

.....: SIMASTICUS :..... A MEIN STIFFI PRODUCTION



MAJOR STUDIO :: INTERFACE >> Project 02 - Postmortem report by Chuck Yust
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INTRODUCTION ::

For the Simasticus project, we sought to create positive interactions between strangers in Union Square by projecting dialogue and iconography from “The Sims” game and using computer vision techniques implemented in Processing and MAX/MSP/Jitter. We developed a version of the project as the basis for the 24-hour Sims game jam sponsored by the Parsons Design and Technology Department and utilized this opportunity to test a number of prototypes. We also designed a custom Sims-based interface to enable a wider audience to control the project in anticipation of the “Parsons Does The Sims” exhibit at the Chelsea Art Museum on April 12th, 2007.

The concept applies Sims game-play to the real world where actual people and the public take on the role of Sims and the game player retains control in provoking interactions. This approach is described in the following quote from Lev Manovich’s article titled “Metadating the Image”::

“...the example of new “social granularity” is provided by the popular computer game *The Sims*. This game that is better referred to as “social simulator” models ongoing relationship dynamics between a number of characters. Although the relationship model itself can hardly compete with the modeling of human psychology in modern narrative fiction, since *The Sims* is not a static representation of selected moments in the characters’ lives but a dynamic simulation running in real time, we can at any time choose to follow any of the characters.”

Our project seeks to model in real life what Lev refers to as “ongoing relationship dynamics” in the Sims game where pedestrians in public are the actual characters. Through our prototype testing projecting interaction modules in public and user-testing our custom interface we proved that provoking positive interactions using our technique is indeed possible and a full-scale mockup would have a high probability of success.



Cross-section and overhead view of Union Square site.

We chose a site at the Southern tip of Union Square for our projected intervention given the vantage point of the site one is able to obtain from the fifth floor of the Filene's Basement store across the street. We studied this site by measuring the frequency and diversity of pedestrian traffic through this site over a 10-minute time span in the morning and evening.

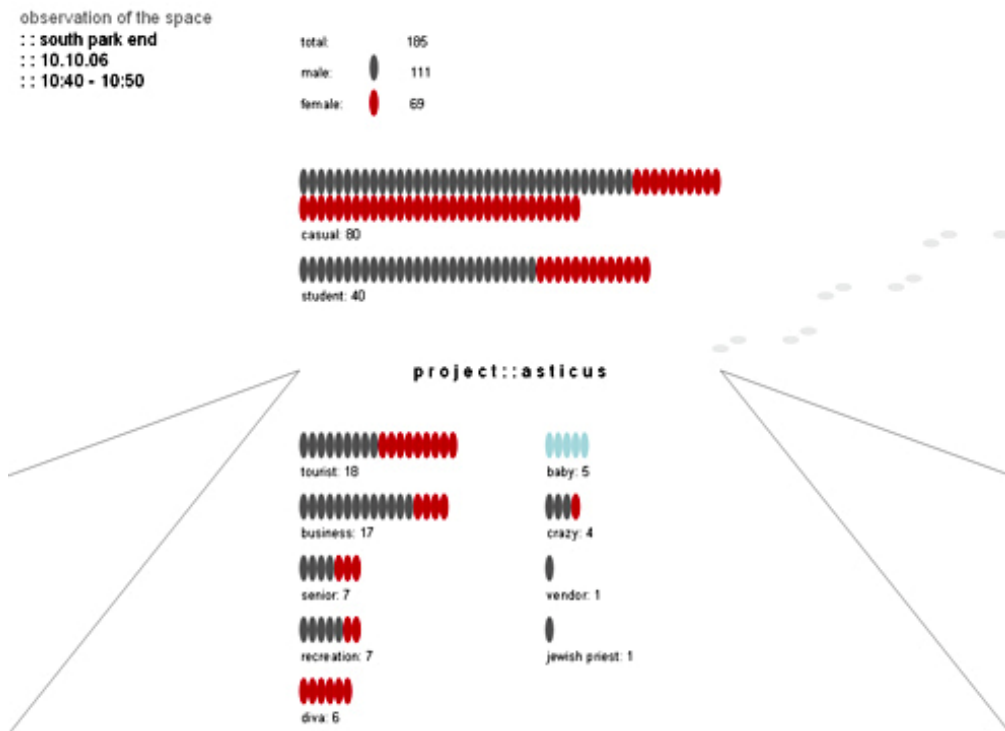


Diagram showing pedestrian traffic through the site.

Ultimately, we were unable to get permission from Filene's basement in time to use the Union Square site, however we were able to test the project in public from the 10th floor of the building at 2 West 13th.



Image of the test site. The intersection of 13th street and 5th Ave below 2W. 13th.

During this test, we confirmed that a 2000-3000 lumen projector would work for our purposes as this distance from the 10th floor was twice that of the official site we looked at and we were still able to communicate with pedestrians on the street. We were also able to encourage pedestrians to interact (and dance with strangers) during this trial. Other projector testing was achieved at Tischman auditorium where the Audio Visual consultant showed us a range of lighting conditions using his 6000 lumen projector.



Auditorium in varying lighting conditions.

We were also able to use test our interface for the gallery exhibition. Students from a local high school visited the Parsons Design and Technology program and were able to use our interface while it was connected to the projector in much the same way it would be connected in a gallery setting. The students were all very familiar with the Sims game,

and were consequently familiar with the interface elements. The students were extremely enthusiastic about being able to write custom messages into thought bubbles in order to get people to interact, which is in contrast to the Sims very structured mode of character interaction. The main criticism of the students was the processing slowness of this particular iteration ran and the lack of diversity in interactive elements available (which have consequently been added).

The final implementation of the project consisted of a 2500 lumen BENQ projector that was connected to laptop running our interface in a Flash .swf file. The laptop was also connected to MiniDV camcorder which was calibrated the same vantage point as the projector which provided the live video feed in the background of the interface.

STRENGTHS ::

The main strength in this project was the opportunity we gave ourselves to test components of the project independently and then assemble them collectively for the final iteration. We started with testing whether or not we could get pedestrians to interact with one another using a crude prototype and a remote projection from the tenth floor of a Parsons building. Once this was confirmed we proceeded with the implementation of specific elements and graphics that we would display on the street. We then designed an interface that could organize these elements in an intuitive way for a non-tech-savvy populace, which could be installed in a gallery setting in the future. During all of these steps we tested varying lighting conditions and equipment including projectors, Mac and PC laptops, wireless and MiniDV camcorders, and screen display methods.

WEAKNESSES ::

The main weakness of the project was the selection of a site that had a low probability of implementation. We were given an initial design constraint that stated the project had to be implemented in Union Square. The site we chose was ideal from a conceptual standpoint, but other locations in the park such as below the New York Film Academy or the New School University dorm on Union Square may have made more sense in order to launch the project within the tight deadline we were provided.

RELATED PROJECTS ::



Marie Sester
Access project

ACCESS lets you track anonymous individuals in public places, by pursuing them with a robotic spotlight and acoustic beam system.

ACCESS presents control tools generated by the surveillance technology combined with the advertising and Hollywood industries, and the internet.

RELEVANCE

Real-time, one-way communication is initiated in this system through the use of a projection mic and spotlight which gives participants the awareness that they are unwittingly the subject of a game or system that is interacting with them.



TXtual Healing By Paul Notzold

The piece explores the use of mobile technology to trigger dialogue, action and create content for a staged public performance. By using the facade of a building the intention is to engage an audience to think about the physical spaces we move through, live in and share. I'm trying to address public vs. private space and what kind of dialogue might transpire if we shared out private thoughts. The piece was designed to encourage play, idea sharing, thought, discourse, and entertainment.

RELEVANCE

A project which projects speech bubbles on buildings and initiates dialogue that is conveyed by the public through SMS. Different from our project in that only the "game-player" or person using the interface has the ability to determine what is displayed in the speech bubbles