

# **BRIDGET JONES' IPOD**

## *Relating Macro and Micro Theories of User Experience Through Pastiche Scenarios*

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**Abstract:** This paper draws on macro and micro theories of user experience in order to focus on the use of Apple's iPod. It begins by outlining macro theories from Cultural Studies on the process of product articulation illustrated with reference to the Sony Walkman. The paper then turns to more recent theories of user experience generated in HCI over the past five years that offer micro accounts of experience and the ways in which a product interaction is shaped by particular people in particular contexts. These theoretical approaches are brought together in an account of the Apple iPod using pastiche scenarios that draw on popular fiction as a resource for reflecting on design. The account focuses on broad developments in the recording industry and also instances of individual iPod use

**Key words:** User experience, ubiquitous computing, wearable technology, acceptance and use of new technologies.

### **1. MACRO AND MICRO THEORIES OF USER EXPERIENCE**

There have been many studies of technology in use carried out in Cultural Studies over the past twenty years and the theoretical accounts that emerged from them are often neglected in Human Computer Interaction (HCI) although they are often relevant. When the Sony walkman first appeared it caused much debate about the privatisation of public space: the user could effectively isolate themselves from their environment to create their own experience of it; problems of personal stereo etiquette such as volume and appropriate location caused, and to an extent continue to cause, concerns about isolation, alienation, manners, home taping and copyright

infringement. Stuart Hall's *Doing Cultural Studies* traces the story of the walkman's production from original designs, to modifications following market research, to its adoption and integration in everyday life. Hall described "a circuit of culture" in which there were complex interrelationships between production, consumption, regulation, representation and identification (Hall and Du Guy 1997). The initial designs for the walkman for instance, envisaged two users listening to the device because it was believed that people would not want to listen to music by themselves. When it was discovered in early user tests that this is precisely what people wanted to do the design was modified. How the product was consumed then influenced later production. The study also traced, the development of the products name. This had to be "cool", early suggestions included "soundabout, stowaway" and "freestyle" (Ibid). Marketing campaigns were analysed to account for the process of representation in the media and the ways that people identified with the product, there was a concern then with what users thought the product said about them and how these messages were constructed. In order to account for the process of regulation the study focused on the recording industry's "home taping kills music" campaign in the nineteen seventies and eighties. This circuit of culture model can be thought of as a macro account of the ways in which cultural artefacts come to be embedded in everyday life. McCarthy and Wright (2004) in their analysis of technology as experience have argued that cultural analysis, valuable though it is to HCI has a tendency to downplay the role and diversity of individual experience.

In HCI there have been several attempts to account for user experience at the level of the individual (Ford and Forlizzi 2000, Davis 2004, McCarthy and Wright 2004). Wright and McCarthy argue that individual and cultural should be seen not as alternative perspectives on experience but rather as deeply inter-penetrating aspects of a more relational account of how we make sense of technology. They argue that the experience of technology is co-constructed by the designer, the user and the artefact with the user bringing values and meanings based on their own personal history and experience. Their relational or 'dialogical' approach suggests that our analytical methods should not force us to talk in terms of culture or individual experience but rather in terms of the individual-in-culture.

This paper attempts to combine the macro and micro approaches to user experience by reflecting on Apple's iPod. The next section presents a macro account focusing on the development of the recording industry. The section after that focuses on micro theories and considers the experience of use in pastiche scenarios.

## 2. THE RECORDING INDUSTRY: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

It has only been possible for musicians to make money from recording performances for a relatively short period of time. Although technologically possible since Emerson it was not until the mid nineteen twenties that gramophones were aimed at a mass market (Norman 1998). As the recording industry developed the sale of classical music made enough money for the particular companies to grow but few individual musicians could refer to the sale of their recordings as primary sources of income. It was not until the nineteen fifties that recordings of particular performances were bought by sufficient numbers of people to make a primary source of income for musicians. Up until around sixty years ago then, musicians made money by performing, not by recording their performances and selling that recording. The Beatles were the first group to become recording rather than performing artists. From Sergeant Pepper onwards the group stopped touring and the albums became the performances (MacDonald 1995).

When the Beatles launched "The Beatles" commonly known as "the white album" it was principally available on vinyl LP. As cassettes became more popular the situation became slightly more complicated and we witnessed the first great panic to seize the recording industry. Home taping, consumers were assured, was killing music. Although Beatles fans might have thought that they had bought the white album, the recording industry's position was that they had in fact merely bought a piece of circular plastic with grooves cut into it. The recording industry still owned the music and if the music became available in another format then consumers would have to buy that as well. And following the development of the compact disc this is exactly what many consumers did. They bought for a second time the albums they had previously owned in the LP format. This was, of course, a very profitable situation for the recording industry which made as much if not more from its back catalogue during the 1980s than it did from new recordings. So it was in *Men In Black* that Tommy Lee Jones could show Will Smith a newer, tinier music disc and tell him that this was going to replace CDs "Now" he remarks "I'll have to buy the white album again"

But the new format was not a newer smaller CD as the makers of that film imagined. The mini-disc never really took off as a replacement for CDs. The new format was not a tangible object it was a computer file. Marsall McLuhan famously argued that the medium is the message. The results of industrial automation were job losses regardless of the kind of machine in question (McLuhan in Munns and Rajan eds 1995). In this sense the iPod is a fundamentally subversive technology. The final layer of its justly celebrated packaging is a cellophane wrapper bearing the inscription

“Don’t steal music” in four languages. However, when it is connected to a MAC it immediately copies every song from the iTunes library into its memory without any reference to whether the music has been paid for or not: it is essentially amoral despite the manufactures admonitions. Increasingly music users are engaging in moral debates in order to justify and validate their experiences of technology. The British government have launched a music manifesto which will teach children that file sharing is wrong (Lettice 2004). However the interpretation of file sharing as theft can be and is contested (Woodworth 2004). Some music consumers then are beginning to think that they have bought the white album enough now.

Although mix tapes have long been produced by music fans the iPod allows for immediate re-organizations of material and for random elements to be incorporated. The iPod, unlike the walkman, introduces such elements to the listening experience as randomness. Someone listening to the white album on an iPod set to play tracks from it randomly will have a very different experience to someone listening to the album as it was made to be played: in a linear sequence of around twenty minutes per side. Indeed the Beatles spent a long time arguing about the sequence of songs on the white album and great care was taken to see that they flowed into one another (MacDonald 1995). With an iPod the user has far greater control, the user can literally co-construct the album. The technology liberates the user not just from the recording industry but also from the artist and the ways that they envisaged the experience of their music. Of course the music industry and certain artists within it (notably Metallica) have resorted to litigation in order to protect the existing models of music consumption – themselves accidents of technology. Legal means of file sharing such as the iTunes online shop and the iTunes network sharing facility are possible new models of music distribution and consumption but clearly we are still witnessing the process of articulation.

### **3. THE INDIVIDUAL IN CULTURE: PASTICHE SCENARIOS**

A historical perspective on the development of the technology indicates that the use of any new media will be contested. This macro level account of the experience of technology has little to say about individuals with particular histories experiencing technology. Michael Bull has identified patterns of personal stereo use such as creating personal space, blocking intrusive sounds and images and disengaging from particular social situations (Bull 2000). These insights were drawn from interviews with personal stereo and iPod users but user studies are not the only way of reflecting on technology

in use. Scenarios have long been used in HCI to reflect on use where either time, resources or access do not permit extensive user studies. A scenario, as the term is usually used in HCI, is a short narrative illustrating how a user might interact with some device or service providing sufficient detail to suggest design implications (Carroll 1997). They have been used to summarise the results of semi-formal user-centred requirements analysis (Monk 1998) and to summarise findings from field studies and other observations as the input to creating a design rationale (Carroll and Rosson 2003). They may also be useful in considering the impact of new technologies as they are adopted or articulated. Cooper (1999) argued that scenarios are only effective when used with personae. He argued that there are no typical users, no one, for example has two point three children. He suggested the construction of personae with names, ages, jobs and details about how they lived. Lene Nielsen has argued that users in scenarios are often mere functionaries that illustrate the workings of the product being described. She suggests drawing on traditions of European character driven film to generate more vivid and compelling characterizations.

Similarly, Wright and McCarthy (2004) have argued that the novel and in particular, the character-based novel is potentially a valuable tool for analyzing user experience since it provides a lens on the emotional-volitional nature of human agency. Pastiche is a style of writing that borrows from other texts and can be used as a method for creating rich personae in scenarios who represent individuals in culture. Pastiche scenarios then draw on existing narratives in order to create richer and more resonant descriptions of users and technologies (Blythe 2004).

The following scenario pastiches Bridget Jones' diary:

*Gah! Almost missed train. Got on in nick of time but had no choice of seat. Just one left next to quite nice looking bloke but opposite nasty looking youth in baseball cap. Said youth plugged in v. loud headphones almost immediately so had no choice but to play nice new iPod. Took this out below table with some care. Wanted nice chap to see it (advertise self as successful young professional) but not youth in cap (must not see self as very much worth mugging.)*

The identification with the iPod (self as glamorous young professional) is counterpointed by her fear that it makes her a target for crime (mugging by said youth). This anxiety can be thought of as one of the problems of what Reed calls "losable" technology as a counterpoint to the current term "wearable". (Reed submitted). The iPod has important symbolic functions then which are multiple and mutable.

*Listened to Dear Prudence. V. good song. Reminds me of first year at uni and Marcus. Nice bloke and Beatles fanatic. Apparently John Lennon wrote said song for Mia Farrow's sister. They were in India being all spiritual and following the Maharajah or similar. This Prudence went off deep end and meditated for about three days straight in manner of scary hermit. Think of it - Paul McCartney and John Lennon outside strumming guitars and probably in need of severe seeing to after all the chanting and what not, and Prudence decides she'd rather sit in dark hut. Inappropriate lyrics current weather-wise. "The sun is out, the sky is blue, it's beautiful and so are you" I think not John, I think you'll find that the clouds are low, the sky is grey and the awful youth in front of me is picking his nose. Hippies. Mean well I suppose but it just isn't practical. All you need is love. Pah. What about chocolate and fags? Not to mention a nice Chardonnay.*

Her memories about other encounters with the white album, the stories she knows about the Beatles; her images of India; the atmosphere of the music; the lyrics of the song; her imagination and the technology delivering the sounds combine to make a unique experience. This experience is both an internal and an external event.

*"Look around around around around round" Beatles suggest. I do and the landscape doesn't seem so bleak. For a moment I feel all sixties. Yes, everything is beautiful, even youth in front of me. And of course he's not a mugger just because he likes baseball caps. Peace, love, yes, why not? Then abrupt stop. Forgot to charge wretched iPod so spent rest of journey listening to youth's tinny headphone sound and trying to work out why he was listening to swarm of bees humming song by Metallica. Then it occurred that youth was listening at least to a CD, not stolen songs like self on one woman crime wave.*

Although it is commonly argued that personal stereos are alienating, turning what was once a communal activity (listening to music) into a personal one and making public spaces private, the scenario illustrates the ways in which experiences of technology can be as intense and moving as any experience of art.

"at its height it [experience] signifies complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events" (Dewey 1934: 19)

The user brings their own past, constantly changing expectations and reflections to bear on an experience. The user's personal history, knowledge and values then play a large part in the experience and the technology allows for the expression of a range of values, contrary to those of the music

industry and the law as it stands. iTunes are still negotiating for the Beatles back catalogue. The only way currently that Bridget could have got Dear Prudence onto her machine is by copying a CD she owned or one that she did not own.

*Is this on? Not sure. Supposing had bought white album instead of lending it from Shaz and copying it onto computer. Money would go straight to Yoko Ono and whinging Julian Lennon. Seem to remember John Lennon saying he did not want his kids turning into new aristocracy or similar. Quite right. Must save poor Sean from terrible fate of perpetual payment. Shouldn't buy Beatles again on principle. Intellectual property is theft. Hmm, quite a ring to it that. Must write some sort of article on same.*

The experience of the iPod is made up not just of stories about the songs creation, her own memories and the song itself, but also of her moral and political attitudes to the technology: the experience of the iPod then, is not only social, cultural and aesthetic but also moral and political.

It may be argued that Bridget Jones is a stereotype. Viewers of the recent film sequel would be justified in thinking so. But the character in the book is much more than that, the text could not have resonated at the level it did were it otherwise. Bridget Jones may be a caricature but she is certainly more vivid than the kind of stereotype a conventional scenario might evoke and so a useful device for thinking about the micro levels of experience that recent HCI theories articulate. Patrick Jordan has argued that method acting can be a useful way for researching groups (criminals for example) who cannot be reached by more conventional methods (Blythe 2004). Pastiche scenarios might also be used in this way. Imagine, for instance, that the youth in the baseball cap opposite Bridget Jones in the last set of scenarios is one of Irvine Welsh's Trainspotting characters, Renton. In the following scenarios, Renton sits opposite Bridget having quite a different experience of the same environment.

*This Velvet Underground track is making me wish I had some skag. It is impossible to maintain an anti-drug position and listen to great music. If Paul McCartney had done more hardcore drugs he would have composed less shite like the frog's chorus, the result, evidently of wine and marajuana. "When I'm rushing on my run And I feel like Jesus son" Yes, I could do with some of that. But no I tell myself I'm off that shite for good now. When this train meets its destination Mark Renton arrives a new man, a man on a diet high in moral fibre. Aye, maybe just one more hit though eh? And that woman has in her possession one skag voucher of the highest order, an iPod. White earphones, dead giveaway. Worth*

*about three hundred quid retail, on the open market, more than enough for one last hit. And she's only popped it into her right hand jacket pocket, just near the aisle, perfect.*

Here then is a perhaps infrequently recognised affordance of an iPod, not only is it a machine for playing music it is also a means of raising cash. The portability so attractive to users is also a useful feature for thieves. Mobile phone theft is one of the highest growing crimes in the UK, as palm computers, PDAs and iPods increase in popularity so too will, if not actual crime rates, then fear of crime rates. These items are what Reed (submitted) would call "stealables".

*Some gadget in a suit is saying something to me, I remove an earpiece and raise a laconic eyebrow in the style of the young Sean Connery*

*- Excuse me I think you're in my seat.*

*- I don't think so, I reply with as straight a face as possible. - I reserved this seat in good faith.*

*That's strange, can I have a look at your ticket?*

*- Certainly not, I know my rights.*

Everyone around us is pretending not to listen. The woman is shitting herself, all of them just wishing I'd go away.

*I stall him and the tension builds. Eventually I ask to see his ticket.*

*- I'm terribly sorry, clearly there's been some terrible misunderstanding. Fucking GNER or whatever you call the privatised shite eh?*

*I flash round a friendly smile but everyone looks away, including the target. I stumble against her and slip the skag voucher away unnoticed.*

*Sorry madam, I do apologise.*

*I laugh and she looks terrified. We're almost at the station and one last hit. "Enjoy." Thank you Mr iPod, don't mind if I do.*

Ironically, just as Bridget Jones is debating the morality of copying music (or stealing music if the recording industries' construal is accepted) Renton steals her iPod. The use of pastiche prevents the scenario from becoming one of an ideal use situation, Bridget's hapless and disorganised character suggesting that she would not have charged her iPod. Renton's addiction suggesting the affordances of the iPod in terms of its stealability. The iPod slogan "enjoy" is re-situated by the character and its meanings are subverted.

*I had to buy a charger so as to make it a better buy. The woman's music collection represented a shocking state of affairs. The only decent album on it was by the Beatles. Her top 25 playlist had All by myself at the top!*



*All by Myself! I'm no fucking surprised love listening tae crap like that. That track alone knocked at least twenty quid off its value. Trying to explain the technological possibilities of the machine to drug dealers was an exercise in futility. I tried to tell them that all they had to do was steal a MAC and they'd be sorted but they weren't biting. More skag inspired musicians required in that music collection. The white album, case in point. Lennon off his tits on skag writes Happiness is a Warm Gun. McCartney contributes music hall shite like Rocky Raccoon. I need a fix cos I'm going down.*

When an iPod is stolen so too is an entire music collection. This is likely to have far more value to the person who has lost it than the thief. The iPod, containing playlists of the most frequently played songs is highly personalised and its loss might be felt quite profoundly. Bridget and Renton's opposing notions of what constitutes good music and their widely different readings of the white album indicate the particularity of experience even with regard to widely popular cultural artefacts. Marc Davis (2003) drawing on reception theory points out that when we read cultural texts (both written and in other media) we bring as much to the text as the text brings to us in order to form a gestalt – something greater than the sum of its parts. The white album means very different things to Bridget and Renton and so too does the iPod.

These scenarios defamiliarise the familiar and this in itself can be a useful resource for design (Blythe, Bell and Sengers in press). The scenarios defamiliarise the use situation and perhaps also the genre of writing – the scenario. They also illustrate some concerns which may be addressed by design. For example one design implication is that while the distinctive iPod design is valued as a status symbol it may be useful if that appearance could be modified at times in order to relieve the fear of crime if not prevent actual crime itself. Similarly iPods might be given more prominent security settings such as passwords of the kind available on many mobile phones which might make them less usable to a casual thief. Alternatively they could be made cheaper so as to be less appealing to thieves. These implications are merely examples of how such approaches might be of use to design. Because the source material is rich the scenarios are ambiguous, other readings and so design implications may be latent in these scenarios.

#### 4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In *Resistance Through Rituals* Stuart Hall (1982) reflected on the youth culture of the sixties and seventies. While the peace movement of sixties

hippies and the seeming outright rejection of mainstream culture embodied in the punk movement of the seventies were deeply political and in some senses revolutionary, Hall points out that this same resistance was almost immediately absorbed, repackaged and sold back to the sub groups that originated it. Thus fashion shops began selling the safety pins that so alarmed the parents of the punks that put them through their ears and noses. Current popular culture is frequently characterised as apolitical and apathetic. Cultural commentators refer nostalgically to the revolutionary spirit of the sixties counter culture, the rebellion and energy of the seventies punk movement. The current music scene and the artists dominating it are seen as bland, corporate representatives. But the music fans who are engaged in file sharing and building trans-national communities of music sharers can be seen as far more revolutionary than their predecessors. They may also be more effective.

File sharing and CD copying have reduced very powerful international corporations to a state of free fall panic where they are attempting to litigate their way out of the problem (Woodworth 2004). Assuming that they will not be able to criminalise a very large part of the population this may be one form of pop cultural resistance that cannot be incorporated and commoditized. The use of the iPod then is deeply political. In an age where capital presses ever further in to our every day lives and even has the temerity to trademark DNA, here is a bastion of resistance to copyright culture. But iPods and other music file playing devices are in themselves highly stealable. As the gap widens between the technology haves and have nots crime and the fear of crime are likely to become increasingly important problems for designers to address not just for music producers but music consumers.

Emerson's gramophone offered users new ways of experiencing music. For the first time it was possible to listen to music in the absence of musicians. Music could be enjoyed at home. Recorded music is now an integral part of our lives accompanying many of our daily activities. Digital media, like the earliest recording technologies, offers radically new forms of experience. In time the music industry will adapt, although the process of articulation may be a slow and painful one.

Geertz (1986) suggested that cultural analyses can appear to float several feet above their human ground, but likewise, psychological analyses can seem to be buried several feet beneath. A dialogical approach to user experience aims to analyse the individual-in-culture and to explore the interpenetration of culture and individual in understanding how people make sense of technology in their lives. A commitment to a dialogical view of individual-in-culture is a commitment to ways of analysis that do not treat these as separate components. Bakhtin argued that the character-based novel

is the most sophisticated tool available for seeing, valuing and expressing human experience in all its richness (Morson and Emerson 1990). By bringing some of the techniques of the novelistic genre into scenario-based design, pastiche scenarios offer a way in which we can get a glimpse of the richness and complexity of the individual-in-culture and incorporate macro and micro accounts of user experience.

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