

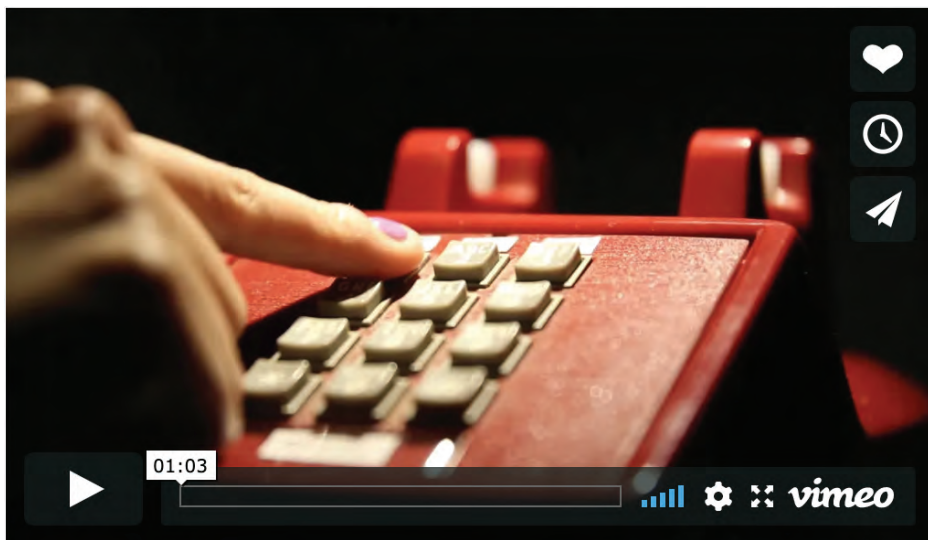
WONDER CORNER

Masters thesis project at ITP, Tisch School of the Arts, NYU

Role: concept development, research, experience design (UX, user testing, prototyping), software architecture and development, fabrication

Media: analog phone, phone software, custom-built phone booth, custom lighting, projection

Wonder Corner is a participatory installation that invites adults into a private and safe space to wonder about the world. It is a place where no one can see or hear them and they can ask anything they want.



Research shows that compared to children adults are less likely to seek out help, share and ask questions about things they don't know. Somewhere along the way of growing up, they lose the openness of their former curiosity. Adults think they're supposed to have all the answers and become embarrassed about what they don't know. This lead me to my research question:

What kind of experience would encourage adults to be as curious as children and wonder about the world?

My own research

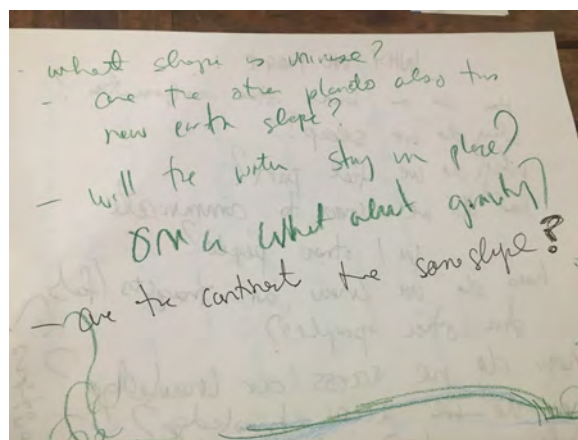
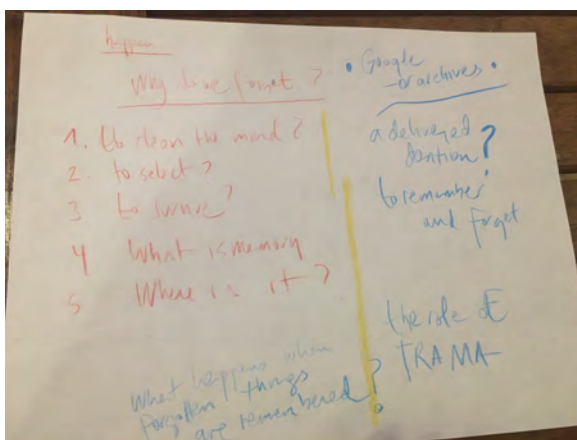
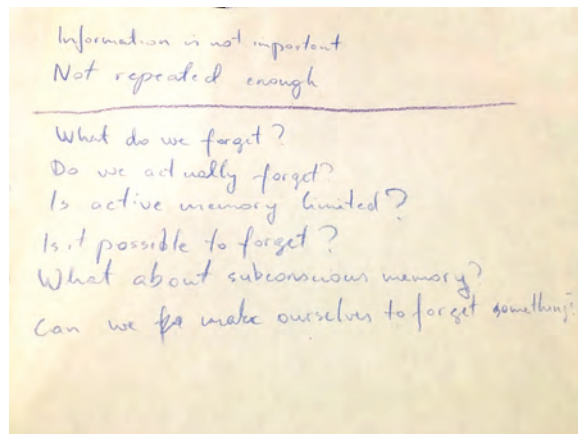
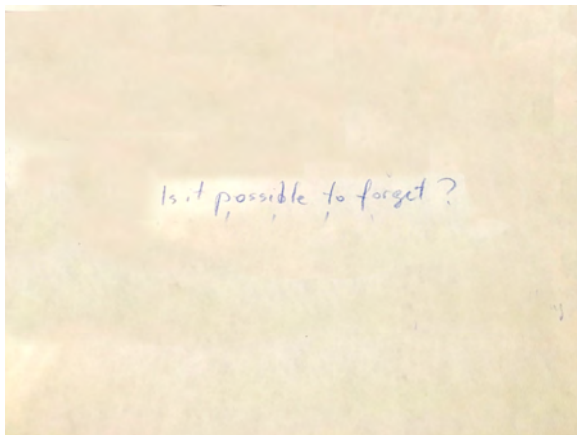
I started off by doing my own research trying to figure out what were some of the things adults were embarrassed they didn't know and what were the questions they always wanted to ask but never had. Questions varied from very technical ones like How does Excel work? to more general ones about life like How people perceive me? or Why are people so afraid all the time?

Unlearning workshop

I ran a workshop trying to figure out what encourages adults to ask questions and what kind of questions make them wonder. I based the workshop on the technique that educator Sugata Mitra used during his SOLE workshops with children. At the beginning of the workshop children are given a big question and left alone to figure out the answer.



What I found out from the workshop with adults was that instead of looking for answers, they just kept asking additional questions based on the previous experiences they had. Questions inspired questions.

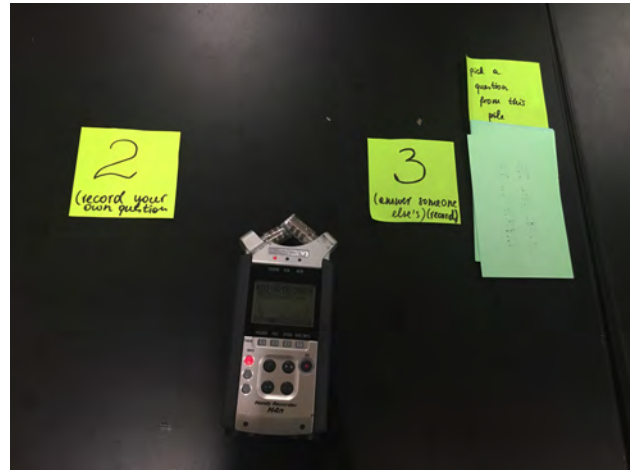
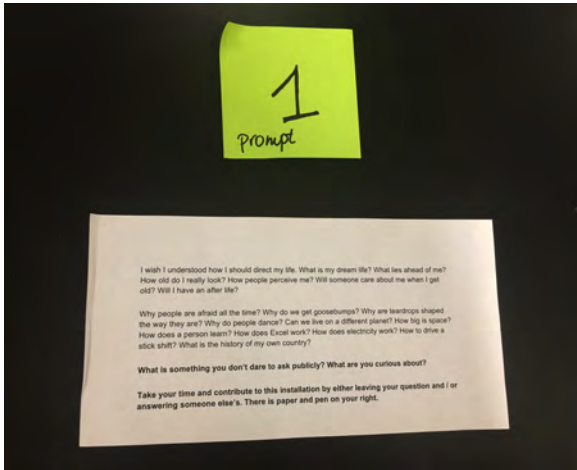


The workshop also showed that the moment adults who participated in the workshop were given permission to ask questions, they instantly thought of more. As well as it was a two fold experience: individuals themselves should want to ask questions and at the same time community around them should encourage their asking.

That's when I realized I wanted to create a participatory installation where adults could ask and answer questions they were afraid to ask in public.

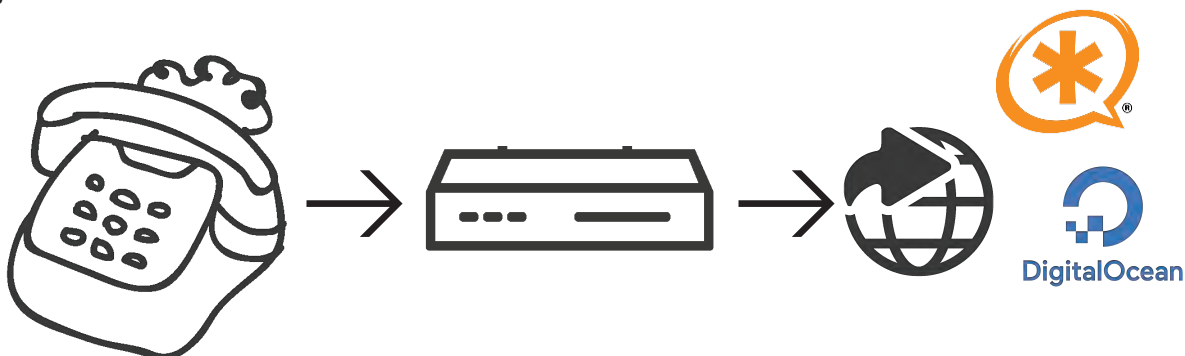
User tests

I did a few user tests to figure out what kind of interaction I should have. I learned that hearing and seeing other people's questions prompted to think about their own, that people related to voice more than reading and always wanted to sit down.



Phone

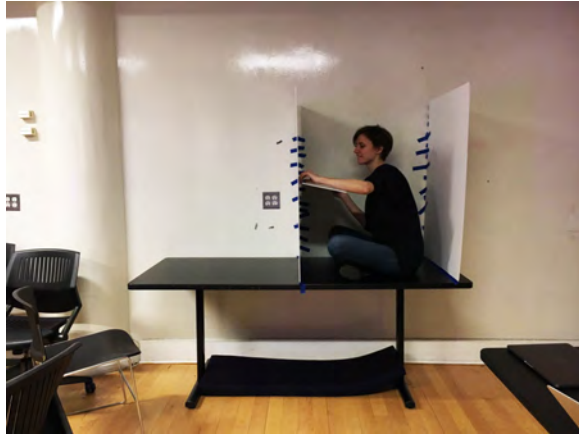
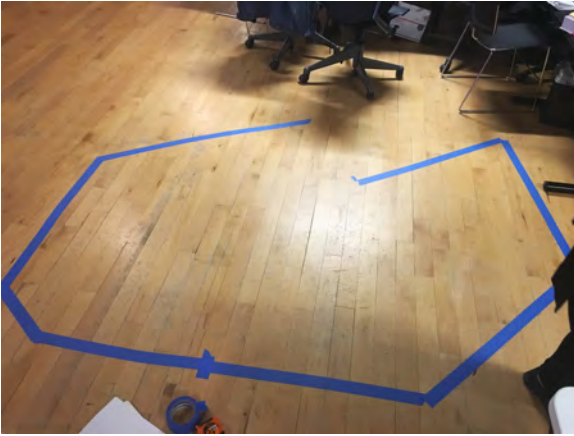
I asked people if there was an object they would trust to leave their questions with. A lot of the people mentioned a phone, therefore it became one of the main objects in the installation.



I used Asterisk, an open source software for communication applications, to turn an analog phone into a digital one and coded my own interactions.

Installation

When I was user testing how people interact with the phone I noticed that if there was even a little chance that someone might hear what people said, they started whispering: on the contrary, I wanted to design a space that would be familiar, cozy and private to ask and answer questions.



After some testing of what form and size the space should be, so it would allow adults to also shape their bodies as those of children, I built a custom booth with the steps attached that let people climb inside. Inside there is a cushion and pillows, so people are comfortable sitting in front of the phone and asking their questions.



Website

From the user tests I also learned that people would like to see what other people asked or answered, but not necessarily as part of the installation. To make this work, I decided to build a website repository that would hold all the participant contributions. For me it was a proof that asking questions is a way to contribute to a bigger conversation of wonder and awe about the world.



To make the website work, I was anonymously recording everything people shared and had a Python script running that used Google Speech API to transcribe the audio input and then display that input on the website.

Final user journey



Interaction starts when participant approaches the booth to read the introductory text projected on the outside; Then they pull back the curtain, get inside and sit in front of the phone.

As they pick up the phone, they hear a welcome message and are prompted with other people's questions, as well as instructions what to do next.

Participant has three choices:

- dial #1 to ask own question
- dial #2 to listen to someone else's question
- dial #3 to answer someone else's question

Here is my ITP thesis presentation about the design process:

