1. ASSIGNMENT OVERVIEW

This is the first of five group assignments to redesign your chosen artifact. The first group assignment is to use ethnographic methods (observation, participant-observation, interviews) to document the usage of your chosen artifact.

Objective 1. Refine your understanding of the artifact that is your topic for the Semester: phone, camera, Web, or game.

- Obviously these are still very large and vague categories that you will focus upon, so narrow your artifact of interest. For example: What kind of phone—a mobile phone or line phone? What kind of camera—a digital still camera, video camera, or camera phone? What kind of game device (and game)—a handheld game console, a home video game console, a PC computer game, an arcade video game machine, or what? What kind of Web application—a web application such as Google or Friendster or what?
- Remember, you want an artifact flexible enough that you can redesign it for the next four redesign assignments (to make your artifact more programmable, to enable new forms of communication, new forms of social organization, new forms of game play), but specific enough that you have a clear idea of what you are redesigning.

Objective 2. Use ethnographic methods to develop a profile about how your artifact shapes the users’ (individual, group) communications, experiences, attitudes, actions, whatever dimensions you discovered as important.

- Note that your group should design your report for presentation on your group Web page.
- Your report on the artifact usage should be documented in any medium that captured the information: your writings, your images, your audio evidence, sketches—be creative.
- Note that your inquiry usually includes both facts and hypotheses about your artifact. For example, you might include information on the past of this artifact (when did those you interviewed began using this artifact, and why?), or develop hypotheses about the future of this artifact.
- Ethnography is often about hearing stories that give you new insight into the artifacts and the value found by your respondents in artifacts. Trust your instinct about the stories that seem interesting or surprising, in addition to looking for consistent patterns in the use of artifacts.
Questions you need to answer in your ethnographic report include:

1. **Utility.** How do different people use the artifact, and what are some of the features of the artifact that are not used?
2. **Image and style.** How is their sense of image or style expressed by the artifact?
3. **Social networks.** How did they learn to use the artifact? Who influences their use? How do they use the artifact to relate to people?
4. **Life style.** How does the artifact influence (or change) their life style?

How to do ethnographic research:

- **Who?** Your group can decide to watch one particular group to study in depth (college students), or two groups to compare (men and women, students and working people).
- **How?** If your artifact is the Web, you can observe people online, and/or ask someone if you can talk with them while they're online, or use email or IM. Otherwise, observe in public spaces, or ask if people are willing to be interviewed.
- **How long?** I recommend that each of you watch at least two people, for at least an hour each time, then write up key behaviors you think are important. I recommend that each of you interview at least two people who use the artifacts, write up at least a page of key findings, and then have your group meet to try to identify patterns.
- **Working together.** If you want to work together, your whole group could watch the same event (for example, how students on Telegraph Avenue use an artifact on campus), each of you write up your one page of notes, then compare findings and figure out patterns. Two people can interview someone together, but two is usually a maximum.
- **Organizing the report.** Your report should be organized around the four themes from above about your artifact, featuring two kinds of evidence. First, are there specific behaviors you observed or stories that are really interesting; for example, who stood out and why? Second, what patterns does your group think are important?
- **Point out debates.** If your group doesn’t particularly agree about patterns or examples, it’s also great to set your report up as a debate and competing interpretations.

Next week we'd love to hear from each group in class reporting some observation, and we can give feedback about how to develop the idea.

2. **ASSIGNMENT TURN-IN**

The write up of your ethnographic observations (including images, sketches, notes, etc.) needs to be turned in to your group webpage. Upload your files using the web-based assignment turn in page. Write-ups should be equivalent to 3-5 pages of text plus supporting documentation from your observations. **This assignment is due by THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2005, at 2:00 pm.**