Interaction
Design
Institute
Ivrea

TELECOM ITALIA
progetto Italia

Interaction Design Institute Ivrea
Via Montenavale 1
10015 Ivrea (To)
Italia
Tel: +39 0125 422 11
Fax: +39 0125 422 101
info@interaction-ivrea.it

STRANGELY *familiar*

Unusual Objects for Everyday life.

Applied Dreams Workshop | 10/22 January 2005

Credits:

Project coordination and project lead: Heather Martin.
Design Advisors: Dario Buzzini & Heather Martin.
Electronic Engineering: Massimo Banzi & Gianluca Martino.
Physical prototyping & modelmaking: Edoardo Brambilla & Dario Buzzini.
Videos and DVD production: Simone Muscolino.
Pictures: Ivan Gasparini.
Design and Illustrations: Dario Buzzini.

Special thanks to:

Steven Blyth, Federico De Giuli and Progetto Cluster, Gianluca Martino, Stefano Mirti, Myriel Milicevic .

Context:

Nearly all domestic devices contain digital circuits:
We find them in our washing machines, radio's, toasters, microwaves, alarm clock's, VCR's, toothbrushes and telephones. If we begin to trace the history of these devices we soon see how we have accepted a shift from a comprehensive world of simple analogue control to a world of digital control - manifested through buttons, screens, repetitive GUI's and instruction manuals. Manufacturers also often exploit the potential of digital circuits by loading superfluous features into a single device – purely because the capacity is available. As a result devices often converge, and in this process any inherent physical characteristics, or personality, of each object becomes blurred. For example, our mobile phone is now a calculator, an address book, an alarm clock, a stopwatch, a to-do list, a games platform, a web browser, a camera, and finally a phone. Yet our interaction with these 'virtual devices' remains the same:

Through a single device, a numerical keypad and a small LCD screen.
This convergence usually means that we loose any recognizable affordances, or clues, that were inherent to the original device. The virtual nature of these devices means that we often struggle with our conceptual model of their use, resulting in feature redundancy and steep learning curves.

This project rethinks existing devices and harnesses their existing functionality to try to make them more understandable, meaningful and delightful to use. The vehicle for investigation was everyday digital devices found in the domestic environment.
Each project described is a derivative of a domestic device: either a telephone answering machine, or a radio alarm clock.

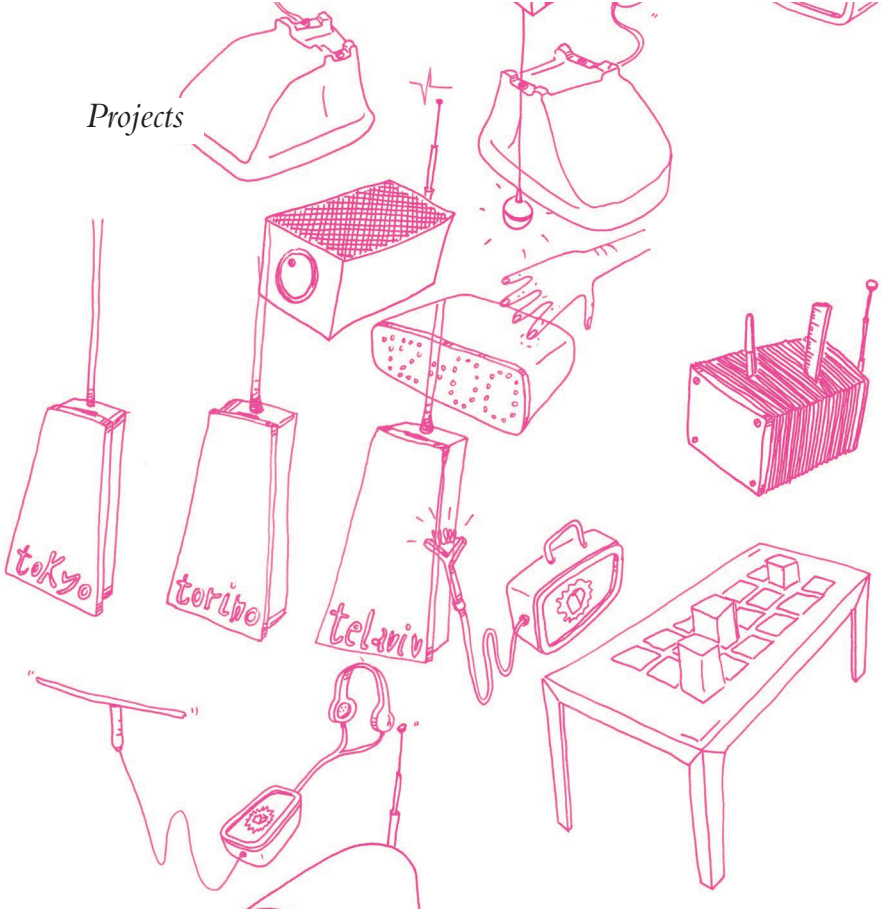
The Amazing All Band Radio
by Oren Horev & Myriel Milicevic
(with Marcos Weskamp)

Radio signals traverse our homes in endless streams, bringing signals from far away places: from objects in our close vicinity to galaxies in distant lands. The Amazing All Band Radio is a series of objects used for 'hunting down' unheard radio waves:
The stars, the music of the earth, or the signals that our communication devices emit.

The ideas presented here were generated during a four week class ‘Strangely Familiar: Repurposing Everyday Devices’ led by Massimo Banzi, Heather Martin, Yaniv Steiner and Reto Wettach. The work was further developed for two weeks during an Applied Dreams Workshop, led by Heather Martin, Massimo Banzi and Dario Buzzini.

Special thanks go to Edoardo Brambilla for the modelmaking throughout the project, to Federico De Giuli and Progetto Cluster (www.progettocluster.com) for the location.

This work was exhibited for the first time the 22nd of January 2005 as special event at AB+ Via Della Basilica 13, 10122 Torino (Italia).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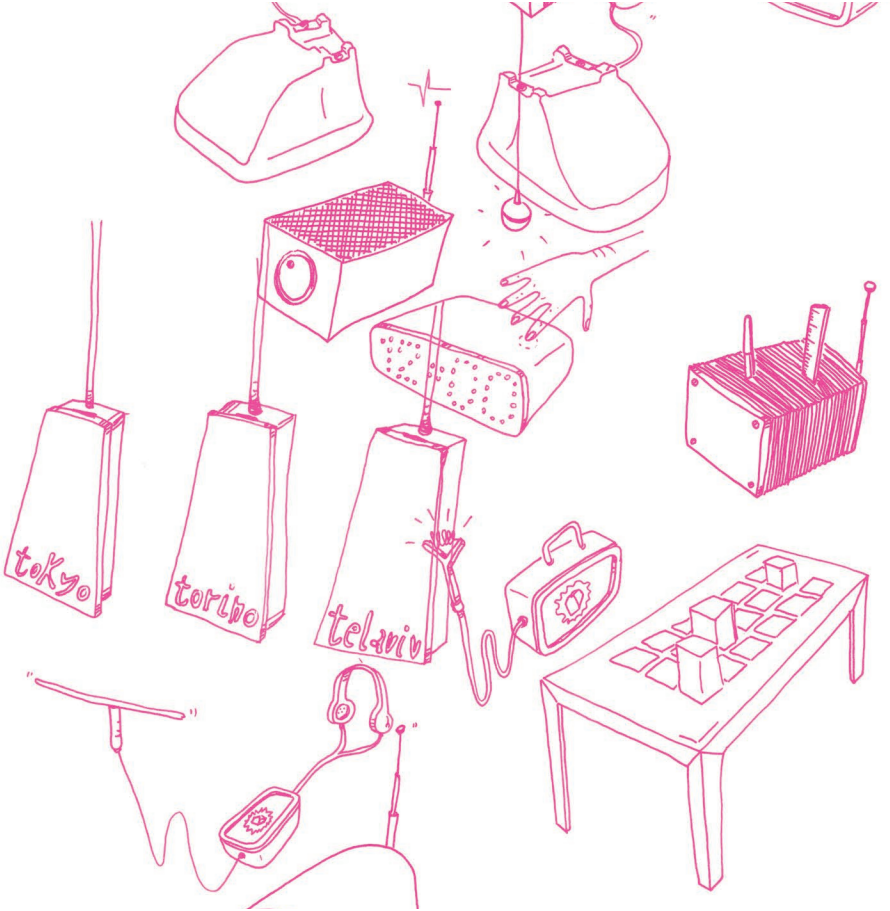
Tug Tug
by Haiyan Zhang (with Aram Armstrong)

Tug Tug are dedicated telephones whose cords are connected via the handset to the base on both phones. This forms a shared interactive object, allowing each person to physically affect the other object by pulling their cord.



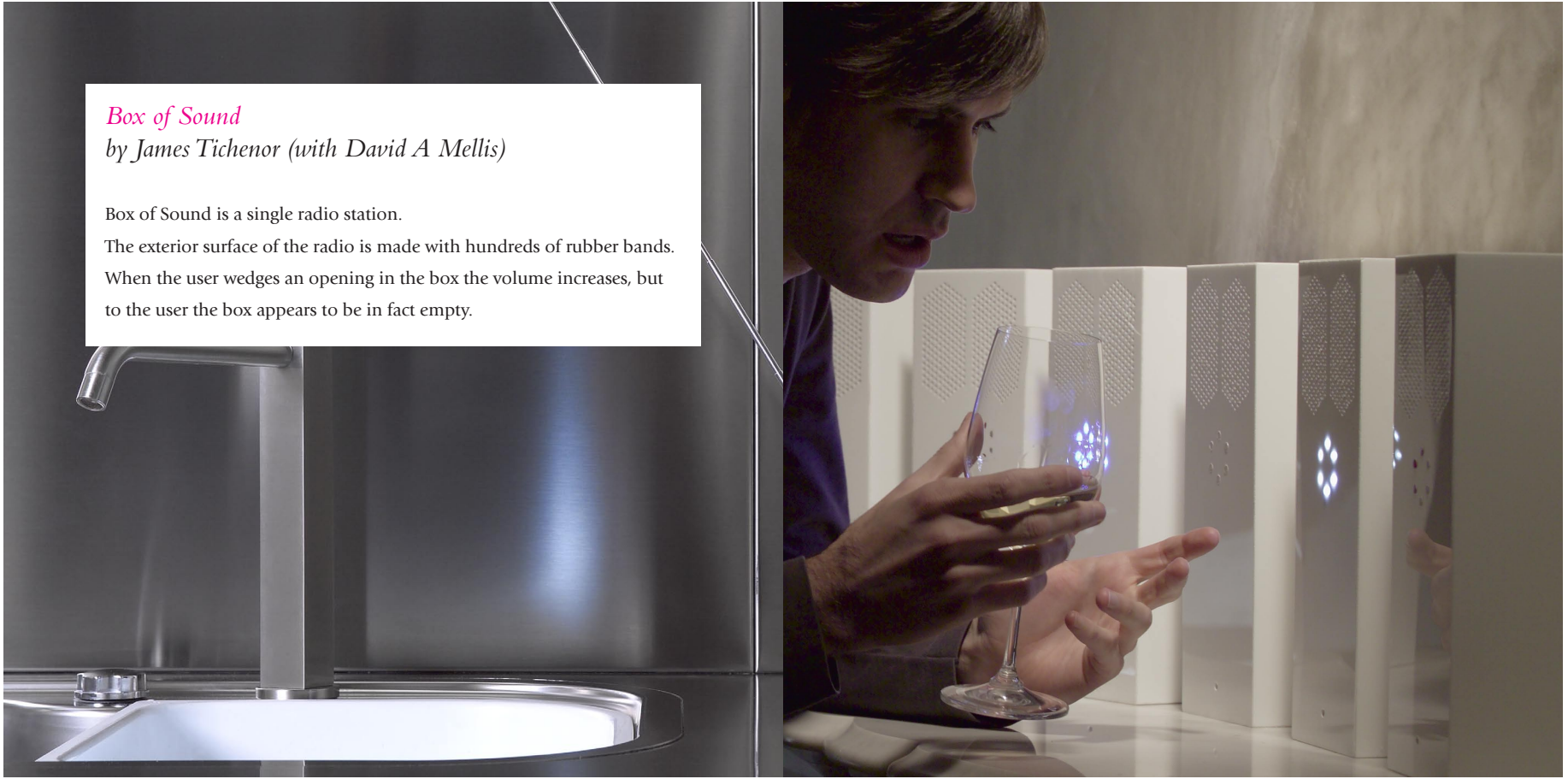
Message Table
by Shawn Bonkowski (with Dana Gordon)

Message Table is a desk merged with an answering machine. It can receive, play and store telephone messages. Every time a message is left, a single box slowly rises up from the table. The longer the message, the higher the box becomes.

When the box receives this pulse it responds by transmitting the same pulse - or knocking sound – back to the original box. The further away the city is, the longer the delay.

Tok Tok
by Aram Armstrong (with Haiyan Zhang)

Tok Tok connects you to your distant loved ones in far away cities. Close partners each own a box. Knocking on one box transmits a sonar-like pulse to the 'twinned' box in the remote location.

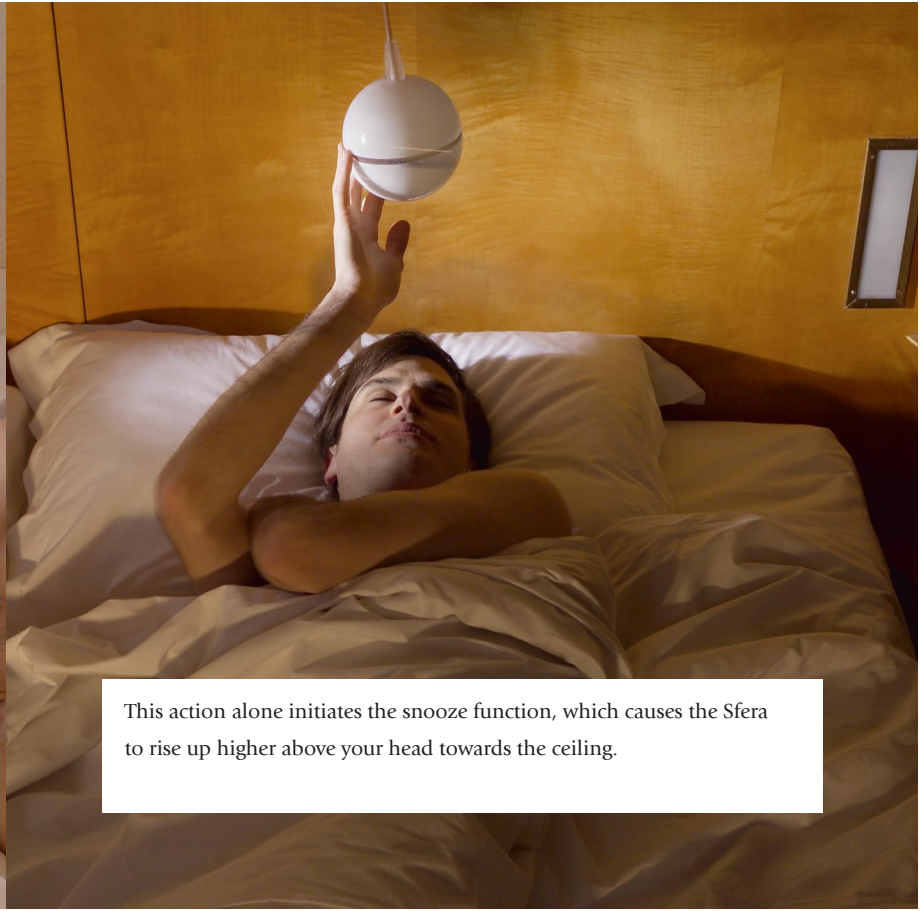


Box of Sound
by James Tichenor (with David A Mellis)

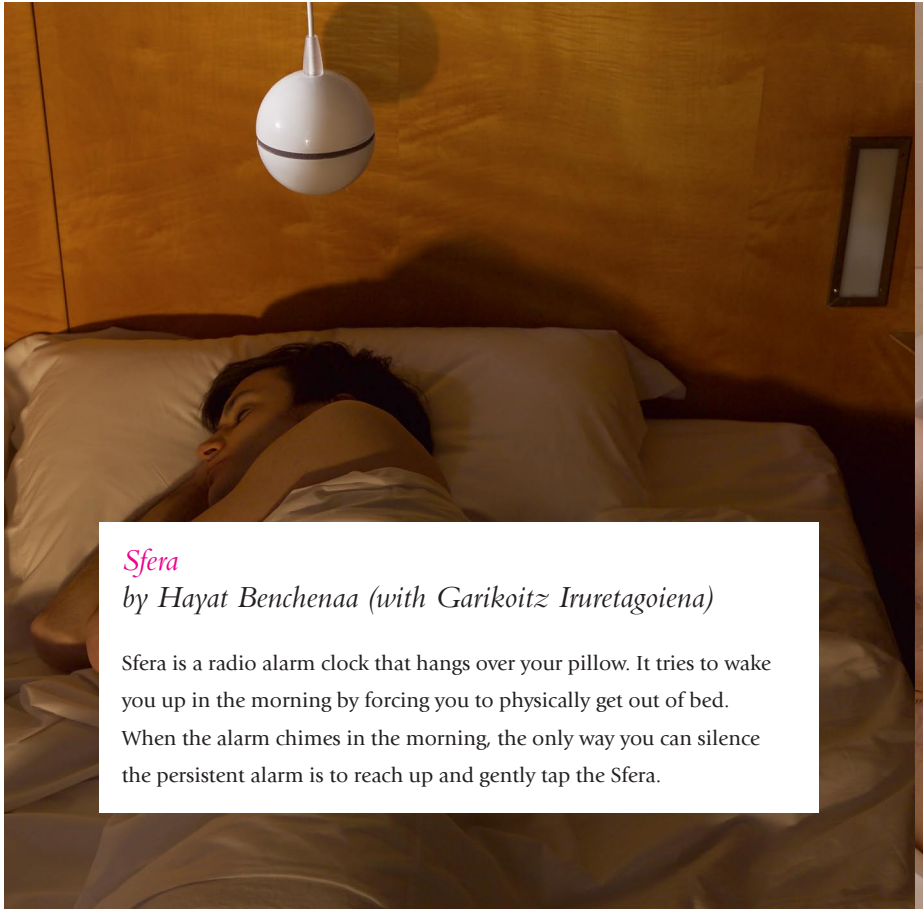
Box of Sound is a single radio station.
The exterior surface of the radio is made with hundreds of rubber bands.
When the user wedges an opening in the box the volume increases, but to the user the box appears to be in fact empty.

Speak Out
by Tristam Sparks and Andreea Cherlaru (with Ana Camila Amorim)

Speak Out is a way to keep an intimate link alive. It is an 'always-on' audio channel between friends. It gives an ambient insight into what is happening in the other space. Effectively you are evesdropping with permission.



This action alone initiates the snooze function, which causes the Sfera to rise up higher above your head towards the ceiling.



Sfera

by Hayat Benchenaa (with Garikoitz Iruretagoiena)

Sfera is a radio alarm clock that hangs over your pillow. It tries to wake you up in the morning by forcing you to physically get out of bed. When the alarm chimes in the morning, the only way you can silence the persistent alarm is to reach up and gently tap the Sfera.

Feel the Music

by James Tichenor and David A Mellis

Feel the Music is a radio with only a tuning knob. As the user spins the knob the sound of the station disappears, so only the knob itself indicates potential stations through tactile feedback.

Quattro
by Didier Hilhorst and Nicholas Zambetti

As you approach Quattro, it detects your presence and reveals the relevant controls. Its functions are determined by its orientation and it works in tandem with a cuddly, plush bear for remote 'snooze' operation.