



Two Designs for the Elderly
Interaction Research Studio



Introduction

Two new interactive prototypes have recently been designed by the Interaction Research Studio of Goldsmiths, University of London and given to groups of older people to live with. Focusing on spirituality and daydreaming, and designed for a group of cloistered nuns as well as inhabitants of a traditional care home, the devices look beyond stereotypes of frailty. Instead they help elderly people make connections with the world that are of interest and use to them.

The devices were developed in collaboration with researchers at Newcastle and Northumbria Universities as part of the New Dynamics of Aging (NDA) programme, a seven-year multidisciplinary UK research initiative with the ultimate aim of improving quality of life of older people. The programme is a unique collaboration between five UK Research Councils - ESRC, EPSRC, BBSRC, MRC and AHRC - and is the largest and most ambitious research programme on ageing ever mounted in the UK.

This work responds to the NDA call for ways to enhance people's experiences of growing older through a better understanding of the technological, social and cultural issues of ageing in the twenty first century. Existing work on how new digital technologies might benefit older people tends to emphasise devices that monitor older people to ensure their safety and reassure distant caretakers. Such work is valuable, but runs the risk of casting older people narrowly in terms of frailty and need. In contrast, we have been developing technologies and systems that create opportunities for engagement with issues of place, environment, and community, to support older people in pursuing their ongoing activities and interests.

Both of the prototypes have been built after substantial engagement with the particular communities of elderly people with which we worked. The final designs have been deployed for the volunteers to live with over extended periods of time, and thus don't merely suggest new possibilities for the role of technologies in older peoples' lives, but realise them.

About

The Interaction Research Studio, part of the Department of Design at Goldsmiths, University of London, designs new forms of interactive devices as a way of exploring human values and the ways they can be supported and enhanced by interactive technology. The studio is led by William Gaver and includes Andy Boucher, John Bowers, David Cameron, Nadine Jarvis, Tobie Kerridge, Robert Phillips and Alex Wilkie.

Visit www.gold.ac.uk/interaction for more examples of the Interaction Research Studio's work.

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Hi-res Images available on request. Please contact us if you wish to publish photographs of the Studio's work contained in this booklet.

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Focusing on
spirituality and
daydreaming

The Prayer Companion

Supporting Contemplative Practices

An electronic device developed by the Interaction Research Studio, in the Department of Design at Goldsmiths, University of London has been introduced into the lives of a group of nuns in York who otherwise abide by medieval traditions.

The Prayer Companion - or 'Goldie' as the Poor Clares nuns from St Joseph's in York call it - is a tabletop appliance with a small screen on the top.

Short sentences about current news or people's feelings continuously scroll across the screen reporting up-to-date events and concerns. The sentences are taken from a wide range of global news sites as well as web sites where people can write about their experiences and emotions.

William Gaver, from the Interaction Research Studio, said the overall effect of the Prayer

Companion is to give a view onto people's current concerns at individual and social, local and global levels. "We built the Prayer Companion to provide a resource for prayers of intercession after getting to know the Poor Clares nuns from St. Joseph's in York and understanding something about their spiritual lives. They have lived with the device for about a year and a half, and tell us that it has been valuable in keeping their prayers pertinent."

In the York monastery the Prayer Companion is kept on a table by a notice board in a central hallway that the Sisters pass through frequently. The device is designed to be unobtrusive: the screen faces upwards and can only be viewed from a fairly short distance, so that it is not unduly distracting to passersby.



The Prayer Companion has helped resource prayers of intercession.



The Photostroller

Drifting Through Photography



The wireless controller tunes into different categories of photographs and controls how far the topic may drift.



The wide variety of images encourage story-telling amongst the residents.

The **Photostroller**, an interactive device developed by the Interaction Research Studio, in the Department of Design at Goldsmiths, University of London has recently been introduced into a care home in York to enhance the daily lives of its residents.

The Photostroller shows a never-ending sequence of images drawn from the Internet, some related, others more random, like an electronic daydream. The flow can be influenced to stay close to a selected category of images, or allowed to drift away to more tenuously related subjects.

Prior its introduction, the research studio carefully studied the appropriate level of interaction for the elderly residents before designing the Photostroller to complement and enhance their daily lives. Part of this work included the design of a wireless control to enable the residents to tune the type of photographs displayed in the slideshow. The tuner includes a large dial and

sliding input mechanism specifically designed for people with limited hand mobility. A moment of wonder for the team, during the deployment, was witnessing a 99 year old arthritic resident handling the controller with relative ease.

As time goes by members of the research studio will be keeping in touch with the elderly residents in order to understand how the Photostroller adds to their daily lives. At the moment both the residents and the carers seem very happy with it. For instance, some residents have started to take responsibility for turning it on and explaining it to newcomers. Of interest to the design team is how the residents' engagement with the Photostroller might grow and change over the months to come.

Two Designs for Elderly People

The Prayer Companion and the Photostroller were developed in collaboration with Mark Blythe from Northumbria University, and Peter Wright from Newcastle University, for the Landscapes of Cross-Generational Engagement project, funded as part of the Joint Research Council's New Dynamics of Aging initiative.

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