

Jun 8th, 9:00 AM - Jun 12th, 5:00 PM

## Interface Cultures, Forever: speculative prototypes for technological awareness

Mario Ciaramitaro  
*Università Iuav di Venezia, Italy*

Pietro Costa  
*Università Iuav di Venezia, Italy*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dl.designresearchsociety.org/drs-conference-papers>



Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#)

---

### Citation

Ciaramitaro, M., and Costa, P. (2026) Interface Cultures, Forever: speculative prototypes for technological awareness, in Simeone, L., Gray, C. M., Verhoeven, A., de Götzen, A., Bakırlioğlu, Y., Zohar, H., Stead, M., and Buwert, P. (eds.), *DRS2026: Edinburgh*, 8–12 June, Edinburgh, United Kingdom. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.1750>

This Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the DRS Conference Proceedings at DRS Digital Library. It has been accepted for inclusion in DRS Biennial Conference Series by an authorized administrator of DRS Digital Library. For more information, please contact [library@thedrs.org](mailto:library@thedrs.org).

# Interface Cultures, Forever: speculative prototypes for technological awareness

Mario Ciaramitaro<sup>a\*</sup>, Pietro Costa<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Università Iuav di Venezia

\*Corresponding author e-mail: [mciamitaro@iuav.it](mailto:mciamitaro@iuav.it)

<https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.1750>

**Abstract:** As artificial intelligence increasingly takes over the designer's role in shaping interfaces for services and platforms, a key challenge is how to teach young designers to critically reflect on how design mechanisms shape users and their everyday lives.

Interface Cultures, Forever was a design workshop that challenged the conventional notion of the digital interface. Participants were asked to design critical interfaces - concepts that reveal tensions, paradoxes, and invisible mechanisms within digital life. Through speculative and ironic prototypes, students explored how interfaces shape behavior, emotion, and identity. The projects articulate a landscape of cultural critique, where the interface becomes both medium and message: from bodily automatism and sensory addiction to algorithmic control, mediated self-representation, temporal anxiety, and digital silence. Each prototype employs strategies of parody, over-performance, and inversion of norms, thus repositioning interface design as an act of commentary - an inquiry into the conditions of human experience within contemporary techno-social systems.

**Keywords:** interaction design education; speculative prototyping; critical interface design;

## 1. Introduction

Interface design education has traditionally focused on the coherent arrangement of visual and interactive elements, and on empathy understood as a practical ability to anticipate users' needs and emotions. Within this framework, students are trained to optimize usability through techniques such as layout composition, interaction mapping, and user-flow modeling (Chen & Jin, 2025). This functional emphasis becomes even more evident with the emergence of AI-assisted design tools that increasingly automate the operational aspects of interface design - from automated layout generators such as Galileo AI, Uizard, or Figma's Smart Design features, to text-to-interface systems that compose screens from prompts (Luo, 2025). Tasks once requiring lots of research and knowledge are now delegated to computational systems capable of proposing visual structures, hierarchies, and interaction



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International Licence.

flows in seconds. Results are immediate, research and design processes collapse into an instantaneous outcome.

In this new context, the question for educators is no longer how to teach students to make interfaces, but how to teach them to think through and about interfaces. As automation begins to replicate designers' competencies, the pedagogical challenge shifts from teaching how to design for users to teaching how to design for awareness. The recent diffusion of automation tools and *vibe coding* platforms has granted unprecedented creative power to non-experts, enabling millions of users to build websites, applications, and digital services with minimal technical knowledge. Yet these generative systems are trained on vast repositories of existing code - code that, over the past decades, has silently normalized specific logics of persuasive and extractive design. As a result, the interfaces they produce tend to reproduce a behavioral grammar oriented toward engagement, data capture, and consumption, rather than toward the user's agency or well-being. In this landscape, teaching students merely how to operate these new digital tools would have been a partial success. The automation of design processes and turning the designer into a supervisor that fine tunes automated results, risks erasing the investigative and interpretative stages that have historically defined design as a discipline.

Therefore we defined some objectives: first, to let students experience something that current AIs cannot yet design, as for example, an interface that questions its own premises; second, to use the interface itself as an object of inquiry capable of eliciting reflection on the metaphors and languages we adopt to mediate experience; third, to create a shared expressive space in which students, born in a generation that was raised within digital ecosystems, could make comments to the use and the power structures; finally, to build interfaces that resist the inherited biases of generative coding models, achieving outcomes that stem from processes of analysis, critique, and experimentation.

Drawing on Maus's notion of critical design literacy, interface design education can be reframed as a space where students learn to question not only *how* interfaces work, but *why* and for whom they are designed, engaging with their wider social and environmental impacts (Maus, 2021). In order to give solid ground to these objectives we have chosen the theoretical framework of reading the interfaces as cultural objects and for inspiring a critical approach to young designers.

## 2. Theoretical context

The theoretical foundation of *Interface Cultures, Forever* integrates insights from interface studies, media theory, and critical design. The workshop began from Steven Johnson's seminal proposition in *Interface Culture* (1997): interfaces are cultural artifacts that mediate how we think, perceive, and act. This led to understanding that the workshop wouldn't focus on how to determine or judge good or bad user experience but to focus on how designers can intervene in the debate on a complex theoretical object positioned in between power, control and representation. It was then introduced the research of Bardzell and Bardzell (2008) where interfaces are framed as metaphors that shape how we think about information and ourselves. The graphical user interface (GUI) brought computers into everyday life, making them visually and cognitively accessible, while the interface itself

functions not just as a technical layer but as a medium that molds creativity, thought, and communication. Within the theoretical framework of the course, Alexander R. Galloway's (2012) contribution served as a key reference for rethinking the concept of the interface beyond its representational dimension. His perspective repositions the interface within media theory by focusing on its performative and operational nature—on what it *does* rather than what it *shows*. In this view, interfaces are not static objects or visual surfaces but “autonomous zones of activity,” processes that generate transformations and relationships. This interpretation invites students to understand the interface as both *effect* and *cause*: a site where social, political, and aesthetic forces are simultaneously materialized and made visible. Through this lens, digital media are not merely tools of mediation but mechanisms of control that structure perception and behavior according to the logic of networks and code. Engaging critically with interfaces therefore means examining the conditions of mediation that enable them—how software embodies ideology, how interfaces obscure their own systems of power, and how interaction itself becomes a process of subject formation. The perspectives of Johanna Drucker (2011) and Branden Hookway (2014) further deepen the understanding of the interface as an active and interpretative construct. Drucker conceives the interface not as a fixed or neutral entity but as a *performative structure*—an interpretative field that participates in the production of meaning and shapes the very act of reading. Her approach invites students to consider how every interface organizes perception and interpretation, transforming data into experience. Building on this view, Hookway (2014) redefines the interface as a *threshold*—a liminal zone that functions both as bottleneck and as enabling passage, mediating between user and algorithm. This dual nature reveals how power operates through the interface as both constraint and potentiality. His metaphor of the *cockpit* enriches this conceptualization: the interface becomes a space of subjectivation, where the user, like a pilot, is simultaneously confined and empowered by systems of control. Integrated within the course's theoretical framework, these contributions highlight how interfaces operate as sites where agency, interpretation, and power continuously intersect. In parallel, the introduction of the concept of interface inside Benjamin Bratton's *The Stack* (2016) reframed it as a political infrastructure - a layer of the planetary computation, where algorithmic governance and user experience overlap. It underlined the concept of *interfacial condition*, the intrinsic and extrinsic interfacing potential of the objects at our disposal. Within digital services we can transfer and conceive relationships between objects, signs, and interfaces and everything can become a tactile technology available for personal micro-rhetorics of data analysis. Students were invited to think on how they are connecting to feelings, jobs, objects from the advent of digital services. To make students even more aware of the persuasive UX design, the course connected to B.J. Fogg's notion of persuasive technologies (2003), which defines digital interfaces as systems designed to modify users' attitudes and behaviors. Principles such as social comparison, recognition, and reciprocity reveal how software operationalizes psychological mechanisms to sustain engagement. This awareness of the *captological* dimension of design serves as a conceptual trigger for students: every persuasive interface can also be reinterpreted as a field for counter-design. These theoretical positions collectively situated the interface as a site of aesthetic, ethical, and political negotiation. They inform the workshop's critical stance: to understand and redesign interfaces as *cultural and ideological constructions* that produce subjectivities, values, and emotions. The course also introduced the Critical Interface Toolbox (Moll & Noni, 2016) and the work *Facestate* of Metahaven (Hyde, 2011) and the work

*Interfight* by César Escudero Andaluz (Tomas, 2017), which exposed the ideological operations of digital systems through visual, performative, and algorithmic interventions. The task of designing a “critical interface” thus was given actual examples on how to design an interface to create commentary on the mechanisms of mediation themselves.

### 3. Educational Approach

*Interface Cultures, Forever* was conceived for an interface design class within a design master's program at Università Iuav di Venezia. The focus was to address a fundamental tension in contemporary design education: how to cultivate critical awareness in a time when artificial intelligence increasingly automates the making of interfaces. As software begins to generate layouts, icons, and interaction flows autonomously, design education faces an urgent question - how can we still teach designers to think rather than merely to operate? The workshop thus repositions the interface as a conceptual and reflective medium rather than a service instrument.

The educational approach builds upon three interconnected principles. First, learning through provocation (Bendor & Lupetti, 2025): students are encouraged to design not to solve problems but to construct questions. Prototyping becomes a way to interrogate rather than to optimize. Second, making-as-reflection: the prototype is treated as an epistemic object - knowledge is produced through the act of making, and speculation becomes a method of inquiry (Ward, 2021). Third, peer critique and reflexive narration (Auger et al., 2021): learning occurs in dialogue. Each iteration is accompanied by critical discussions, self-evaluations, and short reflective texts that articulate the intent and implications of the design gesture.

This attitude draws from the tradition of critical design, where the design process itself becomes a site of knowledge production. The workshop's methodology appears to parallel the critical orientations articulated by Michael Dieter (2022). Dieter frames interfaces as terrains where the craft of design and the gesture of critique must converge to three interrelated strategies for critical engagement: specifying traps and enclosures, surfacing asymmetries, and augmenting alternatives. Augmenting alternatives moves from analysis to invention, fostering speculative or interventionist practices that imagine other configurations of interaction - playful misuses, poetic frictions, or experimental prototypes that subvert efficiency and productivity logics. For Dieter, these three modes together define a methodology of resistance: an ethics of design that problematizes computation while expanding the possibilities of aesthetic and political experience. These modes invite designers and researchers to expose the hidden infrastructures of control and to imagine counter-practices that expand users' interpretive and affective agency. Strategies such as anti-usability, irony, over-performance and the inversion of interface norms have long been articulated within critical and speculative design traditions (Dunne & Raby, 2013; Gaver et al., 2003). These approaches deliberately suspend usability conventions to foreground cultural assumptions, behavioral scripts, and ideological framings embedded in interface design (Sengers et al., 2005; Pierce, 2012; DiSalvo, 2012).

The learning goals are thus twofold: on one hand, to foster technological awareness - the ability to perceive the interface as a mechanism of control, persuasion, and subjectivation; on the other, to strengthen critical agency - the designer's capacity to re-appropriate technological languages as tools of commentary and resistance. Through speculative and ironic design exercises, students experienced how interaction can be reframed as reflection,

Mario Ciaramitaro, Pietro Costa

avoiding a functionalistic approach where the interface must be almost invisible (Norman, 1990).

### 4. Methodological Structure

The structure of *Interface Cultures, Forever* translates theoretical reflection into a process that unfolds in iterative phases, integrating conceptual exploration, prototyping, critique, and reflection. The workshop was designed in order that the eighty participants from an MA in Visual Communication Design could work in groups of four people, collaborating with each other by conceptualizing, designing and presenting the results. The came after a few weeks of training on the concepts of interaction design and introduction to the tools of the trade.

Table 1. Workshop structure.

	contents	assignments
Week 1	introduction to interface cultures, interface critique and critical design	Identify a tension within interface cultures. Write your own research question. Write your own brief.
Week 2	presentation of the briefs identified by the students  first review	Draw the first sketches of a possible interface. Conceptualize the user experience that could transfer the question into a milieu of power, subjectivity and identity.
Week 3	second review	Present the results of concepts and create the very first interactive prototype.
Week 4	final review	optimize the materials for final presentation. Create or record a video to present user interaction.
Gap		
Week 7	final presentation	

Each group begins by identifying a *tension* or *paradox* of digital life - for example, algorithmic control, sensory addiction, fear of missing out, the aesthetics of multitasking, or the disappearance of silence. After having identified the main area of investigation, students were asked to develop a research question for developing the design proposal. The process was meant to be clear and step by step avoiding the implementation of visual designs before defining a critical point of view. The research question was then used to make students write down their own group brief that would establish the connection between their critical point of view and the actual visual and interactive approach. Students were required to produce a short-written statement that synthesizes their interpretative stance. The brief defines: the experiential paradox to be revealed; the emotional or behavioral mechanism to be activated; and the aesthetic and interactional strategy (e.g., parody, over-performance, inversion, subtraction). This writing exercise operates as a moment of conceptual grounding, translating reflection into design intention. After achieving these two outputs, research question and brief, students were invited to present their sketches and interaction paradigms into a series of reviews that were always referring to the identified question.

The prototyping phase revolves on the development of mobile prototypes using Figma. The goal is not functionality but *discursive performance*. Interfaces are deliberately unstable, ironic, or excessive: they simulate social media, operating systems, or self-tracking apps to dramatize invisible dynamics. The prototype becomes a narrative device that transforms user interaction into cultural commentary. Each prototype is discussed through collective critique sessions. These moments of confrontation encourage students to analyse not only the design outcome but also the ideological and affective implications of their work. Discussion focuses on how effectively the prototype renders visible a mechanism, triggers reflection, or provokes a positive reaction or discomfort. At the very end of the workshop every group submitted a written abstract and a reflective note that explicates the rationale behind their prototype. These texts function as analytical counterparts to the artefacts, capturing the *thinking-through-making* process. A final presentation that included a short video walkthrough of the prototype, was chosen as a collective moment for reflection identifying again what all the eighty students discovered about the interfaces and services that they use everyday.

## 5. Results and Critical findings

Each group treated the *interface* as a cultural artifact capable of commenting on human digital experience, not merely mediating it. The result was a collection of *critical prototypes*, embodying what Michael Dieter calls a way of surfacing the asymmetries, dependencies, and desires embedded in everyday digital experience. It is relevant to underline that each group defined a research question and a prototype developed in Figma. We would like to frame the different questions as an integral part of the results as they are texts that both mediate and contextualise not only the services but track the critical approach adopted. The workshop valued the possibility of identifying a relevant question and explored the different possible design proposals without evaluating just the usability of such service. Instead, it was made clear that the solutions were tools for debate and discussion. The goal was not to create a

new way of interacting or a new design paradigm, but to frame interfaces as part of culture and to enable potential users to experience and navigate a critical point of view. To illustrate the range of critical interface strategies, three examples from the students' groups can be considered, each interrogating a different structural condition of digital experience: the body, visibility and the psychology of attention, user statistics. Each project adopted a distinct approach: performative parody (GymInch), overlaid demystification (Third Eye), and the staging of data fetishism (Log). The guiding questions behind each project were, respectively: Can an interface turn compulsive scrolling into a trainable 'athletic' practice? (GymInch); How can an app expose the hidden psychological mechanisms of social media design and make users more self-aware? (Third Eye); What influence do smartphone usage statistics have on our everyday life and our desire for self-affirmation? (Log).

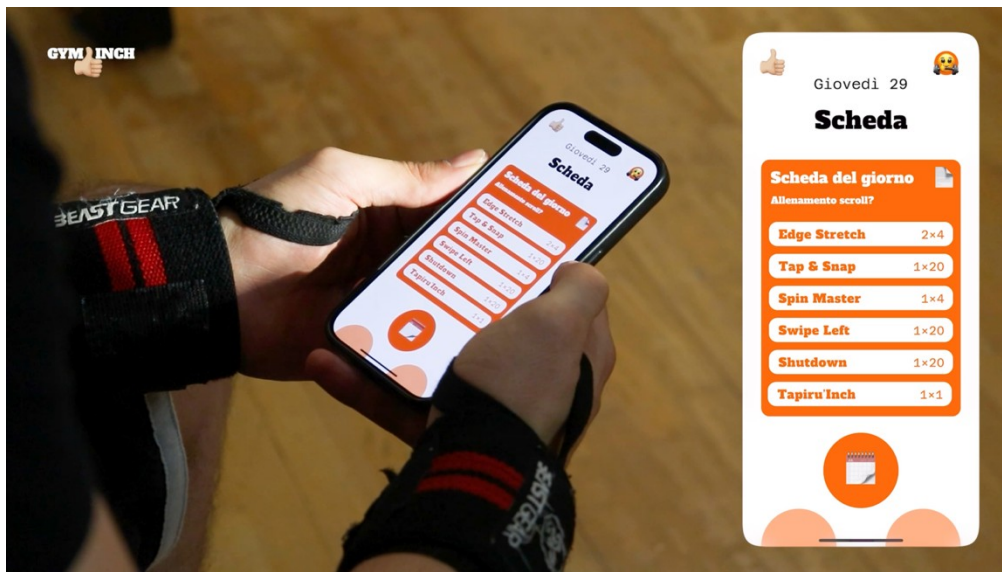


Figure 1 *GymInch mimics the language and dynamics of the gym world-workout plans, levels, badges, a motivational coach-to magnify the absurdity of “thumb training.” The parody makes the interface-induced bodily performativity visible and upends the logic of efficiency.*



Figure 2 *Third Eye* is a transparent overlay designed to sit on top of Instagram, stripping its interface down to an annotated functional skeleton. Likes, scrolling patterns, and notifications are highlighted as mechanisms of attentional and identity conditioning.

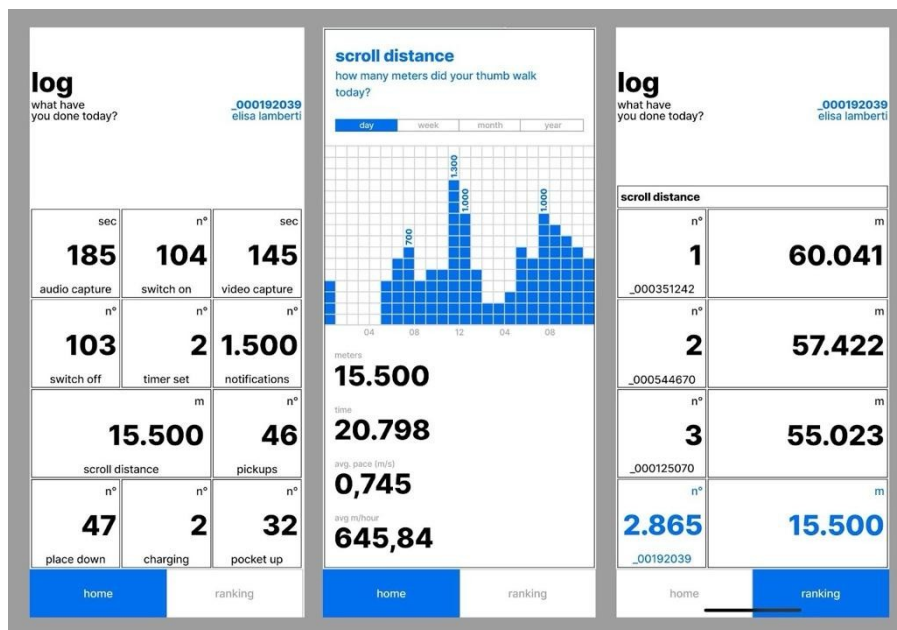


Figure 3 *LOG* is an app that emphasizes statistics and social comparison around smartphone use. It unsettles our relationship to metrics, showing how constant counting produces new anxieties about success and self-evaluation.

As students were free to choose themes and subjects for their app or service, five major macro-areas of inquiry emerged:

- **Embodiment and gesture:** Some projects have reinterpreted the interface as an extension of the body. Through exaggerated or ironic interaction, they reveal how gestures-scrolling, touching, swiping-have become conditioned reflexes. The interface becomes an *affective surface*, where intimacy and alienation coexist.
- **Anxiety, control, and surveillance:** Several works dramatize the psychological pressure of self-tracking, gamified feedback, and digital obedience. Interfaces here act as instruments of soft coercion-revealing the emotional costs of optimization and visibility.
- **Identity and representation:** Other projects question how identity is produced and verified through platforms, algorithms, and institutional systems. They highlight how bureaucratic and social media architectures script subjectivity, turning “being online” into a form of performative existence.
- **Algorithmic behavior:** In some prototypes, automation becomes both an aesthetic and critical tool. Repetitive, endless actions foreground the loss of agency and the transformation of human attention into extractable resources.

- **Decision-making and cognitive saturation:** A further cluster explores the paradox of digital choice - where abundance produces paralysis rather than freedom. These interfaces stage the collapse of intentionality within algorithmically curated environments.

## 06. Workshop limitations

At the end of the workshop, a short qualitative, open-ended questionnaire was sent to participants in order to collect observations on the overall progress of the course and on the value of introducing critical interface theories and practices within an interface design curriculum. The open comments highlighted both strong interest in the topics and some criticalities related to time constraints and the immediate transferability of outcomes.

Several students expressed a desire to push prototypes toward real applications in order to test user reactions and assess market impact: “If we had had more time, it would have been interesting to go deeper and potentially turn the prototypes into real apps to understand how users would respond to their introduction”. Others framed the course as an opportunity to reflect on the future of the profession:

“Questioning how interaction design will change is one of the most relevant topics for my generation. Big corporations keep proposing AI solutions, which lowers the perceived value of human reasoning, making it necessary to redefine the designer’s role.”

Multiple comments also linked critical reflection on interfaces to broader transformations in design work: “Reflecting on how interfaces are structured for extraction raises questions about their future and about the role we, as designers, have to negotiate within companies.” While acknowledging that the acquired skills are not always immediately marketable, some appreciated the methodology of formulating critical questions before the brief: “Working on the questions first and only then on the brief built a project scaffold I can reuse in other situations.” Finally, others noted that the projects’ ironic and parodic approach made everyday platform dynamics tangible through design language: “Even if I didn’t fully grasp the exercise’s objective, I think some classmates’ outcomes achieved a playful, ironic perspective on the services we use every day.” Overall, the questionnaire confirms the educational effectiveness of a speculative and critical approach, while also underscoring the need for longer timelines for experimentation and a tighter coupling between theoretical reflection and hands-on design practice.

## 07. Design implications and guidelines

From the results it was possible to identify some design implications that emerged from both strategies and themes.

Table 2. Observations and design implications

Areas	Sub-themes	Observed Strategies	Design Implications
-------	------------	---------------------	---------------------

Embodiment and gesture	The interface as a bodily extension and site of performativity.	Parody of bodily automation; tactile simulation; physical resistance.	Train designers to read gestures as cultural codes; design for awareness of embodied behavior.
Anxiety, control, and surveillance	Systems of digital discipline disguised as personalization.	Overload, gamification of compliance, ironic surveillance.	Investigate emotional cost of UX optimization; design friction as critical awareness.
Identity & Representation	Self as mediated construct through bureaucratic or social systems.	Irony, misalignment, anti-usability.	Reveal hidden ideological assumptions in identity infrastructures.
Algorithmic behavior	Economy of focus, distraction, and acceleration.	Induced frustration, overload, rhythmic disruption.	Use temporal dissonance and slowness as design critique.
Decision-making and cognitive saturation	Emotional void generated by over choice	Sarcastic experience, ephemerality, ritual, poetic non-action.	Explore cognitive sustainability and digital empathy.

Building on the first iteration of *Interface Cultures, Forever*, we propose a set of guidelines for replicating and refining the module in other interface design curricula, taking as a loose orienting framework the questions formulated by Sengers et al. (2006) around reflective and critical HCI. These questions, which concern the values embedded in design, the kinds of subjects and practices that HCI takes as its focus, and the institutional positioning of critical work, were guiding the design workshop but can be made more relevant. Some of them were already addressed in practice, for instance, by inviting students to question what kinds of experiences interfaces privilege and which forms of subjectivity they presuppose, while others can now be mobilised more deliberately to fine-tune the structure of the course. We respond both to the strengths observed during the module and to the criticalities highlighted in the final questionnaire, particularly the limited time available, the perceived difficulty of translating speculative outcomes into “real” applications, and the need for a closer alignment between theoretical reflection and hands-on practice.

Regarding the workshop structure, we suggest retaining the original sequence - from the identification of a tension, to a research question, brief, sketches, prototype, and final reflection - while formalizing it as a clearly named, phased framework. In the first phase (week one), students map tensions within one of the five research areas, are introduced to theories of interface cultures and critical/speculative design, and identify a specific paradox (e.g., fear of missing out, social comparison, algorithmic opacity). A short “gesture ethnography”, in which they observe how people scroll, tap and hold their phones, grounds

these questions in situated, embodied practices. A second phase (weeks one and two) guides students from research question to brief. Each group formulates a question drawing on its chosen research area and develops a self-authored brief linking this stance to a concrete interface situation and rhetorical or aesthetic strategy; the brief thus operates as a hinge between theory and practice. A third phase (weeks two to four) centres on discursive prototyping: groups sketch interactions and then develop mobile prototypes that prioritise narrative and critique over technical completeness, staging tensions around power, subjectivity and identity. A final phase (weeks four to seven) concentrates on reflection and transfer, with extended collective critique sessions on which mechanisms are made visible, which emotions or discomforts are triggered, and which ideological assumptions about users, bodies and data are surfaced. Each group produces a short abstract and reflective note situating its prototype within the relevant research area and contemporary interface cultures and presents a video walkthrough clarifying both interaction and critical intent.

It would be beneficial to translate the design implications that emerged from final the prototypes into five research areas that structure student inquiry from the beginning:

- designers can be asked to consider how bodily habits and everyday automatisms are shaped by interfaces, treating micro-gestures such as scrolling, tapping or swiping as culturally and affectively loaded routines that interfaces can foreground, exaggerate or reconfigure;
- designers could focus on the emotional consequences of optimization, analyzing seamless experiences for their potential to produce anxiety, dependency or compulsion and exploring calibrated interruptions or delays as resources for critical awareness;
- designers could shift attention from individual screens to the systems that organize digital identity as political and cultural devices tied to governance;
- designers could treat time as a design material, inviting students to use delay, waiting and asynchronous rhythms to contest expectations of constant availability and instant response;
- designers could address attention fatigue, multitasking overload and self-tracking pressure, asking how interfaces might care for users' cognitive and emotional resources by acknowledging limits, encouraging rest and fostering more empathetic relations between systems and their users.

Articulating explicit assessment methods emerges as crucial in a workshop that foregrounds speculative and critical approaches to interface design. Without explicit criteria, students often default to conventional expectations of usability, or market readiness and may struggle to recognise the value of work that is intentionally unsettling, incomplete, or resistant to optimisation. Drawing on the work of Ringfort-Felner et al. (2025), we propose that students' projects should be read in terms of how *experienceable* and how *thought-provoking* they are: the degree to which a speculation is materially realised and plausible, internally coherent yet relatable, specific yet simple enough to be grasped, and, at the same time, capable of captivating attention, provoking critical or emotional responses, and, where

appropriate, mobilising ambiguity to open multiple interpretations. Positioning these qualities as assessment criteria has a double function. On the one hand, it provides students with a concrete vocabulary for planning and self-evaluating their work; on the other, it legitimises forms of design that prioritise reflection over solutionism. In this way, assessment moves from being an external judgment applied at the end of the process to becoming part of the methodological infrastructure students use to formulate questions.

## 08. Conclusions

Building on Dieter's trajectories for critical interface practices, our contribution testifies to how a concrete pedagogical path can be constructed to give structure to critical reasoning while foundational interface design skills are being taught. The programme translated critical design methods into a stepwise process that simultaneously operates as an active critique of the extractive economies in which many students are embedded in their everyday lives.

Feedback from students underlined a perceived gap between theory and practice; addressing this requires not only more time for critique but also a deliberate weaving of theoretical and practical elements. Critique can be structured so that every discussion explicitly asks which theoretical concepts the prototype is materialising and which assumptions about users, bodies and data it is reinforcing or challenging. Students could be encouraged to quote or paraphrase these references within their briefs and reflective notes, making the conceptual lineage of their design choices visible and reinforcing the idea that software tools and theoretical frameworks belong to the same field of inquiry.

Student comments also suggest that the workshop already functioned as a site for reflecting on the future of the design profession in the context of AI-driven automation. Future iterations of the workshop might therefore treat professional futures and AI as an explicit thread running alongside the research areas and phases described above. A dedicated session could examine how generative code and interface tools are trained on existing persuasive logics, how automation may accelerate extractive interface patterns, and how critical and speculative competences can position designers as negotiators within organisations rather than as mere implementers of client briefs. From this perspective, the workshop is an educational response to AI-assisted design: rather than replicate the interfaces, students learn how to debate the assumptions, behaviors, and power structures that automated systems silently reproduce.

"Interface Cultures, Forever" differs from approaches focused primarily on envisioning distant interaction futures: rather than projecting speculative scenarios, the workshop invited students to connect to and comment directly on a present condition, making explicit the role designers play in either reinforcing or challenging those processes through which users feel they can construct aspects of their subjectivity and identity via digital services. Interfaces were treated as cultural, political and affective objects that shape subjectivity, attention and behaviour. In this sense, the workshop had the interface itself as an object of inquiry, asking what kinds of experiences and subjects current platforms presuppose and produce. Treating prototypes as epistemic objects enabled students to see making as a mode of thinking and to accept incompleteness, discomfort and friction as legitimate design outcomes.

**Acknowledgements:** The authors wish to express their gratitude to all the students who participated in the Digital Interface Lab at the Università Iuav di Venezia during the academic year 2024/2025.



## 6. References

- Auger, J., Hanna, J., & Mitrović, I. (2021). Future paths. In I. Mitrović, J. Auger, J. Hanna, & I. Helgason (Eds.), *Beyond speculative design: Past – Present – Future* (pp. 202–211). SpeculativeEdu; Arts Academy, University of Split
- Bardzell, J., & Bardzell, S. (2008). Interaction criticism: a proposal and framework for a new discipline of HCI. *CHI'08 Extended Abstracts on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 2463-2472). <https://doi.org/10.1145/1358628.1358703>
- Bendor, R., & Lupetti, M. L. (2025). Teaching speculative design. *International Journal of Technology and Design Education*, 35(1), 403-425. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10798-024-09908-3>
- Bratton, B. H. (2016). *The stack: On software and sovereignty*. MIT press.
- Chen, Q., & Jin, D. (2025). AIGC-Enhanced Curriculum for Interface Design: Integrating Prompt Engineering, Visual Logic, and User Empathy. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 14(3), 419–429.
- Dieter, M. (2022). Interface critique at large. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 30(1), 49-65. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13548565221135833>
- DiSalvo, C. (2012). *Adversarial design*. MIT Press.
- Drucker, J. (2011). Humanities approaches to interface theory. *Culture machine*, 12.
- Dunne, A., & Raby, F. (2013). *Speculative everything: Design, fiction, and social dreaming*. MIT Press.
- Fogg, B. J. (2003). *Persuasive Technology: Using Computers to Change What We Think and Do*. Morgan Kaufmann.
- Galloway, A. R. (2012). *The interface effect*. Polity.
- Gaver, W. W., Beaver, J., & Benford, S. (2003). Ambiguity as a resource for design. *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 233–240).
- Hookway, B. (2014). *Interface*. MIT Press.
- Hyde, A. (2011) *Metahaven's Facestate*. Available at: <https://walkerart.org/magazine/metahavens-facestate> (Accessed: 10 November 2025).
- Johnson, S. (1997). *Interface culture: How new technology transforms the way we create and communicate*. Harper San Francisco.
- Luo, Y. (2025). Designing With AI: A Systematic Literature Review on the Use, Development, and Perception of AI-Enabled UX Design Tools. *Advances in Human-Computer Interaction*, 2025, 3869207. <https://doi.org/10.1155/ahci/3869207>
- Maus, I. (2021). Critical design literacy through reflection in design. In E. Bohemia, L.M. Nielsen, L. Pan, N.A.G.Z. Börekçi, Y. Zhang (eds.), *Learn X Design 2021: Engaging with challenges in design education*, 24-26 September, Shandong University of Art & Design, Jinan, China. [https://doi.org/10.21606/drs\\_lxd2021.03.228](https://doi.org/10.21606/drs_lxd2021.03.228)
- Moll, J., & Noni, A. (2016). *CRITICAL INTERFACE TOOLBOX*. Available at: <https://crit.hangar.org/toolbox> (Accessed: 10 November 2025)
- Norman, D. (1990). Why interfaces don't work. In B. Laurel (ed) *The Art of Human-Computer Interface Design*. Reading, Addison-Wesley (pp. 209-219).
- Pierce, J. (2012, May). Undesigning technology: considering the negation of design by design. *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 957-966).

- Ringfort-Felner, R., Dörrenbacher, J., & Hassenzahl, M. (2025). The Quality of Speculation—A Scoping Review. In Proceedings of the 2025 ACM Designing Interactive Systems Conference (pp. 2373-2394).
- Sengers, P., Boehner, K., David, S., & Kaye, J. J. (2005). Reflective design. Proceedings of the 4th decennial conference on Critical computing: between sense and sensibility (pp. 49-58).
- Sengers, P., McCarthy, J., & Dourish, P. (2006). Reflective HCI: articulating an agenda for critical practice. CHI'06 extended abstracts on Human factors in computing systems (pp. 1683-1686).
- Tomás, E. (2017). How the arts can help tangible interaction design: A critical re-orientation. In Informatics (Vol. 4, No. 3, p. 31). MDPI.
- Ward, M. (2021). A practice of hope, a method of action. In I. Mitrović, J. Auger, J. Hanna, & I. Helgason (Eds.), Beyond speculative design: Past – Present – Future (pp. 166–200). SpeculativeEdu; Arts Academy, University of Split.

#### About the Authors:

**Mario Ciaramitaro** earned his PhD from Università Iuav di Venezia in 2019, focusing on Interface Critique. He is currently lecturer of interaction design and Post-Doc Research Fellow for the Interreg Euro-Med project Med4Regen.

**Pietro Costa** is a researcher at Università Iuav di Venezia. Since 2010, he has carried out research activities on User Experience and interaction design, applied to the areas of design for social and environmental sustainability.