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CULTURES
OF CHANGE

SOCIAL ATOMS
AND ELECTRONIC
LIVES

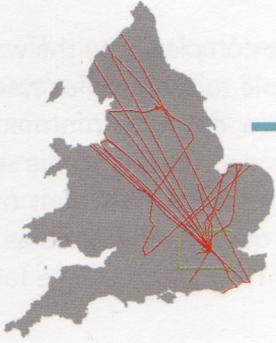
Curious Home

The Drift Table

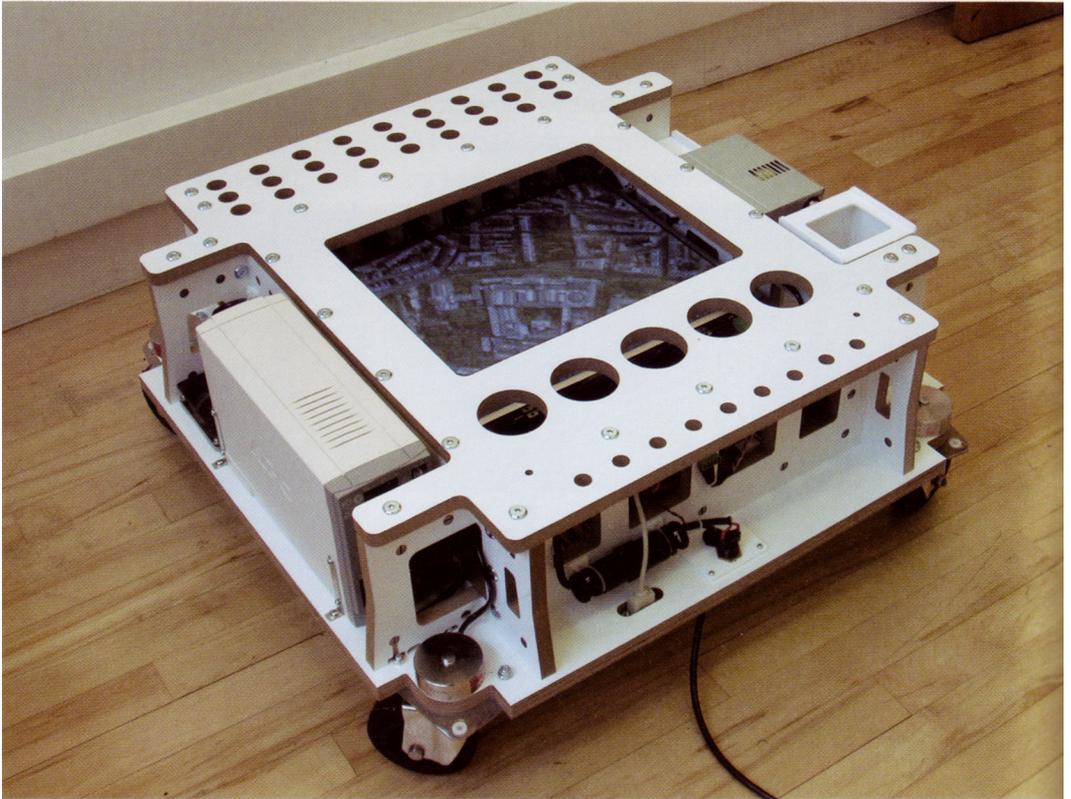
**Interaction Research Studio,
Goldsmiths, University of London.**

The Drift Table allows people to float over the British landscape from the comfort of their own home. The weight of objects on the coffee table controls the slow scroll of high resolution photography displayed on a central view-port, giving detailed visual access to all of England and Wales. Adding weight causes the table both to accelerate and to descend towards the landscape below. But progress is always slow – travelling from London to Devon may take days. So what do you do with it? You do with it as you wish. The Drift Table is not designed to solve problems, but to provide a resource in the home. You might use it to take journeys, or to revisit favourite holiday destinations. You might explore particular questions about geography or town planning. You might even just lose yourself and watch the world go by.

Developed before the advent of systems like GoogleEarth™, the Drift Table can be seen as an investigation into new ways that information might enter the home. What are the implications of having access to terabytes of imagery as a mundane part of everyday life? Does it democratise information? Does it dissolve the boundaries of the home? The Drift Table also explores how we relate to digital technologies in everyday life. Should they always be task-oriented? What do we mean by usability? Perhaps most fundamentally, the Drift Table explores how designs can be left open for interpretation. The piece provides a rich resource for the home, but doesn't imply how it should be used – instead, it allows users to find their own meanings within it.



Open-ended designs like the Drift Table are completed by the ways people use them. We give our prototypes to people to live with for weeks and months. Ethnographic observation provides detailed information about how they accommodate the pieces, but we complement this with more experimental documentary videos produced by independent filmmakers. These videos overlay meaning, showing users' own stories as filtered, edited and interpreted by the filmmakers. They serve as one facet in a multi-vocal account of our work.



The Interaction Research Studio explores the design of computational systems for everyday life. Our practice-based research integrates designed research methods with work on embedded and ubiquitous technologies to produce prototype products embodying new concepts for interaction. As an integral part of our process, we lend our prototypes to people to try in their everyday lives, with their stories becoming part of the designs.

