Understanding Motives Using Drama

CS 260: Human-Centered Computing

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April 6, 2009

# 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

ॐ Statement about motives must have:

    ॐ **Act** (what was done)

    ॐ **Scene** (when or where it was done)

    ॐ **Agent** (who did it)

    ॐ **Agency** (how he did it)

    ॐ **Purpose** (why he did it)

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

ॐ Terms are simple enough to understand quickly, but allow for a lot of complexity

BREAKFAST AT THE GRAMMAR CAFE

WOULD YOU LIKE THOSE EGGS OVER EASY OR OVER EASILY?
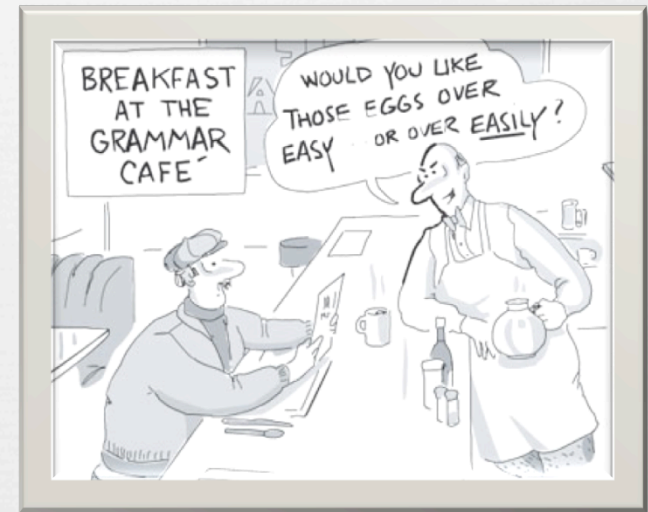
Philosophical Idioms

- **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

Ambiguity

◌ 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

Overlapping Terms

◦ 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

Entering a Situation

ଓ When someone enters a situation, he wants to discover the facts of the situation:

ଓ All the relevant social data

ଓ Their innermost feelings about him

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

ଓ 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

The Performance

ଓ Two extremes:
  ଓ Individual is convinced that his performance is real (**sincere**)
  ଓ Individual is not convinced at all (**cynic**)

ଓ Cynical performers are deluding the audience, although it is not always for private gain
  ଓ 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

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- ❧ 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
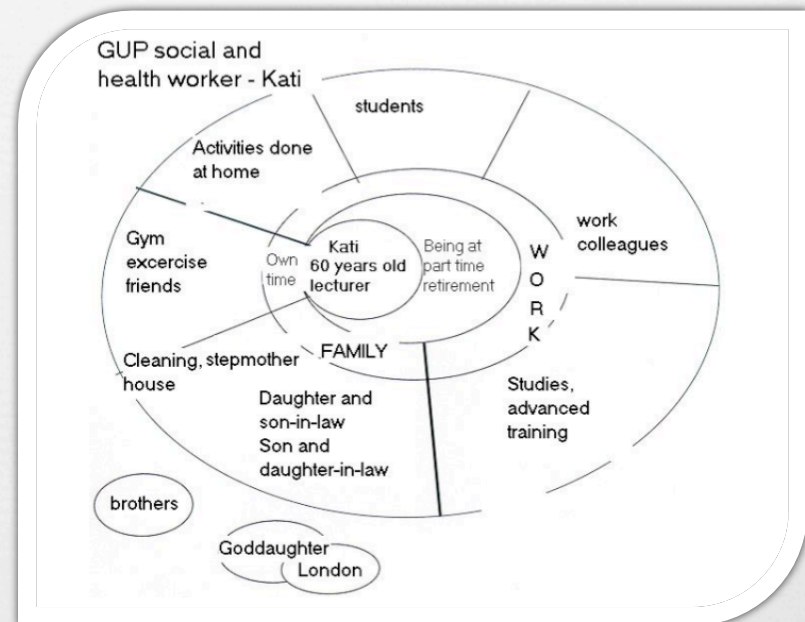
Problems with Personas

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

ଔ Method to:

    ଔ Understand the material

    ଔ Analyze the material

    ଔ Further shape the material

    ଔ Represent the material

ଔ **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
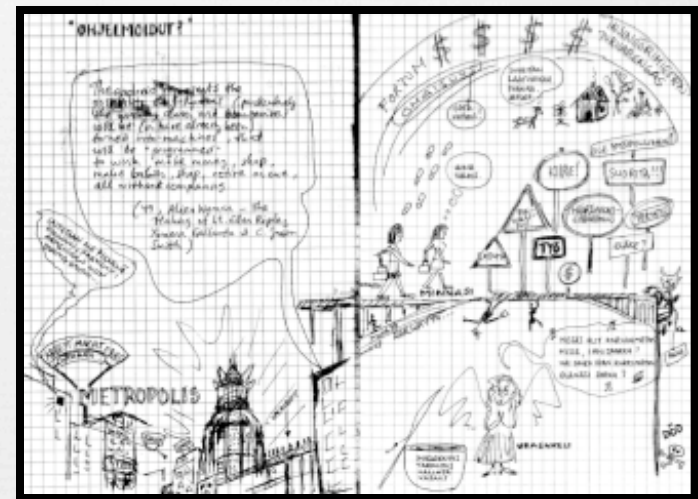
Workshop

֍ 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 (**poster** of user's life, **trailer** 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?

Workshop Cont.

⁂ 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?