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Programme of study: Media and Arts Technology PhD programme
Department: EECS
Title of study: Conversations in the Turbine Hall
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I confirm that QMUL is responsible for this study and that I am not receiving any funding for this project (other than that provided by myself or through my course):

Yes

Funding body: EPSRC
Level of funding: full

Summary of the research:

This activity is part of a Ph.D research project into how aesthetic assessments are accomplished in naturalistic conversation. It aims to gather recordings of spontaneous conversations between groups of people viewing an performance artwork by artist Tino Sehgal at the Tate Modern.

Similar studies on conversations in museums and galleries using video ethnography have attempted to use CCTV-style cameras to record video and microphones in the plinths of static artworks such as sculptures to record audio (see Hindmarsh et al., 2002), however, this study involves video recordings of movement and interactions between paid participants and public visitors to a live performance artwork taking place from July – October on the ground floor of the Turbine Hall in the Tate Modern, taken from the balcony above.

Methods

The location is covered by CCTV cameras, and many hundreds of visitors regularly record video of the piece along with audio from the same balcony. The single, static wide-angled shot, taken from above at approximately 30°, at a distance of approximately 20-60m, will not make individual visitors or participants in the work easily identifiable. Simultaneous audio recording of the conversations of visitors on the balcony is the main object of study: how their conversations thematise the activity below. However, no video or photos will be taken of people talking on the balcony – only of those involved in the performance below.

All recordings will be anonymised, any conversations not appraising the performance below in some way will be deleted, and a notice that recording is taking place will be prominently attached to the camera, as the often crowded balcony will not allow for visible signage to be hung nearby.

We have consent from the artist Tino Sehgal, and have requested official confirmation from his representatives at the Tate Modern for the recordings to take place, however, for practical reasons it is not feasible to seek consent from each visitor and paid participant in the work.

Conversations will be transcribed and analysed by the researchers alongside the video of the performance being talked about.

Ethical Concerns

The Turbine Hall is the most visited section of the Tate Modern, the most visited gallery in the world, with over 20,000 visitors on peak days. Families including children often walk through the space that will be covered by the camera shot.

However, this study does not aim to identify individuals in the hall or on the balcony, and no personal data will be collected. Although video analysis will include observation of gaze direction and body orientation where they are thematised in viewers' conversations, the wide angle and distance of the camera shot will make it difficult to identify individuals. Furthermore, video materials would remain available only to researchers. While it is customary to provide clips and stills to illustrate analysis of video ethnography, care will be taken in the selection of materials so that no individuals will be identifiable in archived publications.

The conversations between visitors on the balcony of the Turbine Hall mezzanine will be recorded without video – in a public space that is regularly filled with people themselves recording video and audio. Clips, images and recordings of the ground floor featuring video and audio recordings of conversations between members of the public and paid participants regularly surface online, both in professional publications and in user-generated content sites such as youtube.

(<http://www.timeout.com/london/art/event/233030/tino-sehgal>) - photo

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1IRZKfAQhxs>) - video

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GoWilVKrtlQ>) – video / audio

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b9TDXJwFkSw>) – audio conversation and video

However, any conversations about specific private individuals, places or activities that are not in some way related to the assessment of the performance will be anonymised and/or deleted.

Although the Tate does show work by artists that features nudity and/or disturbing scenes, such exhibits are clearly signposted and located in closed galleries. The Turbine hall in general and this performance piece in particular includes no content that might be considered risqué.

Bibliography

Jon Hindmarsh, Christian Heath, Dirk vom Lehn, and Jason Cleverly. 2002. Creating assemblies:. In Proceedings of the 2002 ACM conference on Computer supported cooperative work - CSCW '02, page 156, New York, New York, USA. ACM Press.

Responses to detailed questions:

- Are the participants under 16?
No
No comments supplied
- Could the participants be classified as vulnerable adults?
No
No comments supplied
- Do the participants have learning difficulties?
No
No comments supplied
- Does the research involve using or collecting human tissue?
No
No comments supplied
- Could this research uncover illegal activities (drug use, immigration etc.)?
No
No comments supplied
- Could this research cause stress or anxiety in the participant?
No
No comments supplied
- Will you be asking questions relating to issues of a personal sensitive nature?
No
No comments supplied
- Could this research bring the University into disrepute?
No
No comments supplied
- Does the research involve the person taking a drug of any description - even over the counter medicines?
No
No comments supplied
- Does the research involve an intervention e.g. exercise, hypnotherapy?
No
No comments supplied

- Does the research rely on covert observation of the participants?
No
No comments supplied
- Will this research be conducted in the participants' homes?
No
No comments supplied
- Will the participant be paid - not just expenses?
No
No comments supplied
- Will the data collected be sent or used overseas?
No
No comments supplied