Designing experiences

Everything we do is an experience of some sort. For many of them there is something that makes them worth discussing.

http://bs.brokensaints.com/intro-website.htm

Though new and old at the same time, the most important thing for you to understand is:

All experiences are important and that we can learn from them whether they are traditional, physical, online or offine experiences; or whether they are digital, online or technological experiences.

We deal with technology and you must understand that most technological experiences- including digital and especially online experiences- don't hold a candle to the real thing and are unsuccessful as a result.

What you have to know is:

1. What makes a good experience;
2. How to translate these principles;
3. How to manage the technology so it does not dictate the form of the experience.

Experiences are the core of what we do. It is like story. It has a beginning, a middle and an end. What we do looks at it a bit differently. All experiences require:

1. *An attraction;*
2. *An engagement;*
3. *A conclusion.*

Attraction is what initiates the experience. It can be a cognitive, visua or auditory experience of something else that appeals to our senses.

Engagement is the experience itself. It has to be different from the surrounding environment to hold the viewer's attention.

The conclusion is up to you but it must provide some sort of resolution, whether through the story or activity to make the experience enjoyable.

People looking for an experience will choose the media – web, print, broadcast, CD- to meet their needs. For some odd reason CD's and web sites aren't seen as having a compelling need to be interesting simply because they are so novel. What you will find, however, is that the most successful media are those that offer unique experiences and compete with traditional media for usefulness and satisfaction.

We might as well admit it, seduction has always been a part of what we do. Though there are sexual connotations attached to the term there is also the aspect of enticement and appeal. View the interface as an opportunity to seduce people as your effort to enhance their experiences and lives.

What we tend to forget is experiences cross all media and all media experiences are unique to the particular media. New media developers have overlooked this fact , blinded by the sheer novelty of the medium. They don't understand the plain truth that all experiences compete with each other on many levels and many different media.

Think about going to Canada's Wonderland. Can you really recreate the experience of the Drop Zone or Top Gun, the sensory assault of the various shows and attractions and the smells of the various vendors? The experience here is visual, sonic and olfactory. Is there a digital equivalent?

The experience provided by a Palm is quite a bit different from that provided by a portable computer, ATM or PC Tablet.

Another way to understand experiences is to identify the different media in which they occur. Do this and it is easy to identify the prominent attributes that differentiate products and media. There are no right answers.

One way of measuring experiences is to qualify them against personal value. The results will be vague because we all attach such different meanings with things. Consider the fact that digital media doesn't have a clue where it will be in six months. Since we can't look ahead to compare current experiences we must look back.

One hundred years ago a pharmacist claimed heroin cleared the complexion, gave buoyancy to the mind, regulates the stomach and bowels and is, in fact a perfect guardian of health. Then again, cocaine was a key ingredient of Coca-Cole before caffeine replaced it.

"Take Away's"

The two most important experiences in our lives are birth and death and we all have powerful feelings around both experiences. But why are they so important to us? In his book, Generation X, Douglas Coupland talks about a "takeaway". A takeaway is a memory so powerful that it is the one you will take with you when you die to prove that you were alive.

Takeaways will help you derive meaning from the things you experience. Think of one.

A takeaway is a memory so powerful that it is the one you will take with you when you die to prove that you were alive.

I am willing to bet there is no tech, radio , TV, CD's or web sites in your takeaway. It may just be that technological experiences are so ubiquitous they have become less important in our lives. Perhaps it is because technological and media experiences are so often reproduced, their specialness is lessened.

The best experiences are transformative. They change people and as such are the absolute best for measuring the value of experience.

One of mine occurred when I was five or six and living on the army base in Kingston. It was a hot July day and we had a sudden torrential downpour. I was in my bathing suit at the time and a friend and I just ran through the rain, splashed in the puddles and glorified in the experience. I can still see slight oil slicks on the puddle, still smell the freshness in the damp air and feel the humidity of the evaporating rain as the rain stopped as suddenly as it had begun.

Here's an example of a transformative takeaway translated to the web. I don't think any of us will deny watching one's house slide into the ocean is not a takeaway. Yet this couple are allowing us to share the experience of something we can't even come close imagining here in Toronto. They do it through words, pictures and even sound.

So your house slides into the ocean. How can you make that information understandable to a group sitting in a classroom thousands of miles away?

It is all in how that information is designed.

Designing Information

Information is nothing more than data transformed into something more valuable by simply adding context around it. In the case of our unfortunates, it is not the diary or the pictures, it is the neighbour's phone call.

Understand something … by itself, data is meaningless. Understanding though, is a continuum, from data. Allong the path from data is an ever increasing value chain of understanding which is derived from an increasing level of context and meaning that becomes more personal and sophisticated as it approaches Wisdom.

The structure of what is designed has meaning and it can not only affect the effectiveness but the meaning of the message. Data can be made to lie by simply rearranging it. This rearrangement alters our understanding of the information. A look at graphs and charts, for example, shows a weakness that is due to a lack of initiative and imagination rather than opportunity or ability.

There is a building in the U.S. that looks like a duck. In this case we don't see it as a house, we see it as a "duck building" and our understanding of a building is altered because the design overpowers the information. To build more effective communications we must experiment much more with the form it might take but always be true to the information as it approaches wisdom.

To build more effective communications we must experiment much more with the form it might take but always be true to the information as it approaches wisdom.

We aren't suffering as much from information overload as we are from information anxiety- a lack of context and meaning in our world. It isn't so much as there is more to read but no one has yet shown there is a greater number of meanings to understand than ever before.

How do we deal with that one. Create more insight.

Insight is created as we add context and care about the presentation and organization of the data as well as the needs of the audience. As insight increases, communication with your audience is pushed higher or deeper into the understanding chain.

Above all else remember this, *DATA IS NOT INFORMATION*.

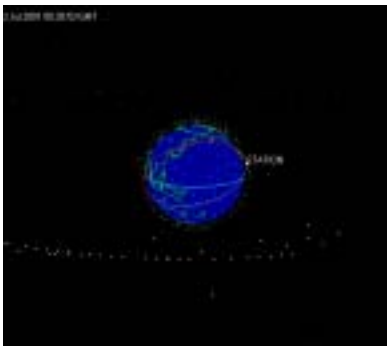
It is the building block upon which relevance is built.

Data needs context for it to become information.

It is only when we put data into context- our personal context- that it becomes information.

Data is so uninforming that it is like wearing our winter clothes. It enshrouds us as we interact with others. It doesn't stop us from communication, but it does make it more difficult.

Here's an online experience that you couldn't have had even ten years ago. Here are all of the satellites currently orbiting the earth. There is no meaning. No synopsis but the glimpse into something we have never considered is powerful.



You can surmise from this that information is the beginning of meaning.Information is data put into context with thought given to its organization and presentation.

Organizing data:

Like data, information can- like our satellite map, be frozen in time. It can be printed in books or found in the tides. However it only has value if we can decode it, speak the language with which it has been encoded and the information hasn't been obscured by interference.

It is important that you understand the organization and presentation of data can profoundly change its understanding. Data can be organized within a very few principles:

Magnitude, Time, Number and alphabet are sequences that allow us to organize things based on similar characteristics shared by all of the data. The last three are easy to understand but rarely have inherent meaning for the data. They are simply easy to use, even though their use is somewhat artificial.

Category and Location do add inherent meaning to the data. These are more qualitative than quantitative; seem to be a moremore "natural" and less artificial means of data arrangement. They are sometimes considered as two-dimensional models in that data is organized in at least two directions..

Randomness is the lack of organization. It is a great technique to use when building an experience that isn't necessarily easy. Ever played Quake?

Before you bust my chops , lets get clear on the fact that the same organizational method can be presented in several different forms. Let's use Humber's location as the organization for the information. We can use a map to show where it is, we can write out how to get here, we could use a graph, spoken instructions, a series of trail markers. All show where Humber College is located. The organization doesn't change, so the meaning is consistent throughout. What will be the barrier to understanding is the recipient's ability to understand the presentation.

Knowledge is a kind of meta-information that must be understood in a more general way. A definition could be: "Sufficiently generalized solutions gained through experience."

Clearly designed information leads to knowledge and the differences between knowledge and information are difficult to explain. Knowledge isn't just a complex iteration of information. Knowledge is a kind of meta-information that must be understood in a more general way. A definition could be: "Sufficiently generalized solutions gained through experience."

This means knowledge is something that is accessible in many and varied contexts and situations and not merely a description of the details.

This may generalize the concept but this generalization makes it more important. In other words, generalization is a criteria that helps us understand a meaning that is deeper or of a higher order than information.

The Sumerians left behind thousands of clay cones.Once we understood they were “money” we could understand what they meant to the people that used them. Until we understood that, they were simple clay cones.

This example demonstrates that knowledge builds on itself, making it increasingly easier to acquire more knowledge. This is because it helps us use and acquire our own contexts and understandings, and these things help us more easily integrate new experiences, information, data and thus knowledge into the system.

Because experience is so critical to building knowledge, the richer the experience, the more likely it is to fit one of our contextual models and the more able we are to find meaning it. Be careful. Just because it is rich doesn't mean it is effective. Rich experiences sometimes only offer more stimulation and not context making it difficult to decode and integrate any knowledge. This is why story telling and conversation are so powerful and necessary for creating knowledge.

Rich experiences sometimes only offer more stimulation and not context making it difficult to decode and integrate any knowledge. This is why story telling and conversation are so powerful and necessary for creating knowledge.

They allow us to interact with the information in a way that helps build personal context and integrate the information into our previous understandings.

Finally, the continuum leads to wisdom. It is even more difficult to explain since the levels of context become more personal and thus the higher level nature of wisdom renders it much more obscure. Where knowledge can be thought of as generalized solutions think of wisdom in this way:

Sufficiently generalized approaches and values that can be applied in many, varied situations.”

Wisdom can't be created and it can't be shared. It resides in our personal context and is incompatible with the contexts of others without extensive translation.

We can value wisdom in others but we can only create it for ourselves. As a teacher, I can only offer you knowledge and expose you to my wisdom. Hopefully you have enough experiences or common sense to translate what I teach you into generalized approaches and values that only you can understand. It can only be done by you and this requires an intimate relationship and understanding of yourself.

It is quite possible wisdom is not attainable until we approach understanding with an openness and tolerance for ambiguity. Since wisdom is so personal a fear or lack of understanding about yourself becomes one of the most extreme roadblocks to becoming wise. Since we are always striving to understand ourselves, this becomes a continuous process that requires we constantly evaluate ourselves as well as our previous understandings.

The most important aspect of any design is how it is understood in the minds of the audience. The most successful designs are those in which the artist and the audience understand the same thing. This concept is called a cognitive model.

The cognitive model

The most important aspect of any design is how it is understood in the minds of the audience. The most successful designs are those in which the artist and the audience understand the same thing. This concept is called a cognitive model.

Whether or not you focus on a cognitive model for your experience you can be sure your audience will form their own. It might be a mental map of the sequence or process or location. It might be their feelings or merely a randomly strung together list of memories of their experiences.

New cognitive models can often revolutionize an audience's understanding of data, information or an experience by helping them understand and reorganize things they previously understood (or , perhaps, couldn't understand), in a way that illuminates the topic of the experience.

When the subject of digital media was really new, I would start a digital media seminar to newbies that started this way, ' I am going to show you things you know. They are fine. I am going to show you things you don't know. That will be neat. The really great stuff, the stuff that will grab you by the nose hairs and pull you out of your seat is the stuff you did not know that you did not know." I was letting them know, subtly, that they were about to form new cognitive models of new media and to get set for it.

For example. Tim Berners-Lee, one of the fathers of the Internet, is deeply concerned about the power of the Internet that he helped to write. In fact, he concluded a paper in 1996 by saying, "*In the long term there are questions as to what will happen to our cultures when geography becomes weakened as a diversifying force? Will the net lead to a monolithic American culture or will it foster even more disparate interest groups than exist today? Will it enable a true democracy by informing the voting public of the realities behind state decisions, or in practice will it harbor ghettoes of bigotry where emotional intensity rather than truth gains the readership? It is for us to decide, but it is not trivial to assess the impact of simple engineering decisions on the answers to such questions.*"

The software engineers that wrote the Internet know they let the genie out of the bottle and Tim is wondering if they should have in the first place. Something I know, you didn't know that you didn't know.

New cognitive models can often revolutionize an audience's understanding of data, information or an experience by helping them understand and reorganize things they previously understood in a way that illuminates the topic or experience. I just did that by letting you know the engineers of the Internet have some reservations about building it in the first place.

To create these cognitive models, consider the ways in which you want your audience to find meaning and what you want them to remember. The old saying "Form = Function" comes into play and you will need to choose the form best suited to the overall experience. Just be aware that not everybody will "get it". When it is important that they "get it" create other ways of moving through the experience that allows them to form a mental map in a way that better suits them.

Sometimes the best cognitive models don't use metaphor or environments but they are abstract and reduce meaning to a purer state. This image is the interface of a company named PlumDesign. What they have used here is a diagramming system that relates terms, objects or elements to eachother in a cognitively reduced manner. One of the results is there are no other meanings laid over the cognitive space.

Presenting experiences

The most difficult thing for you to understand is that the presentation of an experience or design is separate from its organization.

Any organization can be presented in any number of ways. Text can be written (books), visual (charts), aural (spoken ,recorded), or a combination.

Often the presentation itself affects our understanding so much, that we misunderstand or misinterpret the data.

This is often the case with political or legal presentations in which we are being “convinced” that the information is true. If you can incite that particular opinion, it will come to be viewed as true. This is exactly the way propaganda and disinformation work.

This is how much of your work will be viewed because most designers value visuals and appearance over understanding and accuracy.

We should not be constrained from looking at new forms of the information that can communicate the relationship of atoms to one another and their importance to the world around us.

Though ost of us are familiar with the Periodic Table of the Elements from High School Chemistry we should not be constrained from looking at new forms that communicate the relationship of atoms to one another and their importance to the world around us.

How about the Internet?

There are any number of ways to view it but we always seem to return to a visual model of a spider web. Here’s a site that throws those ideas in the garbage. There are a few dozen maps that all describe essentially the same thing- the size and activity of the web. This should be a strong hint to you to search for new- and better ways- to visualize and describe what you are trying to communicate.

The key to developing these cognitive models is the diversity of your audience’s learning styles and abilities, as well as the complexity and depth of data in many circumstances.

Multiple views just may be called for here. They may seem like a waste of time and resources, but duplication(multiplicity) is important for a lot of people.

Remember this: *Everyone has different skills and experiences thus there is no one way of organizing data which creates understanding by everyone.*

Complex data may require several levels of organization at each level to suit the content. Look at how an encyclopedia organizes data. It nests the organization. The data is broken into meaningful chunks that can be navigated more easily. They also reflect and create hierarchies of importance and priorities, and thus, meaning.

Multiple levels of organization work just as well for a page as it does for a CD. The most important meaning is the most visible and so on down the line. Importance should be reflected in obviousness which makes the reading of the message even easier. Unfortunately many designs use style over substance. They decouple the relationship between meaning and visibility. The end result is difficulty of navigation and the meaning of the content. Not a great place to be.

Once we understand that everyone has a different need for the same things, and different ways of finding them we can then bring this to our designs. This Ikea site is a good example. The furniture is organized in multiple ways so the user can find what he or she wants based on need or what they already know about the furniture.

Having understood we are designing for the masses we have to clearly understand there is no such thing as objectivity. Every part of the communications process is subject to the values, perspectives and understanding of the designer.

This doesn't mean objectivity goes out the window or , more formally, to present meaning with as little hyperbole and sensationalism as possible. In fact some of the best understandings are formed from presentations of differing, balanced views and opinions.

This puts you in an interesting position. Even the simple act of organizing the information is subjective. Inded the organizing and creating of information may even have a profound impact on its meaning.

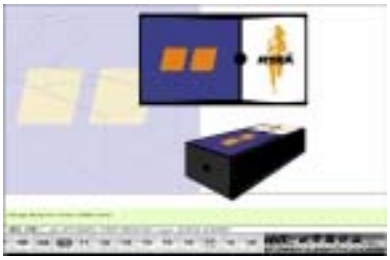
This isn't a bad thing. Subjectivity is needed for the communication of opinion and personal stories. The problem will rear its ugly head only when you deny the existence of subjectivity at all levels of communication.

Salon magazine is a good example of this. The quality of any knowledge depends on the quality of perspective and the character of the information. Salon has great writing without leaving out the perspective. In fact it is the perspective of the writers that makes this so valuable.

http://www.salon.com/

The Experience of Navigation

Navigation is an experience. Always remember there is always more than one way to get anywhere. If at all possible offer several navigation choices. Many websites offer a site map that is supposedly a visual representation of the site. The problem here is many of them contain content that constantly changes or the content is locked in - like a Flash site. To make matters worse many designers will only put high level content in these maps so that the index is slightly more useful than horizontal site navigation. The trick is to organize as much of the sites content in the map and to present it as clearly as possible.



http://www.movedesign.com/

Movedesign is San Francisco has a a great site that underlines this principal. Other methods can use maps or charts as a navigable data set when called for.

Wayfinding, for example, is a good technique to use. These are subtle navigation aids that let the user choose where to go and where they are. The neat thing is they don't have to do anything. They aren't links or buttons. Just remember to keep the wayfinding system and the menus and elements consistent throughout the site or CD.

If you must move the viewer vertically then use a directory path. This line of links is sometime s referred to as a breadcrumb path. The simplest one is the back button on the browser or CD interface.

Cascading menus are another method of allowing the user to jump to any section of the site through the use of a pop down menu.

Fish eye views are another form of navigation. These essentially show the site in one view but allow the user to focus on only one section at a time. These can be effective because the user isn't bombarded with so much data they become confused.

The consistent experience

Another principal of designing the experience is consistency. Though we stress consistency we also have to realize it can get in the way because life experiences are inconsistent. A good measure of when it works is to compare it with the expectations of the users . Because experience is a cognitive process, it is something that must work for us mentally, and the only way to test it is with real live people in situations as close to real as possible.

Now this is not a call to chaos. Unless confusion or disorientation are the goal as in a game.

Consistency is also important in related experiences. Branding works because of a focus on consistency. On the cognitive level you can be anywhere in the Nike site and know you are experiencing Nike because of the consistency throughout.

Media differ greatly in their strengths, weaknesses and how people perceive them. It is critical, therefore, that transmedia design be mutated in order to take advantage of these differences and to be successful in each. What is carried away fromn the experience is a connectedness thanks to consistency. The mistake most designers make is in trying to design once for many media. Doesn't work.

The experience of metaphor

Metaphors are one way to build a cognitive model and they can be very powerful in orienting people to understanding the experience. The can be equally disastrous if they aren't done well.

Another principal of design is metaphor. You will be learning a lot about this but you have to understand metaphors are one way to build a cognitive model and they can be very powerful in orienting people to understanding the experience. The can be equally disastrous if they aren't done well. Metaphors use references to already known experiences as clues to new ones. The computer desktop is a good example. It is an attempt to help you create and use files, store and arrange them, delete them and work with them. It has been very successful only because the metaphor isn't totally consistent with the real thing – really does an OS work like a desk drawer?

In many respects a metaphor can be regarded as a similie

Metaphors are not required and can actually be crutches for poor design and equally poor ideas. Used well, they are absolutely illuminating for the user. And can quickly orient them to the functions and interactions of the experience.

Interface design is only one of the many terms we use for the design of experiences. Designed back is the ‘70s it was a term that meant software interface design. It has subsequently expanded and you can now think of it as encompassing information design, interaction design and design that includes a sensorial element: auditory, visual and so on.

http://surface.yugop.com/

Mostly, interface design is concerned with the effectiveness and usability of a computer interface but should also be expanded to include the usefulness and usability of the product itself.

Usability is the battle cry today. Many books by such observers as Nielson, Veen and Krug, talk about the topic from an engineering design POV but the important aspect which is missing is thatusability applies to all experiences at some level or other.

You are going to be inundated with this over the next year or so, Listen to what we have to say. It is important. Understand this: *Usability can have many factors.*

Learnability is the ease with which people can understand the experience/interface and begin using it.

Learnability is the ease with which people can understand the experience/ interface and begin using it. The other is functionality which is how easy the interface is to use once it has been learned.

Learnability and functionality are mutually exclusive. You will have to set your goal to be the achievement of one or the other. The reason is the cues necessary to help a newbie learn what to do are usually the very things that block experienced users from using the design quickly, easily and efficiently.

The best way of illustrating this is to pose a question: How would you react if, every time you booted up your computer, you had to go through a tutorial that teaches you how to use the computer? For a newbie, this great. For you… well.

One of the things that most impacts functionality is memorability. How easy is it to remember what to do and when? Quake is a great example of this. You quickly learn which weapons kill which monster in which situation. Therefore memorability is directly affected by the cognitive model discussed earlier which people build in their minds about the experience. You know the only way to kill a zombie in Quake is to blow it up. How? You learn they tend to rise from the dead and kill you if you don't.

Easy error recovery is another consideration that , while not making the experience nicer or easier to use, does have a profound effect upon satisfaction.Have you ever hit an e-commerce site where you ordered the wrong item and couldn't change it? Easy recovery is something that doesn't end the experience, requires a restart or require previously started work to be redone.

Uability is often the starting point for good design. When we approach preconceived notions with a "fresh eye" – put yourself in the user's shoes- you open up the possibilities to create more satisfying experiences.

You are about to discover something absolutely breathtaking. It is something that will turn you inside out and rearrange your molecules. In fact, once I tell you, you will never be the same person your were five minutes ago. What is it?

You are about to discover something absolutely breathtaking. It is something that will turn you inside out and rearrange your molecules. In fact, once I tell you, you will never be the same person your were five minutes ago. What is it?

No two users will interact with your work in the same way.

This interaction can be a source of information for customizing the experience so that it responds differently for each user. Therefore, experiences should, ultimately, change and modify themselves to be more appropriate for users. Again, let's go back to Quake.

You can choose three experience levels. No two users will move in the same direction, choose the same weapons or attack plan. Yet they are experiencing the same space. Go to Amazon and order a few books. Eventually your page will change to reflect buying patterns. They will suggest choices based upon interests . It is your choice. Again, it is the same space.

Amazon and game developers are smart enough to realize it is almost impossible to know a lot about the audience and design to a broad range of user behavior. These experiences happen in real time and people controlling the experience can modify the experience to keep them engaged.

Story tellers are masters at controlling user behavior. They can modify the story, their voice, the pace and so on for as long as the story is being told. How? By sensing the mood of the audience.

There is no reason why an experience can't be designed to change based on how people react to it. Whether the experience is digital, theatrical or occurs in real space, like this room. Even small changes to only a few characteristics can make an experience feel more interactive.

The meaning in experiences and things are based on a wide variety of personal values.In fact, the only constant you can safely count on is that people find meaning in things.

Meaning is often built by objects or experiences that allow the user to experience emotion.

Remember this when you design experiences. People look for meaning by making connections to their own lives and values. This means people are looking for a lasting impact.

Meaning is often built by objects or experiences that allow the user to experience emotion. It is the user reaction.Where does this reaction come from? Artifacts of the experience. I was at FlashForward this summer in New York. I purchased a T-shirt. Sure it's dumb but just looking at it serves to remind me of the experience and to relive it.

One of the best uses for the internet is to connect people across distances and cultures in support of common values.

I belong to a number of discussion lists on the Internet. One is the Dreamweaver list run by Blueworld. I have met a lot of people I have never physically met through this list. In fact, I am currently writing a book and one of the co-authors is a gentleman, Chris Flick, who lives in Virginia. I have never met him but have had several intense and illuminating discussions with him on the list. What is common between us is that we have established an an important connection in our lives and help eachother in an important and direct way.

People look for meaning by making connections to their own lives and values. This means people are looking for a lasting impact.

You know the tech behind what we do is so seductive that we often forget its purpose is to serve people's interests and needs. Ultimately, and never forget this, technology is not important. It is the people it serves. Over the next year or so you are going to hear a fundamental message and will be hammered into your psyche's: *Focus on the user. Don't focus on the technology.* The tech will overwhelm. The user won't. He or she will simply abandon you.

The Interactive Experience

We believe the technology behind what we do has to , ultimately, be transparent. If it isn't, it becomes the experience. Tech enables and limits the experience often creating an aesthetic of its own. Programtic art – Praystation- is becoming a trend in today's world. This may be important but technologies need to be understood and implemented after the overall experience is designed.

Interactivity is the competitive advantage of interactive media.

Isn't it odd that humans have been interacting with each other throughout our history. The computer is an odd thing because we thing we can interact with it. For the first time in our stay on this planet we think we should interact with a tool rather than use it.

This is why you are here and the thing about interactivity is that it is not so much as definable thing as it is a nebulous concept. There is a straight line of experiences from passive to interactive and the thing is there is no one point on that line where passive transforms into interactive.

So we have this new tool where interactivity is important. Now think of the issues around it for the past few years- content, technology, bandwidth, connectivity, security. They concern everything but interactivity.

Even those who claim to understand and design interactivity tend more towards building dynmic media rather than interactive experiences. This in some ways explains the rise to prominence of Flash in such a short time. The focus is on the animation not interactivity.

Interactivity is the competitive advantage of interactive media.

We have had multimedia for a long time. Slide shows with sound. Stage productions, video with sound. What is so different now is that interactivity is a part of the mix. Technology didn't suddenly become interactive. It takes time to carefully develop the process that makes it possible for the audience to participate in the action..

The problem with interactivity is its misuse The term has come to mean either animation (a passive medium at best) or anything that appears on a computer.

What is important to understand is that everyone creates interactions at all times. I am interacting with you, You talk to someone in the class while I am yacking and you are interacting with that individual. You just don't think of it that way.

Interactivity has a number of other attributes. These include feedback, control, creativity, adaptivity, productivity and so on. These are also valuable experiences. Interactive experiences which contain them are highly valued when designed well.

...whether the computer is capable of initiating rather than merely reacting through the programming. This is one of the deepest issues you swill confront.

On a philosophical level, interaction is a process of continual action and reaction between two parties. What is debatable is whether the computer is capable of initiating rather than merely reacting through the programming. This is one of the deepest issues you swill confront. As we continue to explore this issue the answers we find may guide us in creating experiences that are more interactive and successful than what has been created to date.

Experiences and creativity

One thing that makes us human and the thing we stress around here is creativity. It is the ability we all have to create things. We are inherently creative creatures and when we have the chance to create we feel more satisfied and more valuable. In fact, the products we create have at great deal of value to us, at least on a personal level. Think about it, if you were to graduate this course and have nothing, absolutely nothing, that you have created I would have a serious rebellion on my hands.

Unfortunately our culture is one that tends to discourage creativity- your web site sucks, you don't draw or paint well enough. That sort of thing. This is mostly true on a professional level where certain standards have to be enforced. The interesting thing here is that it is the "home made" work , not the manufactured work, that is most valued. Don't believe me? I'll bet your parents have a box of your stuff stashed somewhere in the house that includes everything from finger painting from grade 1 to a letter from camp.

Therefore creativity is an end in itself whether anyone else either sees, experiences or appreciates the output. Based on that experiences which allow us to be creative give us a feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment.

Creativity is often thought of in terms of artistic expression while productivity is though of in terms or work and value creation. In fact there is no difference because Creativity and Productivity create things. The difference is in the association.

Creativity is often thought of in terms of artistic expression while productivity is though of in terms or work and value creation. In fact there is no difference because Creativity and Productivity create things. The difference is in the association. Creatives tend to abhor structure and look upon work as limiting or constraining their self-expression. Those on the production side of things tend to see what they do as being efficient and valuable while they see the creatives as wasting time upon something that is frivolous, abstract and unproductive. The truth is both groups are right because they are involved in the same activity. What I find so interesting is that both groups value spending time to create something.

Creativity ,when you get right down to it, recognizes that people have an inherent need to express themselves. Experiences that allow people to communicate with each other or to simply be heard tend to be both rewarding and satisfying.

There are innumerable ways to communicate whether through text, gesture, speech, symbology, iconography and so on. The result can then be recorded on paper, a screen, as data or not at all depending on whether or not you want to add permanence to the communication.

Just remember something when trying to communicate through a computer – it is still being filtered through a machine and can not even hope to approach the rich diversity of traditional forms of communication.

Communication between a human and a machine can be typed, spoken or gestural using a mouse. However the richeness and depth of Human-to-machine communication is extremely limited. It is limited to the algorithms and code which give the machine an extremely narrow range of appropriate and possible responses. This is because machines are stone, cold stupid. They can't deal with ambiguity. Don't believe me? Get a spell checker to distinguish between red, read and read or between check and cheque?

Remember those lists and chat rooms I was talking about earlier? They are so successful because, like productive and creative experiences, one is given the opportunity to communicate with people who understand and share the stories and opinions expressed. Because these interactions inevitably involve two or more people they also incorporate high levels of control, feedback and adaptivity.

Just remember something when trying to communicate through a computer : it is still being filtered through a machine and can not even hope to approach the rich diversity of traditional forms of communication.

So what is this adaptivity all about?

Experiences that adapt themselves to our interests and behaviours always seem more real, sophisticated and personal. Though these experiences may take more energy and planning and are seriously difficult to accomplish, they are more valuable to the participants.

Customization is a form of adaptivity. It allows people to choose options to tailor and experience to their needs and desires. (Put a skin on an MP3 player such as WinAmp). Customization is easier to acieve than personalization since the options are finite and controllable.

Personalization is sophisticated because the choices and options can't be predicted. Yet personalizations allows the creation of even more unique experiences .

It is possible for experiences to adapt themselves to the participants in a variety of ways. The experience can change based on the behaviour of the user, reader, participant, actor or users interests nedds goals and desires. It is important for you to understand which attributes make the experience successful and valuable to users and balance these with those that are possible to create within the limits of budget, system, resources and other production constraints.

The best experts and most effective communicators are always adapting their interactions on the fly to suit the reactions they perceive from their audiences: from body language, statements, answers, questions and so on. Because we expect this behaviour from people we simply assume the comnputer will respond in kind. Big mistake.

There is a growing body of literature that looks at digital media in a way that is completely divorced from how we look at traditional media. It does not attempt to describe the aesthetic or academic values of the media. Instead it looks at it from the perspective of the experience gained from the media.

The experience of a story

There is a growing body of literature that looks at digital media in a way that is completely divorced from how we look at traditional media. It does not attempt to describe the aesthetic or academic values of the media. Instead, it looks at it from the perspective of the experience gained from the media.

I find this to be intriguing because isn't that what a story is all about. Listen to a combat pilot talk about a dog fight and it will usually start with:

"It was great flight. There we were inverted, supersonic…"

"There we were…" immediately tells you that you are about to hear a personal experience.

In 1999, Joseph Pine and James Gilmore wrote a book called "The Experience Economy". It described how the idea of experience creation is not merely a new design approach but the result of a fundamental economic shift that doesn't place wealth creation on traditional consumption but upon the creation of experiences. They offer a whole range of examples from theme restaurants to luxury travel and argue " companies stage an experience whenever they engage customers, connecting with them in a personal, memorable way." What could be more engaging, personal and memorable than "There we were inverted, supersonic…"

David Jones is Austalian. Here is an example of his work that underlines my next point when it comes to telling a great story,

The beauty of this piece is drawn from the story. It is a great story of love and romance, with a twist. It is also done in Flash, whose main strength, is the ability to tell a linear story. What makes this story work so well is not the underlying technology. It is the characterizations. It is the creative tension- Will she get the flowers? Will they fall off of the mountain? These are the hallmarks of a great story and they are no different from those of the Ojibwa or Wayson Choy.

http://www.transience.com.au/teetering.html

Sometimes you are simply handed the story and asked to make something from the literate tradition have just as much appeal in the oral tradition. If you have ever been to a poetry reading you will discover that the poet can make the poem more vivid and compelling than were you to simply sit in solitude and read the poem from the printed page. Moving media from one tradition to the other is extremely difficult if not impossible. It can be done and done well if you approach the story from the oral tradition and look for areas where the strengths of the technology add power to the written word.

There is a 'zine out of the U.S.- Born Magazine- which, each month asks a digital artist to bring a poem to life. One of my favorites is this one, Flesh of a Mangoe

In this example the technology is used to its fullest. The imaging is dead on. The sound is amazing and the typography is excellent. Yet what makes this piece so compelling is not the technology. What makes it so compelling is the fact the technology is so transparent. You pay attention to the story, not the underlying technology that, by the way, is flash-based.

For a story to work, the audience must focus on the story. Not the storyteller. Let me tell you a story about that one.

http://www.bornmagazine.org/projects/mango/#