

Mobile Feelings

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Background

Mobile phones have intruded our daily lives like hardly any other technology since the television and the desktop computer. While mobile phone users are generally glad to embrace the enormous advantages of being reachable any-time and any-where, a reduced sense of privacy combined with the involuntary witnessing of anonymous people's private businesses has created a strange and sometimes awkward form of self-awareness and attention towards others. Mobile phones have transformed ordinary people into actors who narrate their most private details on the theatrical stages of train stations, restaurants, public spaces, streets, meeting areas, and any other social gathering places.

Concept

"Mobile Feelings" is an artistic project that explores the ambivalence of sharing personal information with an anonymous audience. Instead of communication via voice or images to people we know, "Mobile Feelings" lets people communicate with strangers through virtual touch and body sensations including smell and sweat using specially designed mobile phones.

As opposed to application-based systems in the area of "affective computing" [1], "wearable computing" [2], "robotic user interfaces" [3] and tactile interfaces for handheld devices [4], "Mobile Feelings" aims to create unusual and unsettling sensations of sharing private body sensations with complete strangers over a mobile phone network.

Description

Users at the Ars Electronica are provided with specially equipped "Mobile Feelings" phone devices that resemble organic or bodily shapes. These devices host miniature bio-sensors and actuators that capture the users' heartbeat, blood volume pressure and pulse, skin conductivity, sweat and smell. All data can be sent to other anonymous users who can perceive and feel these most private sensations through actuators, vibrators, ventilators, micro-electromechanical and micro-bio-electrochemical systems which are also embedded in each "Mobile Feelings" device.

"Mobile Feelings" devices communicate with each other through a standard mobile phone network and users can move around freely to use their devices anywhere and anytime just like normal mobile phones.

Besides capturing and transmitting the various body data, the "Mobile Feelings" devices also display images of the other connected users. When a user touches her device and selects one of the displayed persons, she can receive this person's body sensations, through for example a tickle, a vibration, a small wind or humidity, a pulse, a push or a slight stroke, creating a strange and perhaps erotic ambiguity.



Mobile Art for Daily Life

"Mobile Feelings" works anywhere and anytime and the physical location of people becomes completely irrelevant.

"Mobile Feelings" proposes an art form is this not any more location- or context based but instead becomes integrated into people's daily lives.

"Mobile Feelings" is an artistic project that investigates how technology has transformed our social and individual lives [5] and how we have accepted a reduced sense of privacy in exchange for connectivity and mobility. The project also explores how the sense of "touch" still remains one of our most private sensations, which we often avoid to share with strangers [6] and still lack a concise language to describe [7].

Finally, "Mobile Feelings" explores novel forms of mobile communications that might as well include smell and sweat as more private ways of "feeling and communicating with each other over distance." In our aim to get media art off the walls and out into people's lives, "Mobile Feelings" presents another step towards the merging of art, life and society.

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