Unboring
Unboring

"Many of you feel bad for this lamp. That is because you're crazy. It has no feelings! And the new one is much better."
Where does meaning come from?
4.2 Deconstruction (I): Meaning, Representation and Genre

CS 5984 Design of Interactive Systems
February 9, 2005
Meaning

- Reading Objects
- Why Think About Meaning?
- Understanding Meaning
- Deconstruction Games
- Metaphor Game
- Sketch Problem 3 Feedback
Meaning

- **Reading Objects**
- Why Think About Meaning?
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Are meanings of objects the same as the meaning of words?
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PICTURE OF BARBIE BEING CRUCIFIED
Are meanings of objects the same as the meaning of words?
Are meanings of objects the same as the meaning of words?
Are meanings of objects the same as the meaning of words?
Meaning

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Why Think About Meaning?

- Measurable (“scientific”) results
- Intangible results
- Cultural context (illustrated by comparison of “beauty”)
“Scientific” Study of Appearance

• Don Norman’s *Emotion & design: attractive things work better*
• Example: comparative study of ATM interfaces
• However, no breakdown of qualities of “attractive”
• Numerous CHI articles
Feather, Scent & Shaker
vs.
Mankoff’s Mobile
Beauty

• In Math
• In Engineering
• In Art
  – Traditional European
  – Japanese
  – Contemporary
Mathematical Beauty

- Elegance
- Symmetry
- Simplicity
- Compactness
Engineering Beauty

• Optimization
• Efficiency
• Systematicity
• Repeatability (sometimes)
European (traditional)

- Transcendent
- Narrative (allegorical, etc.)
- Apprehended by the many ("Big WOW")
- Immediate
Japanese art

• Subtle
• Surface appearances
• Apprehended by the few, with patience
Contemporary Art

- Irony (the tension of meanings)
- Abstraction
- Provocation
- (NOT “Beauty”)
Meaning

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Philosophical Studies of Meaning

• Phenomenology
• Structuralism (AKA semiology)
• Ecological semiotics (”affordances”)
• Genre systems
Phenomenology

• oppose the acceptance of unobservable matters and grand systems erected in speculative thinking;

• oppose naturalism (also called objectivism and positivism), which is the worldview growing from modern natural science and technology that has been spreading from Northern Europe since the Renaissance;

• justify cognition (and some also evaluation and action) with reference to “Evidenz” -- awareness of a matter itself as disclosed in the most clear, distinct, and adequate way for something of its kind;

• believe that not only objects in the natural and cultural worlds, but also ideal objects, such as numbers, and even conscious life itself can be made evident;

• hold that inquiry ought to focus upon what might be called "encountering"

• Recognize the role of description in universal, a priori, or "eidetic" terms as prior to explanation by means of causes, purposes, or grounds
Sign = Sr + Sd
(Structuralism)

- Linguistics
- Saussure

Saussure's graphical representation of the sign as being made up of a sound image and a concept.
Sign = Sr + Sd

The sign is intrinsically arbitrary.

It can be identified only by contrast with coexisting signs of the same nature, which together constitute a structured system.
Structuralism

• Admits values and history
• Foundation for:
  – Post-Modernism
  – Critical Theory
  – Post-Structuralism
Affordances and Ecological Semiotics

• Rooted in Gestalt psychology
  – Kurt Lewin
  – The whole is more than the sum of the parts

• Ecological psychology: a psychology of affordance
  – JJ Gibson
  – Door handle “wants” to be grasped
“Affordances”

- Does not admit values or history
- “Universals”
- An implicit foundation of Alexander’s Pattern Language
Hold me

Pour me

Yank me

Like a power tool

Blender

2-stroke chainsaw engine says “Macho”

Name says hard-drinkin’ at sporting events

“Affordance”

Structuralism
Genre

• “kind of”
• socio-technical system
• meaning comes from: media + content + production + consumption
• Media example (printing):
  – books
  – newspapers
  – memos
• content example (fiction):
  – romance
  – mystery
Meaning

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Deconstruction Game(s)

- Use philosophies as tools
- Basic idea:
  - One thing seen in relation to another
How to read....

- Affect
- Context
- Genre
Affect

• Affect precedes cognition
• Familiarity breeds fondness
• Argument for:
  – designing appearance
  – reading reaction
Affect and content

• How to “read” affect?
  – “Subtract” content (cognitive psych method)
  – map associations (literary method)
Subtractive Method (4.2.1)
Reaction affects reading

- Examine presentation of information
- Substitute content with unintelligible content
- Ask, “What is first impression, first thing ‘reader’ understands?”
Map of Associations (4.2.2)
reaction is part of reading

- Deconstruct all meanings of content
- Map each primary meaning to one association with meaning
- Any re-presentation is a new construction
Context

This is the painting Van Gogh made just before he killed himself
Genre Method (4.2.3)

- Context most often set by genre
- Identify and establish meanings due to:
  - media
  - content
  - production (”follow the money”)
  - consumption (audience)
Meaning

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Metaphor

• Indirection
• poetic
• analogical
Hunting the Metaphor (4.2.4)

- Hints:
  - something presented as something else.
  - novel view of reality
  - Based on everyday experience
  - abstract presented in relation to concrete things
  - Test: literalizing or evoking?
Meaning

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Part Two of SP 3

• Due Monday
• Take someone else’s problem
• Write short evaluation based on:
  – plausibility of the device and its interaction
  – how compelling the story line is
  – how easy/hard it is to understand

• Two copies, please
How smart does your bed have to be to make you afraid to go to sleep?
Planning Ahead

• Friday: meet in groups

• for Monday:
  – feedback on SP 3 due
  – read DG Chapter 4
  – Justin Belcher and Wenji Zheng send me notes by noon

• for next Wednesday: team presentation “A”
  – site
  – problems