

Designing with Environmental Data

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Overview

This conversation takes the form of a 'design crit' featuring three practice-based design research projects that take environmental data as a shared concern. It is a facilitated discussion between attendees and three researchers, each presenting material from different projects, from in-process designs to finished outcomes.

In adopting the design crit as a format, the presentation of design processes and design decision-making provide the impetus for an open and participatory exchange about environmental data as a research topic. There is also an ambition for this conversation to be documented and published as part of the conference proceedings.

Key catalysts

Presenters from three research projects at Goldsmiths, University of London will be joined by a facilitator, John Bowers, Professor of Creative Digital Practice, from Culture Lab, Newcastle University. The three projects are: Legible landscapes, Energy & Co-Designing Communities, and Citizen Sense.

In advance of the conversation, a selection of attendees will be briefed as commentators, each providing a different mode of capture including sketching, transcription and photography.



Figure 1: From left to right; The Indoor Weather Stations (Legible Landscapes), Energy Babble (Energy & Co-Designing Communities) and Citizen Sensing.

Topic

Citizen climate data, energy demand reduction, and urban air quality were start points for these three projects. However, rather than prototyping and testing technology platforms that present environmental data in order to illicit behaviour change, these projects have taken speculative approaches to design research. Overlapping project themes include the interpretation of environmental data, data as a design material, and making and using data as a practice.

By taking the design crit as the format of this conversation, we aim to give focus to intentions, themes and decisions not served well by papers. Additionally we seek to experiment with modes of documentation that capture emergent forms of knowledge associated with live critique. Rather than treating design practice as tied to the studio, we demonstrate that interpretation and evaluation can arise from a group of participants.

Framing

This conversation has three framing concerns. The first is a theoretical concern about environmental data, and how behaviour change for energy demand reduction, as well as citizen sensing for addressing air pollution together with policy programmes may be variously shaped by engagements with these data (Hronn et al., 2012; W. Gaver, W. et al., 2013; Gabrys, 2013). Secondly, we are mindful of a recent move to developing alternative forms of documentation and knowledge sharing for empirical research practices where designing and making systems are a feature (Bowers, 2012; Jarvis et al., 2012). Thirdly, we are motivated to explore the role of diverse and active participants who act as commentators and therefore shape design knowledge (W. Gaver, 2007; Kerridge, 2009).

Planning

The crit and conversation will run as a 90-minute session. Works from each of the three design projects will be presented for 10 minutes, with each presentation followed by approximately 10 minutes of facilitated critical discussion. Extra time is allocated to introduce and conclude the session.

Running alongside the crit, a group of invited commentators – for example, writers, social scientists, designers – will capture the critique in a manner specific to their discipline. For example, an illustrator may "draw" the conversation. We intend for their commentaries to be published during the conference, for example, as part of the conference proceedings, and we would be open to suggestions to how this could work.

References

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