Over the last 20 years repeated attempts have been made in HCI to put enjoyment into focus. However, it is only recently that the importance of enjoyment, even in serious applications, has been widely recognised by the HCI community.

Typical of a relatively new area of investigation is the lack of an agreed set of terms: enjoyment, pleasure, fun and attraction are often used interchangeably. But do they really refer to the same experiences? Of course, in common speech pleasure, enjoyment and fun are almost synonymous and this is not an attempt to fix the language. None of these terms are reducible to single definitions but for the purposes of this chapter we will propose a difference between pleasure and fun in an attempt to delineate distinct forms of enjoyment.

The chapter begins with a consideration of the psychological account of peak experiences and how this might relate to less intense activities. After exploring the semantic and cultural connotations of the word fun the chapter goes on to consider the historical and political construction of leisure in the West. The final sections outlines distinctions between “fun” and "pleasure". It is argued that pleasure is closely related to degrees of absorption while fun can be usefully thought of in terms of distraction. The distinction has important implications for design. It is argued that repetitive and routine work can be made fun through design while non-routine and creative work must absorb rather than distract if they are to be enjoyable.

2. PLEASURE FROM A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE: FLOW

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s (1975) study of “flow” is one of the few psychological accounts of pleasure. After studying diverse groups, such as rock climbers, chess players and dancers, who were engaged in self motivating activities, Csikszentmihalyi discovered a common characteristic of their experiences. “Flow” was a term used by the participants themselves to describe a peak experience of total absorption in an activity. Csikszentmihalyi identified the conditions for flow as: a close match between skill and challenge, clear goals and constant feedback on performance. It was characterized by a decrease in self-consciousness and time...
distortion in that an hour might seem like a minute (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Flow experiences may be experienced in non-leisure and serious contexts.

The term “micro-flow” was coined in order to catalogue small periods of activities which are not necessary, yet are engaged in routinely, for example, chatting, doodling and stretching. These activities are intrinsically satisfying, although they do not induce the deep and intense experience of flow. Csikszentmihalyi (1975) suggested that these apparently unnecessary activities are in fact vital to our well-being. Doodling, for example, may aid concentration in a dull meeting. However “micro-flow” is a less well defined concept than flow and does not adequately account for less intense experiences.

Flow addresses a "deep" kind of enjoyment which may be only rarely achieved (and actually called for). To experience flow, we have to go beyond our own limits. This, however desirable from a humanistic view, is not the type of enjoyment most people choose. Most of the time, more superficial, shallow, short-term and volatile "pleasures" are in the fore. Or as Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) put it:

"Why do we choose to watch television over reading a challenging book, even when we know that our usual hedonic state during television is mild dysphoria while the book will produce flow?" (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000)

The answer to this question may be, in part, political. The next section considers the history of the word fun and offers an account of the leisure industry and mass media in relation to their development in the West.

3. THE POLITICS OF FUN

An examination of the changing uses of the word “fun” as illustrated in the Oxford English Dictionary demonstrates that fun, meaning - diversion, amusement, jocularity - appears relatively late in the language. (The following citations are all taken from the OED http://dictionary.oed.com/). In the earliest records, its meaning is - to fool, to cheat or hoax: “She had fun’d him of his Coin” (1685). Although this usage continued it was superseded in the eighteenth century “Tho he talked much of virtue, his head always run upon something or other he found better fun” (1727). In the mid eighteenth century Samuel Johnson described it as a “low cant word”, its disreputable aspect continued into the nineteenth century “His wit and humour delightful, when it does not degenerate into ‘fun’” (1845). The use of the word in the phrase “to make fun of –“ also appears in the eighteenth century: “I can’t help making fun of myself” (1737). Similarly, fun as in exciting goings on appears relatively late: “The engineers officers who are engaged in carrying out some of the Sirdar’s plans get much more than their fair share of ‘the fun’” (1897).

It was, then, at the turn of the eighteenth century that the language required and developed the word fun in something like its current form. It is not fanciful to relate this semantic development to the industrial revolution. When British society was industrialised and class relations came to be organised around production and labour rather than feudal ties, a “low cant word” appeared which signified the absence of seriousness, work, labour. When production is mechanised, when labour processes