

# Within Touching Distance [Live Performance]

This is a trailer for a live performance experience, video created by Sanjay Pandey, performed at Sheffield DocFest 2023, University of Greenwich, Theatre Sound (as) Collaboration. Distributed creations, shared agencies (conference, LMU Munich, 2023) & London Bubble Theatre Company.

Within Touching Distance (performance) is the result of research carried out by Jorge Lopes Ramos and Persis Jadé Maravala into arts-led methods exploring the potential of remote touch synchronisation within XR (Unity-based Platform) using low-cost devices to address gaps in current digital mental health therapies, and the training of nurses and carers.

Research looked into:

- The experience gap between human and haptic touch;
- Skills for nurses and carers utilising appropriate and effective touch;
- Cross-industry collaborations.

Guiding questions included:

- How can we apply immersive technologies to delivery of mental health/wellbeing therapies, specifically for home-bound/bed-bound patients?
- Can combining remote touch synchronisation/haptic touch/360° video provide similar mental health benefits to skin-to-skin human affective touch?
- Which creative health partnerships can offer ideal settings for these solutions?

The project aims to combine creative/technology/partnership/training approaches to address an unsolved gap in the digital mental health therapies market: the positive role of touch in healthcare.

Supported by Liverpool Cares 'Love Your Neighbour' programme (supporting younger volunteers to regularly visit home-bound older neighbours), and in collaboration with University of Greenwich Simulation & Learning Centre, providing expertise, students and resources.

Within Touching Distance (performance) is a one-to-one mixed reality experience that combines human touch and virtual reality. Exploring the fragile nature of life and the comfort of human connection, the audience is taken from childhood through to old age, exploring the nature of touch as it is experienced by an infant, adult and a person in palliative care. Using embodiment in virtual reality and the ritual of the mundane everyday task of getting ready for bed, the participants are taken through human life cycles, highlighting how our experiences change the way we interact, at a sensory level, with the world. The experience involves synchronisation of 360° visual, binaural audio and haptic experience and performers who carry out the choreography of synchronised touch.

In the experience, a live performer, embodying a mother-figure, greets a participant and guides them silently, with light application of touch as a means of instruction, through the process of getting ready for and into bed.

The artwork received a special mention by the Jury of the Sheffield DocFest International Alternate Realities Award Competition 2023. It has received the UNLIMITED International Partner Awards for further development with Freedom Theatre, Palestine, and was recently presented at the "Prime Minister's Council for Science and Technology: Infrastructure Roundtable" to discuss the potential of arts research to provide crossover benefits to the UK economy and in healthcare.

Within Touching Distance (performance) is the latest experimental production from award-winning and internationally acclaimed ZU-UK, by Jorge Lopes Ramos and Persis Jadé Maravala. Lopes Ramos and Maravala's work has won numerous awards and nominations in the fields of immersive theatre, hybrid art, interactive technology and socially engaged art. Amongst their most acclaimed projects is Hotel Medea (2006-2012) - the standout hit of Edinburgh Fringe 2011, and considered by press and academics a pioneer in the field of Immersive Theatre. Their work has also been presented by Hayward Gallery Southbank Centre, Summerhall, FACT Liverpool, LIFT Festival, A.N.D. Festival, Latitude and TEMPO Festival (Rio de Janeiro) amongst others.