Creating Community Environments

Why are some communities fun? Why do we only reluctantly participate in others? In this class, we do community fieldwork—battling for mayor on Foursquare, offering opinions in Hunch, researching products and services on Get Satisfaction to discover how collaborative actions happen. With a special focus on navigation, we'll think about markets and audiences, looking for ways to create receptive environments for interactive work. Along the way, we'll research language markers, design cues, griefing, upcycling, excellence, and craft as we focus on the agency of objects and the targeted representation of ideas.

Readings range from single-purpose sites like WafflePeople.com to ecoturist short stories to Irish poetry; students will use Tumblr blogs to respond to readings and share their observations with text, images, and video. Heavy emphasis on small group work in class meetings will lead to user testing at the midterm and an individual final project refined and evaluated by the class. Students will develop a deep understanding of consumption and contextual patterns to apply to their larger portfolio.

Grading: 40% final project, 20% midterm, 20% weekly responses and observations, 20% participation.

Class attendance is mandatory as we build our class community. More than one absence for any reason will be reflected in overall grade.

Students are expected to create a Tumblr (http://tumblr.com) Tumblelog that will be part of a class Tumblr group and must be open to participating in online community sites.

SECTION I: LOCATING IDENTITY

Week 1: Transference  Flickr.com, Roland Barthes, "Chopsticks," Leo Marx, Machine in the Garden

- What, historically, is technology? How might we define a community tool? What must you know to Flickr?

Week 2: Ambient Signifiers  Brightkite.com, Get Satisfaction.com, Henry Dreyfuss, Designing for People, Robert Hoekman Jr., Designing the Moment, Granta 102: The New Nature Writing

- What helps and what impedes navigation of a community space? How are migratory issues relevant?


- Invisible, floating, underground: how are markets bounded?

Week 4: Nationalism  Foursquare.com, Ebay.com, Arika Okrent, In the Land of Invented Languages: Esperanto Rock Stars, Klingon Poets, Loglan Lovers, and the Mad Dreamers Who Tried to Build a Perfect Language

- How do membership models tier participation and craft language for inclusion and exclusion?

SECTION II: EXTERNAL FORCES

- Do graphic and textual representations allow othering? What is the role of a community origin story?

Week 6: Concept Hierarchies, Asymmetry  Brizzly.com, Facebook.com, Dominic Widdows, Geometry and Meaning

- How does asymmetry allow for affordances? When communities learn, how do they sort knowledge?

Week 7: Networks and Catastrophe  The WELL, Second Life, Yochai Benkler, Wealth of Networks, John Berger, Hold Everything Dear

- How do communities mourn and remake? How do network ripples affect a community’s health?

Week 8: Midterm  User testing, collaborative evaluation, submitted testing reports, feedback measurements

Week 9: Cartography as Art  strangemaps.wordpress.com, hitotoki.org, Nato Thompson, Experimental Geography: Radical Approaches to Landscape, Cartography, and Urbanism, Katharine Harmon, The Map as Art: Contemporary Artists Explore Cartography, Eavan Boland, "That the Science of Cartography is Limited"

- Who is a mapmaker? How are mapmakers artists? Where does creative cartography situate community?

SECTION III: MATERIAL CULTURE


- What does it mean to take pride in one’s work? What drives unlimited attention to excellence?


- What is the afterlife of things? How are commodities traded and for what purposes?


- What is a community object? How can actions be, literally, object-oriented?

Weeks 13 and 14: Submit final project proposals, class presentations, and collaborative evaluation