



STAPLE
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THE SOCIAL INSURGENTS

14 - 19 SEPTEMBER 2012

A DEMOCRATIC CATALOGUE

STAPLE
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FOREWORD

How can one be insurgent when overt protest is stifled or ignored? How does one rebel against a culture dominated by a totalising market logic without looking quaint or unwordly?

This exhibition suggests the possibility of quietly disengaging from the large systems of media, commerce and government that overhang our lives. The collection may be small, but the work makes big statements: One media mogul shouldn't control our news. One Internet company shouldn't supply all our maps. There can't be just one version of the Iraq war.

But these social insurgents are neither heroic individuals nor isolated cranks. We call the exhibition the 'Social Insurgents', but we're not just referring to the individuals exhibiting here - many of the pieces shown here enhance and distill work done by larger publics. i.e. Bridle's books are publishing 'our' views on the Iraq war. Muruganatham's low cost sanitary napkin machines not only provide hygienic female sanitary products at an affordable price to those below the poverty line but it also provides jobs for women. The Balloon Toolkit forms part of a larger network of grassroots mapping available online, Prayer Companion re-presents social news as potential resource for prayer.

We like to think that this exhibition echos some of the themes and tactics of our exhibitors. In occupying the Deptford Town Hall, the baroque headquarters of a former council, it follows a number of high profile protests that took place here in the recent past. Moreover, in choosing a site that is off the well-established design trail (for the London Design Festival these days, that means the affluent West Brompton quarter) we want to emphasise the disparity in these recessionary times between design for the elite and the more grassroots efforts shown here, and to suggest that real change is as likely to come from below as above. Finally, in gathering work that, in some cases, is years old, we mean to question the tendency for LDF to value novelty, and suggest instead that what is new here is the way that these pieces come together to suggest a new landscape for design.

This exhibition is not a polemic, however. In fact, it is a methodological experiment, an exploration in our ongoing research on the sociocultural possibilities of new technologies. We are trying to open a space and ask questions, not create a definitive manifesto. Our catalogue reflects this: inspired by the Society of Independent Artists, we are allowing visitors to collect individual pages and collect them together as they see fit, thus allowing each of us to curate our own version of the exhibition. We hope your version will be thought-provoking, inspiring and optimistic.

INTERACTION RESEARCH STUDIO, SEPTEMBER 2012

SOSOLIMITED

PRIME NUMERICS

A seven-minute reel from a live remix of the Third UK Prime Ministerial Debate which took place on April 29 2010. Sosolimited analysed and reshaped the BBC broadcast of the debate in real-time for a theatre audience at the People's Museum History in Manchester, England.

Their software (which incorporates the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count databases for analysing speech), allowed them to sample and analyse the video, audio, and closed captioned text of the television signal. Through a series of visual and sonic transformations, Sosolimited reconstituted the material, revealing linguistic patterns and exposing the content and structures – usually confined to the knowledge of the spin doctors. E.g. a greater personal pronoun count for David Cameron would make him appear more personable than Nick Clegg and Gordon Brown.

Sosolimited are currently preparing new work for the live analysis of the 2012 Presidential debates between President Obama and Mitt Romney beginning in October.



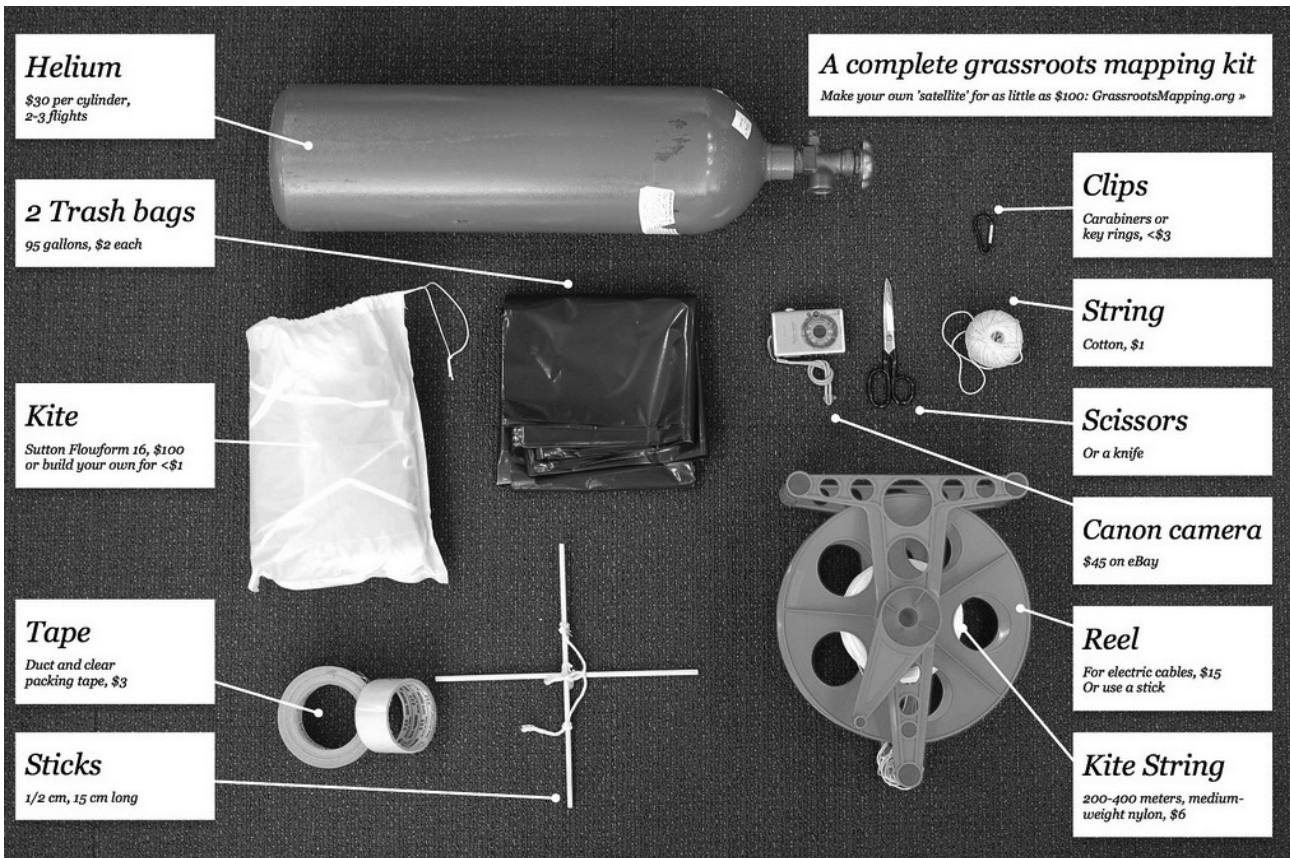


PUBLIC LABORATORY

BALLOON MAPPING KIT

Once assembled, this kit, developed by community researchers from the Public Laboratory for Open Technology and Science enables you to make your own aerial photos from up to 1000 ft. Using the open source MapKnitter web-based software, you can stitch the resulting images into a web-viewable map - your own "counter-cartography" Google Maps. Use it to tell a different story from the "official" map - document contamination (it was used to map the BP oil spill) or wetlands loss, or to record a temporary condition like the Occupy Oakland encampment.

To learn more about balloon mapping, check out the open source documentation on the Public Laboratory website. In addition to this kit, you'll need a camera that can do continuous shooting and a 2-liter soda or juice bottle.





PUBLIC LABORATORY CONTRIBUTORS

GULF OIL SPILL, GRASSROOTS MAP

Public Laboratory, a group of activists, educators, technologists, and community organizers came together to organise the Gulf Oil Mapping project in 2010. Using their Balloon Mapping Kit (exhibited at the top of the stairs), the project aimed to document aerial imagery of the oil spill that could be used for environmental and legal use. All of the imagery from the project has been released into the public domain.

The large printed map, 'After the Oil Spill', was created by project contributors Cesar Harada & Hunter Daniel. The image shows high definition images that have been stitched together and overlaid on a satellite Google Map of the area, clearly depicting the purple oil spill across the coastline.

Bay Jimmy LA, After the Oil Spill

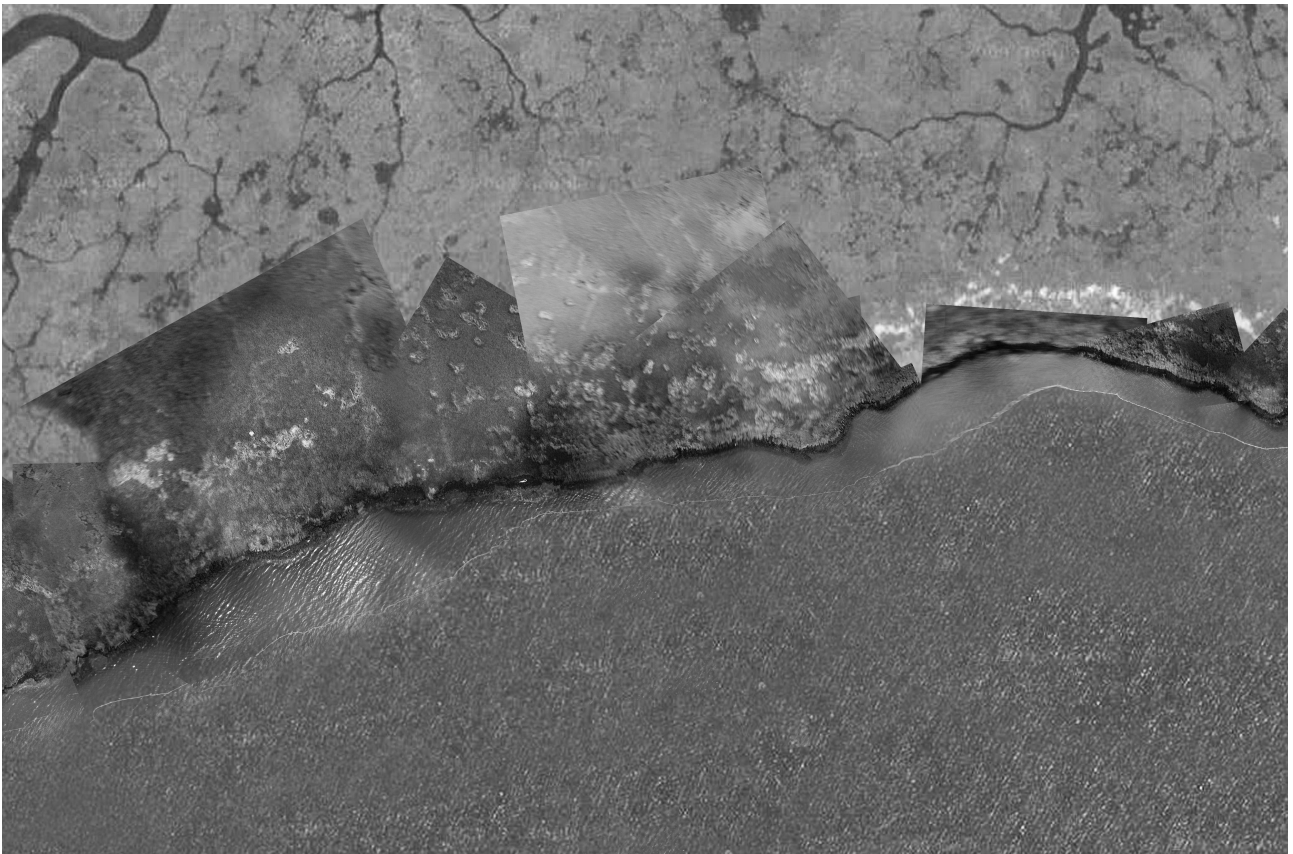
Map created by: Cesar Harada & Hunter Daniel

Location: 29.468400; -89.911300

Time: 2010 July 22 @ 10:30AM

Basemap: Google 2010

Image available for download at: opensailing.net/download/20100722bayjimmy/





INTERACTION RESEARCH STUDIO

THE PRAYER COMPANION

The Prayer Companion was designed for a community of Poor Clares nuns. Taking vows of poverty and enclosure, the nuns lead a simple life bound within the walls of the Convent. Their monastic practices haven't changed much since medieval times. Contact with the outside world is mostly via Catholic Newspapers, BBC radio 4 and the occasional look at the BBC news home page on the newly donated desktop computer.

The project originally set out to address the nuns as an ageing population but the designers became curious about how they decided what to pray for. Concerned about how media bias might affect the nuns (does Murdoch have a direct line to God?), the Prayer Companion delivers news headlines from around the globe, ranging from Aljazeera to Russia Today. These are interspersed with excerpts from social networking sites, both to capture a sense of everyday concerns, and to alert the nuns to those who may need intervention yet don't ask for it (but Tweet about it).

The nuns have been living with the Prayer Companion for more than three and half years now and say that it does help to keep their prayer pertinent. This is an exact replica of Prayer Companion in the monastery, displaying the same text in real-time. There is also currently a replica in MoMA, New York.





INSTITUTE OF APPLIED AUTONOMY

GRAFITTI WRITER

While robots are generally multifunctional and useful for a broad variety of duties such as high precision activities, telepresent operations, data collection, and so on, one function above all other is of greatest interest to the Institute of Applied Autonomy. That is the ability of robots to be deployed into situations that are dangerous or hazardous to humans. The IAA have inverted this model, and have appropriated militarised social space with robots. Their Contestational Robots included a propaganda-distribution robot and several graffiti-writing machines. The best-known of these is the GraffitiWriter and has inspired subsequent robotic graffiti projects and activist technologies.

GraffitiWriter was first deployed in 1999 at anti-globalisation protests in New York. It is basically a combination of a remote control toy car linked with air brushes and some simple chip technology. This robot can lay down slogans, much like a mobile dot matrix printer, at speeds of 15mph, and can be deployed in any highly controlled space or public event from a remote location. To date, GraffitiWriter has never been confiscated and it now faces the unlikely prospect of dying of old age.



ARUNACHALAM MURUGANTHAM

LOW COST SANITARY NAPKIN MACHINES

The high-cost of female sanitary products means that many women in rural India often have to choose between purchasing food or sanitary products. This forces women to have to improvise with unhygienic materials, and so Arunachalam Muruganatham set about to develop a low-cost alternative. It proved a difficult process because in rural India menstrual health is still a societal taboo, in some communities women are forbidden from entering the kitchen because they are considered unclean during menstruation. He discovered that branded napkins were made from cellulose converted from pine wood fibre, and that the technology to do this is prohibitively expensive (and therefore controlled by multi-nationals such as Procter and Gamble).

Eventually Muruganatham devised a small-scale solution. Powered by foot pedals, his machine de-fibres the cellulose, compresses it into napkin form, seals it with non-woven fabrics, and sterilizes it with ultraviolet light. His machine makes 1,000 napkins a day, which retail for about 10 rupees (11 pence) for a package of eight. But what makes this project even more inspirational is this: Muruganatham doesn't sell the napkins commercially but the machine to make them. These are sold to rural communities in India, providing affordable sanitary wear and jobs for women.

There are about 600 machines deployed in 23 states across India and Arunachalam Muruganatham is expanding his model across the globe.





JAMES BRIDLE

THE IRAQ WAR: A HISTORY OF WIKIPEDIA CHANGELOGS

This particular book—or rather, set of books—is every edit made to a single Wikipedia article, The Iraq War, during the five years between the article’s inception in December 2004 and November 2009, a total of 12,000 changes and almost 7,000 pages.

It amounts to twelve volumes: the size of a single old-style encyclopaedia. It contains arguments over numbers, differences of opinion on relevance and political standpoints, and frequent moments when someone erases the whole thing and just writes “Saddam Hussein was a dickhead”.

Bridle describes this as historiography (the study of the methodology and development of History as a discipline.) This is what culture actually looks like: a process of argument, of dissenting and accreting opinion, of gradual and not always correct codification.

And for the first time in history, we’re building a system that, perhaps only for a brief time but certainly for the moment, is capable of recording every single one of those infinitely valuable pieces of information.





FURTHER INFORMATION

CREDITS AND FURTHER READING

THE SOCIAL INSURGENTS

CURATED BY THE INTERACTION RESEARCH STUDIO

<http://www.gold.ac.uk/interaction/>

SOSOLIMITED

<http://sosolimited.com/>

PUBLIC LABORATORY AND CONTRIBUTORS

<http://grassrootsmapping.org/>

<http://publiclaboratory.org/>

INTERACTION RESEARCH STUDIO

<http://www.gold.ac.uk/media/The%20Prayer%20Companion.pdf>

<http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2011/talktome/objects/145526/>

APPLIED INSTITUTE OF AUTONOMY

<http://www.appliedautonomy.com/>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Institute_for_Applied_Autonomy

<http://we-make-money-not-art.com/archives/2007/06/interview-with-l8.php>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?vID9RiS5OEBsQ>

ARUNACHALAM MURUGANANTHAM AND

<http://newinventions.in/>

<http://www.fastcoexist.com/1679008/an-indian-inventor-disrupts-the-period-industry>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?featurelplayer_embedded&vIV4_MeS6S0wk

JAMES BRIDLE

<http://shorttermmemoryloss.com/>

<http://booktwo.org/james-bridle/>

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