

Leisure and CSCW: Introduction to Special Edition

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Abstract. In this article we review the contribution to this special edition, and putting them into the context of research into leisure and technology. We discuss the challenges of studying leisure in a field where its very name seems to focus attention on the study of work.

Key words: enjoyment, entertainment, friendship, games, leisure, media consumption, social network analysis, tourism

1. Introduction

One of the successes of CSCW has been how it has brought new topics and techniques, previously unconnected to computer science, into the discipline. Haptic interfaces, ethnography, political economy and ethnomethodology have all entered computer science through CSCW, and have provided valuable contributions. Indeed, through expanding the horizons of relevant research, CSCW has influenced not only HCI, but ubiquitous computing, distributed systems, software engineering, as well as reached out to other disciplines such as management science and human geography (Barley and Kunda 2001; Thrift and French 2002). In some ways CSCW has acted as an ‘early adopter’ of new approaches and concerns, a passage point between distinct academic areas. It should therefore be no surprise that leisure practices, and the use of technology in leisure have become increasingly important new domains for CSCW.

This special edition brings together a set of contributions that explore what a distinct *CSCW* approach to understanding and building for leisure might be. Together the articles describe how a research field, founded in the study of work, can come to examine non-utilitarian activities. For even though the word ‘work’ in CSCW’s name might seem to exclude non-work concerns, CSCW has a broad set of contributions that bring together design and research around supporting actual, rather than imagined, activity. That leisure is an important technologically mediated activity worth investigation should hardly need to be pointed out. Yet there is still something of an academic reflex to focus on work activities over leisure, and the importance of leisure has frequently been downplayed. There is something marginal

about leisure that can let it escape our notice. Indeed, leisure's importance can still seem surprising: for example, time use studies show that the average European spends more time *watching television* than in paid employment (Smith 1995). The balance of research, of course, has not followed this surprising result.

This is not to say that leisure has escaped academic attention in particular in the healthy although still small research field of leisure studies (Bramham et al. 1995; Crouch 1999). Many of these examinations of leisure avoid a detailed engagement with the actual lived practices of leisure. This generates a familiar problem for CSCW, and those of us who draw on the social sciences to inform design: a lack of detailed descriptions of experiences, in terms of what is done, where and when. In leisure studies there has been much more of a focus on the *effects* of leisure, rather than what is involved in leisure activities itself. For example, Fodness and Murray comment that in tourism studies "detailed knowledge of the basis of actual tourist behaviour [is] lacking" (Fodness and Murry 1997), whereas Miller points out that much work on the domestic fails to describe the 'what and how' of everyday activities such as shopping or home-making (Miller 2001). These absences of detail create particularly problems for design. Without an understanding of how activities are carried out it is harder to build relevant technologies. Yet this does provide opportunities for the sort of approaches pioneered in CSCW, as the papers in this volume demonstrate.

Leisure is also something that increasingly makes use of CSCW-type technologies. As the sociality of online activity shows, many CSCW's technologies have had much more success outside the workplace than within. Collaborative virtual environments (Churchill et al. 2001), for example, although seldom used in the workplace, have blossomed into one of the most popular uses of computers in the form of massive multiplayer online games. The growth in 'social software' (Shirky 2003) builds on many CSCW chat systems, such as 'Babble' (Bradner et al. 1999) and early CSCW discussion forum systems (Bentley et al. 1997). Broadly, leisure is saturated with collaborative technology, even when we try and 'get away from it', we still show considerable attachment to our communication devices.

Even if we were to try and ignore leisure within CSCW, making a sharp divide between work and leisure is problematic (as Perry and Rachovides, this volume, demonstrate). Focusing narrowly on paid employment,¹ much of paid work is intertwined with leisure. Many of us meet our friends and partners through the workplace, or one's work itself can be the provision of leisure to others. In some senses the history of work can be read as periods of

¹ The many homonyms of work (Grint 1991) make dissecting work an interesting problem. One definition proposed in CSCW has been to take work as any purposeful activity, whatever the overall goal. However, this can conflict with many everyday understanding of the distinctness of work.

separation then integration between work and leisure, home life and employment (Burns 1973). In terms of workplace technologies, even the most utilitarian of computer technologies can depend upon the enjoyable for their acceptance (e.g. DVD drives).

The interdependences between work and leisure cuts across many core concerns of CSCW: awareness, division of labour, collaboration, distribution of tasks, efficiency and even workflow. These exist in our leisure lives as much as our work (Brown et al. 2005). It is not that leisure is exactly like paid employment, but rather that many of the concepts of CSCW are concepts of *collaborative organization*. As such, leisure can depend upon this organization as much as work, giving CSCW leverage in understanding, and designing for, this domain of activity (Crabtree et al 2005).

2. Studying and designing for leisure

Before we discuss the contributions to this volume, it is worthwhile reviewing some of the existing literature on leisure—drawing on the field of leisure studies, as well as design work supporting leisure activities. As mentioned above, leisure has attracted considerable academic interest, although this research has been generally distributed across a diversity of different domains. The study of media, sport and tourism, for example, have essentially developed independently from leisure studies. This has led to a lack of some coherence (Bramham 2006). Unlike studies of the workplace, studies of leisure seldom feature a common set of references, so contributions have tended to remain at the level of specific leisure activities (Carmichael 2006). This has lessened the contribution that could be made by drawing work across domains together. From the broad range of studies of leisure, for this special edition three domains are of most relevance to the papers here. In each of these there also exists a significant body of social science work and a (usually much smaller) body of work that engages with building technology for these activities.

Tourism is perhaps the form of leisure that has attracted the most focused attention—in particular, in terms of the many problems that tourists cause in the places they visit. One major focus of tourism studies, since the publication of MacCannel's book *The Tourist* (1976) has been the experience of visiting itself, in particular the ways in which visiting comes to constitute and construct what a tourist experience is, in that those who provide services to tourists have created an artificial experience that is tailored to the demands of tourists. Some authors have gone as far as to argue that there is now a worldwide 'tourism system' creating packaged experiences of the requisite 'foreignness' for visitors (Cheong and Miller 2000; Dann 2003). One example of this set of arguments is Urry's book 'the tourist gaze', which describes the ways in which tourists seek 'sights' and how environments come to be

arranged and constructed so as to support the ‘tourist gaze’ (Urry 1990). More recently, there has been a reappraisal of experiences of tourists, attempting a more sympathetic ethnographic engagement with the experiential aspects of tourism—for example, in Harrison’s work on the transformational quality of holiday experiences (Harrison 2001). In contrast, in terms of technological systems, the mobility of tourists has meant that a number of tourist systems have been examined as exemplars of mobile or ubiquitous computing systems. Perhaps the most well known is the Lancaster Guide system (Cheverst et al. 2000), which provided context aware information to tourists on a portable mobile device. In a similar way the Cyberguide (Abowd et al. 1997) made use of historical data on visiting, and there are also a range of systems, which have been designed specifically for interaction within museums (Brown et al. 2003). One perhaps surprising aspect of technology for tourism is that even though it is a very obvious applications of ubiquitous computing there have only been a handful of papers published researching ubiquitous visitor systems.

A second domain of interest is in how the experience of leisure activities is tied up with socialising and peer social relationships. Surprisingly, friendship is if anything something of a peripheral issue to social science (with some important exceptions—e.g. (Simmel 1949)). The work of Wellman, and more broadly social network analysis, is an important exception (Wellman and Berkowitz 2006; Wellman and Frank 2001). This research has gained renewed interest with the growing use of social networking software (instant messenger, text messages etc.). However much of this work is dominated by social network theory, an approach that focuses on analyzing social relationships in terms of relatively undifferentiated connections between individuals. While this work has been powerful in collecting data about the nature and distribution of social relationships, and particularly how those relationships might come to be consequential for personal gain (most notably in the work on weak ties (Granovetter 1983; Montgomery 1992)), their descriptions of social relationships can seem somewhat ‘bowled out’ to those of us more familiar with ethnographic accounts (Blau 1992; Granovetter 1985; Mizruchi 1994). For more detail on social relationships one must turn to the few studies that have explicitly focused on the experience of friendship (e.g. Aveni 1977; Ellis 1995; Rawlins 1992; Tillmann-Healy 2003), although this topic is touched on (if not explicitly engaged with) by nearly every ethnographic study.

Within CSCW, a number of studies have explored the role that these technologies play in friendship relationships. In particular, work on instant messaging (Grinter and Palen 2002) and text messaging (Taylor and Harper 2002) has underlined the importance of the emotional and playful aspects of communication. Text messages and instant messages are important venues for coordinating social events, gossiping and enjoying the company of

others—demonstrating care and attention to friends and loved ones. One shortcoming here has been the lack of experimentation with new features or types of instant messaging systems. Few systems have experimented with the opportunity for incorporating new types of awareness or mobility into IM (unlike Counts, this volume).

A third aspect of leisure is media consumption, and specifically video game playing. Since media studies and communications are disciplines in their own right this has meant that perhaps the most common leisure pursuit—watching television—is strangely absent from most discussions of leisure activity (frequently marginalised as ‘casual leisure’ (Stebbins 1997)). This ambiguity has been carried through into the playing of computer games as a form of leisure. Within media studies games have drawn more interest, in part for how they raise issues concerning the relationship between activity—the different forms that media consumption takes as an active process—and ‘textual’ approaches to media that focus on the media itself.² This has played out in the debate between those interested in studying game play – the ‘ludic’ experience of games, and those who instead focus on analysing games out-with any specific sites of gameplay (Castronova 2005; Juul 2001).

Games have also attracted growing interest in CSCW and CHI—although with quite different methods and approaches to media studies. Recent work such as “Can you see me now?” (Flintham et al. 2003)—(winner of an Ars Electronic award) have demonstrated much of the value of games as a HCI topic. This has inspired both research and commercial interest in ‘pervasive games’ - games that take place out on the city streets. Virtual environment based internet games (so called Massive Multiplayer Online Games—MMoGs) have also been a topic of considerable interest (e.g. Ducheneaut et al, this volume).

3. In the special edition

The papers in this special issue present several different approaches to studying leisure technologies. Each paper reflects uniquely on the CSCW relevance of leisure—not only what is involved in leisure activity but the consequences for leisure oriented technology. They illustrate how broadly the concept of leisure should be viewed and how the premature setting of boundaries limits the applicability of our research. Leisure involves different steps on the way to enjoyment, from planning, to execution, to revisiting, each addressed in a different way by the papers in this collection.

² There is an interesting contrast here with the reception studies that have explored in more depth the active work of viewers in making a home for television, and work on how readers create their own meanings and interpretations of popular media. It must be said that the role of consumers in this work is often very much downplayed, as opposed to the ‘structural conditions under which media is consumed’. (Gauntlett 1998)

O'hara et al. starts the special edition by describing an experience oriented mobile system for Zoo visiting. Although targeted towards children, the study broadly provides particular insight into challenges of deploying mobile technology in an open environment. In particular the particular technology used at the Zoo (involving barcodes to provide access to information) were less efficient for larger school groups of children than individuals. O'hara's study echoes existing work on tourism and museum visiting, underlining the importance of not only augmenting visits with with information but also the sharing and social revisiting of information.

The second paper in this volume by Schiano et al. addresses the planning and structuring of leisure activities among a technology savvy population: groups of friends meeting in Tokyo. The study is motivated not only by the high level of mobile technology use in Japan but also the need to co-ordinate numerous constraints for Tokyo's inhabitants such as long commutes, tight schedules and dispersed friendship groups. While in many ways we might think of leisure as more ad hoc than employment, this paper opens up the particular problems of co-ordination involved in leisure. Again, this invites reflection on simple dichotomies between work and leisure.

Of the daily activities related to social leisure, communication is perhaps one of the most important aspects, and communicating about social activities is now possible through a myriad of technologies, the mobile phone being one of the most significant devices. The third paper in this special edition by Counts, presents a multi-functional tool providing text and photo messaging for groups. Moving beyond the rudimentary picture sharing offered on most mobile phones, this work explores the use of this tool as a low cost method for simple communication. Group messaging and coordination among friends was found to be a great source of enjoyment and the technology resonates with the co-ordination explored in Schiano's paper.

Another more low-tech, but nevertheless important way of communicating is through paper messages, often left strategically at specific places at home. Our fourth paper, by Perry and Rachovides describes how such practical chores of communication can prove to be playful and enjoyable experiences. This paper highlights the ways in which playful and the seemingly trivial, have an important role to play in leisure—even if they escape the attention of traditional HCI. The authors go on to explore the fluid relationships between chores and self-created entertainment.

The final three papers explore the familiar theme of games. Ducheneaut et al. paper explores sociability in a popular multi-player online game, *Star Wars Galaxies*. Their virtual ethnography compares social 'third places' described by Oldenburg, with the game simulation of these environments. They question if virtual places can support any sort of sociability and the different game mechanisms that attempt to encourage it. In this case, the social architecture of the game combined with goal oriented game playing, does not

seem promote to social behaviour and it merely becomes 'dutiful' social behaviour. In contrast, Crabtree et al.'s work takes a look behind the scenes in the running of a multi player game discussing what is involved in running a performance game, *Day of the Figurines*, a multi-player game taking place throughout players' normal day. Crabtree's paper uncovers how the orchestration of the game becomes intertwined with the actual experience of the game from players' points of view.

Finally, our last paper looks at a new type of game play: physical exercise games. Grinter and Sall present an ethnographic study of physical game play at home, highlighting the unique problems and challenges this specific type of game play triggers when removed from the video arcade to the home. Physical exercise games sit between two different type of activities—the fun of games, and the 'chore' of exercise—provided user with challenges in how they account for their gameplaying.

4. Conclusion

There is some irony in how a field such as CSCW, and the concepts it has developed, have turned out to be of relevance when looking at leisure. Yet in some senses this is not surprising. Work and leisure rely upon much in common—they exist in similar social worlds of money, exchange, interaction and the like. Work and leisure have a strong interdependence, one that CSCW can profitably explore. As we have argued these important interconnections can be revealing for how we live our lives and use technology. CSCW, by drawing on the lessons and contributions from studying work, can reveal aspects of both leisure and work that have remained neglected in both literatures.

However, this is not to say that CSCW-orientated studies of leisure are not without their challenges. In particular, studying leisure demands that we consider aspects of practice, such as happiness and enjoyment, as much as effectiveness or efficiency. These challenges apply also to the outputs of research too. The value of our implications, or how much we influence the use of leisure technology, cannot be measured simply in terms of its economic contribution. Taking on leisure invites us to question how our research has a payoff in its contribution to greater happiness or welfare, or technology that promote happiness or welfare. In investigating leisure CSCW needs to take a broader view on the outputs of research. To use a contrasting example, the value of computer graphics research is not just in how it contributes to economic growth – but the aesthetic beauty of its creations, and the enjoyment caused by its outputs. For CSCW, this invites reflection on the products of our research. Greater happiness and welfare are provoking goals for academic research, particularly since recent work suggests that happiness and economic growth may not even be particularly correlated (Layard 2005).

Our goal of this special edition has been therefore not simply to move CSCW into studying leisure, entertainment and pleasure but to explore the new contributions and outputs from our research. How can our methods help develop enjoyable and not just effective systems? How can we explore enjoyment as a broad research goal? Engaging with the contributions of our research of this kind questions the implicit economic assumptions of building new technology, and offers new opportunities for reflections on CSCW goals and purposes.

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