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Data Gardens

Leaving Notes and Flowers

When I began this project, I knew I wanted to make something related to a website I found called Find a Grave, the “World’s largest gravesite collection.” In this site, visitors are able to search for graves and find profiles of the deceased. I became very interested in how lives are memorialized online. One of the topics that came up during our class was how the internet can both feel personal and impersonal. When we looked at GeoCities, we could see the internet as a smaller, more connected space. There was personalization in these webpages that we don’t really see now on sites like Facebook or Twitter.

As for Find a Grave, I felt that it combined these two worlds; personal and impersonal, and did so in a strange way. Here we have a site that has documented over 180 million memorials, which is a very large database, but not all memorials exist there. At the same time, there is a sense of community in the site, since members have been helping document these memorials since 1995. I found it striking that there was an option to leave a virtual flower, with many flower varieties (all represented by clipart images), and other categories such as “Fun Flowers,” “Children,” and “Religious” were available as well. The clipart images were both sweet but also somewhat strange—some users appeared to have uploaded their own clipart and GIFs that automatically moved when they appeared on an individual’s page. There was a unique element of time—in real life, flowers left behind on gravestones wilt, but the flowers left on this site live forever, so long as the website remains.

So, I decided to make my own version of this. I chose four types of flowers and hand-drew them. I liked the idea of including a Forget-Me-Not, which is a flower, but also serves as a statement from the person being written to. I wanted to make my own page where people could address a note to someone, sign their name, and leave that note as a way to grieve or find solace. Ideally, I would love to have more categories of images for people to choose from, not just flowers, and also allow them to change the font of their note, the image of the note, and even draw their own flower to make the site feel more personal. As of right now, it is a space for people to think and reflect. There is a sense of longing that I want to be present. I wanted to make something where people could get their thoughts out and write to someone who they miss, or even someone they never really knew.

In the feedback I received from this project, I liked the idea of each note left by someone being represented by a flower. There would be a public section, where anyone can access flowers and notes made by other users. Users would ideally still be able to find their flower among everyone else's because it would have a distinct appearance. There could also be a private area where users could generate their own flower field if they wrote enough letters. There, they could go back to the letters and find solace again.

I think these letters need to have some kind of destination. It should go somewhere, and the end goal would be to have people do something with it, rather than just generate the letter. Ultimately, I'd like the project to allow people to share their stories and personal lives, and have a site that allows for them to feel comfortable sharing that information with a supportive community.