

Iso-phone: a total submersion telephonic experience

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ABSTRACT:

In this paper we describe the Iso-phone, a telecommunications concept providing a service that can be described simply as a meeting of the telephone and the floatation tank. By blocking out peripheral sensory stimulation and distraction, the Iso-phone attempts to create a telephonic space of heightened purity and focus.

By presenting an everyday product in a new configuration and context, using a typical product aesthetic, the Iso-phone offers both an experiential and visual experience.

The project is intended to provide a space for analysis of technology and its application in everyday situations. Whilst it is acknowledged that the subject of this project is well discussed within the field of philosophy and other areas of academia, the premise for using a product language is to bring the debate to a wider audience.

Introduction:

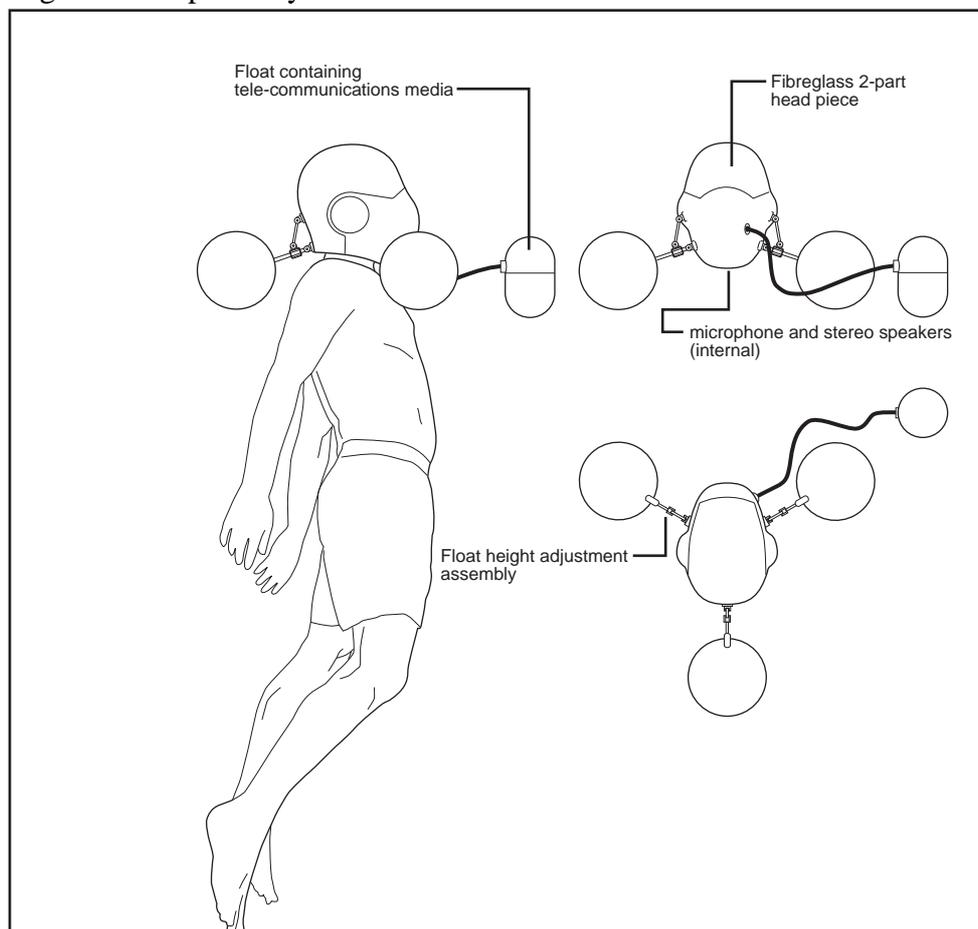
The Iso-phone explores the scenario in which a person wishes to engage completely in a remote conversation. Total immersion into telephonic space is facilitated by the removal of the peripheral physicality of the world.

This project examines how tele-communications might exist from a perspective that prioritises quality of experience over the design industry's blinkered notion of efficiency, often represented in multi-modal, omnipresent services and portable products.

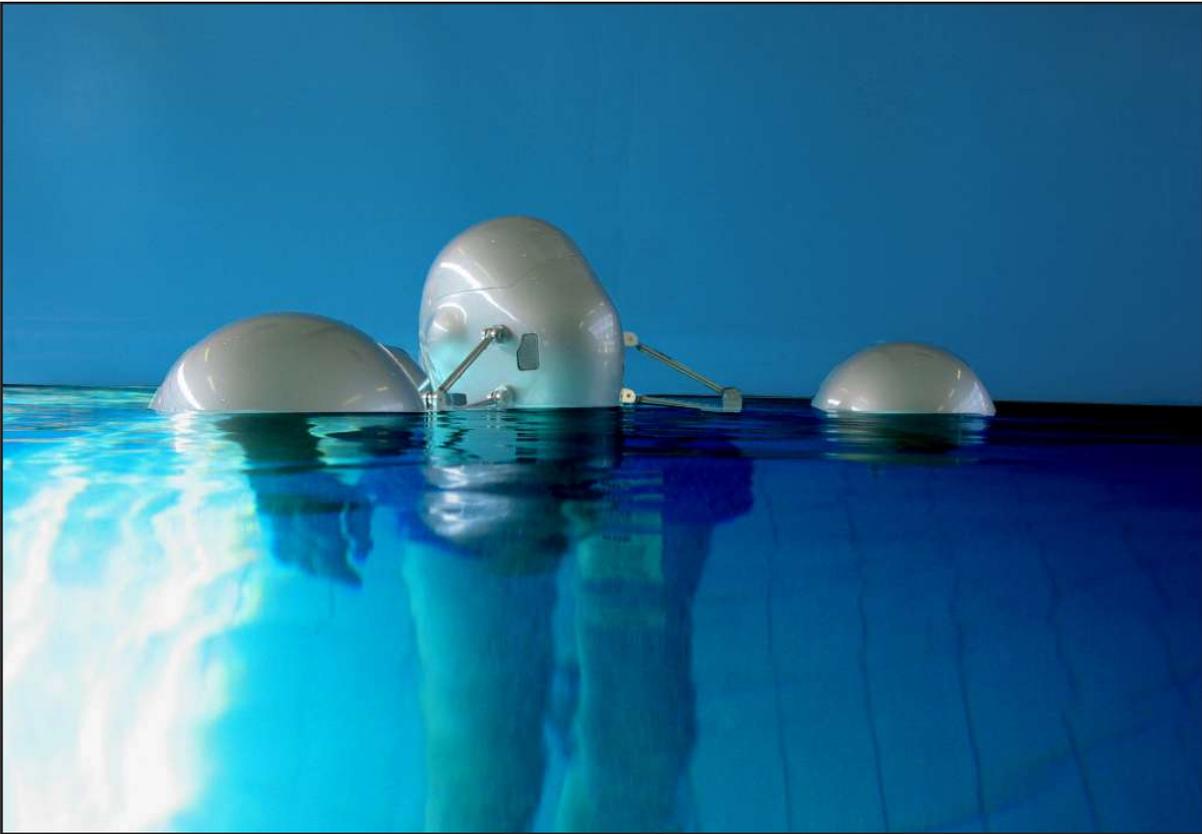
Description:

The Iso-phone is essentially a telecommunications concept providing a service that can be described as a hybrid of the telephone and the floatation tank. The user wears a helmet that blocks out all peripheral sensory input whilst keeping the head above the the surface of the water. The water is heated to body temperature blurring the boundaries of the user's body. In combination, a space is created providing a pure, distraction free environment for making a telephone call. The only sensory stimulus presented is a two-way voice connection to another person using the same apparatus in another location.

Figure 1: Iso-phone system schematic.



Figures 2-4: Initial floating tests with prototype Iso-phone



Background:

Codes of behavior evolving to suit emerging technologies have been evident since the beginning of the telephone's history. The Victorians, far from being at ease with this new communications tool, required instructions informing them how to use the handset and what to say to the person at the other end of the line. For them, this device needed new social protocols and situational descriptions to deal with this new and abstracted form of presence. The telephone and its use were regarded as strange, and interaction with this new technology was awkward, requiring a reassessment of what communication was and how to go about it.

Contemporary attitudes towards developments in telecommunications are on the whole, totally accepting. The cultural assimilation of the mobile telephone is now at a point where its ubiquity permits function with little contextual discrimination. Only a couple of decades ago the primary means of telecommunication was provided by the telephone box; essentially a piece of designated architecture providing a contextually neutral space for remote conversation. This provision for telecommunication was an environmentally dislocated and intimate space where distractions were minimised.

Efficiency and novelty have become something of a preoccupation in the design of many multi-functional electronic products, often at the expense of quality or depth of experience. The Iso-phone attempts to redress this imbalance by providing a space where the product can exclusively celebrate the technology of telecommunications.

Scenarios (product fictions):

A man walks into the Cardiff municipal swimming baths. He's carrying an old leather suitcase and a towel under his arm. As he enters the building he glances at his wristwatch; a watch that several hours earlier was synchronised with the watch of his wife. Somewhere in the southern mediterranean she's removing her clothes by a deep blue lagoon. At the same time they enter their respective pools and slip into their Iso-phones.....

After several minutes wearing the Iso-phone, floating silently and readjusting to the new environment, the two statesmen heard the dial tone signalling that they were about to be connected. Both men felt exposed in the absence of their entourage and the distractions of their physical surroundings. Both knew there was going to be no small talk.

Dr Yolanda Humphrey, MRCPsych, respected psychoanalyst, has an impressive client list including several high ranking executives, actors and politicians. She has a busy work schedule offering remote Iso-therapy to her clients as business requirements take them around the world. Operating within appropriate time zones, her team of psychoanalysts, whose offices are fitted with special water tanks allowing easy connection, provide a twenty-four hour service.

Status:

Two prototype Iso-phone helmets have been built and have undergone preliminary testing. We are currently engaged in an iterative design process in which increasingly extensive user tests inform refinements to the prototype.

Notes on floating:

Temperature: The solution is kept at skin-temperature and so feels neither hot nor cold. This removes a subtle yet constant source of stimulation to the nervous system and brain.

Touch: The only thing in contact with the millions of sensitive nerve-endings covering the skin is body-temperature fluid. During floatation there is no sense of separation between the body and its surroundings ... body boundaries gently dissolve and vanish.

Sight & sound: Floating in complete darkness and silence prevents any external aural and visual distraction.

Traditional floatation tanks are intended as sensory deprivators – effectively removing all stimuli to the brain. The Iso-phone uses floatation theory to create a sensory accentuation environment, a dedicated space for tele-communication.

Acknowledgements:

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For further information:

<http://www.medialabeurope.org/hc/>

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Related works:

Krystof Wodiczko: <http://www.mit.edu:8001/afs/athena.mit.edu/course/Dunneandraby>: <http://www.dunneandraby.co.uk>
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