



Interface (MIT Press)

By Branden Hookway

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In this book, Branden Hookway considers the interface not as technology but as a form of relationship with technology. The interface, Hookway proposes, is at once ubiquitous and hidden from view. It is both the bottleneck through which our relationship to technology must pass and a productive encounter embedded within the use of technology. It is a site of contestation -- between human and machine, between the material and the social, between the political and the technological -- that both defines and elides differences. A virtuoso in multiple disciplines, Hookway offers a theory of the interface that draws on cultural theory, political theory, philosophy, art, architecture, new media, and the history of science and technology. He argues that the theoretical mechanism of the interface offers a powerful approach to questions of the human relationship to technology. Hookway finds the origin of the term *interface* in nineteenth-century fluid dynamics and traces its migration to thermodynamics, information theory, and cybernetics. He discusses issues of subject formation, agency, power, and control, within contexts that include technology, politics, and the social role of games. He considers the technological augmentation of humans and the human-machine system, discussing notions of embodied intelligence. Hookway views the figure of the subject as both receiver and active producer in processes of subjectification. The interface, he argues, stands in a relation both alien and intimate, vertiginous and orienting to those who cross its threshold.

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Editorial Review

Review

This is a uniquely subtle and compelling study of the human relation to technology. It quietly and insightfully threads itself through multiple disciplines to offer a truly transformative analysis of the ubiquitous yet elusive interface without which neither human nor technology can be thought.

(Mark Wigley, Columbia University, author of *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture*)

"A theory of the interface is a theory of culture." When interaction design becomes the liberal art of the age, the origins of interface become worth sounding. Deep below the surface, in a book whose very topic is surface, Branden Hookway has found something very different from the usual Silicon Valley origin myths, more ancient than Maxwell's daemon, more numinous than a luminous screen, and more ubiquitous lately than anything you might think of as technological apparatus. If, like Agamben, you seek immunity to the tech lords' sovereignty, you might try a jump into this fresh metaphysical read.

(Malcolm McCullough, Professor of Architecture, Taubman College, University of Michigan, and author of *Ambient Commons: Attention in the Age of Embodied Information*)

Against its startling ubiquity in our contemporary experience of space, architecture has lacked a robust theoretical framework to engage the interface. No longer. From epistemological origins in the fluid science of the nineteenth century, through the military-industrial forges of the twentieth, to its proliferation in our own, uncertain time, Branden Hookway's bravura *Interface* provides an essential guide to this most ineffable of landscapes.

(Nicholas de Monchaux, Associate Professor of Architecture and Urban Design, University of California, Berkeley, and author of *Spacesuit: Fashioning Apollo*)

About the Author

Branden Hookway teaches in the Department of Architecture and the Department of Design and Environmental Analysis at Cornell University. He is author of *Pandemonium: The Rise of Predatory Locales in the Postwar World*.

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