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# Streams from the Past

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Social Media video-centric platforms, such as Snapchat, YouTube Live, Twitch and Instagram Stories afford anyone to live stream their daily life. The possibility to gaze into this multitude of presents encourages a belief that all that is seen is “real”, that is, spontaneous and natural. Live stream is seen as an open window into the streamer’s private life, a gaze into a reality of non-pre-planned actions. *Streams from the Past* is an interactive installation that questions such concepts by offering a space for contemplation of one’s performance in the world, showing multiple layers of one’s recent past. The installation uses the same technologies that could be used for live streaming to create an immersive environment that subvert the idea of a live stream, encouraging one to face their own performances within different layers of past.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Streams from the Past* is an interactive installation that makes a commentary on the mainstream “media literacies” of immediacy and livestreaming, by allowing for contemplation and questioning the meaning of what is “real-time.”. This project is an important part of our research, as members of the Public Interactives Research Team (lead by Dr. Anne Balsamo and Dale MacDonald at the School of Arts, Technology and Emerging Communication at the University of Texas at Dallas), we investigate interactive media in public spaces and its social, political and cultural impacts. As artists, we use the Public Interactives framework to create pieces of art and observe them in different contexts that allow collective interaction. Our work as researchers feed our artist practice, which in turn gives us more material for research.

The appeal of what we are considering as amateur, or personal, livestreams comes partially from the perception that what is shown is spontaneous, therefore authentic within the routine of the persona been streamed. *Streams from the Past* defies this idea: although these streamers may not be as produced and professional as corporate media products, they are performing for the camera. The installation consists of two sets of computer, projector and camera and each set is positioned in a manner to create an “infinite mirror” effect. Each camera is set on a different time delay, so visitors are able to face their multiple pasts from different angles and times.

## 2. ARTISTS STATEMENT

*Streams from the Past* takes a critical look at the relationships between performance and mediation, in the context of modern norms of cultural practice with digital technologies. “Live” and “Real-Time” digitally mediated performances are not, technically speaking, simultaneous to their physical performance — for that matter neither should a mirror be considered a literal reflection of the present. However, the human senses perceive those experiences as simultaneous: especially as we don’t necessarily see the “physical” performance happening, there is no possible way of making sure the digitally-mediated one is even close to actual “real-time”. *Streams from the Past* brings not only the physical performance “face-to-face” with the digitally mediated one, but it adds layers to the former, encouraging users to question their perception of present and past, immediacy and simultaneity. In many ways, *Streams from the Past* is in dialogue with Dan Graham’s *Present Continuous Past* (1974) as both pieces allow the observer to gaze upon their performance by playing with the temporality of mediation, using delay and mirrored images. While Graham’s piece was created

using analog technologies, including real mirrors, *Streams from the Past* utilize a set of cameras and projections to achieve a similar mirrored perspective. The code runs on Processing, adding different delays for each camera, and are often changed for different iterations. In *Streams from the Past*, visitors face themselves, while in *Present Continuous Past* one can explore their image on 360 degrees.

Live streaming media is commonly perceived as been more authentic – because it is broadcast as it happens, as an intimate backstage performance. This is just an impression: such performances are still planned and calculated, especially in platforms like Snapchat and Twitch, in which users want to be seen, “liked” by others and act accordingly to their personal “brands”. This project provokes visitors to revisit these issues by creating spaces to reflect on one’s own performance, in which they are in contact with their layered pasts through digital technology.

In previous displays of the piece, we observed that often visitors will take some time either observing the piece (and others playing with it) or indirectly interacting with it from a distance. Often, after getting more comfortable and exploring the images for a bit, visitors will develop a very playful relationship to the piece, experimenting with the delays, taking pictures and trying funny face, weird body positions and so forth. Although the approach varies accordingly to where and to whom the piece is displayed – we had observed from children interacting non-stop to other media artists carefully approaching and slowing experimenting – the underling experience is based on experimentation and playfulness.

We believe that the popularity of live streaming and real-time digital media disregards contemplation and the poetics of memory over ephemeral and as-it-is-happening streams. *Streams from the Past* uses exactly such ephemeral and livestreaming technologies to create an interaction that encourages reflection on memory, retention and understandings of time.

The project was created in 2016 as a provocative response to a prompt to create a project in which the use live-streaming was mandatory. The first iteration of the piece was presented at the Dallas Museum of Art during a Dadaist night event. Other iterations of the piece were displayed in diverse occasions, including a group exhibition entitled “The Neighbors Weeds” (2017) at Central Trak Art Gallery in Downtown Dallas (Dallas, Texas, USA) and at HASTAC 2017, in Orlando, Florida, U.S.A..

Fig. 1. View of piece installed at Central Trak, Dallas, TX, May 2017. (Photo by author).

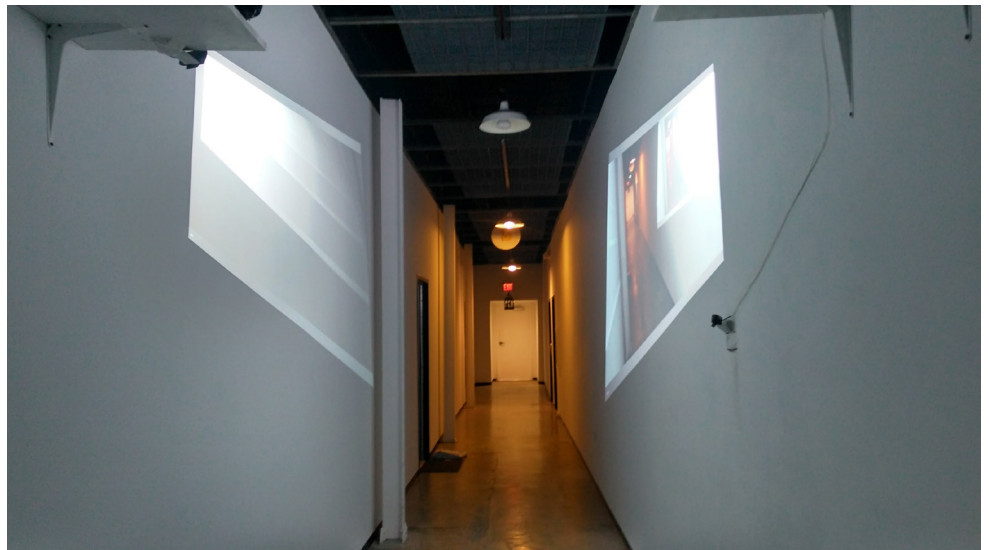


Fig. 2. View of piece installed at Central Trak, Dallas, TX, May 2017. (Photo by author).



Fig. 3. Visitors interact with the piece at Central Trak, Dallas, TX, May 2017. (Photo by author).



Fig. 4. Video of the piece, available at: <https://youtu.be/wC3q5f6S7yc>

