ENC 6428: “Digital English: The Desktop”

Professor Terry Harpold
Fall 2005
W, 4:05–7:05 PM (periods 9–11)
Turlington 4112

office hours (Turlington 4361): Tu, 3–5 PM, & by appt.
voice: (352) 392-6650 x282
email: <tharpold@english.ufl.edu>
home page for Terry Harpold:
   <http://www.english.ufl.edu/~tharpold>
home page for ENC 6428:
   <http://www.english.ufl.edu/~tharpold/courses/fall05/enc6428>

Clockwise from top right: Desktop of Apple’s OS X (“Tiger,” 2005); Desktop of Xerox’s Star Information System (1981); Desktop of General Magic’s Magic Cap (1996); Antonello da Messina, Saint Jerome in His Study (c. 1475).

Course description

“The whole space is organized around a piece of furniture (and the whole of the piece of furniture is organized around the book). The glacial architecture of the church (the bareness of the tiling, the hostility of the piers) has been cancelled out. Its perspectives
and its vertical lines have ceased to delimit the site simply of an ineffable faith; they are there solely to lend scale to the piece of furniture, to enable it to be inscribed.”

– Georges Perec, on Antonello da Messina’s *Saint Jerome in His Study* (c. 1475), *Species of Spaces* (1974)

“I have never personally seen a desktop where pointing at a lower piece of paper makes it jump to the top, or where placing a sheet of paper on top of a file folder caused the folder to gobble it up. I do not believe such desks exist; and I do not think I would want one if it did.”


“Why is a raven like a writing desk?”

– The Mad Hatter to Alice, Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1897)

In this seminar, we will undertake an historical and genetic-critical review of one of the most common metaphors of contemporary human-computer interaction, the “desktop” of the modern graphical user interface (GUI). We will trace its emergence from classical and medieval traditions of the memory palace and the scholar’s study, piled high with books and other documents, through early 20th-century prototypes of the office workstation (Bush’s Memex), the first “direct-manipulation” interfaces (Engelbart’s Augment, Software Arts’s VisiCalc) and GUIs (the Xerox Star, the Macintosh), and contemporary forms (Mac OS X, Windows XP and Vista). We will also investigate important missteps in the evolution and dissemination of the desktop metaphor (Lisa, Magic Cap, Microsoft Bob.)

Readings will include…

– classic and contemporary texts in human-computer interaction design and media studies (Vannevar Bush, Douglas Engelbart, Alan Kay, Lev Manovich, Ivan Sutherland, Bruce Tognazzini and others);

– texts in the semiotics of pictorial forms and perspectival methods (James Elkins, Erwin Panofsky);

– historical and literary-critical texts on the bookshelf and the scholar’s carrel (John Willis Clark, Henry Petroski), space and enclosure (Georges Perec)

Course requirements include a critical-historical analysis (“case study”) of a significant desktop GUI, and a research project, including an in-class presentation of the project-in-progress, and a final written research paper of 15–20 pages.
Required texts

These texts are available for purchase at Goerings Book Store, 1717 NW 1st Avenue (voice: 377-3703).


These texts and videos are held on electronic reserve at UF’s George A. Smathers Libraries <http://eres uf.lib ufl.edu/> or are available online from other sources.


Other short texts may be distributed in class or placed on electronic reserve at UF’s George A. Smathers Libraries.

**Attendance, assignments, & grading**

*Attendance & lateness*

The texts we will read are complex, subtle, and challenging. You cannot reasonably expect to master them if you do not keep up with all required reading assignments and come to class prepared and on time. This is, moreover, a seminar class; we will spend most of our time in class reading and discussing texts closely and precisely. For these reasons, your presence in class is essential and is required. *After two absences, I reserve the right to lower your final course grade by five points for each additional class that you miss.* I treat excused and unexcused absences alike in this regard. It is your responsibility to keep track of your absences and to make sure that you complete all required work for the course. If you must miss class, make sure that you are ready if an assignment is due on the day you return to class. In the event of a prolonged illness or other emergency, you should notify me as soon as possible, so that we may make provisions to insure that you do not fall behind.

Lateness is disruptive to others in the classroom, and is strongly discouraged. If you are more than 25 minutes late to class, this will be considered an absence.

If you have special classroom access, seating, or other needs because of disability, please do not hesitate to bring those to my attention, so that I may make appropriate accommodations for them.

If you are unable to attend any part of a class meeting, or work on a course assignment because these coincide with the timing of religious observances, you must notify me of this conflict well in advance, so that we may make appropriate adjustments to relevant assignment deadlines.

*The use of computers and other electronic devices in class*

Students are free to use laptop computers and other portable electronic devices in class for the purposes of taking notes during class discussion or for in-class presentations. WWW browsing, emailing, chatting, etc., unrelated to class activities is, however, inappropriate and will not be tolerated. In the event of a violation of this policy, I reserve the right to prohibit the use of all electronic devices in class by individual students and/or the class as a whole. Cell phones, pagers, and other communication devices may not be used during class meetings, and must be turned off at the start of class.
Assignments & grading

Your final grade will be determined by the average of three assignments:

- GUI case study: 20%
- Presentation of research project-in-progress: 20%
- Research paper: 60%

Grades are calculated on a numerical scale, as below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>90–100</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87–89</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77–79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>80–86</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>70–76</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you feel that you’ve been unfairly graded on an assignment, you may make a case in writing for a better grade. I will consider no grade changes without this written rationale.

You may turn in a written assignment late without penalty only if you have a written medical excuse from a doctor, a signed letter from a judge or law enforcement officer (if you are called for jury duty or to testify in court, for example), or if a death or serious injury occurs in your family. In each of the cases, I will expect you to notify me of the reason(s) for your absence(s) in a timely manner, and may ask you for written documentation of them.

Format, topics, & due dates of assignments

Unless otherwise specified, all written assignments must be submitted on paper, have been composed with a computer or word processor, and must follow guidelines on format and citation methods that I will distribute in class. You must submit two copies of every written assignment. I will keep one copy, and return the other to you, marked with my comments and corrections.

Early in the semester, I will post a sign-up sheet on my office door on which you may indicate your ranked preferences with regard to three (each) of the case study and project-in-progress slots noted in the course calendar, below. I will collate student preferences and will attempt to assign each student her or his first or second choice from among the slots. Please note that, barring emergencies or unexpected class cancellations, a case study or project presentation must be given on that date. Date changes for a case study or project presentation may be difficult or impossible to arrange after the first few weeks of the semester.

The case study

You will be required to compile a brief critical-historical analysis (“case study”) of a significant desktop GUI, chosen from the list below. The case study will include a 4–5 page written analysis of the GUI and an in-class presentation of 15 minutes. The written analysis must be distributed to the class 48 hours prior to the class meeting time, either in
printed form or (preferably) electronically. Dates for the case studies are scheduled over the course of the semester. The number of case study presentations given in a class meeting will vary according to the number of students in the course, but should not exceed three.

Students may choose from these GUls. Those marked with an asterisk (*) are obligatory – if all are not chosen, I will assign each of those remaining to someone in the class. If possible, please choose one of these as (at least) your second or third choice, in order of preference.

- Xerox Star Information System*
- Visicalc / Visi On
- Mac OS 1.x – 6.x*
- Mac OS 7.x – 9.x*
- Mac OS X 10.x*
- GEM
- NeXTSTEP
- GNOME
- Magic Cap (for PDAs and Windows)*
- Packard Bell Navigator / Ark Workspace
- Lisa Office System 1–3*
- Apple II MouseText / MouseDesk
- Microsoft Windows 1.x – 3.x*
- Microsoft Windows 95–98*
- Microsoft Windows XP*
- Microsoft Windows Vista
- Amiga OS
- BeOS
- KDE
- Microsoft Bob*

**The research project**

The final outcome of your research for this course is a 15–20 page paper on a subject that you choose, relevant to concerns of the course. Prior to completing this paper, you will give a 15 minute “project-in-progress” presentation to the class, including a short (2–3 pages) written summary of the project’s method, thesis, and initial research bibliography. This summary must be distributed to the entire class 48 hours prior to the scheduled class meeting time, either in printed form or (preferably) electronically. These presentations are scheduled for the last four meetings of the course before the final meeting. The number of presentations given in a class meeting will vary according to the number of students in the class, but should not exceed five. The final paper is due one week after the final class meeting, on December 14.

**Policy on academic honesty**

The University community’s policies and methods regarding academic honesty are clearly spelled out in the Academic Honesty Guidelines. The Guidelines are printed in full in the current Undergraduate Catalog, and are available online from the Office of Student
Judicial Affairs home page of the Dean of Students Office WWW site, at <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/>.

Academic dishonesty in any form will not be tolerated in this course. Examples of academic dishonesty include but are not limited to:

- Possessing, using, or exchanging improperly acquired written or oral information in the preparation of graded assignments submitted for this course.
- Substitution of material that is wholly or substantially identical to that created or published by another individual or individuals.
- False claims of performance or work submitted by a student for requirements of this course.

I am obliged to act on any suspected act of academic misconduct. This may include a reduced or failing grade for the course as a whole or other disciplinary proceedings, as per the recommendation of the Dean of Students. If you have any concern that you may not have made appropriate use of the work of others in your research or writing for this course, please confer with me before you submit the assignment. You should retain all graded materials that you receive from me until you receive your final course grade.

---

Course calendar

Aug 24  
Course introduction

Aug 31  
Bush, “As We May Think”  
Perec, “Notes Concerning the Objects that are on my Worktable” (*Species of Spaces*, 140–43)  
Perec, “Still Life / Style Leaf”

Sept 7  
Kay, “Doing With Images Makes Symbols” – *view this streaming video first*  
Engelbart, “The Augmented Knowledge Workshop”  
Engelbart, *et al.*, “A Research Center for Augmenting Human Intellect”  
Sutherland, “Sketchpad” (Short Version)  

ENC 6428 Syllabus (Fall 2005) • page 8 of 8
Sept 14  
Clark, “Private Libraries”  
Perec, “Brief Notes on the Art and Manner of Arranging One’s Books” (*Species of Spaces*, 144–51)  
Petroski, *The Book on the Bookshelf*

Sept 21  
Panoñsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*

Sept 28  
*GUI case study: Xerox Star Information System*  
Xerox Corporation, “The Star User Interface: An Overview”  
(streaming video)  
*GUI case study: Lisa Office System 1–7*  
Ludolph & Perkins, “The Lisa User Interface” (article & streaming video)

Oct 5  
*GUI case study: Mac OS 1.x – 6.x*  
*GUI case study: Microsoft Windows 1.x – 3.x*  
Gentner & Nielsen, “The Anti-Mac Interface”  
Stephenson, *In the Beginning Was the Command Line*

Oct 12  
*GUI case study: Mac OS 7.x – 9.x*  
*GUI case study: Microsoft Windows 95–98*  
Marcus, “Metaphor Design in User Interfaces”  
Mead & Pacione, “Time and Space”

Oct 19  
Manovich, *The Language of New Media*

Oct 26  
*GUI case study: Mac OS 10.x*  
*GUI case study: Windows XP*  
*Apple Human Interface Guidelines* (2005)  

Nov 2  
*GUI case study: Magic Cap*  
*GUI case study: Microsoft Bob*  
*Project-in-progress presentations*  
Perec, “Species of Spaces” (*Species of Spaces*, 1–91)

Nov 9  
*Project-in-progress presentations*

Nov 16  
*Project-in-progress presentations*  
Elkins, *The Object Stares Back*
Nov 23  

**No class meeting**

Nov 30  

*Project-in-progress presentations*

Sculley, “The Relationship Between Business and Higher Education”

Tognazzini, “The ‘Starfire’ Video Prototype Project”

Apple Computer, Inc., “The Knowledge Navigator” (*in-class screening of video*)

Sun Microsystems Inc., “Starfire” (*in-class screening of video*)

Dec 7  

**Course review**

**Final class meeting**

Dec 14  

**Research paper due**