

Statement of Intent

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Seven years ago I entered the Digital Design program at the college of DAAP for its variety of technical and artistic topics. Its curriculum included classes in 3D, audio, animation, drawing, interaction, narrative, photography, programming, typography, and video. More importantly, classes typically involved the intersection of a number of these topics. A cross-disciplinary approach to affecting and analyzing aesthetics was a core part of my education. Over the course of my studies, I also had a variety of professional experiences through the University of Cincinnati's co-op program including paid internships at Hasbro Toys, Hasbro Games, and Big Spaceship.

Since graduation, my fulltime and freelance work has revolved around Flash development and animation. I specialize in computational solutions for dynamic visuals. Outside of work, I particularly enjoy studying typography (an interest which took me to the Basel School of Design last summer) and game design. I also go through an occasional fit of life drawing or playing music.

My interest in interaction design was cemented during undergrad after a conversation between my roommate and I over whether an on-screen character in a game should be referred to as him (the character) or you (my roommate). While topics relating to character audience relationships can be found in any literary or dramatic medium, game characters prove interesting as they can reflect not just general aspects of an audience but also the audience's immediate actions and reactions. The topic eventually served as the basis for a research paper attempting to formulate the dynamics between players and characters in terms of a character's behavioral dependencies. Building primarily off Costikyan's discussion of game tokens in his essay "I Have No Words & I Must Design" I found that the qualities of these dependencies could be abstracted to any interactive system. Through this research, I gained an understanding of screen based interaction design as a discipline that, while manifesting itself visually, is marked by a particular concern with the indirect, temporal, and generally invisible relationships that characterize its aesthetics.

I've found the easiest way to understand the importance of non-visual aesthetics is from looking at traditional non-computer games. The characteristics of almost any game are not tied so much to the visual and tactile qualities of its pieces but, more importantly to the rules that govern their manipulation. Interestingly, the design of these systems is a practice of reducing the natural interactive potential of the material where as screen-based systems have no inherit interactive potential but must have their systems explicitly defined. In each case however, the rules governing how the system should respond to use are vital to its aesthetics.

Understanding how behavioral principles of a single user screen-based interactive piece influence its aesthetics and may be manipulated for functional or communicative purposes is my main impetus for pursuing graduate study. A potential goal of my research would be to create studies for personal investigation of the objective qualities of compelling interaction. These studies would initially involve limited abstract visual aesthetics and stress behavioral variations. As any number of static or time based visualizations could be based on a singular behavioral system, these studies could also be used for more traditional investigation.

The qualities of multi-user spaces could be a topic of further research. When it comes to design I've found that the discussion and critique of a project is often as compelling as the work itself. I've had two opportunities to act as a TA for design freshmen and found the experiences to be not only enjoyable but also educational and inspirational for myself. In contrast, the actual process of creating content in front of the screen can be somewhat isolating. As such, the idea of bringing a more human experience to the process is rather appealing. I'm particularly interested in collaborative environments where content can be manipulated by multiple users.

My most important career goal consists of finding an environment where I can continue to explore. Furthermore I'm far more interested in solving aesthetic problems related to products than those related to marketing messages. While I'm interested in games, my end goal is not to end up in the field; I simply enjoy studying them for insights into how people learn and manipulate systems, and how their visualizations can help or hinder various goals. Ideally, I'd like to spend my time contributing to the discourse, critique, and education of interaction design whether through research, instruction, or the creation of tools for manipulating content.

—*Ian Bellomy*