

## ARISTOTLE'S OFFICE

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**Abstract – In an increasingly wired and wireless world, objects are being embedded with communicating technologies, and are increasingly drawn into networked behaviour where previously they were independent. Objects are no longer passive receivers of one-sided instruction. The machines talk amongst themselves. Aristotle's office “#n Objects and an interface” presents talking office furniture in the form of a shaky plant, rustling bin, clicking phone, angle poise light and answer machine. Originally a Lighthouse, Brighton 2007 commission, a selection of objects currently roam the UK, to continue their conversation.**

### #N OBJECTS AND AN INTERFACE

*“Changes brought about by the internet will be dwarfed by those prompted by the networking of everyday objects” – report released at the UN net summit in Tunis, 2005 [1].*

Aristotle's Office presents the user with an easy to use ‘plug and play’ patch-bay interface, allowing users to orchestrate relationships between a selection of animated office objects, loosely based on Aristotle's concept of the ‘the essence of things’.

Colour-coded leads extend from each object to a patch-bay, ready to be assigned (or re-assigned) a connection with another object. We investigate potential relationships between objects using simple universal rules. How does an office plant behave with an office light? How will the bin respond to the advances of a telephone?

Orchestrated by physical actions of the user, the rhythms and counter-rhythms of each object lay open the otherwise invisible structures of a network. We are in control, but who knows what these objects are saying and how our relationships with them evolve as they slowly begin to talk.

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The installation playfully makes visible the underlying software and hardware structures between networked objects. Users are able to connect objects in an easily identifiable manner, triggering multiple object relationships. A consol, similar in form and function to an early telephone exchange, orchestrates relationships between a set of office objects. The original set included; an office plant, waste paper bin, table lamp,

telephone, answer machine, water cooler, green filing cabinet and grey filing cabinet. With all leads connected, the user may be confronted with something a-rhythmical, or soothing and slow if a harmonious relationship has been discovered between like-minded objects. After a period of time the objects become bored with one another, slowly reducing their movements, until a new relationship is formed via the console.

Utilizing a **POLAN** (Physical Object Local Area Network), the user can connect multiple **NODES** (office objects) to create unexpected object action relationships. The physical patching of these objects enables embedded microcontrollers to begin 2-way communication via the elderly sounding **OAP** (Object Action Protocol). Each **NODE** has a unique identity and set of behaviors, programmed to react to other **NODES** (objects). In this way, software structures and attributes are physically manifest via mechanical movement, sound or visual elements.

Simple mechanical actions such as shaking, rotating, clicking and switching on and off, are the audio visual means of communication for the objects. Why does the light fade in response to a vigorous shake by the plant? Unexpected consequences occur, as objects negotiate behaviour between themselves, creating accidental narratives through the inter-relationship of mechanical movement, sound and the visual.

*Clearly this will eventually lead somewhere more interesting than the Ray Bradbury inspired MIT House of the Future where your fridge starts giving you diet tips [2].*



## References

- [1] ITU Strategy and Policy Unit (SPU) *The Internet of things*. ITU Internet Reports, 7th edition. International Telecommunications Union, Tunis, 2005.
- [2] ALEXANDER, A. *Of RFIDs and Arphids : the logistics of the future*. London : MUTE. 12 June 2006. <http://www.metamute.org/en/Of-RFIDs-and-Arphids>