IAT 432

Studio Preparation Exercise #1: Naive Usability

This is to be done individually and prepared BEFORE the studio lab class in which it is due.

Be prepared to hand in your 2 pages and talk about your experiences in the studio lab class.

The purpose of this exercise is to get you thinking in terms of usability, and noticing usability issues from the user's point of view. This is to be done individually not with your team.

During the week, pick two times that you use some sort of technology or information system: a web site, an ATM machine, a car, a bicycle...the possibilities are many. Choose one that you have used many times in the past (i.e., something familiar) and one that you are using for the first time.

For the length a transaction, or about 10 minutes, whichever is less, notice and record usability issues or problems. Pay attention to such issues as the following:

- instances in which you had to modify your own activity to suit the needs of the system or technology;
- moments of confusion or uncertainty, such as questions about what actions you should take or what a display or system response means;
- inconveniences, instances requiring added effort from you -- physical (e.g., doing something, or doing something in an awkward or effortful way) or mental (e.g., having to remember something that takes some effort).
- emotional reactions, such as annoyance ("why do I have to do this? why can't I do that?"), anger, fear ("will it eat my ATM card?"); pleasure, happiness ("That was fun!" "That's really convenient!"); whatever.
- added effort or attention of any kind.
- What's even harder to notice: times when everything went smoothly, without problems.

When you are using the *familiar* system or item, these may be harder to notice.

Pay attention to the ways in which you have been trained by it to do things its way, the accommodations that you are now used to making. During the exercise, simply keep track of these instances as they arise. Then summarize your observations on paper in a bulleted list for both the familiar and new technology. Then write a reflection on what you learned about usability from this exercise. The point is not to apply any of the readings, but to notice your own experience as a user.

Stay with noticing the disjunctions between how you act and how the system works; do not leap into redesigning it to work better. This is hard; often our tendency is to focus on how to make it better without first noticing the problems. But premature re-design can lead to suboptimization: we solve some problems while creating new ones.