Group 4:

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Project Description

Reach Out and Map Someone examines the nature of space through the perspective of individuals who participated in the project. The purpose of this undertaking is to manually map ideas of space through images, texts and sound recordings. In this age of increasing dependence on digital media, particular for interactions (i.e. email and the web), we wanted to reinforce the idea of direct human contact and interpersonal connections that specifically reject digital technology. We used cameras, notebooks and audio recorders as devices for gaining information. We used our group as a base point for handing off, sending or randomly approaching friends, peers, or strangers to collect a wide demographic of individuals in respect to age, occupation, location and mindset. The method was not intended to be scientific in its scope but rather to reveal and explore the organic nature of human interaction and encourage the development of new relationships. We were able to map the wide geographical range of the participants through these devices, and more importantly, attempted to understand the broader interpretations of space and the parallels between the information and ideas recorded.

The goal of this project was to encourage interactions between different individuals in an effort to reveal commonalities in perceptions of space. Not only were we trying to map people's ideas of space but to actually visualize these spaces and create a sensory experience from the collected data. How are people in different parts of the world connected by ideas about public and private spaces and the concepts of comfort and discomfort? Do these ideas change based on the nature of the environment in which the individual operates-private versus public space, home versus work, geographic location, and the general qualities of their everyday lives. Does the method of material distribution and levels of personal intimacy affect how candid people are about the spaces around them? The collection of the various materials allows us to visualize or 'map' conceptual connections by these spatial interactions and ideas.

Critique of Everyday Life Henri Lefebvre

Lefebvre is concerned with human interaction on a micro and macro scale and how those relationships determine social behavioral patterns. In his words, "the 'macro' does not determine the 'micro'. It encompasses it; it controls it; it penetrates it and imposes regulations upon it, which are themselves at differing levels of depth and effectiveness: norms of conduct and behavior patterns, models and roles." This introduces some interesting concepts to the fundamental goals of the project and how our results should be analyzed. Our project works on a microsociological level and attemps to map the macroscopic implications of the connections made during the process. Based on Lefebvre's hypothesis, our analysis must question the authenticity of the so called "unmediated relationships," interactions that occur directly between people. The intimacy between individuals as well as the social hierarchy in place may affect the nature of our results in terms of what people are willing to share or how they present their ideas or surroundings. There is a need to contextualize the results in terms of the various components of everyday life as perceived by the individuals and the surrounding environment.

Furthermore, Lefebvre attempts to 'relativize the concept' of alienation in terms of its connection to a social framework. An awareness or feeling of alienation is, in effect, disalienating and connects the individual to a defined social situation, but does not necessarily prevent further alientations from the social collectivity. By using instructional prompts to determine different individuals' ideas about private spaces, we can determine definite patterns or overlapping perceptions of what constitutes 'private' or 'solitude.'

Project Process and Results

As a start, each group member sent out four cameras and four notebooks to a variety of family, friends, peers or strangers. Roughly half were distributed locally and the others were sent much further geographically. Each camera or notebook had a set of rules attached with instructions and prompts to complete the task. The idea was that each item was completed by one person and then passed on to another until completion. Each of the four notebooks and cameras had a different set of prompts to encourage a broad range of data. Some cameras and notebooks also asked the participants to record their name, location and occupation. Some also asked that a picture be taken of the individual participants. The goal was to create a set of prompts that would possibly affect the participant's level of comfort with the candor of their submission, i.e. who would be seeing their written text or photographs. For instance, a camera might ask the participant to take a picture of your favorite public place that you experience on an everyday basis and your favorite private place that you experience on a daily basis; or it may ask that you photograph a place that you spend a lot of time in and then to pass the camera to someone that you wouldn't normally have a conversation with, specifically someone who does not share that space. A notebook might ask you to write about a place that you feel most at home and about a place that makes you feel uncomfortable; or to write about a place that others generally don't know you spend time in. Based on an initial test and set of results, we found that we needed to increase our distribution to ensure retrieval of materials and also to refine the rules. Some subsequent cameras involved not only taking two photographs, but writing about why they chose their subjects. Or the prompts became more specific about who they hand off their material to.

Some of the challenges that we experienced in the process included:
- getting willing random participants
- full candor
- general spatial awareness of individuals
- time constraints and travel of the items
- articulating rule sets to get intended results without constraining or limiting responses

Results / Findings

The process of 'reaching out' to family, friends, and even random strangers reveals existing networks and bonds between people. The way the participants chose the next participants reveals the microsociological network in place for that particular group. Analyzing the images and texts within this context allows us to draw macrosociological conclusions about social hierarchies, structures or institutions. The mapped movement of a given camera or notebook shows the strength or extents of a given social circle. For instance, a camera may have moved only within a family unit or a group of peers, demonstrating the concept of the unmediated 'blood ties.'

Comparing the images and text to the initial rules or prompts allows us to either form patterns of perceptions of space or acknowledge anomalies. Even across the wide range of participants, we can find commonalities that link seemingly divergent groups of people. For instance, a recurring favorite private place was the bedroom, while a favorite comfortable place was a spot in the home. These findings begin to create a social commentary of how people operate in their daily lives and feel about their surroundings. However, what we found was that by disregarding digital technology, it became clear that the microsociological networks in place define social interactions in a way that does not necessarily encourage the idea of "reaching out." Requiring passing of materials from one person to another mapped existing connections between people, even if geographically far reaching. It was much harder for us to create new connections between participants, but rather took the role of archivists. It also should be noted that the process is still ongoing and that materials will continue to arrive even after the presentation and the participants' interest in the results remains to be seen.