First-person research in the arts: exploring the values behind new music technology

Giacomo Lepri
g.lepri@qmul.ac.uk
Centre for Digital Music
Queen Mary University of London
London, UK

Andrew McPherson
a.mcpherson@qmul.ac.uk
Centre for Digital Music
Queen Mary University of London
London, UK

KEYWORDS
Design fiction, value discovery, music technology, community of practice

ACM Reference Format:

INTRODUCTION
Our work is grounded by the idea that a designer “express a scenario of the device in question - a script out of which the future history of the object will develop” [1]. Although individuals will add their own interpretation, the script will become a major factor for the understanding of uses and interactions.

Permission to make digital or hard copies of all or part of this work for personal or classroom use is granted without fee provided that copies are not made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage and that copies bear this notice and the full citation on the first page. Copyrights for components of this work owned by others than ACM must be honored. Abstracting with credit is permitted. To copy otherwise, or republish, to post on servers or to redistribute to lists, requires prior specific permission and/or a fee. Request permissions from permissions@acm.org.

Conference’19, June 2019, San Diego, CA, USA
© 2019 Association for Computing Machinery.
ACM ISBN xxx-x-xxxx-xxxx-x/xx/xx…. $15.00
https://doi.org/10.1145/nnnnnnn.nnnnnnn
It is possible to argue that, in the context of new instrument design, a luthier transfers into a music technology specific values \[10\]. Music researchers might *inherit* and *promote* values linked to specific social and cultural contexts \[9\]. On the other hand, musical priorities and concerns might arise from individual’s practices-based investigations concerned with the creation of new musical works \[5\]. However, within the domain of musical interaction, HCI research often examines new digital tools and technologies which can carry unstated cultural assumptions \[6\].

This paper advocates for the need of a more explicit exploration and explication of the values, assumptions, and expectations that circumscribe music technology research. Within highly multi-disciplinary design domains such as NIME - New Interfaces for Musical Expression, this process of acknowledgement would help to situate a large number of design choices, fostering the emergence and legitimacy of diverse methodological approaches and clarify, to the targeted communities, the intended goals and uses of specific artefacts.

**DISCOVERING MUSICAL VALUES THROUGH MAKING**

First-person research approaches have a varied history in the context of music and HCI \(^1\). Within this domain, the role of the ‘practitioner-researcher’ is crucial \[5\]. Indeed, instrument designers are often active artists and musicians engaged with the creation of new musical artefacts. This situation might imply that instrument designers are also the primary users of the technology they develop. While sharing their work, researchers often aim to exploit the particularities of specific artefacts while engaging with broader design concerns \[4\].

In our work we examined the ways in which individual designers express their own values through making through a series of design workshops based on design fiction methodologies \[2\] (see Figure 1). In particular, we engaged with instrument designers and musicians in order to explore the breadth of perspectives practitioners belonging to diverse technical and cultural contexts might have while envisioning not-yet-existing technologies for musical interaction (see Figures\,2, 3, 4 and 5).

We organised a series of activities in which musicians were invited to built non yet existing musical instruments “as if by magic”. The main goal of the activity was “the creation of cultural objects, allowing them to act as prompts for a story we tell about ourselves” \[2\]. Gradually moving away from the imagined device and its functionalities \[3\], our workshops focused on the emergence of those narratives, values and concerns associated to the artefacts we create.

**DISCUSSION**

One of the core elements of our research is the use of design approaches that could facilitate the acknowledgement of sources driving a specific vision of the world that precede the development of a new technology. In this regard, by reviewing the literature related to music in HCI contexts, it is
First-person research in the arts: exploring the values behind new music technology

Conference’19, June 2019, San Diego, CA, USA

difficult to find works that explicitly establish connections between music research and first-person approaches adopted in other HCI domains.

Our contribution to the workshop discussion will provide an artistic account on first-person research for the critical understanding and development of music technology [8, 11]. We would discuss the importance of embodied intimacy [12] throughout the various design stages.

We believe that the music technology researchers could strongly benefit from a conversation with other HCI communities. In particular, much can be learned about approaches, attitudes and methods based on first-person research. In this regard, we would be particularly interested in tackling the following questions. How could first-person methodologies help to made visible to the researcher’s eyes subjective and culturally situated meanings? How could first-person methodologies help while imaging and designing technologies for specific communities of practices [7]? How can we fully acknowledge the spectrum of values and concerns that might characterise the communities we are part of?

REFERENCES