

Topic Movement in Social Engagement

From timing to synchronization to socialization; Embodiment and empathy

FOR ORAL PRESENTATION

TITLE:

Somability: movement, independence and social engagement for adults with complex needs

Wendy Keay-Bright

**Cardiff School of Art and Design, Cardiff Metropolitan University
Western Avenue, Cardiff, CF5 2YB**

correspondence: wkbright@cardiffmet.ac.uk/cariad

Keywords: interaction; independence; disabilities; playful

This paper will report on Somability, a project developed with a day centre for adults with complex disabilities.

Objective: Somability uses camera and projection technologies to translate full body movement into graphical outputs. The overarching objective is to make movement irresistible by rewarding the most tentative of actions with bold, playful and dynamic effects. Working within adult services posed many challenges - staff lacked confidence with technology, and had limited scope for meaningful recreational experiences due to time pressure and the constraints of physical space. Thus, our goal was to create a playful experience that could enhance the well-being of service users and their carers, whilst at the same time improve access to technologies.

Methods: We adopted a research through design methodology, collaborating on generating concepts that amplified ordinary actions, making them the source of highly visceral creative exchanges between peers and carers. A process of iterative prototyping led to a focus on three core movements: reach, balance and flow, and a customisable interface that offered video mirroring, as well as options to extrapolate extraneous detail so that only traces of movement exist.

Results: Staff at the centre conducted regular evaluations of Somability using a framework that measured the independence of service users. Results revealed that even those with poor self-awareness and limited movement were able to interact independently. Dramatic increases in dynamic movement were also reported. Carers expressed that they also felt creative, to the extent that the service participated in two public performances of the Somability project.

Conclusion: Reduced funding for the arts, together with limitations on time and space mean that opportunities to enjoy creative movement are minimal within day services. The impact of a sedentary lifestyle is well understood, yet for some people the idea of an exercise regime is onerous. Our approach was to make simple movements the trigger for playful exploration. The focus on fun, rather than task, opened up opportunities to experiment with technology without fear or failure, and for individual movements for have value, thus empowering those with profound disabilities to participate using their own movement in meaningful ways.