Inter*faces*

British HCI Group
www.bcs-hci.org.uk

Suppose they held a conference and nobody came?

Can we …

design keyboards for children?
bluff XML?
afford affordance?
all go to HCI2005?

HCI and …

civil society • not-for-profits • public policy • cultural exchange

View from the Membership Chair

Welcome to the 63rd edition of *Interfaces* from me, Adrian Williamson, the group's Membership Chair. I duly caught the baton that Peter Wild thrust in my direction some time ago and so here I am with a short column on that topic. The aims of the Membership sub-group are to support the group's membership needs, identify and collate benefits, oversee the running of member administration and, of course, we contribute to promotion.

Personally I come to HCI from the common human-factors-in-engineering background. I can point to any Rover K-Series powered car or JCB 3CX digger and say "my soft-ware assembled that!". Well, of course, the truth is, my software helped by a few production line staff – with some optimal man–machine interfaces (for the time!) I hope. During a rewarding ten years in academia it was a small step to HCI'94 and a place in the institution. Since 1999 I have helped run development at Graham Technology, where I ensure that our GT-X Business Process Framework product looks increasingly like my successful past academic research projects (sic).

The day to day admininstration of membership was passed over to the BCS some time ago, and so most of you will have exchanged missives with our hard-working officer there, Sue Tueton. Sue manages a host of activities from membership and *Interacting with Computers* subscriptions through to *Interfaces* distribution and the hidden world of direct debits. A further benefit is our access to BCS Connect, the BCS member web site, that should serve up an improving range of help and benefits for group members, in addition to the full range offered to BCS members. Many thanks to Barbara McManus, who represents us within the BCS, to ensure we have our finger on the pulse and influence when we need to.

Whilst access to a world-leading HCI community is the prime benefit of group membership, we continue to pursue additional benefits such as reduced subscriptions, registra-tions and, of course, the events that Peter Wild now looks after. Thanks to Daniel Cunliffe, notice of relevant local events arrives regularly to your inbox, and Dave England keeps a watching brief on organisational liaison with other similar interest groups.

We already have many members worldwide, and our aspirations are truly global. Gilbert Cockton represents the group at international level in SIGCHI and IFIP, and we thank Andy Smith for his forays to India and China as part of the BCS overseas program. Nearer to home we look forward to welcoming you to our events, and hope to see as many of you as can make it to Edinburgh for HCI'05.

We aim to deliver what you need and want from a profes-sional HCI special interest body, and trust you will then become ambassadors for the group to swell our numbers. Please do contact me and the wider executive with feedback and suggestions as they arise so that we can achieve this. With the world waking up to usability and HCI, and the BCS pursuing accreditation that will duly encompass HCI profes-sionals, there has never been a better time to join, and join in with, the British HCI Group.

Adrian Williamson
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Editorial

Laura Cowen

With the extensive media coverage of the Tsunami Disaster in Asia, donations to charity reached record levels this year. This included a large number of donations made online.

In the first week of January, the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) [1] raised £30 million from online donations. In the nine days following the disaster, Christian Aid [2] took nearly four times as much in online donations as it did in credit card donations over the phone. [3]

Clearly the Web (and a usable one at that) is important to the success of such causes.

So, I asked on the British HCI Group mailing list [4] whether there are significant differences between working in usability and user-centred design for not-for-profit organisations and in commercial settings. Frances Forman and Richard Butterworth describe their experiences of not-for-profit work.

My original question was prompted by the recent special issue of *Interacting with Computers*. The issue focused on Design for Civil Society and is briefly introduced, by its editors,

in this issue of *Interfaces*. One of its editors, Andy Dearden, also discusses the impact of the HCI community on public policy.

Meanwhile, Ann Light describes a mutually beneficial partnership between an academic institute and a mobile phone corporation in Hungary. And Christina Li reports on her bilingual Web project to bring together Western and Chinese HCI communities.

And besides all this, there's much, much more, from both regular contributors and first-timers. Enjoy!

[1] http://www.dec.org.uk/
[2] http://www.christianaid.org.uk/index.htm
[3] http://society.guardian.co.uk/aid/story/
    0,14178,1384674,00.html
[4] http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/BCS-HCI.html

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RIGHT TO REPLY

Make *Interfaces* interactive! We invite you to have your say in response to issues raised in *Interfaces* or to comment on any aspect of HCI that interests you. Submissions should be short and concise (500 words or less) and, where appropriate, should clearly indicate the article being responded to. Please send all contributions to the Editor.

To receive your own copy of *Interfaces*, join the British HCI Group by filling in the form on page 27 and sending it to the address given.

NEXT ISSUE

Interfaces welcomes submissions on any HCI-related topic, including articles, opinion pieces, book reviews and conference reports. The next deadline is **15 July**, but don't wait till then – we look forward to hearing from you.

with thanks to commissioning editors:
Book Reviews: Sandra Cairncross, s.cairncross@napier.ac.uk
Profile: Alan Dix

Photo credits: *Interfaces* 62: page 6 Stephen Brewster; page Anna Lawson. *Interfaces* 63: cover picture: The new Lindsay Stewart Lecture Theatre will be the heart of HCI2005 at Napier University, Edinburgh (Photo copyright and courtesy of Napier University).

Deadline for issue 64 is **15 July 2005**. Deadline for issue 65 is **15 October 2005**. Electronic versions are preferred: RTF, plain text or MS Word, via electronic mail or FTP (mail fiona@hiraeth.com for FTP address) or on Mac, PC disks; but copy will be accepted on paper or fax.

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and copy email submissions **to Fiona Dix, *Interfaces* production editor; email: fiona@hiraeth.com**

PDFs of *Interfaces* issues 35–62 can be found on the B-HCI-G web site, www.bcs-hci.org.uk/interfaces.html

Deflections
I Can't Get No Iteration

Gilbert Cockton

> I can't get no iteration,
> I can't get no iteration.
> 'cause I try and I try and I try and I try.
> I can't get no, I can't get no.
>
> When I watch ulab tv
> And that man plays back and tells me
> That it's poor usability.
> Well he can't be a man 'cause he doesn't use
> The same task methods as me.
> I can't get no, oh no no no.
> Hey hey hey, that's what I say.

It is a little known fact (due to its mendacity) that Mick Jagger was originally a usability professional, before rising up, via a short spell in a hairdresser's in his native Dartford, to lead the Rolling Stones. The initial usability focus of his lyrics widened to cars and girls, and thus Iteration become Satisfaction.

Lucky Jagger – if only our iterations could become satisfying. April 1st is long behind us now, so I must get to the point. Evaluation research, we are told, poorly serves practitioners with its current emphasis on finding problems. Real evaluation methods should have downstream utility: that is, have a real influence on the next design iteration, preferably by recommending design changes that get implemented and improve products. Evaluation methods cannot merely evaluate. Having found where things are going wrong, a proper evaluation method fixes things too.

How could I be so dumb as to think that evaluation concerns measurement and judgement, i.e. the measurement of performance, outcome and preference, and the determination where this indicates problems that threaten the ability to deliver the value intended for a product or service? It's not enough just to measure things: bad measures must be fixed.

My wife has a cool digital thermometer. She had a nasty virus last week, so I fished it out, gave it a good wash (she is Clinical Director of Infection Control, so I'm well trained) and popped it in her mouth. She was well above 37°C and thus officially unwell. But she didn't expect the thermometer to identify the virus causing the fever, or to prescribe a course of treatment.

My wife did have an advantage over me in usability mode, however. She knew that a temperature well over 37°C was bad news. If only I knew in advance what would make users too slow, or make too many errors, or be too unimpressed with a product under test. Usability people don't always get to e-valu-ate, that is, to work out the value that an artefact will have in its intended usage contexts. We need measures and targets to be able to judge whether a design destroys, degrades or delivers its intended value (or even Design's Shangri-La when unexpected value is donated!)

Delivering true evaluation – that is, a well-grounded assessment of the impact of 'poor usability measures' on the achieved value of a digital product or service – is thus something that we all need to achieve more often. Once we can do this reliably, maybe then we could extend evaluation methods to improve their downstream utility? Well, maybe we could, but at that point we would not be dealing with pure evaluation methods. The simple fact is that evaluation, by definition, stops when it has assessed the achieved value of a system under test. Everything after that is iteration, and we will get very confused and muddled if we try to extend evaluation methods into design iteration methods.

At the dawn of HCI, iteration was seen as an attribute of the development process, which would repeat itself (too often like the enablers listed at *www.belch.com*) until things had all settled down. Given that evaluation drove iteration, we were attracted to the idea of 'downstream utility' for evaluation methods. After all, there was nothing between evaluation and re-design, so evaluation had to provide the re-designs. Well, if we regard iteration as a phase rather than an attribute of development, then we do have something to mediate between the evaluation of Version N and the re-design of Version N+1.

Microsoft's RITE method is structured around three questions: Is it a problem? Do we understand it? Can we fix it? (Cue Bob the Builder …) Only the first of these is an issue for evaluation. The others drive the two main activities in the iteration phase of development: causal analysis and design change recommendation. Causal analysis may require different measures and instruments to those used in the initial evaluation. Controlled experiments may be required to isolate and confirm causes. More mundanely, bringing in other development roles, especially developers, can lead to rapid identification of causes ("Oh, I know how that happened …"). As for design change recommendations, evaluators are often not the world's best interaction designers. They may not fully understand the design space, especially for novel modalities and devices, and they will rarely fully understand the application domain. At this point, a wide range of development roles are required to generate new design options ("I'd wanted to do that in the first place, but …") and to select which ones to take forward. Still, good evaluation methods do make iteration easier by preparing the ground for causal analysis and change recommendations. However, we should not expect evaluation methods or evaluators to cover a complete iteration phase unaided.

Moral: Just as thermometers don't prescribe antibiotics, evaluation methods won't fix designs. Life is complex, and so is the iteration required to get from a broken design to a fixed one.

References

Medlock, M. C., Wixon D., Terrano, M., Romero R., Fulton B. (2002). "Using the RITE Method to improve products: a definition and a case study." Usability Professionals Association, Orlando FL July 2002; available at http://www.microsoft.com/usability/publications.htm, last accessed 17 April 2005

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Email

Russell Beale

Email is both our oxygen and our carbon monoxide. It fuels our academic exchanges, enabling us to achieve more, faster, and simpler than ever. But the monoxide of spam slowly suffocates us – it first makes us drowsy and lethargic ("not another hundred adverts for porn and viagra, I'll do my email later") but can even kill us off ("too many messages, not bothering with checking my email now").

Numerous solutions have been proposed, ranging from micro-charges, which hardly impact usual users but which would cost spammers a large chunk of their revenue, through to challenge–response systems that question the sender to ensure they are legitimate. Signing mail, verified mail servers, ever more intelligent spam filters, block lists, allow lists, and crafty use of email names are all possible approaches, and hopefully one or more of these will provide a workable, acceptable solution – though it may take the re-writing of many internet protocols to achieve it.

One of the issues is that email has become the medium of choice for so many different things: the office memo, the conversation, the quick check to see if someone is around, the passing of data, the sending of documents. It is, all at once, the friendly conversation, the passing comment, the heated debate, the orders, the adverts, the content. It acts much as a common room, the corridor, a database, a parcel carrier, and a telephone call. But also it's a semi-public medium – with an email message, you know that I know about something - and so I'm often forced to respond because I feel I ought to participate (whether I have something to say or not) – and this only increases the traffic. This multifunctionality, and this visibility, is one of the sources of our problems.

One approach to managing email is to restrict how it is used, which in turn restricts what it is used for – here are a few ideas to illustrate what I mean.

- No distribution lists. At all, ever. Move group-wide notices to a bulletin board, notice board, or other shared space.
- Effective use of the CC field – if you are address-ing me and want an answer, send it To me. If it's for information and I don't need to act on it, CC it. I instigated this in a large e-commerce organi-sation I once worked in, and it was fantastic (while it lasted). I had a vast CC box, and could read it at my leisure. I had a very small To box, which was usually only important stuff.
- Internal addresses different to external ones. That way I know what is coming from clients (and spammers) and what is from colleagues.

But one of the biggest issues is behavioural. Many people have their email client open all the time, letting them know when new mail is received. And they have to, because it could as easily be a quick invite to coffee, or the rescheduling of a meeting. When we send email, we generally assume that it's been read – so we can't afford to miss these quickfire messages. But the high level of noise now prevalent because of spam, or the indiscriminate use of distribution lists by certain colleagues, means that we are too often interrupted and getting any serious work becomes very difficult.

So I'm trying a new approach. I'm separating out the immediate and the conversations from the email, and trying to use messenger much more. Now, I know I'm not the first person to discover messenger, but hoping it'll help me manage my email is an unusual take on things. I will only allow certain people to message me, but the presence features means I can immediately cut down on the "are you in" conversations. And I'll keep my email closed, checking it once or twice a day. Very little that comes in externally needs a faster response time than that, and anyway they can always ring me. We'll see how it pans out.

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CFP

IDEC 2005: International Design and Engagability Conference
(HCI 2005 Guest Conference)
Chair: John Knight

6 September 2005 • Edinburgh, Scotland

IDEC 2005 welcomes theoretical, empirical papers and interactive user experiences dealing with any aspects of engaging designs, products and services. IDEC 2005 will bring together academics, researchers, designers and companies interested in engaging products, services and designs. With case studies, theoretical papers and interactive user experiences, the conference pro-gramme is designed to create a lively atmosphere, as at the first year of the conference.

The content of this one-day conference celebrates designing for engagement. The themes of the conference are, but not limited to

- Sensory perception of products
- Object–user relationship
- Design methods and research
- Narrative and flow
- Engaging excluded user groups
- Engagability and product lifecycle
- Design for the senses
- Aesthetics and value
- Community and inclusion
- Design for collaboration
- Post-modernity and technology

Submissions should be emailed to john.knight@uce.ac.uk. The fee for registering for the conference is only £75. For further information, please contact John Knight, Director at User-Lab, on +44 (0) 121 331 7868.

Deadline for all submissions
25th July 2005

Long papers: 5000-word (maximum) paper
Short papers: 3000-word (maximum) paper
Posters: 300-word description
Interactive user experiences: 300-word description

Two languages, two forums, and a cultural exchange
An Introduction to the uiGarden Project

The uiGarden Project was started by Christina Li, and quickly attracted many volunteers around the world who share the same vision and passion. As a result, a collaborative team was formed.

The team's goal is to provide swift and abundant information exchange and communication between the Chinese and Western HCI communities, and to create a situation that will benefit both sides eventually. In January 2005, a monthly bilingual webzine, *www.uigarden.net*, was launched as the first step towards that goal.

The uiGarden webzine serves as an open door for researchers and practitioners who work in the user interface design and usability related fields in the Chinese and the English-speaking world to publish their ideas and facilitate exchange of views with each other. We have received, and continue to receive, valuable support from well-known organisations and personalities in HCI research institutes and companies. Since January, the webzine has had more than 20,000 page hits, with visitors from all over the world.

China is becoming potentially the biggest market and an economic giant in the near future. The Chinese IT sector has been a driving force in this economic growth under the government policies of promoting industrialisation through digitalisation. At the same time, Western countries are now the leading contributors in the HCI field. However, with the current economic climate in China, usability is not afforded the same priority as it is in the West.

We, who have worked both in the East and the West, appreciate the gulf between the two sides. Therefore, we hope to develop active and sustainable links between the Chinese and Western IT communities, promoting HCI/usability within China and thereby facilitating the design of a new generation of interactive systems for a global community. By providing a swift and free information exchange platform, the uiGarden webzine will make a significant contribution, not only in helping modern Chinese industries keep up with the pioneers in related fields, but also in opening up opportunities for Western communities to establish contacts and collaborate with the fast-growing Chinese communities.

The uiGarden webzine has articles published in both English and Chinese. Content is categorised and currently includes Opinion, Methods, Case Studies, Reviews, and Interviews. It brings to audiences articles with a focus on:

- exploring theories and concepts that reflect current industrial practice
- addressing the challenges faced by our discipline
- teaching user-centred techniques and methods
- demonstrating the application of user-centred techniques with case studies from projects
- reviews of books, conferences, websites, software, tools and interactive projects
- interviews with leading experts in the field showing their point of view on professional issues

A discussion board is provided at the end of each article to enable readers to communicate with the author. In addition, there are forums for casual discussion, focusing on various topics. In the future, we envisage having personal columns by well-known contributors in this field.

Christina Li

The webzine successfully facilitates active discussions and communications between authors and readers. Most recently, an article from Whitney Quesenbery, a renowned user interface designer and usability expert, aroused lively discussions on the differences between Chinese web sites and Western web sites. An interview with Dr. Don Norman, the author of *The Design of Everyday Things* and *Emotional Design,* will also soon be published, giving his views on Chinese product design and the usability industry.

It is a great chance for authors to provoke thought among peers and to have a readership both in the West and in the East. If you would like to share your views with peers on the other side of the world, please send them to editor@uigarden.net.

In addition, we also need volunteers to help us with:

- translating articles
- designing and developing the site
- moderating forums

If you are willing to volunteer some of your free time, please send an email message to volunteer@uigarden.net.

Currently, the uiGarden project consists of six team members: Christina Li, Eleanor Lisney, Min Lin, Ryana Chan, Sean Liu, and Ying Wang. Advisers include Ann Light, Nico Macdonald, and Patrick Jordan.

If you feel you would like to be more involved in this project, to become an editor, adviser or sponsor, please feel free to contact Christina on christina.li@uigarden.net

Christina Li
christina.li@uigarden.net

Experiences in the field
Developing an open source content management system

Frances Forman

I've just built and tested an open source content management system (CMS) for a not-for-profit organisation that provides education about things like global issues, sustainability, and development. I tried to make it standards-compliant, accessible, and usable. Working remotely on open source software with freelancers and volunteers, this was a lot harder than I'd originally anticipated but not impossible.

Working with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and with not-for-profit organisations in general, I've found that the key issue is effective strategy meetings at the start and ensuring the manageability of content. Everyone is so keen, empowered, and motivated to get all their own ideas and resources online (because they're for a good cause…) that they don't always think about the users, customers, and resource constraints. This means that, for a start, it's harder to negotiate that less information is sometimes better and more effective (budget- and time-wise) than more.

We tried to get across ideas about how

to manage content types (such as downloadable worksheets, teacher training, and magazine pdfs) using prototypes. The system we have now is an amalgamation of those ideas and of several different approaches advocated by different team members. The organisation will now have to learn how to evolve and improve on its manageability.

We had a lot more flexibility than we would have had on a commercial project but this also meant reduced usability in some respects. I think the requirements analysis phase could have been better, and, because we were doing something very ambitious with the available time and budget, there were a number of interesting obstacles to overcome.

My main concern regarding the system that we implemented is that the in-house employees need to understand that to keep a site up to date you have to strip away content as it becomes less important; you can't just keep adding and adding and adding it. I'm addressing this now with training.

Also, because the organisation is very small (4–5 employees but massive networks of people), we needed to think about how the web-based system that we were designing would fulfill in-house needs (e.g. databases for resource centre administration) as well as customer needs (resource information, news, case studies, etc). Because most of the content in the system is done by volunteers and freelancers, a lot of the usability and accessibility features that we added (e.g. common global and local navigation structures, breadcrumb trails, search engines, CSS layout, 'alt' tagging, menu trees, acronym tags, etc) meant additional work, training, and documentation to help maintain best-practice site design and site consistency over time.

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Experiences in the field
Developing a specialist digital library

<div align="right">Richard Butterworth</div>

Keen readers of the New Testament will no doubt know of St Matthew's rather depressing prediction that "He that hath, to him shall be given, but he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath". Having spent a couple of years trying to put together a digital library system for a charitable library which in financial terms definitely ranks in the hath nots, I can see where St Matthew was coming from.

As part of developing a digital library system for a tiny, criminally under-funded but wonderfully unique library, I have spent many a happy hour in the library spying on the librarians and their readers (technically its called requirements gathering by ethnographic study of course, but untechnically its called spying). A particular favourite moment of mine was when a gentleman visiting from across the Atlantic waved at all the books and told the librarian that "all this stuff is on the web, right?".

"No. No, its not. But we're working on it."

"But all the Library of Congress stuff is on the web."

"I think this library and the Library of Congress have slightly different funding arrangements…"

It's the perception that we have to work against. One web site system *looks* much like another, whether the Library of Congress has spent $20 million on it, or whether it has been cobbled together on an academic's kitchen table, so why should users know (or care about) the cost of building a serious digital library system? The thing is, the government funding agencies seem to be making much the same mistake, and predicate funding on such issues as 'widening access' where a digital library system is seen as a great way to widen access. So if you're one of the haths like the British Library, you can build your fantastic online presence and have whole funding departments putting together cogent documents saying how wonderful you are and how you've opened up access to whole new audiences (which, to be fair, you have) and how you deserve more money, which indeed you get. The hath nots cannot afford to do this, don't get the funding and can very easily finish up in a downward funding spiral where from them is taken even that which they hath.

The problem (an observation that is the result of my many happy hours spent spying on the librarians and their clients) is that these sort of small specialist libraries work rather differently from more typical academic and commercial libraries. For one thing, the 'readers' very rarely come into contact with the books, which sounds ridiculous, and certainly surprised me, but what actually occurs are not reader–book interactions, but reader–librarian interactions, or reader–other reader interactions. Small specialist libraries are as much the hub of a research community as a book repository, and the human–human interactions they support are a much more efficient, and enjoyable, way of transmitting information than sticking your nose in a book.

Most of the off-the-peg digital library systems developed for and by the big players assume that their main objective is to make it easier for readers to find online books to stick their noses in, and so don't fit the little guys who really should be looking at more CSCW-type systems. This increases the cost because the little guys need tailor-made systems.

Continuing to pick the situation apart only turns up more problems: think about the requirement to build a digital library system that 'widens access'; who are the users you are widening access to? In effect, you don't know. We all know that a critical determinant in project success is gathering good user requirements, but how do you gather requirements from users when you don't know who they are? Furthermore, the library I'm working with may be small, but it is unique and has an international reach: who pays to survey users internationally?

I was once jokingly told by a head of department that "We don't have problems, only opportunities. We have, however, several insurmountable opportunities." Working with an under-funded charity has certainly made me aware of a whole new raft of opportunities and rather than declaring them all to be insurmountable (which has been sorely tempting) I believe the way forward is to address the issue of scaling down interactive systems. Just because a system works well for a big organisation, there is no guarantee that a cut-down cheap version will be appropriate for a similar, but much smaller organisation. This sounds fine in theory, but it is not being played out in practice. User-centred design must be used to show what roles small organisations actually play (not what everyone else thinks they do or should play) and to design systems that support these roles, but this is certainly not cheap. The organisation I've been working for cannot afford to be seen not to have an online presence, but equally cannot afford to create a genuinely valuable one, and I'd suspect that it is not unique in this. Still, it wouldn't be much of a research project if it was easy, would it?

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Call for Participation

CHI2006: Interact. Inform. Inspire.

April 22–27 2006 • Montréal, Quebec, Canada

Submissions to CHI will be organised round CHI's communities: Research, Design, Usability, Engineering, Education, and Management.

Submission deadlines:

CHI Courses	**July 11, 2005**
Archival submissions	**September 23, 2005**
Papers, CHI Notes	
Early Community submissions	**October 14, 2005**
Panels, Experience reports	
Artifact presentations,	
Organizational overviews	
Late submissions	**January 13, 2006**
Doctoral Consortium	
Student Design Competition	
SIGs, Work-in-progress	

http://www.chi2006.org/

Designing for Civil Society

Special Issue of *Interacting with Computers*

Steve Walker and Andy Dearden

The recent Special Issue of IWC foregrounds the design and use of digital technologies and information systems in civil society. The idea for a special issue emerged from two workshops held during 2003. The workshops provided opportunities for researchers and practitioners to explore issues associated with civil society and social movement use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).

We know that the design, implementation and use of ICT is intimately related to context, but most ICT research is conducted in the contexts either of individual users, corporate organisations or, to a lesser extent, the public sector. This does not, however, exhaust the range of use contexts. Civil society is a term widely used to describe those networks and institutions that operate independently of the state, the family and the market (Wikipedia, *www.wikipedia.org*, accessed 3 May 2005).

However, while this meaning is commonly accepted, commentators differ in the significance and roles they attribute to civil society. For some, the significance of civil society is in sustaining social cohesion – participation in society through, for example, sports clubs, evening classes and voluntary services. Others emphasise civil society as a source of social change, for example in the emergence of a 'global civil society' of social movements and non-governmental organisations concerned with issues such as humanitarian relief, human rights, trade relations or the environment. The concept of civil society is further confused by the blurred nature of its boundaries with state, market, and family. However, it is clear that civil society is an important area of social life, distinct from market and state, though often interacting with both.

We might expect characteristics that distinguish civil society from state and market to be reflected in the design and use of the technology in this sector. There has been relatively little sustained engagement here by Human–Computer Interaction (HCI) and Information Systems (IS) specialists. The special issue questions how we as researchers and designers can contribute to more effective application of ICT in civil society.

If civil society is distinct, it is natural to ask whether the design and use of ICT in this field can, or should, be studied as a specific subject area. A positive answer might suggest concerns such as 'computer mediated campaigning', 'e-activism', 'non-governmental organisational learning' and 'computer supported co-operative service'. However, the benefits from such a move would depend on three pre-conditions being satisfied.

1. That ICT in civil society is significant enough to sustain interest. ICT use in civil society is significant in two broad ways. Firstly, civil society actors have come to rely heavily on ICT. The growth of a 'global civil society' made up of NGOs, social movements and others operating at a transnational level becomes possible in part because of the new communications technologies. Secondly, civil society contributes to shaping wider practices in ICT design and use. We can point to the example of Scandinavian trade unions contributing to the development of participatory design of ICT. We might include disability campaigners' influence over design for ICT accessibility, and the influence of green organisations in establishing standards and regulation of technologies throughout their lifecycles.

2. That ICT usage in civil society is sufficiently distinctive. A number of aspects can be identified as distinctive in civil society that could have a major impact on usage and design. Among these are: the dependence of organisations on uncoerced or voluntary contributions; values of inclusiveness and democratic participation; the fluid boundaries between the 'core' of civil society organisations and the wide range of people and organisational actors who are engaged in their activities; the limited resources that constrain many of these organisations; issues of conflict inherent in much campaigning; and the conflicting pressures faced as campaigning organisations are drawn into the delivery of services funded by governments and other public bodies.

3. That the field is sufficiently coherent, in the sense that lessons learned from studies of one group or organisation are likely to be applicable to other groups or organisations. Whether this final condition is true requires empirical work to establish. This special issue of *Interacting with Computers* (and other projects, such as 'Technology and Social Action', *www.technologyand socialaction.org*) are steps in a broader action research agenda to investigate this question.

The papers in the issue cover a range of domains and suggest that the three pre-conditions might be satisfied. Kavanaugh et al. consider how the availability of on-line media might affect the levels of involvement by individuals in civil society organisations. Blythe & Monk discuss a work system allowing elderly people to gain the benefits of on-line shopping through a telephone mediated service, highlighting new design methods and ways in which volunteering might be adapted in 'bite-size' chunks for the 'ICT-rich/time poor'. Kleine examines design considerations for on-line fair trade, showing how differences in emphasis between campaigning and commercial goals give rise to differing web design solutions. Cunliffe & Roberts-Young compare the standards of usability achieved by professionally and non-professionally designed web sites in the context of minority languages (in this case Welsh). Their paper touches on the contested nature of much of civil society and the use of ICT in the formation and maintenance of shared social identities. Van der Velden's paper considers how different conceptions of 'knowledge' give rise to different designs for managing knowledge for world development.

Each paper illustrates some of the distinctive features that mark out civil society from other domains, and provides a contribution that may be of value to others working with ICT in civil society.

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You can freely read and download the full text of this Special Issue of *Interacting with Computers* from:
http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/ 09535438

Making an impact
Public policy and the HCI community

Andy Dearden

During the recent CHI 2005 conference, a wide variety of concerned individuals met in a 'special interest group' session on 'Making an Impact: HCI and US Public Policy'. The group ranged from older established figures such as Ben Schneiderman through to young HCI masters students. It also included two members from the British HCI Group (myself, and Chris Johnson from Glasgow University).

It is clear that HCI practitioners are concerned with a number of public policy issues, both in the US and elsewhere. For example, one recent discussion in the US was the scope of legal requirements to make websites accessible (referred to as Section 508): should this apply to government bodies only, or should it be a legal requirement on commercial organisations, or perhaps on commercial organisations over a specific size. Other issues that may be important in future may be ways of allowing users to control privacy, safe design of medical devices, approaches to spam, intellectual property law and usability of electronic voting machines. But recognising that HCI has a contribution to make is a long way from finding effective ways to influence policy makers. There are some practical questions that need to be considered.

Firstly, how might such policy interventions relate to the charitable status of the organisation making the representation? The ACM cannot act as a lobby group. However, as an 'educational and scientific' body, they can act to educate public policy makers. The BCS charter is similar to that of the ACM, in establishing the society 'to promote the study and practice of Computing and to advance knowledge and education therein for the benefit of the public.' [BCS Charter, clause 2]. However, the BCS charter may leave a little more flexibility in setting out one power of the society as '… to represent the Computing profession both nationally and internationally' [ibid., clause 3 (g)].

Secondly, there is the issue of whether the HCI community should seek to aggregate its views within a larger body (e.g. the ACM public policy committee or an equivalent group in the BCS) – which might add weight to arguments, but might also see some HCI positions weakened by people in other domains of computing with different priorities – or to develop an independent voice. In fact ACM SIGCHI has chosen the latter option by creating a US Public Policy special interest group (*http://sigchi.org/uspolicy*), with its own webpage and mailing list.

Thirdly, how might an HCI organisation (SIGCHI or BHCIG) agree on what its policy actually is on a particular topic. Often, there may be only a few weeks between recognising that an HCI-relevant issue is being discussed by government and the key decisions being made. One approach discussed at the meeting was to enable a scale of representation. An individual can respond immediately to an issue, but only as an individual. An issue could be discussed by the public policy group and then a common position could be presented with that additional backing. If that position is agreed, then more time could be used to seek agreement of the larger ACM public policy group or from the SIGCHI executive. Each step gives a different point in a trade-off between making a timely intervention against making an intervention with strong backing. A similar model could be considered by the British HCI Group, or by other HCI groups in Europe.

One final point considered by the meeting was the practicalities of actually getting the attention of US legislators. In Britian, we are perhaps in a better position than our US partners. The attendance of the then government e-envoy Andrew Pinder at HCI 2003 in Bath, and recognition by parliamentary select committees of the value of consulting representatives of the Committee of Heads and Professors of Computing (CHPC) suggest that we can achieve some influence. However, the proliferation of bodies – BCS, IEE, CPHC, UK Computing Research Committee, and recent proposals to add a new UK 'Learned Society' for theoretical computing – run the risk of diluting our influence on government rather than strengthening it. We should also consider how we could have an impact at a European level.

As the new UK government takes shape, perhaps now would be a good time to consider how well HCI concerns are being communicated to those whose decisions could have a significant impact on so many users.

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When the going gets tough, where's the funding?

Ann Light

In recent years, money for public joint ventures between industry and academia has become scarcer. Gone are most of the lavish deals that saw key technology players supporting blue-sky research for the prestige value. Now the likelihood for most research establishments, certainly in Europe, is some sponsorship in kind and a bit of co-supervision for a PhD student. The flow has not only slowed, it has even partially changed direction, with schemes like the Knowledge Transfer Partnership, *www.ktponline.org.uk*, seeing money from the UK Government making its way through grants into small British businesses who are prepared to learn from university-based consultants.

While research councils have been encouraging academic bids to come accompanied by promises of interest and collaboration from industry partners, the technology market has been going through the kind of retrenching that sees every penny labelled and accounted for. Whether the dotcom crash at the start of the decade was the reason – or merely the excuse – for a tightening of belts, the last few years have seen a period of consolidation where big gestures are out and canny fostering of confidential business research is the new agenda.

This has been partly motivated by a crisis in identity. Sales of some existing products have slowed in industrialised countries: the markets are maturing, and upgrading seems less pressing. Many of the new developments in computing are behind the scenes; their longer term impact still unknown; and it will take a few years for the world outside the R&D lab to catch up. Educating people into new practices – such as using networked environments – has taken over as a priority, to make new developments meaningful in financial terms.

Yes, the recent ESRC-funded e-Society dissemination event in London became the 'Trust and Triviality: Where is the Internet Going?' conference with collaboration from Yahoo! UK, and Fru Hazlitt, its managing director, contributed a great deal on the day (see *What do we Trust on the Internet, asks eSociety Event* at *www.usabilitynews.com/news/article2065.asp*). But this is not the long-term investment of time and resources that makes for real partnership.

Nonetheless, one group of technology companies is still innovating rapidly and feeding a seemingly insatiable consumer appetite. Life still looks good for mobile phone manufacturers and their network providers. Perhaps we should look here for benefactors…

And it is in Hungary, with a long history of cultural leadership curtailed by the post-war Iron Curtain, that we find an excellent example of the kind of enlightened self-interest that could be the keystone of major companies' sponsorship activities. Hungary is neither wholly 'Western' in its economy, nor newly industrialising like much of the Pacific Rim and India. It might be argued that some catching up is needed. T-Mobile Hungary is going one better – it's setting an example.

The fifth international conference within the framework of the 'Communications in the 21st Century' project took place this April. This joint interdisciplinary social science project is coordinated by T-Mobile Hungary (formerly Westel Mobile Telecommunications) and the Institute for Philosophical Research of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, under the man-

agement of philosopher Kristóf Nyíri, the Institute's director. It was launched in January 2001 by Westel Mobile, just at the time when everyone else was closing their chequebooks. Why? Why not just sponsor a chair in the department or couple of conferences and get all the kudos with little of the commitment?

"Before we approached Dr. Nyíri with the idea of a joint research project in a field where we were traditionally not active at all, there indeed was some internal debate and hard thinking," says T-Mobile Hungary's Chief Development Officer, Deputy General Manager István Maradi. "We have recognised in the last few years that innovation has its own price. A corporation like ours must take responsibility for its actions towards society. Our developments, our actions, and our communications are not always accepted in the way we anticipate. Why are certain services well received, while others are hardly accepted? Why are some people against mobile developments, while others strive to participate and enjoy them to the utmost?"

"Answers to these and many other questions are important for us, but they are not available to our eyes and ears. We see the issue too much from the inside, and sometimes this makes it difficult to recognise simple things, motives, and arguments. This is why we were more than happy when Kristóf accepted the invitation to do a joint analysis of the society around us, so that we could understand more together. This is of great value to us, and it is not available via normal sponsorship."

"The Institute was selected," says Nyíri, "because it had acquired a reputation, on the one hand, of being interested in the history of communication technologies from a philosophical point of view, indeed of regarding communication as the paramount philosophical problem, and, on the other hand, of rejecting facile techno-pessimism."

But both sides of the organisation stress that it was very much the company's idea. "Kristóf and his team are great on their own hunting grounds," continues Maradi. "But they did not know as much about mobile telephony when we signed the deal to co-operate."

This knowledge gap led to an exchange of skills. The phone company provided an environment where the philosophers were able to use and learn about everything the company offered. They were trained in the latest technology. In turn, the philosophers cast a characteristically analytic eye over the business: "It was amazing to see how fast they caught up," says Maradi. "We were under heavy pressure to answer questions, set up systems, and explain bugs in handsets and services. Thanks to them, we were even able to improve some of our services after feedback from team members. We got a lot out of the project even during the consultancy periods. For us, many questions and answers were opening up regarding previously unknown aspects of our approaches towards the mobile market."

And then there have been the conferences and the volumes of conference proceedings… Surely sharing research that one has substantially sponsored is against the spirit of competitiveness currently pervading the technology industry?

Nyíri credits his partners with more vision: "They had an

idea that mobile telephony was probably more than just the next major step in the technology of telecommunications; that it was a humane technology, capable of making the world a better place."

Has there been no tension, then, between, on the one hand, publishing research ideas and findings and, on the other, keeping one's learning from the public domain where other companies can use it?

Maradi, aware that such tensions do exist, is nonetheless clear where the company stands on the matter. "The results are important for the whole Hungarian mobile community. Our joint research has not delivered specific solutions, rather it provides a view of the mobile society. This is why we were happy to see that more and more forums have used the results, and quoted from it. Anything really confidential stays within the organisation, but whatever could be used for further public development is published. And I am pleased to say that most of the data have been published – to jointly help us, our service development partners, the media around us, and of course our customers, to better understand the mobile environment."

The conferences are attended by a widening international community of researchers interested in the concept of mobility. The latest event, 'Seeing, Understanding, Learning in the Mobile Age', which took place in Budapest in late April, featured talks by communication theorists, philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, economists, linguists, and political and educational theorists on subjects as diverse as the epistemology of the mobile phone; visual communication and pictorial meaning; collective thinking and the network individual; and ubiquitous learning and the transformation of education.

Maradi points to the benefits for the company: "We have attended the series of conferences the team organised, and we were able to see the results of their investigations. Simple things were brought to our attention, like difficulties as regards MMS usage: we were able to recognize that the tariffing formula of our darling MMS service is too complex. Usage behaviours indicated that this may be a solid blocking factor to achieving better penetration. As a consequence, we have made changes. Simply understanding user behaviour from another angle and perspective may contribute a lot to our future actions and developments."

Nyíri notes that the collaboration across domains has been smoother than one might expect, with no real conflict between the technologically minded approach of the telecommunications engineer, and the philosophically minded approach of the humanities scholar. But, Nyíri stresses, the success of the collaboration owes a great deal to the personal make-up of T-Mobile Hungary's management – above all to CEO András Sugár's interest, guidance, and empathy, he says.

So what has made the difference? Perhaps the consistent vision, within the company, that learning fuels innovation… and that this remains crucial to sharpening the competitive edge?

The company is aware that this kind of joint research has not been done before, says Maradi. But, he continues: "This is our nature: innovation in all areas. And, if it has an additional value for us, why not? As long as we see that everybody can gain from such co-operation, we will continue."

And the institute? Not only has it presided over four years of dream-like collaboration, but, in the process, it has started to produce work to demonstrate the thesis that inspired Nyíri and his colleagues – that mobile telephony alleviates, rather than enhances, the alienation modern communications technologies gave rise to – is vindicated. Nyíri is in an enviable position.

So, whether mobile telephony is really such a blessing to humankind may remain the subject of research, both within and outside the Institute's walls. What is undisputed is the value that the mobile phone company has delivered, with its committed support of these questions.

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Experiencing design
What were they thinking?

Robert St Amant

Interface designers can often gain insight from past efforts to solve a problem. Imagine that I've been asked to design a new interface for some task, to replace an existing interface. I might find that my user population is a small group of experts who have only limited time to meet with me to talk about the new design effort. Design documents for the existing interface are nowhere to be found. Whatever the reasons for the lack of information, it's useful for several reasons to analyse the existing interface: it may improve my understanding of the task; it will have flaws and shortcomings to avoid in a future design; it may suggest partial solutions that I hadn't considered.

This kind of analysis is a staple of HCI research and practice, and yet it is by no means easy to work backward from a finished artifact to the designer's rationale. (Describing the problem in this way puts us in the role of archaeologists doing field work on virtual artifacts, though usually in less dusty environments.) As an exercise for the students in my HCI classes, I sometimes describe cases of apparently (or actually) poor design in the real world and ask the students to come up with possible rationales. Here's an example:

> My brother recently had a stay in the hospital. His room was similar to most hospital rooms: it was boring, even just to visit. The only real entertainment was a television in the corner. The problem was that the remote control that the hospital supplied left much to be desired.
>
> This remote had a single button to change the channels. When the television was turned on, it was tuned to the lowest channel. Each time you pressed the button, the channel would go up to the next one. When the last channel was reached, pressing the button would turn the television off.
>
> Fortunately we were able to locate an aftermarket remote that worked with the television and didn't cost that much. But whoever designed the remote seemed not to consider the convenience of the patient. The little money they saved came at a high price of frustration to a patient who should be taking life easy.

This case turns out to be hard to analyse, even informally, partly because it's hard to conceive of a more ludicrous design. What could the designer have been thinking? Eventually, however, it's possible to think of explanations that are not completely implausible. The device might have been targeted at patients with very little mobility, for whom pressing more than a single button is beyond their capabilities. The device might allow a caretaker to change channels for a patient as quickly and with as little fuss as possible. Leaving interface considerations aside, the device might have been much cheaper to manufacture than a more capable one.

None of these explanations is especially good. What makes the exercise worthwhile, though, is that it requires thinking about various factors that make a design appropriate or not: who exactly the users are, the environment in which they work, external constraints on design, and so forth.

Other real-world design cases suggest issues more directly relevant to HCI, including design trade-offs and the role of context. From my repository of design cases submitted by students come the following two examples:

> I have noticed that every time I go to the drive-through ATM machine at my bank, I have to get out of the car to operate the computer. If I pull up too closely, (which apparently many people do, judging by the multi-coloured paint smears), I too will leave a paint sample of my car behind. To me this is not a user friendly system. If I choose to pull up, and not get out of my car, I will have to take my seatbelt off and open the door half way to reach the controls.

> There is a women's restroom on the first floor of Mann Hall. The two stalls are extremely small and the doors swings inward toward the toilets instead of outward. The designer should have considered the fact that the users of this bathroom were going to primarily be female students with purses and bookbags on their backs. The way the doors open makes it even more difficult to manoeuvre in these tiny stalls!

It is easy for students to see the importance of spatial trade-offs in both examples. Restrooms are necessary but not 'productive' areas in university buildings, and will be allocated much less space than classrooms. Drive-up banking machines similarly take up space that might instead be allocated to parking or even to a larger building. Trade-offs also can be seen in accessibility and cost. These trade-offs have analogs in interface design: How much space and prominence should this particular piece of information receive? Will the graphical interaction also support screen readers for the visually impaired? Will this interface be usable on a mobile device? Will it be more cost effective to use off-the-shelf interaction components, or should a specialised look and feel be developed?

Students can also see the importance of task context in these examples. If you are driving a car through a narrow lane while putting away a bank card, or shifting a backpack from one shoulder to another while trying to close a door, you are trying to do two things at once. The result is sometimes a costly error. It's again easy to see analogs in interface design. A travel planning system on a desktop machine is unlikely to be as effective when encountered in the navigation system of a car or in a subway station. Voice input will be less useful for interacting with bank machines, in voting booths, or in a crowded office.

If a user interface is designed in a way that initially seems unintuitive, imposing surprising constraints on user actions or allowing more flexibility than seems needed, it may be that the designer had in mind a different context than the one in which the interface is now used.

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My PhD

I graduated in 'Digital Media Design' in 2000 from the Berlin University of the Arts. The aim of the course was 'to explore digital media, grasp its specific qualities and use them to design information, narration and form in an experimental way.' [1]

One of the main concerns was to create a close relationship between the interface of an installation or GUI and the content itself. Visual or tangible interaction should reflect the structure and nature of the content or at least make use of the principles of everyday actions. In practice that would mean, for example, that an interactive installation piece at an airport regarding aviation would try to use principles of flight, such as steering a kite or an ultra-light, as an interface.

Research and my own experience led to the belief that there is great potential in digital media to create intriguing, delightful as well as intuitive-to-use interactive installations. These installations could *move* people through subtle qualities that I still had to comprehend.

Due to time limitations my student projects often had to end at the point where they just began to become interesting. So naturally when I was offered a 3-year practice-based, interdisciplinary PhD studentship (Fine Arts / Computer Sciences) at Sheffield Hallam University, I gladly accepted.

I began with extensive research and development concentrating on a variety of interactive installations in public spaces. My task was to try to understand them better by creating categories and dimensions of interaction. The next step was an attempt to analyse their interaction principles and characteristics of use and how the installations employed the senses in different ways, while also investigating their subtle and poetic aspects. I found that systems including *live data, biofeedback controlled interfaces* and *data mapping from one medium to another* created the experiences that interested me most.

The practical element of my research has been to develop 'radiomap', which is an interactive multi-user environment that consists of a large photorealistic map of the world projected onto the floor. Participants walk upon this map and through this activity are able to navigate and listen to live radio stations at corresponding geographical locations.

Due to its technical complexity I required the help of a programmer, which also incurred involvement of a self-reflexive account of the inherent problems and opportunities of working across scientific and artistic disciplines.

In September 2004 I presented the project's first study, consisting of a screen-based version of 'radiomap' at the 'ACM SIG Multimedia Conference 2004' exhibition. I conducted semi-structured interviews with participants about their experience with the application. The overall response was very encouraging. The majority of visitors were enthusiastic about the experience and eager to share this information in the interview. The interviews gave evidence that the visual appeal of the map, the sense of control as well as the live character of the radio broadcasts were perceived as the main experiential qualities.

Currently I am in the third year of my PhD research project and tweaking the video tracking system of radiomap while refining my methods to capture its 'experiential qualities'. I have discovered that the area I am interested in is in theory covered by some aspects of Telepresence [2] ('staying here, going there, meeting in a virtual environment'). Significant writings on related epistemologies and ontologies have also been published in recent years [3], and will be useful to me describing theoretical aspects of the work. Some of radiomap's more sociological functions include 'aesthetic pleasure' or 'satisfaction' and can be explained with the help of Sutton-Smith's 'rhetorics of play' [4]. While looking at different methodologies I found that 'Sensible, Sensable and Desireable' [5] could be a useful framework to describe the technology, affordances and the use and limits of the environment.
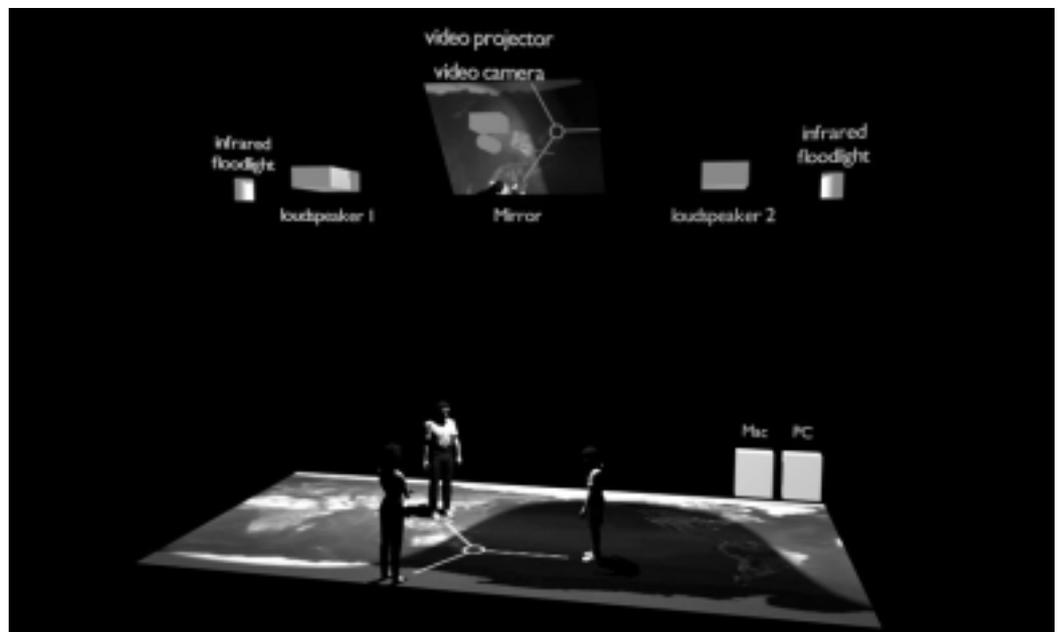
Technical setup of environment

At the moment, I would describe my research as exploring and understanding the effects of interactive environments that display transformative properties of remote location data in telepresence installations. I want to use these effects to create experiences of *interconnectedness* with remote places; a *holistic*

Function layers of main application

overview of the world and offering participants enhanced *insight*. The results will hopefully allow other artists and practitioners to employ them to benefit interdisciplinary projects.

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HCI Educators Workshop
Beyond the Rhetoric
Chair: Janet Read

6 September 2005 • Edinburgh, Scotland

Recent HCI Educators workshops have focused on the impact of external frameworks and guidelines on the HCI curriculum. This workshop will continue these discussions, looking at the Skills Framework for the Information Age, as well as the BCS accreditation requirements for undergraduate and postgraduate HCI courses and for skills training in the workplace.

This is just one theme, however, as this workshop aims to provide a meeting place for educators mapping out a research and activity agenda for common concerns. Themes may include efficient assessment processes, a curriculum for user interface design, or the management of HCI for a broad student base.

A call for participation will invite delegates to express their own areas of interest and the workshop organiser will manage the programme for the day. The workshop will be supported by a dedicated website (hosted by the HE Academy) and will result in the production of a number of posters for the conference attendees.

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Change, Caps Lock, and creativity

Janet C Read

Recently I attended a meeting in Brussels that was arranged to provide a forum for discussion about the guidelines for children's use of ICT that are being prepared by the ETSI organisation. The guidelines that are being produced cover a range of areas including service providers, content providers, interface design and the physical design of input and output tools.

Anyone that attended the panel that I participated in at Leeds will no doubt be aware that I have an uneasy relationship with guidelines, especially when applied to products for children. There is a delicate balance to be trod between pre-

The use of the shift key comes quite late in a child's keyboarding apprenticeship and one might ask the question "Do children need the Caps Lock key?" and more to the point, "Does anyone need the Caps Lock key?"

scription and possibilities and although most guideline creators are motivated by all the right reasons, the products of their endeavours are all too often taken out of context and applied in a cavalier way.

Software developers like to have guidelines, students like to have guidelines, and organisations like to have guidelines. Each of these stakeholders has a slightly different reason for their affinity to guidelines. For software developers, guidelines make design and implementation easier and quicker and avoid costly mistakes. Students are similarly motivated; they also like guidelines as they perceive them to be in some way 'trustworthy' and they provide them with a feeling of security about their design and development activities. Organisations like guidelines because they are enforceable and the application of them can be measured and monitored. In some instances (and I make the point that ETSI is **not** one of these) the guidelines can be sold for profit.

Some guidelines, as a result of their prolonged application become almost de-facto standards. I recall only a week ago, being told that animation is bad on websites. When I asked why, the individual replied "because Nielsen says it is". In this respect, guidelines become the enemy of creativity and they put brick walls in front of designers.

It is the case that well-constructed guidelines can result in better-designed products; a guideline for the design of children's products that is well known is '*use language that the child can understand*'. It is unlikely that anyone would claim that this is a bad guideline, and it is equally unlikely that this guideline would really get in the way of creative design.

There is a renewed interest in the usability of the QWERTY keyboard for child users and most experts will argue that children would do better with child sized keyboards. When you watch children at keyboards, one feature that is noted is their reliance on the *Caps Lock* key to change the case of characters that they type; they turn on capitals, and they then turn off

capitals. The use of the shift key comes quite late in a child's keyboarding apprenticeship and one might ask the question "Do children need the Caps Lock key?" and more to the point, "Does anyone need the Caps Lock key?".

Guidelines might propose that keyboards be made smaller and that children should know when Caps Lock is on, or off (system status!). What if, instead of trying to make adult devices fit children, we tried to make devices that children could use? Would our keyboards still have a Caps Lock key? Would they have both Del and Backspace (another confusing area for children), and would we label keys Shift and AltGr? More to the point, would our keyboard look the way it does; in fact, would we have a keyboard at all?

Attempts to make the QWERTY keyboard into a more useable device have generally focused on the production of new layouts and the use of prediction for faster text input, and have been tested on adults that have already become conditioned to use the QWERTY keyboard.

Technology for children should be technology that is designed for them. The easy option is to take technology that has been designed (sometimes (as with the QWERTY keyboard) less designed than developed!) for children, make some small adaptations and feel good that the adaptation has been made. The hard option is to try and forge a creative change, and to realize that with new populations come new opportunities.

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Demos, Poster, Videos, Doctoral Colloquium – call for proposals
deadline: **June, 10, 2005**
http://ubicomp.org/ubicomp2005/

Interact 2005
Communicating Naturally through Computers
12–16 September 2005 • Rome, Italy

MobileHCI 05
Human Computer Interaction with Mobile Devices and Services
19 – 22 September 2005 • Salzburg, Austria
Industrial Case Studies submission deadline:
5:00pm GMT, Friday 1 July 2005
http://mobilehci.icts.sbg.ac.at/

TAMODIA2005
For Work and Beyond
26–27 September 2005 • Gdansk, Poland

Does 'Affordance' afford affordance?

G. Alan Creak

A little while ago, I read an interesting article entitled 'We can't afford it!' by Gerard Torenvliet [1] about the notion of affordance. It took me back to my first encounter with Don Norman's mind-changing book [2], which I'd read in self-defence when I found 'affordance' turning up more and more in my reading. The idea of affordance made a lot of sense to me almost immediately; it fitted into my experience in many ways, and I thought that if I'd only been a bit cleverer I could have written it down first, and then I'd have been famous. This is a thought which comes to me about once a month in a surprising variety of contexts.

But then I began to wonder. Certainly *an* idea made a lot of sense to me, but whether or not it coincided with what Norman meant by 'affordance' wasn't at all clear, because, so far as I could see, 'affordance' didn't describe it.

As I understood it, 'afford' meant 'bear the expense of', as in Torenvliet's title. 'Affordance' itself wasn't a word I recognised. That doesn't matter much – new words turn up frequently, and we all cope with them – but it did mean that I had to work out what it meant. The suffix '-ance' isn't strange; it turns up in words like *resist*ance and *repent*ance, so clearly Xance means something like 'that which ensues when you X'. What ensues when I afford? Primarily, my bank balance decreases. That did not seem to be what Norman had in mind. Generalising didn't help; the only thing that seemed to decrease when affordance happened was confusion or ignorance, of both of which I have an inexhaustible supply.

I was aware of another meaning for 'afford', which I thought might work, but I still wasn't quite sure of it. In effect I had to take it as a new word – though with some unfortunate and confusing baggage from the more familiar meaning which left me in doubt for quite some time as to whether I really had caught Norman's intention. It seemed to me that a much better name would be 'offering': the affordance is, after all, what you perceive the entity to be offering to you.

It isn't Norman's fault; he didn't choose the word. Torenvliet [1] attributes the terminology to James Gibson, and quotes from him, 'the affordances of the environment are what it offers …'. Quite so. So why not call it that ?

I don't think that the problem is my vocabulary. I have never been accused of having a limited vocabulary; on the contrary, I have been accused of delighting in obscure words, usually when I thought I was speaking plain English. Apart from my technical interests, I don't think my vocabulary is unduly specialised, and I don't usually have any difficulty in understanding new terminology. I have been caught before now by differences in usage between American and British English, but I don't think this is such a case.

In the context of computing, this isn't an isolated instance. Computing English has always been odd [3]. In evidence, I offer an example from a computing dictionary published in 1970 [4]:

> **background processing** 1. In a multi-access system, processing which does not make use of on-line facilities. 2. High priority processing which takes precedence … over foreground processing. 3. Low priority processing over which foreground processing takes precedence. Note: as definitions 2 and 3 are directly contradictory and definition 1 has a related but different meaning, this phrase should be used with caution.

Why should it be used with caution? – because we don't know how it will be perceived by the recipient. One might almost say that its affordance is ill defined.

It is true that I've stretched the notion of affordance a little there, but I think not by much. The affordance of an object, in Norman's view [5], is the perceived opportunity for action; I'm discussing the perceived opportunity for interpretation, which is the action you apply to a word.

Words are a user interface; like any other active interface component, when they are used (by being read or heard) they afford interpretation. If the words are ill chosen, the affordance is misleading, in the sense that the interpretation is not what was intended. That was my problem with 'affordance' – so, for me, at least, 'affordance' didn't afford affordance.

Am I alone ? To find out, I conducted a profoundly informal survey of those on our department's 'academic' email list. In fact, they're not all academics – 'academic' doesn't afford academic, at least in our department – but they are all practising more-or-less professional computists, so it's a reasonably informed population. Not all the 16 replies were entirely to the point, but of those that were three supported the official definition, while five joined me in thinking it strange – and there was no obvious correlation between these opinions and American, British, and New Zealand habits of speech. (It's interesting too that four explicitly stated that they'd never come across the word before, and a few more implied the same; this was a response I hadn't expected from experienced professionals. But that's another topic.)

Of course, I and my five supporters can learn the intended meaning – I hope that we have done – but we shouldn't have to; affordances are supposed to be self-evident. This was going to be one of the big advantages of graphical user interfaces, or so they said; things could be presented much more clearly with graphics than they could with words. That's why they called them 'intuitive interfaces', which I found very annoying because it's wrong – the intuition is in the people, not the interface. That's not a trivial distinction; if the focus is in the people, then just getting the interface right isn't enough – you might have to train the people too. I was, rather reluctantly, converted to the virtues of graphical interfaces, but I certainly needed training.

An example: I started using a Macintosh a very long time ago – 1985, I think. My first impression was that, compared with the editors and selection interfaces I'd used before, the only significant difference was a better screen and a mouse to move the pointer instead of arrow keys. Never mind – it worked. And there was an editor-like program called MacWrite. I used it. When I'd finished editing my file, I tried to close it; a box appeared with the question 'Save changes before closing ?', and buttons severally labelled 'Yes', 'No', and 'Cancel'. 'Save changes before closing' was exactly what I wanted; I clicked 'Yes'; it worked. But before long I fell into the trap for which the box had been designed. After choosing to close the file, I

realised that I didn't want to; I'd forgotten one thing I should have done. I didn't want to close the file, but I didn't want to lose the changes I'd made either. Did 'No' mean 'Do not save changes, but close the file', or 'Abandon the sequence 'save changes and close''? If I answered 'Cancel', what would be cancelled? All my editing session? I played safe, and answered 'Yes', then opened the file again. This whole story happened several times. Each time I told myself I should find out what the other words meant. I didn't. Finally there came a time when I wanted to go back and carry on editing, but didn't want to destroy the original version of the file; I had to choose one of the others. I didn't dare risk 'Cancel', so answered 'No' – and the result was what I feared would happen if I'd chosen 'Cancel'.

All the buttons afforded clicking – but of the three words, only 'Yes' afforded what I expected. Of course, that was a long time ago. All that will have been sorted out. Now I'm using Appleworks; what happens when I try to close this file? Well, a box appears with the question 'Save changes to the document 'Affordances' before closing?', and buttons severally labelled 'Don't save', 'Cancel', and 'Save'. Heigh ho. (*Note*: 'Heigh ho' affords an intimation of resigned acceptance.)

Observe the first sentence of the previous paragraph. (*Note*: sentences afford thought separation; paragraphs afford topic separation; or something like that.) Why did the buttons afford clicking? – only because I'd been trained to recognise that property in the context of images on a screen. The context is important, and so is the training: buttons on a real control panel afford pressing, buttons on my clothes afford buttoning. Now I've been trained to recognise that a button labelled 'Cancel' in a dialogue box affords 'Send the box away without causing any other action', and all is well – but the training was necessary. Now I understand that 'affordance' in the context of discussions on computer interfaces means affordance, all is well.

Graphical interfaces can work very well, but words are still tricky. They afford interpretation, which leads to understanding or misunderstanding, so they should be designed just as carefully as – perhaps more carefully than – graphics. Writing as an incorrigibly literate pedant, it has not infrequently occurred to me that the entry of graphics has marked the departure of even such literacy as was once evident; there appears to be some tendency to suppose that impressive graphical design liberates you from the responsibility of designing the words too. It doesn't. If for some reason you can't design the words, make sure that the people who are going to use your interface can find training somewhere.

And – *please* – make sure it's clear. It was quite some time before I was confident that I really had understood the meaning of 'affordance'.

References

[1] Gerard Torenvliet, 'We can't afford it !'. *Interactions* **X.4**, 12–17, August 2003.

[2] Donald A. Norman, *The Psychology of Everyday Things*. Basic Books, 1979.

[3] G. Alan Creak, 'Why do computists like gibberish?', *Working Note AC68*, March 1998. See http://www.cs.auckland.ac.nz/~alan/worknote.htm#DEPT

[4] Anthony Chandor, John Graham, Robin Williamson, *A dictionary of computers,* page 42. Penguin Books, 1970.

[5] Donald A. Norman, electronic mail to Ben Anderson, 14 October 1994. Available at http://is.twi.tudelft.nl/hci/Discussion-Norman/msg00010.html, last accessed 2 May 2005.

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HCI2005: The Bigger Picture
Napier University, Edinburgh • 5 – 9 September   **Tom McEwan**

It's you that we are after. The HCI2005 committee want you to join practitioners, researchers and educators from around the world at HCI2005, where we will examine 'The Bigger Picture'. It's your annual conference, and your best chance to do a bit of serious thinking – the kind you can never do in the office with all its interruptions; to network and see old friends from the community.

Officially the 19th, this will actually be the 21st British HCI conference (we joined with INTERACT in 1990 and 1999). Either way, it's 20 years since HCI85 in UEA, the first British HCI Group conference, so HCI2005 is a major milestone – a chance to see how far we've got, and to examine the things we have yet to achieve.

Software, hardware and system developers don't always notice the battles we thought we'd done so well to win: defining international standards and successfully influencing government policies. Usability and accessibility are increasingly understood, but marginalisation and tokenism hover. Globally, HCI struggles to find an identity. Shneiderman (2003) chews over whether our discipline is child, adolescent or adult; Preece et al (2004) seek 'Interaction Design, beyond HCI'. Certainly we have spent the last few conferences forging closer bonds with the creative end of the design community, but outside the structured worlds of industrial design and nearer the world of graphic design, we find another young discipline evolving into a profession, meeting the same frustrations. In his keynote at HCI2004, Kees Dorst struck a chord, identifying the shift from 'design as reaction' – to a brief supplied by clients on behalf of a putative user community, to a more proactive design – investigation of community needs, then definition of a solution, then building the consensus to realise it; a long way from 'skunk works', and 'solutions looking for problems', echoing Karen Holtzblatt's keynote at INTERACT99.

Therefore, this year, we've realised we must reach deeper into practice, to reach professionals in the worlds of customer relationship management, customer experience, new product development, management and information systems, as well

as our regular audience from design, multimedia, ergonomics and industrial psychology. Together, if separately, we define the user experience across every aspect of our lives – commerce, education, entertainment, family life and civic participation. We share a multi-disciplinary ethos and a passion to harness technology for global benefit. This means innovations in the conference – the traditional core of academic papers remains as strong as ever, but it is supplemented by additional opportunities for participation by those who can only spend a day with us, or even less. We aim to bring HCI experts together with people who are unfamiliar with the field, and to supply the online archives, links and communication channels that will sustain momentum, long after the handover ceremony to HCI2006.

Scotland is also a distinctly north European country, and our committee and programme are rich with our fellow Nordics. We share a tradition distinctive from the Anglo-Saxon, with innovation rooted in social activities and needs. The Scottish Enlightenment in the 18th century, in a nation effectively freed from direct control of both church and monarch, was earthier than that in the salons of London and Paris. This led to a different attitude to philosophy, social responsibility and capital, exemplified by David Hume, Adam Smith, Robert Burns and, for example, Owen & Dale in New Lanark. Co-construction of meaning at the interface is a lot easier if a "man's a man for a' that"!

Your conference host, Napier University, Edinburgh, is a modern, creative university with a reputation for quality teaching, graduate employability and award-winning knowledge transfer, with a rapidly growing research reputation. The School of Computing has almost 70 permanent academics and dozens of researchers, and hosts a variety of research groups relevant to HCI, chaired by weel-kent professors in the field: the HCI Research Group (David Benyon), International Teledemocracy Centre (Ann Macintosh), Social Informatics Group (Lissie Davenport), and several others. The university is, of course, named for John Napier, 16th-century inventor of logarithms, the decimal point, and computational devices that were a quantum leap beyond the abacus, leading directly to the slide rule. A true Renaissance man, he was one of the first to see the potential of information processing.

The conference venue, Craiglockhart Campus, is famed for housing the recuperation of the First World War Poets, Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, under the care of WHR Rivers, as commemorated in Pat Barker in 'Regeneration'. Many would see this as a pivotal moment in both psychoanalysis and our understanding of post-traumatic stress. The original Hydro building remains and has been enhanced with a £25m extension adding modern teaching and conference facilities.

HCI2005 Programme

The conference will follow the usual formula, with Wednesday, Thursday and Friday morning given over to an exciting range of papers, presentations, panels, posters and interactive experiences, as well as keynote speakers and special events to explore the commercial and industrial benefits of HCI research and practice. But before the conference even starts, we are busier than usual on the Monday and Tuesday with 8 tutorials, 10 Workshops, the HCI Educators' Workshop, the Doctoral Consortium and a guest conference, IDEC 2005: International Design and Engagability Conference.

Our keynotes this year are most assuredly 'bigger picture' people. Mary Czerwinski (Microsoft Research), who opens the conference, is well known to the community for many things but some of her recent publications have addressed the conference theme literally – how we process information on very large displays. She promises to review this and other recent work, and then to use this as a starting point to investigate how we progress as a scientific discipline, calling us to arms around the growing need for adaptive designs, more privacy research and how we could enhance and enrich our daily lives with the help of digital memories.

Later Ted Nelson (Oxford Internet Institute) will seize control of the podium in his inimitable way. Ted has been confronting conventional notions of how humans interact with information through technology for over forty years, introducing words such as hypertext and hypermedia and concepts such as cybercafés. He has been a thorn in the side of almost every other area of computing, and we look forward to his engaging with the HCI community. Perhaps the last great rebel in computing, he continues to work to connect people with information and his presentation may be, by turns, informative, provocative and infuriating – and most certainly memorable.

At the time of writing the Industrial Chairs were still finalising the keynote speakers for industry day (Thursday) but we're very pleased to confirm that they will include customer experience expert Pippa Dunn from Orange. A number of other invited industrial experts will give presentations throughout a single track on industry day

The task of the final presentation falls to one of the grandees of British HCI, Alistair Sutcliffe (University of Manchester). He needs little introduction to this audience – you can still find copies of Sutcliffe & Macauley (1989) on Amazon for £10! Alistair plans to investigate how HCI needs to develop intellectually to respond to the computer science grand challenges, and analyse how the impact of the considerable success we have already achieved can be leveraged for greater impact in the wider world.

The heart of the British HCI conference is found in the high quality of the full papers. Following an increase in submissions compared to recent years, the programme committee has been able to accept a larger programme – 31 full papers in all, from 92 submissions. These had been peer reviewed by over 100 international experts resulting in over 400 individual reviews. In all 62 papers were recommended for acceptance by at least one reviewer, and the programme committee selected the best 31 and these are listed on *www.hci2005.org*, along with short summaries.

A quick analysis of the themes addressed, and countries of origin, may help scope out how big this bigger picture will be! Based on the primary and secondary keywords, the most popular themes are Design methods / principles (9); User experience (9); Evaluation (7); Methodology (7); Multimodal and multimedia interfaces (7); Applications / case studies (6); Novel interfaces (6); Interaction techniques (5); HCI for children (4); Mobile interaction / technology (4); Tool support for design of user interfaces (4). Skimming the locations of the first named authors reveals 11 different countries, several with more than one paper: 1 Belgium, 2 Canada, 3 Denmark, 12 England, 1 Finland, 2 Germany, 1 Netherlands, 2 New Zealand, 2 Scotland, 1 South Africa, 2 Sweden, 2 USA. (Similarly, tutorials and workshops came from Denmark, England, Germany, Scotland, Sweden, USA and Wales). Looking at co-authors, the list of countries grows even longer.

Ticketing arrangements

The programme committee wants to reverse the decline in recent years in BHCIG members attending the conference – only around 15% of you came last year. This year we are determined to bring much more of our community together. As well as pegging the 3-day prices at the same as last year (£390 for members, if bought before 15th July), we introduce this year a 'no-frills' one-day ticket for only £95. This includes lunch and coffees, etc, but excludes items that can be purchased separately at cost: the social programme (£60), the Volume 1 proceedings (£40) and the delegate bag and Volume 2 (£20). You may be surprised at how much the costs for these three items have risen over the last few years, so especially for those of you struggling to get employer funding, the one-day option offers a chance to focus on the programme alone. Prices are also subsidised for full-time student members, who pay £210 for exactly the same 3-day package as full delegates. Tutorials are competitively priced at £140, while one-day Workshop attendance is £75. Both these prices include lunch, etc, and you don't have to attend the rest of the conference if you don't want to. Lastly, you can register and pay online at *www.hci2005.org*.

We would like as many of you there for the full week as possible, but we recognise that this might not be possible. So we've tried to make it easy for you to dip in and out as opportunity allows. You are part of the Bigger Picture in HCI, we want you there. Please join us in Edinburgh this September.

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Sutcliffe, A. & Macauley, L. (1989), *People and Computers V: Proceedings of the Fifth Conference of the British Computer Society* (British Computer Society Workshop Series)

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Tutorials and workshops at HCI2005

Monday 5 September

Tutorials

A user-centred introduction to HCI 2005
Steve Cummaford, John Long
This tutorial presents an introduction to HCI, and seeks to help delegates identify the conference sessions which offer the most promise for delivering practical value, based on their specific needs.

Usability Design – Incorporating User Centred Systems Design in the Software Development Process
Jan Gulliksen, Bengt Göransson
User Centred Systems Design (UCSD), a process focusing on usability throughout the entire systems development lifecycle. This tutorial present 12 key principles for UCSD, a UCSD process and strategic UCSD.

Working With and Analyzing Qualitative Data from Field Studies
David Siegel, Susan Dray
Field studies can produce data that is overwhelming and ambiguous. This tutorial teaches techniques to improve validity and credibility of findings while helping researchers to avoid drowning in data.

Effective and enjoyable research careers in HCI
Harold Thimbleby
This lively, participative and well-tuned tutorial is for anyone wanting a long-term, fulfilled research career in HCI, despite outside pressures including the RAE. It complements the Doctoral Programme for students.

Workshops

HCI and the Older Population
Dr Joy Goodman, Dr Anna Dickinson

Commercial uses of eyetracking
Natalie Webb, Tony Renshaw

Ecological Validity and Behavioural Measures in the Usability Testing of New Applications (2 days)
Gitte Lindgaard, Bruce Tsuji, Shamima Khan

Understanding and Designing for Aesthetic Experience
Luigina Ciolfi, Michael Cooke, Olav Bertelsen, Liam Bannon

Improving and Assessing Pen-Based Input Techniques
Janet Read, Phil Gray

Not more problems! New challenges for usability evaluation methods
Suzette Keith, Mark Springett, Serengul Smith-Atakan

Tuesday 6 September

Tutorials

Iterative Project Management
John Long, Steve Cummaford
HCI specialists are involved daily with Iterative Projects. This tutorial inducts specialists into the theory, methods and practice tips of Iterative Project Management to support its more effective conduct.

How to create engaging personas and use these in design projects
Lene Nielsen, Eva Brandt
This tutorial presents novel ways of working with personas. It introduces two approaches to creating personas - design games with video-snippets and engaging personas. Both are grounded in field data.

An Introduction to User-Centred Design and Usability
John Meech, Jerome Nad
This tutorial provides an introduction to the science and art of user-centred design based on extensive practical experience. Participants will learn from concrete examples from real projects.

Cognitive Factors in Design
Thomas Hewett
The tutorial uses "minds-on" exercises to introduce basic processes and phenomena of memory and problem solving. You will gain insights into using these capabilities in designing for the human mind.

Workshops

HCI Educators Workshop – Beyond the Rhetoric
Chair: Janet Read

IDEC 2005: International Engagability and Design Conference
HCI Guest Conference – chair: John Knight

Human – Animated Characters Interaction
Daniela Romano, Lynne Hall, Ruth Aylett

Games testing methodologies and their impact on actionable user requirements
Geanbry Demming, Jamie Gerig

Design and Performance
Catriona Macaulay, Chris Hand, Morna Simpson, Jon Rogers
The Role of Emotion in Human–Computer Interaction
Christian Peter, Gerred Blyth

Lost – or liberated? – without theory
Jan Gulliksen, Inger Boivie, Liam Bannon, Lidia Oshlyanski, Harold Thimbleby

A Bluffer's Guide to...
XML

Lon Barfield

XML is the 'Lingua Franca' of structured information. It is a common language that different information systems can use to communicate with one another. An interaction designer probably doesn't need to be a whizz with it, but they should try and avoid meeting its mention with glazed looks.

Before I explain XML let's go back in time to look at 'Lingua Franca'. Lingua Franca was a trading language developed as the communities around the Eastern Mediterranean started trading with one another by sea. Its origins are unclear – apart from a need for common communication and transactions, but its demise started with the rise in importance of French and in particular the introduction of French in Algiers. Lingua Franca was a heady mix of Italian, Provençal, French, Spanish, Greek, Turkish and Arabic, (the name Lingua Franca actually comes from the Arabs' description of all Westerners at that time as being 'Franca').

Today, XML does the same job that Lingua Franca did, but it is not a language for people to speak, it is a language that information systems use to put information in files so that other information systems can pick them up and use them.

Why do we need another file format? Surely there are enough Microsoft Word users out there to make Word files the 'Lingua Franca'? Well, not everybody has Word, and although it's OK for text documents it's not good for other sorts of structured information. Also, the files it stores its information in are incredibly complex; you have to have some pretty heavy tools to start extracting information.

XML, on the other hand, is simple. It is just text interspersed with funny little tags that look a little bit like HTML (the layout language of the web). All the content and the tagging is done in readable text and so XML files can be opened with any program that opens ordinary text files, which is pretty much any program that deals with text in some form or another.

If you have an application that takes some input from an XML file then that XML file can be output from some other program or you can just write it yourself with a simple text editor like 'SimpleText' or 'Notepad' or 'HomeSite', you can even use Word as long as you remember to save the file as text only and not as proper Word files. Imagine you want to encode the details of a book, you could start with the title. The text of the title is:

Designing the Real World

You want to make this an XML 'thing' (an XML node) so you invent a type of tag, let's call it 'TITLE', and then put begin tags and end tags around the text like this:

```
<TITLE>Designing the Real World</TITLE>
```

The difference is that the end tag has got that back slash before the name. The author and ISBN number are similar:

```
<AUTHOR>Lon Barfield</AUTHOR>
<ISBN>0954723910</ISBN>
```

Then we can invent a tag for a book and wrap all three up with book tags:

```
<SOMEBOOK>
<TITLE>Designing the Real World</TITLE>
<AUTHOR>Lon Barfield</AUTHOR>
<ISBN>0954723910</ISBN>
</SOMEBOOK>
```

Now put the whole thing in between these XML tags `<XML></XML>` and you're done! Is that it? Is this the whole XML story? No, of course it isn't, but one of the nice things about XML is that you don't need the whole story to start making use of it. If you have someone to help you you can be doing useful stuff within a day.

Lingua Franca is long gone now. It was rarely written down, there is no surviving poetry or stories written in it. It was purely a functional language for touting your wares and closing a business transaction. Towards the end of its lifetime variations of it were spread by the Portuguese to Africa, America, Asia and Oceania where the Portuguese mixed it with native languages to do their trade. Soon though it was eclipsed by the spread of the big colonial languages like French itself. What little we have of it today has survived in operas where composers of the era, wanting to give their opera a bit of exotic spice, would stick a few lines of Lingua Franca in it.

Hopefully, the same fate will not befall XML, its power lies in the fact that it is not owned or controlled by big companies and hopefully its simplicity and flexibility coupled with its ubiquity will mean that it won't be superseded by another format and that any time spent learning more about it will be time well spent.

Lon Barfield
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Lon Barfield is an interaction designer. He is the author of several books in the area the latest of which is *Designing the Real World* (www.idhub.com/realworld) a ripping collection of anecdotal design essays and analysis. His next book will be *An Introduction to Taxonomy and Card Sorting* (www.idhub.com/card)

BrainAcademy 2005 promotes HCI

Paul Curzon

Can you answer Computer Science questions on subjects as diverse as logic, interactive art, Don Norman and the history of computing … and program creatively to boot? BrainAcademy, the online Computer Science talent spotting competition, run by Queen Mary, University of London and supported by Microsoft and the British HCI Group, is back … and the winner will do just that. An aim of the competition is to challenge stereotypes about Computer Science in a fun way showing that the subject is much more varied and interesting than School ICT, and that it draws on a wide range of other, human-centred, subject areas. It is about people as well as computers.

The competition involves completing an online research quiz to qualify for the second round: a programming chal-

Gavin King (right) of Microsoft and Jon Rowson (left) of Queen Mary, University of London with the 2003 winner, Adam Kramer (centre) at the prize ceremony.

lenge. This year BrainAcademy explores the diversity inherent in computer science and includes a strong HCI flavour. Don Norman features in a question highlighting the importance of both Design and HCI to Computer Scientists. Another question is about the merging of Art and Computer Science: BAFTA award winning Interactive Art company Soda Limited are one of the competition's supporters this year. Another question concerns the Therac Radiation Therapy Machine. It is a classic case of a computer product gone wrong in a tragic way: where a poor user interface and general lack of consideration of human factors was instrumental in the death of patients. Finally, the programming challenge, accessible only once all 12 questions have been correctly answered, is concerned with computers and emotion.

Even those that do not make it to the second round should learn about Computer Science in the process as well as having

some fun. The competition is free to enter: anyone can test their knowledge and research skills on the quiz stage. For those more dedicated, serious prizes are available: for example an undergraduate degree place with fees paid, together with career enhancing plug-ins. In addition to software and other prizes, Microsoft are offering a guaranteed interview for their student internship and graduate recruitment programmes: the chance to win a place at Microsoft. Top Internet publishers ZDNet are offering summer work experience, likely to involve doing product evaluations, for the winner.

The competition has also been expanded this year to include prizes of Masters bursaries, with one winner getting the chance to study on, amongst others, an advanced HCI course: Intelligent Web Technologies, or the Advanced Research Methods MSc that includes a strong HCI component. There is also a Conversion Masters bursary up for grabs: suitable for someone from a non-computer science background looking for a career change.

BrainAcademy was first launched in 2003. The quiz received over 80,000 hits, with 120 hopefuls making it through to the programming challenge, and a handful making it as far as the interview stage. The fun "life-changing-prizes-game-show" caught the imagination and even received commendations from the government Minister for IT. The competition also won Queen Mary's Drapers prize for teaching and learning. The 2003 winner, Adam Kramer, from North London, is currently entering his second year and is one of the top students on the Queen Mary Computer Science course. Adam, then 17, was a self-taught programmer when he entered.

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To enter the Academy and for more information go to

http://www.brainacademy.qmul.ac.uk/

Are you up for the challenge?

Book reviews

Edited by Sandra Cairncross

We have three reviews for you this issue to help you start planning your summer reading.

- Firstly Xristine Faulkner kicks off with her thoughts on *Constant Touch: A global history of the mobile phone*, a series of articles edited by Roman Longorias. This book has something for everyone focusing on both technical issues and design issues
- Next up we have Stephen Brockbank (who is the Exhibition Co-ordinator for HCI2005) who reviews *Designing the Real World* – a collection of Lon Barfield's popular columns for the SIGCHI Bulletin.
- Soren Lauesen's *User Interface Design: A Software Engineering Perspective* is then reviewed by John Knight. The author is seeking to build bridges between the HCI community and the programming community and has something to say to each.

As ever I'd welcome suggestions and volunteers for reviews for the next edition.

Sandra Cairncross
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Constant Touch: A global history of the mobile phone
Roman Longorias (editor)
Springer, 2004
1-85233-785-0, £39.50

This is, as it says on the tin, a book for the practitioner; anyone who is scared of programming will be lost in parts since it assumes you can tell your XHTML from your cHTML and your Java from your Brew. Of course, you could just do what Sir Walter Scott suggests and skip what the less technical will find the boring, tricky parts and get on down to the bits that have to do with designing for people. There's still quite a lot for the non-programming usability expert to read and appreciate.

There are six chapters in all, each one contributed by a different set of writers. Chapter 1 kicks off with an excellent contribution from Avril Hodges, Jolie Bories and Ronan Mandel on Designing Applications for 3G Devices. The chapter opens with a consideration of the designer's role in the development of these systems and then goes on to provide a pocket introduction to the industry, the user (this bit is fascinating) and the technology, which is where the tricky bits begin.

Chapter 2 provides some background and examination of speech technology. I remembered much of this from my days playing around with artificial intelligence so I rather enjoyed this and even went so far as to think that my students might like to consider the problems of speech recognition systems and the interface issues they raise. The chapter concludes with three excellent and entertaining case studies to hammer home the problems and solutions. I liked this section because it makes the technology come alive and the writers have a canny knack of making you feel as if you are experiencing the problems along with them.

Chapter 3 is very much more technical and examines the design problems with J2ME applications. J2ME is the Java platform for embedded devices like mobile phones. The chapter provides an overview of the platform and goes on to examine the process for creating a MIDP application. It is a technical view so it won't be to everyone's taste. However, there are some considerations of the user along the way which reinforces the idea that this book really is about designing for users rather than designing for the technology.

Chapter 4 considers the design of multimodal applications and once again gets back to consider the design problems that these systems have. There are some excellent examples which should set you thinking. I found myself worrying about the safety critical aspects of systems that told drivers the way but seem to require attention which I would prefer to have concentrated on the road. However, the amount of time these systems take of drivers' attention isn't discussed so I was left somewhat unnerved by the idea that people might be playing with their multimodal maps rather than concentrating on the road. The chapter ends with a consideration of how and why multimodal systems work and

then offers some solutions for voice and graphical interfaces. Again, the chapter hammers home the usability aspects of designing for these contexts.

Chapter 5 provides a series of heuristics that can be used in the design of mobile applications. For the non-technical this is probably the chapter that you'll feel most at home with though don't come to it with preconceived ideas as some of the mantras we're used to chanting for other contexts don't apply to mobile technologies. The heuristic I liked best was 'Employ feature shedding'. I have mixed feelings about flexibility when it comes to adding functionality so that products can do as much as possible so I like this one urging to do away with features. However, the authors are clear that baby should be retained even if you do ditch the bath water and heuristic 10 emphasises that basic UI principles still apply in the mobile context.

Chapter 6 by Aaron Marcus looks at the developmental process for advanced user interfaces of wireless mobile devices and takes the reader through a particular and very fascinating example. The chapter is more or less a case study that examines the different user attitudes to the product in development and how it supports these different attitudes and lifestyles. Designing interfaces for tiny devices turns out to be just as difficult as I'd imagined and the solutions are at once inventive, appealing and surprisingly simple.

I enjoyed this collection of essays very much and it gave me some interesting ideas to play with. My

students are fascinated by mobile devices so this should prove useful to them – it's short and the technical and non technical aspects being covered in one slim text is very appealing. However, it does say it is written by practitioners for practitioners and I

have to say that I think that market will be pleased with this book. All too often books are either technical and neglect design, or cover design but you have the feeling that the writer couldn't build the thing they are telling you how to design. But this

book is clearly written by those with technical as well as designing expertise.

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Designing the Real World
Lon Barfied
Bosko Books 2004
0-954723910, £19.75

Based mostly on a collection of Barfield's own 'Real World' columns, *Designing the Real World* is a refreshing look at Interaction Design. Barfield starts by introducing three general areas in the world around us: Natural, Designed and Digital. Within each of these worlds are Physical Things and Agents. After describing these various areas, Barfield looks into how observing the Natural and Designed worlds can give an insight into good and bad design. This knowledge can then help to inspire good design when developing interaction in the Digital world.

" '62…63…64…' What am I doing? '65…66…67…'Counting sheep? No. '68…69…70…' No such luck, I'm at work." To be precise, Barfield is setting the ethernet address on a new network printer. While pointing out the frustration of having limited hardware with which to communicate with equipment, Barfield manages to illustrate the trade-off between fewer buttons and ease of use.

The first set of columns is about hardware. In this section Barfield covers many of the types of hardware interaction in the world around us. Different methods of achieving the same purpose are explored, along with the advantages and disadvantages of each method. Having only a couple of multi-function buttons is much neater than having a different one for each function. However, there need to be enough of them to achieve the job. When setting the address of the printer, certainly not a common job, was the manufacturer justified in making Barfield press one button anything up to 255 times – for each of the four parts of the network address?

The second set of columns focus on people. In this section Barfield explores the inter-relationships of people. There is an exploration of how

people communicate with each other – especially focusing on technology mediated communication. How people react to devices, 'a user group of two' looks at how there is often conflict between people over technology. There is the obvious 'ownership' of the TV remote control, but a much less obvious problem involving the setting on a toaster.

The third set of columns is about the 4th dimension, that of time. We as humans are experienced at working in two dimensions – shapes on paper and three dimensions – the physical environment (either real or in virtual

" '62…63…64…' What am I doing? '65…66…67…' Counting sheep? No. '68…69…70…' No such luck, I'm at work."

reality). However, most interactions also use a fourth, much less tangible dimension, that of time or narrative. This third section of the book looks at design issues related to time and narrative.

In this section Barfield looks at all design issues relating to the passing of time. What to do while waiting? What happens if the interaction gets interrupted? Is it possible to design a complete interaction without a start or end? Or do you need to set up a series of paths that lead the end user to the relevant parts of the story regardless of the 'choices' they make. These are all covered to varying degrees throughout this section.

The fourth and final section in the book looks at interaction design itself. It takes the raw ingredients of the

previous sections and provides some of the bits of recipes that allow the pieces to be brought together into a whole. This section looks at all the basic methods of interaction, what works and why. Designers sometimes come up with new and novel ways of creating interactions, but if it is not based on what people already know and are used to, they will just find it confusing. Labelling, terminology and logical structures – loops, chains and hierarchy –   are covered here as well as broader topics such as broadcasting and very specific ones such as how to run an online shop.

This book has obviously been written by a designer, but a designer who gets excited about buying a drink from the new coffee machine, or just copying a single double page on a complex photocopier – just to see how someone else has designed the interaction. Barfield makes it clear in this book that good designers should always be aware of the world around them. A number of forms to fill in with your own observations are even included at the back.

As might be expected, the book is carefully designed to be easy to navigate. There is a table of contents at the beginning, a summary of the individual columns, a list of the titles in the order they were written and of course an index. Also, to help group the main sections in the book, each column has a representation of a plastic filing tab on the right hand page to indicate which section you are in.

This is a very accessible book that has been thoughtfully collated from a collection of thought-provoking articles on design. This book is not a textbook, but it does provide pointers to areas that designers in the real world should be thinking about.

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Soren Lauesen is a professor at IT University Copenhagen. He has twenty years of experience in the software industry and has written this authoritative book for tutors and students. It features the 'Virtual Windows Method' to 'define the right screens and transform them into a full user interface'. In addition, the book 'shows how user-interface design relates to systems development and object oriented approaches'. The book is extensively illustrated and runs to over 600 pages. It is divided into three sections comprising the 'Best of the Classics', 'Systematic Interface Design' and 'Supplementary Design Issues'.

The introduction suggests that there is a 'communication gap' (p. ix) between the programming and HCI communities. The book plugs the gap by palatable content and effortlessly deals with complex issues from both disciplines. However, in building bridges some of the granularity is lost. Tackling such a big topic means that some subjects, such as accessibility, are neglected.

'Best of the Classics' reviews HCI research, introducing interaction design and usability. All the usual suspects are here except Gould and Lewis for some reason. As well as the basics the section also deals with data presentation, Gestalt, mental models and dialogue levels. There is a good spread of old and new research and the territory is covered sufficiently for the next section that sets HCI within software development.

The second part starts with 'Analysis, visions and domain description'. This chapter tackles business goals, requirements focus and makes the case for user-centred design. Readers are introduced to a hotel booking application that is used to illustrate subsequent chapters and the Virtual Windows Design method.

Lauesen offers a definition of Virtual Windows. 'A virtual window is a user-oriented presentation of persistent data. Early during design, the virtual windows may be on paper. They show data, but have no buttons, menus or other functions. Later we allocate functions to them.' (p. 167). These early virtual windows are checked for task fit and can be used with scenarios and use cases. Useful templates are provided for doing this including one for task descriptions.

The next chapter entitled 'Function Design' shows how virtual windows are fleshed out with functionality. Standard functions are described and there is an in-depth discussion about the problems with undo. Having added functionality to the Virtual Windows prototypes are developed and tested. In this way the method is easily integrated within a user-centred design lifecycle. The section ends with some reflections on the User Interface and considers Virtual Windows in relation to different development methodologies.

Despite its catch-all title, the last section is extremely useful and takes up nearly half of the book. It includes worked examples of designing a system for evaluating (and managing) courses at a university, and an email system for complex case management. Other chapters investigate methods, methodology, user documentation and usability testing. Here the benefit of the author's industrial experience is evident and makes *User Interface Design: A Software Engineering Perspective* useful to practitioners as well as students.

This is a good book for learning HCI in a practical context. The editing could be better and it has omissions. Lauesen achieves his goal of building bridges and does a good job of promoting HCI to a wider audience.

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GALA – Gathering of Animated Lifelike Agents

17–19 October 2005 • Hong Kong

GALA, Gathering of Animated Lifelike Agents, is an annual festival to showcase the latest Animated Lifelike Agents created by university students, academic or industrial research groups. The goals of GALA are manifold:

- to provide a forum to present and evaluate the state-of-the-art in the technology of virtual humans and innovative applications
- to disseminate research, by establishing an ever evolving GALA Gallery (a repository at a permanent web location) of virtual humans for study and re-use;
- to stimulate students to work on virtual humans.

An international jury will select entries for the GALA Gallery and award prizes to student submissions according to certain aspects. The presentation of the best entries and announcement of the awards is coupled with a prestigious conference each year.

For the first time, GALA will take place at the CASA Conference, 17–19 October 2005 in Hong Kong .

The quality and capacity of the virtual character is to be presented in a short movie. In this respect GALA is complementary to scientific conferences where demonstrations are at most illustrations of talks, usually not included in proceedings and thus hard to reproduce. Another difference is that GALA intends to attract students, with submissions prepared in a shorter time, preferably as a project related to some university curriculum. This is unlike the output of larger-scale research presented at conferences.

Submissions deadline
30 June 2005

http://hmi.ewi.utwente.nl/gala/

Profile   Nicolas Guernion talks to Alan Dix

I am an Associate Programme Manager at the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) where I manage the 'People and Interactivity' theme within the ICT programme. I've been in post for three months and, prior to this, studied for my degree and PhD at the Faculty of Sciences at UWE-Bristol and worked as a postdoctoral research fellow in the Chemistry department at the University of Reading. I am originally from Brittany in France and still trying to resist complete Anglicisation although it is rather difficult…

What is your idea of happiness?
A nice walk on a Breton beach whatever the weather

What is your greatest fear?
Hornets/Wasps

With which historical figure do you most identify?
Lavoisier (A French Chemist who lost his head at 40, literally since he was decapitated in 1789)

Which living person do you most admire?
Peter Kaye

What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?
Lack of confidence

What is the trait you most deplore in others?
Arrogance

What vehicles do you own?
None

What is your greatest extravagance?
Proper French food

What makes you feel most depressed?
Both French and British politics

What objects do you always carry with you?
Currently my Blackberry, which is really sad I know...

What do you most dislike about your appearance?
My nose!

What is your most unappealing habit?
Being too passionate about everything

What is your favourite smell?
Magnolias

What is your favourite word?
Republican

What is your favourite building?
The Eiffel Tower

What is your favourite journey?
Stansted to Dinard in Brittany, because it still feels like home!

What or who is the greatest love of your life?
My wife Laura

Which living person do you most despise?
I don't hate anyone

On what occasions do you lie?
Never although I can be economical with the truth

Which words or phrases do you over-use?
"I'd rather you didn't"

What is your greatest regret?
I don't think I have any

When and where were you happiest?
My wedding day (24th July 2004)

How do you relax?
A game of Playstation 2 does help!

What single thing would improve the quality of your life?
Teleworking

Which talent would you most like to have?
Speak all the world languages

What would your motto be?
Liberty, equality, insanity

What keeps you awake at night?
The light on!

How would you like to die?
While active

How would you like to be remembered?
With a funny anecdote

British HCI Group – Application Form 2004–2005 *Please print or type*

www.bcs-hci.org.uk

Contact Details (Give a personal contact when asking for Corporate Membership)

Title .... First Name .... Last Name ....

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Tel. .... Fax ....

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Please send mailings to: my work address ☐; my home address ☐.

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Data Protection Act

The data on this form will be treated as confidential to the BCS. Names and address may be used, under our strict control, for mailings judged by the British HCI Group Executive to be of value to the membership.

Membership Directory

Do you wish your contact details and professional interests to be listed in the Membership Directory sent to all members of the group? (We will NOT use your home address, unless that is all you have given us.) Yes ☐ No ☐

Getting Involved…

We are always looking for people interested in contributing to HCI group activities by, writing for *Interfaces* magazine, helping run the annual conference or joining the executive. If you are able to contribute in this way or if you have ideas for 1-day meetings or new activities please contact Adrian Williamson, adrian.williamson@gtnet.com

Membership Fee

Membership classes and fees for 2004–2005 are:

BCS Member £30 ☐   Non BCS Member £35 ☐   Student £10 ☐

Corporate £235 ☐ Corporate membership entitles the organisation to 8 copies of *Interfaces* and other mailings; membership rate for any 4 individuals at British HCI Group events, as well as a free one-page entry in the membership handbook.

£ ....

Journal Subscription to 'Interacting with Computers'

The HCI Group manages a journal, *Interacting with Computers*, published quarterly by Elsevier Science. Members may subscribe to this journal at a reduced rate (£52.50).

Please send me Vol. 16 (2003/2004) of *Interacting with Computers* (£52.50)   £ ....

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Please enter the total amount for membership and subscriptions   £ ....

I enclose a cheque/postal order (in Pounds Sterling only please), made payable to *British HCI Group*

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Queries about membership can also be e-mailed to: hci@bcs.org.uk

The British HCI Group is served by Sub-groups comprising representatives from a broad range of academic and industrial centres of HCI interest. The Sub-groups are committed to promoting the education and practice of HCI and to supporting HCI people in industry and academia. For contact details of the persons in each Sub-group, please select from the following:

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