

Project title: Touched

Concept

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Introduction

In 2012 I wrote a chapter entitled (Dis)Embodiment for Maria Chatzichristodoulou and Rachel Zerihan's book 'Intimacy Across Visceral and Digital Performance'. The chapter discussed a number of my telepresent artworks in relation to audience participation and the process of disembodiment and re-embodiment as reported in the experiences and accounts of the participants.

One of the main examples in this discussion was Telematic Dreaming, which I developed 1992, with its connotations of intimacy and dream states, it extended telepresence beyond the screen to spatialize the site of interaction and transform it into a live theatrical event in which visitors are key performers, exploring presence, absence and the psychology of human interaction within technologically mediated communications. In Telematic Dreaming the combined visuals of remote participants on a projected bed surface allowed them to interact by 'touching with their eyes'. This shift of senses occurs through the exchange of sight with the sense of touch, reaching the equivalent cognitive experience of closeness through the visual stimulation of the body at a distance – as if extending their finger nerve endings through a telepresent body. In the context of this chapter I made a reference to Myron Krueger's pioneering 'Metaplay' experiments in the late 1970s, that identified a consistent shared telepresence experience as the precursor for much of my work and that of his own, which later became better known as VIDEOPLACE in 1983:

Krueger and his colleague used a telephone to discuss a waveform: After a few minutes of frustrating discussion, we realized that we had a far more powerful means of communication available. Using a two-way video link we turned the cameras on ourselves seated at our respective computers. As we did this, we used our hands to point to various features on the composite display. It was exactly as if we were sitting together at a table with a piece of paper between us. After a while, I realized that I was seeing more than an illusion. As I moved my hand to point to the data my friend had just sent, the image of my hand briefly overlapped the image of his. He moved his hand... I was struck with the thought that he was uncomfortable about the image of my hand touching the image of his... The inescapable conclusion was that the same etiquette of personal space and avoidance of touching that exists in the real world was operating at that moment in this purely visual experience.

Krueger, M. Artificial Reality, 1983:125–27

Krueger's account of this 'Metaplay' experiment has constantly reminded me of the significant role our hands have to play in both our interaction with networked media, through keyboards and touch screen surfaces, but also our physical intimacy with that of others through touch. Although our hands are not normally seen to have any further role or function other than pressing keys, this installation proposes to turn our webcam and Skype attention away from the talking head and focus on our hands, located on a shared telepresent keyboard, as a backdrop to a new space of remote intimacy. A space that was once the domain of textual exchanges now

becomes the space of theater and performance. What effect this has on the intimacy of our messaging and interactions is to be redefined and understood, perhaps as abstract poetry, a textual impression of a handheld encounter or a new sensation of language.

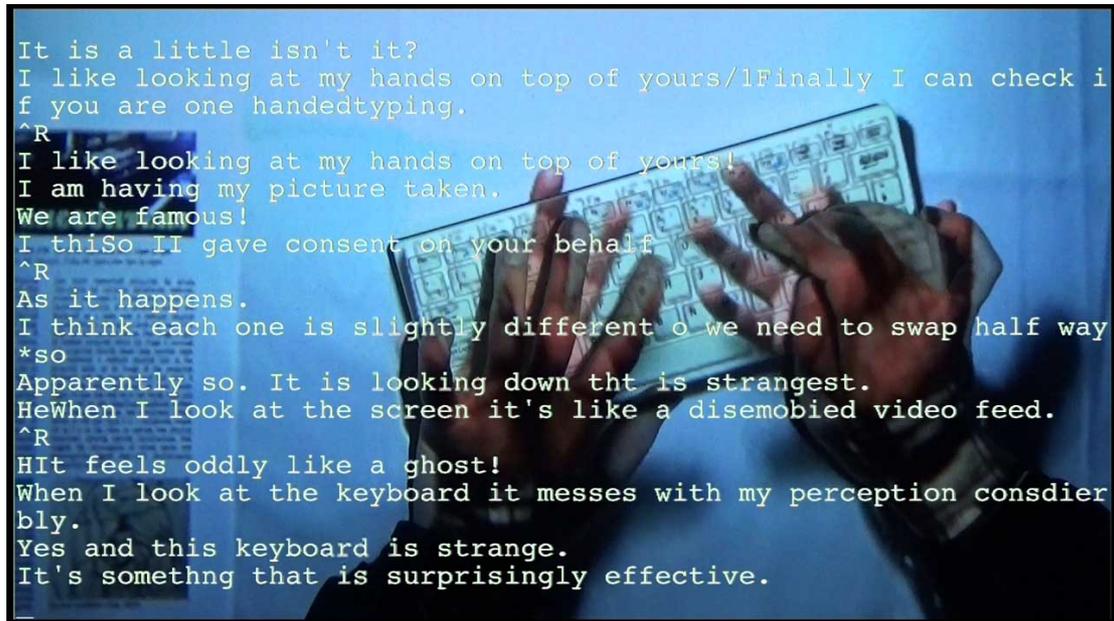


Fig. 1, *Touched*, line-out video still, 2017

Outline Description

Whilst our typing hands do not normally have any further role or function other than pressing keys, this installation proposes to turn our webcam chat attention away from our talking head and focus on our hands, located on a shared telepresent keyboard, as a backdrop to a new space of remote intimacy. A space that was once the domain of textual exchanges now becomes the space of performance, abstract poetry, and handheld encounters as a new sensation of being touched by text. 'Touched' aims to provoke an altogether new social networked encounter by simply rearranging our computer peripherals; webcam, projector and screen in an alternative manner. The installation consists of a computer screen and keyboard on a table with a webcam situated directly above it, picking up a birds eye view of the table top and keyboard below. This image is sent to another computer where the image is received and projected directly down onto another table and keyboard. A webcam situated next to the projector picks up an image of the projected keyboard and the actual keyboard and sends it back to the other participant. As each person begins to type and chat his or her hands meet and visually mix on this telepresent keyboard surface where dialogues, games, and encounters unfold. Whilst on the one hand it is a completely simple set up it is on the other an entirely new physical encounter; echoing palmist conversations that suggest the convergence of virtual spirits and contemporary digital chat-room environments composited on screen.

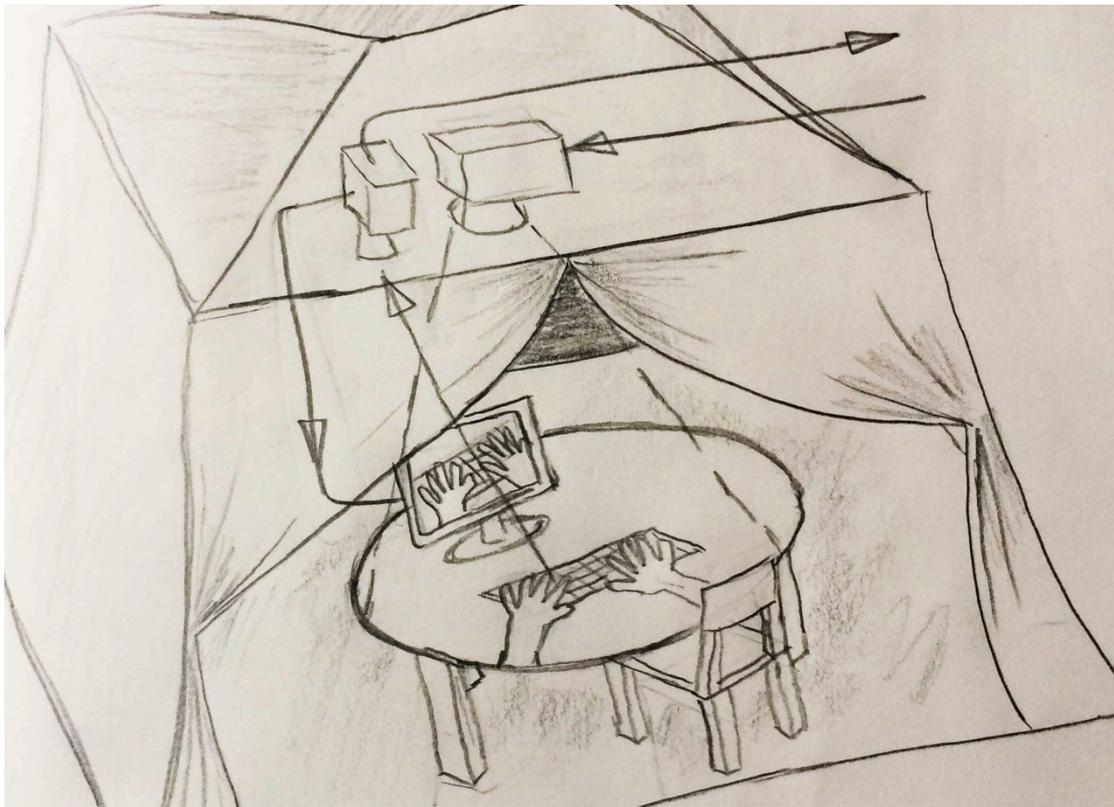


Fig. 2, Touched, installation concept sketch, 2017

Materials and Equipment

- 1 x Video projector
- 2 x Chroma-key video mixer
- 2 x Mac Mini
- 2 x 24" computer screen
- 2 x Bluetooth keyboard
- 2 x Video camera
- 2 x MagicArm and mounting devices
- 2 x Table and chair

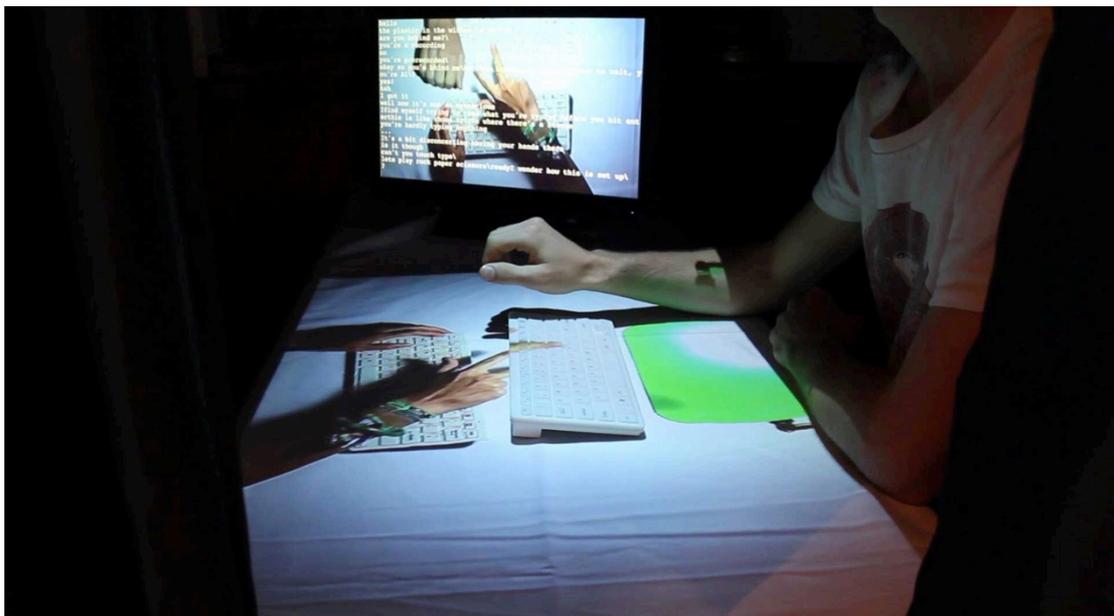


Fig. 3, Touched, projection space 2017



Fig. 4, Touched, camera space, 2017



Fig. 5, Touched, projection space, 2017