

Interactivity is nothing new.

People have been interacting for as long as they've existed. What *is* new is that we consider it possible for computers to be interactive—that is, people can truly interact with computers and related technologies, rather than just use them.

Interactivity is not so much a definable thing so as it is a nebulous concept. It is a spectrum from passive to interactive; and, there's no distinct point along the continuum where an experience switches from passive to active to interactive. In fact, it's probably only possible to compare experiences as being more or less interactive, rather than interactive in and of themselves.

In an interactive medium, it would seem that interactivity would be important, but the issues over the past years have revolved around almost everything *but* interaction: content, technology, bandwidth, connectivity, politics, security, and so on. Even those who claim to understand interaction usually produce merely dynamic media (such as animation) rather than truly interactive experiences.

Interactivity is *the* differentiable advantage of interactive media.

<<< passive

We have had multimedia for a long time (in print and television, for example), but what is different now is **interactivity**. Technologies are not inherently or automatically interactive. They must be made so through a careful development process that makes a place for the audience (users) to take part in the action. Products and experiences in these media that aren't truly interactive won't be successful because the medium isn't being used to its advantage, for example, using the interactive media to broadcast content or recreate traditional passive media experiences like television. Television will always be better at being television than the Web or any other interactive media, though it may evolve online and redefine what we consider "television" to be.

The biggest problem with the term *interactive* is that it has been misused by too many companies and people, as the term has been generally accepted as meaning either animation (which is an old passive medium), or anything that appears on a computer or on the Web since these are "interactive media." Unfortunately, these definitions are not only incorrect but misguided in how narrowly they look at activities. Interactivity encompasses everything that we do, not just that which we do on or with computers. In fact, most interactive experiences in our lives have nothing to do with technology. Playing sports or other games, hobbies, and work are more interactive than computers have been able to address. Probably the most interactive experiences in your life will be great conversations.

What's important to understand is that **everyone already creates interactions** for themselves and others, we just don't think about it. However, we already know a

Interactivity

feedback

interaction: a cyclic process in which two actors alternately listen, think, and speak. -Chris Crawford

Understanding Interactivity
www.erasmatazz.com/book.html

control

creativity

interactive >>>

great deal about interactivity from which we can draw experience, processes, and techniques for creating computer-based interactivity.

Interactivity is also comprised of many other attributes. Some of these include feedback, control, creativity, adaptivity, productivity, communications, and so forth. Many of these attributes are also valuable experiences (certainly creativity and productivity); and, correspondingly, interactive experiences that contain these attributes are highly valued when designed well. Interactivity isn't necessarily better, but it usually does correspond with higher involvement by an audience.

productivity

communications

On a philosophical level, **interaction** is a process of continual **action** and **reaction** between two parties (whether living or machine). It is debatable whether or not a computer is capable of actually initiating action rather than merely reacting through its programming. This controversy about action and initiation is one of the deepest issues for interactivity, and may represent one of the key differences between animals (including humans) and machines. 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.

adaptivity

Interactivity