

Entangled roles and processes in dance-research residencies

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Figure 1. Rehearsal of “The Game of Life”.

ABSTRACT

For this workshop, we contribute our knowledge and experiences from participating in dance-research residencies. Most recently, the first author joined a dance company in the combined role of HCI researcher and interaction designer for a new experimental dance piece requiring the development of multiple interactive systems. From his experience embedded on the creative team and the second author’s broad research and artistic resume, we consider the relationships between researchers and artists to be a complex and dynamic space, demanding flexible approaches and blurring lines between research and artistic roles.

CCS CONCEPTS

• Human-centered computing → Field studies; • Applied computing → Performing arts.

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1 INTRODUCTION

We are attending DIS this year to present our case study of the first author’s experience during an art residency where they participated as a researcher and interaction designer on a contemporary dance work [6]. The first author is a designer, musician, and HCI researcher, and he joined the dance company *Le principe d’incertitude*¹ for the development and premiere of a new piece for dancers and live musicians entitled “The Game of Life”. The creators, choreographers Pierre Godard and Liz Santoro, and composer Pierre-Yves Macé wished to incorporate interactive systems that would allow the performance to unfold procedurally based on a set of rules that dictated available modules of music and choreography that could be sequenced. The second author is an HCI researcher, dancer, and choreographer whose work spans design research and artistic production. She has organized and participated in several arts-research

¹<http://www.lpdi.org/>

residencies where she choreographed dance pieces that integrate interactive technologies [3, 4]. Through these residencies, she has authored multiple publications reflecting on her practice of both performance-making and choreography and designing interactive technologies for dance.

In considering the topic of this workshop, we find our current work on “The Game of Life” to be highly relevant to the topic of art residencies as a form of DIS/HCI collaboration. In our paper [6], we argue for embracing diverse roles and approaches to arts-research collaboration and characterize the entanglements between stakeholders, processes, art forms, and technologies as “messy spaces” which require flexible approaches and a degree of improvisation.

2 A CASE STUDY IN RESIDENCY-BASED ARTS-RESEARCH COLLABORATION

For “The Game of Life”, I (the first author) joined Godard, Santoro, and Macé to work on their new piece in the dual role of interaction/technology designer and embedded researcher. I documented my daily involvement in the production through field notes and ran conversational interviews with the creators and performers. From these perspectives, I constructed a direct account of the preparation of the piece and the co-design of the interactive technologies that we developed. Throughout the residency and collaboration with the artists, I have paid particular attention to how the design process itself is a situated activity within the larger artistic creation, with its own unique priorities, approaches, and challenges.

Together with the co-authors, we characterize our work as an example of performance-led research in the wild as defined by Bedford et al. [1]. Through this lens, we examine our design research, situated in — and arising from — artistic practice, with an eye to characterize the unique demands, constraints, and opportunities that it entails within broader contexts of design and HCI practice.

We have presented our findings in [6] as a firsthand account of co-designing technologies, illustrating complex relationships of design within artistic practice including various stakeholders and roles, managing artistic and technical demands, and operating within constraints of timelines and production budgets. They are further elucidated in a set of several themes drawn from conversational interviews, classified into two broad categories. The first thematic category presents the realities of a constrained and messy process, focusing on tensions and interplay of the technology design and the evolving creation processes. The second explores the shift towards trusting technology to become an invisible scaffolding for an embodied performance that occurred as the technology became integrated into the artistic work over time. Together, the identified themes serve to illustrate artists’ relationships with artistic-technical creation “in the wild”. Finally, we have offered a critical reflection on how art and design intertwine, relating our own experiences to theory from HCI literature.

3 ABOUT US

John Sullivan is originally a performing musician, having worked professionally as a recording and touring artist for many years before moving towards installation and interactive media design and then into HCI research. He holds a bachelor’s degree in jazz and contemporary music performance, an M.F.A in Intermedia, and a

Ph.D. in Music Technology. This unique path to research prioritizes artistic work and goals in collaboration. Simply put, when design and research occur in the context of artistic creation, the work, methods, and outcomes must support the artistic goals. In “The Game of Life”, this artistic background was a great benefit, allowing the research and design work to flow alongside and intermingle with the artistic work.

Sarah Fdili Alaoui works at the intersection of human-computer Interaction, interaction design, and dance. She has a background in science (mathematics and computer science) but is also a trained dancer and choreographer. Throughout the years, Sarah has been involved in many dance and technology projects, collaborating with other dancers and choreographers or performing herself. Her projects always include a technological element either to create interactive dance performances or to offer audience members interactive installations to try with their bodies or in the form of interactive systems for supporting choreography and dance learning and documentation. Her work is practice-based and applies artistic research in the making of both the interactive systems and the dance performances. For Sarah, the design of the technology and the choreography are entangled and feed one another. Her dual positionality contributed in “The Game of Life” to understanding what was at stake from both the artistic and the academic sides.

4 ON MUTUAL BENEFIT

Reflecting on the mutual benefit of art-DIS collaborations, we can add additional insights to our involvement with “The Game of Life”. Some aspects and methods of HCI research may be foreign, or even unwelcome, in an artistic creation setting. Imposing research agendas onto artists is a way in which academic research sometimes instrumentalizes artistic creativity for the sake of assessing a system and getting a paper published. Asking artists to allocate time (in most cases unpaid time) to conduct interviews or to document their practice or their interactions with, for example, an interactive system that they are given, can be taxing and invasive. There are also moments during rehearsals and creative work that can be intimate and emotionally intense and that cannot welcome an outsider’s eye that is simply there to investigate a related topic.

In a residency setting, people are personally involved. They collaborate intensely for multiple days in a row. They might share meals and accommodation. They create a lasting relationship that makes everyone share a common attitude of curiosity and interest which fosters a truly interdisciplinary and collaborative working environment. In this way, much as we see the designer/researcher as an artist, the artists, in some ways, become researchers as well. While much has been said in recognition of artistic practice being a fertile area for HCI and design research (for example [2] and [5]), our experiences highlight themes of curiosity, interest, and willingness to try new things that we experienced working with a group of artists. In our work with this production, this openness and support for the research activities and goals were manifested through our own reciprocal and deeply entangled roles in the artistic creation itself and an openness to blending the research and creative activities.

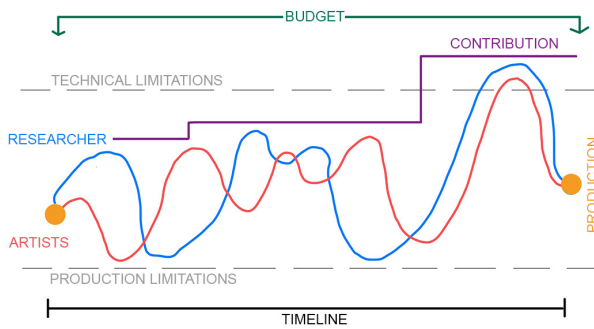


Figure 2. A diagram for artists researchers collaboration

4.1 Towards a diagram for collaboration

At this time of submission, we formulate a visual diagram of factors and relationships that determine “mutual benefit” in collaboration. In this vision, we do not see relationships existing on a polar continuum, with researchers on one side and artists on the other happily bouncing ideas, activities, methods, and materials between them. We argue in this proposal that these types of collaborations are always unique, made up of collective and individual skill sets and backgrounds, explicit and implicit roles, and dynamically changing circumstances and demands. They are defined by, and emerge from, relationships and interactions that happen in situ and may be resistant to formal models or linear structures. We also note the complexity found in arts-based design practices, which are subject to real demands of production timelines, budgets, and technical limitations, as well as informal and idiosyncratic processes related to artistic practice. Therefore we characterize these spaces and practices as both messy and situated, each demanding its own mapping of collaboration, work, and contribution.

5 CONCLUSION

The topic for this DIS workshop is timely and highly relevant to the work that we present here at DIS and going forward. We look forward to sharing our own experiences and insights and hearing other unique perspectives from all of the workshop participants.

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