

# Understanding & Designing for Aesthetic Experience

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**This workshop aims at discussing conceptual and methodological tools for studying and understanding aesthetic experience of technology. Within the HCI and interaction design community there is an increasing interest for the role that aesthetics and, more broadly, user experience plays in the design of interactive artefacts, environments and interfaces. Theoretical approaches dealing with experiential aspects of human interaction such as aesthetics, fun and enjoyment have been developed in the past few years, and novel methodologies –mainly borrowed from the art and design field- have been applied by HCI and interaction design researchers. Participants in this workshop will present their experience in using conceptual and methodological tools for dealing with aesthetics in the design of interactive technologies, as well as discuss some emergent issues related to the topic of aesthetic experience which are not dealt with by existing literature.**

*Keywords: aesthetics, user experience, design methods, conceptual approaches.*

## 1. BACKGROUND

In the last decade or so the fields of HCI and Interaction Design have become less defined by an explicit work orientation regarding the design of technology, and increasingly concerned with issues of fun, enjoyment and aesthetics. This has occurred in parallel with a greater increase in consumer choice, and the proliferation of consumer electronics to the extent that often the decision to purchase a product rests more on its visceral attractiveness than its technical specifications. For example the Apple iMac and iPod are seen as essential fashion accessories, and memory sticks are now being worn as items of jewellery, etc.

Interaction design has received direct inspiration from graphic design and industrial design and terms such as user engagement, experience design [1] and seductive design [2] now compete with usability as primary concerns for HCI designers. Also, the development of ubiquitous computing systems that are embedded within the objects and environments in the physical world has contributed to an increasing interest in topics such as design aesthetics and user experience. In designing tangible artefacts and locales, researchers are facing issues related to aesthetic and experiential aspects of people's interaction with their personal, material, and socio-cultural worlds: for example, the development of the notion of *place* for the design of interactive environments [3], and the design of interactive jewellery endowed with interactive capabilities inspired by contemporary crafts methodologies [4].

There has also been a body of theoretical work that has attempted to understand the nature of the aesthetic experience of technology such as Norman (2003) [5] who looks at our emotional attachment with consumer products. Also a recent book on "*Funology*" presents a collection of perspectives on the design of computers for fun [6]. McCarthy and Wright have developed a framework for understanding human experience to support design, based on the philosophical work of John Dewey and Mikhail Bakhtin [7], to give just a few examples. This body of work has given us a set of conceptual tools for making sense of aesthetic experience coming from a variety of perspectives ranging across cognitive, behavioural, emotional and socio-cultural dimensions.

However, the relationship between such conceptual tools and design practice is not always clear, leading to a gap between understanding aesthetic experience on the one hand, and how to design aesthetics into technology, especially interactive systems, on the other. McCarthy (1999) [8] discussed the *paradox of understanding work for design* as a conflict between the divergent tendencies of social scientists who study work and the convergent needs of designers who require specifications. One may ask if there is a similar paradox at work when it comes to understanding aesthetics for design. Is it possible for designers to use conceptual tools in the design of aesthetic experience or is the designer ultimately dependent on artistic insight? Also, what is the role of user participation for aesthetic design.

This workshop aims to discuss some of these outstanding issues as well as bringing together examples of work dealing with the study of and design for aesthetic experience of technology.

## 2. WORKSHOP AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The workshop aims at bringing together researchers and practitioners with concerns regarding the aesthetic dimension of interactive technologies, to present and discuss their experience in using conceptual frameworks and/or specific methodologies for studying and designing for aesthetic experience.

As well as acting as a forum for sharing design or research cases, the workshop aims at fostering debate on a number of issues that are currently emerging regarding aesthetic aspects of interactive technologies, but not well represented in the HCI literature. For example:

- the role and importance of aesthetic concerns in the development of interactive systems that are not explicitly designed with aesthetics in mind, such as work technology;
- the users' role in authoring the aesthetic experience of technology (for example, in the case of interactive installations that respond to people's behaviour);
- the relative importance of artistic insight and of conceptual tools in the design of aesthetic experience;
- the importance of aspects of materiality in shaping the aesthetic experience.

The participants will discuss such issues in smaller groups coordinated by the workshop organisers.

Planned result of the workshop is a collection of position papers. Workshop participants will be invited to submit an extended version of their papers for potential inclusion in a special issue of "CoDesign" journal.

The workshop's website will be available at: <http://www.idc.ul.ie/WSAesthetics>.

### 2.1 Intended participants

Maximum number of participants is 20. This workshop aims to attract researchers and practitioners with backgrounds in art and design, HCI, psychology, sociology, anthropology, architecture, cultural studies, interactive systems design and communications.

Prospective participants will have interests in issues such as theoretical frameworks, development of the design process, novel interaction techniques, multi-disciplinary approaches to design.

## 3. WORKSHOP FORMAT

This full-day workshop will consist in three different sessions:

- short presentations of position papers
- group discussions
- subgroup activities.

The co-ordinators will lead the smaller group activities using brainstorming and storytelling techniques to elicit discussion on open issues.

The co-ordinators have direct research experience in the topics discussed in this proposal, as well as experience in leading discussion and design sessions.

## REFERENCES

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