# The Digital - What are we misreading?

Have you been to The Digital? It's this new place that opened a few decades ago, but it only exists virtually. A site where your friends can hang out without physically being next to you. Where your fingertips decide where you go instead of your feet. Somewhere that's everywhere; in your pocket, inside your school bag, in your living room, maybe on your wrist and even in the streets. It's like an unlimited library, but also like a club where you meet people. More like a debate group full of diverse opinions, where they offer free entertainment like music, all sort of games, movies, comedy and much more! In The Digital, multitasking is doable too. At home, I can't shop for groceries while also cooking, but here, that's possible! Wait for a second, if you are here already, in The Digital, reading my article, then why all of this promotion? You must be an expert in this magical place! There's no way anyone is missing out on The Digital! So, what are you actually missing out on?

Two weeks ago, I was asked to play Pokemon Go around campus with my friends and instead of capturing powerful Pokemons; I discovered unexpected things about The Digital. Pokemon Go is a game designed to use your environment as a live field to capture creatures. The interface or your user experience depends on where you stand, in my case at the University of Rochester's campus. When I looked at the map, it amazed me! "How lucky!" I exclaimed to my group of friends. There were MANY Pokestops, spots to collect Pokeballs to catch characters, on campus. Students can refill by Starbucks, Rush Rhees or Hoyt Hall! Imagine just sipping coffee and accessing pokeballs without effort. But did you know, it's not the same story for many parts of the world? Do you know about Redlined areas? Redlining was a process practiced in the 1930s where institutions refused to offer mortgages in certain neighborhoods based on the customer's racial and ethnic composition, targeting foreigners and black people. Favorably, this practice was outlawed in 1968, but even in Pokemon Go's map, people may witness prevailing effects of this policy.
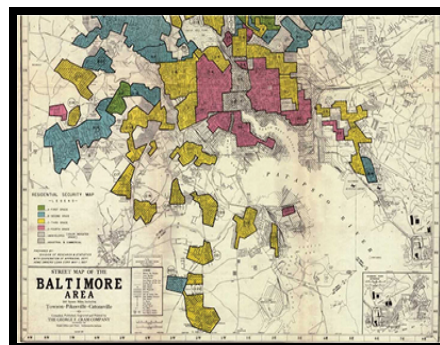
Baltimore's Redlined Map

The regions colored in red were the ones designated for the black population back then, resulting in a massive segregation of communities. These areas have less or no Pokestops, maybe even no monsters to catch. Why would a simple game like Pokemon Go base their experience on old Redlining policies? To answer this question, I looked into remaining Redlined cities like Baltimore and New Orleans and noticed a similarity; the red zones are mostly empty and lined with vacant buildings. They lack basic services, like banking or healthcare, and have fewer job opportunities and transportation options. Therefore, we can suggest these areas are less frequented, but what about the people that live there? How could we know Niantic, the company that created the game, considered the significance of Pokestop at unfrequented places instead of being suggestively racist? I rather not turn this article into a controversy, but I want you as a reader to analyze how universal access is impacted by similar conflicts like these. Is it fair to deny access to someone according to where they live or by their color? The Digital is meant to grant access to anyone regardless of race, gender, age, or any social and personal characteristic.
Marshall McLuhan once said: "The products of modern science

are not good or bad, it's in the way they are used that determines their value." (3) What does this conflict say about our use of The Digital? Are we using digital media, respectively? Wasn't The Digital inclusive? I certainly thought, but playing Pokemon Go taught me otherwise.

There's more to the story. As my team and I played, quoting McLuhan one more time, "we [were] as numb in our new electric world as the natives involved in our literate and mechanical culture."(7) What am I suggesting? Out on campus, I remember the day was sunny, and the sky was free of clouds but was I appreciating any of this? While being on the Eastman Quadrangle, a couple of my friends were walking toward a class or going to the library but I didn't notice at all. Where did my respect for my peers go? I mean, I could justify I was trying to catch Pikachu (Yes, I saw Pikachu ON campus), but was catching a fictional character more important than an interaction with my peers? We know that's undeniably false. We are missing out on how The Digital is unconsciously manipulating our attention from time to time, and no one needs to play Pokemon Go to realize. If you already walk around with a phone in your hands, don't you feel your mind is automatically elsewhere?

What should we do about the access and interface problem? Ban Pokemon Go? Limit our use? Not at all, I strongly believe The Digital is an extension of who we are as a race. We are doing

unimaginable things; we connect to others around the world, learn at any instant, create and share ideas in one click. It's extraordinary to live in a time where we are given universal access, but everyone deserves that access. How may we unite to expand? And where do we trace our limits of the uses of The Digital? I certainly don't have the answers or am entitled to find one, but we may start somewhere by evaluating design structures.

A few mornings ago, I assisted a "Design Thinking Workshop" at iZone with my DMS 101 class. Our job was to *design* a solution to a problem our class partner suffered. What caught my attention was how instead of emphasizing a perfect design, the activity focused on understanding our classmate's needs. One step involved creating an "Empathy Map", which prompt us to define what does our customer value the most. Helping a designer understand what others value incites selflessness and encourages a shareable and authentic design. Compiling this data guides designers into the next step: gathering ideas to find a fitting resolution. Multiple approaches may arise, but whichever one might choose, the essential step will rely on the feedback the client provides. Their opinion may indicate that I must refine the product or restart the whole process again. Imagine this exercise was a common practice inside The Digital, how many outcomes would there be? Billions! Each individual possesses unique perspectives, one solution won't relieve an.

entire population. Yet, as a whole, designers in The Digital may improve and fortify our access and use by simply listening to what users have to say.

There's no definite answer to make The Digital the ultimate place for everyone, but we may start by being keenly aware of how we perceive and get involved in The Digital. By living in a reputable campus, I might have overlooked Redlining's impact. How many things are we overlooking thanks to our privilege to access? And how many more are we missing because of the interface in our pockets? Evaluating design should become the first step in revolutionizing this already-amazing place. What else can you find out by looking closer?

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