The question is: “What is lost by the idea of "knowledge as design?" Does this create an overly practical emphasis for what is learned?"

Nick sums it up nicely in saying that “relying solely on Perkin's 4-question framework seems reductionistic,” though I would extend this to say that reductionism is not inherently bad – it helps us see the world in more organized ways. The problem arises when you take this reductionist tack as THE way to see the world. If Perkins’ goal was to completely define knowledge as a designed thing that can always be easily parsed using the four questions he provides, then we have problems.

By treating knowledge in an almost algorithmic sense, Perkins does it a great disservice. Moreover, by accusing academia of “truth mongering – knowledge disconnected from the contexts of application and justification that make it meaningful” (p.4), he is putting the rhetorical equivalent to a landmine in the road for anyone following his argument. If you disagree, why, you must be one of THOSE types who dismiss the application of knowledge so as to feel powerful. Uh, no. By giving a sweeping proclamation about knowledge as design that involves highly arguable terms (like purpose, as we’ve already discussed, for one), and then following it with a highly defensive rhetoric, he is exactly who he accuses. This view of knowledge leaves questions of value-judgment and aesthetics in the dust, and that’s not a good thing. Apparently, knowledge can not be sought purely for knowledge’s sake, nor can it exist without some purpose (an apparently objective purpose that is perceivable by any who simply looks close enough).

I’m not sure if it was intentional, but the discussion of Newton’s laws on page 24 shows a naïve understanding of how representation of design can confuse things – what frame of reference are we in, the rocket’s, or some “stationary” frame? This example of how our internal ‘physics’ is somehow wrong actually illustrates how tied to reference frames we are – and, a strong argument can easily be made to show how such “wrong” answers are actually dead-on given our standard frame of reference.

Lest I be thought of as a complete cynic, there were aspects of his work that I appreciated. For instance, I have often asked whether or not we are able to dismiss knowledge by dismissing its purposes? Therefore, can we discount a design based on its structure or purpose? If so, can we pick and choose our knowledge based on the purposes we find important or necessary? Would I be able to ignore some scientific theories (evolution) while accepting and using the byproducts (antibiotics)? There are many people I know who would argue that ignoring the knowledge while reveling in its applications is perfectly acceptable, yet this seems somehow schizophrenic to me.

This is Steve (in case I am having the troubles with logging in that I think I am having)... I'll say that I had a tough time with this, as there are so many disparate aspects to consider - in the end, few of them overlap nicely. Therefore, I had to "zoom out" a bit to a more encompassing frame of reference. As a result, I'd say that my glasses (spectacles, as I am fond of calling them) are the things that define me simply by permanently altering (for
the better, as far as I am concerned) that which I see. There’s something really deep there, I just know it. <Insert some wise statement here.>

Anyway, that was a great question – I’m going to ask my wife to get the "spousal triangulation" on this one as well.

Again, this is Steve, and it appears that I have not solved my "logging in problem" yet. Anyway, I had a thought...

Some schools (mostly private) have used uniforms as a means of "equalizing" the clothing and appearance of students. Having taught in a private school, I can see both sides of this argument in my own experience. Now there are some school districts and states (Maine, for example) that have mandated a "uniform" level of technology for all students. I wonder if, in the attempt to minimize the negative effects of economic stratification, this might have some of the same negative effects as uniforms. I mean, if technology is now a way in which people (especially kids and several members of our very own class) identify or even define themselves, what does it say about schools if they try to regulate the technology that students use and can bring with them to school?

I don't mean to call you out, Kym, old buddy, but I would have to disagree with your assertion that "aesthetics are less than critical but far more than icing" in computer games. Granted, computer games may not bow to the 'high romantic' sense of aesthetics, or they may not be what Martha Stewart would call "home" - but therein lies the problem with this whole mess. We can't think of aesthetics as some "immutable" feature of the world like mass or time (I know that both are completely variable, but let us assume non-relativistic speeds). If we do, then the temptation to speak of, or more dangerously from a position of ultimate aesthetic awareness can be too great. Could it be that computer games are ALL ABOUT aesthetics (they do have to sell, right?) - just not the ones that we might appreciate, and instead geared toward the aesthetics of 'typical' teenage males?

Well, anyone want to jump on that one before Kym takes a shot back? Does the idea of THE aesthetics of [insert anything] seem scary or dangerous to you?

Nick, I love ya. It's so much fun to toss mental grenades back and forth - no one seems to get hurt (I hope), and that's the good part.

I guess my worry, as expressed in class, is not that everyone has their own kind of "definition" for aesthetics - it's that there is increasingly fewer definitions that are being held up as the normalizers for society. Though I don't think (correct me if you feel otherwise) that this is as big an issue in games as in other contexts, I have seen it tend that direction more and more. A friend of mine worked for a now-defunct game design company for a while and spoke of how narrow the vision was for design because of what he perceived as a 'normalized aesthetic.'
This is also where I was coming from regarding the infamous "blanket claims" suggestion. I simply would want anyone tossing their epistemological hats in the ring to recognize (and even admit) some of their assumptions about what is "normal," "beautiful," "good," etc.... That is not to say you, Nick. I very much appreciate your thoughtfulness and willingness to engage in discussion with your mind open.

As to the "irrelevant" comment, I was merely referring to your use of mobile phone address books as a fair comparison to game aesthetics. It came off way harsher than I had intended, and I apologize - I certainly meant no offense to you, and pray that you took none.

Yet, this brings me to a larger issue - I really enjoy having this kind of back and forth (when my schedule allows). I hope we can all continue this with future posts, and not be held back from looking at older posts to provide grist for our argumentative mills. :-)

So here is a question that ran through my mind while reading, and does so again after reading Kym's post:
What is the difference (in Norman's mind, as well as yours) between 'standardization' and 'normalization'? Which does Microsoft represent?

Ok...
I'll pass on it for now.

A couple of things, though:

1) Leigh - Is that 'high' or 'low' romance?

2) Nick - Not to sound like a broken record, but how >you< define assessment may be drastically different than how others do so. As a teacher, gestures and word choices can be assessments of the informal variety, even though non-written assessments usually get the shaft when folks list them. Moreover, the purpose of assessment should also be questioned when considering its design and visibility - perhaps it is not desired for students to be aware of their assessment, so therefore it is not intended as a navigational tool for the user (student).

3) Kym - "Real" scientists? What are they? I'll wager that the majority of my senior-level secondary science ed students don't know what "real" scientists do - and they're going to be teachers of the subject. Heck, that seems like part of the problem to me: teachers are urged to help students see what "real" scientists do in the classroom, when they don't know themselves. Not to mention, the classroom is an awfully undemocratic place for such an individualistic and democratic activity to really take place. After all, if students were "real" scientists, they'd only work in one field and answer questions that interested them. ;-)
Just a thought:
If creativity is inherently a unique thing - how can it be taught? In other words, how do you teach someone to be unique? It seems that you can show examples of creativity, encourage it, hope for "transfer" from other domains, maybe; but teach it? I have these images of a 'Creativity' textbook used in 'Creativity' class... funny, really.
In the end, I suppose it is one of those terms that educators bat around like "problem-solving skills" - we know it when we see it, but I'll be damned if there is a way to globally discretize it for complete coverage in some "curriculum." In fact, I might suggest that creativity is "teachable" in the same sense as a behavior, but certainly not in the sense of a skill.
Hmmm... I wonder what they'll all think of that...

Yi, I had a quick <ahem> thought about your last question.

I am a musician (drummer), and I love to both play and listen to music. I find that there are times where a simple, repetitive beat with a plain harmony is exactly what I need. Yet, I LOVE listening to more "complicated" songs with layers of rhythm, melody, harmony, counterpoint... and lyrics. After I read that quote from Postrel, I couldn't help but think about how affectively engaged I am when listening to some kinds of music, while how cognitively engaged I am when others play. Lyrics seem to be mostly cognitive for me - when I hear lyrics, I try to understand what is being said. Yet, they can also be an instrument - one of my favorite groups is Yes, and their singer/lyricist purposely chooses words for their sound more than their meaning.

In terms of playing, I can also be both cognitively and affectively engaged in what I am doing. When playing with a great group of people (or just on my own sometimes), I can slip into an almost trance where I am no longer aware of the precise actions taken by my body. Yet, when focused on playing a specific song with a specific structure, I can concentrate more acutely than ever on the details of what I am doing.

In the end, I read the quote and thought; both the meaning and the message have an aesthetic. <Great, now that I've talked about it, I want to play my drums!>