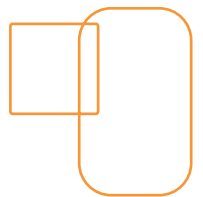# Future Screens

Special Issue. Editorial

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This special issue of *DigitCult* engages the research and practitioner communities in a dialogue surrounding the concept of Future Screens. Rather than offering a definitive definition, we propose this term as a working concept that could serve as a catalyst for innovation and critique. The rapid proliferation of screen technologies in recent years has reached such an extent that they often become invisible to us, a phenomenon that has historically characterized our relationship with media. As technology evolves, we tend to absorb its presence into our daily lives, rendering it almost unnoticed. This notion resonates with information technology pioneer Ted Nelson, who noted in the 1970s, «We live in media, as fish live in water» (Wardrip-Fruin & Montford, 2003, p. 302).

In parallel, the technological landscape of screens has rapidly diversified. From extended reality (XR), including augmented and virtual realities, to wearable devices, immersive dome visualizations, and large-scale video mapping, the variety of forms and functions is becoming integral to our everyday experiences. These advancements not only push the boundaries of technical possibilities but also fundamentally redefine the role of media in our lives.

Examining the future of these technologies allows us to capture early signals across various domains, including immersive media, film, narrative and game design, as well as music and performing arts. This exploration can illuminate how Future Screens have the potential to reshape the cultural sector, particularly within entertainment and the creative and cultural industries.

This collection of articles embarks on an in-depth exploration of the theme of Future Screens, investigating their intersections with performance, film, immersive technologies, and digital spaces. We invited contributions on this cross-disciplinary topic to serve as a catalyst for rethinking immersive media, narrative design, game development, and broader sectors of creative and cultural industries and entertainment.

When we announced the call for papers for this special issue, the focus was on three key areas of impact. First, audience engagement and experience are being redefined as

Figure 1. *Screens of the Future* (2017). Universal Everything-Media Art Studio. https://www.universaleverything.com/media-art/screens-of-the-future.

immersive technologies enable deeper, more personalised interactions, while also expanding opportunities for collective experiences in both physical and virtual realms. Second, spatial transformation examines how these new screen technologies are reshaping our relationship to both urban and virtual environments, creating hybrid spaces for new forms of community and collective engagement. Third, creative practices and industrial impact explore how emerging screen technologies are driving innovation in artistic fields, challenging traditional narrative structures, and reshaping media industries and new value chains.

As we navigate the burgeoning landscape of screen technologies, it is crucial to acknowledge that both big tech and creative industries often herald emerging technologies as the next transformative milestone. However, the discourse surrounding screen futures is not new. The evolution of the concept of future screens reflects a significant journey from the utopian and experimental origins found within video art, expanded cinema, and media art to a context shaped by research funding agendas and creative industry focused shaped by technological advancements. Early explorations in these artistic forms laid the groundwork for understanding immersive experiences, emphasising immersion, interaction and the potential for transforming narrative engagement. While we do not have the time to elucidate a history from the expanded cinema context of the 1960s and 70s, through video art, media art and beyond, to the contemporary mainstream experiences found in installations like *TeamLab, Atelier De Lumier*, and *Outernet* and perhaps most spectacular (not always a good thing) The Sphere, in Las Vegas, a few key tendencies can be identified. For example, miniturisation, mainstream adoption, increasing levels of liveness and participation, imbrication of the virtual and real – and the complications and opportunities that arise from this.

With advancements in technology, innovations in miniaturisation and the mainstreaming of devices like the Oculus Rift, HTC Vive and introduction of products like Apple Vision Pro marked a pivotal shift, bringing immersive technologies into everyday life

and making them accessible to a broader audience. Projects like the collaboration between the Royal Shakespeare Company and Marshmallow Laser Feast, *Dream*, further exemplify this trend, combining immersive technology with traditional performance art to enhance viewer engagement and deepen emotional connections.

This shift highlights a commitment to inclusivity and community engagement, ensuring that advancements in immersive technologies are viewed not merely as technological marvels, but as meaningful tools for storytelling and social connection. As we move forward along this progressive trajectory, Future Screens are becoming integral to cultural production, reshaping the narrative landscape to address complex contemporary societal issues. Buckminster Fuller, the American architect, futurist, and inventor of the geodesic dome – which shapes modern immersive media spaces like the Sphere in Las Vegas – remarked, «There is nothing in a caterpillar that tells you it's going to be a butterfly» (Fuller, 1970, p. 30). This raises the question of whether today's screens will similarly transform into something new and unexpectedly beautiful, akin to how cinema, the eighth art form, emerged, or whether they will remain in their current "caterpillar" state. Through this special issue, we aim to present a range of perspectives that will help trace this evolving narrative.

The articles within this volume present a tapestry of insights. Federica Patti's work, *The Fifth Wall – Digital Performance and the Metaverse*, explores the evolution of digital performance and its burgeoning significance in our digital age. Complementing this, the article by Stefano Brilli, Laura Gemini, and Francesca Giuliani, *Experiences of Online Theatre Performance*, examines digital space in performance from a spectatorship perspective, utilising interviews to enrich their discussion. Both works demonstrate how digital technologies dissolve the traditional boundaries between performer and audience, creating opportunities for communal interaction and the collective construction of meaning.
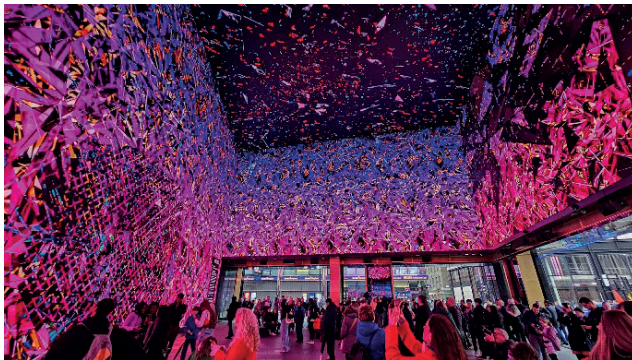

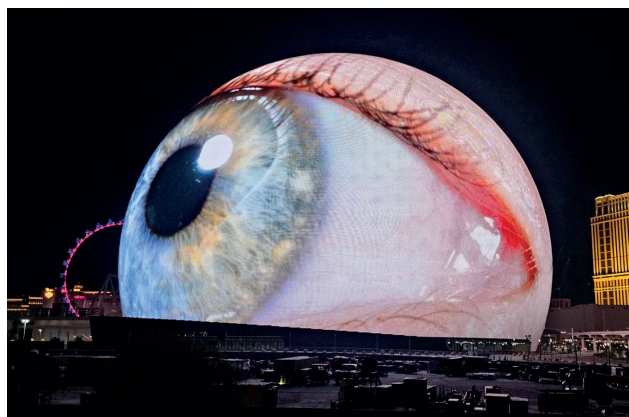**Figure 2.** https://www.outernet.com. London 2025.

Figure 3. https://www.thesphere.com. Las Vegas.

At the convergence of film and immersive technologies, Vanessa Vozzo's piece on *Expanded Realities* illustrates the evolution of documentary practices to accommodate immersive environments. In contrast, Dani Landau and Diego Zamora's *Volumetric Video with Skateboarders* investigate the potential of volumetric video through the lens of skateboarding culture, showing how innovative digital technologies can expand the possibilities of documentary filmmaking. Their distinct approaches – Vozzo's focus on interactivity and Landau and Zamora's emphasis on observational techniques – underline the transformative nature of emerging technologies in shaping narratives. Skateboarding, as a focal point, serves as a potent metaphor for the adaptability of urban environments. Skaters transform ordinary public spaces into arenas of exploration and innovation, reflecting a historical narrative of filmmaking that engages with mobility and spatial reimagining.

Significantly, a special section *Artistic Dialogues* features the work of Katerina Athanasopoulou et al. in *The Ring – A Conversation through Projection*, which chronicles a circular sharing process among artists during the Covid lockdown. By facilitating site-specific projections of their works, the artists recontextualise and transform each piece in dialogue with others. This collaborative framework challenges conventional notions of screen engagement and reimagines future screens as inherently local and participatory.

Conversely, Yuming Chen and Gianni Corino's *Emotive Immersion* shifts attention to sensory experiences within immersive dome environments, integrating affective computing and generative AI to propose a new paradigm for future screens. Their interactive installation, Coids, captures emotional states through EEG technology, enabling dynamic audiovisual experiences that emphasise the relational interplay between human emotion and machine perception.

James Sweeting's *Digital Resistance Against the Lasting Manipulation of Capitalism* critiques AI through cyberpunk tropes, illuminating the complexities of labor and resistance within contemporary socio-economic structures. Michele Varini's ethnographic study of *Cyberpunk 2077's Night City* complements this by examining how immersive digital landscapes influence storytelling and community interactions.

Emma Taylor's exploration of *The Gamification of Online Dating* further broadens this thematic spectrum by analysing how game-like elements on dating platforms shape identity and interpersonal dynamics. Together, these texts present a multifaceted narrative on how emerging technologies redefine individual experiences and societal constructs in contemporary digital contexts.

Collectively, these articles converge to articulate the thematic essence of digital and immersive environments, urging us to critically examine their implications for future screen experiences. This anthology reveals a complex interplay where performance, media, technology, and narrative converge, illustrating the rich tapestry of our interactions with digital spaces in artistic and cultural practices.

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