DESIGN – NARRATIVE



This post is in a series of commentaries on a class running at Stanford, Winter Quarter 2010 – "Transformative Design" ENGR 231 – [Link]

The other day I was reflecting upon storytelling in connection with the pragmatics of design, seeing both as performative – located, time-based, adaptive – [Link] (see also on Odysseus and Hermes – [Link])

Today Cliff Nass joined us in class for a "fireside chat" about his work on how people get on with things, interaction and design. (Cliff's website – [Link])

We started with his latest findings about media multi-tasking (running email, Facebook, Twitter all at the same time while watching a movie) – basically people can't multitask in this way without their performance crashing. No way.

Cliff takes an experimental and social-psychological approach. But it didn't surprise me to find that he has also worked on narrative and storytelling in the design process, and in people's interaction with things. His approach is through narratology – that formal and systematic way of analyzing narrative structure that I mentioned in that earlier post [Link].

I particularly liked the study he did of what kinds of story work best with venture capitalists (stories about the need for a product), and the kinds of story about innovation that get people in developing countries to change their ways (confirming my view, I think, that innovation always in some way implies a take on tradition).

The stories things tell – making sense of the world.



Cliff Nass