
“Being-in-the-World”: Embodied Interaction

Chapters 2 and 3 introduced tangible and social computing, two current research directions in Human-Computer Interaction. HCI, of course, encompasses much more than these two areas of research, but the goal was not to be comprehensive. The goal, instead, was to provide enough background to support an argument that, despite the fact that they are normally taken to be different research agendas, tangible and social computing are in fact two different aspects of the same program of investigation. This chapter sets out to show how.

Chapter 1 considered the development of HCI in terms of the human skills and abilities that interactive technologies draw upon. Understanding the relationship between tangible and social computing means finding the common skills and abilities they exploit.

One straightforward observation is that they both smooth interaction by exploiting a sense of “familiarity.” Tangible and social computing both capitalize upon our familiarity with the everyday world, a world of social and physical interactions. As physical beings, we are unavoidably enmeshed in a world of physical facts. We cannot escape the world of physical objects that we lift, sit on, and push around, nor the consequences of physical phenomena such as gravity, inertia, mass, and friction. But our daily experience is social as well as physical. We interact daily with other people, and we live in a world that is socially constructed. Elements of our daily experience—family, technology, highway, invention, child, store, politician—gain their meaning from the network of social interactions in which they figure. So, the social and the physical are intertwined and inescapable aspects of our everyday experiences. Tangible and social