

FILLING IN THE UNSEEN

Research + Crit 2 Provocation & Prototype Directions

Core tension

Why do we automatically assume that partial information is incomplete?

INCOMPLETE INFORMATION ≠ INCOMPLETE EXPERIENCE

1. Research Frame

DISTANCE → THE UNSEEN → INTERPRETATION → MEANING

My inquiry began with long-distance relationships and the question of whether reduced access to another person's everyday life necessarily weakens a relationship. Small signals, repetition, and expectation can still produce presence and meaning. This suggests that a lack of information and a lack of experience may not be the same thing.

Gaver, Beaver & Benford (2003)

Ambiguity as a Resource for Design

Rather than treating ambiguity as a flaw that design should eliminate, the paper presents ambiguity as a design resource that can encourage interpretation and engagement. When information is not fully determined, people can project their own expectations and interpretations into it.

Project connection: This provides a direct way to rethink [] not as missing information, but as interpretive space.

PARTIAL INFORMATION → INTERPRETATION → ENGAGEMENT

Reference: <https://doi.org/10.1145/642611.642653>

Sengers & Gaver (2006)

Staying Open to Interpretation

The paper questions the assumption that interactive systems should communicate one precise intended meaning. It considers how design can remain open to multiple interpretations.

Project connection: A state that is not fully explicit or determined can still be an intentional and complete design condition.

SYSTEM → [OPEN SPACE] → MULTIPLE INTERPRETATIONS

Reference: <https://doi.org/10.1145/1142405.1142422>

Wilson et al. (2005)

The Pleasures of Uncertainty

The studies found that, under certain positive conditions, uncertainty about an event could prolong positive affect. Participants tended to predict that certainty would feel better, but greater certainty did not always produce the better experience.

Project connection: This supports the question of whether more information and certainty necessarily create a better experience. It should not be generalized to mean that all uncertainty is positive.

UNCERTAINTY ≠ AUTOMATICALLY WORSE EXPERIENCE

1. Research Frame

Reference: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15631571/>

Gooch & Watts

Social Presence and the Void in Distant Relationships

This work examines how mediated interactions in distant relationships can contribute to social presence and a sense of togetherness over time.

Project connection: It connects to my heart experiment: signal → repetition → expectation → presence.

LOW INFORMATION ≠ LOW PRESENCE

Reference: <https://researchportal.bath.ac.uk/en/publications/social-presence-and-the-void-in-distant-relationships-how-do-peop/>

Kleinberg & Marsh (2023)

Less Is More

In a decision-making context, the research shows that more information is not always more useful, and that simplified information tailored to a goal can sometimes support better decisions.

Project connection: This is not the same phenomenon as relationships or imagination, but it can serve as supporting evidence for the broader proposition that more information is not always more useful.

MORE INFORMATION ≠ ALWAYS MORE USEFUL

Reference: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10469135/>

Hallnäs & Redström (2001)

Slow Technology — Designing for Reflection

Slow Technology challenges the assumption that technology should always prioritize speed, efficiency, and immediate resolution, proposing technology that creates room for reflection.

Project connection: This helps situate AI AS FILTER within a broader design tradition that questions efficiency as the default technological value.

TECHNOLOGY ≠ ONLY SPEED / EFFICIENCY / COMPLETION

Reference: <https://doi.org/10.1007/PL00000019>

2. Crit 2 Assignment

Choose one question, tension, contradiction, or assumption from Crit 1 and generate at least eight provocations using de Bono's methods: **Reversal**, **Escape**, **Wishful Thinking**, and **Outrageous**. Then choose three provocations that make the inquiry look different and create a prototype, experiment, or study for each. The prototype does not need to literally represent the provocation; the provocation should push the inquiry somewhere it would not normally go.

Chosen tension

Why do we assume partial means incomplete?

3. Eight Provocations

1. Reversal

What if knowing less makes an experience more complete?

2. Reversal

What if AI removes information instead of generating it?

3. Escape

What if completeness does not require access to the whole?

4. Escape

What if an AI gives no answer at all?

5. Wishful Thinking

What if technology knew exactly when to stop giving us information?

6. Wishful Thinking

What if two people could feel fully present without knowing what the other person is doing?

7. Outrageous

What if AI deliberately made every image, message, or memory less complete each time we accessed it?

8. Outrageous

What if the most accurate representation of someone contained almost no information about them?

4. Three Prototype Directions

PROTOTYPE 1 - REVEAL ONLY WHAT YOU NEED

What I made

Users move their cursor to reveal parts of an image, but they can only see a limited amount. It explores how much information is actually enough to understand an experience.

p5.js prototype

<https://editor.p5js.org/present1513/full/v8uPTowZx>

REVEAL → ENOUGH INFORMATION

PROTOTYPE 2 - THE MORE YOU LOOK, THE LESS YOU SEE

What I made

Each time users look again, more information disappears. It explores whether losing visual information actually makes a memory or experience feel incomplete.

p5.js prototype

<https://editor.p5js.org/present1513/full/afbKjt5Bu>

REPEATED ACCESS → LESS INFORMATION

PROTOTYPE 3 - FILL IN THE UNSEEN

What I made

Users are given incomplete sentences and asked to fill in the missing information themselves. It explores how people use interpretation and imagination to create meaning from partial information.

p5.js prototype

<https://editor.p5js.org/present1513/full/mhdYjptFL>

PARTIAL INFORMATION → INTERPRETATION → MEANING

Prototype relationship

Together, the three prototypes test partial information through three different actions: revealing only enough, removing information through repeated access, and asking users to fill missing information themselves.

5. Conceptual Shift

OLD

COMPLETE REALITY → PARTIAL ACCESS → MISSING INFORMATION → COMPLETION

NEW

PARTIAL ACCESS + INTERPRETATION → EXPERIENCE

AI AS GENERATOR

[?] → [ANSWER]

AI AS FILTER

[MORE INFORMATION] → [ENOUGH INFORMATION]

In this project, the Filter does not have to be a device that simply hides or damages information. It can become a way of asking **what information is actually enough**. The inquiry therefore shifts from preserving incompleteness to reconsidering how completeness itself is defined.

6. Questions to Carry Forward

- Is a gap actually a gap?
- Why do we assume partial means incomplete?
- When is incomplete already complete?
- Does more information always create a better experience?
- What is enough information for an experience to feel complete?
- What happens in the space technology chooses not to fill?

Working statement

Completeness may not come from having all the information. It may come from having enough space to construct meaning.

Maybe completeness does not require seeing everything.

Research note

The studies on distant relationships, ambiguity, uncertainty, and information quantity do not describe one identical psychological mechanism. They are better used as references from different domains that complicate the shared assumption that more information and greater clarity always produce a more complete experience.