



# Where the Action Is: The Foundations of Embodied Interaction (MIT Press)

By Paul Dourish

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Computer science as an engineering discipline has been spectacularly successful. Yet it is also a philosophical enterprise in the way it represents the world and creates and manipulates models of reality, people, and action. In this book, Paul Dourish addresses the philosophical bases of human-computer interaction. He looks at how what he calls "embodied interaction" -- an approach to interacting with software systems that emphasizes skilled, engaged practice rather than disembodied rationality -- reflects the phenomenological approaches of Martin Heidegger, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and other twentieth-century philosophers. The phenomenological tradition emphasizes the primacy of natural practice over abstract cognition in everyday activity. Dourish shows how this perspective can shed light on the foundational underpinnings of current research on embodied interaction. He looks in particular at how tangible and social approaches to interaction are related, how they can be used to analyze and understand embodied interaction, and how they could affect the design of future interactive systems.

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## **Editorial Review**

### Review

Human-computer interaction meets philosophical treatments of embodiment. The result: a foundational study of living and acting in a wired world. And a rare achievement too: a readable and engaging book which manages to be both sensible and groundbreaking at the same time.

**(Andy Clark, Department of Philosophy, University of Edinburgh)**

A revolution in design and the role of computer science is upon us: *Where the Action Is* describes the way. In the old days, the focus was upon the technology and 'computing,' hence the interest is the interface between humans and machines -- us versus them. Not anymore. As Dourish so cogently explains, design should not be about tasks and their requirements, or applications, or computing--design is really about interaction, with a focus on ubiquity, tangibility, and most of all, shared awareness, intimacy, and emotions. This is a revolution badly needed: It's about time.

**(Donald A. Norman, Norman Nielsen Group and UNext Learning Services, author of *The Invisible Computer*)**

*Where the Action Is* provides intellectual foundations for the emerging movement that makes people, and not machines, central to the process of design. With a clarity and thoughtfulness that make hard ideas easy, Paul Dourish's book will only increase in importance as the social nature of computing becomes evident to a new generation of technologists.

**(Philip E. Agre, Department of Information Studies, University of California, Los Angeles)**

Engagingly written....

**(R. Keith Sawyer *Philosophical Psychology*)**

Important reading for anyone engaged in designing computer-based systems to support human activities... full of interesting ideas and insights.

**(Richard Mateosian *IEEE Micro*)**

In this beautifully written book, Paul Dourish synthesizes conceptual resources drawn from across the humanities, social and computing sciences, in a way that is generative for our thinking about human/artifact relations. He surveys an intellectual terrain that provides both theoretical and practical support for new forms of engagement across the disciplines, and with the objects of creative technical practice. This book will be a resource not only for designers in human-computer interaction and computer-supported cooperative work but also for scholars of science and technology interested in understanding those worlds from a deeply insightful,

reflective practitioner's point of view.

(**Lucy Suchman**, Professor, Centre for Science Studies, Lancaster University)

This is the first book to provide a broad view of how our interaction with computers is intertwined with our physical world. Dourish gives a wealth of examples of innovations in computer technologies, along with a deep grounding in the philosophical, psychological, and sociological issues and theories. The book is unique in combining great breadth of intellectual underpinnings with a clear explanation that elucidates the relationships between the fields without falling prey to the jargon of either. Everyone interested in seeing where computer interaction is leading us in the coming century will benefit from the wide view and clear perspective that Dourish presents.

(Terry Winograd, Professor of Computer Science, Stanford University)

#### About the Author

Paul Dourish is Professor of Informatics at the University of California, Irvine, with courtesy appointments in Computer Science and in Anthropology.

### Users Review

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##### **Dina Hirsch:**

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##### **Jeff Brown:**

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