Interactions: We're Not in Kansas Anymore

One of the main reasons interaction design is so magical—and so elusive—is because it touches on the very footprint of our collective soul: As we design explicitly for behavior, we affect implicitly our local culture and the fabric of our world.

Transcending our local culture is our global dependence on relationships, on personal connections, and on our ability to share in the beauty, sensuality, and realism of humanity. Emotions are often all too real, and the vibrancy of happiness and the pain of anguish paint our physical artifacts in a shallow and obvious glow. We've outgrown and outlived the making of these objects, and yet we still live with the culture these objects have helped to substantiate.

This issue highlights some difficult topics, topics that in turn emphasize a theme of interconnectedness and of human relationships. Uday Gajendar introduces a framework for considering beautiful experiences that speaks to the idea of a poetic and fluid interaction model that delves deeper than previous considerations of "usability" or "usefulness." Jeffrey and Shaowen Bardzell articulate a more tangible form of new-century beauty, as they describe the manner in which sexuality has become grounded in digital realms like Second Life. Together, these pieces describe the ways in which interaction design is beginning to examine the "highs" of life: beauty and intimacy.

Juxtaposed are the articles by Mike Wu and Chris Le Dantec. Both authors are independently investigating the often grimmer sides of humanity:

Mike describes the unfortunate reality of memory impairment in family life, while Chris offers a powerful view into the effects of technology on the homeless. Harold Thimbleby, author of *Press On*, describes how the ill consequences of poor "interaction programming" can result in death, while William Odom, Eli Blevis, and Erik Stolterman paint a grim picture of our personal environmental impact.

These topics are difficult, as they challenge us to examine our own emotions, the depth of our feelings, and the extent of our personal responsibility. Beauty, loss, and despair are real, and as the reach of interaction design grows, so do our relationships and ties to emotions in our users and consumers. At the least, we must consider these topics in the due course of our often banal job; at the most, we should absolutely examine the emotional repercussions of our design activities when our efforts are embodied in real, delivered products and services.

Therein lies an important subset of the needs that call out for new models of design and design education, such as those put forth by Meredith Davis and Hugh Dubberly. Our world is changing; old models no longer suffice. We must embrace complexity; meaningfulness supersedes simplicity.

Without question, Toto, we're not in Kansas anymore.

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