Project 4   Retail Therapy

Schedule   *Field Trip to Intel to see RealSense tech/demos – October 22nd*
Project Out – October 29th
Project discussion (with Intel represented) – November 3rd
Initial ideation Pin-Ups (Intel) – November 10th
Observational reports & ideation mash-ups (Intel) – November 17th
Initial proof-of-concept – November 24th
          - Thanksgiving Break -
Refined prototype, with branding – December 1st
Documentation, storyboards and video planning – December 3rd
Live Presentation and Deployment with Intel at CCA – December 10th

Assignment   The space of consumer-facing retail has always been on the cutting edge of both cultural and technological trends. Getting people to part with hard-earned money involves establishing desire (linked to cultural relevance) and getting attention (which often requires some sort of surprise or flashiness. We'll do some readings to see how this has emerged over the years, as well as how it shows up in more contemporary retail settings.

In recent years, a lot of shopping has moved to on-line situations. This is great for some purposes, and few would argue that many mundane items can be bought sight unseen. Other things really need to be seen to be appreciated, and shopping in the real world can be incredibly fun! That said, there are a wide range of ways that technologies can make shopping easier and more satisfying. Seeing that new Ikea table in a walk-around image of your actual kitchen, or trying on some custom color and pattern of jeans might be totally sweet. Showing an accessory to your fashionista friend might save you some embarrassment – and a quick connection to her at the right moment is all you need.

That's not to say that consumption is a totally positive or even neutral territory – far from it. Marketers use every trick in the book to encourage and convince us to consume. Technology can be in service of the users, the proprietors, or even of causes. What if shopping technologies enforced a 48-hour cooling off period for particular products? What if they reminded you of similar purchases that are sitting unworn in your closet, or introduced you to the underpaid worker who glued your Puma soles, or gave you public props for resisting an environmentally harmful impulse buy?

Retail doesn't necessarily mean the mall. We make some pretty major consumer decisions in other settings. We shop for bicycles, buy phones and tablets, choose fruit and groceries, and snag beverages – all of which could be smoother experiences if we looked closely.

Are smoother consumer experiences necessarily better? What's the right level of friction for various kinds of consumer behavior? We don't protest when a tailor or seamstress takes time to fit a jacket or dress, or when a mechanic expertly sizes our bike to us. Why is that?

This project is about the retail experience, and how it could different. It's not a broad project…each team will be getting their hands dirty in a very specific retail context (of your own making/choosing) – talking to proprietors, consumers, lookers, and theives. Fantasy, materiality (not to mention materialism), self-projection, fit, the notion of "taste"– are all ripe areas for play in this form of public engagement.

We will consider the overall collection of interventions at the event as a touch point into the topic of fashion. We will guide you towards outcomes that are possible in terms of development costs and hardware.

Activity   Working in teams of two and three, create an experience which adds novelty to an aspect of the retail experience. It should be constructive and add fulfillment to somebody in the overall ecosystem, but needn't be about proprietors selling more stuff. Our Intel sponsors would like for each of your projects to include some capability (quite possibly more than one) of their RealSense hardware (you've seen the demos down at their lab).

Teams will be decided upon based on initial brainstorm results/themes, balancing skill sets to maximize success, and instructor whims.

This will be a comprehensive project, with firsthand data collection, prototyping, development, mood boards, personas, journey maps, branding, and extensive documentation. We have some budget for your projects, for materials, services, goods, and additional equipment. Let us know your wants and desires as the project unfolds. We've already dedicated some funds to laptops, so you don't have to scrounge like we did with the Kinect project last year.

We will have access to some Intel folks for critique sessions, help with concept selection, language and library tutorials, and debugging purposes. They can steer you to resources, give you code fragments, and demonstrate both basic and obscure RealSense features. It is not 100% necessary that your projects be fully working as your design implies – without a doubt, some of you will design things that would require a team of developers and a year of effort. That said, many of you will be able to get core bits of functionality working in a convincing way.

It IS necessary that you create a compelling representation of how your retail experience would work. This can be accomplished however you see fit (do run your plans by us), but the point is that you create documentation that depicts the totality of your proposed intervention into the retail world. If that has multiple touchpoints, show them. If that has both physical and virtual facets, create them. Your video should be very convincing, because Intel will use this long after the studio is over.

Readings   We will continue to assign readings throughout the course of this project via email and the Dropbox folder. Some may be on 2-hour reserve at the library and/or in the library reference section.

We will also be emailing relevant links, and expect that you will review them before a class.

Presentations   While your projects will be deployed at a final show for Intel on December 8th. It is also likely that there will be an additional presentation down in Santa Clara early next year. Make sure you capture footage of the December event, in case we want to use it in January instead of setting the system up again for the January event. If it's simple, you may be asked to do so, so don't destroy any of your work or props.

Documentation   We will be posting projects in a summary document(s) for future students and for further sponsored studios to reference, and expect that you will be sharing your work on your own blogs. Please consider how you will post your work in that forum (or author your presentations in that medium) as you document.

Evaluation   Evaluation on this project will continue to be based on engagement, ingenuity, creativity, sincerity and beauty. Oh, and, as always, generosity towards your team members and peers.