

- modeling held on March 20 and 21, and there is little doubt that they persuaded many specialists in the field of the usefulness of a mathematical approach to these biological processes. ■

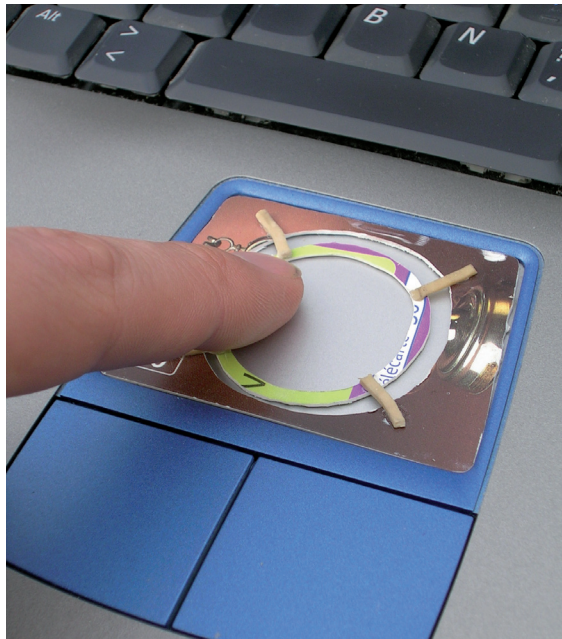
→ CONTACT

Mostafa Adimy, Anubis project-team, INRIA Bordeaux - Sud-Ouest
 Tel.: +33 5 57 57 11 13, mostafa.adimy@univ-pau.fr
<http://www.math.u-bordeaux1.fr/~adimy/modlmc>

IN BRIEF

■ TOUCHPAD OF THE FUTURE

The era of tediously moving the cursor around on your computer screen with a mouse, touchpad or TrackPoint is over! Géry Casiez and his colleagues at the University of Toronto have perfected a new mechanism that combines the advantages of these various modes of cursor movement while eliminating the disadvantages. This touchpad, christened the RubberEdge, can be used to move the cursor comfortably even with a small workspace and a large screen. The central portion of the touchpad operates with the precision of a mouse, and its elastic edges work like the TrackPoint to control cursor speed, eliminating the need for multiple small motions when moving the cursor a great distance across the screen.



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 First touchpad prototype: the ring held by four elastic bands provides an elastic reset for speed control.

In creating this mechanism, which is the only one of its type, the main challenge was ensuring continuity between the two different operating modes for speed and directional

controls. The researchers also tested the device's ergonomics to test its convenience and learning curve. Based on experiments, they developed models to predict the impact of the touchpad's characteristics (size, transfer function, etc.) on user performance.

The research was presented at the prestigious UIST conference on human-computer interfaces last October in Newport, Rhode Island, and is now protected under a patent filed with the University of Toronto. The main potential applications include small, portable objects such as new-generation telephones and PDAs. ■

→ CONTACT

Géry Casiez, assistant professor at the USTL and member of the Alcove project-team, INRIA Lille - Nord Europe
 Tel.: + 33 3 62 53 15 68, Gery.Casiez@inria.fr
<http://www2.lifl.fr/~casiez>

- It is a structured, large-scale approach: one ADT can involve three to twenty people. It offers an opportunity for researchers working on different projects to meet and propose ambitious programs and initiatives that would not have been possible previously. New directions for research can emerge from this process that might not even have occurred to the originators before they worked together. This prospect is highly motivating for researchers. The first ADTs will begin in 2008. The call for proposals for these initiatives is scheduled to end in early April, and the number of applications already received demonstrates how enthusiastic researchers are about this approach.

INédit : Do you have any other initiatives in mind to encourage software development?

Pierre Paradinas: One initiative that is already well underway is the effort for software evaluation (which item should be evaluated, based on which criteria, and why). The initiative,

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led by Daniel Pilaud and the D2T, will involve many players within the Institute as well as external participants. We are also currently looking over our technological platforms, which are essential not only to the visibility of work performed at INRIA but also in our dealings with our most frequent academic and industrial partners. The process has two objectives: first, determining at what point to create a platform or decide that work performed for a certain piece of software has become a platform, and second, determining the optimal mode of governance for the type of structure in question. To do this, we must reconcile the interests of users, who want a stable product, with those of researchers, whose role is to constantly develop the platform. ■

→ CONTACT

Pierre Paradinas, Director of Technological Development (D2T)
 Tel.: + 33 1 39 63 51 51, Pierre.Paradin@inria.fr