

## Learning from Slime Mold

Developing interactivity to create compelling media experiences across platforms

### CORE CONCEPTS

Communication relies on interaction: The medium is the message. All communication i.e interaction, depends upon shared systems, as well as being an instantiation of the system/s.

Media interaction involves a 'call-to-action' – this is particularly significant in cross-media projects utilising stretching or augmenting strategies where you must persuade individuals to participate on multiple platforms. The core steps in a successful interaction are:

- **Prime:** prepare and motivate the user to act;
- **Refer:** provide them with the knowledge and means to act;
- **Reward:** acknowledge and recompense their action.

Good interactivity is:

- **Meaningful** – does something that the user wants in a way that they understand;
- **Discernable** – provides feedback that allows the user to gauge their transaction with the system;
- **Integrated** – the forms of interactivity and affordances given the user arise out of a consistent representational system.

But what is 'compelling interactivity'?

- **Satisfying** – emotionally/instrumentally.
- **Sticky** – reasons to stay/reasons to return.
- **Engaging** – participation becomes multi-levelled/participation generates a 'new reality'.

Compelling interactivity creates great experiences. It includes all of the below modalities:

- **Interpretive** – users engage cognitively; explicit framing for meaning; users participate as agents within representational contexts (Laurel);
- **Functional** – users manipulate elements of the system to produce results (the nuts and bolts -- buttons, indexes, search etc); direct intervention – action creates meaningful change (Cameron);
- **Explicit** – what the user is there for – what they want to do and how they do it;
- **Relational** – reciprocal relations between system elements (Crawford). Incl. Cybernetic – self-governing relations generate emergent qualities (Turing, Beers);
- **Meta-interactivity** – users participate within the culture of a system.

The user can be thought of as bringing 4 kinds of questions into any digital environment, questions that it is the designer's job to answer:

- 1) Procedural questions: What does it do? What did it just do? What does it think it is doing?
- 2) Participatory question: What is my role? What can I do? How can I make it do what it does?
- 3) Spatial questions: Where am I in relation to the whole? How can I get from one place to another? How can I retrace my steps? What is the overview map of this environment? What do these proximities/distances signify? How can I

juxtapose non-proximate elements?

- 4) Encyclopedic questions: what is the extent of this artifact? Is everything here? What is left out? Where is the boundary? How are things sorted and labelled? What is the granularity at which I can retrieve things?

## **CHECKLIST**

- Iterative or active design process: define, prototype, evaluate, refine.
- Prime, Refer, Reward.
- Meaningful, consistent and integrated interactive options.
- Simple options to generate complex results.
- The 'killer app' is other people.

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