Understanding Motives Using Drama

CS 260: Human-Centered Computing
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Outline

- Burke: “Introduction: The Five Key Terms of Dramatism”
- Goffman: “Self-Presentation”
- Goffman: “Social Life as Drama”
- Kantola et. al.: “Using Dramaturgical Methods to Gain More Dynamic User Understanding in User-Centered Design”
Grammar for Motives

- Statement about motives must have:
  - Act (what was done)
  - Scene (when or where it was done)
  - Agent (who did it)
  - Agency (how he did it)
  - Purpose (why he did it)

- For any given statement, the purpose/scene/etc. is often disagreed upon

- Terms are simple enough to understand quickly, but allow for a lot of complexity
Philosophical Idioms

- **Grammar**: Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, Purpose
- **Philosophy**: statement about motives utilizing the grammar
  - **Fragment of a philosophy**: random or unsystematic statement about motives
- **Philosophical Idiom**: five terms that are more specific than act/scene/etc.
- Note that some philosophical idioms are better at characterizing certain situations, and other philosophical idioms are better at characterizing other situations
Perfectionist might try to come up with **unambiguous** terms

But we cannot avoid ambiguity! No two acts, scenes, etc. are alike—using one term to describe two different things is automatically ambiguous

Motives are themselves ambiguous and mysterious
Imagine the following scenario: “a hero (agent) with the help of a friend (co-agent) outwits the villain (counter-agent) by using a file (agency) that enables him to break his bonds (act) in order to escape (purpose) from the room where he has been confined (scene)”

Where is the motive?
- Agent? (he escaped because of his personality, his "love of freedom")
- Scene? (he escaped because he was imprisoned)
- Co-agent? (he escaped because he was assisted)
- Counter-agent (he escaped because he was imprisoned by the villain)
- Agency? (he escaped because he had a file)

Reducing the 5 terms to 1 results in branching out again
When someone enters a situation, he wants to discover the facts of the situation:
- All the relevant social data
- Their innermost feelings about him

He is not privy to the facts, so he employs cues, tests, hints, expressive gestures, status symbols, etc. to make predictions.

He treats the impressions of others as promises that they are reflective of the facts; ironically, he expects others to be unconscious of his own expressive behaviors!
Others in the Situation

Two options:

- Be “gentlemanly”: allow the individual to get valid impressions of them
- Create an invalid impression (including an invalid impression that they are being “gentlemanly”)

With the latter option, individuals become performers and those observing become the audience

- They are not concerned with realizing the standards that they are judged by, but with convincing others that they are realizing those standards
Two extremes:
- Individual is convinced that his performance is real (sincere)
- Individual is not convinced at all (cynic)

Cynical performers are deluding the audience, although it is not always for private gain
- Example: a doctor who gives a placebo
Dramatization of Work

Individual typically infuses his behavior with signs that highlight what might otherwise not be apparent.

Example: baseball umpire makes decision quickly to *look* like he is sure of it (ironically making sure that he isn’t)

Dramatization is not a problem with violinists, surgeons, etc. because their signs are in line with exemplary work:

- Violinist who sounds good *is* good
- Surgeon who saves lives *is* good

However, it can be a problem in other areas of work.

Example: nurse who looks like she’s chatting when she’s checking for proper breathing might do less of that.
Irony of Dramatization

- Sometimes dramatization requires that people completely forego the attributes they are trying to impress
  - Example: someone who runs around frantically to different auctions to create the appearance of a serene household
  - Example: giving the appearance of an informal radio talk show might need heavy scripting

- **Dilemma of expression versus action**: those who have the time and talent to perform the task well might not have the time and talent to make it *apparent* that they are performing it well!
Recap: Personas

- **Persona**: archetype of a user that is given a name and a face, carefully described in terms of needs/goals/tasks.

- **Graphical User Profile**: a way of visualizing a specific user or a persona.
Problems with Personas

- There are four major problems in using personas:
  - Characters are not believable
  - Characters are not communicated well
  - No real understanding about the use of the characters
  - Projects have little support from high-level personnel
Dramaturgy

- Method to:
  - Understand the material
  - Analyze the material
  - Further shape the material
  - Represent the material

- Dramaturgical readings: shaping the material into different forms to make different elements and meanings visible
Dramatic Personas

- Embodied dramatic personas are:
  - More life-like than paper personas
  - Movable to other situations/contexts
  - Linked to other characters
  - Linked to time
  - Linked to the actor portraying the role
Workshop

Steps of a dramaturgical reading workshop:
1. Choose one user and read his/her material
2. Create small groups of 3-4 researchers and do theatrical improvisations: (posters of user’s life, trailers for their life, user’s dreams and nightmares, etc.)
3. Write monologues: public, private, intimate (i.e. for a diary)
4. Discuss in groups:
   - Is the character reminiscent of a myth?
   - What does user’s world look like?
Steps of a dramaturgical reading workshop continued:

5. Create contexts and mind maps (socio-political map and personal relationships)

6. Create scenario to reveal:
   - Motives and hopes
   - Problems, crushes dreams, etc.
   - Contextual elements for character’s interaction

7. Represent the scenario on stage
Creating a Character

- Character can be created from the workshop’s scenario material
  - Example: Satu, a 60-year old woman who was a former nurse who works in consulting and dreams of retirement, but must deal with her father’s worsening Alzheimer's

- Qualities of the roles are structured by the actors performing them

- Unlike a persona, characters are biased
Questions

Tavi:
- What are the pros and cons of acting “gentlemanly” (allowing others to get a valid impression of you)
- Can you come up with further examples for dramatization and the dramatization of work?
- Dramaturgical readings allow actors/readers to interpret everything for themselves and to “run with it”—how dangerous is this in user-centered design?

Seth:
- What are the differences between the “sincere” performances of people in everyday life and the “cynical” performances of stage actors in theater?
- What effect do insincere actors (such as con men) have on our perception?
- Are these dramaturgical methods just a forced attempt to fit sociological ideas into computer science, or are they more than that?
- Organic and natural transfer of ideas from one field to another?
- Is the time and effort needed for these methods worthwhile?