

Datacatcher

INTERACTION RESEARCH STUDIO (Goldsmiths)

The Datacatcher is a mobile device with a screen on one end and a large control dial set in a recess underneath. Short sentences appear on the screen every few seconds, providing facts about the surrounding area. Topics include average house prices, typical income, the number of pubs or of GP surgeries. Turning the dial one way scrolls through all the messages that have appeared on the device; turning it the other way accesses a set of poll questions that can be answered using the dial to select among alternatives.

We designed the Datacatcher to give a sense of the sociopolitical texture of the neighbourhoods where it is used. The messages are derived from public and private datasets, such as the census and credit agency data. We built the system to take an expanded view on how technologies might enrich our engagement with environmental issues. The Datacatchers are also relevant to current activities aimed at making data more transparent and empowering; indeed, during a test of an early version of the Datacatcher, one participant said that it presented 'Big Data for little people'.

We manufactured Datacatchers and distributed them to 130 people in the greater London area, who used them for up to two months. During this period, we employed teams of documentary filmmakers to interview participants about their experiences and to capture the multiple ways people engaged with the devices'

This film presents an edited selection of the 60 short documentaries that were made. The participant's voices demonstrate a range of experiences. Some were frustrated with the lack of variety of data or technical issues (whereas others found this mesmerizing); others described certain data sets as entertaining (bird droppings as a local issue), depressing (levels of unhappiness), interesting ('this is a racist area') incorrect ('1,720 people in Hackney have never worked'), and more. Each voice has its own story to tell, but they merge and mingle to create a kind of polyphonic interpretation of use.

Energy Babble

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The 'Energy Babble' is a networked audio device that broadcasts environmental and energy related content sourced from the Internet, especially Twitter, as well as contributions from the people using it. This content is read out by a cast of synthetic voices that give different inflections to the matters at hand. The result is a kind of energy-obsessed, automated talk radio that challenges the listener to consider a variety of viewpoints, reports and issues associated with energy-demand reduction. This effect is heightened by regular live updates from the National Grid as well as ambiguous jingle-like sounds.

The Interaction Research Studio has deployed a total of twenty-one Babbles to low carbon communities across the UK as part of its work to understand their practitioner knowledge and experience of energy-saving initiatives. This deployment has provided the research team with an in-depth and nuanced understanding of how communities and their members have their own unique focus and interests regarding energy, highlighting, for instance, that matters of energy tie into broader practices of sustainability as well as entanglements with other aspects of everyday life, such as income, food, and transport.



WEB SCIENCE 2015 #WebSci15
Exhibition



The Interaction Research Studio in the Design Department at Goldsmiths explores the design of computational systems for everyday life. Our practice-based research integrates design-led research methods with work on embedded and ubiquitous technologies to produce prototype products embodying new concepts for interaction. We don't pursue design as problem solving, but instead design research devices that raise issues, create situations, and provide resources for people to engage with in their own ways.

Because our prototypes are evocative and open ended, a crucial part of our process involves asking volunteers to live with our designs to see how their experiences evolve. The outcomes of our work include articles and exhibitions that expose our philosophies, methods and empirical work to academic, industrial and general publics.

www.gold.ac.uk/interaction

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