The Role of Objects in the Constitution of Collaborative Spaces

This paper examines collaborative processes involving users and product development practitioners, in virtual co-creative spaces. Qualifications of roles are entailed in and through the mediation of objects, as they serve part and parcel of the coming-into-being of the collaboration. By focusing on the role played by objects in collaborative spaces, more specifically an Internet-based forum established by a medical device manufacturer for users of its products, the paper makes a threefold argument concerning the active role played by objects in collaborative processes: 1) the premises for user involvement in such spaces is subject to behind-the-scenes qualification processes directed at particular user configurations; 2) virtual spaces are being re-configured by users’ and practitioners’ interactions through diverse references of objects; and 3) users and practitioners qualify the content of these spaces by negotiating the meaning of the objects that both engage. Thus, such collaborative processes bear with them potential trade-offs and inherent tensions by way of boundary drawings and reordering of roles, articulated through qualification.

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