Chapter 7
Design Etude

Part 1: Familiar Strangers

Over the next 72 hours, make a list of people you might call familiar strangers in your everyday life. Take note of these people, the time, place, and contexts in which you find them. Separate the "real-life" ones from the "virtual" online familiar strangers (two lists?). Speculate, imagine, invent reasons why they have this tacit relationship relative to you. Work? Common interest? Sleep schedule? Or... what?

Part 2: Imagine & Sketch

Design a technology-mediated social experience: an instrument, toy, game, or activity, specifically for a group of familiar strangers on your list. What roles and rules make up that experience? What is the shared activity? For example...

Soul Train!

A mobile phone-based collaborative music game for daily mass transit commuters (e.g., Caltrain commuters between San Jose and San Francisco). The app would search for other users by location, and anyone within X meters can automatically join the app. The experience begins as the train moves: familiar strangers would all move while staying relatively close to one another (because they are on the same train). Users operate a collaborative audiovisual sequencer to generate beats and can also take photos of their surroundings (buildings and landmarks they pass) to be semi-automatically added to the app’s audiovisual mixer, and perhaps even sonified as sonic material for the sequencer. Each song begins when the train leaves a station and ends at the next stop. The app does not require users to ever meet one another, but it is designed to induce a sense of camaraderie and localized significance for the familiar strangers that share the hour-long train ride to work. It operates as a participatory drum circle and audiovisual soundtrack for the trip. Cool results can be saved and replayed to your co-workers when you get there! More sophisticated works, bonuses, and achievements can be earned by repeated play from the same people!