(24 pts – 1-2 hours) A darn good Hall of Fame and Shame. Do a really thoughtful critique, with a well-presented and well-justified redesign, of an object or interface of your choice. This can be an improved version of an HFS you have already done, if you wish, or a new critique of something that grinds your gears, but it should be, well, darn good, and it should also show evidence that you understand class principles and readings, and that you think at multiple levels, not just a ho-hum “Affordances, Visibility, Usability” critique. If you're stuck for ideas, think about critiquing the physical and social design of some aspect of the Trillium: the food selection area, the checkout and condiment area, the seating area, and/or the trash/cleanup area. That might help you think about the next questions.

Artifact

I would like to examine a spice rack of unknown brand and unknown origin that somehow made its way into my college apartment’s kitchen. It was a gift to a parent of one of my roommates. They didn’t want it, so it was one of our many housewarming gifts. We thought “Awesome! Free stuff!” but maybe the fact that they were trying to get rid of it should have been a warning...

The Good: Overall Appearance with a Touch of Visibility

All in all, I like the appearance of this spice rack. It is sleek, modern, and shiny. It looks young and hip, which is how a spice rack in a college apartment should look. This spice rack has several good features, despite its need to improve its overall visibility. Each individual spice is clearly labeled and although labels aren't usually a prime element in good design, I believe this is a good visibility feature for the spice rack. There really isn’t any other easy way to identify an individual spice; icons and photos would be much harder to recognize. All five spices in any column are displayed at an equal level for quick viewing. It is also very apparent that there are more spices available than just the five spices that face the user. The remaining spices are visible on the sides, but the design of the spice rack does not have appropriate affordances to let a user know the proper way to get to those other spices.

The Bad: Affordances and Spin Room

The worst feature of this spice rack is that it requires way more room to spin on the counter than it takes up when it is not in use. Because of its square corners, the user has to leave a lot of free space in order to spin the spice rack. Counter space in college apartments is typically hard to come by, so whenever I wish to use the spice rack and don’t get lucky and need one of the five spices that are currently facing me, I have to rearrange my entire counter.

Other really bad features about this spice rack involve its affordances. There is nothing about this spice rack that says "SPIN ME!" Since when do squares spin? Wheels spin. Circles spin. But things
with corners? The only way that this spice rack might afford that it spins is the visibility of the additional spices previously mentioned. The spice rack’s affordance problems do not end there. It has a handle on top; one that you would grab to pick up something. When on earth am I going to be carrying around my spice rack? Is it supposed to be portable? If I didn’t know that it spun and I saw that it had a “pick me up” handle, I would try to pick it up and manually rotate it every time. However, I do know that it spins, so I never use the handle. I did utilize the handle once to bring the spice rack to my bedroom, so that I could write this. It was heavy and I felt like it was just going to snap off the handle and crash to the floor. The handle isn’t there to make the spice rack portable, it is there to assist in spinning but the shape of the handle affords a completely different action than the true purpose of the handle. The handle is not correctly mapped to spin the spice rack.

The design of the spice containers also poses a problem. Because the spice containers fit nicely inside circular holes for storage, there is a physical constraint that requires the use of those specific spice containers. Once the spices run out, the user will have to go buy new spices, which usually come in their own container, and then transfer them to the spice rack’s own container. That’s a lot of work. Although spice racks that have shelves still have some physical constraints, they usually allow for a variety of spice container sizes. Also, the spice containers only have one size of holes for the spices to come out of. This design does not take into consideration that the user may only want to use a small amount of a spice. This design also does not make it easy if the user wants to measure out a specific amount of the spice.

The Debate: Visibility

To reiterate this spice rack provides good visibility with its labels, preview of more spices to the right and left, and even display of the five front spices. However, the spice rack provides the user with no way of knowing what spices are on the other three sides of the rack without turning to them. The user has no way of knowing which direction they should try turning first or when (or if) they will find the spice they desire. I asked my roommates and several friends whether they would prefer a spinning spice rack or a simple wall or flat counter spice rack. Most said they would prefer a flat spice rack and one of my roommates was shocked to find out that our spice rack actually spun. The argument here is that in a flat spice rack, all spices are visible at once, but the ones at the back may not necessarily be easy to access. With a spinning spice rack, it takes a little more time and effort to find that spice (especially if you pass it), but all are equally accessible when in view. These are the trade offs and the reason why both types of spice racks exist. Different people have different needs.
The Solution

This spinning spice rack really needs to lose its square shape and become circular. This will allow for more room when spinning and would give more indication that it does in fact spin. I would also add a double sided arrow to the base of the spice rack to indicate movement and direction. Also, the shape of the handle needs to change. Instead of having handle that affords picking up an object, it should afford spinning it. I suggest two options to replace the current handle. The first is a round knob like handle with grooves in it for fingers on the top of the spice rack. It is similar to the wheel that you have to turn in order to get a new roll of toilet paper in a public restroom. I propose this idea because it does not afford picking up the object and it does provide torque to spin. It also shouldn't be too obtrusive and ruin the aesthetics of the design. The second option is to add little pegs around the edge of the top rim. This will also provide torque to spin, but does not afford picking up the spice rack. It could be incorporated into the design.

I would also change the spice dispenser on each individual spice container to a design that is commonly used. I would make it so that only the half of the top is actually open and the user can turn the top to switch between large holes or small holes. I would also make the cap able to unscrew, so it would be easy to get a large amount of spice out as well.

Personally, I would much prefer a flat counter spice rack or a wall spice rack. A wall spice rack could relieve both problems of the other two types, but unfortunately requires wall space. With either a counter or wall spice rack, I could easily weigh all my spice options without doing extra work, but this one was free and I'm in college.

[Handwritten notes: concepts 5, description 5, solving 4, redesign 5, justification 5, very nice]