ABSTRACT

The concept of interaction is foundational in technology interface design with its presuppositions being taken for granted. But the interaction metaphor has become ambiguous to the extent that its application to interface design contributes to misalignments between peoples’ expected and actual experience with computer-enhanced actions. This chapter re-examines the presuppositions governing human-computer interaction with the motivation of strengthening weaknesses in their foundational concepts, and contributing a theoretical framework to designing for artistic as well as mundane experience. It argues for abandoning the interaction metaphor to refocus design discourse toward the intermediation and mediation roles of technology interfaces. Remediation (i.e., representation of one medium in another) is proposed as a conceptual model that more precisely describes the human-to-computer actions.

INTRODUCTION

“Art calls for technology. An emergent technology can produce leaps into both science and art” (Risset, 2003). The rapid integration of computing technology in everyday life, thus leaving its mark on human thought, emotion and action, attests to the leaps Jean-Claude Risset envisions. Such historic velocity of change
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in the human-computer relationship, or ‘interaction’, however, leaves experts and non-experts little time to reflect on the foundational principles of this relationship. This essay examines the nature of human-computer interaction. The motivation is twofold: first, to see whether there are any cracks in the foundation of the interaction concept as it is used in computer interface design, and thus consider whether these should be repaired or replaced; secondly, with an eye toward developing theory that serves as a framework for research and design of technology, contribute to revisions of current descriptions of the relationship between people and computers, concepts which function as models of human embodied cognitive processes, and models applied to design and engineering of computer interfaces, impacting people’s everyday experience, culture and art. These purposes are realized with and through an interpretive discourse and a sketch of a prescriptive approach to methodology.

The author’s strategy for decomposing presuppositions is grounded on ‘foundational analysis’ (Saariluoma, 1997), but deviates from the framework by using methods of the phenomenological tradition. The concepts employed in the critique can be applied to technology in general, but the following treatise is limited to the domain of computer technology, and specifically to the concepts used in design of computer interfaces. Throughout this work, the term ‘ordinary user’ denotes people without expert knowledge of computer technology, in contrast to the term ‘expert’, which is used interchangeably with ‘designers and engineers’.

Two themes emerge in the following sections. First, interaction as a conceptual metaphor denoting what happens during human usage of computers foregrounds illusionary aspects of the intermediation, mediation and operational roles assigned by experts to computers. The author contends ‘interaction’ is a misplaced label. This misplacement leads designers and engineers to rely on a partial view of design discourse. Modeling and labeling discrete events as interaction, without foundational analysis, contribute to the problem of misalignment between ordinary users’ expected and actual experience derived from computer usage. Second, there is a need for a philosophy of human-to-computer relationship that reframes the modeling process in order to assist experts to refocus the design discourse towards the intermediation and mediation roles of the computer interface. To this end, the author proposes using the concept of ‘remediation’ as a more accurate description of constitutive events in the realm of human usage of computing devices, to understand them well enough to make decisions on interface design.

WHERE THE INTERACTION IS NOT

One cannot deny the contribution of metaphor usage to modeling technical aspects of the operating principles used in contemporary digital computers: it has triggered the
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