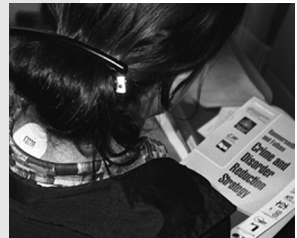


# Local Beat

06.99, 4 weeks



Fictionally situated as a component of a borough crime prevention strategy, this product proposed the engagement of local citizens and interest groups in a new kind of neighborhood watch. Locals participate in the affective monitoring of their environment, contributing readings of their psychosomatic state to a public map of the neighborhood.

## brief

Working from a brief set by Tony Dunne and Fiona Raby, the project was about designing for an extreme psychological condition. The outcome was intended to be (1) a design solution which acts as a placebo, giving phobic users a false sense of control, and (2) a fiction about the product as if it were implemented in its context of use.

# process

Taking the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, the design solution is a public map intended to give people back a sense of control over their environment. Extending the new Crime Prevention strategy of my local council and real statistics about the high occurrence of PTSD in urban areas traumatized by natural and sociopolitical disorders, the product is intended for a paranoid, hypervigilant populace living in a dystopic version of my own neighborhood.



In the course of the project several possible solutions were evaluated, including wearable alert and alarm systems, personal remotes for street lights and CCTV, and street furniture as rentable shelter. Idea generation stemmed from concepts in the work of the Situationists, Archigram, Krzysztof Wodiczko, and Lucy Orta.

Opening up a design space around psychology involved a methodology of putting myself into the user's shoes - part of the project involved staking out sites in my neighborhood and following people home, logging their reactions and behaviour, and imagining extreme scenarios around everyday places and events.

The final design solution evolved from my desire to make the product as real-world as possible, integrating existing policies, location-based networks in place, and visualization software currently being developed by a local research group. Decisions among types of sensors, wireless networks, and display technologies were based in research of the technology, robustness for public space, and immediate feasibility. Working from immersion in a user perspective, the solution involved designing extensions and convergences among diverse stakeholders, policies, and technologies.

## outcome | system:

The design proposed a system for generating a continually updated map of the psychosomatic state of the neighborhood. Participants wear an EMT patch which transmits readings of their stress level to local receivers, which is sent to GPS satellites, collected in online datasets, downloaded into customized visualization software, and projected onto a map located in the local subway station. Muggings, bomb scares, and traffic jams are reported visually by the collective emotional impact they have on the people involved.

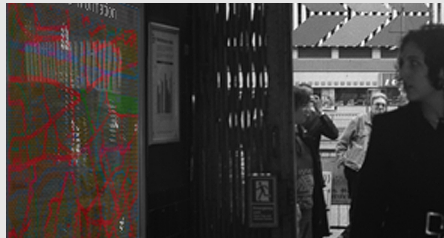


Incidents and patterns in the data are represented in an abstract manner, as spurts of activity or prolonged accumulation of anxiety. By conducting experiments with physical properties such as magnetism and tense materials, a visual solution was derived and refined through a series of graphic animations. Deciding between explicit or impressionistic representation of data, I took an iconic language from information design and applied it in an abstract manner, thus allowing the interpretation of the data to happen in the mind of the user rather than given by me (as the designer) or by the fictional client (the borough council).

## story:

The presentation of the project involved telling the story of the product in use. In the role of 'journalist', I presented the project as if I were documenting a system already in place, carrying out interviews with fictional locals. The value of the product was thus revealed: alongside weather reports and daily newspaper reports of stock progress, it was part of the morning ritual of a businessman; every day a woman who works late checks the map for the safest way home. These fictional scenarios also suggested potential misuse of the system: the use of publicly available data to target vulnerable people. Storytelling created a tension between fiction and reality - an emotionally extreme experience and a convincing solution - succeeding in thoroughly engaging the audience in the fantasy that I had designed.

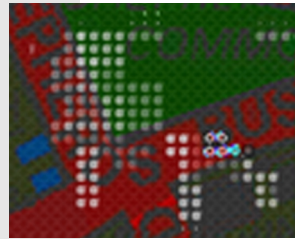
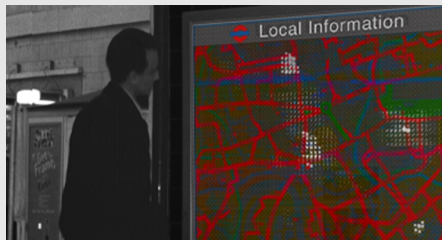
# project | implications:



Designing for a fictional psychological condition allowed an exploration of 'immaterial' aspects of technological products. The project introduced a methodology to open a new dimension within real, familiar sites, a dimension of psychological experience as an opportunity for design. I realized the role of the designer to be implicitly political, implementing products which change behaviour, public opinion, and social practices. (This is a view subsequently expanded upon in my master's thesis.) Storytelling was a way to communicate this, engaging the audience in imagining possible futures.

Applying technology to enable a culturally desirable design solution, the project extended design beyond the usual scope of architectural or design practice. The project allowed me to think about the value of a design product, considering things which architecture doesn't usually consider like public behavior and psychological experience, and things which design doesn't necessarily consider, such as the 'future' of a design product, and the space for appropriation and 'misuse' of products in their context of use.

# project | context:

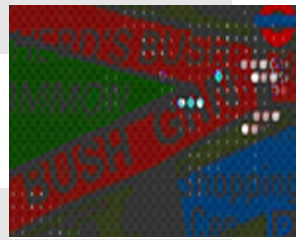


Technologically, the project can be situated in relation to current innovations in the areas of GPS and data visualization systems, particularly research in spatial analysis at the University College London, as well as to work in affective computing being carried out at MIT. Rather than inventing new technologies or even applications of technologies, this project recombines existing work in the field, revealing potential cultural and emotional effects of a technological system within a particular political context and in our everyday lives.

Conceptually, the project was inspired by writings on urban design by Mike Davis and Bill Hillier, and by the work of Dunne and Raby, Diller + Scofidio, and Julia Scher. Seen in relation to critical design and architectural practice, the design approach uses fiction, irony, and exaggeration to reveal the immaterial psychological, cultural, and political significance of design. The use of narrative as a methodology draws on my previous experience in publishing and design theory in order to tell a story about the role of design and technology in our daily lives. In designing for a specific condition and locality, this project focused on everyday experience, examining the cultural implications of technological applications.

# project | reflections:

Overall, the project was successful in fulfilling its stated aim and the project brief, as well as allowing me to explore a conceptual territory about an architectural site and a particular design approach. For the final presentation, I believe that the right tension between reality and fiction was struck. The difficulty comes in re-presenting the project to stand on its own, without a personally delivered 'performance' and the preconceptions of a CRD context. Perhaps a clearer definition of the 'role' of journalist, complete with forged props such as a newspaper and more journalistic graphics, would help to communicate the project for other audiences.



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## resources:

Asymptote Architecture, interactive environment for the New York Stock Exchange, 1999.

Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis, University College London [www.casa.ucl.ac.uk/](http://www.casa.ucl.ac.uk/)

GeoWeb project for National Spatial Data Clearinghouse

[www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~plewe/paperwww.html](http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~plewe/paperwww.html)

MEGRIN Europe (mapping geographical metadata) [www.megrin.org](http://www.megrin.org)

NASA International GPS Service [igscb.jpl.nasa.gov/](http://igscb.jpl.nasa.gov/)

Raby, F. 'Flirt' project [www.crd.rca.ac.uk/rcacrdresearch/](http://www.crd.rca.ac.uk/rcacrdresearch/)

UCL Geodetic Engineering Research [www.ge.ucl.ac.uk/research/geodetic/flinks.htm](http://www.ge.ucl.ac.uk/research/geodetic/flinks.htm)

Xerox PARC: Sunset Boulevard project [www.pair.xerox.com/cw/sunset/info.html](http://www.pair.xerox.com/cw/sunset/info.html)