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@Brunning: People & Technology: At the Only Edge that Means Anything / How We Understand What We Do

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@Brunning: People & Technology

At the Only Edge that Means Anything / How We Understand What We Do

by **Dennis Brunning** (E Humanities Development Librarian, Arizona State University) <dennis.brunning@gmail.com>

Let's Book Review: the Digital Wunderkammer....

Don't look for this book in your online bookstores; so far there isn't one. The *Digital Wunderkammer: 10 Chapters on the Iconic Turn* is all about being online while we once were — off-line. One might call this the ironic turn.

Hubert Burda, the author, nominates the book as the first Augmented Reality-Enhanced Book for Smartphones. There is an **iPhone/iPad** app built from **Junaio**, a fascinating user-driven image forum.

Despite its origin in a German way of thinking, the *Digital Wunderkammer* isn't hard to read. It's a picture book; with short meditations on the author's sense of what's going on in the pictures and how that relates to, well, life. Interleaved among the pictures and "words about pictures" are interviews with some German professors.

The iconic turn is German art historian **Gottfried Boehm's** term for culture's transition from text or script culture to culture defined by visual communication. First there was the linguistic or semantic turn when **Gutenberg** published the *Bible* using movable

type. Then came the Internet turning Gutenberg upside down.

We know the story. Through **Gutenberg's** printing press the *Bible* became the people's word and not just the Pope's. Protestantism and the reformation came along, and the printed word gave birth to the Renaissance and its humanism. Then humanism gave us science and **Al Gore**, the Internet.

This is pretty much Civilization 101 and 102 with doses of **Marshall McLuhan**, **Harold Innis**, and **Walter Ong**, thrown in with such German thinkers as **Adorno**, **Habermas**, and **Hans Magnus Enzensberger**. Somewhere the secular angel of **Heidegger** hovers.

Burda's brief observations are thought-provoking and sensible; even insightful. As an art historian he understands both the aesthetics and economics of the image. The big picture can only be understood where admiration, understanding, and appraisal come together. Art creates sense in culture but also is defined by culture.

What does the digital do to art? **Burda** assembles an array of images — from art's history and the imaged world (through cinema, television, and publishing) and argues lightly

the iconic turn in our times is where all media become intensely personal, customized by the individual, then shared through the medium that allows for the transformation in the first place.

We live in a digital Wunderkammer — an online wonder room. Although not a precise term (we can expect no more in post-Heideggerian German writing), it also evokes the oddly stimulating and always fascinating world of digital media mash-ups, editing past, present-day, and future visions of the world into a new cultural view.

In pictures and words, *Digital Wunderkammer* reminds us of **Marshall McLuhan's** more playful and pictorial *The Medium is the Message*.

Where the book slips are the interviews with German scholars. These guys are likely well-known along the Romantic Road and in the Black Forest, but the English edition provides us zero biographical detail. Left with just the words — responses to **Burda's** questions — we come full-face with contemporary German scholarly thinking on the mass media.

Oddly these professors say little about the

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Internet. They mention **Facebook** and **Google** but not much. Instead, they offer cultural critique — a German staple. **Burda** asks **Professor Bazon Brock** after several wandering paragraphs of the death of giant print media, “Can all these developments also revert to paper?” Here is **Bazon Brock**:

“the crucial question is whether those who are geared towards the dissolution of all communication will continue to be rewarded when, on a social level, they demand that others support them. The customers of commercial broadcasters, of course, no longer have the option of seeing the world as a communication, unless in terms of simple of devouring and having sex. But this problem needs to be made clear to them. The Americans knew from the very beginning that the multitude of people streaming into the USA needed to have something in common as the foundation for the Constitution. Otherwise the entire life praxis becomes void.”

Huh?

Actually if you know how German intellectuals in the **Frankfurt School** write about media and society — and you have read your **Marcuse** and **Enzensberger** — you realize these guys are trying to saying something, and it is a something that those of us in media chain should try to understand. Technology and society don’t act independently and don’t occur without the other.

The Germans just say it differently.

Your Links:

<http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/709663487>

Do You Trust the HathiTrust?

Of course you do. Some of us may not know how to pronounce it. Even more likely, some don’t know for sure what it’s about. For a couple of years, at conferences and on the Web, the Hathi people have provided glimpses into their digital resource. They spoke of collections, cataloging digital objects, preserving our digital heritage in their search engine. They even provided searching that returned wildly interesting results. They made agreements with **OCLC**.

Whatever they were doing it seemed hip, new — something. But now what?

Recent news cleared matters up. **The Author’s Guild** is suing **HathiTrust** and its members. Why? Because **HathiTrust** has a batch of orphans it wants to let the world adopt through open access.

Who or what are orphans? They are the digital second copies of titles supplied to **Google** for scanning from the **HathiTrust** member libraries. They gave them millions and the orphans are those the **Trust** has defined as

out of print, in copyright, and whose owners are nowhere to be found.

Right now this orphanage is just a small test group — a hundred or so titles the trust claims are ownerless. They figure there are many more. And frankly, they are testing the copyright waters to make the millions of other titles open at least to the original library partners.

For some this is the birth of the universal digital library. For others, especially the **Author’s Guild**, it violates copyright. A suit similar to the 2005 “cease and desist” they filed against **Google** for scanning library books into its search engine, has been filed in the same 8th Circuit Court in New York City.

Overnight, lines in the sand were drawn. The same plaintiffs — who are still hard at work with **Google** lawyers about the 2005 case which became the **Google Book Settlement** compromise which became the “back to the negotiating table” exercise — do not want just anyone to catch and release just any old book to the digital world.

You can cheer the plaintiffs if you agree with copyright and intellectual property law and its role in protecting the rights of authors and the traditional business model that results.

The defendants are the **HathiTrust**. But behind the trust are all those who believe that the Internet has made copyright obsolete, silly, and moot — especially when it comes to dusty books in dusty old libraries. Those captive in an ownerless digital state they want to catch and release.

The **HathiTrust** elephant has come head-to-head with its nemesis — the **Authors Guild’s** donkey.

The digital library is in birth pain, like bearing a tiny elephant.

Your Links:

http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2011/09/19/michigan_admits_flaws_in_hathitrust_system_for_identifying_orphan_works

<http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/digital/copyright/article/48722-hathitrust-suspends-its-orphan-works-release.html>

http://www.libraryjournal.com/lj/home/891965-264/hathitrusts_growth_strategy_full-text_search.html.csp

<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2011/09/13/qt>

<http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/digital/copyright/article/48722-hathitrust-suspends-its-orphan-works-release.html>

Friday Afternoon Lights: The Shape of Things to Come

Took a stroll late Friday afternoon through our library’s main computer area. Surprisingly, the place was as busy as any regular fall semester’s day. Friday has never been a strong showing day for students; this is not new,

for decades — or since prohibition’s repeal — Friday was always a sketchy day, especially after the college student’s official start of the weekend — Thursday night.

When computers in libraries were new (and not yet the title of a busy little conference) the library was mainly a clean, well-lit place full of books, tables, seats, reading rooms, copiers, and a library staff omnipresent to police, protect, and answer questions.

It’s almost a fool’s errand to say this has changed dramatically. The books and librarians for many reasons are dwindling, dissolving before us like unpreserved images over time. We’re there, in the databases, online journals, eBooks, and online reference works we license. We’re there, somewhere along that vast broadband spectrum that sends this through wire and the air.

Bad economic times, changing norms of public behavior, and this technology were hard on our library as place. We needed new carpet, new furniture, and space-saving desktops (those video displays with cathode ray technology really take up space and use the watts!). And when the books started disappearing, heading off to off-site storage, our library started resembling a defunct **Borders** where some direct marketing had thought about setting up but lost funding somewhere along the line. If you were smart and a librarian, you just hid out in your office, staking claim to the last space you could control. It said Librarian on your door. Yeah!

This Friday, though, it is different. The students could be elsewhere, a day late in celebrating their weekend, but here they are working away.

One big reason is we’ve HGTV’d our library. We had some money, and we sunk it into student-friendly furniture, technology-friendly power outlets, learning-friendly whiteboards, and some seminar tables that feature large-screen TVs that interface with laptops.

When first installed during intercession the new furniture and study areas looked like an **IKEA** cafeteria. Without students it appeared plastic, unfriendly, modular — some Swedish Community College near the Arctic Circle where a **Nokia** cell phone saved a student from boredom-induced suicide.

Yet when the semester started, within hours of the library opening, this new library space was a transformed place. Students had settled in like it was a living room managed by caring and loving parents.

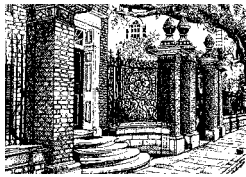
Use has only evolved in the several weeks since school started. Students study singularly and in groups. Yesterday a student had his **Apple Mac Air** opened as he talked on his **iPhone** and scribbled a complex equation on a whiteboard. This beautiful mind moment became today a group of economic students gathered around the seminar tables actively discussing a spreadsheet displayed upon the full breadth of the 52-inch big screen television.

Today, at 3 pm, our desktops were occupied, the wireless routers humming to capacity, printers churning out pdf. Students were surrounded

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by print of their own making but also library and course textbooks. What they finally had was a convenient space to engage all the learning tools provided them.

Likely, this scene is unique to library space and place everywhere. Other place and space may aspire to this — all the student unions everywhere who because of technology are one with the campus library as well as the universal library steadily being built. What the library had that a union lacks is the aura of learning that persists in our libraries despite changes that felt like loss.

It's Friday, this library is full. The lights are on and the students — their minds and computers — are bright.

Your Links:

- Interesting Library Renovations — <http://chronicle.com/blogs/buildings/ohio-state-us-library-renovation-is-stupendous-says-a-leading-consultant/7988>
- <http://www.mcgill.ca/construction/mcclennan-redpath-library-renovations>
- <http://www.rochester.edu/news/show.php?id=2923>

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in publishing, didn't I know that? Oh well. **Lisa and Alix** will be in the **Charleston Vendor Showcase** along with many (93) other great vendors! Did y'all realize that we have expanded the **Vendor Showcase** space this year? Let's enjoy it while we can!

Oh! I CANNOT believe it! After many problems, all my fault I am sure, the **2009 Charleston Conference** proceedings are available!! Should be available for purchase soon!! Hooray! And Yay! And like WoW! We all are saying! <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/charleston-conference-proceedings-2009-katina-p-strouh/1105847152?ean=9780983404309&itm=1&usri=9780983404309>

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