

Virtual Ethnography in an Online Learning Environment

Using the Web as an Object of Study

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SUNY TLT 2006
Syracuse

Virtual Ethnography in an Online Learning Environment

The Web as an Object of Study

- As the Web has emerged as a distinct media form in the past ten years, it has increasingly been viewed as an object of study by social researchers.
- Poses challenges for scholars as they seek to develop methodological approaches permitting robust examination of Web phenomena.
- One approach has been labeled “virtual ethnography”

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Virtual Ethnography

virtual

virtual

- Structured observation of phenomena enacted by individuals or organizations

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Teaching through virtual ethnography

- Subject matter objectives
 - Examine Web campaigning during 2006 election
- Methodological objectives
 - Introduce research methods, observation techniques, grounded theory construction
- Experiential objectives
 - Register for and use new Web services
 - Obtain, install and use new software

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POS/COM 262: Online Politics

- Identify Web sites produced by Senate and House campaigns in 2006
- Identify features provided by campaign Web sites
- Observe techniques associated with features
- Associate practices of campaign organizations with specific techniques
- Analyze factors associated with tendency of campaigns to engage in certain practices

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Example

- Actor: Campaign
- Feature: Contribute online
- Technique: Transaction
- Practice: Involving



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Doing Virtual Ethnography

- Observing
- Focusing
- Archiving
- Sharing
- Tagging
- Reporting

■ Practices

– the things we do

■ Techniques

– the way we do things

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Observing

■ Practice

- identify and observe relevant Web objects

■ Technique

- Firefox browser
- Google search



Virtual Ethnography in an Online Learning Environment

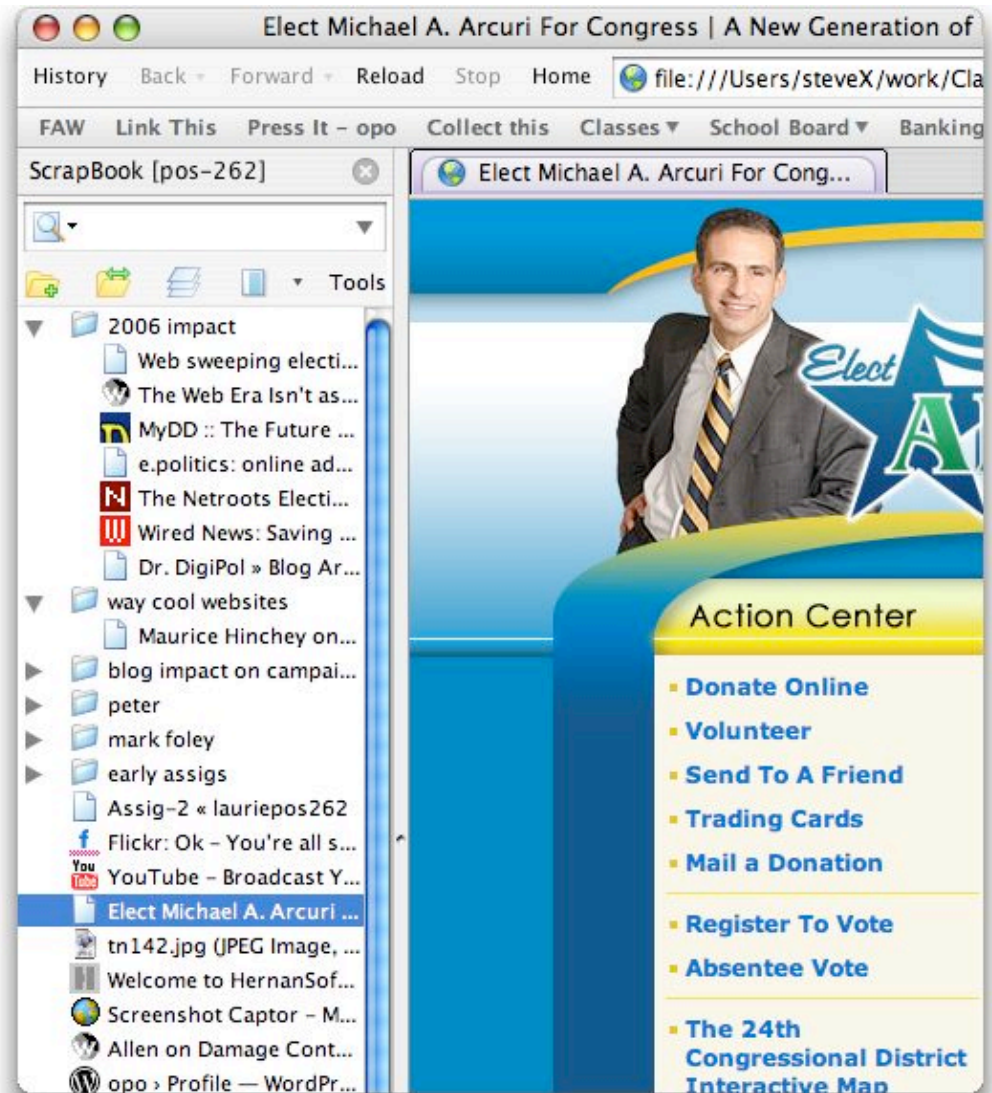
Archiving

■ Practice

- make a local copy of the object in context

■ Technique

- Scrapbook Firefox Extension



Virtual Ethnography in an Online Learning Environment

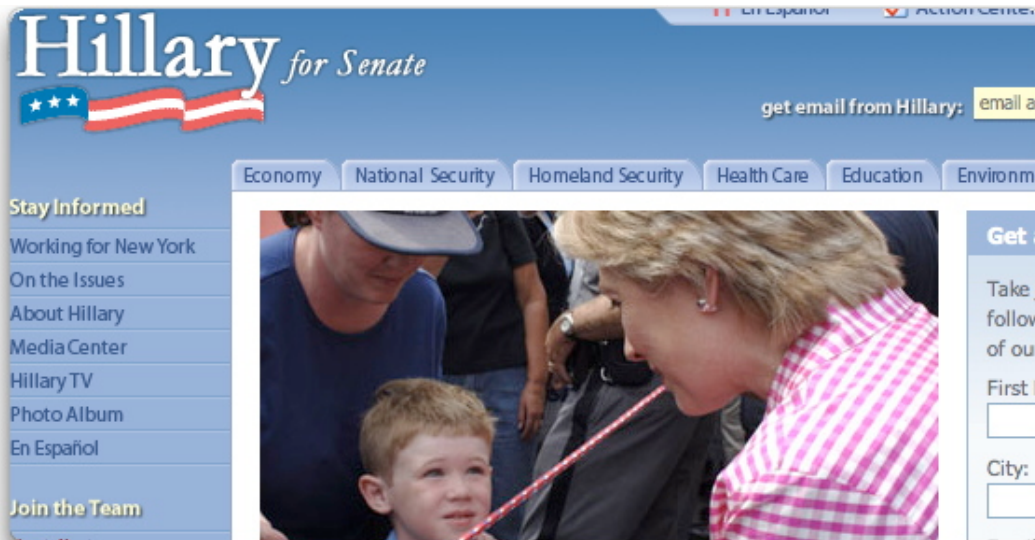
Focusing

■ Practice

- zoom in on specific aspects of object
- create “Webshot”

■ Technique

- Webshot with snapzpro (mac) or snag-it (pc) or other jpg maker



Virtual Ethnography in an Online Learning Environment

Sharing

■ Practice

- make Web bookmarks viewable and accessible on Web
- make Webshots viewable and accessible on Web

■ Technique

- del.icio.us
- flickr



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Tagging

■ Practice

- associate relevant metadata with observed sites and with specific observations

■ Technique

- del.icio.us tags
- flickr tags



del.icio.us / stevesuny /

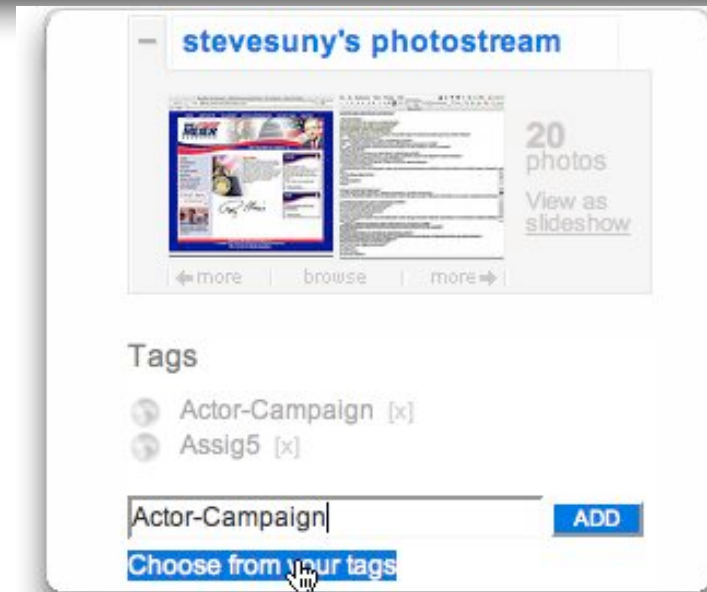
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url

description

notes

tags



stevesuny's photostream

20 photos
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Tags

- Actor-Campaign [x]
- Assig5 [x]

[Choose from your tags](#)

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Reporting


■ Practice

- Write illustrated notes on observations in tagged environment

■ Techniques

- Categorized Wordpress blog entries powered by flickr Webshots

Blog this photo



Compose your blog entry


Title:

opo
online politics online

« [Jim Web blog site](#) [Electoral Web Sphere Site #1](#) »

Linking from Citizen to Campaign Site
September 17th, 2006

In the Virginia Senate race, a [blog](#) produced by an Actor-Citizen has a link to a site produced by an Actor-Campaign. The link is a graphic link prominently displayed on the site. Click on the Webshot to see the Annotation on flickr.



James Webb TRUE PATRIOT

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About
Welcome. Users are encouraged to participate in the community by creating an account in their name. From your account you can comment on the front page forum topics or create your own to be posted to the front page.

About Us
Submitted by Nichole Herbig on Tue, 2006-09-12 10:00

This site is designed for sup best-selling author James Webb's candidacy. The goal is to help him win the Virginia Senate race.

James Webb for Senate Campaign Site:
Jim WEBB U.S. SENATE
Born Fighting
webbforsestate.com

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Practices & Techniques

■ Live Web Examples

- Observing: Firefox, Google
- Archiving: Scrapbook
- Focusing: Webshot
- Sharing, Tagging: del.icio.us, Flickr
- Reporting: Wordpress