Networked Performance: How Does Art Affect Technology and Vice Versa?

Moderators
Michelle Riel (California State University, Monterey Bay)
Helen Thorington (turbulence.org)

Panelists
Julian Bleecker (University of Southern California)
Susan Kozel (Simon Fraser University)
Martin Rieser (Bath Spa University College)
Andrea Zapp (Manchester Metropolitan University)

Overview

An exploration of the worlds of performance, social collaboration, and play. Artists, technologists, educators, and scientists converse on all manner of computationally dependent cultural practices, including wireless culture, location technologies (GPS), grid computing, sensing, and reactive (sensor-based) interactivity. Mobile computing and network practice cut across all aspects of practice and research, engaging optimization, visualization, tool creation, hacking, etc.

Position Statement: Michelle Riel

As we move to an "anytime, anywhere" information and entertainment model, a new paradigm for experience enabled by mobile and networked computation emerges. Action in the physical world increasingly happens within a framework in which a participant contributes their own experience and content through embodied engagement with networked technology. This user experience becomes performative.

Since July of 2004 I have collaborated with Helen Thorington and Jo-Anne Green of the net.art platform turbulence,org to present the networked performance blog (http://www.turbulence.org/blog/) chronicling the current practice and critical discourse of networked performance. We define networked performance as any work that is enabled by computer networks (satellite, wireless, internet), which engage users in a performative experience.

Surveying the blog we identify four attributes which current work explores in various combinations: telematics provide control of objects through a network, such as telerobotics or haptics; locative media provide location aware engagement; smart environments enable architecture and objects to respond to environmental changes of state generated by occupants/inhabitants; and wearables extend the body's senses through technological prosthesis.

Bodies become screens, displays of media and information, conduits, mobile interfaces for navigation and communication, and intermediaries of sensorial extension.

I am interested in looking across this broad range of practice to focus on the changing role of the user/participant/ audience whose networked experience is now physically in the public world. Open frameworks prompt anonymous participants to perform within the work, and through their performativity to create in public and with the public, In a culture of spectacle, stardom, voyeurism, and surveillance, I am interested in public engagement enabled by networked technologies that invites playfulness and social collaboration, negotiating the desire and/or fear to observe and/ or participate, particularly among the everyday public who happen upon such experiences.

Biographic Sketch: Michelle Riel

Michelle Riel is an Assistant Professor of New Media and Chair of the Teledramatic Arts and Technology Department, a multidisciplinary program at California State University Monterey Bay. She has an undergraduate background in bioengineering and sociology and a master's degree in scenography focusing on the integration of media in live performance and virtual reality sets, site specific performance, and art installation.

Her current work with mobile and locative technologies, networked sensing environments, and real-time video explores social relations to public place. She is interested in creating playful and contemplative experiences through unexpected encounters with art and technology in public environments. This takes the form of interventions via embedded, responsive artifacts in public space and site-specific responsive installations. This strategy aims to reach an unintentional audience and to expose the general public to experiences of technology beyond productivity and utility application or mass, commercial entertainment experiences.

Additionally, through a Wireless Education and Technology Center (WeTEC) grant she leads student research in applications of mobile and locative media exploring narratives of place. She is also a principal investigator for the Center for Interactive Media and Games (CIMGames) researching alternate reality game models for learning and assessment of strategy based content.

Position Statement: Helen Thorington

Drawing on the over 700 entries on the networked_performance blog set up (by myself, Michelle Riel and Jo-Anne Green) to chronicle and discuss the range of work in this category, we have broadly define networked performance as any event or activity that includes a live component and is enabled by networked computing technologies (satellite, internet, wireless) — We locate current practice within an historical continuum (Kaprow's Happenings and the open work, Galloway's Electronic Café, the EAT experiments, the Situationists, Fluxus, etc.) concluding that this historical trajectory, combined with networked computing, is redefining the model for artistic and cultural practice as performative.

Biographic Sketch: Helen Thorington

Helen Thorington is an artist and the founder and director of the turbulence.org website. Founded in 1996, turbulence commissions, and exhibits networked art and networked performance performance. As an artist she has taken part in numerous networked performances, including Adrift (1997-2001) and many networked musical performances. Along with Michelle Riel, she has been studying current practice since setting up the networked_performance blog in July '04.

Position Statement: Julian Bleecker

The challenge of locative media art-technology projects is precisely to create compelling, situated and place-specific experiences that leverage the affordances presented by location technology.

Early in the conceptual evolution of location-aware services, typical user scenarios had the template of receiving an SMS message to your mobile phone when you walked past a cafe. The deficit of creativity in such scenarios presents an opportunity for more exciting locative media experiences.

I would like to offer a perspective on locative media and its possible contribution to social interaction, place-based annotation, and entertainment by describing, through projects, the collaborative design approach practiced at the University of Southern California's Mobile Media Lab. Our collaborative projects bring together faculty and students from the School of Cinema-TV, Viterbi School of Engineering, social scientists at the Annenberg Center and engineering scholars from abroad (e.g. Keio University, Japan.)

Our collaborations emphasize a category of art-technology and media that make rich use of technology for the purpose of developing creative location-based, "situated," and mobile networked experiences.

Our approach is to consider the specifics of "place" as a kind of human geography. We start from the premise that location-based media is best understood as producing an revitalized humanist geography. Creative context and content arise through design that take into account experiences that can happen in particular locales based on the specifics of the place. These activities can be instrumentally coordinated by things like GPS data, but they must be understood as activities that people will experience in much more existential ways. Another way to state this is that locative media is far less about latitude and longitude and much more about the emotionally charged, site specific activities that make immersive human realities.

Biographic Sketch: Julian Bleecker

Julian Bleecker is a Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of Southern California. He directs the Mobile Media Lab at USC and have been developing location-specific mobile media art-technology projects for several years.

He is on the Steering Committee for the "Interactive City" event at ISEA2006, the International Symposium of Electronic Arts, and serves as a faculty director for the University of Southern California's Mobile Media Institute. He is also a faculty researcher at the Institute for Multimedia Literacy at the Annenber Center, and a fellowship recipient for "Vectors," a new, online peer-reviewed journal dedicated to expanding the potentials of academic publication via emergent and transitional media and technology.

His recent work can be seen at http://www.techkwondo.com/.

Position Statement: Susan Kozel

Our cultural practices are computationally dependent, but inadequate attention is paid to the performative and gestural dimensions of responsive networked technologies. My contribution to this panel addresses questions of performance and embodiment through the lens of social choreographies and flesh. Flesh includes the substance of our bodies, but also can be interpreted to include organic and inorganic objects (bodies and devices) plus the space between people (that ever-shifting relational space of social connections). I will discuss how the use of technologies in performance helps us to experiment broadly with social choreographies — particularly when performers become guides and audience members become performers/authors. My overall claim is that the lived experiences of the performer and performative audience member are catalysts for understanding the wider cultural engagements between humans and computers, and for developing the next generation of devices and interfaces.

I am involved in 3 major collaborative interactive arts projects based around dance and live performance. TRAJETS (http://www.trajets.net) is an installation where a 30x40ft sensing floor tracks visitors, causing suspended screens to rotate their direction and video imagery of dancing bodies to be projected onto the screens. Audience members, digital portrayal of bodies, and structures are entwined in a symbiotic relationship. IMMANENCE (http://www.meshperformance.org) is a installation/performance which uses real time live motion capture and other sensing systems to allow performers to explore interiority and exteriority in close proximity to audience members. The WHISPER project is an ongoing research project into wireless wearable technologies (http://whisper.iat.sfu.ca). Our team has designed garments to read one visitor‚Äôs physiological data (heart, breath, muscle contraction) and to map this data onto another visitor's garment through sound, haptics or visuals, thus creating a wireless embodied network of physiological and gestural exchange. EXHALE, an iteration of the whisper project, is confirmed as part of SIGGRAPH Emerging Technologies this year.

Biographic Sketch: Susan Kozel

Susan Kozel is a professional artist working in the field of live performance and technologies since 1994. She is a dancer, choreographer & writer, and also an Associate Professor at the School of Interactive Arts and Technology (SIAT) at Simon Fraser University in Canada. She has a PhD in Philosophy from the University of Essex in England.

Position Statement: Martin Rieser

Networked performance has been transformed by the advent of locative and situated media. The additional overlap of diegetic space with physical and geographical location has profound implications for the development of new forms of framing and

interaction. I intend to ask a number of questions: What are the potentials for the emergence new visual and auditory languages and strategies of narration? How does one analyse and redefine the visual and auditory languages required to enable the realisation of effective interactive narratised art forms in urban and site-specific environments? Does the extension of interactive technology from fixed installation to real urban geographies radically alter the mode of audience participation and reception? When the physical space overlaps the space of diegesis, can this emergent space for art and performance create new perceptions of space and place in an audience?

In addition I wish to interrogate the double-edged nature of these emergent technologies, particularly questioning the role of the artist in highlighting their other uses in surveillance and military contexts, and the possibility of inadvertently promoting social acceptance of technologies with totalitarian potential. Through specific case studies of new located works such as Riot (Mobile Bristol) , Uncle Roy All Around You (Blast Theory) and my own work (Hosts) I will try to outline effective strategies for collaboration between Scientists and technologists, artists and cultural observers.

Biographic Sketch: Martin Rieser

Martin Rieser is the author of a new book entitled "The Mobile Audience" (See www.mobileaudience.blogspot.com) which examines the field in terms of the transformation of the role of audience and how that should be understood. I have a track record of publication and curation in the field as well as being an internationally exhibited media artist. (www.sof.org.uk) He was co-editor of New Screen Media: Cinema/Art/Narrative, BFI/ZKM 2002 and have a critical knowledge of performance based works in new media stretching back over 23 years of practice and critical engagement, and has been on many panels previously at conferences ranging from Creativity and Cognition to ISEA and Plan.

Position Statement: Andrea Zapp

Digital networking not only presents itself as leading platform for artistic ideas, but is extending far beyond political and social neighborhoods, infiltrating nearly every sector of our everyday life. Due to this constant merging of real and virtual spaces and existences, the "networked narrative environment" must be defined as a modus operandi that reflects not only creative but also social processes.

I will refer to my artistic and theoretical research into public installations and performance spaces that are linked to the Internet integrating both viewer and user into the artwork. An online installation then equals a corporeal room + hybrid space + generic content. The network provides the technical backdrop that enables a remote and open-ended dialogue between these realms. The resulting narrative demonstrates interactivity as a user-controlled construct and narratives as an episodic chronicle to achieve a scenario of physical cause and virtual effect. The environment presents itself as a physical installation architecture that creates a stage for real and virtual role-play, with site specifics underpinning metaphors and supplying "plots." Human presence and space is addressed as increasingly subject to a flow of online contributions, material and data. How does this reposition our collective understanding of the physical and the virtual, the real and the imaginary? How can the logistics of a networked participatory platform query the idealistic potential of an allegedly "virtual existence" within the dissolution of locale and prototypes of disembodied identity? This type of open system can be understood as an "interval," as it tests media art and its reception on a transitory stage: between the natural and digital space and their communities, being a symbolic passage or point of transfer between provinces of "pure potentiality" (Grossklaus, Götz, 2000) - ultimately linking it to Zizek's phantasmatic room and the symbolic orders of a nomadic second nature.

Biographic Sketch: Andrea Zapp

Andrea Zapp is currently AHRB Research Fellow at Manchester Metropolitan University, UK, where she investigates networked performance applications and narratives in her own installation work, in convening a conference and resulting book (Networked Narrative Environments as imaginary spaces of being, Manchester Metropolitan University/FACT Liverpool, 2004; as well as co-editing (with M. Rieser) "New Screen Media, Cinema/Art/Narrative", BFI London/ ZKM Karlsruhe, 2002); and most recently in curating an intern. Exhibition "Storyrooms - networked installations", for the Museum of Science and Industry Manchester, UK, scheduled for Oct. 2005.