

**BUREAU RELEASE: Public Release of feral robotic sniffer dog: MegaByte 2.
Codename: Sniffer Dogs**



You may not be aware that **OUT THERE**, in happy family homes, in the offices of corporate executives, in toy stores through out the globe, is an army of robotic dogs. These semi-autonomous robotic creatures, though currently programmed to perform inane or entertaining tasks: begging for plastic bones; barking to the tune of national anthems; walking in circles; are actually fully motile and **AWAITING FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS.**

The first successful operation has been performed. The **Megabyte II**, aka, the Radio Control Mega Byte Cyber Watch Dog by Wow Wee International Ltd. has been successfully repurposed as a bureau agent. In his nose a radioactivity sensor has been fitted; a new brain (microprocessors) has been transplanted into his spinal region. MegaByte now successfully functions as **gamma source detector** agent, identifying any radioactive sources within a 10ft radius, and onboard storage of this data for later reconnaissance.

The transform kits are currently being tested and instructions reviewed in preparation for **wide release**. This kit will be made available for the adaptation of any or all of the approximately two hundred thousand MegaBytes that have been released and distributed through **toy stores near you**. Blueprints and plans to adapt other commercially available dogs are forthcoming.

When asked to comment, a bureau engineer who worked on the project, on condition of not being identified, voiced concern that the bureau may have "gone too far". He claims that putting this sort of data in the hands of 'just anyone' is dangerous, and is unsure, if these kits are successfully released widely, how the data by untrained personnel will be managed. "What will be done with all this feral data? Anyone could try to interpret it!" he stated. A high school intern who donated her robotic dog to the bureau experiment claims that she is also concerned that people will never be able to look at these robotic toys the same way again. "wherever I go, I am always thinking about what my robot dog could be detecting."

1. Brief description of the project.

The development of a 'hobbyist' kit for the adaptation of commercially available robotic dog toys. The adaptation kit will include a sensor, data collector and path following behavior, such that the movements of the dogs will follow concentration gradients of the parameter being sensed. The dogs will behave as if they are sniffing out environmental toxins. Several of these dogs with low level communication, could expose the data of a small area effectively and quickly.

The proposed project is to build and deploy several prototypes of these adapted sniffer dogs and 'release' them in a particularly public site: e.g. shopping mall. This is intended to create a temporary spectacle in order to:

- 1) demonstrate that the movement of the dogs provides legible and immediate environmental information to a diverse audience;
- 2) arouse public interest in the kits ;
- 3) arouse public interest in the local environmental phenomena being sensed;
- 4) to demonstrate the viability of 'feral' data collection and empirical strategies for activist and cultural work

2. How does your proposal go 'beyond convergence' ?

In so much as convergence homogenizes products, media and information, this project is devised to privilege the different conditions that the same product experiences; it particularizes the information landscape; adapts uniform commercial product to device of interest to local community; and is directed toward developing a different sort of engagement with information production. (active construction and interpretation of information vs. passive consumption of commodified information)

3. How have you addressed the key relationship of public and private spaces?

The 'consumption of information' in the dominant model of information technology design is a private act of passive consumption, lone users downloading stock information, reading a personalized newspaper, a personal conversation on a cell phone as it doesn't matter where you are, who is beside you etc. The primary concern of this project is to privilege the shared social experience of 'information consumption', or the crucial role of social interaction in meaning making. In watching the spectacle of the dogs tracing concentration gradients, the 'data' is rendered in a way that is legible to a diverse audience (i.e. understanding that the path following algorithm is 'following a trail', sniffing something out', going towards a source etc etc.) Because of the legibility of the 'behaviour' of the dogs, the spectacle is a real time sense-making event. The imperceptible phenomena being traced is embedded in the lived environment that invites speculation about where and why the dogs are heading towards something, that is, someone who has an idea, a bit of history that helps make sense of what the dogs are doing becomes a source of information. The project is intended to complicate the idea that information is a 'closed' consumable. Rather than information being thought of as the data read out from the sensor, information is reconceived as the active interpretation and ongoing interactions of the audience. The immediately legibility of the dogs movements information, in contrast to a graphical display of the same data plotted on a graph in a 'scientific genre' of representation, demonstrates radically different interpretive stances. The brief public spectacle is intended to demonstrate the shared interpretation that is crucial to 'information' or 'sense' and that

the privatizing logic of convergent information technologies works against these shared social experiences.

4. Is your proposal a critique of the technologies of convergence, if so in what way?

Information is traditionally seen as having the same value everywhere and being essentially the same everywhere. In this project the data generated, in addition to the local interpretation of the data, is highly locally contingent. Exploiting the mass market sameness of the dogs exacerbates these local differences that are systematically overlooked and underprivileged in globalizing information technology.

The project is also intended as a critique of the corporate imagination that has developed and sold the tail wagging obsequiously obedient robotic dogs for 'entertainment'. By devising organized and systematic misuse and readapting these consumables (and their cheap mass market mechanisms) the critique is aimed at the representation of animal human relationships embodied by these toys.

5. How does your proposal relate to society and community?

This project relates to society and community (See 3.) through the social construction of knowledge demonstrated by this project. The local information is of interest to the very local community, often at a resolution that does not appear on federal maps or beyond the concern of expert literature. This project retrieves the sense of community that is drawn from the shared material conditions that we join use with our neighbors, whether or not we have any shared interests or even know each other. The community rhetoric spawned by on-line communities, has by contrast privileged the shared-interests model of community. The cost of which is to under represent the material/environmental issues that cement communities across class, race and widely variant interests.

In short, convergence technologies are marketed in a point and click model of interaction; where networks are conflated with the technical network. This project tries to retrieve the sense of interaction that involves everything we do, a word that can be synonymous with 'social'

6. What audience or public does the proposal address?

This project is specifically designed to actively engage a diverse audience.

It is also designed to enlist

1. the passerby/shopper, to whom the spectacle is intended to be immediately legible
2. kids, tweens and teens who are the target market for robotic dogs, and other communication technologies to enlist them in alternative uses of these technologies;
3. environmental activists and activism who are seeking to demonstrate the phenomena
4. an online community that will support the further uploading of data and information sources; faqs etc

7a. Please indicate which of the issues, listed in the brief, your proposal responds to

- *to engage critically with the social impact of technologies on society*

rather than 'impact' on society, this project engages the complicit co production of information space, and tries to explore alternative sociotechnical organization strategies.

- *to engage the relationship between physical and virtual in public spaces*

the data that is rendered by these dogs is imperceptible to the lived daily experience of the site, yet unexplainable without the lived social history of the site. To collapse the physical and the virtual such that the virtual data representation of the site, is collapsed back onto the actual site through the comic motions of the dogs, also situates the data and therefore makes it contestable and interpretable. The paths that the dogs take, while not being marked onto the pavement will remain etched in the social memory of the site.

- *to explore the relationships of institutions and corporations to public spaces*

the corporate product and its universalized (but demographically decomposed) user has generally inserted private uses into public space. This project, however, work to create and instantiate the public gathering, and public interpretation in public space, to make science and ie information spactab

- *to address how technologies are changing social interrelationships in public spaces*

contrary to the cellphone model of public space as a private phone booth, this project is intended to reinforce the sociality of shared material condition, vs the shared interests model of the internet.

- *to explore the issues of false utopias / fantasies created by technological futurology*

the utopia of exact, authoritative and incontestable information is taken on by this project, which renders the data as something much less complete and open to interpretation.

- *to address the management of anxiety through technology; how the devices we use both fuel and assuage our fears and desires of being responsible citizens, parents, workers etc*

one of the argument used to restrict data access is the paternalistic concern for public hysteria. The panic surrounding Radon meters are used as the example of this. However, the project (perhaps also using radioactivity sensing) argues for the attention to sites of shared interpretation.

- *to explore the changing nature and experience of time caused by technology use*

the privileging of a temporal a spatial information is contrasted by the situated local nature of this data and event.

- *to address how technology changes our concept of community*

online community has been used to promote 'shared interest' based communities, however the 'shared resources' model of community binds people into a direct link with those with whom might not have any shred interests; both can cross classes

- *to address how technology changes our inhabitation of public spaces*

see above

- *to address how technology changes our concept of sociability*

see above

- *the materiality of technology; how we react when our virtual, networked lives are abruptly brought down to earth by being offline, out of the network reach, out of batteries, etc...*

see above

and, 7b. how it addresses them.

8. What materials are you submitting (media/format)?

1. Brief written description
2. Preliminary Kit (forthcoming)
3. Video of adapted MegaByte 2 functioning see:

<rtsp://milhouse.cat.nyu.edu/docidog1.rm>

and

<rtsp://milhouse.cat.nyu.edu/docidog2.rm>