Deliverable

A pdf with useful section headings and the required content

Module 4 Overview

Overview

This module moves us toward thinking about, and developing skills, with WYSISYG (What You See Is What You Get) editors. We'll also continue talking about the impacts of interfaces on our writing and we'll discuss the affordances of various user-interfaces in our writing editors. Additionally, we've curated some tutorials for students to start thinking about which skills they'll continue to develop as part of their writing career.

WYSIWYG

Generally, in 2021 when people talk about WYSIWYG editors they are refer to writing technologies that have web-based circulation as their end goal. Of course, in 2021 when people talk about writing (professional or otherwise) it's often toward web-based circulation. But this wasn't always the case. Believe it or not, in the past digital writing technologies did not always create documents that looked the same on every machine. What's more, in order to force a machine to show a font in italics or with special heading presentation you'd have to insert a brief line of code. There were some benefits to this, certainly. Arguably, some writers performed better free of the distractions of margins, typography choices, and such. But as computer writing moved from the exclusive realm of the experts and toward more general-public use things like "word processors" were created. Maybe you've never given it much thought: but a word processor is distinctly different from a text editor. Text editors are generally plain text with no special functionality. Open up a notepad and write and you'll see there is no text-wrap (you can enable it but it's not tied to margins), no heading styles, no footer options, and likely no font alternatives. It's just pure textual input.

Suffice to say: for most of us today our writing is done in word processors. In fact, many of you might struggle a bit to write an essay in a plain text editor. It just won't feel right, you'll have little gauge of how many pages you've written, and spell cheque (although far from perfect) is a trusted friend missing in plain text ;-).

Benefits and disadvantages

With so much of our writing now being circulated in public forums (print or web), it makes sense that we've moved toward WYSIWYG editors. One major benefit of these editors (HTML, CSS, Docx, PDF, etc.) is that it allows us to proof while we read and write. No need to run the text through some processing or conversion to know what it will look like - it's right there staring you in the face. Of course, if you're writing in one software and moving to another (e.g. Microsoft

Office to Adobe InDesign) you run the risk of copying over "invisible" formatting cues. Maybe you've done it yourself: you try to copy and paste a works cited from an article you read and it brings over strange line breaks or unintended characters.

Do you really get what you see?

A significant limitation of WYSIWYG editors is that it *black boxes* the writing to publishing process. For what it's worth, *black boxing* is a systems theory term that refers to the the obscuring of how inputs enter a system/machine/interface and are produced into outputs. WYSIWYG editors don't show a lot of what you get when you're editing with them. For illustrators and designers screen colors vs print colors can complicate publication processes. Because screens produce color differently than how printers produce color you need to be careful with part of what those WYSIWYG editors are hiding. This is especially true of accessibility issues. For instance, screen readers will pass over my 14 point bold font (a de facto heading to a sighted reader) as if it were plain text. A plain text editor and a little code (e.g. "##" in markdown) will solve this sort of problem.

Some systems are better than others. As a general rule, widely adopted formats that are non-proprietary (and the editors that they work with) are better suited to as a sort of: What You **Really** Get Is What You See editor. But nothing is perfect.

What's a good Digital Writing Technologist to do?

If all you've ever hoped for is to publish books of poems or go into an industry job or work in a writing adjacent field, then you might feel that knowing the tools of the trade will give you a leg-up. And perhaps they do. But I'm inclined to side with George Hayhoe (you can read his opinion here). It's not the knowledge of the technology that proves to be our primary skill but instead the ways we can think carefully about what we create and for whom we create. In other words, in matters of technology: the right avenue for the aspiring writer is to be inquisitive, analytical, and critical of editing software interfaces, and capabilities. The readings and discussions for this module are designed to give you the analytical tools to take this on.

Reading Response 2

- Due Oct 4, 2021 by 11:59pm
- Points 10
- Submitting a file upload
- File Types doc, docx, and rtf

Read the following three essays (Awaywithwords is fairly short and Tufte's powerpoint critique has plenty of pictures)

[The_Politics_of_the_Interface.pdf](#)

[awaywithwords.pdf](#)

[tufte-powerpoint.pdf](#)

Each of these essays takes a different stab at how technology reifies, norms, legitimizes, and exercises its domain over users. What competing ideas are present in these essays about the agentive power of technology? Do you get the sense that technology critiques lean too hard toward technology determinism? Or is there a more fine line?

Don't just attempt to answer these prompts.

This is a graded discussion: 10 points possible

Due Oct 11, 2021

[Chris Scheidler](#)

Reading Response Discussion 2

[Chris Scheidler (He/Him)](#)

Return here on October 6th for a discussion of your classmate's responses.

This batch of reading garnered mixed analysis on the role of technology in society and how we might *responsibly* work within technology. Generally, the authors of these excerpts saw writing technologies' roles in society to be influential in a manner of degrees. We can easily get a bit lost in how far we might take it in either direction so to lend some clarity it might be illustrative to categorically separate the multiple views of technology and society here. Some useful categorical separations I'll point out are:

1) how/when particular technologies are chosen/used

2) the semiotic potential of technology

3) the interaction between the first two

With regards to these categories - and in light of the excerpts here: respond with **1)** where you see these categorical distinctions at play across the author excerpts below and, especially **2)** how might these understandings shed light on the responsible practices of a digital writing specialist in a career (or otherwise)?

AUTHOR A)

In the Selfe paper on the politics of the interface, I see a concern that the very interfaces of our technology have a significant effect on influencing the user. There is a call to acknowledge the white, middle-class, heteronormative environment in which these interfaces were developed, but is not always the environment in which they are used. I do think, personally, that this paper ascribes a little too much influential power to technology…. A point is made in the paper that computers in minority schools are used to drill basic skills, as contrasted to majority schools where the devices are used to "develop higher order literary and cognitive skills as objects of study" (67). To me (and my biased worldview), that seems to be an issue with *how* the technology is being used. I can't see the implied connection that folder icons and an office theme somehow deter minority students from utilizing computers fully. I see that as a small hurdle that all students had to overcome at some time; I myself learned what a 'folder' and a 'file' were in computer terms before I understood their real-life counterparts.

Awaywithwords seems to give slightly less power to technology's hold over people and society, but it acknowledges that they are both highly intertwined (which I agree with). The focus in this paper is how words and other information are spaced or arranged. A point was made that spacing between words was not really a thing until reading shifted from a public speaking to a private context. Ambiguity in tightly-packed text could be utilized by the one rare person who was speaking to an audience, but as more people read, a standardization had to be created. In this example, it was a societal change that dictated the technological shift. I am more in agreement with this middle way where technology and society are highly intertwined, always pushing and pulling, but I think some authors take technological determinism too far. One exception I will grant (and it is a huge exception), is social media's influence in modern times. However, I see it as more of a tool that has been leveraged in the extreme by a small number of entities to influence large swaths of society. I don't see social media as a regular kind of 'technology', but rather as an unexpectedly powerful exploit of human nature and psychology.

AUTHOR B)

The first article, "The Politics of the Interface," spoke extensively about literal and figurative borders found in digital writing. The idea proposed is that women, non-whites, and non-English speaking individuals experience a system of differential power whenever using technology. Throughout the article, they explain the boundaries found in computer interfaces and how everyone can learn to see and alter these boundaries in productive ways. The computer interfaces they reference are mainly linguistic contact zones, or places where cultures and beliefs can mix and tangle with each other. This article also warned how counterproductive an overly optimistic view about the positive impacts of technology can be to destroying the perceived boundaries.

This article showed the negative impacts of the agentive power technology has over users. One section that I found especially persuasive in showing these boundaries had less to do with actual digital writing, and more to do with access to technology and the skills taught to minority students. The article reported that minority students are only taught basic skills. Meanwhile, majority students are taught higher, more cognitively demanding skills. They pointed out that this is adding to the growing "technological underclass" in America. This idea plays into

technological determinism by portraying a culture where access to technology and the intensity of skills learned can feed into oppressive ideas of superiority over someone else. I had never considered how skills you learn on a computer could possibly affect your perception of life. I do believe technological determinism is a fine line in this aspect of technology exercising domain over users. This is because, when someone doesn't know how to do something on a computer or cellphone, I don't immediately think that it's because they're a minority. I only think it's because they haven't learned how to do it. This is my own perception, but I can still acknowledge the disadvantage people have when they have less access to education that can benefit their lives, such as computer skills.

AUTHOR C)

The [Wysocki] article discussed different methods that can be used to transmit information. I loved that the author recognized that by labeling things as incommunicable methods, we are limiting our abilities to communicate effectively. Is there really technology that just doesn't work for communication? This text argues that there isn't. The following quote stood out to me as I think it supports the claims made in the first text we read about different technology being used in the educational atmosphere. [wysocki] writes:

"...we were asking people in our classes to go out into the world believing that the only writing everyone everywhere ever does is the academic research essay."

When it comes to utilizing technology to communicate, we cannot box ourselves in. There are so many ways in which we can effectively communicate ideas via technology.

AUTHOR D)

I heard the phrase "With great power comes great responsibility," in quite a few super hero movies. This phrase kept popping into my head as I read the essays. Mainly because it seemed to me that most people were throwing this phrase out the window. It seems with business, education, and everyday life that technology is lacking in the responsibility department despite its overwhelming power that it has with communication. These essays as I read them said that as technology is expanding the communication portion is getting left behind. Like a first year foreign language student most people are relying on the few words they can decipher and in the end it becomes a crutch. Like Louis Gerstner turning of the projector. He knew that these people had become dependent on this tech to talk and most the information that was needed was lost in the translation. In my opinion as users or technology it is our responsibility to make sure that we don't lose the aspect of proper communication. If a piece of technology cannot say or teach the whole picture than we should find a different way to say what needs to be said.

AUTHOR E)

The Politics of the Interface, Awaywithwords, and The Cognitive Style of Powerpoint all approach the issue of technology and its influence and power from different angles and opinions. Cynthia and Richard Selfe (in The Politics of the Interface) point at the politics expressed in computer technology and its accessibility. Anne Wysocki (in Awaywithwords) points to the

power of history and experience shaping our interaction with technology. Edward Tufte (in The Cognitive Style of Powerpoint) points out the widespread use of Powerpoint and the issues and limitations associated with that particular program. Though seemingly unrelated at first, they all have something to say about the role of technology. Out of the three articles, Cynthia and Richard Selfe's The Politics of the Interface gave me the most to chew on so I will address that article last.

The Selfes point out that the layout, icons, and terminology are done within the framework of capitalism and business, which is both understandable and believable; however, the Selfes then go on to point out "the interface does not, for example, represent the world in terms of a kitchen countertop, a mechanic's workbench, or a fast-food restaurant—each of which would constitute the virtual world in different terms according to the values and orientations of, respectively, women in the home, skilled laborers, or the rapidly increasing numbers of employees in the fast-food industry" (pg. 70, Selfe). The proceeding quote is when my teeth began to grind but my temper flared when I read the line, "the virtual worlds of interfaces also means, at least in part and at some level, entering a world constituted around the lives and values of white, male, middle- and upper-class professionals" (pg. 70, Selfe). I was angered about two points which were implied by the statements. Firstly, how is a kitchen top styled program layout more inclusive to women than a desktop? Don't women occupy other spaces than the kitchen? Secondly, why would "users of color" not be able to relate to a business oriented layout? Can not users of color also be part of the middle and upper classes? As you may imagine I felt I had a lot to chew on. The suggestions made by the authors are meant to be well-meaning and encourage inclusiveness, but at the same time the suggestions come off as demeaning. I do not know whether the authors are white, black, asian, latina/o, rich, middle-class, or poor, but I do know that saying software should be tailored to the special experience and point of view of a user implies that the user does not have the capacity to adapt.

AUTHOR F)

I've always been of the ideology that computers create safe spaces to fight against forms of oppression that minorities face, and "The Politics of the Interface: Power and Its Exercise in Electronic Contact Zones" really challenged me on this belief. I believe that anyone can be taught how to use technology, and that it is a vital resource for fighting against systemic racism, sexism, and homophobia, but the article makes a wonderful point that privileged groups, who have grown up with access to this technology, have quite a significant advantage ahead of minorities. I think Selfe said it best "The recognition of this situation, for many computer-using teachers of English, is not possible without a great deal of pain." As a [worker] at Weber State, we have experienced this immense push towards technology, so much so that we were trained to [workers] in programs like Adobe In-design, spark, and premiere, since this is the direction writing is going. It hurts me that I have been an advocate for the advancement of technology wholeheartedly, and until now, did not realise the hardships that digital interfaces can force onto minorities in our education system.

AUTHOR G)

The essay entitled, "The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint," brings up a good point about the space shuttle Columbia disaster. Engineers made the mistake of trying to condense complex information into summarized bullet points without distributing accompanying reports that fully explained the danger of explosion upon reentry into Earth's atmosphere and its effect on the seven lives aboard the shuttle. But then the author goes on to blame Microsoft and corporate culture for imposing PowerPoint on the populous. Using any Microsoft product is a choice and people are responsible for the consequences of their choices, not the corporation selling the product. Personally, I've worked in both the private and public sectors and I have never seen any scientist or CPA disseminate complex information in PowerPoint. They write long reports and distribute those reports to board members. Besides that, PowerPoint is excellent for Human Resources orientation presentations. Also, the I.T. Dept. comes in and throws down computer use rules via PowerPoint presentations so it works there too. That's pretty simple information that is perfectly suited to presentation software.

Final (working prototype Tutorial)

- Due Oct 14, 2021 by 11:59pm
- Points 10
- Submitting a website url or a file upload
- Available after Sep 30, 2021 at 12am

Instructional design is a relatively new (but highly in demand) specialization in professional and technical writing. In this assignment you're building interactive tutorials that "solve" technology issues that might trouble specific users. We have a wide range of expertise within this class so I am very open on what counts as an "advanced" feature. Suffice to say - it shouldn't be surface level.

What is ID

Instructional Design is a genre of Technical Writing where a TPC worker creates interactive multimedia slides that educate an audience on a specialized subject. Instructional Designers might end up gamifying their courses, they may act and create scenarios in their courses, or they may keep it more dry. You are not required to partake in gamification or voice acting or any of the more involved aspects of Instructional Design.

What you'll do

You are each responsible for creating a polished tutorial on an advanced technology skill. Following your proposal and script, you should fully flesh out your ideas into a cohesive tutorial that will be shared with the class (you can opt out of sharing, just write me a note on the comments when you submit). My intention is for you to use Adobe XD in creating these

materials; nevertheless, you're free to choose whichever platform and delivery best suits your needs.

Checklist

Assignments will be assessed based on the following checklist

- A complete tutorial
- Attention to User Experience and Design (if you need a primer on this topic https://uxplanet.org/the-psychology-principles-every-ui-ux-designer-needs-to-know-24116fd65778 (Links to an external site.))
- Consistent and cohesive style, design, & tone

Assessment

Your grade will be assigned following the below rubric.

Incomplete	Projects that do not meet one or more of the assignment checklist items will be assigned an incomplete. (e.g. a course that is only 3 minutes worth of content)	0%
Meets Minimal Standards	Projects with significant errors or design issues that, nevertheless, fulfill the requirements of the assignment will receive a "meets minimal standards". (e.g. a course with poor interaction or broken links)	50%
Meets Expectations	Projects with polish in content and design that meet the assignment checklist and show competency of class outcomes will receive a "meets expectations".	80%
Exceeds Expectations	Projects with polish in content and design that meet the assignment checklist and show mastery or emerging mastery of course outcomes will receive "exceeds expectations". (e.g. a fully gamified course, a rich discussion of the context of this technology skill, expert design, etc.)	100%

Proposal (Interactive Technology Ethics)

- Due Oct 18, 2021 by 11:59pm
- Points 2
- Submitting a text entry box or a file upload
- Available after Oct 10, 2021 at 12am

Overview

In this project you'll work with a group to create a website or prototype of a web/mobile app that addresses an ethics issue in digital writing technologies. Your project should include linear and non-linear elements. During the course of this project you should expect to learn and demonstrate:

- Competency with contemporary design
- Strength of analysis, summary, and synthesis of documented ethics issues
- Familiarity and adherence to intellectual property guidelines
- Competency with either prototyping tools / web authoring tools (recommended Adobe XD & Adobe Dreamweaver)

Ethics & Digital Writing Technologies

The easiest way to get off track in this assignment is pick a pet peeve and mistake it for an ethics issue in digital writing technologies. For instance, a project that just complains about text speak in non-mobile environments is unlikely to get a student far here. On the other hand, something that examines the reliance of electronic submissions in the context global broadband access and reliance on proprietary file formats will serve a student much better. Regarding ethics, this isn't a philosophy class so I'm not holding you to nailing down some treatise on deontological, consequential, or virtue ethics. Instead, just consider: does it impact people and things in the world in a significant and demonstrated way.

Grade Breakdown

The entire process of this project (proposal, deliverable, group evaluation) is worth 25% of your final grade. The breakdown is as follows:

Proposal	2%
Content	8%
Interaction and Design	8%
Group Evaluation	7%

Expectations

Below are expectations for each portion of your grade for this project.

Proposal

Your proposal should include guidelines for how often group members will communicate with each other and how often they'll check canvas. You should layout a general idea where the group is leaning for considering a digital writing technologies ethics issue and why your issue is important (~500 words). You should identify individual strengths of group members. Finally, you should propose any deadlines you'd like me to hold your group to (e.g. "we want a rough draft to Dr. Scheidler by 11/10" or "we'll send a weekly memo to Dr. Chris discussing our progress").

Content

The final version of this project should have ~6000 words of polished alphanumeric content. This content should be in a consistent style and tone, it should be in standard written English, and it should relate to your digital writing technologies ethics issue. You are expected to properly attribute quotes and research citations consistently (you can use APA, Chicago, MLA, AP, or any other established citation practice). Your content should summarize and articulate the scope of the issue and the importance behind it AND explore the depths of the issue. Surface level analysis will result in a significantly lowered score. It may be helpful to contextualize past or analogous issues but the bulk of your work should be directed toward your topic at hand. It may also be helpful to offer tentative solutions or new perspectives on your issue but, again, the bulk of your content should toward the examination of the issue.

Interaction & Design

Your project should include linear and non-linear elements. Linear elements are parts that are meant to be experienced in sequence (a slideshow is a linear element). Non-linear elements are parts on which a singular sequence is not imposed (a slideshow with various choices and tracks that change the sequence are non-linear). For instance, you might create a handful of sections that read fairly linearly but are navigable independently. A truly excellent group may also create an interactive infographic that addresses their topic. Additionally, your project should follow contemporary design principles and follow best UX practices (e.g. read here for -> CRAP principles) (Links to an external site.). Finally, some simple guidelines:

- Your links should work - deadlinks are an easy way to lose points.
- Images should be captioned (and/or contain alt text)
- Your final version should be in "deliverable, work-ready" format (e.g. using free webhosting for a website [I can help here] / a working link for XD).

BIG NOTE: if you elect to build a website avoid the allure of the various website generators and template sites. Wordpress, Weebly, Wix, Squarespace, Jekyll, Drupal, etc.

Evaluation

Each group members will be all be given a poll at the end to evaluate each other. The results are private. The poll will include qualitative and quantitively responses. Taking the poll earns students 2 or the 7% the remaining 5% is based on questions of effectiveness and collegiality following a Likert scale 0-5 checked against qualitative responses.

What you turn in below.

Your proposal as outlined above.

Groups

For our Interactive Technology & Ethics assignment (Proposal gives an overview) we'll be working in groups. Part of learning digital writing technologies is learning to collaborate in synchronous and asynchronous environments. I know that university group projects can often be a cause for stress - I've built in a few processes that, I hope, makes this less the case. I also know that some of you may not know each other very well. Hopefully you've read responses in the discussion board and you have a good idea of who you think you'll work well with.

This project is worth 25% percent of your final grade (of which a group evaluation makes up 7% of the final grade) so pick your groups carefully.

Expectations for groups

Formal group discussion take place on canvas in your group discussion board. Formal group discussion means selecting a topic, choosing internal deadlines, exchanging materials, and delegating tasks, and arranging any synchronous time (if necessary). The purpose of this is to prevent group members being excluded if they (or want to use) a different messaging media. Of course, I won't know if you choose to backchannel and work on Slack, Trello, Signal, Facebook Messenger, Email, or other media -- but I hope you'll honor the expectation.

Groups consist of 3 or 4 members.

In the next few days - fill out this survey of a few names of students you'd like to work with. By Friday I will create the groups and the group space.

Introduce Interactive Technology and Ethics

Overview

The purpose of this assignment is to get you critically thinking about issues or ethics in digital writing technologies. Among the many skills of successful technical writers is not just the know-how (or able to figure out) skills in technologies but a critical awareness of how these technologies interfaces with us, the end-user, the planet, or society. Obviously that's a big undertaking and there are lots of directions to go but you'll work with a team and you'll work with me to get it to a place where we can all do some interesting work.

Skills you should practice here

- Critical Thinking
- Analysis
- Adobe XD / Dreamweaver
- Collaborative Writing
- Project Management
- Document Design

Deliverable

For the end version of this project you'll turn in a complete and functioning non-linear interactive guide to your topic. Both Adobe XD and HTML/CSS/Dreamweaver are my expectations for your deliverable. Of course, you might be able to come up with something creative that also fits the bill - I won't say carte blanche - so maybe run it by me.

Bare minimum for this project is that it is interactive and non-linear + it incorporates critical analysis of a thoroughly researched ethics topic relevant to the course.

In addition to the an excellent analysis - truly exemplary projects might envision new tools, new ways of organizing writing, new apps, or other creative approaches that make some attempt to solve or bridge the ethics issue addressed.

More guidance

I know - this is for a grade and you're a bit anxious about that. I can offer more guidance as requested. For now I'm curious as to what you might envision but I'm more than happy to toss ideas around with you as you begin to think about a topic.

Groups

My expectation is that we work in groups of 3-4. Group work is required and will only be waived as an absolute last resort. Part of incorporating digital writing technologies is also working within the new regimes of circulation they bring upon us.

We'll select groups after our next reading discussion: I recognize many of you don't know each other so I want to give you some extra time to figure each other out and who you prefer to work with

Reading Response 3

- Due Oct 22, 2021 by 11:59pm
- Points 10
- Submitting a file upload

Read the intro to [How Artifacts Afford](#)

(starts on page 14 of the PDF - no need to read the acknowledgements or the series forward unless you're particularly motivated by the affordances of things). Compare this understanding and approach to affordances to our previous conversations on affordance (Module 3 Overview).

Additionally, read [Tools Matter.pdf](#)

(you should really focus on the concepts here rather than a comparison to other writing technologies you may have worked with).

About Tools Matter

This particular piece can be a bit dense at times. The parts you might struggle the most with are ANT (Actor Network-Theory) and CHAT (Cultural Historical Activity Theory). If you've taken classes with me in the past you've likely been primed on these two approaches but for those of you still in the dark I've included brief primers on both below.

CHAT

CHAT stands for Cultural Historical Activity Theory. In the most simple of terms: CHAT is a theory and method of examining cognition and social practices. Chat is primarily interested in asking: how does work get done and across what social dimensions? For most contemporary scholars in CHAT these dimensions are "Person, Tools, Rules, Community, Division of Labor, and Purpose" all toward the eventual "Outcome". It's important to recognize that "outcome" is more a measure of what empirically happens than what is desired for. Of course, it can be more complicated at times. For instance, scholars might ask if automatic spellcheck is a "tool" or a "division of labor" but these complications are largely immaterial to what we'll read about.

CHAT can be particularly useful for making various connections in in activity legible and for this reason it's fairly common in Human Computer Interaction (HCI) work and User Experience (UX).

ANT

ANT stands for Actor Network Theory. ANT is primarily focused on social relations from a nonessentialist viewpoint. This means that to ANT scholars, ideology and power do not exist in the immaterial world but are instead what we might name the outcomes of various relations. This approach generally aims to be strictly empirical: ANT scholars study how things (people/objects/environments) exist in networks (relationships with one another). Students sometimes are skeptical of the more radical claims of ANT: namely, that objects and people exist in co-constituting relationships and deserve equal attention. For example, that a shopping cart and a person shopping both have separate goals that may (or may not) overlap. You might read this with some hesitation and perhaps suggest: "well yes, the person who designed the shopping cart had specific goals but the cart doesn't have them." But to an ANT scholar (who remains entirely material and empirical) - the goals of some long-gone designer that somehow still matter to this day sounds like believing in ghosts. All the ANT scholar sees is the shopping cart (as is) and how it exerts or compels a shopper to different activity.

ANT is often polemic in class. Don't feel compelled to agree or disagree. But do try to understand the benefits and constraints of both CHAT and ANT.

Your task

Read both portions and synthesize the ideas and concepts introduced in each. What seems to be the main topics and implication of each and how are they different / alike? Does one fill particular gaps that the other leaves? Or are these in stark contrast with each other? As people who will undoubtedly use writing technologies, what lingering questions do these essays raise?

Merely summarizing or answering the questions is insufficient for this assignment. If you feel stuck, email me your questions and I can help you work through your response so you can receive full credit.

This is a graded discussion: 10 points possible

Due Oct 29, 2021

Chris Scheidler

Reading Response Discussion 3

Chris Scheidler (He/Him)

Most of the responses this week demonstrated particularly strong understanding of the concept of affordance. Some of you even went a bit further and started articulating your own approaches, ideas, and connections with ANT and CHAT. ANT and CHAT are generally reserved for analysis but you may come across something like them if you take researcher roles in UX or research positions in HCI.

There were a few sticking points that we might use these excerpts to address. For starters, we can ask:

- **To what degree does the intention of designers matter in an affordance approach to technologies?**

- **To what degree does the user's experience matter in a technology?**

Read the author excerpts here and synthesize your peers' responses toward an answer to one of the above questions. Then, try to simplify how the concept of affordance might apply to the forms of writing produced in the world (e.g. books, essays, resumes, instructions, documentation, and so on).

Author A)

The first article, "How Artifacts Afford: The Power and Politics of Everyday Things," clearly portrays how objects are imbued with values that have the ability to shape social, political, and economic relations. It addresses the social dynamics of technology in particular. One idea offered by this article was how ethics, values, and interests are built into technological objects, therefore shaping and influencing humans that interact with them. An emphasis was put on the constraints that either enable or disable users, directly manipulating potential behavioral outcomes. Simply put: Technology can't make people do things, but they can push and pull people into certain actions. The article made sure to clarify that as much as humans can be influenced by technology, it's human agency and materiality working together that formulate change. No feature can make certain actions inevitable or impossible. This article gave an example of the constant push and pull of human agency and technology by explaining that even when an application is being created, there are implicit and explicit decisions that will affect the outcome of the software, thus affecting the users. Because of this, the article claims that

technologies are often infused with the politics of the powerful. The implications of this article's ideas are that every single device, software, and form of technology has biased values embedded in the very sinews of its being. It also implies that every application has an agenda that will affect the user in some way. Lingering questions I have after reading this all seem like conspiracy theories. Whose agenda am I unconsciously absorbing? What values are being planted in my brain just because I prefer certain software over others? Does my five year old nephew's obsession with Mario Kart have nefarious origins that will somehow influence who he becomes? I feel like a crazy person after reading this. **While I see the importance and impact technology and society has on each other and their development, especially when looking at social media platforms,I have a hard time grasping the idea that every piece of technology has values that will affect me in some way.**

The second article, "Tools Matter: Mediated Writing Activity in Alternative Digital Environments," focuses intently on the writing tools utilized in modern technology, and how they impact the authors. This article specifically notes the different experiences in using distraction free writing tools versus the standard word processing programs. Early on, it is understood that tools mediate activity, calling to attention the complex ways writers use tools in order to achieve their end goals, whether they realize it or not. The main points used to further explain this interaction between humans and technological tools are as follows: habit, distraction, focus, motivation, materiality, and writing process. Habit encapsulates the writing process and how certain tools cement habits that may go unnoticed until disrupted by an unfamiliar writing tool. Distraction includes internal and external factors. Distraction free writing platforms prevent the user from easily accessing other applications while open, and eliminates many features seen in word processing software. Focus closely resembles distraction, certain tools being designed as blank as possible to ensure complete attention remains on the task at hand, as well as making it difficult to go in and out of the application to prevent interruptions from other applications. Motivation was seen as both positive and negative depending on what software was being used. Features meant to promote continuous typing could be negative if the user ends up typing nonsense just to avoid repercussions. Materiality was seen as the extent to which writing technologies are experienced and perceived in relation to other writing technologies. Finally, writing process is the conclusion a user comes to concerning their own writing process and how it fits with different software. For example, they may prefer one software at the beginning of their writing process then switch to a different software in order to finalize and edit their project. The article concludes by suggesting that designers of writing software consider the relationships between users and the tools they create because they will have a lasting impact on one another

Author B)

Throughout this course, we have deeply examined the relationship between a program and its user. These ideas are brought into immense clarity with this week's reading. "How Artifacts Afford" examines the way that objects, technologies in particular, impose a sort of will on their users. The myriad technologies that we use for writing and communicating, by their very nature, are a distillation of the biases, desires, and ideologies of their designers. This is true universally – even when the imposition of these things is not conscious on the part of the designers. This distillation is the source of these programs' "will."

This translates well when we are looking specifically at the programs that we use to write with. In the same way that a simple pad and paper are able to impose their substance upon their user, so too does a word processor. **Every program that we use for writing establishes certain standards for its user and imposes limits and barriers, while also providing the writer with features that allow for greater creative freedom. This seems paradoxical, but that is the nature of any program.** In "Tools Matter" the author gives us insight into how some programs both aid and hinder the writing process.

One thing that was striking to me was the analysis of 'materiality' in "Tools Matter." Ching describes the connection between simplified writing programs and analogue writing tools. The students who took part in the study often noted that their writing felt more organic while using the more minimalist technologies. This points to one of the major issues with modern tech design: human connection. Much ink has been spilled explaining how the technologies we use to connect ourselves make us lonelier, but this is a specific aspect of that idea that I haven't yet seen discussed. Writing in MS Word as I am currently, I realize that I feel somewhat alienated from the work that I am doing. There are millions of bells and whistles that I could be using to write this analysis, but I am not. I'm just writing. Meanwhile, as I write, my voice is being called into question every few minutes by little blue lines under my text. This sanitized platform is helpful for writing 'Standard American English' but anything outside of that is unacceptable to the idiot machine I'm typing into. It's incredible that by simply removing the fluff from a program, so many students were able to more intimately connect with the things that they were writing.

Author C)

In both readings, the authors articulate how technology influences the actions that users take (Ching, 2018; Davis, 2020). **These influences do not necessarily force users to take certain actions, but technologies are crafted with design choices, features, etc. that contribute to the overall experience of using them**. For example, let's take a look at one of the most iconic writing tools used today – Google Docs. In the software, we see a large percentage of the user view taken up by a blank writing canvas. At the top, there are myriad tools to use to help format writing. These design choices emphasize the priority of writing and the ease of accessing tools. Additionally, those tools do not interrupt the focus of the writing experience. Google Docs is designed in a way that focuses a user toward writing, which is its main purpose as a tool. Most word processors are designed this way. Additionally, Google Docs motivates a writer by its ease of use. If I need to start a new document, all I need to do is type "docs.new" in my Google Chrome address bar and I am already on my way to typing a paper.

With these examples, I'll re-emphasize that Google Docs does not force me to be more focused on writing. Nor does it make me create a new document whenever I have a paper to write. It simply encourages me toward those behaviors by its design. I am still in control as a user.

Personally, I do believe that these technological design choices are on purpose. However, I do not believe that they are just designed for the benefit of the user, at least in some cases. To look at another example in technology, I own a Google Home device that I currently have stationed downstairs. If I use the words "hey Google" all the way from upstairs in another room, at a pretty

tame volume, I can hear that the device responds with a noise. This means that it heard me from pretty far away.

I am inclined to believe that the design choice of putting a strong microphone in this Google device was not just motivated by my convenience. I would not doubt that the product was also manufactured that way to make it easier to gather data from the dialogue in my home. Although I may be wearing a tinfoil hat here, I do believe that technology companies have more in mind than my well being.

Author D)

Jenny Davis's How Artifacts Afford and Kory Ching's Tools Matter both challenged what I had previously thought about technology and technological theory. Davis demonstrated and explained affordances by using a personal allegory, which clarified what had only been a murky vocabulary word to me prior to her essay. Ching argued that writing tools affect one's writing process, which is something I had not truly considered before. [...]

Ching's main point is that technology affects how we do things, not only a transparent tool that leaves no trace. Ching provides a study to help bolster his argument that selecting a specific writing technology influences the writer's writing process. Though it is not something I had previously considered, I find that I have to agree with the fact that one's writing patterns or process can alter based on what technology chosen to do the writing. I have always favored taking notes in class with pen on paper because I like the physical aspect of a location (rather than digital) and because I'm old school. Even though I had this preference, I did not link my preference to any one effect on my writing. If I had read Ching's article earlier then I probably would've taken special care to observe how my writing changed on a computer from a notebook and pen. Looking back, I notice that I am much more prone to editing while still drafting if I am writing on a computer, no matter what software. I realize that my pen and paper writing is more raw material because I don't go back to edit as I draft. If I write on pen and paper then I tend to let myself just keep writing until I feel like I've expressed everything I need to, only then will I begin to edit. **Ching seems to be suggesting that a person favoring one writing technology is not just an arbitrary preference but an active shaper of the product (the writing).**

Author E)

The second article, 'Tools Matter' by Kory Lawson Ching, expands upon many of the points made by Davis in the shopping cart example. Ching explains that over time, the invention of the typewriter has eventually spiraled into the use of 'distraction free' writing materials. While in many ways both Ching and Davis would agree that technology must evolve in response to demand for a specific product, they also presented some conflicting points as well. For one, Ching writes extensively about both CHAT and ANT, with a slight emphasis on ANT. Contrarily to this, Davis emphasizes the completion of an objective by the human, not a network of people and technology alike. In 'Tools Matter', Ching also presents an interesting idea about the relationship between humans and the technology they use to complete writing tasks. This idea was coined the "post-humanist view" and it makes the claim that the lines between human and machine are blurred entirely when working to complete a task or goal. **In modern writing**

careers, is there a distinction between man and machine, or do they function as one?
Throughout these readings, it can be concluded that the distinction is often lost, especially as technology grows more intuitive and 'hands free'. For example, when a student uses Word to write an essay, the student isn't truly writing the essay all by themselves. There are functions within word that play a role in the creation of the essay as well. Word offers grammar and spell-check, formatting tools, and stylistic tools that take part in the essay the same way the student who is writing the essay takes part. Throughout the creation of a simple essay, the lines between man and machine are blurred momentarily.

Both CHAT and ANT were interesting topics to me as well, as I have not ever heard of either prior to this week's readings. CHAT resonated with me because I often find myself trying to place different variables into specific hierarchical 'boxes'. This theory essentially provides the hierarchical boxes, and we inadvertently fill them as we complete specific objectives. ANT, on the other hand, was a little more mind boggling for me. The total personification of technology was confusing to me, but after reading both articles it made a little more sense. Instead of thinking of it as "All technology has thoughts and feelings", I had to switch my mentality to understand this theory as "Everything, living or otherwise, is working towards an objective".

Author F)

The intriguing part of todays readings was the shopping cart analogy. I did not think that a shopping cart could have such a far reaching effect. However, the thought that came to mind was the same one that I have about the internet, it cannot be used to effect society with some outside force. Take the shopping cart at your local Sam's Club or Costco, they are much larger than anywhere else. You could say that it's because it's a store that sells bulk, but I think it might be more along the lines of they know you can fit more in that cart and in the end will spend more money. I feel like depending on what paper you would look at would give you the answer to that.

If I understand right then Chat would look at the oversized cart as tool to use for bulk items within the store. Making it easier for the customer to preform the tasks of bulk shopping. Whereas ANT would consider that the cart would be an inevitable relationship between the store and the consumer. The more that the consumer puts in the cart the more dependent they become on that amount of product being a normal thing to buy. But I think they are both right. A cart is a tool and without a consumer it stays a tool. It only effects out lives when we put our hands on it and start pushing.

This applies to technology as well and since I am a writer I might as well use this analogy. Microsoft Word is just a tool. It sits there waiting for me to use. When I use this tool I can effect a myriad of topics. From A to Z, whatever I chose to use this tool for will shape how I view this tool. **I have become dependent on Word. I have "pushed this cart" for so long that it is all that's available. I tried using Google docs for the first time. It might as well have been in a foreign language.** The point is that I have become a slave to a tool. It is my oversized shopping cart that I have formed a contract with. It is more dangerous than a shopping cart. It creates the thing that creates legends or topples countries and that thing is words. It is still a tool but can effect most things. I think these topics of both papers are inseparable. What is a tool, but