KU: iyashikei-net

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ABSTRACT

KU: iyashikei-net is an interactive networked sculpture installation that allows people to communicate through the interface of tears, a physical output of human emotional expression that has not been made exchangeable with current communication devices.

Keywords

Interactive sculpture, networked objects, networked installation, tears, emotional expression

INTRODUCTION

Tears are output of high state of human emotion. Often when a person is extremely emotional, one cannot speak, write, nor sing. In such cases, tears are the only source of emotional expression. Tears are silent and ephemeral. Every teardrop is uniquely expressive in their texture, sound, quantity, speed of stream, and saltiness. Unfortunately, when people communicate over digital network, these physical characteristics of teardrops are lost. Tears are not seen, nor felt by the person that the crying person is trying to reach with the digital networked device, i.e. cellular phones, emails, or instant message.

The goal of the project is to make transportation of tears in networked communication possible, to remind people that natural physical output of human expression such as tears are essential key to communication, which may result in better understanding of one another.

DESIGN CONCEPT

The human desire to communicate has played an important part in the technological advancement of modern societies. From smoke signals, pigeon carriers, to telephones, the Internet, and nowadays with abundance of wireless communication methods, our world seems increasingly smaller as we become more and more connected to other human beings by various means. As new technology progresses, building upon the old methods and using new electronic gadgets, communication becomes increasingly depended on written languages and diminishing are the non-text body gestures and emotional language.

The delicacy of hearing or feeling someone cry, the smudged ink in the letter because of a tear drop, or the broken voice over the telephones, for example, get lost in the world of digital communication. Representing an act of crying becomes increasingly difficult over instant messaging. Likewise, receiving a comforting hug is practically impossible over the telephone, fax, or email.

Feeling the void in this personal aspect of telecommunication technologies, we created an interactive installation that lets users transport tears of sadness and receives comfort response in return. Carefully avoiding the usage of machine to completely replace human being, this installation is an abstract representation of the minute human element that brings forth emotional reaction from the viewer in order to fully communicate the language of crying and comfort.

KU: iyashikei-net attempts to bring back such subtle physical expressions that are missing in networked communications. As an act of successful communication requires human beings paying equal attention, this system requires two persons in order to function its intended objective.

KUs: crying surrogates

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The installation consists of two sides that communicate to each other over the Internet. Each side is designed to be installed at different locations anywhere on the earth where there is Internet connection. On Side A, Tear Well is placed, where a sad person can express his/her sadness by pumping the traditional water pump. The water that is pumped represents the sad person's tears. Then the tears are sent over to Side B over the Internet, where there are teardrop sculptures called KU that act as networked surrogates.

As soon as Side B receives crying signal from Side A, KUs start to cry. The tears KUs shed represent the tears of the sad person on Side A. When a viewer on Side B wipes KUs' tears, KUs stop crying. At the same time comforting response is send to the sad person on side A to cheer them up.
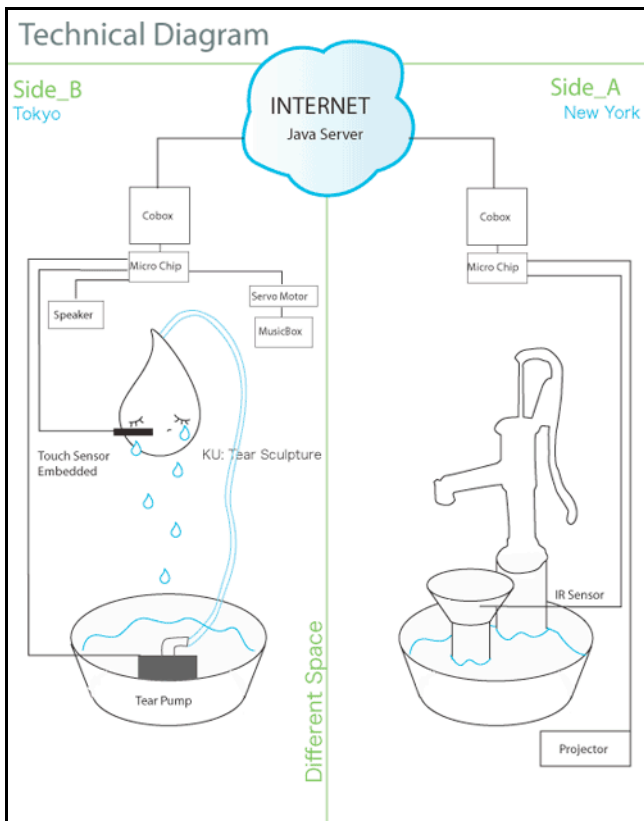
Technical Diagram

Figure 1: the two sides of the installation are connected over the Internet using embedded network circuits; analog sensors on each installation serve as remote switches for one another.
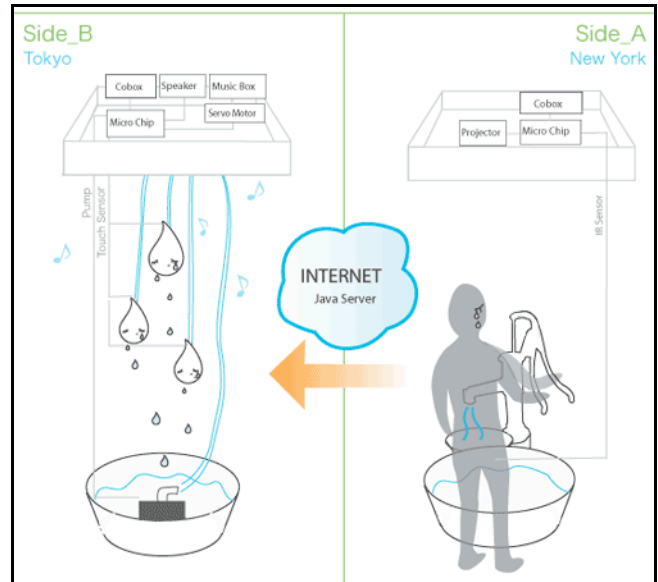
Interaction Scenarios

Figure 2: a user activates the system by pumping at the tear well, KU sculptures start crying and a sad music is played.
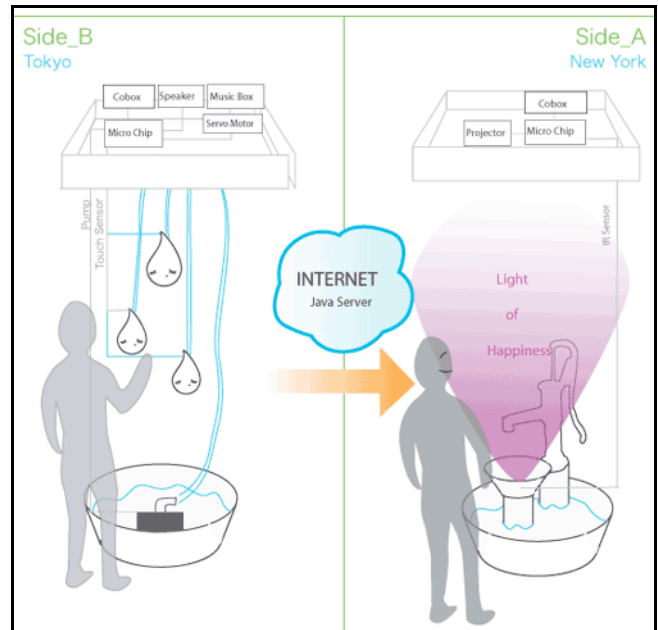

Figure 3: when another user wipes away the tears of the crying surrogates, a signal is sent over the network to comfort the crying person

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