# The Crock of Shh: A Whispering Water Interface for Reshaping Reality

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## Abstract

The Crock of Shh is a water dispenser interface designed for typing messages to water. Instead of dispensing water quickly, users must press the nozzle repeatedly to scroll through whispered positive words representing letters of the alphabet. Each short press releases a small amount of water, slowing the process and creating time for reflection. Users listen to the whispered words by placing their ear near the water tank, which resonates the sounds through an audio exciter. Four buttons on the interface allow users to scroll forward or backward through the spelling alphabet, select letters, insert spaces, and print messages on a Dymo label printer. The printed labels, in black ink on transparent material, can be attached to a water cup or the dispenser jug. The printed labels transmit positive messages, fostering a connection between the user and the water. The work builds on ideas of slow technology, embodied interaction, and placebo effects.

## CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing** → Interaction design, Interaction design theory, concepts and paradigms.

## Keywords

Water interface, novel text-input, placebo, suggestion, slow technology, positive reflection

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Matsaru Emoto's book The Hidden Messages of Water (2004) popularized the idea that human consciousness can influence the molecular structure of water [2]. Through experiments where words were displayed to water or spoken to it, Emoto claimed that positive words formed more beautiful ice crystals, while negative words resulted in malformed crystals. However, these findings have faced significant criticism. Many in the scientific community have failed to replicate Emoto's results, leading to skepticism about the influence of consciousness on water's molecular structure [8]. This skepticism casts doubt on the veracity of Emoto's claims, but raises an important question: If human consciousness cannot influence the water directly, can our interactions with water still affect us?

The Crock of Shh is designed to create a reflective, embodied interaction with water, encouraging mindfulness through the concept of slow technology. Slow technology refers to the intentional design of digital or physical systems that slow down the interaction to foster reflection, deeper thought, and personal meaning [4]. In contrast to Emoto's claim of a direct effect on water, the Crock of Shh emphasizes how the act of reflection and intentional interaction can enhance the user's experience and potentially influence their psychological state, even if the water itself remains unchanged.

## 2 Placebo and Suggestion

While Emoto's ideas about consciousness changing water lack scientific support, the act of writing messages to water may still influence us. Research suggests that writing and speaking can shift our consciousness, particularly for the 25% of people with a specific variant of the COMT enzyme, which regulates dopamine levels and affects how we respond to placebos and suggestions. COMT activity depends on a valine (val) or methionine (met) combination at the rs4680 location. About half the population has a val/met combination (average dopamine levels), 25% have val/val (lower dopamine), and 25% have met/met (higher residual dopamine). Those with the met/met combination are more responsive to suggestion and find experiences more pleasurable [3].

A simple mail-in DNA test can be used to determine your COMT status. My DNA results indicate that I fall into the met/met category, part of the 25% of the population that strongly responds to placebo and suggestion. I use this to my advantage through designing novel text-input devices and peripheral self-hypnosis techniques in my creative work [9]. Even those unaware of their COMT status can benefit from reflective rituals, like writing messages to water using the Crock of Shh. Placebo researcher Dan Moerman boosts the effects of pills by telling them they'll work well before he swallows them, a form of intention-setting we can also apply to dispensing and drinking water [6].

In addition, placebos are more effective when effort or discomfort is involved [11]. A larger pill or slower ritual gives the experience greater psychological weight. Similarly, the Crock of Shh slows down filling a cup, turning a routine act into a meaningful pause. This is an example of slow technology, which extends everyday tasks to enhance engagement [4]. In my own experience, I am


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**Figure 1: The Crock of Shh – a porcelain ceramic water dispenser and stand, audio exciter, 3D printed 4-button interface, 2 cup holders, plastic cups, and Dymo printer.**

usually frustrated in the morning when I pour water from a pitcher into a cup. I want the process to go more quickly so I can get back to whatever activity was interrupted by the chore of hydrating. The Crock of Shh creates the pain or barrier by extending this interaction further, creating an opportunity for reflection and gratitude for the refreshing drink I am preparing. By turning small inconveniences into rituals, we can strengthen willpower and enrich our daily experiences.

## 3 Related Work

Much of the current research on water dispenser interfaces centers on encouraging users to drink more water or to interact with water in a more engaging way. For instance, Chiu et al.'s Playful Bottle used social and mobile technologies to motivate water intake through gamification and peer influence [1], while Lessel et al.'s WaterCoaster employed playful feedback mechanisms to encourage regular hydration [5]. Profita et al. (2014) created an emoting water cooler that displayed emotional states to engage users and encourage hydration [7]. Similarly, Yildiz and Coskun (2019) developed Wwall, a public water dispenser that provided feedback on individual and collective water consumption in an office environment [12]. While these systems focus on motivating users to drink more water, none address the potential for reflection or emotional engagement with the water itself as a medium for positive suggestion or symbolic interaction. The Crock of Shh differs by integrating positive messaging into the act of drinking, encouraging both the user and the water to engage in a process of reflection.

## 4 The Crock of Shh

The Crock of Shh is a porcelain ceramic crock water dispenser on a wooden stand. 2 plastic cup holders are attached to the left and right sides of the wooden stand underneath the crock. The cup holders balance stacks of clear plastic cups. A 3-gallon water jug sits on top of the water crock. A coin type audio exciter is attached to the 3-gallon water jug to vibrate it and make it whisper. A 3D printed interface mount is fitted to the front crock nozzle area and attached to the stand with zip ties. The interface has 4 buttons and 1 microswitch. The four buttons are color coded: green for select, yellow for reversing the direction of scrolling text, blue for a space between letters/words, and black for printing. The 1 microswitch is positioned under the water nozzle so it is activated when the nozzle is pressed halfway from full release. The microswitch prevents the full release of the nozzle and provides audio and tactile feedback to the user so they know when it is activated.

With each activation of the nozzle, a whispered positive word representing a letter in the alphabet reverberates through the water jug. If a user is toggling through the alphabet in a forward direction, then the whispered positive word starts with the letter of the alphabet it represents. If a user is toggling through the alphabet in a backward direction, then the whispered positive word ends with the letter of the alphabet it represents. A Dymo LabelWriter 450 is located on a small table next to the water crock. The table serves as a place for the user to set their water cup while they attach their printed Dymo label to the cup. A small recycle bin is located under the table to dispose the backing of the Dymo label. The arcade buttons and microswitch run through an Arduino Micro into Max/MSP. The external Max objects 11clicks and 11strokes are used to simulate mouse movement and keystrokes within the Dymo software [10]. The Dymo label is clear and prints in reverse, so it is facing whatever it is stuck on in the correct direction.

The user approaches the Crock of Shh and reads the instructions placed on the 10"x14" landscape label on the water jug. The instructions reference Emoto's research on water and invite users to enter a positive word or message. This message is intended to impart beneficial qualities to the water, whether applied to a personal cup or to the 3-gallon jug for the benefit of all exhibition participants who consume the water. Once the user has a word/message in mind, they remove a clear plastic cup from the holder. The user leans to either side of the water jug so their ear is level with the jug. The user aligns their cup under the dispenser and presses the nozzle to begin filling their cup with water. The user listens to where the whispered words are in the alphabet and decides whether to go forward or backward in the alphabet to reach their desired letter. The user presses the yellow button on the interface to switch between forward and backward recitation of the whispered word representing a letter of the alphabet. The user selects a letter by pressing the green button on the interface. Once a letter is selected, the user again decides whether to advance to the next letter in a forward or backward direction. All the while, the user is monitoring the amount of water in their cup. The whispered positive words spoken to the water as the user toggles through the alphabet helps change the molecular structure of the water to be more beneficial to all who drink from it. The longer the message, the more water is dispensed in the cup, the more positively charged the water is left in the jug.

Once the user has completed the word/message, they press the black button on the interface to print the Dymo label. The user hears the Dymo print on the small table next to the water crock and sets their cup on the table. The user separates the Dymo from the machine by tearing it on the perforated line, removes the backing, and places it on their cup or on the water jug. If the user places the message on their cup, they can transmit a personal message regarding an issue unique to them. If the user places their message on the water jug, they are transmitting a general message which can benefit all the exhibition goers who drink from it. The user then recycles the backing of the Dymo label in the bin under the table. The user can keep their water cup and reuse it, transmitting the same message to new cups of water each time they drink. The user can also leave their water cup with message attached on the table as an example of a positive message that can be typed to inspire others.

## 5 The Water's Message to Us

Interacting with the Crock of Shh offers users various experiences. Most importantly, the user is made to consider water from a new angle, bowing down to it as they listen to and dispense it. The air bubbles arising in the water jug as the water is dispensed causes the user to pay closer attention to the process, taking the water more seriously. That the letters of the alphabet are whispered as words causes the user to consider water more gently, not to mindlessly dispense it and gulp it down, but to appreciate it as a way to replenish their body's resources. The slow dispensing of the water causes the user to overcome their habitual urge to rush through the routine task without giving it much thought. The user must hesitate to consider the beginning or ending sounds of the positive words and the letters of the alphabet they represent. The user can be inspired to change or adapt their typed message to the water once they hear the words whispered from the tank.

The decision the user makes between scrolling through the alphabet forwards or backwards to reach their desired letter helps change the path of their thought, extending the amount of time they hold the positive word/message in their head. The user is also forced to consider the quality of the character of the people dispensing water from the crock and the types of messages others may be sending to the water. Some users may examine the messages on the water jug before deciding to drink from it. Just as contamination is a concern at public water fountains, an unclean character is a concern at the Crock of Shh. Finally, the Crock of Shh encourages its users to consider the plausibility of suggestion, placebo, and homeopathic approaches to health and wellness. Even if a user does not want to type a message to the water, dispensing the water in short bursts will still whisper positive words to the water and enhance its qualities. The user will leave with the idea that sending messages to water is not a crock of shit, but instead a slow alternative approach to an everyday interaction that can reshape their own reality and attitude towards water.

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