

Week 4 - The Website

November 16, 2009

- color theory / patterns - The Web is blue
- Usability - “Don’t make me think” vs a navigation poetics
- eye-tracking - heat maps tell stories, and help redesign sites
- site optimization - “grabbing more eyeballs”
 - the line between optimization and manipulation
- site features - types of interactivity ergo participation

Website as Archived Object

- Web archives & types of historiography
 - Wayback Machine (single site histories - “biographical” history)
 - special collections (“event-based” history)
 - emerging: national collections (“national” history)
- archive.org and Alexa founded by the same guy

Wayback Machine ‘features’ and history.

Invites the biography of a web page. Frames the history of the web(site) as a surf space [rather than a ‘search space’ as found today]

- Interface - Query URL; output list of stored pages; * means change
- Navigation - “Jump cuts” through archived time, or to live Web
- Historiisable - solution for 404 errors; no search, rather surf

Special collections

webarchivist.org - started late 90s / early 2000

- September 11th archive - 25,000 web sites
- built in historiography - event-based

- “A web sphere is a set of dynamically defined digital resources, often connected by hyperlinks, spanning multiple websites relevant to a central event, concept, or theme and bounded temporally.” (M. Dougherty and K. Foot, 2007)
- people don’t seem to be using them (lack of “Archived in the Library of Congress Web” in Google Scholar / minimal results in Google)

Things to know before doing website history

(Michael Stevenson | Digital Methods | November 2009)

Issues of Interface

- wayback machine has no search
- the url makes visible the jump cuts necessary for ‘seamless’ surfing
- in addition to the url, note the importance of the *
- note also the importance of the * within the url (wildcard for search)
- “using wild-card query to create a snapshot of a set of sites for a particular time period”
- coded collections, for advanced browsing
- Searchable (sometimes)
 - US cyber cemetery (sites of dead gov projects)

Issues of Inclusion

- thematic and broad-based crawling: what decisions are made regarding inclusion?
- sites blocked or removed by owners, via robots.txt or email

Issues of Exhaustiveness

- Flash and complex javascript is unarchivable software: ‘keep it simple’ a design imperative for archive-friendly websites
- when a web page is no longer one page (dynamic content, page elements archived at different times)
- “Debunking the Wayback Machine”
- working with missing sites: “conjuring up”
 - where would the site have been? what are the related sites?

History of What?

- create a narrative, with a focused question
- consider aesthetics, front page real-estate, and the fold (see also: tabs, featured content, significant blogrolls, “issue lists”)
- politics of what is archived

History of When?

- when treating a genre of sites, consider periodization
- examples: the campaign website, search engines before and after Google

Periodizations

- looking at the context of sites while examining the changes.
 - (the disappearance of Google Directory in relation to the disappearance of human editors)

Retaining their own history

sites that maintain their own history are also possible to study (wikis, blogs)

Research stuff (looking at Heavy Metal Umlaut)

Narrative structure

- full sweep of the history
- looking back at specific elements (the n-umlaut, the factuality of the n-umlaut; an incidence of vandalism)

Built-in assumptions

- make a point about claims that have been made about the internet / subject at hand
- assumption 1: highly dedicated community vigilant against vandalism
- assumption 2: very diverse community of contributors
- assumption 3: “the blogosphere recommended a site for study” – assumes the blogosphere is worth listening to

Tips

This project is more qualitative. Look into the background of the site you are investigating and its context.

Analyze your narrative structure in relation to “Google: politics of tabs.” If you deviate, deviate for the better.