

tel·lu·ric¹
–adjective

1. of or pertaining to the earth; terrestrial.
2. of or proceeding from the earth or soil.



telluricAesthetic is an interactive, participant-generated avatar gallery sampling the symbolic relationships people make between physical elements of identity and cultural associations. Based on feedback from Philadelphians ages 18-30, I will design a digital paper-doll avatar builder that will populate a filterable gallery. The gallery will allow participants to visually compare perceived differences and commonalities of Philadelphia's cultural subgroups. **telluricAesthetic** will be launched in beta and perpetuated online. My hope is that both participants and my audience will become more cognizant of the way we use symbols to classify and evaluate others.



In the first phase, I will carefully screen participants from each subculture and ask them to name five of Philadelphia's subcultures. I will then have them list, sketch, and describe the physical attributes (such as eyeglasses, hairstyles, iconography, and piercings) that they believe to physically define a member of a subculture. Next I will ask participants to think aloud as they create paper-doll avatars representing the typical physical identity of three of the subcultures. The think aloud conversations and the final paper-doll results for each participant will inform my final interface design.



In the second phase, I will create a digital, interactive paper-doll interface, similar in function to the Nintendo Mii interface. Participants will use this interface to simulate their own physical identities and to tag the elements of identities created by others. Participants will then be asked to create an avatar of an identity they choose from a drop-down list. The avatars and tags created will populate a gallery that users can then sort and filter by physical attributes, zip code, and other attributes.

The following sources informed my research on ethnography, subculture, semiotics, and data visualization, respectively:

- Fetterman, David M. *Ethnography*, Second Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998.
- Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Routledge, 1979.
- Marris, Paul, and Sue Thornam. "Encoding/Decoding," *Stuart Hall. Media Studies: A Reader*.
- Tufte, Edward. *Envisioning Information*. Cheshire, Connecticut: Graphics