

# Creative Uses of Virtual Sticky Notes in Art - A Critical Interrogation of The “Bio-tracking” Smart Phone Based Exhibition

Anna Dumitriu  
Centre for Research and Development  
University of Brighton  
Grand Parade, Brighton, UK  
+447890516510  
annadumitriu@hotmail.com

Luciana Hail  
IBVA UK  
Garden Flat, 16 Park Crescent  
Brighton, BN2 3HA, UK  
+447973286094  
luciana@ibva.co.uk

## ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the creative uses of virtual sticky notes, a feature of Socialight Smart Phone software, as an artistic medium. The art exhibition “Bio-tracking” used virtual sticky notes to fuse sonic art, photography, microbiology, brain biofeedback, GPS, text and performance. We seek to investigate the possibilities of future artistic exploration of the medium

## Keywords

Smart Phone, Brain Bio-feedback, Interactive Brainwave Visualisation Analyser (IBVA), Digital Music, Analogue Music, Generative Music, Microbiology, Photography, Micrography, GPS, Text Messaging, Art, Science, Performance.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Anna Dumitriu, lead Artist on the Bio-tracking project [1] was introduced to the possibilities of using Socialight during a presentation at the 2006 Mobile Music Technology Workshop. Socialight [7] is a leading-edge smart phone software (suitable for Nokia Series 60), which enables the placement of ‘virtual sticky notes’ around various locations. These ‘virtual sticky notes’ can take the form of picture, sound and text files and are tagged to a specific location. The smart phone user can then access the ‘virtual sticky notes’ as desired; either by keying in a location (postcode or address) or by using a suitable GPS enabled phone and the appropriate version of the software.

## 2. THE BIO-TRACKING EXHIBITION

### 2.1 The Artwork

In September 2007 visitors to the International Brighton Photo Biennial Fringe were invited to download the Socialight and view an exhibition of digital photographs, sound works and text messages at various noted cultural locations around the city. To

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Figure 1. Pavilion Flora

create the photography Anna Dumitriu (whose work is inspired by microbiology) sampled and cultured normal flora bacteria and moulds from locations around the city, revealing this incredible, unseen and sublime world to us through a series of beautifully enhanced digital micrographs. Luciana Hail, Ian Helliwell, Ollie Glass and Juliet Kac created a series of sound works in response to the images, scientific data and locations. Microbiologist Dr John Paul wrote a series of scientific text messages to describe the microbes. The ‘sticky shadows’ were tagged to the specific locations where the biological samples were originally collected.

### 2.2 Concepts Informing the Work

The photographic images created a dialectic, fusing the pure emotion of the sound responses and the scientific analytical texts. The philosopher Schopenhauer wrote much on music’s ability to capture and express emotion “as an immediate objectification and copy of the whole will as the world itself” by juxtaposing these responses the project sought to create a synthesis between art and science.

### 2.3 Scale and GPS

By bringing in the use of GPS in the initial creation of the work, mapping the locations where the microbiological swabs were taken, the work draws together the microscopic and the macroscopic, drawing a thread between the satellites orbiting the

earth, which are used to triangulate positions and the bacteria at our feet.

## 2.4 Disseminating the Work to a Wider Audience

Smart phones are not common, so currently the use of this medium restricts audience engagement, to overcome this and widen the audience for the work Anna Dumitriu organised a guided performative walk around the sites in September 2006. Participants could see the software in use, hear the music, view the images, read the texts and use GPS to retrace the route. There were some difficulties with the ease of use of the software (currently in Beta test), which this walk was able to overcome.



Figure 2. The Bio-tracking Walk

## 2.5 The Use of Text Messaging

Each sound work and image was accompanied by a text message, which contained an analytical, scientific explanation of the microbial life found at the locations.

## 3. BRAIN BIOFEEDBACK MUSIC

A digital multi layered composition “EEG: SEA” was created for realisation at two sites for Bio-tracking, also generating two live brainwave sonifications “West Pier” and “Palace Pier”. Active EEG (brainwaves) were monitored and recorded with portable Bluetooth IBVA [3], and used as reactive influences upon the original score. The resulting tracks are unique, created by conscious interaction with the sights and sensations from each locale. They convey their social pace and presence also with their levels of interaction as perceived by the artist, as her EEG affects the timbre, tempo, tone and recombination of tracks for each. Clearly one suggests the ominous degradation and isolation of the West pier, whilst the second conveys bustle and business, frenetic behaviors (the Palace Pier recording was created as Luciana played the penny arcade games.)

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

Virtual sticky notes are a powerful means of disseminating sonic and visual artworks. As a medium it is limited only by the artists’ ability to engage with new technology and moreover by current issues with software robustness, which are constantly being improved. The Bio-tracking exhibition is a demonstration of the

creative uses of the medium and successfully engages artistically, conceptually and philosophically with the technology.

## 5. ABOUT THE AUTHORS

### 5.1 Anna Dumitriu

Anna Dumitriu [4] is a visual artist based in Brighton and her work is involved with the nature of trans-disciplinary practice based research. She is currently working on a project about microbiology *The Normal Flora Project* [6], funded by Arts Council England, which forms the basis of her practice based PhD research at The University of Brighton. She is also artist in residence at The Centre for Computational Neuroscience and Robotics at Sussex University.

### 5.2 Luciana Hail

Luciana Hail [5] is an Interactive Neurofeedback artist, proud to have been inspired and mentored by Roy Ascott in Wales for the first degree in Interactive Art in 1994. IBVA sound performances include: *The Future of Sound* 2004 in BAFTA [2] and *The Royal Institute* 2005 in London. For 2006-2007 Luciana is on tour again, performing “Psi-Chic” Live brainwave interactive sonifications at FACT in Liverpool, Millennium Gallery in Sheffield, The Sage Gateshead, Norwich Arts Centre, and at Innovation Expo in Udine in Italy in the MTV Pavillion.

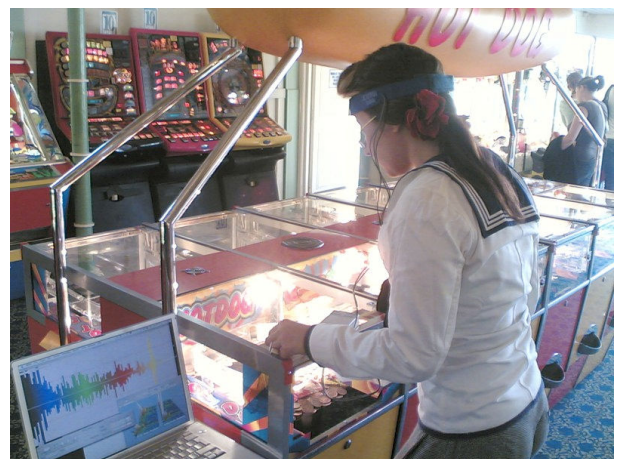


Figure 3. IBVA Recording on Brighton Pier

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