

Designing For Our (Sur)real Lives

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ABSTRACT

In this talk, I present an overview of design-led research that I have been pursuing with a multidisciplinary team to produce prototypes, methods and concepts appropriate to technologies for our everyday lives.

Author Keywords

Interaction design, prototypes, concepts, methods

ACM Classification Keywords

H5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous.

INTRODUCTION

Everyday life is characterised by values other than utility, efficiency and ease of use. Technologies should be as well. Applying insights gained from the workplace to other spheres risks turning the world into a workplace. We need also to understand how to support values such as curiosity, play and wonder.

With my team, I have been exploring how to design for our everyday lives with technology. Our research interweaves the *prototypes* that we build, the *methods* that we use, and the *concepts* that we explore.

For example, the Drift Table shows slowly moving aerial photography to give the impression of floating over the countryside. The Data Barometer displays want ads in the home depending on local wind direction. The Home Health Horoscope uses networked sensors to build a representation of domestic wellbeing, but subverts its findings by presenting them as a horoscope. In each case, the design suggests issues, but promotes user appropriation by undermining easy answers.

We develop systems such as these through provocative forms of user study such as the Cultural Probes, and use cultural commentators to provide material for polyphonic assessment of the long-term field trials we run. Studies such as these allow us to explore concepts that both guide and articulate our work.

Through our embrace of ambiguity, play and interpretation, we have developed a design-led alternative to traditional science and engineering approaches. I suggest that this approach is well suited for developing technologies that are meaningful in the everyday world.

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Cultural Probes are collection of tasks designed to evoke inspiring responses. They subvert traditional research relationships to emphasise interpretation and dialogue.



The Drift Table shows aerial photography controlled by weight upon its surface. It thwarts obvious expectations to promote curiosity and exploration.



Cultural commentators, such as documentary filmmakers, capture surprising engagements with technology. They provide resources for a polyphonic assessment of design.