

Kasper Skårhøj

My First Day at School

For improving his knowledge about human computer interface design TYPO3 founder Kasper Skårhøj decided to join a class at IT University of Copenhagen.

[7:15] Morning has broken! I make a one-eighty around my Y-axis. Surely, I will get up soon. [7:24] Kasper meets cold room air. Sneaks out so Rie and Amelie don't wake up. Fetches morning newspaper in boxer shorts. Breakfast. [7:47] The shower is still hot. That could be the advantage of getting up relatively early. [8:13] Amelie wants food. The marines are called in for a special mission to produce a quick oatmeal. [8:15] Order to go. Oatflakes fly through the air, most of them hit their target with millimeter precision. The siren is off at 8:24; mission accomplished, Amelie ready for transfer to the mother platoon. [8:28] The air is cold and I spot at least 10 snowflakes on my way to the metro station. [8:32] Thank God, the metro is not late today! [8:44] Oh wait, late can also mean "stuck in the tunnel". Hmm, how long is this going to last? Gotta be there at 9! [9:10] Conclusion: If I'm not late myself, surely the public transportation will make me. It seems to be destiny. [9:40] Dehydration alarm. Need water - and then some coffee. Waiting for break. Teacher talking through a bunch of Powerpoint slides. Mostly book references and an overview of literature.



There are around 15 people in room 2.18. Half of them are women. Impressive to me. Last time I was at university was in 1997. We had referred to "the girl" in my class, one out of 35 males. That was electronic engineering. Now, 10 years later, it's a less technical approach I try to take. Obviously.

At the top of the Powerpoint slide I see the title "T3: HCI - Menneske og Teknologi" (in English: HCI - Man and Technology). Funny with "T3"... but it's not a reference to TYPO3, just the name of a course here at the IT University of Copenhagen. Why I'm sitting here? Oh, if you didn't know, I decided that the year 2007 must contain a lot of inspiration for me. At least 40% of what I do should go into that direction. So, to fill a part of that activity space, I decided to sign up for a course in usability here at the university. Just a single course. Partly because my goal is to gain inspiration - and hopefully some knowledge, but also to find out if studying is something I should do more of in the future. As you may know, the price of TYPO3 for me was that I never got a degree in anything from an educational institution.

So here I am, 32 years old, first school day in ten years. I'm very excited. Will it capture my heart or propel me back into a dynamic and purpose seeking work life? Still an unanswered question. But one thing is for sure, even if it might not dawn on many of you guys who are just happy to get out of university and into real life: you must never stop to learn and seek inspiration. [10:02] The teacher announces a pause. I rush to get some water and coffee. [10:08] Back in class. Should I ask people their names? I have no clue about the social culture of university but it feels awkward that we don't know each other's names here. Oh, maybe they all do that already. They could have other classes together. [10:13] More Powerpoint slides. Since I didn't attend the very first lesson, I don't know if this is referring to some homework I should have done. The guy sitting just next to me pulls out his macbook. Is it annoying

that he surfs around while the teacher talks? Does the teacher find it disturbing? Or is that just how today's student culture is? I think he is the type that reads tons of blogs, writes blogs himself, surfs this and that website for fun. Quite a different pattern from me, as I'm always searching for specific knowledge - I rarely find fun in just clicking around. I think he mentioned a funny concept of an old web browser called "netpositive" where all error messages are Haiku poems.

The Web site you seek / cannot be located but / countless more exist. [11:15] The dude next to me is narrowing in his search, throwing "netpositive ErrorMessage" into the Google search box. For some scary reason the fourth search result is the TYPO3.org Repository! Argh! Is that how we get so much traffic!?

The code was willing. / It considered your request, / but the chips were weak.

[11:59] Teacher announces the break and rushes to the metro. He has 60 minutes to get to the other end of town to fetch a bunch of reports that students on last year's course did. We are going to look at them this afternoon to decide on a topic for a project we will do. [12:00] Lunch break. I manage to place myself at a table with the others. Finally we communicate a bit. I explain how I developed software for 8 years but found it very difficult to wear two caps; considering usability and code at the same time. [12:15] Maybe we should analyze the human-machine interface of the vending machine in the corner there? I go for a cup of coffee. The machine engineers have not made enough usability mistakes to warrant a full-blown analysis. In fact it's working as expected. Upload coin, download coffee. TYPO3 is so much more complex.

A file that big? / It might be very useful. / But now it is gone.

[12:50] Slowly moving back to class. I still don't know any names, but I have a better idea of these people. I'm trying to figure out which ones would be cool to do the group project with. In fact, it is a requirement for me to be a part of some sort of team work. I'm pretty fed up with all that solo work I usually do. [12:55] Room door is locked.

Login incorrect. / Only perfect spellers may / enter this system.

[13:10] Flipping through projects from last year. Dilemma: Should I try to do a TYPO3-relevant project? Or should I pursue a completely non-related interface. What about microwave combi ovens? There seems to be room for improvements, at least for male brains. Someone wants to analyze the interface of set-top TVs. That was the guy next to me. Another one is interested in how cultural factors affect interaction design. Also quite interesting. Maybe that could give an answer to the mainly European success of TYPO3? [15:25] I leave with no better idea of the project than I had on arrival. I guess it requires getting deeper into the topic first. I want the project to be exciting but also a little surprising. Next time. [15:29] I follow a few of the others out through the door. We talk. One is in a senior club at ITU for people with kids. Maybe we should go bowling. I wonder why I still only know the name of the teacher...

Hello world of books. / What is your name? None? / Untitled you are.