

## PROBOSCIS: Private Reveries, Public Spaces – Responses to the Brief

### Ben Hooker and Shona Kitchen Hard Shoulders Soft Verges

#### 1 – *Brief description of the project.*

Hard Shoulders Soft Verges is an experimental project to explore how physical and electronic spaces can be designed in conjunction with each other to provide new kinds of experience in the city.

We are designing interfaces between virtual landscapes created by sensor data, computation and information flows and the built physical environment so that existing spaces are electronically extended to amplify their richness, intricacy and narrative possibilities.

In Hard Shoulders Soft Verges we are specifically designing for environments found at the city limits, where open countryside starts to rub up against suburbia – places where the regulated 'nature' of landscaped motorway embankments, reservoir parks and allotments coexists with airports, business parks and residential blocks.

Considering sites like these, we are using interactive computer-based illustrations to communicate a series of proposals based on developing synthetic ecologies\* to integrate into these spaces to the effect that the information flows that run around and through our cities can be experienced in the same way as natural phenomenon in the physical world.

\*Systems of electronic structures, plants and animals which exist in mixed-state (physical-electronic) environments.

#### 2 – *How does your proposal go 'beyond convergence'?*

We are addressing the question 'Can digital technologies be designed for public spaces so that they enhance, rather than distract from, the culture and aesthetics of their surroundings?'

Hard Shoulders Soft Verges aims to expand the range of possibilities for public technologies in terms of their forms, their functions, and their cultural roles. Creating proposals targeted narrowly at specific contexts will allow us to explore ideas and possibilities that a more general approach would overlook.

#### 3 – *How have you addressed the key relationship of public and private spaces?*

When we talk of 'virtual landscapes' we refer to the complex flows of information created by the combination of many private data transactions – a mobile telephone conversation, people visiting a private internet 'home page' or even a credit card payment are examples of this. We believe there is great potential to explore how these kinds information flows can be sensitively re-presented in public spaces to create new kinds of experience in the city.

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

No, our proposal is not a critique of the technologies of convergence. It is an exploration of the future of technologies deployed in public spaces in a way that is usefully unconstrained by immediate commercial requirements. This will allow us to leapfrog current thinking of public technologies in terms of information kiosks, digital advertising, electronic notice boards and the like, to consider technologies that integrate more subtly both with their surroundings and with peoples' lives.

#### 5 – *How does your proposal relate to society and community?*

We think that the private and public information flows that run around and through our cities can be experienced in the same way as natural phenomenon in the physical world – 'regular' nature. Through the design of situated display devices, our proposals suggest new situations that allow this to take place.

#### 6 – *What audience or public does the proposal address?*

The results will have several kinds of payoff. The proposals may form the seeds of new applications

of commercial value. Second, they will raise new issues and ideas for designers and researchers, both in their content and in the strategies used to develop them. Finally, they may provide the basis for a discussion with the wider public about their attitudes towards existing technology, their aspirations for their lives, and the new possibilities that technologies could potentially offer.

*7a – Please indicate which of the issues, listed in the brief, your proposal responds to*  
to engage with the relationship between the physical and virtual in public spaces.  
to address how technologies are changing social interrelations in public spaces.  
to address how technology changes our concept of community  
to address how technology changes our inhabitation of public spaces