies, we link them philosophically with our desire to explore the nature of human interaction and our belief that a playful arena is a fertile ground for experimentation, innovation and creativity. We seek to investigate how Digital Live Art can lead individuals and groups to engage with or participate in the construction of their world and perhaps begin to take ownership of it. As Schieffelin [10] says:

Without living human bodily expressivity, conversation and social presence, there would be no culture and no society...performativity is not only endemic to human being-in-the-world but fundamental to the process of constructing a human reality.

It is a widely held view that the club space can exist as a 'playground of culture' [11] where the distinctions between performer and spectator, between those who act or take action and those who do not, have already become blurred. Drawing on experiences and influences from the DIY party movement of the 1990s, the underground club supports a 'kind of terrain, a shifting dance environment without borders or destination' [12, pp 173] where the gaze turns away from the brightly lit, bounded stage world of the professional performer and back towards the crowd. As this clubber testifies, performative energy emanates from the floor:

The very dynamic of the rave itself felt so liberating - democratic rather than hierarchical. The dancers' focus was not on the stage, but on each other. The hegemony of the performer was usurped, the energy was coming from the participants themselves. [13, pp. 104]

It is in support of performative democracy that we seek to position our Digital Live Art and share its possibilities. The aim is for it to sit alongside and complement the aesthetic of the club already established by the clubbers themselves, rather than replace or usurp it. We are invited into the club to play as artists and we invite people to interact with the artwork so that they may experiment and create for themselves and others. As Graham says of interactive art and its underlying principle of facilitating the participants' experience:

The skills needed by artists if they are to truly loosen control over the audience, but still share their pleasure, are perhaps less like the traditional art skills, and more like the social interaction skills of 'throwing a good party', or of enabling community art. [14, pp.171]

Using Digital Live Art in playful arenas introduces new concepts, methodologies and applications for live performance that may have wider implications for tangible and wearable computing, pervasive environments, ambient intelligence and collaborative creativity beyond the club space. It is our intention to bring together people who are interested in mapping this exciting cross-disciplinary field.

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