Moving Beyond ‘Using to Do’

Broadening the mandate for usability professionals to include lifestyle interfaces

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Acknowledgements

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Talk Preview

Prologue:

Part I:

Part II:

Epilogue

slides @ http://www.msu.edu/~hartdav2/
Talk Preview: Prologue

Prologue

From Usability to UCD:
How our sense of “computing” changes

computing as task  →  computing as medium
Part I:
From Understanding Work to Understanding the User Experience
Talk Preview: Part II

Part II:
Lifestyle Interfaces
Talk Preview: Epilogue

Epilogue:
Why Study Writing, Now?

texts are interfaces  interfaces are texts
Talk In Progress...

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Prologue

From Usability to UCD: How our sense of “computing” changes

computing as task \[ \rightarrow \] computing as medium
“Usability”

• typically assumes a user who is “at” or “on” the computer

• users focus is on “computing task”

• goal is to make computing task easy, easier, or easy to learn

As computers move into non-technology work, a split is evident between what is “usable” and what is “useful.”

c.f. Mirel, Interaction Design for Complex Problem Solving
“User-Centered Design”

• assumes computing is a powerful medium for doing things
• assumes users’ focus is on something more important than a “computing task”
• goal is to make computing seamless with users’ activities

Computation becomes distributed across a variety of devices, incorporated in and incorporating social modes of interaction.

c.f. Dourish, *Where the Action Is*
Trend: Social Computing

• applications that make use of existing social structures to facilitate user interaction

• qualities such as “visibility” and “awareness” become tangible strategies and features
When you use TIVO, you are doing computing tasks that don’t feel like computing. They feel like enhanced TV watching.

“pause, rewind, live TV!”

http://www.tivo.com/1.0.demo.asp
“Imagine if it [Tivo] took the Olympics, or a baseball or football game, or presidential debate, and collated everyone's replay speeds, and then offered up various highlights packages— the most viewed 5 minutes; most viewed hour and so on. This would naturally edit out all commercials, and the commentators padding, and show which parts people as a whole found interesting.”

Kevin Marks, on the Weblog Many2Many

http://www.corante.com/many/archives/2004/10/19/could_we_have_social_video_editing.php
Talk Preview: Part 1

Part I: From Understanding Work to Understanding the User Experience
“User Experience”

- a focus on “everything the user sees or touches” - IBM, [http://www.ibm.com/easy](http://www.ibm.com/easy)

- engages users as goal-oriented, self-aware, and smart

- two important trajectories driving UE focus
  1. The user as knowledge worker
  2. The user as consumer
“Knowledge Work”

- value of knowledge-intensive work demands that workers have control over the ends, not merely the means of work
- studies in the Computer-Supported Cooperative Work area drive a view supportive of work as complex, social

“descriptive studies...meant to unearth the workarounds, innovations, and tacit practices workers have developed.”

Spinuzzi, Tracing Genres Through Organizations, p. 11
“User/Consumer”

• as the web became a full-blown marketplace, helping users make purchases online became a priority... if not the priority

• design becomes “customer-centered” rather than user-centered

“It [being customer-centered] means everyone knows why a service or product makes money, and expects to balance delivering value to the customer, and revenue to the business, through the use of robust and appropriate technology”

“Experience problems?”

• Spinuzzi (2003) suggests that the “fieldwork-to-formalism” pattern of workplaces studies and work-oriented design leads to a “victimized user” trope.

• Customer-centered design introduces a complication for designers, namely whose interests are to be foregrounded...their “customers”? Or their customers’ customers?!

The net effect, in both cases, is that users’ goals and activities are subordinated to someone else’s interests, however well-intentioned.

Spinuzzi, *Tracing Genres Through Organizations*
• the knowledge that underlies “action-centered skill” is increasingly encoded in networked systems where it was previously ephemeral and oral in nature

• this “textualization” of work frees workers from constraints of action-centered work, and also frees them to act on their work in a more comprehensive, explicit way (writing)

• These “freedoms,” though, depend on “two critical conditions: the presence of individual competence and the opportunity to express that competence”
What constitutes “competence” and the “opportunity to express competence” for a system like Tivo?

Tivo textualizes everyday, mundane action...does it free us from TV? What does it free us to do?
Answering the questions posed about Tivo involves a shift in perspective for Usability specialists...

Away from a focus on “instrumental affordances” or the way tasks are mapped to the features and functions of technology

Toward a focus on “social affordances,” or the way social and individual goals and desires are mapped to the features and functions of technology

Huatong Sun, *Expanding the Scope of Localization*
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Talk Preview: Part II

Part II:
Lifestyle Interfaces
Lifestyle Interfaces

What do I mean by “Lifestyle Interfaces?”

• Moments when individuals engage technologies to be, or to become, the person they want to be

• Artifacts, information, and interactions that enable “using to be” or “using to become”

• A perspective on information technology that highlights social affordances
Some Social Affordances of SMS

- Staying in contact
- Having Fun
- Expressing Shared Support
- Saying Something Implicitly
- Avoiding Confrontation
- Breaking the Ice

SMS via cell phone is not well designed for these...
The Camera Phone...curious

- low quality images
- limited storage
- tricky interfaces for saving & moving pictures

A precarious perch for a party balloon

Image from http://www.textamerica.com
Coordinating Experience

The ability to say “would you look at that!”

- to loved ones
- to the world
- anyone distant in space or time

Ah, but what a party!

For that, users will tolerate a lot...

Image from http://www.textamerica.com
Designing for Lifestyles

http://www.planetout.com
Life becomes text...

As more and more of our lives are lived in networked spaces, the "actions" of life are increasingly textualized.

We then can act on these texts...changing our lives and the lives of others.

This is writing, coming to a cell phone near you...
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Epilogue:

Why Study Writing, Now?
Writing becomes design

the problem of mutual intelligibility between humans and machines recommends a research agenda aimed less at the creation of interactive machines, than at the writing of dynamic artefacts intended to be legible, or intelligible to their users.

This shift brings a rich set of resources from recent reconceptualizations of what writing and reading involve, including the inevitable uncertainties in relations of writer's intentions to readers' interpretations, and the active role of the reader in giving life and meaning to the text.

Lucy Suchman, Keynote for Interact ‘97 (1997!!)
“Recent Reconceptualizations”

Traditional views of writing assume writers and readers are engaged in a special kind of conversation, one where the text stands in for one or more absent interlocutors.

Contemporary views of writing, assume that writing is a medium, and that people are more often users of texts (as opposed to participants in a conversation); writing is not the focus of the action, but a powerful context for action.

Derrida, *Limited Inc. (RIP)*; Dourish, *Where the Action Is*
The contemporary view might be summed up this way...

“texts are interfaces, artifacts that facilitate moments of contact between people; they are not simply conversation or past action frozen in time; they also represent moments of future interaction waiting to happen; they comprise both plans and resources for future action”
Interfaces are Texts

Conversely...

“interfaces are texts; they work for us based on the same basic principles make other texts work...a text is iterable and interpretable, infinitely; we can come to it again and again, bringing a new set of contingencies each time, and it works; that is, it appears and offers itself up for interpretation in light of the circumstances”

Derrida, *Limited Inc.*
Text is more important than ever

Consider that undergraduates are members of a generation that may use text to communicate more than they use their voices, and for a variety of reasons:

1. text on cell phones is cheaper to send than the richer data stream of a voice message
2. text on instant messaging programs persist, preserving the idiom of conversation in the midst of hectic schedules
3. sharing text with the world is way to get famous; blogs + RSS makes this feasible

Try Google: “generation text”
Writing is poorly understood

- most of us still consider writing that takes utmost advantage of a medium like SMS - writing that is abbreviated to the maximum degree and highly esoteric - to be "bad"

- most of us still consider the terms "writing" and "reading" to be solitary acts, even though services like Google provide us with fantastic search results precisely because of a relevance algorithm that focuses on "writing" as a social phenomenon, namely how many people make links between a concept, a keyword, or a name
Not just user interfaces...

• most of us are unaware that one of the biggest computing problems we faced 10 years ago - the question of how to make disparate systems interoperable - is being solved with text

• simple text formats such as XML and RDF and even programming languages such as Python all rely on a proven technology for interoperability - text
Writing, Oh how you’ve changed

Most of us are aware, but only casually so, that as we act in increasingly IT-saturated society, everything we do becomes a text.

But we get reminded sometimes when versions of these texts are presented to us...
Checking Out/Writing

I am always a little unnerved, for example, to get a letter from my local grocery store chain that contains coupons, generated just for me, based on my purchase patterns in the most recent quarter.

I am writing (or, rather, co-authoring) a history of purchases each time I swipe my "super savings card;" this text, in turn, gets repurposed to inform other texts - product orders for the grocery store, consumer trend reports for market segment analyses, and yes, custom coupons for me...
Re-writing the checkout text

“What if I could see, edit, and re-distribute those checkout texts...”

http://aislebyaisle.com/marsh-grocery-store.htm
“Deep support enables psychological self-determination. It produces time for life. It facilitates and enhances the experience of being the origin of one's life. It recognizes, responds to, and promotes individuality. It celebrates intricacy. It multiplies choice and enhances flexibility. It encourages voice and is guided by voice. Deep support listens and offers connection. It offers collaborative relationship defined by advocacy. It is founded on trust, reciprocity, authenticity, intimacy, and absolute reliability.”

Zuboff & Maxmin, The Support Economy

http://www.supporteconomy.com/questions.shtml
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