HOW TO
NOT
SUCK
AT
GAME
DESIGN

GAME DESIGN, ART, RESOURCES, RESEARCH,
CRITICISM, TUTORIALS & STUFF BY ANJIN ANHUT.

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, **June 6, 2011 [http://howtonotsuckatgamedesign.com/?p=2899]** by Anjin Anhut.

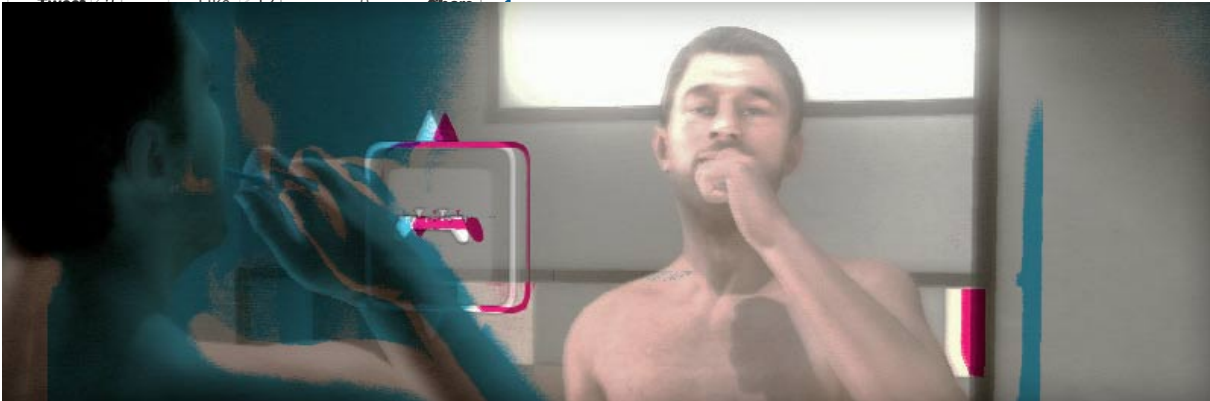Tweet Like 13 Share

I have a bone to pick with the term "interactive medium". Games often get described as being interactive to make them distinct from other media. While it is of course accurate to describe games as an interactive medium or interactive form of art and entertainment, it is completely insufficient to articulate what we actually mean to say.

Interactive Toasters

Games make us engaged in an exciting activity, let us explore fantastic worlds and take part in epic events unfolding before us. Okay, often enough there are pretty boring ones, but you get the idea. Interactivity plays a part in this, but does it makes games distinct or special? Nope. Not really. Games are interactive, so what? Any website is interactive, any e-book, any DVD player. Damn, any vending machine and even my toaster are interactive.

To use interaction as the distinctive feature only describes the fact that games are devices and software. Comparing games to other media, storytelling media to be specific, but adding that games are interactive storytelling is silly and devaluing. Yeah, David Cage, your chest pumping for how hollywoodsy your games are is silly and devaluing. It only sets up games to be imitations of other media with nothing more than a gimmick. And this gimmick even doesn't hold up very well. Many creatives and enthusiasts rightfully claim that any narrative medium is interactive. Any book, song, movie or picture needs the audience to interpret and enhance what is presented and convert it into something meaningful.

Meaningful Interaction?

Have you ever found someone sexually attractive and wanted to physically interact with this person? Ever got pissed off by someone and imagined your fist interacting with his face? Interactivity, while technically fitting, is an incredibly hollow and awkward word, to describe what we do every day. And it gets increasingly hollow and awkward the more meaning we attribute to whatever we are doing.

Yeah, I get it. Interaction is a sophisticated word, conveying ideas of arts and crafts and science and stuff. You know, for grown-ups. It's a term used to artificially enhance the cultural relevance of the medium for adults and to make you sound educated and serious, when talking about games. But it totally deprives video game of the one thing that makes them so magically awesome,Äö√Ñ¬∂ playing.

It Is Called Player Not Interactor.

Games are no medium of interactivity, they are a medium of play. Deal with it. You are doing the same stuff you did when you were a toddler and you are making games so other people can do the same stuff they did when they were a toddler. You aren't interacting, you are playing, you are doing the one thing only games (and toys for that matter) can offer. And no degree of challenge, adult content or technology changes that.

I'm so sick of having people in the gaming community trying to give games relevance by comparing them to films and then being dishonest about what makes games special. I'm so sick of people from outside the community trying to display gaming as kids stuff, with all the paradigms attached, and us trying to get around that by relabelling it. We play! Embrace it! Break the paradigms! Be proud of having kept that childlike ability to play and fucking call it what it is.

So enough with this. I'm now going to sit on my balcony, drinking a cold glass of milk and read a ~~graphic novel~~ comic.

5 THOUGHTS ON "IT'S A MEDIUM OF PLAY. DEAL WITH IT!"

Paul
on **June 9, 2011 at 5:35 am** said:

To me, the reason to use the word 'interactive media' or 'interactive art' is simply that you might not want to just talk about games. Games, as you rightly point out, are great in their own right – they're the reason let us escape from our day to day lives, can be an incredibly powerful teaching and learning tool, and are, most of all, fun.

But often when I write, I want to say something about any storytelling attempt that allows the player to have a significant impact on the tale being told. Games are one part of that (and games aren't always story-based), but there's a huge scope for interactive storytelling past what you see on your xbox. Is the word 'interactive' kinda clumsy? Yes, but until we find a better word to use, it's not going away.

That being said, your point about buzzwords is definitely true. It's kinda sad when you see that being used around a hack'n'slash…

Marcel Jackwerth
on **June 6, 2011 at 12:28 pm** said:

That is indeed the difference between "interaction" (one time) and "interactivity" (permanent/ongoing). The definition of "interactive" itself isn't that clear though. It can't be decided easily (yes/no) so the "degree of interactivity" is used as a measure (which again is highly subjective). The discussion whether something is "interactive" or not (in doubt, e.g. vending machine) can be as unproductive as to discuss whether music-band X is Hip-Hop or Rock.

The conclusion after many conferences is: there are too many people (publishers, press) who use these phrases as buzz-words. Don't fall for them, don't use them – unless you really have to generalize (which is wrong most of the time anyway).

We are no "interactive media developers", we create tasteful stuff to show others. That's what every artist has been doing for millennia.

–
A serious error in my earlier comment: "not declassify" should be "declassify".

Anjin Anhut
on **June 6, 2011 at 12:39 pm** said:

Buzzwords, exactly!
Good points. Feel free to comment more often.

Marcel Jackwerth
on **June 6, 2011 at 11:15 am** said:

My issue with this article/rant is that its motivation seems to be based on the misbelief "games" = "interactive media". "Interactive media" is much more than just games – games are only a small part of it. Board games, VR/AR-installations, websites ("Web 2.0″) and others are considered being a part of interactive media.

Interactivity is more than just punching somebody in the face. Interactivity is as a constant exchange of information between two actors. A mostly one-way or only short interaction would not declassify something of being interactive. Also a permanent query-respond relation wouldn't make something interactive.

While the article tries to avoid the definition of "interactivity" by classifying "interactivity" as an adultish term, "media" should have been classified as adultish as well. Instead of mixing up terms of different fields of expertise the concluding statement could have been: Games are just what they are – games.

Anjin Anhut
on **June 6, 2011 at 11:56 am** said:

Hey Marcel..
Thanks for the second opinion here. And yeah, your right I see the problem with the "media" term as well, but focussed more on the "interactive" part, since this is often used define what makes games games in contrast to movies (for example). I totally dig your conclusion.

My understanding of interaction actually starts at a single action and response event like a punch to the face triggering an "Ouch!" or the push of a button triggering an ingame action. A constant exchange of information is not necessary to qualify.

I also understand that games are part of a larger spectrum of interactive media. Still interactive medium, to me is a poor defining description of games in particular.