COMP 3020 Project Milestone 1: Designer Sense and Ideation

Part (a): Develop your designer sense

(Credit to Tony Tang for the assignment!)

The goal of this assignment is to help you become more aware of the things you interact with each day and what makes them enjoyable (or not) to interact with. For this assignment you need to have a very critical and reflective perspective. Your job is to "think like a designer," and experience the world while being cognizant of how it was designed. Pay attention to everything that you interact with: the alarm clock that wakes you up, the schedule that you look at to catch the bus, the controls in your car and even the feel of the steering wheel, the ways in which doors open, the interface of your phone as you text, etc. What things work well? What things don't work well? Why? Does it match your expectations? Is it because you know how from experience, or because you made lots of mistakes in the past? Are there things that don't work well, but you've constructed a workaround for (for example: creating a path through a field, because the walkway takes an inconvenient route)?

Many computer science students find this exercise difficult - maybe you don't think about things in such terms. That is the core purpose of this milestone: to train you to turn on your designer sense.

Warning: as soon as you start thinking in this way, the whole world will seem very poorly designed. Actually, the funny thing is that it really is, but humans are very adaptable, so we soon forget.

Complete the following tasks.

- **Explore.** Each team member should complete this task independently. Briefly describe 10 interactions you have had with things in your everyday life. Keep good notes and provide a single paragraph for each, describe this interaction, discussing whether it was successful or not. In what ways was it successful? In what ways was it poor? Why was it poor? What workarounds did you come up with to overcome these problems? Note: it is best to keep a small notebook with you so that you can record these in detail as you go about your life. Trying to recall them in the evening or several days later will be difficult and lack the clarity and richness of recording it in the moment.

  Deliverable: This will not be marked, but each member must include their 10 paragraphs in an appendix. This can be rough.

  Deliverable: As a group, review each other's interaction paragraphs and select the best 10. Revise and polish the writing and present the 10 paragraphs.

- **Design Principles**. Meet as a group and go over each others' results. As a team, come up with 5 design principles that could explain a good interaction, or a poor one. Most will make up their own principle based on their results, but do not worry if your principles resemble ones from class (we will review "actual" design principles later in the course).

  Deliverable: For each of the 5 principles:
  - Give it a name. It should be reasonably descriptive of the principle (not the interaction).
  - Provide a 1 paragraph description of what it means.
  - In one paragraph, use your principle to explain any of the good and/or bad examples from above.
  - **Your principles and examples must draw from your exploration task.**

Part (b): Observing Users

At this stage, you might have a general idea of what kind of item/media you want to build a library for. Now, you will be doing some initial investigation to start ideating. Find an app/website for the same item/media that you selected, or if you can't find one (or the ones you do find are so bad as to be irrelevant), an app/website for something that you think has something in common with your item/media. For example, if there are no good boardgame apps/websites, you can consider using one that is for video games, or anything else, as long as there are some similarities. However, be careful you don't later fall into the trap of recreating the video game app, but for boardgames.

Recruit 5 people total (not each) from your friends and family network: you will ask them to complete some tasks relating to your project, using the app/website you selected. You will conduct your research one participant at a time (not in groups) and will take notes on their experience. Ideally, you want two group members present (follow any health mandates and consider taking extra precautions). Every participant should use the same app/website. For each person recruited:

- Thank them for giving you their time! Consider an honorarium, e.g., a chocolate bar or free coffee.
- Ask them to use the app you selected to complete one, two or three appropriate tasks. If the tasks are pretty simple do more, if it is a more complex task, just do one – you decide.
- Pay close attention ("Look") and take good notes on paper. Did everything go smoothly? Which parts seemed to work well? Did they have problems? Were there annoyances? Did they get stuck?
- Have some structure (specific steps, etc.) and additional materials prepared in case they don't know what to do (especially important if the task is complex).
    - Offer a rough task, e.g., find an item, do something with an item, complete a transaction.
    - If they are still uncomfortable, offer a detailed task, specifying the exact items.
    - Your goal here is to get them to use the system and to see them do it. **Prepare your helper tasks ahead of time**, do not do it on the fly.
- After interaction, "Ask" the person what they liked about the interface. Also ask what they did not like about the interface (make sure these are separate questions).

Deliverable:

- Describe the app/website you selected and justify your choice. This should be a half-page max.
- Summarize the tasks you asked your participants to complete. You may want to explain why you selected these tasks. This should also be a max of half a page.
- Provide a half-page summary for each participant. **Do not use their real names.** Instead, give them a number or let them choose a pseudonym.
    - Give a 1-2 sentence introduction to the person (gender, rough age range, work or education context)
    - Summarize what you feel worked for the interface and what did not work.
    - Summarize what the person said they liked and did not like about the interface.

- Provide a half page summary discussion on what you learned from "Look"ing vs "Ask"ing, where these two approaches yielded similar insight, and where they differed.
- Provide a half page overall summary. What, overall, did you learn? Did you find that your observation technique worked? Or not? Would there be anything you would do differently next time?