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9/25/14

The time I spent at Maker Faire this past weekend was one that gave me a lot of new perspectives on the Maker culture, of which I have had little exposure to previously. My first glimpse into the Maker Faire was my first few steps onto the fairgrounds, which, after ducking behind some mysterious tents, turned out to be the 3D printing territory. Through my disorientation, I was caught in bits and pieces of conversations and demonstrations between groups of people huddled at tables, who were all fascinated by the possibilities that 3D printing could realize.

Having never been to Maker Faire before, I was intrigued to see the diversity of people at the fair. In particular, I was interested to find that there was such a large number of children participating in the fair. It occurred to me that to be able to communicate with children and spark their interest in being creative with technology had so much potential to expand the ways students think about what they're learning, and how they can apply it beyond the classroom. It was exciting--and also quite strange--to see little kids sitting at the table soldering away, or others explaining to their parents how the Noisemaker was working.

While volunteering at the GadgIteration table, I interacted with a range of adults, students and teachers of various grade levels. In my conversations with the parents and teachers, I noticed that there were various degrees of interest regarding GadgIteration as an organization, and how the Noisemaker contributed to its platform. Teachers were primarily interested first in the logistics of the organization, about the summer programs and workshops, the age group it targeted. Then they would turn their attention to the Noisemaker. While explaining the projects to the teachers, it seemed like a lot of teachers were amused by the demos and appreciative of the way they brought an element of fun into learning about electric circuitry, but responded the most enthusiastically to the Human Circuit function of the Noisemaker. Of course, this was no surprise--we all knew that this has been and would continue to be the most popular demo at the table. However, what's interesting to think about is why it is this particular function that draws in both the adults and the children.

The Human Circuit function offers a simple but effective means to both creating a circuit, as well as explaining circuitry. By being literally "hands-on", the Human Circuit is able to ground the understanding of electric circuits to something that people are able to be a part of, again, literally. While the participants may have enjoyed the other demos, it could be said that there was maybe a more removed understanding of how they worked. People are able witness the circuitry working within the project, and are able to process and envision the flow of electricity that allows it to function, but to watch that very circuit from a 3rd person perspective intuitively calls for a suspension of disbelief. When they put the object down, they can walk away taking for granted the electrical workings within the demo--just as they walk away from the power of a light switch at home. However, when they are able to create the circuit themselves, the circuit offers no way to escape its process. The participants are forced to realize that electricity is running through their bodies, that electricity does stop when they break the circuit. It is a first person experience that changes the entire perspective of the project and its creative potential.

From reflecting on the Human Circuit, I have realized that it is this kind of first person experience that a website needs to provide in order to engage its audiences in a clear but captivating manner. Rather than dumping esoteric information and fancy elements of design onto a page, the site should be able to take the user by the hand and take the user on a journey through the site. It will be important that we consider how to lay out the site so that the user is not forced into a third person experience where they enter the site as an outsider, and examine the pages at a distance. The site should be able to speak directly to the user, invite them inside to take a look and explore the pages. I think as we develop the site, we will need to develop a structure that will be able to reach out to different audiences at first glance, without being alienating in its interface. From talking to different stakeholders at the fair, we have gained a sense of what information they tend to first look for, and this can dictate the priority of the pages within our site and how we bring the stakeholder to those pages.