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DEVELOPING A LANGUAGE OF INTERACTIVITY
THROUGH THE THEORY OF PLAY

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ABSTRACT

In a world increasingly influenced by interactive interfaces, devices and services both in the commercial and non-commercial spheres, understanding interactivity and its underpinnings is essential. We have moved into a state of flux in which both culture and technology are in constant interplay and the only constant is change itself. The only future-proof approach to designing for and dealing with an environment of constant change in these systems and forms is to look for a mechanism and theoretical framework that underpins them all.

Drawing upon a range of disciplines – from design, art, cognitive science, linguistics and more – this thesis argues that play is such a fundamental building block of culture, society, technology and cognition that it is the ideal lens through which to examine the interactive experience. It is versatile enough to cross boundaries and fundamental enough to be understood intuitively. Through an understanding of the intersection between movement, embodied cognition, metaphor and play, a set of principles of interactivity are developed that are flexible enough to analyse and be applied to a broad spectrum of interactive experiences, from interactive artworks to services to individual user interface elements. Finally, it is proposed that these principles provide a way to examine the phenomenal growth of social networks and the fundamental cultural shifts we are experiencing today as a result of the friction generated between emerging networked technologies and the industrial age structures they are dismantling.

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