Interactions: Time, Culture, and Behavior

Over the past 10 issues, *interactions* has, with a great deal of conscious repetition, investigated themes of global influence, sustainability, temporal aesthetics, behavior change, and the design for culture. These issues are at the heart of the human condition—whether exploring, solving, or celebrating the relationships between people and society. These themes continually combine to offer a glimpse into designing for interaction—the ability to forge connections and bridge gaps between experiences, people, and technology.

This issue of *interactions* is no different, but it exemplifies a new and subtle duality: impending doom and slight optimism.

“At the end of the world, plant a tree.” This advice from the Qu’ran captures what has now become a ubiquitous sense of imminent implosion. However, it offers a glimmer of hope that the impossible is not yet out of reach. Even though the world may be on the brink of collapse, repair is still within our grasp. This notion has been reiterated at design conferences and in design communities with increasing urgency. Our world has dramatically changed in the past six months; the mere thought of continuing down the same path of irreparable consumerism seems tainted and dirty, yet down the path we progress. Impending doom, tempered by a slight optimism.

In these pages we explore this duality through a collection of articles that delve into sustainability, the evolution of practice, and particular methods.

The aforementioned quote from the Qu’ran appears in an interview with Adam Greenfield, head of design direction for service and user-interface design at Nokia. Greenfield carefully explains that he is not optimistic about the future, but instead, hopeful. This sentiment is mirrored by Victor Margolin’s cover story, “The Waste Manifesto,” in which he demands that we come to terms with our waste. In Margolin’s

words, we must “avoid social obesity” and better our ecological footprint.

Hugh Dubberly, Christine Valenza, and Gary Hirsch all offer insight into the interactions between people, which—lest we forget—need not involve complicated information technology. Dubberly, along with Paul Pangaro, investigates the process of spoken conversation, and how ideas are shaped and formed between two people. Valenza parses the visualization of the spoken word, as she describes her work as a graphic facilitator. Hirsch describes how organizational stories evolve, and how one can shape the nature of facts and contradictions through the use of narrative and theme.

Pedro Jorge gives us insight into the conversations occurring in Hong Kong, with the intention of describing how the practice of design is viewed in Asia. In his roundtable discussion, several practitioners vent their frustrations with the speed of action—and the lack of reflective interpretation—occurring in Asian design firms. Equal cultural insight unfolds in Pablo Flores and Juan Pablo Hourcade’s description of the OLPC project in Uruguay. They investigate local reaction to the deployment of 120,000 XO laptops to children in this dairy-farming land, and reflect on the consequences of this controversial approach to massive change.

Greenfield explains that he would “rather live comfortably—hopefully not obscenely so—in the years we have remaining to us, use my skills as they are most valuable to people, and cherish each moment for what it uniquely offers.” He expresses a sense of quiet hope, and this issue echoes that hope. We trust that you, too, strive for such goals, and that this issue of *interactions* inspires you to reflect on this subtle theme.

—Jon Kolko
eic@interactions.acm.org

► Richard Anderson

► Jon Kolko