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A Sea of Sketches: a Conversation through Real-Time Sketching

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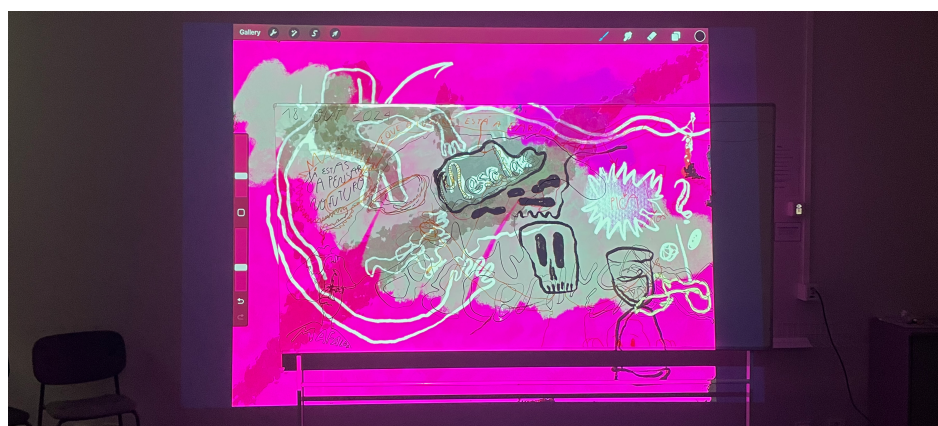


Figure 1: Video still of authors sketching together in conversation; a previous experiment in preparation for this demo.

Abstract

Conversations can take many forms: verbal exchanges, letters, gifts, voice notes, and even drawing together. In this demonstration, we propose creating a space for conversation through real time sketching and a playful exchange with the Designing Interactive Systems (DIS) community. Using our resonating research practices and ourselves as the artefacts to be demonstrated — we open up for different forms of prompting in order to collaboratively create a sea of sketches. This performance combines physical and digital sketching, responding to a selection of audio, text and visual materials around the theme of water. Through our broad and somewhat provocative interpretation of demonstration, we challenge the traditional understanding of conversations and visual practices in interaction design, expanding this form of knowledge towards the ephemeral format of the demo.

CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing** → **Human computer interaction (HCI)**.

*Both authors contributed equally to this research.



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Keywords

sketching, live sketching, performance

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1 Introduction

Building on the multiple modalities of demonstration — including an explanation of how work is performed, an exhibition, or a public meeting in protest — we suggest a live interactive experience with two researchers in the intersection of their sketching practices. This performance-like demonstration seeks to engage in a conversation about bodies of water through multiple voices, extending the format by acknowledging its ephemerality. We aim to explore the ebbs and flows between our practices and across their borders, to defy what it means to converse visually, in real time, and in exchange with the Designing Interactive Systems (DIS) community.

This proposal relies heavily on our expertise — both authors/ demonstrators are researchers who have worked separately on researching visual practices in Human-Computer Interaction (HCI). After many discussions between us, we are now attempting to find a space for collaboration that includes the community in our debates.

We propose an afternoon of sketching together, mixing digital and analogue sketching techniques with different forms of prompting. This visual conversation seeks to reveal the unfolding processes behind our sketching practices by layering them in real time. We

will invite the DIS audience into this live conversation by offering means for their input through various forms of prompting.

1.1 Sketching as a feminist practice

This demonstration explores sketching as a performative device to engage in more open and conversational ways of doing design research together and on-site [37]. This work is grounded in feminist practices of collective knowledge-making, which make space for individual voices, whilst creating shared ground through the act of making itself. We use a feminist stance to design research [1, 2] to frame our work alongside situated knowledges [23], fictions [30], and critical fabulations [31, 34], presenting this demonstration as a form of storytelling that articulates personal knowledge as embodied and situated [11, 13].

This demo highlights how diverse forms of making and documenting research can broaden and enrich our design work [12, 27, 41, 42]. We consider documentation ‘as an extension of the act of making itself’ [22], using the live aspect of the performance to allow the materiality of our conversational processes to matter. We believe there is fundamental value in engaging with the physical and material aspects of these discourses. In addition, making these aspects visible opens them up for scrutiny while generating depth and more access points to engage with the research [28, 29].

We build on previous making-centred gatherings such as workshops we have previously organised at DIS conference [4, 19], where we pay attention to the things we make in research through design and the importance of making alongside each other.

1.2 Sketching in real time as conversation



Figure 2: A sketch of the expected set-up of the performance.

This proposal is framed within a broader body of work that addresses drawing and sketching as important modes of making and inquiry [35, 43]. This investigates sketching as a method, tool and process [3, 33, 36] and articulates knowledge [7, 32].

There’s several practices (and many different terms) that use sketching as a form of inquiry that is done in real time, such as sketchnoting [44], scribing [39], graphic recording [10], graphic notetaking [16], graphic facilitation [40], field sketches [20] and

ethnographic drawing [8]. Each practice comes with a specific genealogy that determines how sketching is constituted and what it offers as a form of research.

Of particular relevance is work that highlights sketching as a form of collaborative visual conversation used to jointly generate knowledge [25]. The interplay between individual and collective means considering not only how sketching facilitates conversation but also how it creates space for personal reflection. This highlights sketching as a collaborative form of inquiry that includes personal experience [18, 26] and engages first-person perspectives as a way to meaningfully navigate and negotiate collaborative processes [17]. Several authors present their practices of sketching as subjective and reflexive [17, 26, 33]. In these approaches sketching is used to bring to surface implicit reflections [21], generating partial and situated interpretations of what is being observed.

These considerations allow us to approach sketching both as a listening structure and a site for speaking and acting together on matters of common concern.

2 The demo-performance

The demonstration will be centred around one large screen showing a live conversation through sketching, where we will use a tablet and pen and paper, simultaneously projected and layered on one another. We will be sketching in response to an audio track with a selection of work around the theme of bodies of water. The audience, seeing the conversation unfold on the screen alongside the audio track, will be invited to input prompts by sketching with pen and paper and/or typing on a keyboard. Together, we will generate a sea of sketches.

2.1 The intersection of two practices

This demonstration engages two practices (Elvia and Mafalda’s) of analogue and digital sketching in a multi-layered conversation in real time. We will unpack our practices in conversation with each other, taking inspiration from diffractive reading as a method for “reading insights through one another in ways that help illuminate differences as they emerge.” [14]. Although our practices resonate with each other in many ways, we are also challenged with making our separate thought processes visible and available as research materials to each other and the DIS community. As a methodological approach, diffraction proposes working with differences to make new differences [24], and highlights that things happen through interdependencies [6]. This not only acknowledges that we are always acting through interdependencies but also allows us to explore the material-relational configurations of our practices in more situated and embodied ways.

Inspired by Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* [5], we explore the porous lines in-between practices, languages and ways of generating knowledge visually and collaboratively. Through sketching we’ll engage with the messiness of applying theory in context, exploring the ambivalences of theorising-doing in live situated gatherings.

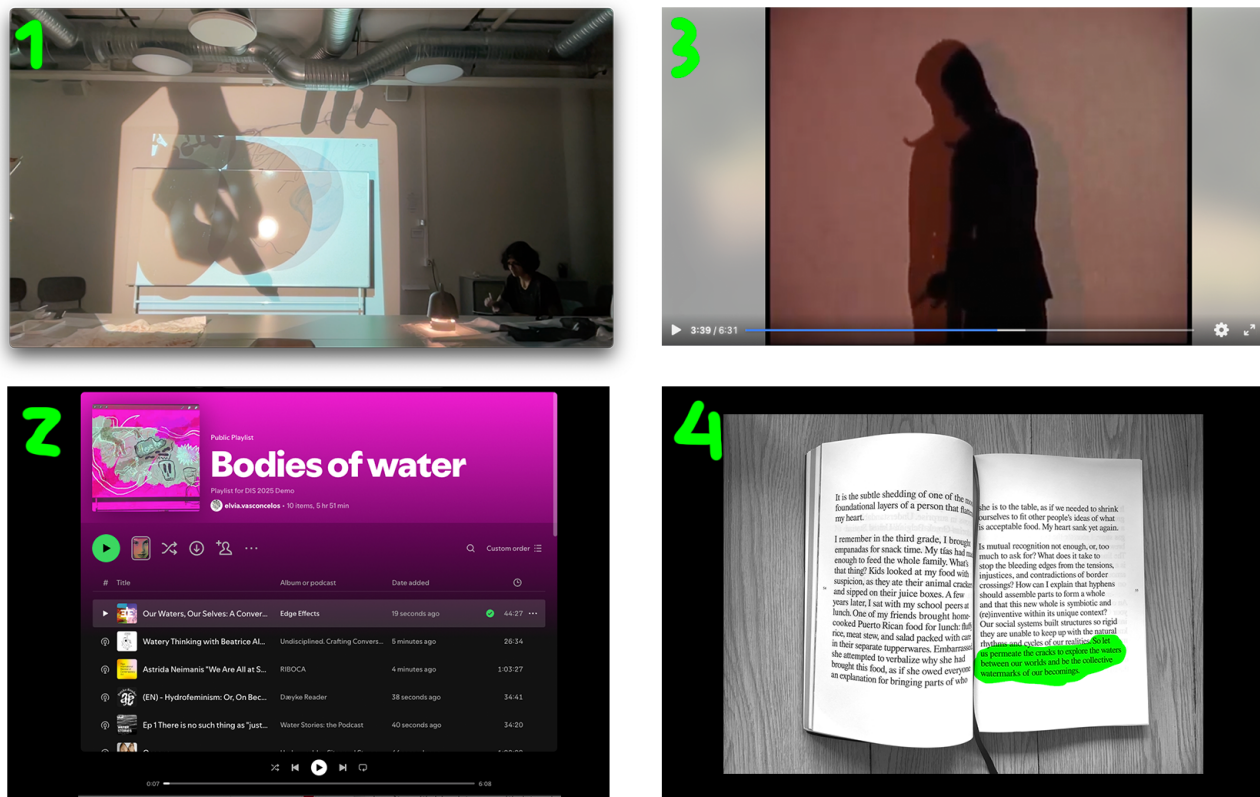


Figure 3: A selection of audio, text and visual materials around the theme of water: (1) Video still of authors sketching; (2) Playlist Bodies of water; (3) Video still from Lourdes de Castro; (4) Elizabeth Patiño's article highlighted

2.2 A playlist and two zines about bodies of water

We'll curate a body of work in advance, bringing water to the forefront through a mixture of feminist theories and local artists (such as Lourdes Castro), whilst also considering the programme of the conference. This will take more than one form to highlight the mixed media aspects within our practices. More specifically, we will present an online playlist of audio content, with the audio track we will listen and sketch to (see figure 3). We aim to produce a Zine to be added to the conference library. In what follows, we present an initial sample of such audio, written, and visual content.

An example of inspiring work is that of cultural theorist Astrida Neimanis 'thinking with water' invites us to consider water as 'a lively collaborator in our ways of knowing and acting.' [9]. Water is approached as a political commons, where politics is the practice of speaking and acting together on matters of common concern. Water is also 'a matter of relation and connection' that carries stories and memories. Neimanis highlights how our relations affect our ways of knowing. We're excited to explore how Neimanis methodology of 'thinking with water' might allow us to investigate sketching as intrinsically relational and fluid. What flows between our practices? What happens when we consider conversations as 'flow, circulation,

and depth'? What comes to surface in the relational space between people, site and sketches?

Similarly, Elizabeth Patiño's article 'IV. VaiVén - The waters we make Home' [15] approaches water as a borderland/connector through Gloria Anzaldúa's work. To include such texts in the audio track we will transform specific highlights, such as 'So let us permeate the cracks to explore the waters between our worlds and be the collective watermarks of our becomings' into voice notes (see figure 2). This is also a way to further reveal the multitude of tactics and materials we use to do our research in conversation with each other.

2.3 Audience interaction

The performance brings in elements of both personal and collective, offering a balance between first-person perspectives and shared experience. The DIS audience will be encouraged to express personal perspectives through sketching and writing, whilst contributing to larger collective gestures in the form of a sea of sketches. We will setup a wall space for these sketches to be placed in conversation with each other.

Depending on the space and available equipment, we will also consider offering more than one way to engage the audience in conversation, such as typing on a keyboard connected to a secondary

screen. We prioritise plurality as a practical strategy to generate these layered conversations and allow multiple viewpoints to co-exist [38], as according to our previous research.

3 Outcomes and future work

The main aim of this demonstration is to create a live conversation between us and the community, presenting ourselves as the performing technique — our bodies and sketching practices are the artefacts — and exploring the risk of liveness as a form of knowledge in design research. Hence, the outcomes are somewhat unpredictable. Still, we will likely generate a series of artefacts: (1) a video of the live performance; (2) a sea of sketches and a zine.

As we will be making collaboratively, the results of the performance as layered conversation composites [18]. These outcomes will serve as performative and visual acts that highlight personal perspectives while generating collective insights. We will reflect and analyse these materials to produce a paper for next year's DIS conference. We will also consider how this can be turned into a workshop format, about ways to enact research practices live and on-site, whilst exploring the ephemeral nature of performance and its possibilities for design research.

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