Survey of Interactivity

**Goal:** To sharpen the analytic eye with which students perceive interactive media in the world around them.

**Overview:** This non-studio course will explore the range of interactive media by critiquing specific case studies. By examining the connections between interactive media and other disciplines, we will begin to understand media critically and explicitly. The other disciplines we choose will depend on the interests of the students in the course. The final project will ask students to use the themes of the course to imagine a new interactive experience and “pitch” it to the rest of the class.

**Topics Covered:**

- Perception. Introductory readings in human perception will set the stage for understanding how we take in media content. Example: Thief (video game). Why is it scary?
- Action. How people tend to manipulate or otherwise interact with things. Readings will be drawn from the Computer-Human Interface Conference Proceedings (e.g., CHI 2001). Example: Palm Pilot – Graffiti.
- Constraints. We will discuss how constraints placed on the interactor and on the content help define an experience. Example: Tamagotchi – only three buttons, and yet a very compelling experience.
- The Infinitely Masterable. Why musical instruments and writing implements last longer than video games. Example: Fountain pen, violin.
- Time Scales. How interactivity may appeal to people in one second, ten seconds, ten minutes, ten hours, or a lifetime. Example: Sim City
- Ambient Interactivity. Some interactive experiences do not require active participation. Examples will be drawn from the work of the Ishii and others.
- Social Behavior. In a multi-interactor experience, interactors may serve as content for each other. How does this change the interaction? How does mediation change human-human contact? Example: chat rooms.
- Dynamic Range. How different parts of the same experience define a dynamic range of expectation, thereby changing the way we perceive future elements. Example: Emotional synthetic characters.
- Reward Functions. The challenges and pitfalls built into many video games resemble the variable reward schedules used by animal trainers; seen in this light, video games are potent exploiters of people’s animal brains. Example: Super Mario Brothers.
- Allusions. New media inevitably references old media, both explicitly and in the paradigms and clichés that it utilizes. Example: interactive cinematography.
- Integration. How all parts need to work together. Example: Virtual actors.