

Interface Culture

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Overview

- Big Ideas
- History to Glimpse the Future
- Activity to Artform?
- Utilize the Medium
- SubCulture Backlash
- Spiritual Interface Design

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Big Ideas

**What is Johnson's thesis?**

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Big Ideas

**What is Johnson's thesis?**

.. interface design is something larger than we've ever considered – and will have larger consequences than we can ever conceive of.

*"The interface came into the world under the cloak of efficiency, and it is now emerging – chrysalis-style – as a genuine art form" (242).*

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Big Ideas

*"The interface came into the world under the cloak of efficiency, and it is now emerging – chrysalis-style – as a genuine art form" (242).*

- Historical view of interface design should cause us to check out assumptions
- Interface design will, and should, soon shift to the status of an art form
- The medium is not being used to its potential
- There will be a subculture backlash against interface norms

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History to Glimpse the Future

**Phonograph**  
Edison, 1877  
Office dictation machine

*"It's as though the sharp, luminous shock of revelation – the eureka moment of all inventory mythology – carries with it a certain haziness" (208)*


**Memex**  
Vannevar Bush, 1945  
Organization machine

*"The power of manipulation is the sine qua non of the modern computer, its core competency. And Vannevar Bush missed it altogether" (209)*

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### History to Glimpse the Future

**Why should we care?**



*"At the threshold points near the birth of new technologies, all types of distortions and misunderstandings are bound to appear ..."*

*"What realm of experience the new technologies belong to, what values they perpetuate, where their more indirect effects will take place" (211-212).*

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### Activity to Artform?

Hardcore geeks use unix command line

↓

GUI is introduced: geeks think of it as a "toy"

↓

Slowly grows; GUI is now an essential tool for productivity

↓

Could the next way of thinking be to see the graphic interface as a medium as complex and vital as a novel? A cathedral? Cinema?

*"All these developments suggest a widening of the interface audience, but the medium itself still belongs to the world of functionality and increased convenience.."*

*"We're reminded a dozen times each day that the digital revolution will change everything, and yet when we probe deeper to find out what exactly will change under this new regime, all we get are banal reveries of sending faxes from the beach" (213).*

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### Activity to Artform?

Essential to acknowledge medium's


- Richness
- Complexity
- Range of expression
- Cultural impact

*"For the most part, our evaluation criteria reduce to the bottom-dollar question: is it easy to use or not? There's invariably a bonus round for the cyber-slackers - is it cool?" (217)*

We need a better vocabulary!

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### Utilize the Medium



**Myst**, as compared to Disneyland

Character development is horrific.

Should we care? Is it about characters, or is it about the environment?



**Sonic**, as compared to a rollercoaster

*"The lack of control wasn't perceived as a drawback because the whole point of the game - what made it such a phenomenal success - lay in the sheer exhilaration of moving, and moving fast. You didn't so much play Sonic as ride it" (220).*

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### Utilize the Medium

*".. We can be sure that the exploratory, spatial quality of the medium - the haptics of information-space - will be of enormous importance .." (221).*

What does he mean?

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### SubCulture Backlash

- Avant-Garde interface design will propel the field into the realm of art
- Democratization of interface design
- A backlash, designed to confuse, perplex, and disorient
- "User-Hostile" ?!

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## SubCulture Backlash

John Maeda

[One](#) | [Two](#) | [Three](#)

Hektor

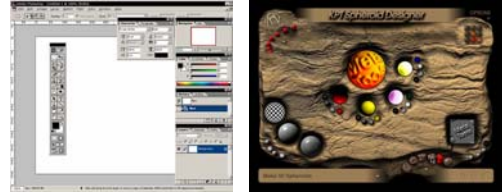
[One](#)

Pixel Roller

[One](#)

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## SubCulture Backlash



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## SubCulture Backlash

*"This predictability – the benign sameness of shared conventions – disappears once a vibrant subculture of interface designers comes into its own .."*

*Information architects with an eye on mainstream success will be torn between two competing drives: the siren songs of intelligibility and innovation, the desire to conform to existing conventions battling it out with the desire to push the envelope" (229)*

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## Spiritual Interface Design

*"We've begun to think in bits and packets, scattering our ideas out laterally through the infosphere" (235).*

**What does he mean?**

*"Conceptual turbulence- the sense of the world accelerating around you, pulling you in a thousand directions once" (238).*

**What does he mean?**

*"If there is a spiritual dimension to the interface medium.. It has nothing to do with believing – or not believing – in God. It has to do more with the general structure of trying to think about something that is too big to think..." (241).*

**What on earth does he mean?**

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## Summary

What do you think?

Interaction Design as Art?  
A SubCulture backlash?  
Spiritual Interface Design?

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