

## PART I: Workshop Survey

Researchers of social cyberspaces come from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds. We are interested in documenting the range of variation in this interdisciplinary area in an effort to build connections and highlight contrasts among these approaches. The following questions will be used to create a resource catalog that can be used by others in this field to guide them through the range of approaches in current use. We encourage people to complete the survey whether or not they intend to apply to participate in the workshop, in order to be included in the catalog.

### 1. Contact Information

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### 2. Research Background

#### A. Research Focus

1. Please describe the topics and issues you focus on in your research.

[In my current research, i am focusing on how to convey identity information about social spaces to users through visual means. Social spaces, like individuals, have an identity. This identity is impacted by the location of the space, what types of people use the space and how they use it. Online, location means little but the relationship between the space and the people are crucial, and usually not considered. Very rarely is there a sense of history, an understanding of reputation or a sense of atmosphere. My research focuses on how to use elements of identity theory and sociology to help architect appropriate space that encourage community development.](#)

[Current project: \*Loom2\*. My collaborator, Hyun-Yeul Lee, and i are bringing our expertise together to develop a dynamic visualization for online social spaces, such as Usenet. We are trying to visually convey the identity of the space, using the available text information to derive quantitative and qualitative descriptions of the space. We are using this information to develop an appropriate visual language for conveying information about the space and the people inside. Hyun's tremendous understanding of interaction design and my work within](#)

computer graphics have allowed us to push the boundaries of how information is portrayed and used for interaction.

2. Please cite 1 to 3 papers or other published works that best illustrate your research focus.

- Donath, Judith, Karahalios, Karrie and Viegas, Fernanda. "Visualizing Conversations." *Proceedings of HICSS-32*, Maui, HI, January 5-8 1999. *This describes the original procedure and goals of Loom. Loom2 extends this project but utilizes a lot of the philosophies. Currently, we have no publications to display what we have done so far. More information is available at <http://smg.media.mit.edu/projects/loom2/>*

## B. Theoretical Affiliations

1. Please summarize the theoretical tradition(s) that you most identify with and use in your work. What attracted you to this approach, what makes it more useful than other, alternative approaches?

### **Theoretical affiliation: gender theory / queer theory.**

Gender theory / queer theory presents a solid formation for understanding the interplay of identity and the self, questioning how identity is formed, mutated, read, and used in interactions. One's identity, self-perceived as well as read, impacts how one can maneuver through space. The interaction between identity and self is extremely crucial for understanding online social interactions. Gender theory has given me tools for deconstructing and analyzing ways in which people portray themselves and react to one another in virtual environments.

In addition to understanding issues surrounding the identities of people, i am concerned with how the identity of spaces alters the ways in which people interact both with the space and with other people in the space. In order to do this, i have started to pull from other theoretical affiliations, including sociology, urban studies and interaction design; i am in the early stages of understanding these fields.

2. For each tradition, please identify the most important text(s) or practitioner(s) that best captures the key concepts of the tradition.
  - **Foucault, Michel.** (e.g. *History of Sexuality*.) Foucault pushed the idea that identity was not a stable component of humanity, but instead something that is constantly changing. Foucault's work on how power impacts interaction is most remarkable.
  - **Butler, Judith.** (e.g. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.) Butler pushes Foucault a step further by suggesting that identity is performed rather than innate, particularly focusing on the performance of

gender. She argues that there is no binary system of gender, only binary expectation.

- **O'Brien, Jodi.** (e.g. "Writing on the body: Gender (re)production in online interaction." In *Communities and Cyberspace*, edited by Marc Smith and Peter Kollock.) O'Brien suggests that identity cannot be simply consciously performed in cyberspace. Instead, how one's identity is read and responded to in real life dramatically impacts, and limits, the performance of identity online. Language and style of interaction is impacted by identity performance, not just issues that are written on the body. Amy Bruckman's "Turing Game" is an implementation that furthers this idea.

### C. Methodological Affiliations

1. Please summarize the methodological tradition(s) that you most identify with and use in your work. What attracted you to this approach, what makes it more useful than other, alternative approaches?

#### **Methodological affiliation: computer graphics.**

Computer graphics provides an appropriate methodology for graphically displaying information. In particular, I am focused on work done in the visualization end of computer graphics. Unfortunately, most previous work focuses on scientific and economic data; thus, the perspective is limited since the goal is purely to understand large data sets, not necessarily to develop an intuitive understanding of the qualitative aspect of information visualization.

Since computer graphics was developed out of engineering, it is only recently that non-technical approaches are even being considered. Human-computer interaction, sometimes considered to be an offshoot of computer graphics, has attempted to push away from traditional engineering paradigms to incorporate cognitive science, psychology, graphic design, and interaction design. My work within computer graphics has emphasized psychological approaches to vision and naïve interaction design techniques.

Up until recently, most traditional computer graphics and the design developed alongside it approach visualization issues from a purely quantitative and systematic approach. Even Tufte's dominating work on large-scale information visualization focuses entirely on presenting purely quantitative data. Recently, computer graphics has moved to incorporate not just the aesthetics of design but also to consider the impact that the visual has on the users. For example, Pixar tests all of their 3D computer graphics on children to better understand the emotional impact of their animations. In addition, academic computer graphics is starting to use artistic techniques to portray information.

Combined with a design perspective, computer graphics provides an appropriate methodological approach to visually conveying information.

2. For each tradition, please identify the most important text(s) or practitioner(s) that best captures the key concepts of these approaches.

- **Tufte, Edward.** (Books: *Visual Explanation*, 1996. *Envisioning Information*, 1990. *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*, 1983.) Tufte presents a very compelling approach to conveying quantitative visual data.
- **Kirby, R.M., Marmanis, H. and Laidlaw, David H.** “Visualizing Multivalued Data from 2D Incompressible Flows Using Concepts from Painting.” *IEEE Visualization 99*, pp. 333-340. October 1999. This paper is one of the most successful uses of artistic approaches to convey scientific data.
- **Sweetland, Doug** (panelist). “Facial Animation: Past, Present, and Future.” *SIGGRAPH 97*. Sweetland presented how Pixar uses facial expressions to convey information not necessarily obvious in the text, in particular emotion and thought processing. Unlike traditional facial CG, Pixar does not try to re-convey information available in language, suggesting that people do not actually do this, but instead often contradict themselves or make visual information available before language.

#### D. Implications of Research

- Please summarize the relevant constituencies, practical applications, and social uses of your research.

Although i have conveyed a theoretical and methodological approach to my research, i believe my strength is in understanding a wide variety of viewpoints, from sociological to technical, biological to artistic. I believe that the creation of online social spaces cannot be done apart from the study of people and how they interact. Unfortunately, i believe that most online communities were developed with technical needs in mind, not with social concerns. As a creator of spaces, i believe that the best approach is to understand, as well as possible, the needs and concerns of the people involved. As a primarily technical individual, developing the language with which to communicate with social scientists and designers is crucial to me. I believe that my contribution to this field will be to bring together related research so as to understand and develop appropriate virtual spaces for building community.

### **3. Research Resources**

#### A. Notable research

- Please list the top two or three papers, books or presentations you found in the past year that were of greatest value to your current research.
- **Dodge, Martin, and Kitchen, Rob.** *Mapping Cyberspace*. Routledge: 2000.

- **Smith, Marc and Kollock, Peter**, Eds. *Communities and Cyberspace*. Routledge: 1999.

#### B. Useful online resources

- Please list the top two or three web sites or other online resources that you find have the most value for your current research.

The following websites are great resources for what texts are out there on issues related to online communities, cyberculture and how gender and identity play a role in them. They are based on class reading lists.

- <http://www.otal.umd.edu/~rccs/courses.html> (cyberculture)
- <http://www.ucs.mun.ca/~jpeddle/cmcbiblio.htm> (gender)

#### C. Useful conferences or journals

- Please list the top two or three conferences or journals that you find have the most value for your current research.

Conferences:

- CSCW (Computer Supported Cooperative Work)
- SIGGRAPH (Computer Graphics and Interactive Techniques)
- Women-and-Performance (particularly Issue 17)

## **Part II: Position Statement**

Researchers take a broad range of approaches in studying social cyberspaces, and each approach has its own theoretical underpinnings, goals, methods, advantages, and disadvantages. The primary goal of the workshop is to delineate different approaches to the study of social cyberspaces, both in terms of theoretical background and research methodology.

Several of the workshop session topics will be determined by attendee interests. To apply for the workshop, we request that you propose a workshop topic and provide a brief summary of your position on that topic. Position statements must be 500 words or less, not including title or references. In developing your position statement, keep in mind that workshop attendees will be selected to reflect a diversity of research approaches. Particular attention will be paid to the advantages and disadvantages of the different methodological approaches researchers take in general, and in approaching specific research topics.

Suggested topics: methodological issues, ethics, the relationship between research and development, the relationship between the real world and cyberspace, identity, privacy, social support and empathy, trust and reputation, representations of space, online learning, social advocacy, and so forth.

### **Identity of space & people in cyberspace**

Both people and social spaces have an identity, partially formed by the self and partially formed by how the person or space is perceived. What components of identity are crucial to mediated social spaces? How do you accurately convey identity-based information to users?

Real life social spaces are designed and constructed to encourage a specific type of social interaction. As the structure of and items in a space change, so does the identity. The way that people utilize the space alters its identity. As with people, we develop a set of personal expectations and stereotypes so as to read various social spaces and act accordingly. In the same way, much is written on the body as well as implied in the dress of individuals. This reading and writing of identity alter the way one interacts with people and places. Unfortunately, very little identity information is easily available in mediated social spaces.

What elements of identity need to be conveyed? How should identity be conveyed?

Elements of a space's identity are both quantitative (i.e. "how many people?") and qualitative (i.e. "what is the style of interaction?"). One approach is to give real life types of information to virtual spaces, either by using graphics to give backgrounds or to construct profiles of people or spaces. Using this mechanism, neither the people nor the

space evolve or age over time, as they would during real world interaction. How else can a space's identity be conveyed?

Dealing with the identity of people is more challenging. Currently, profiles give people an ability to convey identity information, often in the form of the classic A/S/L – age, sex, location. Unfortunately, these are often based on idealized self-perception rather than an aggregate of experience, external perception and unintentional performance. Online profiles either inadequately or inaccurately portray an individual, or at least limit the types of portrayals possible. Since profiles don't work, users are forced to tediously wade through people's words and deconstruct them to build a mental image. Although I view this as a weakness, it's possible that this is a good thing.

One of the first questions asked in most chatspaces is A/S/L – age, sex, location. Are those the critical markers? Although we may be able to easily determine information about sex, race and other physical real life identities, do we want these written on our every cybermove? [O'Brien 99] Digital signatures convey information about reputation and social class as well as interests, but do we want to acknowledge that this is often their role? [Donath 99] Although we construct mental models of the people we interact with, is it appropriate to systematically construct profiles of people for everyone else to see based on previous interactions or reputation? How much control should an individual have over the information that portrayed about hir? Is it reasonable or ethical for a system to develop a series of stereotypes in which to operate, regardless of what we as humans use for mental models?

[Donath 99] Donath, Judith. "Identity and Deception in the Virtual Community." In *Communities and Cyberspace*, edited by Marc Smith and Peter Kollock. Routledge, 1999.

[O'Brien 99] O'Brien, Jodi. "Writing on the body: Gender (re)production in online interaction." In *Communities and Cyberspace*, edited by Marc Smith and Peter Kollock. Routledge, 1999.