Arrival the 3th of June 2018

Hotel: Mentone Hotel, 54-56 Cartwright Gardens

I shortly visited the UCL complexes. They are huge and spread all over London. The IN-TOUCH office turned out to be in a seperate building in a small street nearby. The reason for visiting Carey Hewitt was the opening of the exhibtion Remote Contact by the group Invisible Flock with whom Carey and her team collaborated. It would provide me the opportunity to talk to them and observe how the team collect data at the exhibition.

Monday 4th of June: Interview with Carey Hewitt, professor of Learning and Technology and Director of UCL knoweldge Lab, UCL.

Marloeke: How did you come in contact with the group of artists Invisible Flock?

Carey: Via a collegue Nadia Berthouze[1], computer scientist at UCL. She did stuff around touch in the computer science group at UCL. Observe her research – about affective emotions, touch, pain, wellbeing. She was involved in the project HOLD of Invisible Flock. I got in touch: conversation about touch and communication. This exhibition develops these talks and HOLD to another level. Different set of ideas, more on touch, tactile experiences, thinking about remote contact in that way. The Memory album is the same as in HOLD. But is developed. Focus now is on dementia and ideas of connection. Victoria, one of the artists, her grandmother has dementia, her family's reaction to this, what do you do when someone doesn't remember you any more and is there even a point in trying to get contact. These kind of questions led them to think about this area of communication. Context of dementia, seperation, remote connections, what it means to communicate through touch. It will tour Britain and be developed a little bit more.

I have done three studio visits. Talk through the different exhibits they are working with, we discussed the ideas and I maybe had some input on the way they are thinking about them. I sent them some papers. We as social scientist – during this week - we will use the exhibition space to explore with the visitors; how they interact with the artefacts, through touch. Big question for me is: how the artistic artefacts, the artistic research, *provide a route to explore touch communication*. Artistic research as a

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[1] https://uclic.ucl.ac.uk/people/nadia-berthouze

different route in thinking about touch. Difficult to research, just asking about touch is not going to get us a lot of data. *Exploring some methods we can used: walk throughs, extra interviews, walking around with visitors, engage with their sensory experience of the exhibits. Observing the visitors, playing around with the distance towards the visitors.* <u>*We also look into what kind of role and influence you have as a researcher on what data and what kind of data you get.*</u> *We are going to observe people interactions, what kind of talk they have, we dont want to interfere with them, afterwards ask them to re-enact what they did. What kind of resources and aspects of digital touch, what kind of experiences, practices, does the exhibit provoke for them*. Very exploratory. Two focal points:

Methodological focus: how can social scientists work with artists?

Substantive focus: how do people interact with these objects?

Art council funds, we are paying for the venue, and subcontracted to the artist, many processes applied, tendering exemption question. How you collaborate with artists needs to be thought through. What kind of space etc.

M: Is it the first time you work with artists?

C: Yes, first time we are doing it like this. Previous project was MIDAS[2], Methodological Innovations for digital artists and social scientists. We looked at the Body in digital spaces and we explored how three social scientist groups and three arts based groups researched the digital body. What kind of practices they used, what kind of methods they used, what kind of technologies they used. What kind of questions they asked, what kind of analytical concepts they used. The idea being how could we as social sciences learn and innovate, drawn from artistic practices and vice versa. We worked with London College Digital Fashion Studio, Brunel Digital Performance Studio, and the Information and Experience Design of London College of Art. And three social science groups from UCL. Each group had four to five people in it. Method was ethnography in which we explored each of those research group methods and played around in those workshops about how you could move them across the different spaces and what that might mean.

So this is the first time we really did an exhibition like this with Invisible Flock. We worked more intimately with the artists and we found a more interconnected way of working with them. We did still work in our own domain. We are collaborating on a distance. They are in charge of the artistic process, I might have a tiny contribution to that. When I gone up to the studio, they were in the process of developing one of the artifacts. I was playing around, like a participant and puppet of the artist, and gave kind of responses that went into something of the development. *I would like to have a collaboration from a starting point from what might we do together.* That would be interesting.

M: What is ethnographic?

C: For me, me going and sitting in the studio (first person perspective), being there all day, listening and observing, what do they feel is important about touch, asking them in the flow of that kind of activity, what is important to them? For example to be critical of technology, not to foreground technology, to give an audience the possibility to interact. To document the process, how they think through their making, when do they talk, don't talk, when they program, when they need to do things, how they use their bodies, taking photographs in the studio - it is sometimes hard to capture what is

happening - getting access to their slack channel. What it is what helps them think, what their ideas connect to (not where they come from, they don't know). How they emerge a little bit.

Ethnograhpy is about understanding the practices of that space and being there enough to get some sense of their perspective through immersing myself there a little bit. Some people would say it's too short term – it should be a couple of years. Ethnography can be done as a theoretical kind of everything, immersed for minimum a year. Other people look at it as a kind of perpective, you come in loosely, not for such a long time, but have a desire / ambition to understand the practices of a space and other people see it as a method (the lightest manner). This collaboration has been over a year / 8 months. Quite long, so we have quite a lot of material, also emails etc. In the exhibition, it is going to be the most intense time we spend with them. Afterwards we can show them the data we collected and talk them through some of the ideas that we are exploring. The analytical moment can be quite collaborative as well. Depending if they want this.

M: What kind of data you collect /are you looking for?

C: I think it is quite hard to know. Its hard to know how people are going to interact. What would be interesting for me is to see what kind of touching people do in the gallery, and what kind of responses they give to that art. Like: are they going to be touching things in a way that just feels like a kind of touch they do in other contexts, like with their phone or with a human, in a family.

Motion Print, it came from the studio collaboration with Manheim college, the students came with concept of interacting without speaking – basically having two bits of clay, one person manipulates it and the other person manipulates the clay in response. They took this concept and worked up tot the concept of Motion Print. It's a table now with in the middle a very large monitor screen, the visitors stand on either side of this table. Each visitor has a bowl of Putty – very hard clay, not easy to manipulate. They both wear a MYO band[3] that measures muscle tension. What you see on the screen – kind of visual interface – is a visualisation made in Touch Designer[4], it create a visualisation of the putty based on the movement. Various parameters for this mapping, are taken from the MYO band that is blue tooth connected to the computerscreen. Each person is pulling and stretching the putty. They got different colours. They create visual sculptures, the image is 3d and got depth. Not very direct mapping, but they do want the visitor to have the sense they are doing something, although not very literal. *My question is then, does this feel communicative? Do those people feel like they are communicating with each other through touch and does that feel like something you normally do or have done? OR does it feel very new. And if it feels new what does it make you think of? What sense of digital touch communication people have? What kind of possibilities do people think it has? How they use that and what it means for the ways they think about communication. What touch capacities bring people to the exhibtion. What kind of practice do they bring from the other worlds? What makes sense there. What kind of capacities do the exhibits require of them and what does that mean to people. How do they create communication in these moments. Or they might not do, just think its a bit of fun. After a while engaging with it, would they develop a kind of pattern when they stay longer with an artefact? **Do they have to learn something of touch**? Touch sensitivity? How do they do that? What kind of pressure of learning to touch is there in the space? What kind of discourses of touch do they have. How do they talk about touch*?

Some of the exhibits require two people. If someone would come on their own, how would they interact with somebody. If there is no-one, one of the artist would offer them self up. How do people interact with strangers. And even if you find that they won't or don't, that is kind of interesting as well.

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[3] https://www.myo.com
[4] http://projection-mapping.org/tools/touchdesigner/

Because people don't really look at each other in galleries, they don't talk to each other in galleries. The museums and galleries spend a lot of time and effort to construct ways to get visitors to talk to each other about the objects. If touch enables people to talk quite differently, that is kinda interesting for museums and galleries. But if touch is even harder for people to communicate with, that is kinda interesting as well. Especially while other people are looking.

M: Can you tell a bit about the origin of the research project IN –TOUCH?

C: I have been working on it for a year and a half. The initial starting point of the project: for about nearly 20 years now, I have been researching how people communicate. And that is: looking at all the ways people communicate. My first academic job was working with Gunther Kress[5], looking at / researching how people interact in the science classroom. Which is a very physical and experimental kind of place. Lots of experiments, physical objects that people interact with. It was the first subsidied project to understand multi modal communication in education. Normally as social scientists it's only audio recordings of what people say, interviews of teachers and students about learning. Or look at what they write, what they draw. But that doesn't capture a lot of what learning is or what teaching is. So how can we understand how people teach using their bodies? Moving beyond how people talk. Our project went in and did etnographic studies on science teaching across 9 teachers across 3 different kind of schools, and we were in there for a year. We were video recording and observing how these science lessons are done. We looked at the role of gesture, experiments, demonstrations. We also looked at what people said in the context of what they were doing. *How meaning was often layered across different modes of meaning making and how sometimes in the science classroom, what someone was saying could be in direct opposition to what one was doing. It was the tension between those two things that was actually important for science learning. The scientific knowledge would be in the talk and the everyday understanding would often be in some other mode.* So there are a lot of tensions between everyday knowledge/understandings and scientific knowledge. After the science classroom we did this in the English classroom where it is really accepted that the language is the 'boss'. Lots of projects later, coming to the MIDAS project, that kind of thinking is still there. We understand now how the body is being used in lots of different ways. We understand movement – a little bit – position, gesture, gaze, how that all interact with what people say, what images are used. All this stuff, but actually in that project working with designers and fashion people, the materiality was clearly very important. And what does materiality mean in a digital kind of context? But also the kind of boundaries between the digital and the material. *The sensory and the communicative were much more blurry.* And touch kinda encompasses a lot of those things. Performers, makers, designers are really using touch.

Then also in a parallell project MODE[6] which was around multimodal methods of researching digital environments, in that project we were looking at a lot of interactive tables, touch screens, i pads quite mundane stuff, we are not looking into in this project.

If we think of recent history, how much visual technologies have changed how we see, and the kind of practices we have around communication now like snapchat, youtube, facebook, whatsup. How people take photographs to communicate. All these kind of visual media, MRI scans, visual technology, that really changed how we communicate. <u>*How do all these new tactile media, that are now in the moment being made, how are they going to effect our communication*</u>. They will have to, because they are going to change the landscape. So what does that mean. What might that look like. So this project is kind of odd, while it is trying to research something that has not really happened yet. For

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[5] http://iris.ucl.ac.uk/iris/browse/profile?upi=GKRES81
[6] https://mode.ioe.ac.uk

social research that is kind of problematic. You can't say I want to research this technology that doesn't really exist yet, and is not really used yet. But it is going to have a major impact, we think, maybe it won't. How do we go around doing that? That was the beginning, the project idea. Touch technologies are going to transform our communicative practices in a different but similar scale as visual technologies have, and what will it mean for us, how we communicate, what kind of losses and gains will be about that. Then we wrote a UCL grant.

M: I didn't realize the project is very much related to the future.

C: _It is related to the future of now._ Because that it's more that a lot of technologies that are around, they do exist, but they are still in process of being made. They are going to change a lot. The role of touch in virtual reality, I do think that will change in the next five years. David Parisi[7] was talking about touch. He is media cultural historian. His kind of warning is, is this a moment of perfect storm, between marketing, expectation and nothing is really going to happen with touch in VR? It's just being sold, its just an idea. I do have a lot of empathy with this idea, I also think that all the tech companies get into touch and VR because they don't know how it is going to play out. But they know something will happen somewhere. So they all kinda investing in it in a different kind of way. And at the moment it is kind of limited what is happening and in that sense David Parisi is right, it is very much in relation to the marketing hype but if it takes off, in whatever direction, it is good to kind of explore this a bit beforehand. So this is going to be one of our next case studies – virtual reality and touch.

So if we look at the landscape, we got five areas in which we think touch is really defined:

Work

Learning

Health /wellbeing

Personal relationships

Leisure

Then there are a range of technologies: iphone – wearables, tactile internet, inskin/onskin / internet of skin[8], VR and touch, bio sensing.

What we are trying to do with our studies is saying; ok in this area now, with this kind of technology, this is kind of happening. Lets take that as a little seed to build a case study around. So we have done case studies of personal relationships and touch and we have used this little Kissinger machine[9] which is very simple as a seed to think about these questions around personal relationships and touch. And we are consolidating this case study now through writing it up, situating these kind of ideas in contexts like very accessible social bracelets through to sex robots. We don't do much about seks robots while they are not so much about touch to be honest; they are more intimate sexual relationship that is divorced from touch.

Now we look at Tech bio sensor technology, the Owlett[10], for babies. We got this little technology, how does it add / extend / interfere with touch moments with babies. We run focus groups around that. Another way of researching: there are existing touch patterns, how does putting technology in that space, influence these patterns. How does it shape those, or doesn't it.

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[7] https://campanthropology.org/2018/06/04/david-parisi-touch/
[8] https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/ypwj4v/welcome-to-the-internet-of-skin
[9] https://www.cnet.com/news/kissinger-smooching-robot-for-virtual-make-out-sessions/
[10] https://owletcare.com

Case study about discourses on touch – playful touch, horrible touch etc.

M: You look at these cases via "scholarly lenses", how did you set these up?

Micro semiotic lens: make sure we got that kind of data that enables us to use that analytical lens; when you look at this exibition it is making sure that each of the artifacts is fully documented, looking at the semiotic potentials of each of those things, what semiotic affordances are there, what kind of semiotic provences are people drawing on? Do they understand it is a button? What kind of semiotic histories do these devices have? We can think of the actual objects there, we can talk to the designer about the kind of affordances they are trying to program in and histories they are drawing on. And through recording, video recording the interactions people have with them, we can say, what possibilities of interaction this object has, compared with what the visitor is actually doing.

Why does this visitor does that? How did the visitor try to undermine / resist / remake those affordances? Do they notice them? So think of it as a *semiotic chain of meaning making* if you like. Look at affordances. Look at how people orchestrate their different kind of meaning making so where touch sits in relation to talk, in relation to looking, how people use their bodies to explain how touch can be used to one another.

We look at the semiotics of the body in that kind of space. What kind of signs do they make through touch. With the putty thing; do they take turns? Do they simultaneously touch? How do they react to each others signs? We see how people interact as a form of sign making. That would be the analytical lens we bring to it, to think about touch as a form of communication.

M: Interesting for performance. Think about aesthetics in relation to touch.

C: What are they? How can you think about aesthetics in this context? That is interesting.

We described a framework for procedure. You can't integrate these lenses – micro semiotic, ethnographic lens, experiential lens - but you can layer them. If we take a moment when people interact with the motion print, for instance, then we say we look at it through this lens, and then this lens, and then this lens. How do these three modes complement each other? What tension do they bring? What is useful ?

M: If you think about theory? Where does that come in?

The multi modal stuff has a social semiotic theory of communication. Around semiosis and how people make meaning, always done in a particular moment, drawing on set resources, which relate to their social and cultural history and context.

M: within the workshop you did, did you give them a specific question or did you explain a theory at the beginning?

We started of there – in the context of thinking of digital touch in communication – first we asked them to brainstorm about how they normally communicate. Then to think about how the sensory come into that and within that think about touch in terms of communicating. Then we gave them the prototyping task to design / make a prototype of a device system or environment that supported remote touch communication in the context of personal relationship. And that is what we got them to do. And they had a bit of interaction after that with the Kissinger, which we recorded and got them to think about the challenges of remote digital touch communication. So we gave them a kind of context at the beginning and a set of things/material that is framing what they can do, that's it. And then it is very much what they make. We use the video recordings of their making processes as a way of accessing how they think about digital touch and the kind of norms and etiquettes and ideas they

bring into that discussion. This is a way of getting people to think about touch. Next year we are going to try some other ways to get people to think about touch. We don't really give them feedback.

Short version of interview with Kerstin Leder Mackley, senior Research Associate of the IN-TOUCH team.

M: Can you tell a bit about your background?

K: I came from Germany, 18 years to England to study film, tv and drama. Became interested in audience and reception studies and did a master in this. We mainly focused on film and tv. 90ties etnographies. Master dissertation about emotions, positive/negative. PHD about three generation families on fear and film and tv. Discourse analyses. How people construct a version of the world they live in through language. How to get to the inner world. How much is language part of how we construct the world, how can language shape our world.

As part of the Sandpitch – digital economies – tales of things.com. To explore the beginnings of the internet of things from a multi disciplinairy perspective. Objects with digital histories, using objects that exist in the world and connecting them to stories. Images, written stories, videos online – scan an object (rfid tag). Try to get a lot of specific voices heard.

Then I met Sarah Pink[11], she is an antropologist – developed sensory ethnography. She is now based in Australia. Worked on LEDR with her; Low Energy Demand Reduction. Energy consumption at home. Digital technologies in the home, how to create interventions to get people to use less energy. Use video tours to get people to show us through the house. How is an ecology of things coming together, not just pointing out bad energy habits. Digital concepts to help reduce energy consumption. Paying attention to people sensory perceptions of their home and our sensory perceptions as well. Engaging with people as they were doing things and starting to connect. Habits. We do things, we know things through our body and how do you get them to articulate that. Sometimes we would ask them to talk us through the things they were doing, sometimes they would ask them how it felt, how would they know the laundry is clean? How does it feel? How does it smell? Looked at how they would express it, not asked for sensory categories. We did observations sometimes. What are the laundry routes through the houses. We got really interesting stuff from morning and evening rituals as well, how they shut down the house etc. Things that had to be on, or off. Energy and digital living.com

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[11] http://caseyboyle.net/sense/pink01.pdf

Then the job was open at IN-TOUCH and I had this social semiotics and communication media studies and anthropology of the senses background, which is slightly different from the etnography of the senses.

I became the researcher on the project and Douglas is the phd student. There will be a second phd student and a second researcher. Douglas has a fashion background and uses sensor techology. Very much a maker, how do makers understand the process of making through touch. He is trying to digitize that kind of information.

M: How do you start up a new project / theme.

K: There are four strands. Up until now we sort of identified case studies that sort of fit in these different strands. We started taking lead on different case studies. I am involved on baby smart monitors. Sarah Prize will do the study on VR. We feed into each other. Team meetings are together. _We worked on how to bring multi modality and sensory ethnography together. There is an article to be published about this._

Baby monitoring: it started with the technology. Parenting and digital touch. Bio sensing technology. How much is it related to physical touch? Is it related to distanced touch? It is technology that gets inserted in already existing parental touching practice. It's a little sock, measures heart rate and oxygen levels, Owlett. Sproutling is another one. More on the market in the States. We got into contact with the designers. We are keen to talk to them, what design strategies did they employ?

Focus group: exploratory study, we brought people together to talk about their touch practice, visited people in their home. Talk about co sleeping. Video recording. Some have the device at home and they send updates and we see if it changes the way they interact with their babies. There is no before and after, its much more about introducing a technology in an artificial way. Its more getting a sense of the point of the participants, not our starting point of view.

M: Ethics

K: we discussed a lot about that, how do you speak about touching your child…. Need to sign another ethics contract.

And another ethical topic is related to the designers / artists / makers of the technology: what if you find out information that is not positive, can you publish this information? What do you do with it?