CONVERSACUBE

LAUREN McCARTHY

Proposal

1 Summary

2 Concept

3 Performance Installation

4 Web Presence

5 Technical Requirements

6 Related Works

7 CV

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1 Summary

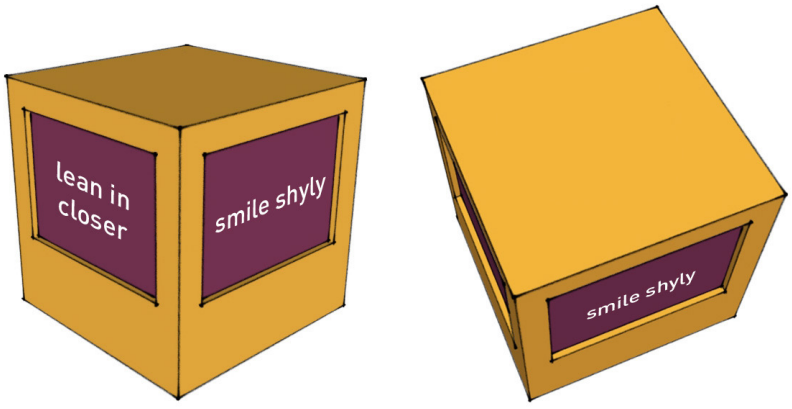
The Conversacube is a small box meant to form the centerpiece of any conversation situation. The box sits in the middle of all conversants, with one face facing each person. Each outward face of the box has a small screen and a microphone embedded just inside. As the conversation progresses, each person is personally prompted with directions or lines to keep the conversation running seamlessly with minimal awkward or uncomfortable moments. The microphones monitor audio levels of each participant and the cube responds accordingly, adjusting prompts to enliven, mediate conflict, or balance conversation as necessary.

The public performance of this piece will consist of a series of interactive demos of the object in various locations throughout lower Manhattan, including subway stops, cafes, bars, and other places of public congregation. Several performers will pose as market researchers conducting user tests with the device as if it is a product coming soon to market. The public will be invited to try out the cube, whether as groups of friends, lovers, strangers, etc., to see for themselves how it affects their interactions and their assumptions about socially expected behavior.

The piece will be performed as part of the Conflux Festival Oct 8-10 (www.confluxfestival.org).

2 Concept

The intent is to create an object that on one hand, is suggestive of an actual commercial product that uses technology to improve interactions, and on the other hand, is critical of our dependence on technology and choreographed social routines, hinting at a dystopic future where we sacrifice our autonomy to avoid having to face anything uncomfortable. The Conversacube asks users to consider in which of these directions we're heading. Or is it both? Are we consciously aware of the future we're building with all of our technological innovation and "progress"?



3 Performance Installation

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User feedback surveys will be administered, and participants will be interviewed on video, soliciting opinions on the look and feel of the device, the overall quality of their experience with it, and whether they would buy one for their homes or workplaces. The goal is to create a situation where the public participants are not sure whether this is a serious product or an art piece, hopefully inspiring thoughts about the implications of such a device or related technologies.

4 Web Presence

A website will be established at conversacube.com where the Conversacube will be presented as an actual product. The site will feature mock video advertisements that introduce and demonstrate the product, suggesting uses in home and social life where it would “ease” interactions. The intent of the website is to further push the boundary between non-fiction and fiction on which the product is situated.

5 Technical Requirements

The performance installation requires only a space for up to four people to comfortably surround the cube (chairs or bar stools or standing room around a table of some sort). The performance team will consist of 3 performers - 2 performers interacting directly with participants and 1 filming the installation and performance. The video recording will be limited to the installation area, and we will obtain permission from each participant before filming them. The installation will last for approximately 1 hour.

TOOLS FOR IMPROVED SOCIAL INTERACTING

A series of wearable devices that use sensors to condition the behavior of the wearer to better adapt to expected social behaviors. Exploring the potential for technology to shape how we think, feel, and act, and questioning our social expectations, attempting to better understand the function and worth of them. Are there alternatives ways of interacting that leave more space for individual expression, thought, and connection?

The Happiness Hat trains the wearer to smile more by measuring smile size and driving a metal spike into the back of the head when the wearer stops smiling. The Anti-Daydreaming Scarf detects if the wearer is engaged in conversation with another person, and vibrates periodically to remind the wearer to pay attention and stop daydreaming while he is. The Body Contact Training Suit requires the wearer to maintain frequent body contact with others in order to hear normally. If the wearer stops touching someone for too long, static noise begins to play through the hood.

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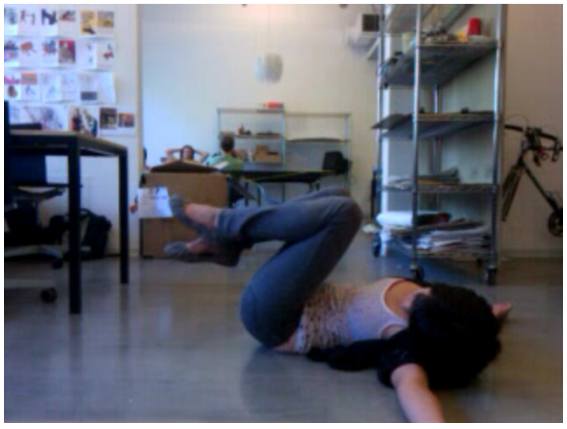
SCRIPT



For once month, I gave control of my life to the internet. Every day, a script of my life for the following day (called the 'Tomorrow Script') was posted online. For example, on January 31st, the script for February 1st was posted.

Anyone that visited the site was able to edit the tomorrow script, wiki style. Participants could script lines for me, stage directions, costumes, settings, etc. They could also write themselves into my script. They could make additions as well as remove or modify previously created script content. The participants could choose to make their edits anonymously or not. At midnight, the Tomorrow Script was closed for editing, becoming the script of my life for the next day, posted on the site as the 'Today Script'.

Throughout the day, I would make every attempt to perform every line and detail of the script, though improvisation beyond the script was allowed. This was a durational performance that lasted for one month non-stop.

lauren-mccarthy.com/script

RELATION ALTERATIONS: TABLE

What if we could discreetly give feedback to the company we keep? Would it lead to better conversations or would it drive us crazy? How far are of a stretch is this from our current technology-mediated interactions with each other?

A home object for affecting shared experience. Users move foot pedals to rate their current enjoyment of their experience with others at the table. The tabletop brightens or dims to reflect the cumulative group rating. If the enjoyment level drops dangerously low, the table flashes a distress signal to call for help from others that might save the conversation.

lauren-mccarthy.com/relationalterations

LAUREN McCARTHY

Education

University of California, Los Angeles, CA
Master of Fine Arts (Design | Media Arts)
Anticipated June 2011

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA
Bachelor of Science in Art and Design
Bachelor of Science in Computer Science
June 2008

Skills

Software development, graphics, interactivity, and web programming (Java, C++, OpenGL, openFrameworks, Processing, Python, C#, Objective-C, Scheme, Matlab, HTML, Javascript, PHP, MySQL, Flash, ActionScript). Web, print, experience, and interaction design knowledge. Proficient with design software including Adobe CS, Final Cut Pro, After Effects, AutoCAD, Max 3DS, Lightscape. Electronics/physical computing experience. Fabrication skills, including metalworking, woodworking, casting.

Exhibitions / Awards

2010
Dean's Scholarship, UCLA
SIGGRAPH 2010 Art Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
InterACT (solo), UCLA, Los Angeles, CA
Interaction10, IxDA Conference, SCAD, Savannah, GA
NC State College of Design Symposium, Raleigh, NC
GADGET OK!, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA
WHAT IF? 60x60x60, Axiom, Boston, MA

2009
Good News/Bad News, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA
Awesome Foundation Fellowship Grant
Twitter Artist in Residence, Brooklyn Art Museum, NY
Overhere, Gershwin Hotel, New York, NY
American Wing Interactive Displays and Wayshowing, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
Monticello Visitor Center, Charlottesville, VA
US Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC
The Politics of Shoes, Mobius, Boston, MA
Typos Edition 01, Sarai Media Lab, New Delhi, India

2008
Zones of Emergency, MIT, Cambridge, MA
NETWORKOUT: Thesis Show (solo), MIT, Cambridge, MA

2007
Exposure: Photography Show, MIT, Cambridge, MA
Placemap, Pixelspaces, Ars Electronica, Austria, Linz

Experience

Oblong Industries, Los Angeles, CA
Design/Software Intern, June 2010 - Present
Design and implementation of visual feedback and interface for gesture interaction, with C++ and OpenGL.
oblong.com

UCLA Design | Media Arts Program, Los Angeles, CA
Teaching Asst, Interactivity (Prof. Casey Reas), 2009-10
Teaching Asst, Type in Motion (Rafael Macho), 2010
Teaching Asst, Video (Prof. Christian Moeller), 2010

Small Design Firm, Cambridge, MA
Designer/Software Programmer, 2008-09
Design and implementation of interactive installations for museums, galleries, and institutions.
www.smalldesignfirm.com

MIT Visual Arts Program, Cambridge, MA
Zones of Emergency Blog Developer, 2008
Worked on design and development of public facing blog to document and publicize the MIT Visual Arts Program Lecture Series. (Advisor: Amber Frid-Jimenez)

Continuum, West Newton, MA
Brand Environments Intern, 2007
Worked with team on research, concept generation and production of experience design projects. Carried out independent concept project, redesigning music store experience from research to design and final proposal.
www.dcontinuum.com

MIT Media Lab, Cambridge, MA
Undergraduate Researcher, 2006
Worked in Context Aware Computing group on PlaceMap Project to create a user-centered interactive map. Developed interactive visual display demos to introduce PlaceMap project to the public. (Advisor: Ted Selker)

MIT Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory, Cambridge, MA
Undergraduate Researcher, 2005
Classified, and analyzed patterns of software bugs to identify predictors of software failure and develop 'failure-oblivious' computing strategy. (Advisor: Martin Rinard)

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