Brand consciousness as a driving design force.

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ABSTRACT
This paper describes a recent interactive project which used slide projectors (instead of video projection or computer screens) to best fulfill the brand specific communication needs of an installation. It discuss why brand issues matter as well as how the design of systems, both physical systems and content there within, can address those issues.

Keywords
Categories: H.5m Interactive Spaces, H.5.2 Theory and Methods. General Terms: Design, Experimentation. Additional Keywords and phrases: Branding, Slide Projectors, Medium Selection.

INTRODUCTION
When creating interactive projects and spaces it is convenient to use rich video systems, e.g. computer monitors, video projectors, LCD and Plasma displays. These do have their obvious advantages: ease of testing, full motion video, standardized interfaces and working environments. However, there are key disadvantages. A monitor is very similar to a television and that similarity brings with it cultural preconception. Similarly, a plasma display is a plasma display. It brings connotations of wealth and technology even if those feelings are not appropriate to the interaction.

In the summer of 2006, for a graduate class in Interactive Objects and Spaces, I completed a project called SlideR-Type. This speculative project was intended to be an interactive installation for Urban Outfitters stores. Urban Outfitters is a chain of stores selling designer, ironic, hip clothes and household goods to urban people in their 20s. A working prototype was completed using several sensors, a microcontroller, a laptop computer, and two slide projectors.

For this project it would have been inappropriate to use any devices that felt too high tech, slick, new, or expensive. I choose to use slide projectors both for their low tech feel and retro-ironic appeal.

BRAND AS A DESIGN DRIVER
Brand, for this discussion, can be thought of as the product (or service or interaction) itself, along with all other aspects that make up the users experience of using the product; where the product operates in the world, how much it costs, the knowledge needed to use it, what color it is, the emotions users feel toward it, and so forth. When a brand – like Urban Outfitters – is taken as a starting point for interaction design, interactive designers will need to consider much more then just what the interaction is and how it work. They will need to consider both the denotative and connotative aspects of things the user interacts with.

From the beginning this project was designed to fit within a specific brand. Not only did it need to function as an interactive space, but it also had to fit into a given brand experience, to be a success. After deciding to design a project for a branded retail space, the next question was to consider what role the installation would have. Is its intention to drive sales? Announce new products? Create a mood? Be a play space? Or just an interesting attraction?

Most of the past projects reviewed were sales driven—little more then commercials in the aisles. While "brand play" had come to mean literally playing with a projection of a companies logo. (GFX SmartTable [1], REACTRIX [2])

I wanted to do more, to capture the feeling of the Urban Outfitters brand and extend, explore, and share it in new ways. Specifically, the retro-nostalgic aspect of Urban Outfitters was chosen to be explored. It was this line thinking the led directly to the use of slide projectors as newer technology wouldn't accurately capture the brand's urban and nostalgic 1970s feeling. However, although slide projectors became the key design element in the design, they also led to several technical problems in execution.

SLIDER-TYPE PROJECT: GAME INTERACTION
SlideR-Type is an interactive game designed to fit a specific retail brand. In this section I will cover the interaction within the game, how the game is a response to the given brand, and why slide projectors are the best choice for this installation.

Once the decision to use slide projectors had been made, the questions of what interactions were possible or interesting came into focus. The final decision was made by making a list of all the things that would be unexpected to

be seen with a slide projector and then choosing video games. Games are frantic and dynamic, while the projectors are slow and (for the most part) static making them an interesting choice. An older video game also works well within the context of creating a retro feeling interaction.

As for the specific game the decision was made to recreate the classic shump R-type. A shump is a style of video game where a craft flies through a background shooting at crafts as they come by. This style of game translates well to slide projectors because one projector could have images of the craft, moving up and down, while another projector could have images of the background scrolling sideways with each frame.

Two tripwire sensors are placed near the screen. One moves the ship on screen up, while the other moves it down. A third sensor, on the stores door, controls the side scrolling and therefore the pace of the game. People moving about the store would randomly move the craft, while people entering and leaving the store would control the pace. Only customers who have figured out the game can play it in a meaning full way. This is a part of the hip "in-the-know" branding of the store.

When actively playing, shoppers move the craft trying to avoid collisions with the background. If the craft collides with a background object, the craft's projector moves to a slide showing a fire ball, while an explosion sound, from the original game, plays. The projector then resets itself so that the craft is in the middle and the title music plays notifying the player that they can move again. If the player can make it to the end they see the "level one clear" slide. But if they crash three times before the end they see the "game over slide." The Title, Level Clear, and Game Over slides all depict t-shirts with those messages on them [3].

TECHNOLOGY USED: DIGITAL AND ANALOG
SlideR-Type uses several pre-made technologies combined together with custom hardware and scripting. This project was completed within the Interactive Objects and Spaces class at Art Center College of Design and uses some proprietary software created for the Media Design Program.

The sensors, two infrared proximity sensors and a knob potentiometer, are connected to an Acroname BrainStem. The BrainStem is connected to a PowerBook laptop. From the BrainStem's digital outs, relays are connected that send signals to the slide projectors. Custom boards hold the relays (the projectors work on 24VAC while the BrainStem runs at 5VDC) as well as custom connectors for the slide projectors. The programming was done within Flash using both pre-made components and custom scripting.

I used a number of standard Kodak 35mm slide projectors at various times. While slide projectors are a good fit for the communication and interactive needs of this project, they
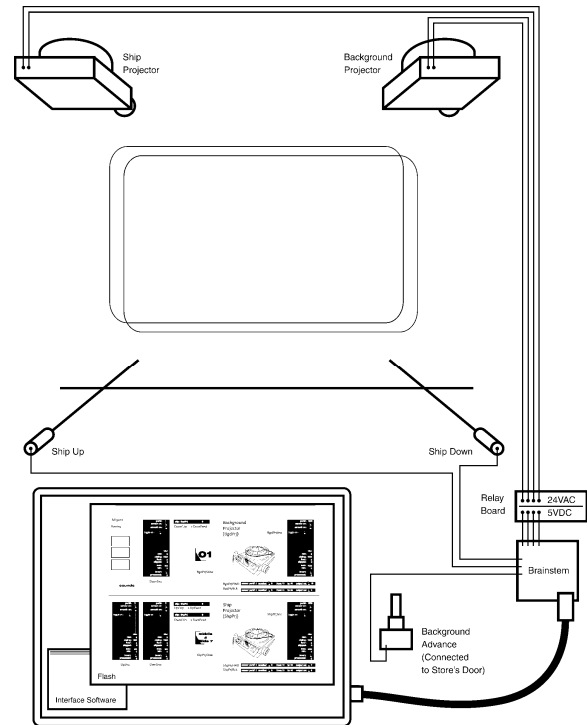

Figure 1. System schematic of all elements.

are a difficult technology to use in terms of maintenance, planning, and synchronous timing.

CONCLUSIONS
In this project fitting the brand was the driving force that all other decisions followed from. Starting this way allowed for the creation of a unique project that fit a particular space well. While brand has a specific, literal meaning here, the idea of choosing media not just for their technical merits but also for the connotative associations connected to them, is a part of the brand experience of any project.

In this design, Urban Outfitters' urban, ironic and nostalgic brand was acknowledged by using side projectors, old technology, in combination with digital technology. This attempts to connect to the UO's brand. As interaction moves from the screen to the world, the form and emotions of the objects being interacted with must be designed with as much care as the rest of the system.

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