ART 40638 - Principles of User Experience (UX)
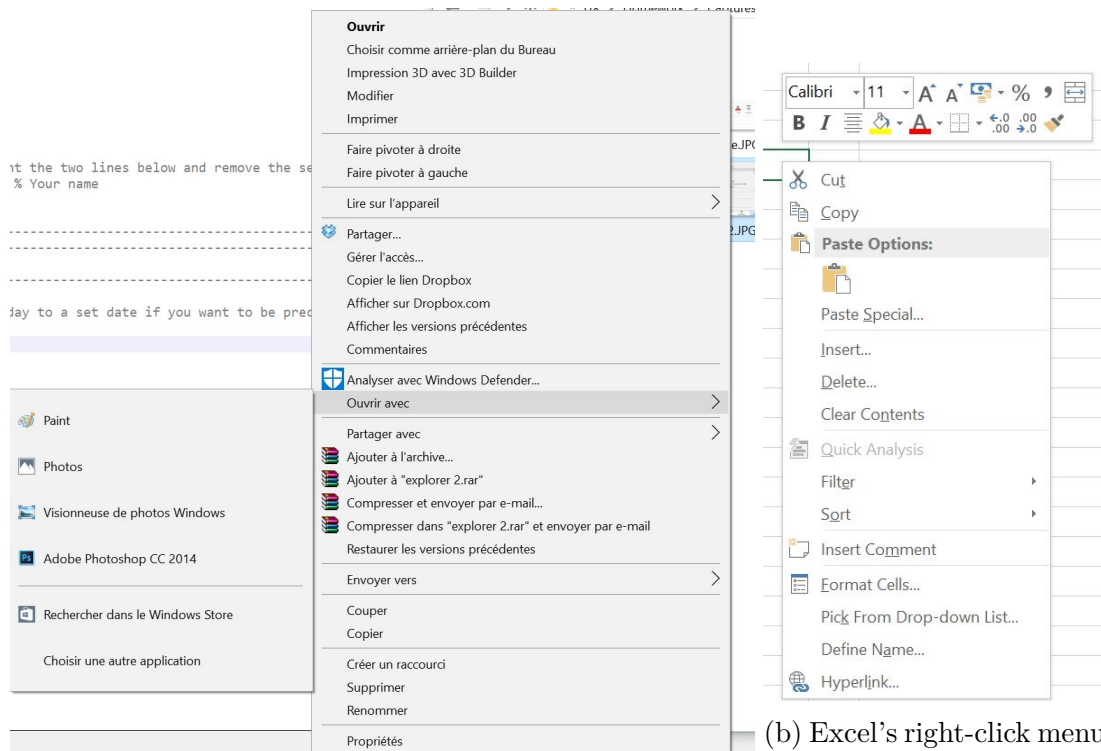
Homework 1 : Design analysis

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The right-click menu

On any computer, there is a fonctionnality that is always repulsive for me : it is the right-click contextual menu. It is a pop-up menu that opens when a right-click is performed. It is designed to provide shortcuts to the most used actions to perform on the item that has been right clicked.

Illustrations

(a) File explorer right-click menu

(b) Excel's right-click menu

An inconsistent positionning

When triggered, the most natural position for the contextual menu is that it's top left corner is set on the coordinates of the click on the screen. So the menu appears down and right of the click. If this positionning was consistent, we would know where to expect an item such as "Copy", and know before-hand how much and in which direction to move the mouse in order to get to this item.

Unfortunately, depending on the size of the menu, and where the right-click was performed on the screen, the menu can appear it approximately every directions of the cursor. Thus making it hard to anticipate the next mouse move. Even if we are copying and pasting a lot of items in a row, and if we are experienced, it is really hard to anticipate where the "copy" or "paste" options might pop.

The order of options is also software dependent. In the screen captures above, you can notice that the "Copy" and "Paste" options are on the top, whereas in the file explorer right-click menu, they are on the bottom.

A clustered interface

I find that every right-click menu has always too many options. Whenever we want to access an item, we must search through a lot of lines before finding it. Most of the times there is not much differentiation, and on computers a lot of options are added over time with the installation of various softwares. *(see illustration a)*

This clustered interface can lead to heavy mistakes. Why is the "Delete" option right next to "Rename" ? It makes it too easy to erase without warning a file, without noticing a mistake had been made.

Mouse-only friendly

The right click menu interface almost never changed for years. With the appearance of tactile screens, this menu gets even harder to use.

I use my computer as a tablet most of my time, because of it's tactile and stylus capacities. But in order to access this menu, you have to long click in order to right-click. A long click is hard to perform : it takes time, accuracy, and precision. And when the menu has popped out, it will disappear with any click, so this click has better be precise.

Sometimes, on some softwares, a tactile interface kicks in, which is a good thing. It just enlarges every options, so you are sure to click on the right one. But it is software dependant, and sometimes it doesn't kicks in. So it is even more impossible to predict the position of the option you plan on using. As in the illustration a, the tactile interface of this tactile triggered menu only kicked in the sub-menu.