

## Space to go

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### Concept

The concept of intimacy is traditionally closely linked to the private sphere. Hence, new, intimate, technologies make intimacy portable: using your smartphone, you can have important and emotional conversations while crossing a public space or while sitting at a train station. In these moments, you metaphorically create a space around yourself, a private sphere that surrounds you. When intimacy and public exposure are twisted into each other, you might wish to have your own physical space around you – a portable space that gives you a shelter and allows you to concentrate on private and intimate questions. A warm, cosy and private space in which you can interact with your phone.

The “Space to go” offers exactly this – its stylish colour and texture allow you to be visible and invisible at the same time, to focus on important relationships within a crowd of strangers; to be concentrated and dreamy at the same time; to be somewhere else without moving.

At the same time, “Space to Go” questions our relations with “intimate technologies” and our social behaviour when we use social media on mobile applications. In both a literal and a metaphorical sense, the textile transforms its users into ghost-like beings that take up room without being present in their social surroundings. It transforms invisible data spaces into a visible and aesthetically appealing, yet provocative form, and thereby questions intimacy and physical presence as key principles of human cohabitation.



### Reflection on the process

To develop our research artefact, we went through a series of iterations to define and refine our prototype. Within this process, experiments with different materials and low-fi prototypes had a central function: Prototyping on the body allowed us to quickly test if something worked or not and to make decisions based on that knowledge.

To find and to approach a common topic, we started by defining “what if” questions that could form an interdisciplinary bridge between our different research interests. The question of “intimate technologies” fulfilled this essential function, because it connects current questions in social sciences with questions in interface and textile design. Brainstorming about different questions, we ended up with “*What if data could take up room to create intimacy?*”

Based on this “what if” question, we started to experiment with different textiles by touching, stretching and wearing them on our body. We also started very early to act out the different versions of our prototype in public spaces and to try out different forms of interaction between body and textile. This “sensuous speculation” helped us to imagine different kinds of social utilization contexts and to critically reflect on emotional and social side-effects for people who might wear the textile. Documenting these experiments with photos and videos turned out to be very helpful to reflect on different kinds of movements and interactions, and the on social and emotional side-effects.







Following this iterative and experimental approach, we could refine our prototype and explore the research field of intimate technologies in an explorative and “sensuous” way. Furthermore, focussing on specific textiles and social contexts turned out to be a very fruitful approach for working in an interdisciplinary team.

### **Reflection on “the everyday” and “the future”**

To explore the topic of “everyday futures”, we started with the currently emerging phenomenon of “intimate technologies”: Technologies that are close to the body, that have knowledge about us and that make intimacy portable. Based on this observation in the present, we envisioned a future in which this tendency will become more and more important and ended up with our prototype. By acting out our research artefact and by refining it, our artefact turned out to be more critical than futuristic: It is not so much a vision for future communication, but more of an object to critically reflect on current everyday life practices when interacting with intimate technologies. Nevertheless, reflecting the present is always a good starting point to make decisions for the future.

### **Learnings**

From the social science point of view, focussing on specific materials as a basis for discussions and reflections; and following an iterative and experimental approach, was rather unfamiliar, but turned out to be very inspiring. Thinking through materials and the body and acting out different social situations helped to test, refine and embody abstract concepts.

Nevertheless, making as a way of doing research seems particularly useful for topic areas that directly affect the everyday life of people; it might be less appropriate for more abstract research domains.

Interdisciplinary working, as a second learning, can also be a double edged sword: If you can establish a good level of communication, and a mutual trust in each other’s knowledge and perspective, interdisciplinary working creates synergetic effects and great results. If you don’t achieve this level of communication, there’s a risk of misunderstanding and friction losses. Against this background, we think that being open for other perspectives and being optimistic (even if you sometimes end up in impasses) are important and decisive attitudes for interdisciplinary working as well as for trying out new approaches.



