



annotate space: interpretation and storytelling on location



Annotate Space (2002) was a walking guide to the DUMBO (Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass) neighborhood in Brooklyn, delivered on an Internet-connected personal digital assistant. The guide consisted of directions to a series of locations where the user could take in specific environments, while reading or listening to the (often conflicting) opinions of local residents, artists and activists about those places. The guide was designed to be a living document, to which users could add new places and comments on places.

My hypothesis was that compared to print travel guides, a Web-based guide was a better medium for delivering a local experience that was about politics rather than tourism. Tourism is premised upon the static offer of a reliably enjoyable experience to be had at a place. Politics acknowledges that places can be changing constantly, and that to know a place is to experience its pleasant and unpleasant features and to encounter the people who live with, work with, own or otherwise claim what is lovely and what is horrible about their place.

Annotate Space offers the possibility of taking a walk in the city and, at the end, feeling that you understand a local issue better—whether that issue is street crime, gentrification, park maintenance, or conflicting proposals for the redevelopment of some parcel of land. This understanding is inevitably partial, but I think it is critical for beginning to engage in local politics. Almost ten years after Annotate Space appeared, there have been many geoannotation projects, but none I know of that have addressed this specific need.

Bio

Andrea Moed designs and evaluates interactive systems for collaboration, including social media tools, enterprise software, and public information systems for museums and parks. She strives to locate and design for the political in her projects: to see that among the group called “the users” there exist disparities of power, choice and capacity, but also the potential to act in concert.