Call for Proposals

Skillful Practices in Social Robotics and HRI— Approaches from the Performing Arts

Special Session at the International Conference on Social Robotics and Art (ICSR2026 + ART, London, 1-4 July 2026)

The past decades have witnessed increased recognition of the relevance of skills and expertise from the performing arts to the development of robot behavior and HRI. Acting and directing methods, choreography and movement analysis, puppeteering, improvisation, scripting, as well as other aspects of making and analyzing theatre and dance have been tried and tested for how they may further the development of social interaction, robotic gesture, movement, and identity, support engagement with users and stakeholders, and contribute to the implementation of robotic assistants in a variety of social contexts. The integration of AI, motion capture, and algorithmic movement-mapping expands what counts as "expressive" robotic behavior, while simultaneously challenging assumptions about authenticity and affective fidelity—especially in non-humanoid systems with limited expressive affordances. As Lucy Suchman reminds us, these technologies do not simply reproduce human intention but reconfigure the very conditions under which agency and emotion become legible (1). Guy Hoffman observes that theater acting and other performing arts could serve as useful testbeds for the development and evaluation of action coordination in human-robot interaction, as well as for providing insights into action-perception frameworks that can support the AI of social robots (2). With his Robot Theatre Project (in collaboration with director Oriza Hirata), Hiroshi Ishiguro demonstrates how the practical knowledge of theatre directors and actors provides valuable insights for engineers designing robot behavior, while also enabling large-scale evaluation of audience impressions of acting robots, which can then be fed back into the design process (3). Heather Knight identifies eight lessons about designing non-verbal interaction that can be learned from the theatre and demonstrates the potential of stand-up comedy for experimenting with and testing out robot behavior and HRI. She refers to Cynthia Breazeal's pioneering work and observes that "using the theater context and body of knowledge to bootstrap the development of effective social robots is important because non-verbal expression is key to understanding sociability" (4). Petra Gemeinboeck, Amy LaViers, and others demonstrate the value of dancers' skills and expertise for sophisticated nonverbal (inter)action (5,6). These performing arts-inspired developments align with a growing recognition of performativity, materiality, situatedness, and relationality as fundamental components of HRI and of the successful integration of robots into social contexts.

This special session invites contributions that show how various skills and expertise from the performing arts (such as acting, directing, dancing, choreographing, scenography, puppeteering, playwriting, and improvising) are deployed for the development of social robots and HRI, and what they can contribute to the advancement of innovative, creative, and responsible approaches to social robotics.

Topics include (but are not limited to):

- Examples of the use of skills and expertise from the performing arts (such as acting, directing, dancing, choreographing, scenography, puppeteering, playwriting, and improvising) for various aspects of robotics and HRI

- The practice of performing arts-robotics collaborations: how to organize them, how to make them successful, how to deal with power dynamics, challenges, risks, and gains
- The emergence of new specializations such as robo-puppeteers, techno-dramaturgs, computational dramaturgy, improbotics, and robostories.
- The transferability of skills, and questions related to tools and training for new types of collaborations
- New conceptual and methodological frameworks for developing and understanding performing arts-robotics collaborations, such as co-design, rehearsal-based iterative development, and embodied prototyping in performing-arts-robotics collaborations

Organizers:

Maaike Bleeker, Utrecht University, The Netherlands (m.a.bleeker@uu.nl)
Ester Fuoco, IULM University, Italy (ester.fuoco@iulm.it)
Marco C. Rozendaal, Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands (m.c.rozendaal@tudelft.nl)

Submissions:

Submission deadline: 15 February 2026

For the conference submission, authors can submit their papers to the appropriate Special Session via the ICSR conference submission system, using the designated SS code. Each paper will undergo a peer-review process managed by the special session organisers, who will invite at least two independent reviewers for each submission.

Instructions for Submission: https://icsr2026.uk/submission/ (Special Sessions)