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MASSEY UNIVERSITY

*A Near Touch User Interface for
Touch Screen Based Systems*

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Masters of Engineering

in

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Abstract

Industry has been heavily pushing for new methods of human-computer interaction in the last several years and this has seen many different technologies move into the mainstream, from infrared sensors[1] and z-cameras[2] to touch screens[3]. Because touch screens are a more mature and developed technology they provide an ideal platform for mainstream technology development, but their level of interactiveness is limited, and these limitations must be overcome or compensated for with clever interface design.

In this thesis, a solution to these inherent limitations in touch screen interface design is proposed by augmenting the touch screens interaction capabilities with one or two cameras to enable a near touch user experience on top of the standard touch screen. This offers flexibility in system design (the near touch is implemented as an extra layer, and can be activated only if present) as well as providing an inexpensive solution. Several Image processing algorithms relevant to this task are also discussed and their implementation evaluated.

Preface

The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate that a suitable near touch interface can be created to allow the cost effective augmentation of basic touch screens to further enhance their practicality and usability as a next generation human-computer interface.

Chapter 1 begins by describing the current issues with human-computer interfaces on touch screen devices, and why they are insufficient to replace the current standard of mouse and keyboard in a conventional desktop environment. This will be followed up by a description of the proposed solution to this issue, and an assessment of its advantages and disadvantages within the context of its intended application.

Chapter 2 will follow on by describing existing systems for human-computer interaction with touch screen devices, as well as non-touch based interaction methods, and list their strengths and flaws in relation to how they relate to the stated problem.

Chapter 3 will cover the design and implementation of this system, discussing relevant techniques, and then assess the quantitative and qualitative results gained. Finally, chapter 4 will describe the strengths and weaknesses that the system demonstrated, and what areas could be improved upon, as well as future development.

The project was carried out in conjunction with our industry partner

Unlimited Realities¹ under a Foundation of Research and Technology TIFFF fellowship, and was designed to be integrated into their product UmajinTM ², and enabled in any supporting FingertappsTM applications built. It was also intended to create a set of image processing functions that could be implemented in any UmajinTM project on any image or video object.

¹Unlimited Realities, PO Box 8015, 60 Princess Street, Palmerston North, 4446, New Zealand. Phn: +64 6 3564120, Website: www.ur.co.nz

²UmajinTM is a platform that allows applications to be rapidly developed and provides a wide range of functionality and diversity to be supported via integrated functions within the application programming interface (API). It is a commercially available product, and has a specialised branch called FingertappsTM which is dedicated to the creation of touch based applications, and has support for multi-touch environments.

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Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Problem	1
1.2	Proposed Solution	4
1.2.1	Overview	4
1.2.2	Use Cases	6
1.2.3	Advantages of the Proposed System	7
1.2.4	Disadvantages of the Proposed System	9
1.2.5	Goals of the Project	11
1.2.6	Contributions of the Project	12
2	Existing Related Work	13
2.1	Microsoft Surface	13
2.1.1	Summary	15
2.2	Microsoft Kinect (Project Natal)	16
2.2.1	Summary	18
2.3	Sony Play Station Eye	19
2.3.1	Summary	21
2.4	Don't Click it!	22
2.4.1	Summary	24
2.5	Mid-Air Input Systems for Projected Displays	25

2.5.1	Textual Input	26
2.5.2	Single/Multiple Point Cursor Input	28
2.6	Camera Based Input Detection	30
2.6.1	Augmented Reality	30
2.6.2	Image Processing Based Input Detection	32
2.7	Feature Comparison	35
3	Design and Implementation of Proposed Solution	36
3.1	Design	36
3.1.1	System Design	37
3.2	Implementation	45
3.2.1	Soccer Technical Demonstration	46
3.2.2	Near Touch User Interface	51
3.3	Results and Accomplishments	55
3.3.1	Soccer Technical Demonstration	55
3.3.2	Near Touch User Interface	60
3.4	Problems Encountered	73
4	Final Thoughts	75
4.1	Conclusions	75
4.2	Accomplishment of Goals	76
4.2.1	Demonstrate the ability to track the users hand in front of the screen	76
4.2.2	Display Ability to report the point they are pointing too with sufficient accuracy for general use	76
4.2.3	Recognise simple gestures	77
4.2.4	Display this in action using a graphical user interface	78
4.3	Future Work	78

4.3.1	Complete Hand Detection	78
4.3.2	Migrate to True Stereoscopy	79
4.3.3	Colour temperature correction	79
4.3.4	Auto skin colour calibration	81
A	Questionnaire	82

List of Figures

1.1	Single camera setup for system	7
1.2	Layout of proposed system	8
2.1	Microsoft Surface in use (Image by ergonomidesign of Wikipedia)	13
2.2	Prototype of Project Natal (Image taken by Jake Metcalf)	16
2.3	Sony PlayStation Eye (Courtesy of Wikipedia)	19
2.4	Don't Click It! website (Image screen captured from Don't Click It! website)	22
2.5	Comparison of Features and capabilities of various current solutions.	35
3.1	The system running in dual camera configuration.	40
3.2	Mock up of possible user interface showing a menu that may be navigated, objects that reveal tool tips when hovered over and highlighted gesture regions. These are designed to highlight the benefits of the system.	45
3.3	'Hole' left behind by a waving arm when using frame differencing.	48
3.4	using weighted averaging to 'learn' the background leaves no holes behind moving objects.	49
3.5	Flow diagram on the soccer demonstrations operation.	50
3.6	Lighting correction applied to an orange.	52
3.7	Flow diagram of proposed system. This will run once per frame.	56

3.8	Final soccer demonstration complete with animated goal keeper and direction indicator	56
3.9	System Detection of a kicking motion within the area of interest.	58
3.10	Developed system in use	60
3.11	Error with plane set at screen frame.	64
3.12	Error with plane set at 10 mm from screen frame.	65
3.13	Error with plane set at 20 mm from screen frame.	66
3.14	Error with plane set at 30 mm from screen frame.	67
3.15	Error with plane set at 40 mm from screen frame.	68
3.16	Error with plane set at 50 mm from screen frame.	69