Ambient Sites:
Making Tangible the Subtle, Ephemeral and Seemingly Silent

Abstract
Ambient Sites are proximal. At our fingertips, under the soles of our feet, along the edge of a cheek, they are characterized by the permeability of boundaries, the sudden awareness of movement, texture, or sound. Commonplace sensory minutiae remain so in part because we perceive them to be diminutive, fleeting or indistinct – mist upon a window, the raised nap of a towel, momentary contact of heel and toe and cool floor. What happens when we amplify and make tangible our perception of the subtle, the ephemeral and the seemingly silent? In this studio we will explore varied modes of attuning to and making tangible aspects of the everyday that are intimate in scale and inconspicuous in presence. We will use open source technology and everyday materials to prototype a participatory installation and to compose sensory and affective experiences that magnify, amplify and re-scale our perceptions of the sonic, the tactile and the intermittently visible.

Keywords
tangible, prototype, arduino, ambient sites, sensors, subtle, ephemeral, seemingly silent, experimental
Introduction
Our bodies are in constant, dynamic interaction with the ambient environments of everyday life. By making tangible the permeable boundaries of these ambient sites we can tune our awareness and re-scale our sensory experience of the present moment.

Studio Proposal
This active workshop is an invitation to artists, technologists, designers and other playful people to amplify, transform and otherwise make tangible our experience of the subtle, ephemeral and seemingly silent characteristics of ambient sites and our everyday moments interacting within them.

Studio activities designed to activate our imaginations will complement a participatory introduction to the open source technology of the arduino microcontroller. We will use this creative tool as a catalyst to re-scale our perceptions and sensory experience of the permeable boundaries between our bodies and the ambient sites of our immediate physical environment. Using the arduino, sensors, and friendly electronics, we will make active sketches and prototypes of these ambient sites now re-imagined as tangible. A set of technically accessible and conceptually compelling scenarios will introduce each of the sensors and companion codes to people who are unfamiliar with the arduino. Together we will create an ephemeral installation that activates the ambient site of our studio space and the sensory experience of people within it.

Studio Topics to be covered
The Studio will introduce activities that enhance awareness of our sensory experience of everyday ambient sites.

These initial experiences become catalysts for collaborative explorations and ways of imagining and making tangible these sensory observations as a temporary installation.

Common materials such as paper, feathers, plastic bags, wire and cardboard are available to be combined with friendly electronics and the open source arduino microcontroller to make active sketches and prototypes of the subtle, ephemeral and seemingly silent made tangible.

Assorted joining techniques for electronics and materials will be introduced as well as simple methods for making light weight structures that create large volumes of space with few materials.

Studio Learning Goals
The studio goals are to:

1. Create a context for exploring and attuning to the subtle, ephemeral and seemingly silent sensory aspects of everyday ambient sites.

We will create an active and socially engaged context for individual and group explorations of these everyday sensory experiences and imagine the conceptual
transformation of these ordinary ambient characteristics now re-imagined with tangible behaviors.

2. Introduce creative tools and activities that encourage active sketching and prototyping of these ambient sites made tangible with dynamic sensory attributes unique to the digital realm.

A collection of everyday materials will be available to participants who collaborate in the process of re-imagining their selections as catalysts for making tangible the subtleties of everyday ambient sites. These may be explored and re-presented as diagrams, drawings, active sketches or prototypes. The workshop organizer will introduce accessible technologies including the arduino [1] sensors, piezos, and motors that provide participants with available resources for proposing new modes of experiencing the ambient sites that they have chosen to re-imagine and make tangible.

3. Provide a studio environment that is a catalyst for artists, technologists, designers, inventors and other playful people to actively collaborate in the process of re-imaging these everyday ambient sites made tangible in an on-site installation.

This studio brings together artists, technologists, designers, and other playful people to transform and make tangible the experience of subtle, ephemeral and seemingly silent sensory aspects of everyday ambient sites.

The workshop is designed to cultivate the ability of each participant to re-imagine the ordinarily intangible as tangible while collaboratively proposing and exploring new modes of dynamic sensory engagement with everyday ambient sites.

Studio Supporting Web Documents
A blog will provide examples of the ideas proposed in the studio workshop Ambient Sites. http://blog.lib.umn.edu/willow/ambient_sites.

This will also provide updated information for studio participants as they prepare for the workshop prior to the conference and as a documentation site for the studio process and the installation that emerges.

References