

Database as Language

Academic year 2010/11

Collect, index, and visualize London...

The term database refers to a highly flexible and abstract structure for the collection, storage, management, retrieval, and organization, of information. It is historically the domain of technologists and scientists. Indeed, familiar databases, such as contact lists, photo libraries, or music collections, can seem purely functional. On the other hand, we also know that a database's underlying architectures can have a definitive impact on the meaningful qualities of its content.

This brief uses the richness of the city as the basis for experimentation with the expressive potential of a database. You will each create a guide to one or more aspects of London based on a database that you develop in collaboration. The goal will not be to accurately summarize or realistically model such a dynamic, intricate, and elaborate city, but rather to meaningfully interact and facilitate new potential interactions with it.

Collect

At the briefing, you will work as a group to define an audience, develop one or more areas of interest, define an appropriate structure, and decide on one or more mechanisms for collecting data (ie online, using a camera, GPS or other mobile device, or on paper / in person). You will need to divide tasks appropriate to the collective skills of the group and coordinate a schedule of group and individual tasks such that the collection phase is can be fully realized by the interim crit.

Index

An index is a means of organizing and retrieving information from the database. At the interim crit we will work as a group to devise and demonstrate one or more suitable mechanisms for sorting and retrieving records from the database for use in a variety of formal contexts.

Visualize

The main advantage of a database is that it becomes possible to integrate and display information in many different ways that convey a range of potential meanings. For the final crit, you are asked to create your own guide to London based on the data set presented at the interim crit. You may work individually or in small groups and the outcome could be digital, environmental, or print-based.



Still from *Man With A Movie Camera* by Vertov

“Our societies are constructed around flows: flows of capital, flows of information, flows of technology, flows of organizational interactions, flows of images, sounds and symbols. Flows are not just one element of social organization: they are the expression of the processes dominating our economic, political, and symbolic life.” -Manuel Castells (1996).

References

Man With A Movie Camera [film] (1927) by Dziga Vertov.
<http://tiny.cc/vertov>

Visualizing Data by Ben Fry (2008).

‘Database as a Symbolic Form’ from *The Language of New Media* (2001) by Lev Manovich.
<http://tiny.cc/database443>

Bits [typeface] by Paul Elliman

Schedule

Briefing	2 December 10.30 - 13.00 Design Studio 3
Interim crit	20 January 10.30 - 16.30 Design Studio 3
Final crit	27 January 10.30 - 16.30 Design Studio 3

Brief set by Rebecca Ross