

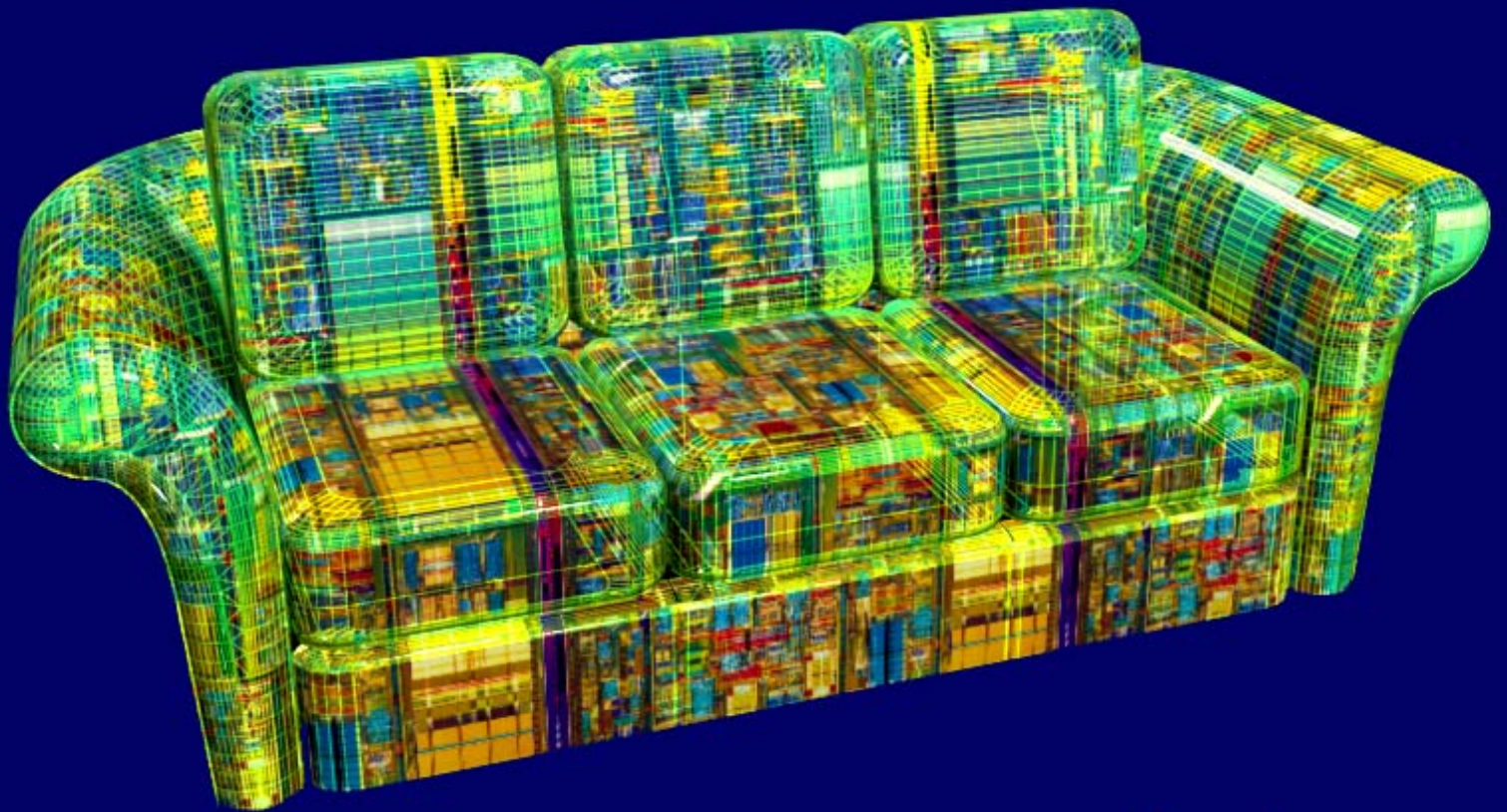
TARGET ISSUE

usability in electronic environments

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Editorial Preface

Time has passed since the idea first crossed our minds of a periodic publication devoted to a theme fascinating us to the point of obsession: the strict connection between humans and technologies. Enjoyable from so many different perspectives - practical, artistic, philosophical-, this theme is acquiring more and more supporters now, gradually dissolving clear-cut disciplinary distinctions that separate people from their technical artifacts and showing its strong conceptual and practical assets.

Simple in its basic claim but subtle in its actual deployment, this perspective calls for complex, careful investigative efforts and pays back with a richer, closer grasp of the phenomena it is applied to. In the process of its realization, the original idea of a newsletter has been replaced by that of a website with an included periodical publication, where a more variegated set of activities could be displayed and which could better support our expanding community, whose core is constituted of people knowing each other for having worked together at times, but seeks new contributors relentlessly.

The point of the journal is in fact to make visible new, original work and, seizing on the advantages of an electronic publication, to attract fresh yet circumstantiated ruminations from young authors on whatever format they prefer. The journal intends to facilitate the exploration of its general theme by proposing a specific topic each issue; for the first issue we have selected the topic of 'usability' since it is well representative of how technologies are intertwined with people

using them and are affected in their very design and functioning by such interdependence.

Usability is a widely acknowledged concern in the engineering community and has triggered close cooperation with other disciplinary fields. Two papers address this issue; Spagnoli, Gamberini and Gasparini describe a procedure ('breakdown analysis') step-by-step for the usability evaluation of virtual environments, implementing those action-based theories which are currently receiving such a warm appreciation in the field of Human-Computer Interaction. A similar theoretical approach is supported by Giuseppe Riva, whose paper offers a comprehensive framework to handle the issue of web usability and organize the confusing plethora of recommendations available in the literature.

Casarotti et al. reviewed various distance learning solutions too see how performance is effected by the degree of interaction users are allowed.

There is another contribution on usability, written by Pietro Guardini who interrogates on the extent to which a successful videogame can be said 'realistic' and guides the reader thorough a detailed series of examples to illustrate the tricks through which players' expectations are indulged.

We hope you will find this first issue satisfying and the topic so intriguing in itself to send your own contribution to the journal or to any other section of the web site.

The Editors in Chief