Panel Organizers:
Marianna Obrist & Peter C Wright
Newcastle University
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 7RU, UK
marianna.obrist@ncl.ac.uk
p.c.wright@ncl.ac.uk

Panelists:
Kari Kuutti
University of Oulu, Department of Information Processing Science
90014 Oulu, Finland
kari.kuutti@oulu.fi

Yvonne Rogers
University College London
UCL Interaction Centre
WC1E 6BT, UK
y.rogers@ucl.ac.uk

Kristina Höök
Royal Institute of Technology, KTH
SE-100 44 Stockholm, Sweden
khook@kth.se

Pardha S Pyla
Bloomberg LP
731 Lexington Avenue
New York, NY 10022
pardha@pyla.name

Jean Louis Frechin
NoDesign.NET
12 passage turquetil
75011 Paris, France
jlfrechin@nodesign.net

Abstract
We believe that it is time to talk about user experience and its theoretical roots as well as about the relationship between theory and practice in UX research. Although user experience is overused as a buzzword, it defines a main step change in the evolvement of the HCI field and deserves a proper (theoretical) attention. Within this panel we follow up on discussions on the theoretical foundations and the value of theory for HCI and UX research from over the last years. In particular we want to go a step further and strengthen the interdisciplinary dialogue on the relationship between theory and practice when talking about user experience. We invited panelists from academia and industry to join a fruitful dialogue talking about the different perspectives on user experience, theoretical roots, and the relevance of theory for practice and vice versa. Two moderators will ensure that the audience gets their beliefs and thoughts across to the panelists as well.

Author Keywords
User Experience; Dialogue; Theory; Practice; Design Practice; Interdisciplinary; Relationship Theory-Practice; Theoretical Roots.
ACM Classification Keywords
H.5.m: Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous.

General Terms
Theory, Design, Human Factors

Introduction and Perspectives
Although the CHI community has engaged in a rich discussion about theoretical, methodological, and design issues around user experience (UX) (e.g., [1][3][9][12][5]), the relationship between theory and practice in UX research (e.g., [2][10][11][9]) can still benefit from a deeper dialogue.

In 2008 [7], when a wide range of experts came together to reflect on and envisage the future of HCI, they were discussing, amongst other things, the need for a lingua franca (new concepts, frameworks, and theories), which enable us (the HCI community) to talk to one another. "We need concepts, frameworks and methods that will enable us to consider people and computers as part of a messy world full of social, physical, technical and physiological limitations and opportunities" (p. 76). Although the authors point towards ‘theories’, they do not address the issue extensively. Nevertheless, they [7] suggest that we look beyond our disciplinary border and learn from other disciplines methods and techniques, as well as re-think and reinforce the HCI foundations for future growth.

Are our ‘roots’ in HCI and user experience research strong enough for the future? Kari Kuutti would likely answer this question with a ‘no’, requesting more ‘Ionians’ especially in user experience research [9]. He calls for more conceptual-theoretical discussions, which are not directed towards immediate practical usefulness. "If we focus only on practical usefulness and exclude explanation and interpretation, we do serious harm to our very nature as researchers. The purpose of research – at least the research done in universities – is to develop better understanding of the world around us" ([9], p. 718).

Kuutti provides an important viewpoint for this panel, challenging the concept of user experience in HCI and in particular the theoretical foundations. Thereby he notes that the relationship to practice is important, however as any other relationship it needs to flourish and does not immediately need to end in a marriage.

In her recently published book on HCI theory, Yvonne Rogers [12] points out that the theory-practice debate is an old issue and we should not focus on it again. Nevertheless, she stresses the fact that theories will play an important role in HCI in the future: “The battles that were fought and the gallant, but often in vain, efforts to bridge the theory-practice divide already seem like a distant past. Instead, we are beginning to learn to be tolerant, open and transdisciplinary. As a result, in the future we will develop broader discourses, conversing with ever more fields, embracing the big and small, creating new theories in-the-wild that ultimately, can make an impact on society, at many levels. Theory may even lead practice rather than lagging behind it” ([12], p. 89).

Rogers provides a valuable argument for this panel, namely fostering the transdisciplinary dialogue between researchers (from different scholarly background) and practitioners. In the ideal case the dialogue is based on
concrete case examples, illustrating ‘best practice’ and ‘failure’ relationships between theory and practices.

Daniel Fallman [4] has also recently discussed the potential of philosophy (philosophy of technology) for ‘good design’. As HCI is no longer only concerned with task-orientation but aims to increase the quality of everyday experiences, theories might provide a valuable foundation for the evolving and maturing HCI field. One of the recommendations Fallman provides at the end is to “Connect specific values with a larger philosophical discourse. As today’s philosophers of technology deal with the same technologies as we do in HCI, we have through them access to a vast history of thinking around ethics and technology and to the different philosophical strands particular ideas belong” ([4], p. 1059).

While a strong foundation in theory elevates the dialogue among practitioners and acts as common ground, theoreticians and practitioners tend to live in separate spheres with different professional goals and incentives. Academic theories tend to be abstract and hard to understand without a careful study of the philosophy behind the theory. This makes it onerous for practitioners to parse and apply theory given the constraints of business environments.

With his background in HCI research and his experience as a practitioner in industry, Pardha Pyla brings a unique perspective to this panel. He discusses the role of HCI theory in practice and how it helps explain different issues that UX practitioners grapple with everyday. His recently published textbook takes a practitioner-oriented approach on user experience [8]. “HCI theory facilitates a holistic understanding of various issues practitioners face in design. That clarity and the little “aha!” moments practitioners have when they connect the dots between the phenomenon they observe in practice and the underlying theory that explains it can be a rewarding experience.”

There is an increasing attention to describe the whole experience in terms of its interconnected aspects, rather than focusing on fragmented aspects [13]. Such a viewpoint (directed towards the complexity of experiences) does not support truly theory-driven design. Gaver [6] points out that we should not demand too much of our theories. When it comes to design practice, a wider palette of orienting concepts and frameworks is often requested, for enabling ad hoc usage, rather than focusing on theories, which cannot be well integrated with the ad hoc fashion of practice-based research [6].

How do we address this relationship between theory and practice? Do we want them to just get along next to each other or strengthen their relationship through a dialogue focusing on their different goals and beliefs? Within this panel, we will hear different perspectives, from very broad to more practical viewpoints. Kari Kuutti and Yvonne Rogers will make strong points on the theoretical roots of HCI and user experience from different disciplinary perspectives, while Kristina Höök, Pardha Pyla and Jean Louis Frechin (CHI’13 Keynote speaker) challenge and enrich the panel discussion from a design and practical angle.

**Focus Points for the Discussion**

We will engage the panelists and the audience in a dialogue on the relationship between theory and practice (in design). We thereby follow Marshall
McLuhan’s\textsuperscript{1} argument: it is not about believing the other’s opinion, but starting a reflection and stimulating thinking beyond one’s own beliefs and thoughts.

The panel discussion will be framed around the following themes:

- \textit{Talking about user experience}: How do we talk about user experience coming from different backgrounds and perspectives?
- \textit{Defining the relationship}: How is the relationship between theory and practice in UX research characterized?
- \textit{Thinking beyond own beliefs}: How can we engage in cross-disciplinary thinking, reach out to practice without fear of losing our own roots, goals, needs?

Overall the leading question we will pose to our panelists and put into a dialogue between them and the audience is: describe what the relationship between theory and practice of design in UX research means to you.

\textbf{Panel Format}

Discussions of a theoretical nature could be perceived as boring and hard to engage with as an audience. In order to ensure the audience an inspiring and engaging experience we will encourage a strong dialogue between the panelists and the audience.

This panel will start with the organizers giving a quick outline of the topic for the panel and the possibilities for the audience to get engaged (through written comments – as known from the keynote speeches, as well as via Twitter). We will emphasize that there is no right or wrong viewpoint on the topic, but that we are creating a space for a transdisciplinary dialogue, encouraging the panelists and the audience to think beyond their own approaches.

The panelists will each have 5 minutes to present their viewpoint on the \textit{relationship between theory and practice of design in UX research}. These statements are followed by immediate reactions from the other panelists and the audience (maximum another 5 minutes). When all five panelists have given their presentations, we will still have approximately 20 minutes for an open discussion, where everyone can deepen previous arguments, positions, and beliefs. The audience will not and should not have an agreed viewpoint at the end, but should rather be stimulated to continue the dialogue outside the room, back in their research labs and possibly by engaging in the planned edited book, which is undergoing preparation by the organizers of this panel.

We have decided to have two organizers for this panel in order to include different backgrounds and expertise. The two organizers will split their roles: one will be responsible for moderating the panelists’ input (keep timing and organize the dialogue), while the other will collect written comments / questions from the audience (with support from the SVs) and bring them into the dialogue with the panelists throughout the presentations and at the final open discussion.

\textbf{Approach and Panelists}

The panel is set up as an interdisciplinary round involving experts with a wide variety of backgrounds.

\textsuperscript{1} Marshall McLuhan was a Canadian philosopher of communication theory, he is well known for coining the expression ‘the medium is the message’.
though all have a common interest in theory and the relationship of theory with practice (practice of design). All panelists have confirmed their participation, including the keynote speaker Jean Louis Frechin. We got involved distinguished experts from industry and academia representing a variety of viewpoints and interdisciplinary backgrounds. We believe that this diversity will energize the discussion and stimulate further interactions with the audience.

The panel will be moderated by Marianna Obrist, Marie Curie post-doc fellow at the Newcastle University, who has a vital interest in the unfolding of the theoretical roots in UX research and practice [10][11] and Professor Peter Wright, who has a fundamental expertise and knowledge in the field of experience-centered design [13].

**Kari Kuutti** is a Professor in HCI at the Department of Information Processing Science, University of Oulu, Finland. He has been actively searching theoretical explanations into what happens in IT usage situations since the early 1990s, and has recently been active in stimulating theoretical discussion within UX research. He has been involved in organizing workshops, SIGs, panels, colloquiums etc. in CHI and various other HCI-related conferences since 1990s.

**Yvonne Rogers** is a Professor of Interaction Design and director of UCLIC at UCL. Her research interests are in the areas of ubiquitous computing, interaction design and human-computer interaction. A central theme in her work is how to design interactive technologies that can enhance life by augmenting and extending everyday, learning, and work activities. This involves informing, building, and evaluating novel user experiences through creating and assembling a diversity of pervasive technologies. She has recently published a new book (May 2012) called ‘HCI Theory: Classical, Modern and Contemporary.’

**Kristina Höök** is a Professor in Interaction Design at the Royal Institute of Technology, KTH, Sweden. She works in the Mobile Life centre where her research focuses on design for bodily and affective interaction, influenced by the idea of somaesthetics. Her design stance is that users of her technology should be allowed to express themselves physically and emotionally. Höök is also interested in ways of involving users in the design process with similarly open-ended methods and allowing them to participate in design processes ranging from stress management to interactive arts.

**Pardha Pyla** is a Senior Interaction Designer at Bloomberg L. P., New York, USA. At Bloomberg he leads the interaction design team for mobile platforms. Before his current position, he was a researcher and a UX consultant. As an adjunct faculty member in the Department of Computer Science at Virginia Tech he worked on user experience methodologies and taught graduate and undergraduate courses in HCI and software engineering. He is a pioneering researcher in the area of connecting software engineering and user experience lifecycle processes.

**Jean Louis Frechin** (Keynote speaker at CHI’13) graduated in 1989 from the Ecole National Supérieure de Creation Industrielle and also Architecte DPLG. He is founder of NoDesign.net, a global digital design agency where he worked on human-centered design in the
area of innovation. Jean Louis is involved in the new design approach and theory.

Panel Outcome and Lessons
The panel organizers are currently preparing a manuscript for an edited book on the topic of the panel, which will include an even broader interdisciplinary dialogue around the relationship of theory and practice on experience research in HCI. The panelists are defining a first set of potential authors for this edited book. The panel should awake further interest in the audience for contributing to this dialogue and be a recruitment pool for additional authors. Moreover, this panel will teach the first lesson to learn for writing the book, which in itself intends to be a ‘dialogue between disciplines’.

Acknowledgements
We acknowledge the support by the Marie Curie IEF Action of the European Union (FP7-PEOPLE-2010-IEF).

References