The Digital Turn: Design in the Era of Interactive Technologies

There is an exciting scramble at the intersection of design and technology to see the present clearly and have a hand in building the future. Barbara Junge, Professor of Digital Media in Visual Communication at Weißensee Academy of Art in Berlin, is chief editor of this new volume, *The Digital Turn: Design in the Era of Interactive Technologies.* Co-editors include professors Zwick, Bērziņa, Scheiffele, and Westerveld, also all from Weißensee. Junge, with Zwick and Bērziņa, who contribute Forewords to the book, co-founded the eLab at Weißensee to foster interdisciplinary exploration of how digital technology becomes tangible design. *The Digital Turn* brings together, in the surprising format of a printed book, forty-seven diverse essays and interviews that share the exploratory spirit and methods of the eLab.

According to Zwick, the title *The Digital Turn* refers to a tipping point in 2010 when more was published digitally than on paper. It is hard to imagine comparing the two mediums quantifiably, given the variety and flexibility of digital publishing. Despite the problematic nature of the claim, we are undoubtedly experiencing radical shifts in content delivery, and are turning towards the digital. The book describes this new landscape, and our navigation of it.

Zwick describes calling for a virtual symposium on the future of reading, with responses culminating in a time capsule on how changing format and distribution is affecting content and how we assimilate it. Contributors interpret the term "reading" liberally as including all types of content absorption. In Janis Jeffries' essay, for example, the human wearer is the content to be read by the textile. Many of the contributors write about their own work in programming, industrial or textile design, installation art, and other fields, coupled with their emotional response to the time in which they are living and making. Kenya Hara's essay stands out for addressing the loss of the book as an object. He considers the individual who leaves a curated bookshelf to posterity, "revealing just how profound had been the world they inhabited" (39). Nicholas Negroponte's forward-looking essay argues that it is time to move on: "Notice film is gone; photographs are not. Vinyl and CDs are gone; but music is very much around. In fact people are undeniably taking more pictures and listening to more music than ever before" (179). Negroponte's assessments are refreshingly concrete, but there are subtleties of digital potential that are difficult to articulate in text. Konrad Hempel describes his installation that explores perception and media-constructed reality. The viewer freely navigates a series of rooms, and can peer through tunnels at videos, but the harder they try to access screens to "read" them, the less accessible the information becomes. Artists like Hempel, and the collective TROIKA, describe pieces that are successful because they encourage reframing rather than pretending to know the way. The book is a balance of these abstract invitations, reflections, and tracings of content delivery evolution. A rich example of this tracing is Tincuta Heinzel's description of the phenomenon of reading. What the book does not provide, however, are novel lenses with which to view the digital content experience.

The editors decline the opportunity to group or frame the essays and draw grand conclusions from them; instead, they present the essays in a seemingly random order. Pieces on e-textiles appear throughout, peppered with others on theory, programming, and specific intersections like digital urban space. Ideas that repeat are annotated in the margin, directing the reader to another essay in the book, not unlike a hyperlink in digital publishing. Each piece begins with an image that resembles a topographical map. Main topics are indicated by the rise and fall of thin horizontal lines. Terms and ideas are compiled in the same motif on the cover, and frequency of mention is correlated with altitude of peak. The graphic wraps around the entire jacket and unfolds to reveal a landscape of content, a needed map. Although these devices are informative, traditional thematic sections might make the content more navigable and useful. Like the Internet, there is a democracy to the collection that leaves readers free to draw their own conclusions, but also vulnerable to not making any. Unlike the Internet, the book is a static object that does support the editors' intention to mark this historical moment. The idiosyncrasy of a printed book exploring and echoing the forms of digital media is resolved once we see this project as a time capsule of our response to the present moment. These experience-rich essays reflect our shared sense of being both lost and excited.