
Research in the Wild via Performance: Challenges, Ethics and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

Performance can be combined with interactive, online and immersive video as a way of conducting research in the wild. This affords the researcher opportunities to engage with participants in a way that can be surprisingly intimate, reactive to live intervention, and scaffolded by aesthetic content in order to shape how participants engage with the research context. It does, however, pose particular challenges with regards to evaluation practices, challenges which vary depending upon whether the researcher favours more traditional methods such as participant interviews, covert or overt observation or quantitative analysis, or whether s/he functions as a participant in the shared experience enabling him/her to explore the engagement in an autoethnographic, self-situated way. In this half-day workshop, we seek to bring together designers who use live performance in

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combination with video as a method for conducting HCI research. Through discussion and experience sharing we aim to tackle practical and logistic challenges, ethical quandaries, and evaluatory pitfalls when working in this way. By crafting and deploying a live performance intervention during the workshop, we will tease out nuances of understanding public performance research to better make sense of human-computer interaction in a wide range of contexts.

KEYWORDS

Mixed-Reality Performance; Research in the Wild; Practice based Research; Evaluation methods; Arts.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In many areas of ACM SIGCHI, large numbers of researchers use arts-based methods to inform their practice [5,8]. These performance applications regularly involve moving images, such as live projections and immersive performance spaces, and foster interactivity through performative elements. In this workshop we focus on the artists, designers, and/or researchers who use interactive, online, and immersive video in performative interventions. By bringing this unique group of performance-oriented design researchers together, we will investigate the merits and challenges afforded by video to a performative approach to research 'in the wild'.

2 AIMS AND SCOPE OF THE WORKSHOP

Workshop organisers Taylor, Spence and Wright [13] have previously explored the interactive dynamics of literally performing one's own research practice. This included i) developing intimacy between researchers and participants; ii) enabling researchers to make sense of interactions using knowledge gleaned through creative practice; iii) shaping participants' relationship to and understanding of research, and iv) enabling researchers to respond to the unfolding of interactive audiovisual performances and refine their investigation as it is being conducted. These previous works were grounded in Taylor et al.'s 'design from within' [12], where 'performer/researchers' take part as active performers in the public experience. Alternatively, Spence's 'performative experience design' [11] focuses on designs that position the researcher outside the performative experience, drawing upon principles of performance theory to craft compelling performative works from which to make sense of human computer interactions. Hook et al. take a similarly 'backstage'

approach to observing the activities of live performers in an extended study with a bespoke performance interface for professional VJs [7], examining how the VJs' performance practices evolved in response to the custom interface.

We also direct the reader to the substantial body of work led by Steve Benford's team at the Mixed Reality Laboratory. Through longstanding collaboration with mixed-reality artist group Blast Theory, Benford et al. have extensively used forms of interactive moving images in combination with interactive/immersive elements to explore social interactions between performers, participants and audiences in public space [1,4,8,9,10].

Williamson and Williamson conducted an exploration of evaluation methods for publicly situated research in the wild [14], focussing specifically on how evaluator intervention influences the nature of research. Their discussion highlighted the potential merits and drawbacks of a variety of evaluation positionings: steward observer, overt observer, and covert observer. Many of the issues raised in the paper are particularly impactful in the performative context, as the audience's perception of the evaluator/ researcher can weigh heavily upon the way the shared experience is made sense of. Drawing from a feminist perspective, Chen et al. raise the issue of how the framing of research practice inexorably imprints upon how it is understood [6], which she has explored particularly through the medium of video. In a live performance piece titled Inflatable, which was filmed and retold through video, Chen and colleague Matt Wood staged an exploration of the CHI style of peer review, using Wood's performance and firsthand storytelling to better illustrate the relationships between research subjects and research practitioners, and the subsequent understandings and misunderstandings that can emerge based on the way research is framed and made sense of [6].

Wood's previous works in which young participants explored self-expression of sexuality [15] use performativity and playfulness to encourage open and honest discourse. His use of material that can be interpreted as sexually charged raised a number of ethical issues. Art's ability to provoke uncomfortable engagement [3] is part of what makes it a useful tool for stimulating intimacy in social interaction [3,13], but raises numerous ethical concerns around the implication of bystanders [14] in public interactions, the social context in which the artistic intervention may be observed and perceived [6,13], and the physical and emotional safety and comfort of participants [10].

Conducting performance research in the wild poses a number of logistical challenges, many of which are discussed in Williamson and Williamson [14] as well as Taylor et al. [13]. Performative interactions sometimes necessitate the active participation of the live performer, which can constrain accessibility and limit scalability. Also, the challenges of conducting any type of research in the wild (i.e. unforeseeable weather, antisocial behaviour, local bylaws and the constraints of the real-world environment [14]) can impact this work.

3 THEMES, FORMAT & SCHEDULE

3.1 Workshop Themes

We propose to explore themes that evolve from, but are not limited to:

- Methodological challenges of deploying performance interventions in public spaces;
- Ethical concerns for implicating the public in performance-based research;
- The role of the performer/researcher in a stewarded public intervention;
- Challenges of integrating the virtual and physical in augmented performance in an immersive rather than passive way;
- Theoretical frameworks to represent potential configurations of audiences, participants, performers and researchers;
- The purpose of video in interactive multimedia performance;
- Tensions between artistic goals and research requirements;
- Understanding multiple streams and sources of quantitative and qualitative data;
- Using aesthetics to shape the narrative of HCI research.

3.2 Format & Schedule

This half-day workshop will be split into two sections, the first third entailing discussion and debate, with the second two thirds of the event taking part in and staging a live performance intervention in the city of Manchester.

3.2.1 Introduction & Panels. The organizers will open the workshop by outlining the goals for the day, introducing themes and discussion points which can be referred to throughout the day. Participants will be organized into panels in advance based on their submissions, and will give a brief argument outlining how their practice illuminates or contradicts the provocation under consideration. Each panel will be followed by a roundtable discussion.

3.2.2 Group Activity. Based on the submissions, a subset of performance prototypes will be selected for use during the workshop. Prototypes available to the workshop organisers include VR headsets, Kinect-based body tracking, and ambient light output devices. Using these prototypes, we will develop performance exemplars. For example, a performance where a VR headset-wearing researcher interviews passers-by about the philosophical questions of VR use demonstrates challenges in this area. Such a performance would allow a researcher to evaluate how people interact with others when their faces are obscured, how non-VR users perceive VR users, and how people can be encouraged to question visions of VR.

4 AIMS AND SCOPE OF THE WORKSHOP

We invite performers, designers, and/or researchers who currently wish to engage with the intersection of live performance and interactive video, as a way of making sense of human-computer interaction in the wild. We plan to accept a maximum of 15 participants. Contributors are invited to submit a 2-4 page position paper in CHI ACM Extended Abstract Format, or a 2-4 page pictorial. We are interested in getting to know your body of work, plus how your experiences conducting publicly situated research have informed your perspective upon one or more of the stated workshop themes. Applications should be emailed to performanceinthewild@gmail.com.

4.1 Attracting Participants

A call for papers will be sent to TVX participants, our own research institutions, organizations with whom we have ongoing external collaborations (ie: BBC, Blast Theory, Advanced Man-Machine Interface Laboratory at University of Alberta, KTH, Northumbria University, UK Puppeteers Network, Bestival), and appropriate mailing lists (e.g. NIME, CHI Announcements). Panel discussion groups will be organised in response to the workshop submissions, and participants will be expected to read the papers of their fellow panellists in order to facilitate discussion. A website will be made to communicate with participants should the workshop be accepted.

4.2 Post-Workshop Dissemination Plans

We will submit an article to Interactions magazine discussing the workshop outcomes and a broader look at how the workshop will have expanded what is currently a 'niche' area of HCI research – how arts practice and public performance inform HCI research through the activities of researchers such as those who will participate in our event.

5 ORGANISER BIOS

Robyn Taylor is a researcher and musician affiliated with Open Lab at Newcastle University. Robyn uses technologically mediated participatory performance as an investigatory medium, inviting members of the public to engage in improvisational performances which explore issues surrounding creative agency and social encounters in public spaces.

Julie Williamson is a Lecturer of Human Computer Interaction at the University of Glasgow. Her research explores how tangible performative interactions can be embedded into public places, focusing on ways of attracting users, encouraging playful behaviour, and evaluating user experience without intervening during users' interactions.

Jocelyn Spence is a Research Fellow at the University of Nottingham's Mixed Reality Lab. She is internationally recognised in the fields of human-computer interaction and intermedial performance studies. Her framework of Performative Experience Design has formed the basis for projects discussed in these communities, including past contributions to the CHI Digital Arts Community.

Matthew Wood is a researcher/performer working at Open Lab, Newcastle University. Matt's research is around sex and sexuality, and takes particular interest in the performative dimensions of research practice. He has explored performance as a medium for research dissemination, and has more recently been exploring the intersection of digital technologies and puppetry.

Jonathan Hook is a Lecturer in Interactive Media at the University of York. His research uses human-centred design methods to explore how novel interactive technologies can support new forms of creative content and practice.

Ko-Le Chen is a videographer who works at the intersection of STS, performance theories and feminist theories. She draws from visual art and performance art practice to interrogate materiality of knowledge. She is interested in reflexive practices in HCI and alternative formats of knowledge dissemination.

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