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Algorithms, Aprons, Accountability: The Edges of HCI's Big Tent

Welcome to the March-April issue of *Interactions*. In our cover story, "Interdisciplinarity in HCI: What Happened in Our Big Tent?", HCI pioneer John M. Carroll traces the field's history. He attributes HCI's success to the pragmatic partnership between psychology and computer science. Carroll argues that the future lies in "socially grounded" interdisciplinarity, where we don't organize by departments, but by teams focused on addressing important, real-world problems. He points to SIGCHI's specialty conferences as the true incubators of innovation. They encourage us to embrace friction, shared responsibility, and focus on problem-centric and "edgy" research.

Last year, ACM President Yannis Ioannidis previewed ACM's planned transition to an open access model. Now, two months after its completion, Ioannidis reflects on its impact so far and how ACM is responding to feedback from the community. It's a valuable update for *Interactions* readers.

Renato Leite Monteiro makes his *Interactions* debut with a wake-up call: Your interface design could be reframed as a legal framework. In "Design Is Law: Regulatory Consequences of Interface Choices in AI Systems," he uses the regulatory backlash against ChatGPT to illustrate how specific design choices carry serious legal weight. By bringing legal and design teams together, he argues, we can turn compliance into a creative opportunity for building trust. Monteiro demonstrates that clear, accessible explanations aren't just good UX; they're a critical defense against regulatory violation and, consequently, a shield from product and platform failure.

In "From Interactions to Investments: Using Data-Driven Design to Prove Game Potential," Pejman Mirza-Babaei tackles the passion vs. profit struggle in game design. Passion usually fuels the initial spark of a concept in game design, but Mirza-Babaei argues that data is what secures the future, reframing analytics not as a cold business hurdle, but as an empathetic tool. By blending the *what* (quantitative data) with the *why* (qualitative player insights), he shows how a deliberate, evidence-backed process can turn a creative dream into a project that investors can get behind.

In our Waves section, Bruno Oro, Jason Cornaro, Subinay Malhotra, and Ugochukwu Eluchie detail an innovative industrial design course where students swapped CAD software for bagel dough. It might sound whimsical, but there's a serious lesson here about embodied knowledge—you can't learn empathy or resilience from a screen the way you can from a batch of dough that refuses to rise. The article is an inspiring blueprint for educators seeking to foster empathy and community through the universal language of food.

Moving from the kitchen to the lab, Martina Mara and her team at the Robopsychology Lab at Johannes Kepler University Linz, address the "visual void" of AI. Their installation, *Faces of AI*, uses "magic eye" screens to force visitors to physically shift their perspective to see how stock photography shapes, and therefore often misleads, our perception of algorithms.

Josh Andres and Preethi Srinivas are launching *Career Making*, a new series that will explore career trajectories, opportunities, and anxieties in the world of HCI and UX. Rather than viewing the current moment as a period of decline, they frame it as a critical evolution, tracing the field's history from the systems-oriented 1970s to the pixel-perfect mobile era. Andres and Srinivas call for a transition from optimization to stewardship, urging practitioners to embrace expanded roles in policy, ethics, and global infrastructure. By contextualizing current industry disruptions within a historical framework, they invite us to move from existential dread toward actionable opportunity. We applaud this directive. If you're attending the ACM CHI 2026 conference in April, please drop by our *Interactions* meetup to discuss this topic further.

Lastly, in a beautiful Exit, Renato Verdugo and Scott Minneman showcase the work of Quoï Alexander, who is redefining fast fashion as a regenerative cycle. By crafting an alternative to single-use hotel slippers from Japanese agricultural waste, such as shiitake stems and seaweed, Alexander has designed for a new kind of VIP *end user*: the soil itself. It's a poetic reminder that the most innovative design choice can be the one that returns nutrients to the earth.

On a somber note, Vicki Hanson, HCI scholar, accessibility advocate extraordinaire, and former president and CEO of ACM, passed away on January 20, 2026. Aaron Quigley and Elizabeth share their indelible memories of Vicki.

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