Live Image and Sound Manipulation in the Context of Performance

or

Interactive Multimedia in Performing Arts

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SUMMARY

ABSTRACT

Considered the 'avant-advant-garde' of European art, performance art has developed as an interdisciplinary gender intriguing, shocking, able to arouse emotion, presence, drawing audiences into active involvement in the artistic act. With the introduction of communication technologies, worldwide quasi-present, digital performances have become increasingly sophisticated and complex. Along with new audio-visual means of expression, remote connectivity led to the introduction of new dimensions of performance.

The continuous development of digital technologies is determining the transition from Web 2.0 towards technologies dominated by artificial intelligence and virtual reality, with major effects on humanity. From this perspective, the arts today are increasingly dominated by a discourse that is either positivist deterministic or especially substantivist apocalyptic.

Performance, in general, and interactive digital performance, in particular, are interdisciplinary and intermedial art forms difficult to define. Our research aims to identify critical paradigms needed to develop definitions and taxonomies of interactive digital performance sites, with a view to proposing an approach of this kind of art education for students from arts majors.

By studying the artistic events that endorse the definitions of intermedia and multimedia, we intend to identify, depending on their complexity, a taxonomy of those art events incorporating digital technologies and disciplines at the interface of several arts: visual arts (visual , video art, photography, sound and light design, stage design), performing arts (dance, acting, performance, technical director), music (interpretation, composition, electronic music, etc.).

In our research approach, we related to the theories of performativity and intermediality in visual and performing arts, from the perspective of the artistic movement that generated the concept in the 60s, only to narrow down the field of research to address the performative events that include interactive digital technologies.

The proposed outcome of the research was to identify the major paradigms that subscribe interactive digital performances within the space of visual and performing arts, with the purpose of developing interdisciplinary courses that address artists and / or technicians that specialize in

one or more branches of multimedia (image, sound, light, digital techniques, interactivity), in preparation of multidisciplinary teams capable of creating intermediate productions.

The preliminary research, which was aimed at clarifying and delimiting the domain and the basic concepts, was conducted in two stages.

For the first stage we chose to monitor digital artistic events that occurred in a limited period in 14 cities in 7 European countries [Netherlands, France, Germany, Romania, Belgium, England, Estonia]. We documented and described numerous non-traditional art events that involved the use of digital technologies in one form or another, that were hosted and curated by various cultural institutions. We also interviewed 16 artists and workers in the cultural field.

In the second stage, we continued the exploration of theoretical frameworks regarding the practice of interactive multimedia performance by analyzing the perspective of an institution of culture / art hosting and organizing such events. We started our approach from the definition of art that is based on the theory of context, namely that "something is art only by the grace of baptism by the 'artist' and the 'confirmation' by accredited institutions [...] Art is what representatives of official or semiofficial art institutions agrees to call 'art' ."(Malita, 2010, p. 36) With this approach, we headed to the Venice Biennale – a prestigious art institution opened for less conventional events – seeking to identify productions that are presented to the public as live performances incorporating in one way or another interactive digital technologies. While The Biennale is a fertile context for experiment and non-conventional exploration (where we expect interactive digital performances to be a part of), with the exception of the 2011 edition, no other performances that meet the criteria sought by us were hosted.

In conclusion, the two studies pointed to the fact that the extension of the boundaries of artistic expression from traditional art disciplines towards other areas, such as digital media and technology, is originating in the arts, while the institutional contexts in which digital performances are performed, at least at an innitial, experimental level, is mainly electronic art or digital technology festivals or fairs, and not the other way around.

The performance studies literature enabled us to identify the important concepts for the research and analysis of artistic performativity within the context of the integration and adoption of interactive digital technologies.

Identifying critical paradigms underpinning the theorizing of digital intermedia / multimedia performance, on the one hand, and developing a program of academic training in art from an interdisciplinary perspective, on the other hand, creates the potential for the development of new models of artistic education in Romania, models aligned to European and international standards.

The first paradigm discussed in this stage of the research addressed the category of social sciences. The research methodologies and topics specific to these fields can be successfully applied in the analysis of the way in which interactive digital performance expresses in relevant ways the cultural and social realities of the information age. Basic theories of the philosophy of technology provide an understanding of the artist's perspective on the future and sheds light on theories of extension of the body approached by posthumanist performers like Stelarc or Orlan. Stelarc is one of the chief representatives of trans-humanism that, through his art, illustrates a range of philosophies and schools of thought that dominate the contemporary discourse related to digital technologies and their influence on life in the information society. His works are illustrative for the theory of the extension of the body through technology, but also for concepts of transcending into a new body, through engineering improvements by digital, bio or nano-technology.

The second category of paradigms has to do with topics that are specific in a cultural context dominated by digital technologies so much that it affected the way we learn, work, leisure time, interact and relate culturaly. In the digital culture paradigm we are dealing with several topics that have to do with the specificity of the medium that facilitates two-way communication. Interdisciplinarity and intermediality are the major themes discussed and interactive digital performance is a representative art genre within the context of digital culture.

Klaus Obermeier - muscian, choreographer, composer, artist - is one of the most important intermedial art exponents, a name consacrated on the stages of the most important contemporary festivals. Its productions are illustrative of the digital culture paradigm in the way they describe intermediality, this time in an aesthetic and narrative register subscribed to digital interactive performance genre.

The two paradigms contained in this research report represent only part of the theoretical approaches identified in the literature addressing the digital interactive performance. To have a complete and coherent image, the study should be extended to incorporate several other paradigms, which will be developed in the completed thesis. Among these, we mention the performing arts paradigm - which will include issues of corporeality, spatiality and spectatorship, the human-machine interaction paradigm, which will address issues related to the aesthetics of interactivity and interfaces necessary for the staging of an aesthetic, total, performance.

We will end our approach to the study of digital interactive performance art by mentioning the pedagogical paradigm noting that, until recently, in Romania performing arts were focused exclusively on the theater.

At the crossroads between visual arts, music, theater and cinema, digital interactive performance has become a consecrated genre, relevant in the context of the information age.

This is reason to consider that the present research is an important contribution to the development of performing arts studies in Romania.