Proposal for V&A Digital Futures Evening / Conference Exhibition at EVA London 2018

Touched

A work in progress, first show in Brighton for the British Science Festival, 5th September 2017
http://www.paulsermon.org/touched/

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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 heads 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. The hands meet, touch and type together on this keyboard surface, whilst also appearing as a live computer desktop image upon which the simple Unix command line chat interface is overlaid. 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 an entirely new physical encounter on the other; echoing palmist conversations that suggest the convergence of virtual spirits and contemporary digital chat-room environments composited on screen.

Digital Futures Evening and Conference Exhibition development:

This installation could be presented in range of ways and adapted to various venues, either as a locally connected video installation between two tables in the same location or between two EVA festival venues via Skype. This would allow the festival visitors and delegates the opportunity to experience both keyboard installation sites, being slightly different in their setup, and to discuss, compare and plan their interactions and encounters. Alternatively the installation could be linked to a geographically remote counterpart via a Skype connection, nationally or internationally. Depending on the duration of the installation it would be possible to simply adapt the connection to present all options throughout the festival programme. In all cases, each installation would occupy a standard table/desk no bigger than 2m^2 preferably in a blacked-out environment for optimal projection.