

# Passages

a very close proximity media space

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A 'media space' is a system that integrates multiple types of media to connect distant places and groups of people. Unlike other media spaces, which often resemble nonstop video conferences, Passages uses computer vision in a new way that allows passers-by to approach as close to the interaction surface as they wish and to touch the silhouettes of their remote counterparts. The installation is intended to create a more intimate kind of portal between different cities in which one must engage the entire body to uncover the possibility of a relationship with a stranger.

Inspiration for Passages comes from early 20th century writings about the arcades of Paris, notably by Walter Benjamin and by Surrealists like Louis Aragon. For these writers, the passage became a metaphor of the urban poetry for wandering, meeting strangers, falling in love, travelling...

As an installation, Passages is situated in two different locations connected with each other via a network. A vertical translucent interaction surface, made of glass and textile and recalling a shop window, is set in each location. As a random passer-by walks in front of this surface, the contour of his/her silhouette is reflected in a visual style that evokes drawing or sketching.

This silhouette uncovers as a mask what is happening at the other location, possibly the silhouette of another person standing there. As the local participant moves, more of the remote scene is exposed. The body incarnated in a silhouette becomes the interface for a playful encounter and communication with a stranger in a far away place.

'Media spaces' have been an area of inquiry for at least 25 years, and many experiments have taken the form of always-on video conferences between selected remote locations. We feel that in these kinds of spaces, passers-by may still perceive a sense of separation because they see each other through wide-angle views captured by cameras mounted at a distance from them.

In order to create a greater sense of intimacy, we developed a new computer vision system to enable interaction at a very short distance to the screen surface, to the point that passers-by can actually touch it. This system maintains a near-perfect registration of the participants' bodies to their silhouettes no matter how close they are to the surface. The result is a perception of unusual nearness, surprising and perhaps unsettling at the same time.

With Passages, we wish to explore the possibilities and outcomes of being more emotionally and physically engaged in a media space: by incorporating elements of a private space in a public urban space; by enabling a heightened sense of proximity and intimacy; by using the body and its movement as an interface; by connecting strangers from different places and cultures.



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