The Editor's Spotlight: TOCHI Issue 25:3

The Last Lunch. I'm just back from Montréal, where I attended CHI 2018 at the Palais des congrès, an ultra-modern convention center glassed in by huge psychedelic panes that gave the open spaces an oft-surreal cast of blue, yellow, and pink sunshine.

I was there to run the final TOCHI board meeting of my tenure as Editor-in-Chief.

And yes, in case you're wondering, the ACM Publications Board is actively seeking TOCHI's next leader. And, since many people have asked me who the next EiC will be, let me say now that all I know for sure is that it won't be me (grin). The search is being organized by Cliff Lampe, and if you want to nominate someone for the gig, please contact him with your recommendation before July 1, 2018.

But back to Montréal. Per tradition the TOCHI Editorial Board met over a nice lunch, kindly organized for us by the CHI Conference staff.

I have to admit that I felt a bit nervous and didn't sleep well the night beforehand. In my quasi-nightmares, I imagined the scene would somehow resemble Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting of The Last Supper.

But, in actuality it was not quite so dramatic (and a whole lot more fun) than *that* Last Supper.

Call it a Last Lunch.

Of course, it was a bittersweet moment as I'll miss working directly with this great group of people. Many people on the board are old friends, while at the same time this role has helped me to get to know leaders across many areas of Human-Computer Interaction less familiar to me. One of the greatest benefits of serving as Editor-in-Chief is that it broadens your horizons, and helps you to see connections, and form associations, between topics that you likely never would have thought about otherwise.

One of the things I always say in these meetings is that the Attitude and Tone of our reviews (and decision letters, and correspondence) is important to me. I stress how important it is for us to think about TOCHI manuscripts from the author's point of view. As editors, we must Enlighten, Encourage, Respect, and help Develop the authors that we work with. And I always include a slide that looks something like the following:

Be a champion for your authors.

Find reasons to like papers—even if you ultimately must decline.

Offer encouragement.

Help to build up, not tear down,

the future of our field.

If nothing else, I hope that my tenure at TOCHI has always held as true to these ideals as possible.

Another topic I always like to reflect on in these meetings—which I believe serve an important role in cementing the culture of the journal—is that of *What is it that we look for in TOCHI papers, anyway?*

Well, this is by no means a complete response, but for me the answer comes down to *Depth*, *Novelty*, and *Insight*—and remembering that our role is to have the authors “on belay.”

And, so that we have a record of these reflections in the journal before my time here is done, here’s (roughly) what I said:

Depth. It starts with great depth—of thought, and in treatment of the topic. Not superficial, or quick, or shallow—but with gritty details and meaningful, balanced reflections.

Insight. And of course manuscripts that deliver great insight... revealing things that were unexpected, or never seen before—or even pointing out the obvious—in ways that change how we think about human-computer interaction. And our approaches to the topic.

Novelty. Sometimes novelty is obvious—first tracks on completely new terrain. Or maybe it’s a relatively simple contrivance—whether of design or of technology—that changes lives. Perhaps it’s a new metaphor for how people interact with technology, yet still in primitive form.

But sometimes looking for Novelty means you have to be open to ideas that are a bit off the wall: something different, maybe not quite your thing. It might even be something as seemingly ridiculous as a giant inflatable emotionally-sentient balloon wall straight out of a J.G. Ballard *Vermillion Sands* short story about psychotropic architecture... But in all seriousness, ideas that initially seem “off the wall” can offer important contributions as well.

My only promise is that I will always read the manuscript before making any definitive judgment. Except maybe for the balloon-wall (grin).

“On Belay.” We’re often tasked to make such assessments—of a manuscript’s Depth, Insight, and Novelty—but don’t lose sight that it’s important we respect the author’s vision for the work.

They can see outcomes and potentials that we (as editors and reviewers reading their words) cannot. To borrow a metaphor from mountaineering, our job is to have authors on belay. Maybe give some advice on finding the route. But, it’s the author’s job to bring us to vistas unknown. As editors or reviewers, we have a different perspective—and may not be able to see them from where we’re standing.

Anyway, so that’s it for “Deep Thoughts” and the inspirational “TED Talk” part of my editorial... let’s get down to some actual content (grin).

IN THE SPOTLIGHT: DIGITAL BEHAVIOR CHANGE INTERVENTIONS TO BREAK AND FORM HABITS

I’ve long believed that making software amenable to the formation of habits—and thus transitioning from cognitively effortful novice-like behaviors to expert (automatic) performance that disappears into the background of attention—is a cornerstone of good user interface design.

This is also a topic I’ve been thinking about for other reasons, as well—primarily, in terms of how some of the devices and (often multi-modal) interaction techniques I work on can themselves become more “habit-forming” and therefore more likely to be adopted, and used—and ultimately, of course, useful in helping people to focus on their actual work (as opposed to the technology).

As such I found this critical review of the main theories and models around effective habitual behavior change interventions to be of considerable interest. The article covers an impressive swath of the literature, and I’m still working my way through it, but I’m finding it to be unusually insightful while also giving new structure to this interesting design space of theories and techniques. Furthermore, there is a nice treatment of design strategies, design principles, and the connection

between habit formation and context detection. So it is not just an article focused on theory, and it gives a tantalizing hint to another of my favorite topics—that of context sensing.

So I'm thoroughly intrigued. I recommend the article strongly to all TOCHI readers interested in this topic.

Charlie Pinder, Jo Vermeulen, Benjamin Cowan, and Russell Beale. 2018. Digital Behavior Change Interventions to Break and Form Habits. ACM Trans. Comput.-Hum. Interact. 25, 3, Article 15 (May 2018), 66 pages.

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Issue 3 of TOCHI Volume 25 features four other articles, as well, including the following:

- design guidelines for safely developing systems that employ electricity to the human body, such as for electric field sensing or to stimulate human muscles;
- a critical analysis of statistical quandaries that can arise in consensus measures typically used in gesture elicitation studies, suggesting that “fallacies of agreement” can arise if great care is not taken;
- an exploration of personal informatics, such as those supported by wearable devices, in amateur vs. elite athletes; as well as
- a cross-cultural validation of “privacy” as a collective construct in social media that depends on the culture in which it is studied.

Enjoy.

In my own little world, my daughter is home sick for the day. She made a lovely flower string for me from the rhododendron blooms that had fallen on our back deck, and it's time for me to go and reciprocate her loving attention. :-)

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Redmond, Washington
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