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Towards a Transmedial Practice of Digital Intimacy

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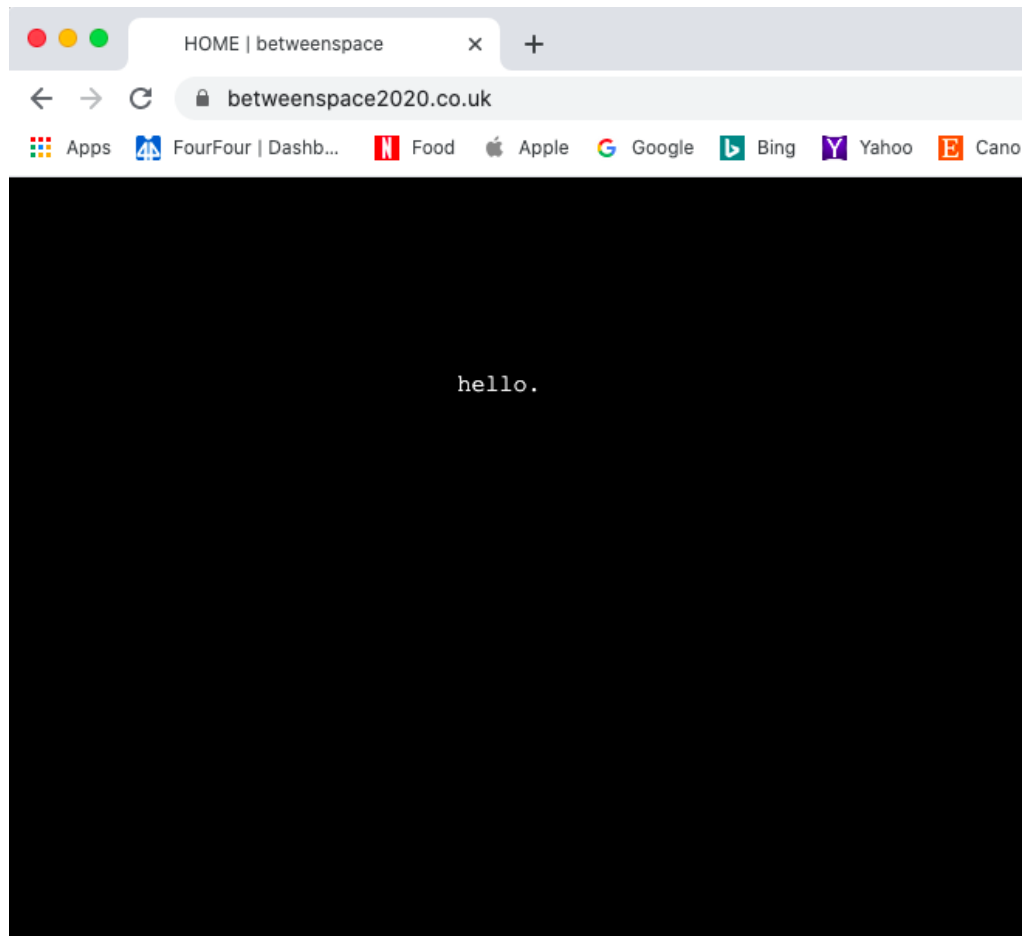


Fig. 1. "*betweenspace* hello," design and photo by Camille Intson

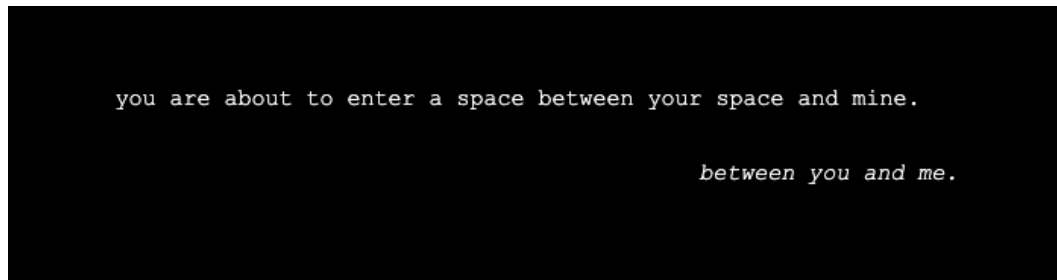


Fig. 2. “*betweenspace* Intro,” design and photo by Camille Intson

1. Introduction

When the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic took hold in March of 2020, I found myself alone and touch deprived for what would become months on end. Quarantined in a garden flat in Kilburn, London, I was in the process of completing my postgraduate degree with the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama’s Performance Practice as Research cohort. I was already engaged with a live intermedial performance praxis, which involved numerous failed attempts to give inanimate objects “agency” as “actors” in a live performance setting. I took my failures in stride and assumed this fixation on object-ontology was short-lived. That was until the first lockdown in the United Kingdom, when I found myself hyper-attuned to the physical spaces, materials, and objects in my vicinity. It was as if my world had contracted to the size of my North London flat, and yet I was experiencing an overwhelming sense of expansion by my consistent use of digital technologies — namely, my phone and laptop — as means of connection: to the world, to my friends and family back home in Canada, to death statistics and Netflix stars, to Boris Johnson in the ICU, to my then-partner in South London, and beyond. My body became my phone, which became the internet, which poured into other phones and other bodies across distributed time and space. When physical contact became unfeasible, I began thinking of intimate touch in the context of my interactions

with digital technologies. It was then that I began circling the question of what a “digital intimacy” could look and feel like, and how it might be capitalized on in performance praxis.

As a performance practitioner-researcher working collaboratively with digital technologies, I find the notion of a digital intimacy, or of a digitally intimate encounter, contradictory yet stimulative. Whereas prevailing ideas of intimacy privilege physical touch, gesture, and copresence, a digital intimacy hinges on the axes of simultaneous presence and absence, virtuality and corporeality, embodiment and disembodiment. These contradictions may at first seem like barriers to the effect of intimacy; however, I argue that, in the deconstruction of their opposition, there exists a fluid and generative space of enquiry through which intimacy is not only possible, but inevitable.



Fig. 3. “*betweenspace* Poster,” design and photo by Camille Intson

My practice-as-research explores the ways in which intimate experience can be generated in performative encounters across digital space, examining the prospect of digital intimacy through

a flat ontological new materialist framework in which interactions between digital and physical media open up spaces of dynamic interactivity. Flat ontological discourse asserts that “there are no essential distinctions between different kinds of things” (Law 6), rejecting the privileging of one sort of entity over all others. Following Rebecca Schneider, I understand new materialism as “[taking] seriously the idea that all matter is agential and that agency is distributed across and among materials in relation” (Schneider 7). I will suggest that digitally intimate experiences are a result of complex material interactions between assemblages of bodies, both human and object, and that the emergent “digital” intimacy is no longer exclusively grounded in human-to-human interaction, but also in human-to-object. My focus on object-interactions as sites of intimacy reveals that, when we reject rigid boundaries between technology and the self, the human and the non-human, and the digital and the physical, we can open ourselves up to new forms of intimate interactions between humans, objects, and computers.

Drawing on psychological concepts of intimacy and materialist philosophies, I began to develop a practice of creating digital spaces for intimate “one-to-one” encounters. Using web design/HTML and embedded widgets, I programmed assemblages of text, hyperlinks, and competing intermedia for participant interaction. This culminated in the creation of a digital work, entitled [*betweenspace*](#), which exists across media, namely text, image, video, and hyperlinks, in the form of an interactive website. By and through a process of disclosing my own personal experience of living in quarantine during the pandemic, I led participants through an interactive map of my flat, prompting them to interact with images and text boxes that told my stories and encouraged them to reflect and write in their own. The aim of *betweenspace* was to facilitate a space of togetherness and intimacy from my body, through the computer, to another computer, to

another body, although the connections are not this linear. I then asked participants to reflect on their experiences by responding to a series of open-ended survey questions.

This paper analyzes retrospectively the development of my practice and its emergent form with the launch of *betweenspace* at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama's annual Brink Festival. It will take conclusions from the practice-as-research to understand how a "digital" intimacy can be generated through assemblages of physical and digital, human and nonhuman matter.

2. Theorizing Intimacy

To arrive at one single definition of intimacy is implausible. The concept of intimacy is always already resisting fixity due to its fluid and subjective experiential nature, and therefore tension arises within the practice-as-research when we attempt to place limits on its definition. This is why, following psychologist Karen Prager, I believe that an understanding of intimacy as a multi-tiered superordinate "concept," under which basic concepts are assumed, is a more appropriate model for qualifying intimacy in the context of my practice-as-research (Prager 17).

In Prager's multi-tiered model, the superordinate level "intimacy" can be broken down into two basic camps: intimate interactions and intimate relationships. Intimate interactions are simply defined as "dyadic communicative exchanges [...] that [exist] within a clearly designated space-and-time framework, [wherein] [...] once that [...] behaviour has ceased, the interaction is over" (3). Contrastingly, intimate relationships are those "in which people have a history and anticipate a future of intimate contact over time" (3). My practice-as-research is primarily concerned with the former. I am not preoccupied with establishing a long-term relationship between myself and

the participants of *betweenspace*; I am more concerned with the interactions between us within the set frame of the work.

Prager's "intimate interactions" can be further broken down into subordinate categories of intimate behaviours and intimate experiences. Intimate behaviours refer to "the actual observable behaviours people engage in when interacting intimately, whether these are verbal or nonverbal (eg. self-disclosure, attentive listening)" (19). What these behaviours *are* will naturally vary across diverse perspectives and is complicated when taking place online and across digital spaces. Intimate experiences are conversely defined as "the feelings and perceptions people have during and because of their intimate interactions (e.g. warmth, pleasure, affection)" (19). To facilitate an intimate interaction, one must trigger intimate experiences by way of intimate behaviours. This is precisely what I was testing for through *betweenspace*.

It must be noted that Prager is not speaking of intimacy in a performative or theatrical setting, although performance scholars including Bruce Barton (2008), Rachel Gomme (2015), Maria Chatzichristodoulou and Rachel Zerihan (2012), and Sarah Bay-Cheng, Chiel Kattenbelt, Andy Lavender, and Robin Nelson (2010) have utilized Prager's model when speaking in terms of performance. A performative intimacy is naturally contradictory as the roles of "the performer" and "the participant" are clearly established in the context of the work, and if the aim of the one-to-one performance is to establish some form of intimacy, that preordained fact may easily work against that intimacy being established. Participants may not feel willing or able to open up, if that is what is "expected" of them in the context of performance, which is inextricable from corporate or capital gains that also work against the development of intimacy. This is why Bruce Barton suggests that:

A theoretically performative intimacy is one in which the basic criteria identified across multiple definitions of intimacy—a willingness to self-disclose; full, positive, and mutual

attention; openness to physical contact and connection; shared understanding—is valued and pursued outside the context of extended aesthetic, corporate, or emotional contracts. It is an intimacy predicated on the devaluation—even rejection—of fictional, thematic, and organizational predictability and familiarity. It is an intimacy not of mutual familiarity, but rather one in which intimate disclosures may occur in interactions between strangers precisely because of the unlikelihood of a further relationship and the attendant opportunities for betrayal. (Barton 82)

To put it simply, in order to have an intimate encounter in the context of performance, that intimate encounter must be somehow genuine and pursued for its own end, and not solely for the end of the performance. This is, naturally, a difficult balance to strike. *betweenspace* demanded that I open myself up, in the most honest way possible, to others, despite not knowing what I would receive in return. The work also positions my spectator-participants as voyeurs, as invisible watchers and consumers of my intimate self-disclosures.

My first objective in conducting this research was negotiating what “intimate behaviours,” in the context of Prager’s work, look like online. A digitally intimate interaction is an interaction in which two bodies are not present in the same space. This makes certain interactions which would normally be considered foundations of intimacy, for example intimate touch, gesture, and body language, impossible. In the context of theatre and performance art, although these mediums rely on a co-presence between spectator and audience member, the division of these two roles limits what “intimate behaviours” can occur. This is something I had to take into consideration when establishing the roles of the spectator-participants in relationship to myself as the facilitator and leading artist. At the beginning of this stage of research, I identified the behaviours most commonly attributed to intimacy across diverse psychological and performance-based perspectives. Prager cites “self-revealing behavior, positive involvement with the other, and shared understandings” (45) as base intimate behaviours, whereas Maria Chatzichristodoulou and Rachel Zerihan write that intimate behaviours “[enable] two sentient beings, who feel comfortable enough with each

other on an emotional and/or physical level, to reveal something about themselves and connect in some form of meaningful exchange” (1). Lisa M. Register and Tracy B. Henley also write of intimacy as “the removal of boundaries between people,” which struck me as difficult in the context of my research (472). The internet and the computer are undeniable boundaries between people, yet at the same time these media have connective — and, I argue, intimate — capabilities. I eventually came up with a list that attempted to translate these intimate behaviours into actions that could take place across a digital interface. This list read as follows:

INTIMATE BEHAVIOURS IN DIGITALLY INTIMATE ENCOUNTERS:

- Exploring another’s online space and the objects or items within it.
- Reading another person’s intimate self-disclosures and personal narratives.
- Exchanging personal details through the web.
- Consent-based exchanges: giving viewers “the choice” whether or not to engage with certain items.
- Curating spaces of self-reflection, asking intimate questions and prompting answers. Typing into content boxes and opening up reciprocal dialogues between persons.
- Trespassing and infiltrating boundaries “together”: providing experiences to transgress spatial or information-based boundaries.

During this time, I became interested in the genre of electronic literature, and specifically in the works of J.R. Carpenter (<http://luckysoap.com>). Carpenter’s digital literature projects fuse text, image, and interactive media together to create a multi-sensory poetic experience for her readers. I was struck by the non-linear and rhizomatic nature of her work, and took pleasure in my being able to curate the online experience for myself, using my mouse and keypad to navigate her digital spaces. Something profound registered when I engaged with this work; I became hyper-

attuned to how I was interacting *materially* with digital and physical matter. I experienced pleasure in being able to press keys on my personal device and change the work's poetic structure, controlling the appearance of maps and descriptions of landscapes in Carpenter's *this is a picture of wind*, just as I was somehow controlling the coastal weather of the world inside the work. I was therefore inspired to use HTML and web design applications to create my own web-based interactive experience, setting up a mock "apartment" that could be explored by participants on their personal devices. Participants could click around the site, engage with hyperlinks, and find hidden stories and objects, all the while being "guided" by myself as an invisible host-figure. The host-figure of *betweenspace* is present in the work as a first person singular narrator, feigning the illusion of presence at every step.

The first instalment of *betweenspace* ended with a data collection survey, which asked a series of phenomenological open-ended questions to gauge how successful my adapted "intimate behaviours" were in producing "intimate experiences." Some of these questions were as follows:

Describe how you felt about the experience as a whole. Was it positive? Negative?
Somewhere in between? Please describe your feelings in a few sentences or bullet points.

Describe your relationship to your host/the owner of this space. Do you feel like you got to know them? Did you feel connected to the host throughout the process? Why or why not?
Please describe your experience in a few sentences or bullet points.

What parts of the work stuck out to you or provoked a particularly strong reaction for you?
Try, as best you can, to identify your feelings in those moments.

What is intimacy to you? How would you personally define it?

Do you feel this project provided an experience of intimacy? Why or why not?

In the following sections, I will delve deeper into participant responses and introduce two key features of the work.

3. Intimacy and Textuality

Text is an integral part of the intimacy of *betweenspace*. It describes and contextualizes objects, is employed as a tool of communication between myself and the participants, and is oftentimes layered over images and video clips to inform participants's experiences of the spaces they are "visiting." Textual animations flow over and between certain objects and spaces, thus creating a more dynamic visual experience. Throughout the work, participants are led through a series of personal anecdotes and disclosures, all through different styles of writing: poetry, prose, combinations of autobiographical writing and critical theory, and informal captions.

It is herein important to consider the materiality of the digital text. N. Katherine Hayles conceptualizes digital text as an "event," as opposed to an "object," which moves from "a binary opposition between embodiment and information through an engagement with the materiality of literary texts to a broadening and deepening of these ideas into computation and textuality" (3). Jerome Fletcher similarly writes of the performativity of the digital text, emphasizing the physical corporeality of engagement with electronic literature (19). Past scholarship on digital textuality and interactive narrative navigation, for instance that of Per Persson (1998) and Marie-Laure Ryan (2005), has emphasized a way of thinking around digital materiality that considers corporeality and interactivity between the body and the "event" of the text.

betweenspace uses hyperlinks and hover boxes to allow participants to click or "hover" above certain objects in the images embedded onto each webpage, revealing anecdotes about my time spent in quarantine. Among these are stories of, for instance, being able to tell time in

lockdown by observing beams of light through my kitchen window, my experiences with disordered eating and being forced to cook in quarantine, and one particularly cheeky autotheoretical note on faeces and vibrant matter. Based on the survey responses, the sections containing my intimate self-disclosures felt the most intimate:

Intimacy felt most apparent when, as a user, I felt like I was being brought into a conversation of understanding the host's experience. That there was space to accommodate a you and a me and the complex relations that develop in between.

The deep sharing made me want to know more about you and encouraged me to reciprocate my own sharing to give you more of myself.

Participants also stated that my self-disclosures made them reflect on their own domestic space, as well as on their own experiences in lockdown. They also encouraged the same participants to want to reciprocate by writing back to me. Participants felt that intimacy was achieved when they felt like they were brought into a conversation of understanding my experience.

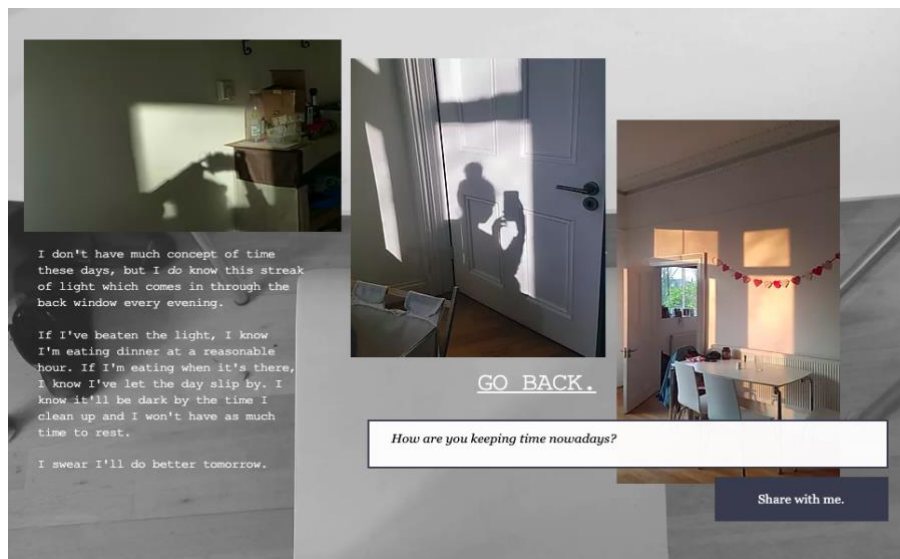


Fig. 4. "betweenspace kitchen table," design and photo by Camille Intson

Text boxes also allowed for intimate exchanges between myself and the participants. To facilitate a more “dyadic communicative [exchange]” (Prager 3), I created form submission widgets where participants could write back to me, answering question prompts based on my various pieces of writing. Besides these question prompts, it is worth noting, there is also an e-mail submission form where participants can freely write back to me, knowing that I will be able to respond to these specific messages. Quite a few participants were enthusiastic in their responses, feeling an intimacy in the reciprocity.

I wrote in all of the boxes - I felt power in being able to anonymously submit responses, and to get responses from Camille in return.

One of the text-box prompts also really resonated with what I was thinking about, so I felt compelled to share. It was actually quite validating.

These text boxes were intended to build trustful relationships of mutual self-disclosure between myself and anonymous participants. Karen Prager defines “trust” in relation to “intimacy” as “an attitude or expectation that one partner has toward another that allows that partner to take the risks involved in an intimate interaction” (Prager 25). She writes that, “[s]ince intimacy involves revealing the vulnerable parts of the self, partners must trust one another to continue to interact intimately, almost by definition” (25). Through Prager’s philosophies of intimacy, I had come to understand intimacy as something that had to be reciprocated. That participants had to trust me, as a virtual host, to continue to make them feel welcome and comfortable in my space; consequently, I had to trust my participants with my personal narratives. To foster this mutual relationship of trust, I revealed intimate parts of myself to encourage participants to do the same. This exchange of text and experience, I believed, was a core interaction of the work.

What I was unaware of, in this matter, was that I had put myself in a vulnerable position by placing unconditional trust in the anonymous audience of internet participants that could stumble upon the site, and read my personal narratives, at any time. This space is conducive to risk on my end, not only of embarrassment but abandonment as some participants preferred not to comment. This was for a wide variety of reasons. Some participants couldn't articulate why they did not want to write back to me:

I prefer silently observing and to give my thoughts on a different forum afterwards.

I'm not sure why I didn't. Maybe I would if I visited again.

Several participants surprised me by writing that the only reason they chose to write back to me was out of social obligation, and not necessarily the kind of "feeling seen" as described in the earlier responses. They responded, not because it enhanced the experience of intimacy for them, but because they felt like they had to. A variety of these responses can be seen as follows:

I did, even though it felt uncomfortable at times. I felt the honesty the host shared need to be honoured through reciprocation.

I think there is an underlying prompt of social politeness in answering questions whether verbally or in writing.

Interestingly enough, each of the participants who responded to the prompts out of obligation still wrote, at the end of the survey, that the experience was one of intimacy for them. Hence, clearly, reciprocity was not a mandatory condition for all, and, for some, the feeling/experience of intimacy was generated simply by looking through the virtual platform and experiencing my call for intimacy for themselves.

Herein was the biggest problem: while I'd achieved this effect of facilitating intimacy for participants through a digital platform, I'd compromised myself in the process because I had set up a unique relationship with participants, which put me at a disadvantage as I was sharing, quite openly, without reciprocity. The work felt intimate to them, but did not have the same affect for me; I had simultaneously succeeded and failed in my endeavour. I had curated an intimate experience for some participants while leaving myself to feel abandoned. While there was certainly a power imbalance present in the work, one which I had conceived of and facilitated, somehow I expected participants to want to engage with me more.

I therefore believe that *betweenspace* propagates an intimacy with the assemblage of materials, and not with me as a host. I cannot be the subject of the intimacy when subjectivity is in continuous flow between media and materials, and perhaps this is the nature of a digital (or mediated) intimacy. While it encourages the sharing of intimate information, it does not necessarily produce reciprocity. At the end of the festival, I was forced to reflect on my feelings of abandonment and the ways in which I had or hadn't experienced intimacy as a part of the assemblage. I myself felt most intimate with the work when I received messages from participants through the anonymous text boxes. Throughout the duration of the Brink Festival, I had these text box responses linked up to notifications on my Gmail account. Whenever someone wrote in one of the boxes, my phone would ring and I would know that someone was, at that moment, "in my bathroom" or "in my garden." When this occurred, sometimes I would actually go out to those spaces and look around. I was viscerally affected by these notifications and they did bring me a sense of intimacy in comfort, although of course I knew, logically, that I was alone in my flat. I realize that this exemplar in itself is not about me feeling "intimate" with another person, per se,

but with the affect produced by the intersections of media, technologies, and bodies as a whole — that is, with the assemblage created by the installation en large.

I would further suggest that the intimacy produced by the assemblage of these digitally intimate encounters is as much “with the self” as it is of the materials and matter that constitutes the work. It is an intimacy sought through performance that Rachel Gomme describes as “with self,” in that the work provides a space of contemplation where the participant can reflect on their own experiences, on what the work brought up for them personally (Gomme 292). This, I believe, is another facet of the simultaneous solitude and connectivity of the digital space. As Lynn Jamieson describes, of a digital intimacy:

It is an intimacy of the self rather than the body, although it might be enhanced by bodily intimacy. It is theoretically possible for the practice of self-disclosure to occur online, mediated by digital technology, either generating a fleeting sense of intimacy between hitherto strangers or developing the intimacy of an already established relationship that began with co-presence. (Jamieson 18)

These feelings of self-reflection were brought up time and time again by participants who used the work as a tool to reflect on themselves, as opposed to communicate directly with me. Many survey responses I was sent from participants included stories and anecdotes that they did not share in the text boxes. My space reminded them of other spaces and other people; my space triggered personal reminders and memories from their own lives.

Some participants may have felt a barrier to me as a human, due to the limits of the medium, however they were still left with the intimacy of the assemblage. My work had touched my participants, yet they had left me behind, and I had in a sense left myself behind in the conception of the work. I did not feel cared for, and yet still I felt comfort in the fact that people were viewing my most intimate spaces and, in a sense, validating my experience of loneliness and longing for others. That made me feel less alone, even if I ultimately was.

I know now this paradox is at the heart of the thing we call digital intimacy. This is a quasi-object oriented intimacy where something of the human is lost, and yet intimacy itself is not lost; these paradoxes I will go on to discuss further in the following section and the Conclusion, where I will offer my final thoughts on this iteration of practice and research.

4. The Participant as Performer-Activator

At the start of *betweenspace*, participants are invited to have a “look,” or a “click,” around the series of webpages that are constructed to resemble a tour of my flat. Here, the participant’s personal device not only connects them to the experience, but allows them to have control over where they move in the flat and what they see, what areas they wish to visit, and which actions they wish to undertake while there. Each participant will naturally click on different things and visit different areas, and therefore the participant becomes an integral part of the assemblage of media surrounding them.



Fig. 5. “*betweenspace* landing,” design and photo by Camille Intson

I understand the participant's role as something of a "performer-activator," which is a term coined by live performance artist Jo Scott to represent a hybrid role which posits the onstage performer as an activator of the live media elements *onstage* (Scott 3). In each of her works, Scott both "performs" and engages each of the technologies present onstage, which can include projectors, live video feeds, and soundscapes. She is both actor and technician; she is visible to her audience, even when performing functions that are usually seen from spectators's vantage points. In *betweenspace*, the job of the participant is to click on and activate the media elements of the work, thus curating their own experience in navigating through the piece. The participant's agency becomes a key component of the work; they are participating in the work, but also "performing" as "themselves" in how they navigate through the world of *betweenspace*, and especially in what they write back to me in the provided text bodes.

betweenspace participants have described a sense of pleasure in clicking to navigate between spaces and discovering the content within. The art of navigating freely around "my space," the agency the participant had in where they went, and the consent-based approach to self-disclosure helped foster a sense of intimacy between us.

Everything felt very "eye of the host" when I looked somewhere or clicked to move through the space, as though I was seeing the space as the host does. The sharing of personal thoughts, reflections, images, and notes all made me also want to share in those places where I was able to and connect in that way as well.

I was disappointed when I'd clicked through everything I could find because the experience of hunting for a link and then uncovering the content was very engaging and made me be an active participant.

Certain rooms inevitably allow us access to personal segments of her routines and her body, but in asking the user/audience whether we want to cooperate and explore further, allows for a more welcoming relationship, as there is no force or pressure.

Many participants described the feeling that nothing was “off limits” in my space; all felt “invited” to participate, and no participants (out of the twenty-five surveyed) wrote that they ever felt pressured or in any way uncomfortable with the interface. Despite many participants writing that they felt some form of connection with me as a host figure through my personal stories, others interrogated the way that they were engaging with the interface of the computer.

These comments were particularly provocative to me:

I am aware that I was moving between specific conceptions of space, attached to individual experience, i.e. mine/yours. However, I was also navigating in familiarity in the context of a web interface.

[...] the minimalist layout, user-friendly structure, and lack of sound made the virtual space quite welcoming for me.

The feeling of being “welcomed” was not *only* indebted to my consent-based approach and self-disclosures, but also to the familiarity that participants had with the web as an interface. Intimacy was felt in the interactions with mouse, keyboard, webpage, and embedded media, which corresponded with participants’s digital interactions with physical objects in my domestic space. These interactions between physical and digital objects contributed to the overall positive experience of the participants.

As Virginia Nightingale and Karen Ross write, “bodies are presupposed by the media [...] [and] media technologies engage audiences because their design interfaces with, and amplifies, sensory dimensions of the human body” (Nightingale and Ross 19). *betweenspace* is programmed to do exactly this; the interface itself is designed so that the screens on each webpage present a perspective of the flat that would normally be seen by an in-person visitor. These photographs presuppose a body because they provide participants with a first person point of view of the apartment, just as they would see if they were physically visiting. The computer screen becomes

the eyes of the participant as they navigate my virtual space. The act of hovering over a box, or clicking the box to find more information, mimics the act of voyeurism or ‘snooping’ about a new space. The human/computer actions taken through *betweenspace* mimic actions that we might desire to take in the real world. *betweenspace* is designed for the human body, to provoke the way we engage with the world both physically and emotionally.



Fig. 6. “*betweenspace* chair,” design and photo by Camille Intson

Whereas prevailing ideas of intimacy are human-to-human, I believe that *betweenspace* works through a different kind of intimacy, which is not only human-to-human, as exemplified through the exchange of stories and overall “guided” experience, but also human-to-object. In *betweenspace*, agency flows precariously between human and non-human bodies. Intimacy is experienced not only through relations with other humans, but with other objects and materials. “Getting to know” me as a host figure becomes “getting to know” the work, the space, the objects, and the stories.

I therefore am brought back to the conclusion reached at the end of the preceding section, which is that participants weren't necessarily being intimate "with" *me*, but with every object and material I had created or involved as a part of the assemblage of the work. While this seems like a logical facet of the project, I did not realize how this would make participants feel about the experience as a whole. This was reflected in a few select responses from the surveys:

So I had these questions: What was I becoming intimate with? The place/the experiences within the place/ a host/ an artist who made the work?

And I want to clarify that throughout my experience, I intensified a feeling of intimacy with the work and not necessarily with a "host" figure.

While I think this project provides an experience of intimacy, and there is a voice which narrates your journey with a second, other person, because I could not see or hear (aloud) an individual (aside from a few photos/videos, most of which were segmented by body part and did not feel like full people). The images of rooms, while clearly lived in, lacked the people which inhabited them. They were photos of empty rooms. I felt like I was exploring the home on my own - not as much so with a guide.

What struck me as interesting was that, even though these participants felt more intimate with the material assemblage of the work than with myself as a host figure, this did not diminish the experience of intimacy produced by the overall work. Each of these participants described *betweenspace* as an intimate experience, but they were unsure of what they were intimate with; with me? With the computer? With the work, or with the place-within-the-work? My answer is, quite simply, with everything together. I believe that, in *betweenspace*, intimacy is generated in the continuous flow and connections between materials in the assemblage. All materials in the assemblage work together to allow for dynamic participant interactions between text, image, object, space (web and physical), human bodies and stories, video, sound, and the computer and its physical attributes that control actions taken through the digital interface.

Conclusion

It has become clear to me that *betweenspace* brings human bodies (both real and represented), computers, objects (both real and represented), spaces (both real and represented), and text together in a non-linear, rhizomatic assemblage where no material is prioritized in the formation of the work. As I have noted throughout this article, digital intimacy is produced as a result of the intersecting interactions and dynamic interactivity between matter. Participants experienced a digital intimacy by and through the assemblage that invites and involves them, and through interactions between complex configurations of digital and physical media.

What can I now say of the nature of digital intimacy, one which balances so precariously between the human and the non-human, between its successes and its failures?

I have already concluded that a digital intimacy comes to us simultaneously present and absent, corporeal and virtual, embodied and disembodied. I argue that such an intimacy requires a deconstruction of self and subject, a dispersal of self across technologies and materials, which is at once necessary for the facilitation of digital intimacy and precisely the reason it fails. I have stated that to be *digitally* intimate is not to be intimate with another human being, but with objects and materials that constitute assemblages of matter. *betweenspace* can also be said to reveal all the ways that it *resists* intimacy. These limits to what we can or can't experience online become obvious through our engagement with the work. There is something of failure in all that I have done, however I believe this failure is itself generative.

As Sara Jane Bailes writes, of the ethics of failure in context of theatre and performance: "failure produces" (Bailes 3). For Bailes, failure can be understood as "a constituent feature of the existential condition that *makes expression possible even as it forecloses it*" (1). I feel that this idea resonates with the paradox of digital intimacy, because I believe that digital conditions create, and

also destroy, the conditions for intimate interactions. Intimacy remains a perpetual possibility through digital technologies, even if those technologies themselves are inherently isolating.

I believe that the next project which tackles digital intimacy in performance must continue to work along this paradox, finding new ways of heightening interactions between humans and computers to deepen the technological scope of these performances. I am interested in the possibility of virtual and augmented reality projects to tackle questions of digital intimacy, and the ways in which all of these ideas can be pushed forward as technology continues to develop and as we collectively witness a further integration of immersive digital technologies into performance work.

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