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Affinities and beyond!! Developing ways of seeing in online spaces

This paper presents an insider view of an online community of adults involved in sharing digital photography through a host website, 'Flickr' (http://www.flickr.com/). It describes how reciprocal teaching/learning partnerships in a dynamic multimodal environment are achieved through the creation of a 'Third Space' (Bhabha, 1994) or 'Affinity Space' (Gee, 2004) where 'Funds of Knowledge' (Moll 2000) are shared and processed in such a way that new meanings and discourses are generated. It is argued that this process is evidence of valuable learning and of the deepening of global understandings within the local space of 'Flickr'. The new understandings are at least partly identifiable on the Flickr space, through the co-constructed 'folksonomy' or 'online taxonomy' of ways of looking at the world. Further, the paper provides evidence for broadening existing definitions of literacy, at a time when the visual mode increasingly works interactively with verbal cues and explanations.
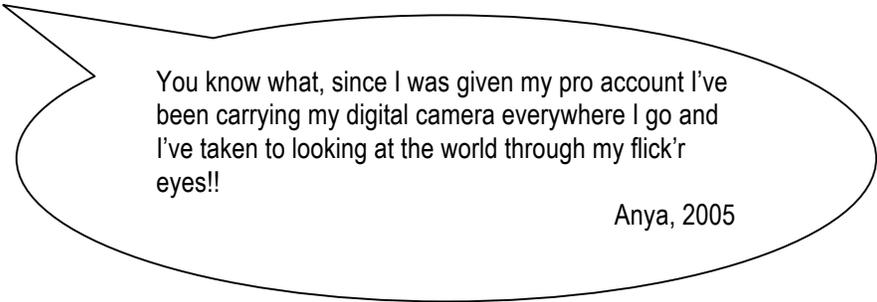
You know what, since I was given my pro account I've been carrying my digital camera everywhere I go and I've taken to looking at the world through my flick'r eyes!!

Anya, 2005

Introduction

Even in the recent past, photography has been a relatively expensive hobby; cameras required special film, time-consuming and costly processing, and even when results were disappointing, images were rarely discarded since they had cost the aforementioned money and time. Many photographs remain treasured artefacts; they are often framed or carried around in diaries or wallets; they are kept in albums and under wraps; passed from hand to hand for special viewing. Stories often get told around much-thumbed snaps before being stored away for another time. Such stories can draw friendships closer; they can confirm family ties; images offer evidence of growth, of significant events, places visited, can disseminate news and reflect the photographer's own perspective. This is not an obsolete or out-of-date process. But nowadays, digital cameras have provided further options for image production and photo-sharing; processing can now be almost instantaneous; many of us constantly, opportunistically, carry our cameras; we delete images; we view them on mobile-phone screens, pc screens and on TVs; we transmit images globally, print them on paper and t-shirts, and even use them as Instant Message icons. Results are often more sophisticated and of better quality than those glossy prints we paid so much for, only a few years ago. Editing programmes, allowing the manipulation of pictures and even the addition of text and music are now included with new pcs so that participation in this photo-production revolution is accessible by millions. I believe many people are becoming involved in digital photography and are increasingly noticing detail in what they see, becoming

experimental and creative in what they photograph and accumulating experience as photographers in their daily lives. In this paper, I discuss the activities of individuals and groups on a photo-sharing website, Flickr, (http://www.Flickr.com) and the ways in which their interactions on this site further intensify their photographic experiences, thus affecting their ways of seeing, experiencing and understanding the world. Respondents to my email questionnaire reflect on the hours they spend on Flickr; how it has changed the way they look at the world; how they now carry cameras everywhere they go; how they even attend meet-ups internationally, just to see their Flickr friends face-to-face (DrJoanne, 2005; Flickr Meetup, 2005). With basic membership free of charge, Flickr is easy to join, yet seems difficult to leave.

I am interested in describing the interactive process of learning that is taking place within the Flickr site and I believe the processes I discuss reflect learning at its best: it is social; it is motivated; it is embedded in people's lives; it is compelling and enjoyable. Learning on Flickr occurs as a social practice; the structure of the community supports development, constant review, a sharing of power and multiple ways of engaging with others. Moreover, many of the interactants involved in the online practices I describe, are aware that they are learning and this seems to motivate them further. I argue that the structure of the site, which allows multiple routes into participation and which values a broad range of types of contribution, make the space compelling. I believe that the space empowers interactants in a range of ways, partly through the site's structure which   actively encourages participants to take part in meaning making practices and partly through 'Flickrites' awareness of their own learning.

Ludicorp was set up in February 2004 to develop an interactive online game (Hicks, 2004) and Flickr photosharing was later developed to further capitalise on the interactive capabilities of Ludicorp's software (Tik, May 2005). The company's gamble that people would enjoy sharing and discussing their photographs paid dividends, for more than 80% of Flickr's users make their photographs 'public' rather than 'private' and belong to groups they have set up within Flickr (Butterworth, 2005). If The Guardian's figures are correct, (McClellan, 2005) Flickr's membership will by now be between a half and one million, all of whom must declare themselves over 13.

I argue then, that it is the multiple social possibilities within the Flickr space, particularly the social learning which 'Flickrites' find so conducive; one respondent to my questionnaire summed this up in her comment,

> I have learned loads and just can't stop coming back for more. I have spent hours
> and hours just looking, reading, moving round the site as well as to links beyond. I
> have found out now why some people say they like learning – I always used to think

that was to do with boring places like school, but now I realise learning stuff is to do with living your life and really noticing what is going on around you.

<div align="right">(Margo, 2005).</div>

In this paper I elaborate upon the nature of the online learning on the Flickr site; I postulate what structures support that learning, and what principles may be transferable to other spaces. I describe interactive, social learning processes which allow individuals to reconsider the way they see themselves and their social worlds. Their interactions with others and the sharing of social discourses, helps them to develop a new space, a Third Space, where new sets of social practices and codes of conduct evolve over time, allowing individuals to re-examine some of their experiences whilst acquiring new ones. The online 'Flickr experience' leeches through to offline practices, and members' worlds are often seen through the 'Flickr lens'; for example in online questionnaire responses Anya (2005) (above), talks about her 'Flickr eyes' and Reggio (2005) explains 'I now take a camera of some sort with me virtually everywhere I go, Peter Parker style' .

 In thinking about the concept of spatiality in relation to learning processes, I draw on the work of Bhabha (1994), Leander and Sheehy (2004) and Moje et al (2004) as well as to Gee's work, looking at learning as a social practice and more particularly at his model of 'Affinity Spaces' (2004). I consider the relationship between Third Space theories and Gee's Affinity Spaces using them to help deconstruct my own observations and involvement in online learning practices. Indeed this project has arisen as a by-product of an autoethnography on blogging, which I am conducting with Guy Merchant (Davies and Merchant,2005). In addition to my observations of my own experiences, those of others, I have also used e mail questionnaires sent to my contacts on Flickr. The representation is therefore affected by my own routes through the space and the contacts I have made; although these have been quite broad ranging and eclectic, I have not, for example joined any 'private groups' or groups which contain censored 'adult' content. I have not attempted to give an overall view of the site; the work is about how Flickr supports collaborative networked learning and this is not undermined by its omissions.

Third Space Theory

Sheehy and Leander write that 'recent theorising has brought to light that space is a product and process of socially dynamic relations.' (Sheehy and Leander 2004:1) and some theorists (Bhabha,1994; Moje et al., 2004; Wilson 2003) have used the metaphor of a 'Third Space' in order to conceptualise notions of social learning. Here, I develop some ideas around Third Space in relation to Flickr, where new social procedures and values have developed through shared practices. I show how, whilst residing in one geographical space, (e.g. the Ontarian home; the office in LA; the school in London or as a soldier posted in Iraq), Flickr

users, through their contacts with others, are developing new Discourses (Gee, 1996), new Funds of Knowledge (Moll, 2000) which give them new ways to think about and 'see' their worlds, by sharing their views with others.

'Flickrites' bring to the Flickr space contributions such as digital images; comments about photographs (comments on photo content, composition, format, source, meanings); technological solutions and suggestions; as well as all kinds of information. These contributions are brought to the Flickr space thus constituting the fabric of the Flickr space. This space is therefore in a state of both constant affirmation and renewal; for contributions can be seen to both sustain the existing values as well as to develop them. These contributions include glimpses of everyday lives; representations of artefacts; observations and commentaries, and are sourced from the everyday experiences of Flickr members, representing what Moll (2000) refers to as 'Funds of Knowledge' or what Gee refers to as Discourses. Gee describes Discourses (with a large D) as,

> Ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking … that are accepted as instantiations of particular roles … by specific *groups of people* …Discourses are ways of being 'people like us'. They are ways of 'being in the world'; they are 'forms of life'. They are thus always and everywhere *social* and products of social histories.
>
> Gee, 1996: viii

 Thus for example, a Flickrite might contribute images to the site which depict preparations for a traditional wedding (emersongeek, 2005); or Abu Dhabi girls in traditional dress (Emaratiprincess, 2005), or even a soldier reading Faust (Lt. TL, 2005) for example. These images reflect Funds of Knowledge, or values of a particular cultural and familial sort; semiotic analysis would reflect the importance of dress codes, of social values reflected through these images, for example. Yet when such photographs are placed with similar others, for example in a group reflecting Muslim Cultures; weddings in general; military life, an individual picture can accrue resonances beyond its individual meanings, being representative of a wider demonstration of a range of cultural traditions and ceremonies. As I shall show, the Flickr Space can the integration of multiple Funds of Knowledge or Discourses, can be a transformative process, so that generating within the Flickr space are new Funds of Knowledge and new Discourses. I further contend, like Moje et al (2004), that the process of recognition of differences between different kinds of Discourse, of ways of seeing things, understanding the world and of organising thoughts, facilitates the reinterpretation of previously unquestioned knowledges, or Discourses. So the co-existance, (sometimes juxtaposition), of different Discourses, can facilitate dynamic, social learning. Moje et al (2004) describe the process in this way:

we call this integration of knowledges and Discourses drawn from different spaces the construction of 'third space' …different or alternative, space of knowledge and Discourses.

<div align="right">Moje et al, 2004:41</div>

Further, drawing on the work of Soja (1996), Moje et al (2004) argue that

what seem to be oppositional categories can actually work together to generate new knowledges, new Discourses, and new forms of literacy. Indeed a commitment to third space demands a suspicion of binaries;

<div align="right">Moje et al, 2004:42</div>

Bhabha's work takes this idea in a direction which articulates my own understanding of the way Third Space works for Flickrites:

Third Space … constitutes the discursive conditions … that ensure that … even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rhetoricized and read anew

<div align="right">Bhabha, 1994: 37</div>

Bhabha's work,(1994) looking at the coming together of cultures within colonialist societies celebrates the notion of hybridity; seeing the space where different Discourses must be straddled as providing the potential of a superior vision, of greater insight and offering new possibilities. He sees a third space as being a product of the coming together of two cultures or Discourses. The transformative work that takes place in order to create a Third Space, is then a *positive* process, whereby Discourse differences, or as Moje et al (1994) characterise it, 'competing Discourses' (43) are brought together so that a 'productive hybrid cultural space' Moje et al, 2004:43) is co-constructed. I see this as valorising both the local Discourses and funds of knowledge brought by individual Flickrites, as well as that of the group as a whole. We witness therefore, a positive process of glocalisation (Luke and Carrington, 2002); here I am talking about the way in which Flickr gains the attributions of a locality, of a familiar space with its own evolved understandings, yet drawn from global members. One e-mail questionnaire respondent commented that, 'Many of my contacts are in North America, and I have learnt a lot about how similar and how different they are from English people' (Trois Têtes, 2005), while DrJoanne explains

I have definitely learned about other parts of the world - England, esp. (Nottingham and Essex). Also, being Polish and having immigrated from Poland, I feel that I can keep my finger on the pulse of what is going on back home through my countrymen's photographic images and comments.

<div align="right">DrJoanne, 2005</div>

Learning as a Social Practice

I have discussed that I see Flickr as a Third Space because of the ways in which Discourses come together, undergoing a transformative process to create a new space with its own values and Discourses, as Bhabha exlains,

> The third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives … The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation, meaning and representation

Bhabha, 1990: 211

The concept is a useful one, but I would argue Flickr is not quite the Third Space of Bhabha's colonial societies; the Discourses that are brought to Flickr are not eclipsed or 'displaced' by Flickr; it is rather that participants can move across spaces, understanding differences, learning from each space, able to operate in more than one context, but learning from each.

In this next section I describe Gee's theory of social learning. I suggest this is a useful model to describe the specifics of online social learning and which I believe reveal the mechanisms through which online third spaces are made possible.   Gee describes Affinity Spaces in some detail (2004) however features I identify as significant here are that in an Affinity Space:

- There is a common endeavour (interests, goals or practices);
- The space has content;
- The content is organized;
- Individuals can choose to interact with content and/or each other;
- Individuals share the same space- even if fulfilling different roles;
- There are many ways (portals) of entering the space;
- New content can be generated;
- Many types of knowledge (individual, distributed, dispersed and tacit) are valued;
- Group endeavour is valued and encouraged;
- Interactivity is required to sustain the affinity space;
- Newbies and masters occupy the same domain - there is no segregation;
- There are many ways of participating and these can change temporally;
- Leadership is 'porous';

- There are many ways of gaining status;
- The organisation of the space can change through interaction;
- Learning is social and enjoyable.

In the following section I illustrate the ways in which I see Gee's principles being realised within Flickr. I view his model as a way of demystifying how third spaces can be generated not just in online groups, but also in other domains, such as schools and colleges.

Flickr: Affinities and Beyond!!

A Common Endeavour
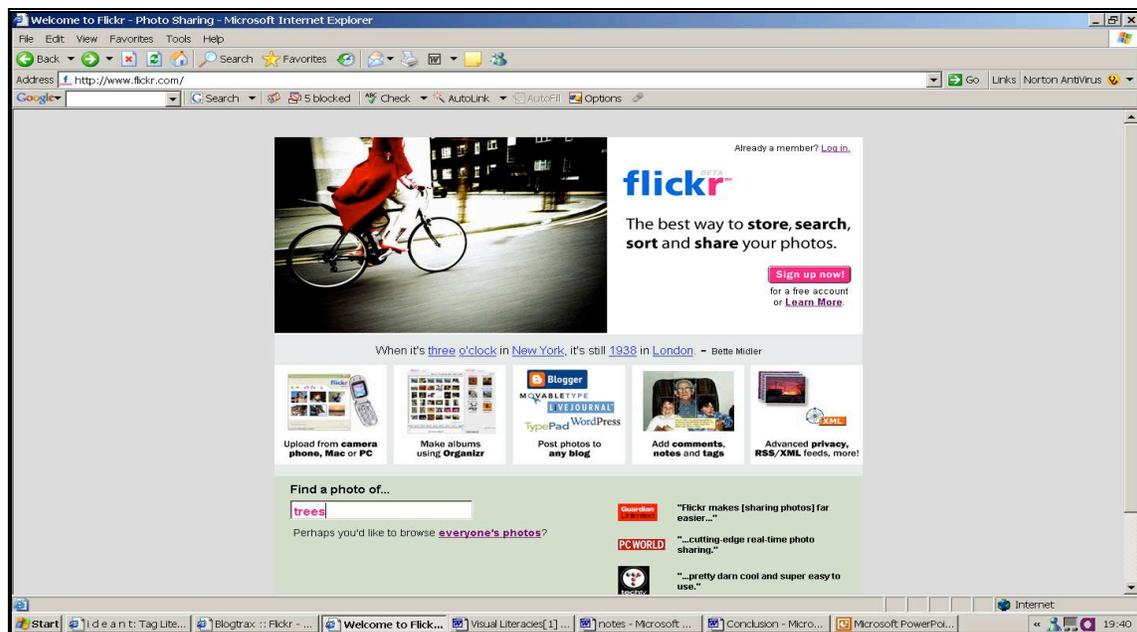
Figure One: Welcome page of Flickr (http://www.flickr.com/)

Like many 'Flickrites' I initially came to the site simply intending just to use it to upload my photographs to a space from where I could publish to my blog (online web blog). With the recent surge of interest in blogging internationally, this has meant a concomitant interest in spaces like Flickr. Similarly, others arrived intending just to set up photographs for use on other sites, perhaps personal sites, market place sites, (such as e-bay), or shared interest sites. Some individuals have been attracted by the idea of sharing photographs with friends and family – a kind of online glass cabinet or photograph album. Others will have arrived from reading blogs and following links from those (Butterfield, 2005; McClellan, 2005). It is possible to use Flickr in these singular, purposeful ways and not become involved with other people's content; one can mark photographs as 'private' and use Flickr simply as a database. It is also possible to locate and enter the site

without a password, simply looking at images without sharing or interacting with others. In Gee's terms (2004), it is possible to interact with just the content, just other particiants, or to interact with content and other participants. Yet as has been established above, the site is more than a static repository and most users participate in the social affordances of the space (Butterfield, 2005) In the pages below, I describe the ways in which interactivity is facilitated and the ways in which interactants come to learn. Here I show a range of portals to the site and a variety of ways in which content can be generated and organised – a crucial factor in provoking interaction. Yet all those who interact on the site, either by looking, reading, commenting or uploading, will be relating in some way with the image-related content, thus sharing, 'a common endeavour' (Gee, 2004: 85).

Content Organisation and Interactivity

 Crucially, the organisation of content and the interactivity of the site work in unison, with each fostering the other, keeping the site viable and dynamic. By tying one to the other, the motivation to remain involved in both is high. By contributing content, one interacts and can select the degree of interactivity; conversely, in order to interact one can select to contribute from a range of content possibilities. For example, in contributing images, there are a number of choices offered, so that one can label the new images with tags, (of any kind, such as according to theme, genre, content, colour, literally *any* label); organise them in sets (again of any kind); contribute to a communal group; add comments/captions or a description to the image; or even add textual notes superimposed on the images themselves (the text is revealed by gliding the cursor across a given image). In this way individuals can extend the modality of their images and can use the image to interact with others; moreover, in order to add tags, it is necessary to repeatedly examine the details of the photograph so that they can be mentioned. In this simple way, visual literacy skills become sharpened. Below I offer details of how the range of modes provide different affordances, provoke different kinds of interaction and affect the fabric of the site.

Comments

Comments can be left by anyone with a Flickr account, and as in advertising, these align the image with particular meanings. Comments often indicate why the photograph may have been placed as part of a group or set, how a person wants others to interpret and see the photograph, or to give information about it. Often the comments will give information about how the photograph came to be taken, including biographical detail. Flickrites often get to know each other through comments and sustain dialogue over a period of time. As will be shown through further examples below, comments help shape Discourses and understandings.

Notes

Through comments and notes, images are affected semiotically, since words can work to emphasise some features, undermine others or explain. In the example below, Miss Peach has shown the contents of her handbag, and has added notes for further interest and information, such as: 'pink make-up bag got from Japan', or 'samsung triband colour flip phone', and 'beloved Dior messenger bag'. This is a carefully photographed still life; not only is Miss Peach able to indicate aspects of the image she wants us to notice, such as the brand name of items and the co-ordinating theme of her personal affects, but she performs important identity work, since she makes it clear that this is her bag and belongings. Picking up on these themes comments from others include, 'It all matches too, awesome' and 'nice, j'adore Dior aussi'.

At the time this image was placed on the site, many other similar noted-images proliferated, for the note facility had been newly introduced. The knowledge for using notes became distributed through use of the application and via the Help Forum. Miss Peach subsequently added her image to the 'What's in your bag?' photo pool; through this action Miss Peach became an active member of the group. The image thus became part of a new set, accruing slightly different meanings than those it had when left side by side with her other work. . The arrangement of her image alongside others of that genre, meant that it accrued new meanings, set adjacent to others, reflecting the group's interest in collections of items. An image which alongside Miss Peach's other work was a reflection of her, but alongside other collections reflected for example, collective interest in this new genre and in other members' lives.
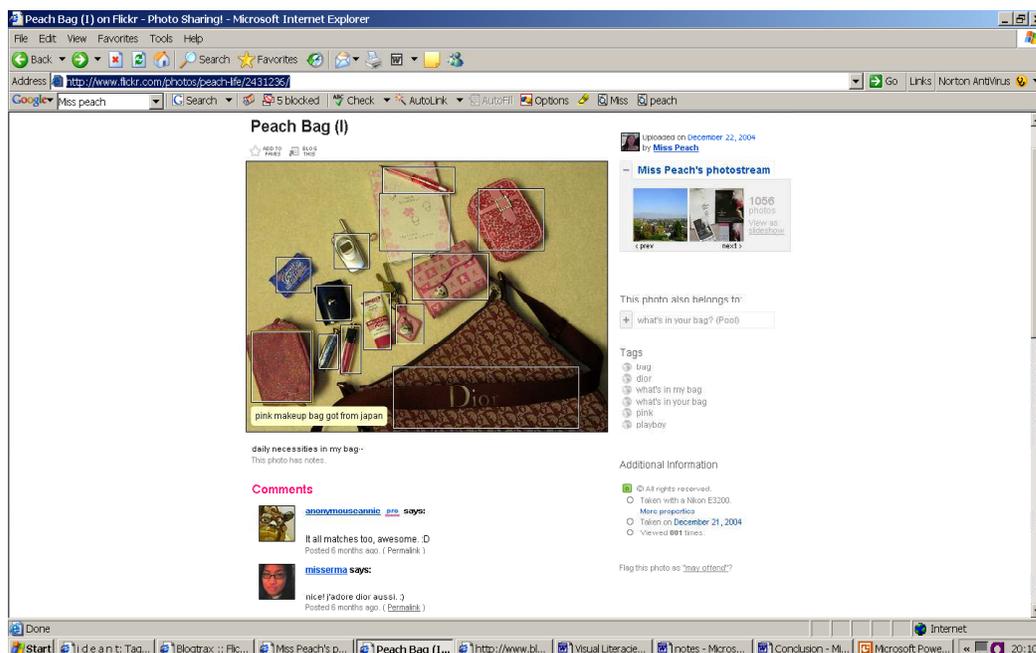
Figure Four: Miss Peach's bag showing notes (Miss Peach 2004)

Tags and Groups

When uploading a photograph, as described above, any number of single word tags can be listed to describe that image and these will be the words which will afford the selection of that the image via a search engine. For this reason, many Flickrites put as many tags as they can to each image, maximising interaction opportunities. That comments are highly valued was confirmed through my questionnaire respondents' words; typical responses included, 'I love feedback on my photos.' (Ingrid, 2005); 'I adore people to comment on my work.' (Rachel, 2005), and as Billy (2005) would have it, 'I always comment on other people's photos cuz I ABSOLUTELY LUVV IT when they comment on mine!! ;))'. The tags help support interactivity and keep traffic to an individual's photographs high.

Within Flickr, one page reveals the most popular tags, arranged alphabetically, with larger font to reflect te most popular tags. This 'tag cloud' is generated and constantly updated according to use, and whilst it is responsive to practice, practice is undoubtedly affected by the cloud itself, since Flickrites are motivated by interactivity.
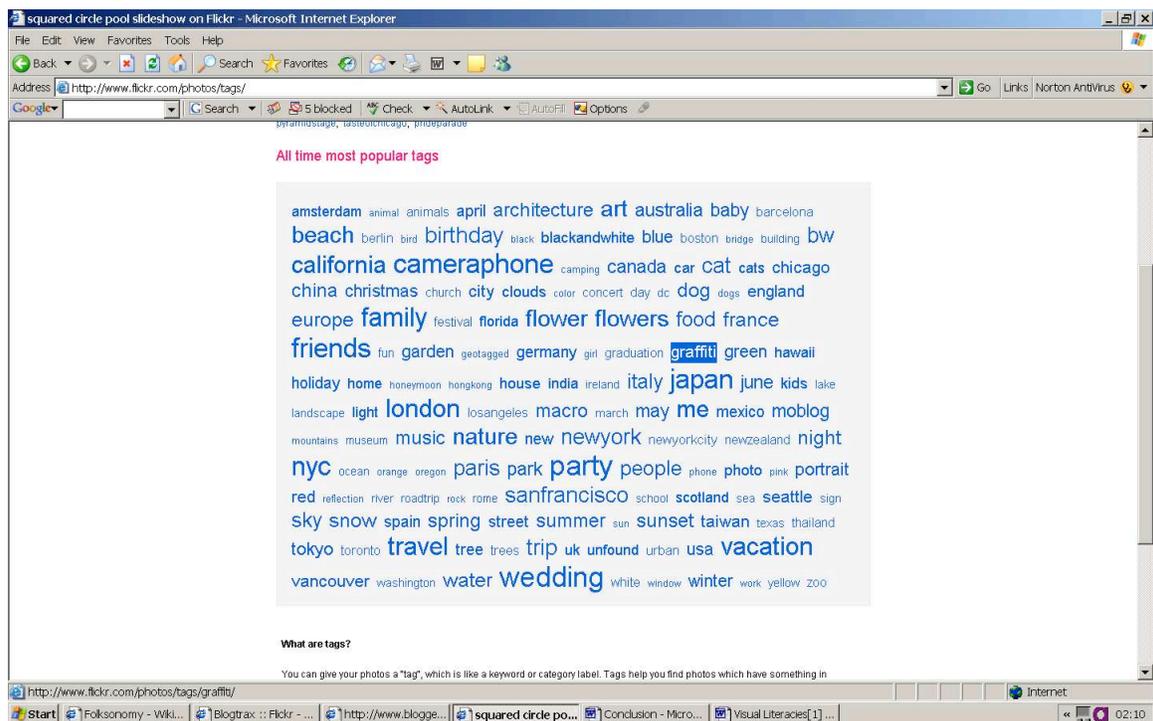

Figure Two: Flickr tags July 2005

Yet tags also function as content-organisers; they classify images in a manner which reflect users' interests; they allow re-definitions within Discourses and Funds of Knowledge, privileging some concepts above others. Tags are powerful since the choice of category implies something about the value system of those who use that tag; by classifying images, one can impact on the way the images are interpreted; moreover if a tag seems popular, Flickrites may be encouraged to actually look for things in 'meatspace' that could be labelled with a particular tag – and thus increase traffic and interactivity around their images. The term 'folksonomy' has gained currency on the Internet to describe this phenomenon, (wikipedia.com 2005b) of the way content management impacts upon shared meanings and the development of cultural understandings. Thus the Flickr tags bring together images in particular ways, and tags can be used to pull together images from right across the space. Tags can overlap, reflecting diverse interests and possibilities in terms of reading images and thinking about the world from which they come. As the images provide the digital landscape of the Affinity Space, the ways they are classified represent Flickr's folksonomy.

A 'group' on Flickr is a specialised term, which describes the way in which one person (or several) can gather together, or invite others to contribute images which fit a particular category. More strongly than tags, I believe that groups on Flickr groups reflect the folksonomy of the space. These groups come in a wide range of forms and often when a new group begins, Flickrites, will search their existing collections for images to contribute. Some groups require a great deal of effort to contribute, in terms of finding appropriate items to photograph; others require great observation skills; some will involve the elaborate setting up of a contrived photograph, whilst others require online technical skills to manipulate an existing image. Groups can therefore impact on the way Flickrite's live their lives; they can lead individuals to review and reinterpret existing photographs or   to develop their technical expertise. One particularly elaborate group was set up by a parent in order to involve international support for her son to carry out a project. The group members needed to go to a site which held an image of 'Flat Stanley', (Hapakorean 2005a) a character from a children's book. They then needed to cut out this picture and then take a photograph of themselves and upload the photograph to the Flickr group, (Hapakorean 2005b) prior to uploading to the project site (Caleb, 2005). This project allowed the child to be involved in a project of international proportions; the interactivity and co-operation from Flickrites, made this a particularly 'creative commons' type of activity. Some groups work as games, for example 'Visual Bingo' invites images which represent the numbers called on the traditional game of Bingo, such as '8 = Garden Gate". 'Photochain' asks for contributions a little like dominoes; the first mage might have a cigarette as main focus, but there is a key in the background. A key could be the main focus of the next image. Figure Three (below) presents a chart reflecting some of the groups on Flick'r; these are organised to reflect what is required of Flickrites and how the groups operate as a foksonomy:

(Add Figure Three here.)

The term 'meme' describes the process whereby a cultural unit, maybe a word or sign, passes around a group, embedding itself within the culture (wikipedia.org, 2004). Memes in Flickr promote group cohesion contribute to its social history, acting like social cement. A meme is often an 'in-joke' across a group of people. Knobel (2005) describes memes as

> contagious patterns of cultural information that are passed from mind to mind and which directly shape and propagate key actions and mindsets of a social group. Memes include popular tunes, catch-phrases, clothing fashions, architectural styles, ways of doing things, and so on.

(Knobel, 2005:1)

 One such meme is the use of groups as discussed above where members are required to locate particular instances to photograph to contribute to the Affinity Space; the Affinity Space of Flickr thus widens into the daily lives and experiences of participants and the meme enters their everyday lives, affecting the Discourses there. Figure Three shows how this might involve users in looking at the world in new ways as described by the group's theme - whether it be 'Forsaken by Society', 'star not star' or 'Visual resistance', for example. Individuals may need to be particularly observant; audacious or bold; to go to specific places or to do particular activities. Biographical comments suggest that many Flickrites' life experiences are shaped partly by the desire to offer certain shots to particular groups.

More on Groups: Developing Ways of Seeing

The group 'Squared Circle' had an astonishing 2588 members at the time of writing (July 2005) and eligible images are simply ones depicting a circle in a square. This intriguing set of images is a disparate collection, including buttons, plates, knobs, CDs, flower centres, wheels and so on. It is easy to find items to add and to do so is to become part of one of the largest groups on the site, contributing to a huge patchwork that is being sewn on a global basis.
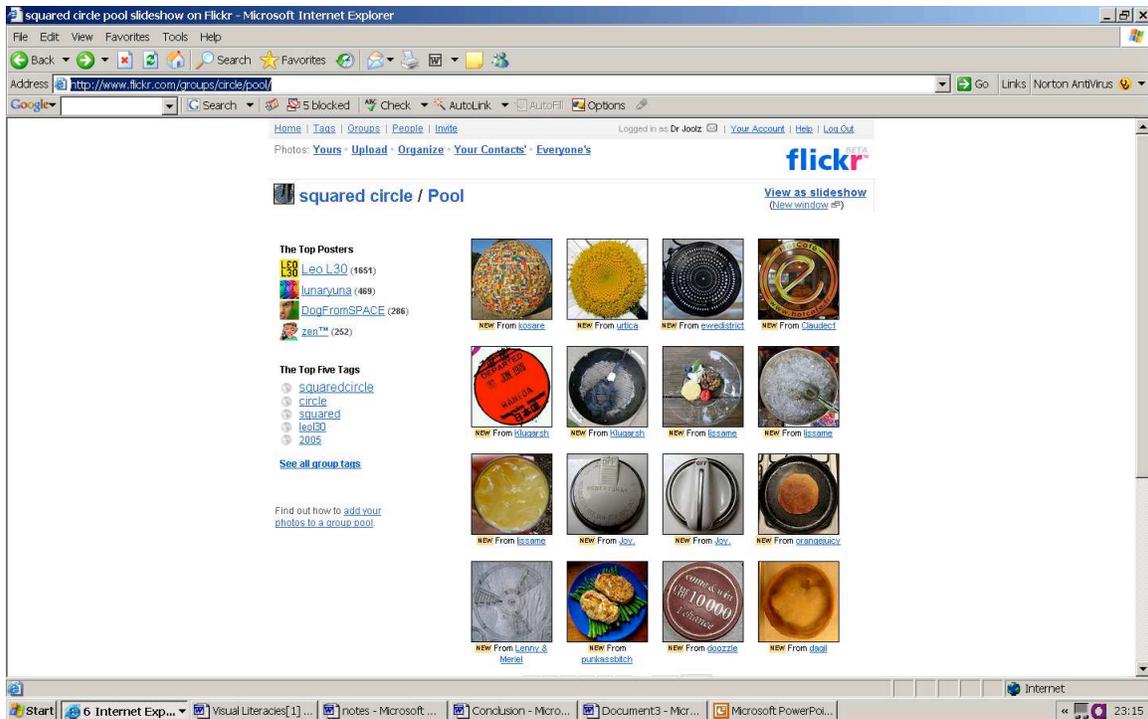
Figure Five: The Squared Circle pool 2005

More difficult to contribute to, requiring observation skills as well as either individual knowledge (from one's head) or distributed knowledge (information taken from the site itself) is Visual Bingo. The group 'Star not Star', requiring representations of stars, has people finding the shape in flowers, lights, tattoos, drawings, jewellery and so on, with commenters often noting the ubiquity of the star symbol. In this exchange of comments we see that there is a keenness not only to join in but to have good photos too:

> Once you start looking you see stars everywhere

> t'aint that the truth. Of course, of the five or so that I've seen in the last couple days,
> all of my photos came out like crap.

Accommodating Discourses

In this next photograph we see how the search for a striking contribution to Star not Star involved a number of participants in an activity designed to respond to the theme:
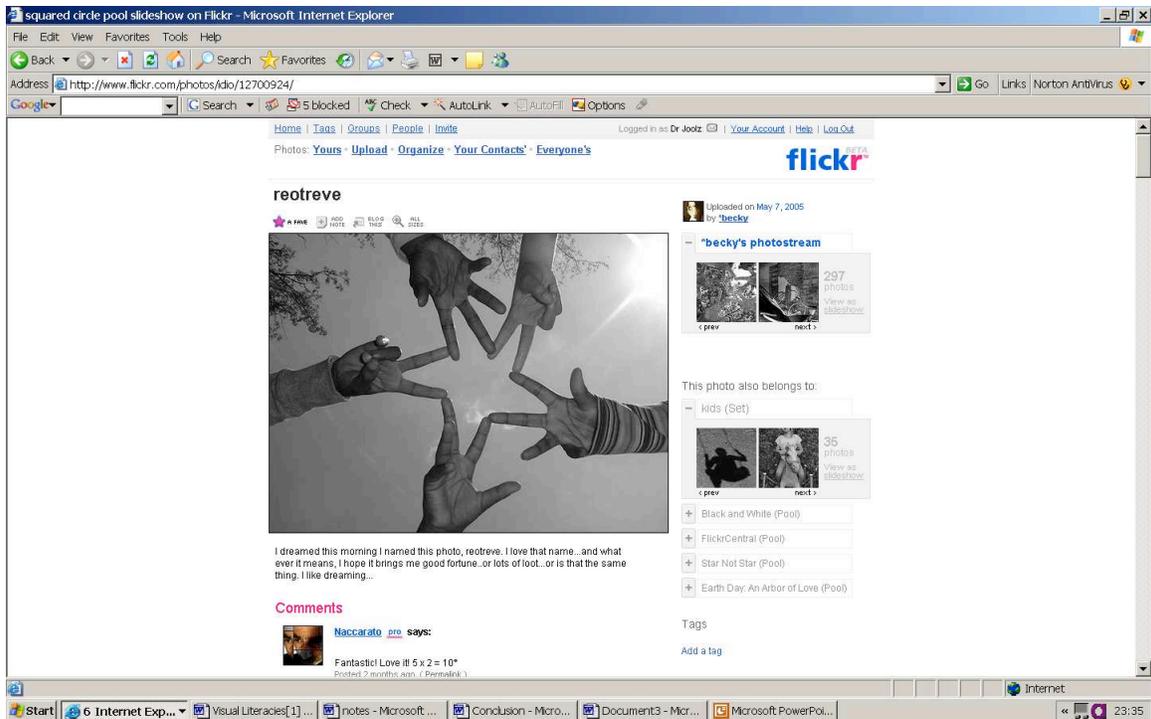
Figure Six: Star not Star: Becky 2005

The behaviour of the American based Becky, and her primary school pupils, was affected by the idea of Star not Star, originating from an English Flickrite. Becky's image received more than 70 complimentary comments, ranging from one word accolades, to detailed descriptions about the light and shade, the symbolism and composition, for example. 53 people picked it as a 'favourite' and within two months had been viewed 380 times, thus becoming iconic within the group. These comments were interspersed with replies from Becky, who overwhelmed by the responses, gave additional details about taking the photograph. Here is her third reply:

> Oh my..such thoughtful words...thank you so very much. Actually, while conducting a photo contest out in the school yards and in-between my kids taking turns with their shots...the others and I made time for some shadow play in the grass as the sunshine was brilliant, and for some odd reason, this idea dawned on me and while trying to put this together in my mind on how to compose such a thing, it just fell into place even with the inability to form and join their hands together to make this star. And I just basically held out my camera underneath their arms and shot away. It really was a spontaneous effort on my part...and the kids were thrilled to death by it. I feel very proud of myself for this shot...finally, for once.
>
> Becky, 2005

Becky shared her experience, embedding it within the social history of the group. Despite Becky's insistence that the shot was achieved through luck, continual praise prompted her to more carefully articulate and re-consider events in a process that reflected heightened consciousness of the way the light helped her achieve success. Becky's participation in the group helped her reflect repeatedly on her experiences and to consider them in the light of the group's valorisation, thus learning from them and developing the way she thought about the photograph.

Sharing Values through Wit

Other memes within the Flickr Affinity Space operate as pure fun, sometimes requiring daring and wit. 'Girls eating Sandwiches' group is a humorous look at the often embarrassing scenes of overloaded bread rolls and buns, enthusiastic eaters, and an insight into people's lives. Brought together as a group, the images look comical and Flickrites therefore share a joke, showing tacit agreement that Girls eating Sandwiches often look funny. Similarly, the absurd humour in the collection named 'Shopping Carts' shows abandoned, broken or overloaded carts, making a collaborative joke through the accumulation of images. Some memes wittily dig at contemporary political or social themes, such as the UK's General election campaigns, Charles and Camillas' wedding and the installation of a new pope. The group 'Hoody Moral Panic' refers to Media coverage in the UK about youths going in shopping centres wearing hooded jackets and behaving badly. This photograph exemplifies the ironic stance taken by the group:
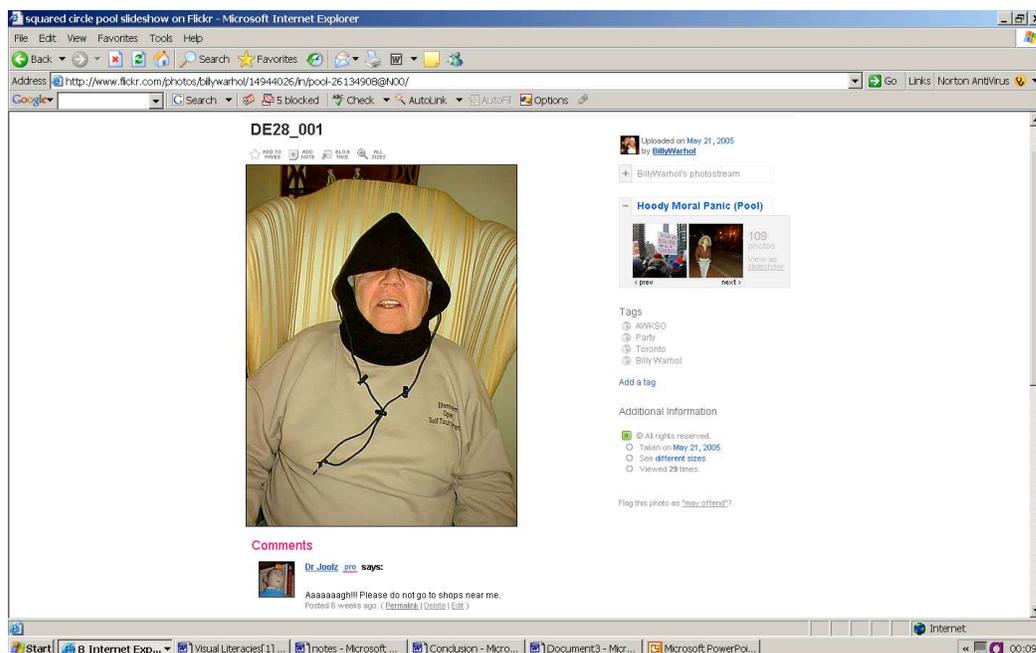
Figure Seven: Hoody Moral Panic: BillyWarhol 2005

By contributing in this way, individuals make political alliances and statements through images and wit. Comments like 'must... cross... street... to escape this... venemous villain!' continues this joke in the same vein, valorising knowledge of politics gained beyond the Affinity Space – dispersed knowledge. In cases like this, local to the UK, those beyond the borders comment with their views on the situation, able to take on the joke and the politics which implies that the Affinity Space has permeable borders where these politics are relevant to all.

Ways of Seeing: Part 2 (Distributed and Dispersed Knowledge)

The art of photography attracts many who are interested in other kinds of visual representation, so in addition to encouraging the search for patterns and shapes in the environment as discussed above, others focus on Street Art, graffiti and even the work of individual street artists such as Banksy. Within these groups there are discussions about how street-art should be valued; the identifying features of particular artists, genres and subjects. Often there are links to other sites with academic articles about Street Art, exhibitions or maps giving the location of particularly interesting pieces of work. All types of knowledge are given value, affirming a further principe of Gee's Affinity Spaces (2004). In this particularly brave shot, there is a nice juxtaposition commented upon by the photographer himself, ('taking a snap of a favourite Banksy when he walks into shot… how fortuitous'**)** as well as others, who note for example, 'Wonderfully timed - great shot!':
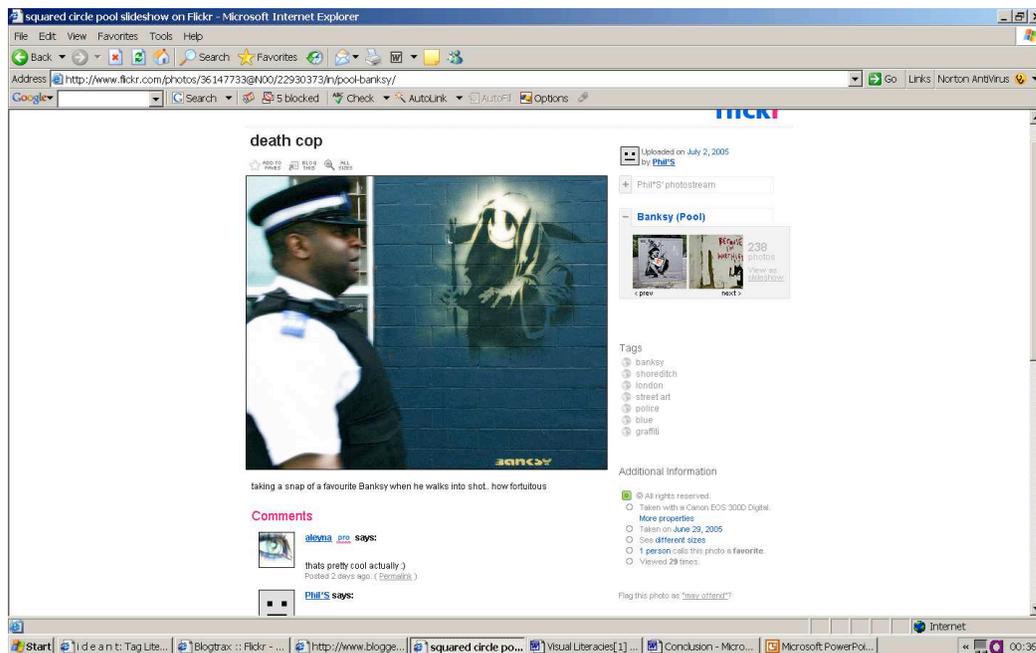
Figure Eight: Banksy: death cop: Phil*s 2005

The careful, ironic titling and the excitement at the fortuitous composition of the image reflect a group which, (shown in comments throughout this group's work), values careful composition, knowledge of the artists and the location of their work. Individual, dispersed and distributed knowledge is pooled within the group, with discussions referring to images elsewhere on Flickr as well as sites beyond.

Reviewing Funds of Knowledge through newly acquired skills
Browsing through the site, examples of ways in which individuals are looking anew at familiar places abound. For example, SlimFatty's set 'Tourist at home' illustrates her new perspective on familiar territory. She comments on the set she has made:

> These are pictures that a tourist might take here in Philadelphia. I'm a native to this
> city and because of my interest in photography, there are lots of places in the city
> that I'm only just now taking an interest in.
>
> SlimFatty, 2005

SlimFatty's photographs reflect her growing expertise and confidence over a period of time, and her comments about her work reflect her awareness of that learning process. For example she discusses self portraiture, her use of colour, her new camera, and later, the acquisition of a zoom lens. Some groups are dedicated to self-conscious work, so there are meta-groups featuring images of people taking photos and groups which are set up to look like stills from films for example. The 'Director of Photography' features of shots taken not from films, but are evocative of film genre. By contributing to this group, one requires either tacit, intuitive or schooled knowledge of conventions film conventions; the ability to observe what is being imitated and stylised in film; the keen eye to select from unrehearsed, 'natural' contexts, moments which appear staged or that evoke film-realism. Bringing these to the Flickr space, is to renegotiate the meanings again, as they are set alongside others.

Figure Nine: Director of Photography: Traversing the tunnel: Lorenzo: 2005

The kinds of photograph one would expect to find in private family albums are also to be found abundantly in the Flickr space. Moreover, much of the interaction that takes place in the comments sees the exchange of personal details, biography sharing - anecdotes revealing a perhaps somewhat disarming show of trust. We see comments of the quality we witness when 'real' artefacts are passed hand to hand. First days of a newly born baby's life, marriages, christenings, refurbished homes, parties, even births are shown. The gathering of artefacts, of experiences of family groups smiling out radiantly, or solemnly with graduation scrolls and so on, give a unifying feel to these experiences which are ceremoniously marked. Despite the many warnings that digital photographs are dangerous, that pornographers manipulate images for sinister ends, there is an overwhelming number of infants photographed full faced and displayed publicly within the space. It is as if Flickrites in their great numbers are acting in defiance and somehow through abundance of availability, as though the shared practice of showing such 'risky' images lose the currency often accrued through rarity.

The comments which follow HapaKorean's pictorial presentation of her family life (Hapakorean 2005c), are directed towards both the photography and the family itself. Commenters often share information about their

children and so the space provides a forum for discussing motherhood in a particular way too. Take this short extract as an example:

> i think your babies are just the sweetest things... i cant wait to have my own =)

> Awe, thanks. =) I love them to pieces. Ever since I was a little girl I always wanted a big family. I lucked out and found a husband who wanted the same. Three boys down, one last shot to go for that little girl. =) We'll wait 2 years before that venture. The birth of your 1st child will change you forever. You'll love like you never imagine you could love. It's AMAZING.

>   KrissieP and HappaK March 2005

Nevertheless, Hapakorean has chosen to licence her photographs in such a manner that copies cannot be made; there is varied practice across the site, since the choices are there. Some people choose to keep all images private; some keep them all public – some have a mix. Similarly, some have all their work will all rights protected, while others allow copying of all the work; others have a variety of options depending on the type of image.

I have shown above ways in which different groups require different kinds of knowledge, (individual, distributed, dispersed and even tacit), which foster different types of allegiance and coherence expressed through a range of modalities. In order to add particular types of image, different knowledge is required, demonstrating the close relationship between content management, interaction and learning. I have shown how individuals share Funds of Knowledge and Discourses through the matching of images to particular ideas and how memes work to affirm the 'folksonomy' of the space. Images are the primary means of connecting and most Flickr members choose to take part in interactions, since these so keenly anchor preferred meanings to content, and this in turn provokes interaction from others.

Additional routes to interactivity and status

To acquire a great deal of traffic to one's personal photostream is a key way in which to gain status, but there are many ways in which traffic can be acquired. Many Flickrites spend a lot of time commenting on other's work, sometimes putting links in to their own photographs of similar content.

Onlookers can add a 'favourite' tag to a photograph; this is one way to show admiration, whilst another is to click on a 'blog this' button, which allows immediate transportation of the image, the name of the

photographer and url location to a selected blog. In this way traffic is increased to that person's part of the Flickr space. 'Favouriting' is often reciprocal and so it pays off to be supportive of others. Moreover, one can make someone a 'contact' and thus have them listed on one's own space. This works as a prompt to look at their photo's regularly and again, interactivity is promoted since the process of contacting is usually reciprocated. This kind of activity reflects the many ways of gaining status and contact groups often reflect the professed interests of individuals. Thus there are groups of contacts which   are primarily interested in graffiti, for example, or in professional type 'arty' shots, for example.

Content Generation and Knowledge sharing

Members can join a range of fora, some of which are run by the 'Flickr Team', such as the help forum; a place for suggesting new ideas to the team as well as to other Flickrites. Innovation is highly valued and the invention or extension of uses of existing software is a constant source of discussion. News travels fast and memes like the Flickr badge, or travels fast and has high currency. New ideas spread quickly since they can be seen in use immediately, publicly shared and exemplified in a range of creative ways. Some experts gain great notoriety and admiration whilst photographs they take are of less interest. In this way we see how different types of knowledge are valued and that all portals allow routes to different types of leadership.

Figure Eleven: The author's Flickr 'badge'

Conclusions

Digital technologies are supporting many individuals to become more visually literate; that is we are becoming more aware of our world by reading visual clues. Online Affinity Spaces allow us to share new

ideas and new ways of seeing and to bring cultural understandings together with others, where they can be re-examined, used and transformed in the image making practices of others. I have found Gee's work useful in deconstructing how these processes function; he shows how by valuing the different types of knowledge that individuals might share with others in a space, develops the learning of many. Communal activities such as those seen on Flickr have the potential not only to help individuals learn from each other but to also to create new meanings together. These new meanings can reside socially within that Third Space in which they have been created, but they can also support individuals to see their world in new ways. Gee's delineation of the features of Affinity Spaces, sheds light on the features that need to be in place for the creation of Third Spaces which as he argues, could potentially be created on line or within classrooms.

Further Work

I aim to continue this exploration of Third spaces, Affinity Spaces and theories of social learning. As yet un-problematised in this piece are the dimensions of power I have seen; despite the creative commons atmosphere engendered through the reciprocity built into the structures and through the multimodal affordances, nevertheless there remain un-theorised hierarchies of power. Bernstein's work on vertical and horizontal discourses (1999) and Bourdieu's (1986) forms of capital will be invoked in order to develop understand how these processes operate within online affinity spaces. .

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