

Veiling Inside Out & Outside In

By Caroline Nevejan

Other people kindly help me to veil. A large cloth, designed to make reference to burqa's, businessmen, science fiction knights and more, is draped around me. Before I had given my profile, picture and statement to be stored in a database. Now the weight of cloth surrounds my body giving breath acoustic space of its own. Outside sound retreats, inner space resonates first. The veil offers limited visual perspective, yet embedded technology promises to improve perception. Like an astronaut watching earth, I now watch my destiny. Move your hand, touch your belly, turn your head, listen and see ...

The rhythm of breath is broken when suddenly voices of others enter my private veiled space. They speak of trusting eyes to relate. Do people around see my hand touching my belly now? Space is flowing and my moving hand seems to generate this. Large screen alternating faces outside and soft alternating voices inside clash in perception. I try to focus. There must be a rule behind these happenings. My own face passes by. Forget about the people around me. Can I find people I know on screen? What is happening in this other-database-to-store-me-in? How can my hand influence what happens next? What is it that my doing triggers to whom?

TeleTrust, an art installation by Karen Lancel en Hermen Maat, raises fundamental questions about how we relate to each other when mediated presence is fundamental to interaction. When entering interaction human beings tune their presence to each other in subtle processes of breathing, movement, gaze and tone of voice. Having presence is an act of performance. Body language, dress codes, gestures and style of speaking helps people to connect. Human beings recognize each other, and negotiate possible trust to emerge. When trust flows, interaction emerges.

How trust emerges is the subject of which all voices in TeleTrust speak. Asking the question whether one needs to see another person's eyes to trust, it takes away gaze while offering stills of faces and voices that talk about trust. The confrontation between public and private sphere sharpens. Easy day-to-day solutions, in which we are used to trust the many systems that surround us in order to survive, become obsolete. TeleTrust's confusion between personal and public sphere, while the on- and offline reality blurs, offers insight in how we navigate the multi-actor systems we are part of. The necessary act of trusting the physical and social laws of nature in the world around us is questioned by the many voices that talk about a choice to trust.

With strong physical elements, like the Aziz veil of business suit textile, and strong mediated presence of many voices and images of people in the database, it confuses the day-to-day sense of one self. Movement of the hand over one's own body triggers the database of voices and images to unfold, but

one cannot steer or navigate in the online world. One does not know who appears when, where and how. Simultaneously private mobile devices offer insight into what happens in the veil which neither the person in the veil nor others online, spectators or just-passing-by-ers can have. Feedback appears to be not reciprocal. A 'mirage' of happenings is the result.

The friction between necessary trust for survival's sake and the choice to trust to safeguard personal well-being, surfaces. To be able to operate the system one has to trust the dynamics of the system. To take responsibility for one's own well-being, one needs the possibility to act. To be able to act human beings anticipate consequences of their actions. But one can only act if one decides to accept the dynamics of the system. And these dynamics are unknown. This insight in the friction between the choice and the need to trust is not the result of an analysis, but emerges from the TeleTrust experience in which different sensorial inputs and possible actions are deconstructed and recombined in unanticipated ways.

When negotiating trust, public and private spheres are distinct. Just as cloths provide a masquerade while revealing truth at the same time, meeting people in mediated presence is real and not real in the same instance. Today's ubiquitous mediated presences challenge notions of public and private spheres. Systems have become part of the human natural environment. The Internet, energy grids, and the many databases around challenge existing distinctions of time, place, action and in relations people feel.

TeleTrust addresses the specific process of the performance of presence and negotiation of trust when private and public spheres merge while on-and offline realities blur. One can trigger but not control what happens next. As result the performance of presence is seriously jeopardized. One has to surrender to a complex system in which multi actors play their role. Amidst the many presences and re-presences only one option remains available. One has to trust to be able to explore and eventually the choice to trust becomes available.

The sound of others is deeply intruding my space, yet I feel I have no voice. The faces on screen are large and mine is one of them. Is there any relation between my image and me? Does the other-database-to-store-me-in make me present somewhere else? Is the sound of my breath intruding other people's space? Where goes my veil? Who are these others?

I want to control the outside-inside influence. It is harder and harder to breath yet the cloth is good and firm. My hand keeps moving, receiving comfort from my belly and bit-by-bit my brain slows down. I finally centre in my virtual crowded veil. In- and outside merge and I start to enjoy the sound-scape that emerges. My body re-finds its balance in this public virtually veiled inner outer space. I am back in control. Shall I trust?