Tension&Gaze: Gaze-Responsive UI Gated by Finger Tension

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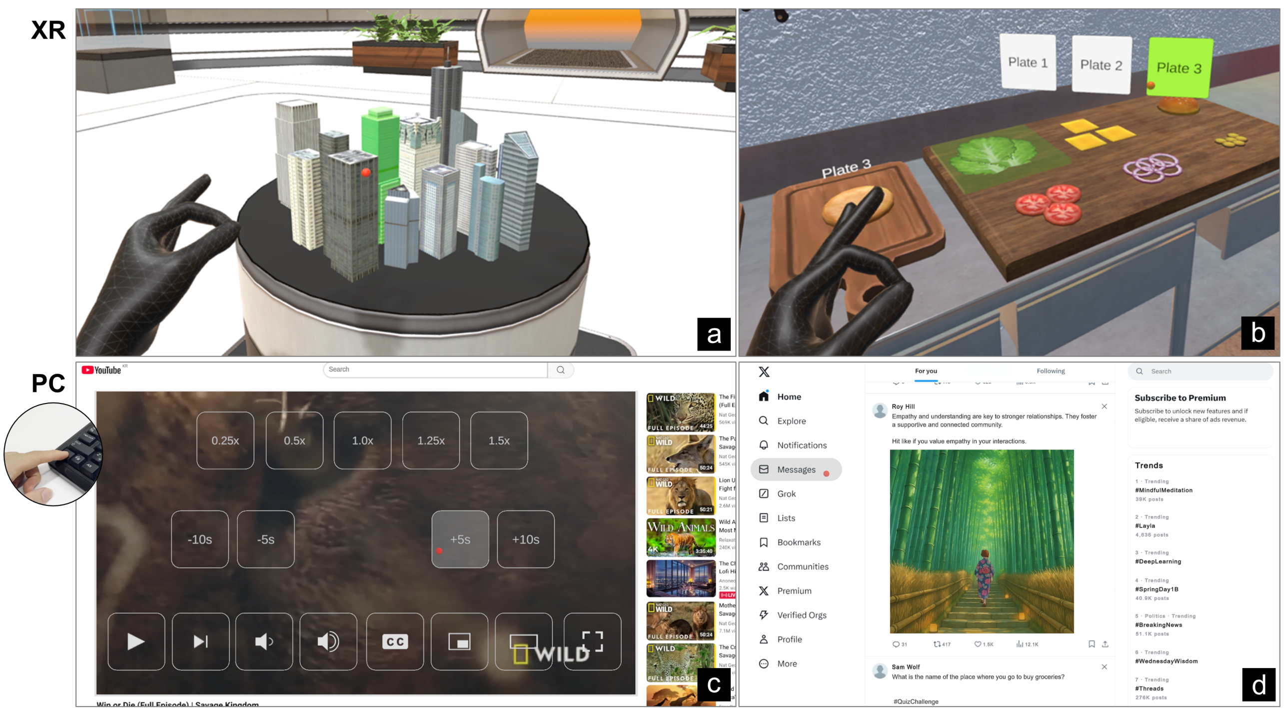

Figure 1: Demonstrating interaction scenarios of *Tension&Gaze*. (a) XR museum: a pinch-and-hold activates gaze-responsiveness on miniaturized building models, with its release triggering selection. Users can also perform occluded target selection with hand-based adjustment while pinching. (b) XR Cooking Room: a pinch-and-hold activates gaze-responsiveness of various targets for preparing a burger order. (c, d) PC-based Youtube and Social Media: holding a key activates gaze-responsive UIs, and releasing it triggers selection on the gazed target. A red dot, invisible to users, indicates the current gaze position.

Abstract

Gaze-interactive applications involve UI responses triggered by users' gaze, which is often involuntary and reflexive. While it may not cause false input 'registration' in eye+hand contexts, it can still produce unintended chains of visual UI responses. Although designers strive to minimize potential distraction and visual irritation, gaze input inherently carries noise; our eyes are *always-on*, often unconsciously scanning the visual field as active sensors, making this a persistent and challenging issue.

We argue that *always gaze-responsive* applications may not be favored by consumers, particularly when they risk causing visual discomfort. As a simple yet potentially effective alternative, this work introduces *Tension&Gaze* interaction techniques, in which UI

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elements become gaze-responsive only during moments of finger-induced tension, e.g., pinching in XR or key pressing on PC. This allows users to engage with gaze-adaptive UI changes only when desired, maintaining a comfortable default viewing experience. We demonstrate four application scenarios: XR Museum and Cooking Room using Meta Quest Pro, and PC Youtube and Social Media using a Tobii eye tracker-equipped laptop.

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1 Introduction

Integration of eye tracking into digital environments, including desktops and laptops [11, 13, 20], smartphones [1, 7, 36], tablets [6, 12], and Extended Reality (XR) headsets [8–10], has gained growing interests in gaze-interactive applications. Meanwhile, gaze-based input inherently involves UI response aids, primarily due to the limited eye tracking accuracy [4]. For example, basic *gaze-hover* feedback of color [32], opacity [8], or outline [28] changes are vital for confident pointing. A more intrusive form involves displaying a gaze cursor, allowing users to perceive tracking offsets in real time [8, 16, 33]. More dynamic UI adaptations, such as adjusting the spacing of elements or enlarging targets [22, 26], also help accommodate limited tracking resolution.

However, eye movements are largely involuntary and reflexive, often unconsciously scanning the visual field as active receptors of information [24]. Suppressing this natural motor behavior is known to impose significant cognitive strain [15]. While such eye movements may not directly cause false input registration in gaze+hand contexts, it can still trigger unintended chains of visual UI responses. Despite designers' efforts to minimize potential distraction and visual irritation, this inherent noise remains a persistent and challenging issue in the design of gaze-interactive applications.

We argue that *always gaze-responsive* applications may not be favored for consumer adoption, especially when they risk causing visual irritation. As a simple yet potentially effective alternative, we suggest the *Tension&Gaze* technique (Figure 2), in which UI elements remain unresponsive to gaze by default and become gaze-responsive only during a user-maintained period of finger-induced tension. This design approach gates *gaze-interactivity* through a tension medium (e.g., holding finger pinch in XR for 0.4 seconds), which is carefully crafted to avoid interfering with existing interaction vocabularies.

2 Tension&Gaze Idea

While the *quasimode*, a mode activated and sustained through kinesthetic tension [2, 30, 31], has been combine with gaze-input techniques, most prior work has not addressed the unintended UI response problem we target [5, 14, 21, 29, 34]. For example, techniques of Tagswipe [21], Hummer [5], Tobii Window Interaction Feature [14], Gaze+Hold [29], and Gaze & Touch [34] all continued to rely on gaze-responsive visual aids, such as gaze hovers or gaze cursor displays, throughout the interaction phase, i.e., even before a user initiates the tension.

To our knowledge, only a few documented instances align with the *Tension&Gaze* concept as we define it: the Look-Press-Look-Release technique in [23], and the Offset Menu and Ray Selection techniques in [37], all developed for desktop environments. Building on these foundations, we extend the idea to 3D XR environments, which feature a significantly larger visual field and utilize a different form of tension (i.e., finger pinching in freehand settings and button pressing in controller-based settings). We also broaden the scope by incorporating further dynamic UI feedback and adaptation scenarios, such as gaze-triggered dynamic spacing adjustment [26], document scrolling [35], information unfolding [27], and XR occluded object selection [3].

3 New Interaction Benefits

3.1 XR: Gated with Pinch Hold

Most existing XR systems rely predominantly on manual input methods like controllers and freehand gestures [17, 18]. Even in newer platforms like the Apple Vision Pro [8], which features gaze+pinch as one of its default input mechanism, *gaze interactivity* seems to remain largely limited, possibly due to the aforementioned issue of false visual responses and resulting discomfort.

Adopting a *Tension&Gaze* technique, interfaces could support unrestricted gaze-responsiveness without this concern. Users can perform gaze-based selection of any XR objects with dynamically adapting UIs when needed, i.e., beyond basic minimal gaze-hovers. In addition to facilitating object selection, new interactive opportunities like glanceable information unfolding [25] or gaze-driven menus [16] can be provided exclusively during the tension period. This is particularly beneficial in contexts like museums, where both uninterrupted viewing and interactivity are important.

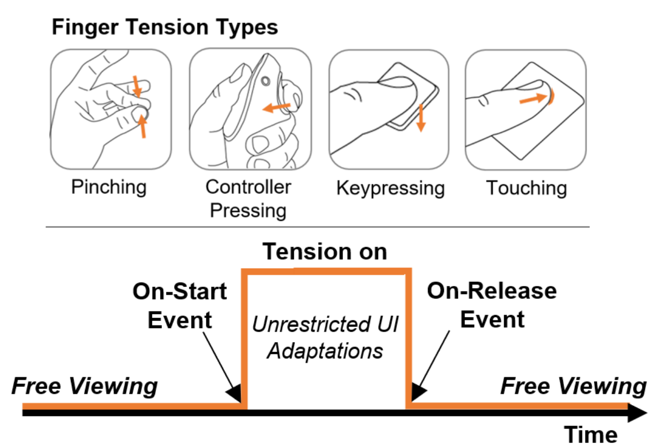

Figure 2: A conceptual illustration of the *Tension&Gaze* workflow. *On-Start Event* is a one-time event coupled with the tension onset, distinct from gaze-responses during the tension period. *On-Release Event* is another one-time event that occurs upon the release of tension; e.g., the triggering of selection on a gazed-at target.

3.2 PC: Gated with Press Hold

Contrasting XR, PC systems rely on a mouse or touchpad for pointing. In this context, *Tension&Gaze* can offer a faster and more effortless alternative. During a keypress hold, the screen UI can also dynamically adjust element spacing or enlarge hitboxes to account for eye tracking accuracy. This enables users to easily make selections with a simple press-look-release gesture (possibly forming a glued "chunk" [2]). This approach may reduce the need for continuous reliance on physical pointing devices while preserving a comfortable, non-responsive viewing state by default.

4 Demo Walkthrough

4.1 XR Demo Using Meta Quest Pro

4.1.1 XR Museum: free viewing, normal gaze+pinch object selection, occluded object selection. A user at metropolitan architecture museum are freely observing miniature building models. For more detailed presentation, the user makes a finger pinch for longer than 0.4 seconds. Holding the pinch and looking at the target building, which might be obscured by others, adjacent buildings respond together with gaze-hover feedback. Moving their wrist while maintaining the pinch activates fine-adjustments. The user then releases the pinch when the desired one is highlighted, getting detailed information including the building's established year, name, height, and more with an enlarged view.

4.1.2 XR Cooking Room: gaze+pinch object selection, menu selection, and gaze-triggered information unfolding. A user is in a burger restaurant kitchen and will prepare an order. Holding the pinch and looking at the wanted vegetable on the worktop triggers a gaze-hover response (e.g. the lettuce in Figure 1b). Releasing the pinch selects the vegetable and reveals buttons for plate placement. The user then pinches again, looks at a button, and release to place the lettuce on a plate. On the other side, patties and bacon are cooking on the stove. To check the remaining cook time before flipping, the user holds a pinch while gazing at the stove area, prompting time labels to appear (e.g., "0:23"). To flip a patty, the user gazes at the spatula hanging at the front while holding a pinch again.

4.1.3 PC Youtube & Social Media: gaze+keypress dynamic spacing adjustment, scrolling, button selection, menu triggering and selection. A user can control the Youtube video player with keypress-and-gaze, such as play/pause, rewind, change speed, adjust volume, or enable captions. Holding the "*gaze key*" on the keyboard and looking at the video player area, a gaze menu with large buttons appear, leveraging the tactile signal of clear state feedback [19]. Releasing the key selects the gazed button on screen and trigger the command. For close screen buttons challenging the gaze tracking offset, e.g., "like", "dislike", and "share" below the player, they dynamically adjusts the spacing upon gazed at, making gaze-based selection easier. To scroll, the user looks above or below the screen while holding the gaze key. The PC Social Media (Figure 1d) offers a similar keypress-and-gaze experience, allowing users to browse a social media without the need to constantly switch to a mouse or touchpad.

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