

Visual Communication from Outside the Frame

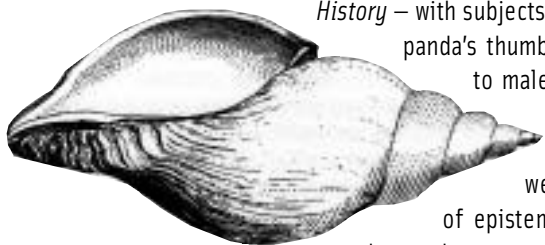
On Stephen Jay Gould's View of Life

by Kimberly Sultze, St. Michael's College, Colchester, VT
Second Vice Head

Stephen Jay Gould
Humanistic Naturalist
1941-2002

Stephen Jay Gould has been called the most influential evolutionary theorist since Charles Darwin. In 1972, Gould and Niles Eldredge proposed a macroevolutionary process they called "punctuated equilibrium" as a replacement for the common idea that evolution proceeds over time by progressive, gradual change. A professor at Harvard, Gould lectured to packed classrooms and wrote prolifically. He penned 300 essays in a monthly feature entitled "This View of Life" in *Natural History* magazine and published regularly in the scientific literature on evolutionary biology, paleontology, and Bahamian land snails. With Gould's death in May of this year, the world lost an interdisciplinarian of the first order.

If you've read this far, you may be asking yourself: What does a Harvard professor of biology, geology, and the history of science have to offer to the field of visual communication? Certainly, one response is that Gould was, quite simply, a great thinker. His essays in *Natural History* — with subjects ranging from the panda's thumb to Adam's navel to male nipples and clitoral ripples (all essay titles) — were about issues of epistemology. A central theme that pervades his work is a persistent curiosity about our conceptions of truth and knowledge, and about how we arrive at them.



As we prepare for the 2002 AEJMC convention in Miami Beach — the theme is "Ways of Knowing" — it seems appropriate to remember a

scholar who was so committed to examining and scrutinizing 'ways of knowing' in different arenas of human endeavor. Many of Gould's writings have relevance to the thinking, research, and theorizing that goes on in the visual communication area, in subject matter or method. Here are a few short recommended pieces which tap into issues of visual representation and epistemology:

A Biological Homage to Mickey Mouse. *The Panda's Thumb*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1980, pp. 95-107.

When Mickey Mouse turned 50, Gould examined this cartoon character's visual transformation since debuting in Steamboat Willie in 1928. In this essay, Gould connects Mickey's evolution to the biological literature on human growth and development. He argues that Mickey has been progressively juvenilized. Over time, the mouse has been drawn to look more and more childlike. The changes in Mickey's visual form are a complete reversal of the morphological changes from human child to adult. Mickey ends up with childlike features, among them a larger head, cranial vault, and eyes.

Gould also brings into play works from biology and psychology which suggest that "babyish features tend to elicit strong feelings of affection in adult humans" (101), and by extension, that people may feel more affection for animals (real or cartoon) that possess childlike features: bulging heads, huge eyes, retreating chins.

Adam's Navel. *The Flamingo's Smile*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1985, pp. 99-113.

Gould explores the controversy hidden behind a visual convention used by artists from earlier eras: in paintings of Adam, fig leaves and vines were extended so that they covered not only Adam's genitals but — for a different reason — also the area of the navel. Adam was not born of woman, so did he have one? How Adam was drawn, or should be drawn, was a religiously, politically, and socially charged issue.

Gould uses this controversy as a jumping off point from which to explore science as a way of knowing, and to separate scientific theories, those that can in principle be tested, from explanations and theoretical frameworks in other areas of human endeavor and understanding.

> see **Gould**, page 8

Letter from the Head

We Need YOU ... to Volunteer

by Andrew Mendelson, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA
Vis Comm Head

Greetings, fellow Vis Commers. This is my final column as head of the division. This has been a great year for Vis Comm. We relaunched the division's website, expanded the content of the newsletter, and participated in the mid-winter conference. Further, we continued to offer the research, logo, creative projects and best of the web competitions. Finally, as you will see elsewhere in the newsletter, we will have a great conference with diverse sessions.

None of this is possible without the volunteers who serve in the various positions. At the Vis Comm business meeting in Miami (schedule for Thursday, August 8, 8:30-10 p.m.), we will elect a new set of officers to keep the division expanding. All positions are open (except for the

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Division Vice Head and the Division Head, as this year's 2nd Vice Head and Vice Head just move up). Below I outline the responsibilities of the different positions. Please think about running for election. If you are interested in a position (whether you are going to be at the conference or not), please email me (amendels@temple.edu) with your interest, along with a brief biography and a paragraph on why you should be elected to this position.

Vis Com Officer Responsibilities

2nd Vice Head

Coordinate out-of-conference activity (mid-year conference)
Coordinate newsletter and website
Attend AEJMC planning meeting (first week of December), assist Vice Head, Teaching and PF&R Chairs
Collect ideas for invited panels in each area (refer to guidelines from Standing Committees on Teaching and PF&R) and submit ideas to Vice Head in early October for December planning meeting.
Work with Vice Head to program panels slotted for conference
Write an article for each issue of Vis Comm newsletter on topic from area

Research Chair

Collect ideas for invited panels on research and submit ideas to Vice Head in early October for December planning meeting

Work with Vice Head to program panels slotted for conference
Coordinate research paper competition
Send out call for papers
Recruit judges
Get final acceptances to Vice Head and authors by May 15th
Write a summary of competition for Division Head (annual report)
Write article for each issue of Vis Comm newsletter on research

Webmaster

Keep website updated and current

Newsletter Editor/Designer:

Solicit material for each issue of newsletter
Edit/design at least three newsletters for division (mid-September; mid-February; mid-June)

Logo Competition Chair

Coordinate student logo competition
Send out call
Recruit judges
Get winner's info to Division Head by June 1.
Write a summary of competition for Division Head (annual report)

Creative Projects Chair

Coordinate creative projects
Send out call
Recruit judges
Get final acceptances to Vice Head by May 15th
Write a summary of competition for Division Head (annual report)

Best of the Web Chair

Coordinate Best of the Web with CTP division
Send out call
Recruit judges
Get final acceptances to Vice Head by May 15th
Write a summary of competition for Division Head (annual report).

Finally, I want to thank all of this year's officers for their hard work: Vice Head and Program Chair Kim Bissell; Second Vice Head and Out-of-Conference Activity Coordinator Kimberly Sultze; Research Chair Renita Coleman; PF&R Chair Loret Gnivecki Steinberg; Teaching Chair Sam Winch; Co-Web Masters Michael Kennedy and Keith Greenwood; Creative Projects Chair Jay Anthony; Best of the Web Chair Gerald Davey; Logo Competition Chair Fabienne Darling-Wolf; Newsletter Editor/Designer Shawn McKinney; and Visual Communication Quarterly Editor Julianne Newton.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve. I hope to see every one of you in Miami.

Letter from the Editor

Stark New World

by Shawn McKinney, University of Texas, Austin, TX

Newsletter Editor/Designer

It's a Starck world, after all ... at least at Target. A previous retail experiment bore witness to a stream of products for the home, designed by architect and postmodern icon Michael Graves, and steadily released into Target stores across the country – invigorating sales and attracting media attention. Even journalist Charlie Rose got in on the act, devoting a half hour of his eponymous PBS show to interviewing Graves about his new line of work. Bolstered by this success, Target recently flooded their clean, well-lit stores with an additional 50 “happy” designer products, this time by self-proclaimed “crazy man” and industrial designer, Philippe Starck.

You shouldn't have a problem finding the new products, even in a massive Target Superstore. Bright yellow signs have been hung from the ceiling above any part of a store where the Starck product line is displayed. The signs feature the bold, oddly whimsical Starck logotype, as well as a posterized image of Starck's face, sinking off the bottom of the sign.

At first glance, the products appear too simple – all style, no substance. Yet given a chance, they often reveal some careful thinking. A touch of humor is expertly balanced against functionality and a flair for invention. Some products serve dual purposes – one, obvious; another, hidden. More bang for your buck. A translucent plastic, chartreuse letter opener manages to look both sensuous and dangerous. It doubles as a magnifying lens. Turn over a soap dish – encased, as are many of the products, in a pounded-skin texture – and you find a nail brush. Handy!

Starck and Target avoid duplicating products previously designed by Graves. The Starck line ranges from colorful officeware, such as scissors and a magazine rack, to dental care and even baby products. Work by both designers shares a proclivity for curves. While Graves' products emphasize class and sophistication, Starck appears preoccupied with creativity and a sense of wonder. One popular item, the “Cozy Chair” folds up into its own carrying bag. Nifty! Most of the products are expertly packaged in a simple cardboard assembly, printed in subdued orange and metallic champagne inks, against a pale chartreuse background. A whimsical black and white photograph of the designer, along with his signature, printed in orange, dominate every package.

The logotype splashed across the hanging signs appears on every package. While other letters in “STARCK” are set in all caps, in a geometrical sans serif, and knocked out to white, the “T” is replaced with a cross, printed in orange. This produces a simple, yet oddly playful effect.

Promotional copy unique to each product helps distinguish one package from another, and maintains an irreverent spirit. For instance, “HELLO, CAN YOU SEE BETTER NOW?” is printed beneath the letter opener. On the back of larger packages, designer “comments” in a handwritten font

respond to three topics: “This product is ...,” “Special thoughts on ...” and “We have designed it with ...” The letter opener, we are told, was designed with “PURITY!”

Small print insists that each product is also an example of “DEMOCRATIC DESIGN.” It is not exactly clear what makes this so, or what this amounts to, unless of course price is the topic discussion. The entire product line is genuine-affordable, on even a decidedly modest budget. ether, Target and Philippe Starck make a convincing argument for design that is at once clever, and widely accessible.



Viewpoints

The Official Newsletter of the Visual Communication Division of AEJMC

Visual Communication Division Officers, 2001-2002

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Viewpoints is the official newsletter of the Visual Communications Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), and is usually published three times a year – fall, spring and summer. Articles and letters to the editor are encouraged. *Opinions expressed in all submissions belong to the authors and not the Viewpoints editorial staff, the officers of the Visual Communication Division, or the officers of AEJMC.* Please mail your submissions to: Shawn M. McKinney, Assistant Professor, School of Journalism, CMA 6.144, Mail Code: A-1000, The University of Texas, Austin, TX 78712. Or email your submissions to Shawn at: smckinney@mail.utexas.edu.

Teaching

Online Educating: Show Me the Money (or Convenience?)

by Sam Winch, Penn State University-Harrisburg, Middletown, PA

Teaching Chair

THE CORPORATE PERSPECTIVE

Distance learning over the Internet is big. Is it "The Next Big Thing?" Maybe ... but it's not quite as big as we thought a couple of years ago (pre- E-tailing stock bubble burst), when online corporate university investors like junk bond king Michael Milken warned us "brick and mortar" academics that he was going to "eat our lunch." But it is still pretty big. According to a February 2000 article in *Educause Review*, private investment in online education went from \$11 million in 1993 to just under \$1 billion in 1999. (Educause is the group that promotes distance education in the U.S.) Last year, analysts at International Data Corporation estimated the worldwide corporate e-learning market will exceed \$24 billion in 2004. Paul Allen of Microsoft and John Chambers of Cisco Systems have invested megabucks in online education. Chambers declared last year, "Education over the Internet is going to be so big it is going to make e-mail usage look like a rounding error." That's big.

Jumping on the bandwagon, many public universities rushed to create online for-profit spinoffs, pouring millions of dollars into Internet online degree programs. Yet recent news articles report that many of these failed to attract a sufficient audience and have been abandoned. A May 2, 2002 *New York Times* article, "Lessons Learned at Dot-Com U," says Columbia University's spinoff, "Fathom.com" lost a lot of money, due to a lack of paying customers. Fathom's focus has shifted from being a for-profit online degree institution into a hybrid, with "free sample" courses as well as professional development courses. Online ventures by other big universities have failed as well. New York University recently closed its "NYUonline" spinoff, and Temple University's "Virtual Temple" closed last summer. SUNY-Buffalo abandoned its online MBA program in February 2002. The UK's Open University recently closed its US online university venture after pouring millions into it.

And yet, while many online programs were failing financially, some private, for-profit online educational ventures have been very successful. The *Chronicle of Higher Education's* "Index of For-Profit Higher Education" shows tremendous growth in the stock values of ten publicly-traded higher education companies. For instance, stock in the University of Phoenix is up 12 percent for the 1st quarter of 2002. (Its stock ticker is UOPX, for you educator/investors hedging your bets.) In the past year, the University of Phoenix posted an 84 percent increase in enrollment. Why are these for-profit, higher-ed corporations making loads of money while several of major university spinoffs are losing it? One reason could be focus. Some say big universities were more

interested in making online courses work intellectually, rather than financially. What were they thinking? The "brick and mortar" academics ended up competing with corporations focused solely on rewarding investors. And Milken was right, he's eating our lunch.

However, not all online programs created by non-profit universities fail. Some, like Duke's online MBA, are doing well. But assuming the public doesn't notice a difference, non-profit universities will never be able to compete with corporate universities, where learning, research, and service are not prime motives. Hopefully, university administrators and the people who control budgets (i.e., state legislatures) can focus on public service and resist "going corporate." Mark Taylor said in *Educause Review*, "The corporatization of the college and university and the commercialization of higher education will accelerate in coming years. Too many educators live with the illusion that they have a choice about (this)." Well, yes, some of us are stubbornly idealistic.

CONVENIENCE FACTOR

Unsurprisingly, my university's administration has been encouraging faculty to get involved in online course development and include online components in conventional courses. I think this is a good thing, though I wonder if I'll ever want to make the jump to a totally online course. I fear that I'll miss the face-to-face interaction in the traditional classroom setting, and I have doubts that any technology could improve on the kind of discussions that happen in a physical classroom.

However, my experience this past semester revealed that increasing my online components can be a big help, to me as well as my students. I put lecture outlines on the web for my media law and ethics class this year and found that students appreciated this. Usually, I uploaded them a few hours before class – allowing me to make last minute changes – and students got in the habit of printing them out just before coming to class. It quickly became apparent that my PowerPoint outline slides were superfluous. This allowed me to assemble visual teaching aids

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(pictures) rather than text-based slides for each class. I grew confident that students would be able to organize the information and understand the goals of each class. I noticed that they spent less time scribbling down notes and more time contributing to thoughtful discussions.

Our Vis Comm colleagues have had varied levels of success with online teaching. Paul Lester says his professional ethics class this past semester, at the University of Montana, was all online – and his best class EVER. Most of the students were nursing students in Butte, about two and a half hours away from Missoula. He said, "this group was the most thoughtful, respectful, and nurturing bunch I have ever had. Through emails, virtual classroom conversations, discussion board responses and comments, and papers, we all learned a tremendous amount."

> continued on next page

My own experience in offering a supplemental threaded discussion board for my law and ethics class was that very few students made contributions – even though they were told that online participation would count as class participation. The ones that did contribute were thoughtful, but I think most students saw it as an unnecessary accessory to the class, which also met in a classroom once a week. On the other hand, I often sent emails to the whole class, with links to new sources and recent cases, and I know they appreciated getting these in the periods between our regular class meetings.

When I taught in Singapore, the media law and ethics students actually set up their own private discussion list without my knowledge. Halfway through the semester some students told me about it because there were some rumors going around in the discussions. I think I may have ruined it when I logged in to clear up the rumors – before that, students treated it like their own virtual private student lounge area, and were quite open in their discussions about the course itself.

Susan Zavoina, photojournalism coordinator at the University of North Texas, says she and her adjunct were dissatisfied this past semester when they tried offering their photojournalism II course with about 25 percent of the course content online. Zavoina says, "In a nutshell, it wasn't as good of a learning or teaching experience as the classroom."

John Freeman of the University of Florida shared the experience his son had with online high school courses. He was first attracted to the online courses because he wanted to avoid having to go to school at 7 a.m. By taking online classes, he could sleep until 9 a.m. He was impressed with the level of help and feedback he received – even at midnight. But he found that when he got behind, it was difficult to catch up, especially when neither of his parents were any help with geometry.

Meanwhile, according to Forrester Research, about 70 percent of students who start an online course never complete it.

NEW PRINCIPLES

Kaliym Islam, in *e-learning magazine*, says many online courses lose students because they follow old pedagogical principles instead of so-called "androgogical" principles – designed for self-directed, mature students with different knowledge levels. Islam says online courses should explain how the information in the course can be useful and help solve real problems. The course should give students choices about which aspects of the course are most important, the topics about which they wish to find more information, and the topics they wish to skim, if they are familiar with them. Pretests can help students identify their strengths, and areas they need to study further. At the end of the course, students can be given problems to solve that require the skills or information contained in the course. Students are tested through practical application of course content, not just through memorization.

Lester adds, "It takes practice and new skills to successfully teach online and maintain a group discussion in a text-based environment."

Without a doubt, these are teaching skills we will all be learning and practicing in the years ahead, as more and more courses and course content are moved online. Like it or not, it *is* "the next big thing."

Research

Strange Tales from the Paper Trail

by Renita Coleman, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, NO

Research Chair

29 papers were submitted to the Vis Comm Division this year; 15 were accepted. After hearing colleagues wonder why their papers were rejected when two reviewers recommended acceptance and a third said "accept if space," I take it as good news that no one who submitted to Vis Comm had that experience.

September 11 and the ensuing anthrax scares continue to touch us in ways no one imagined. Even the paper competition was affected. One author submitted a paper in a typical brown envelope, affixed with proper postage, and mailed it April 1 only to have it returned a few days later, with a note attached: "All mail weighing over 16 ounces must be presented in person at a post office after Sept. 11." We took the paper, which was resent by an overnight service. It was accepted, by the way.

More mail horror stories, proving you're not paranoid: One paper, sent by U.S. mail from a major Northeast city, took 11 days to reach Baton Rouge. Postmarked April 1, it arrived on the day that all other papers had been assigned reviewers, put in envelopes, and were waiting to be mailed. A day may come soon when peace of mind is worth the extra money/effort to use an overnight delivery service.

I experienced more than a few episodes of paranoia myself, worrying about my own paper submissions. I appreciated receiving an e-mail from one division telling me my paper had been received. Should I act as a research chair again, I'd add that courtesy to the job description, and I intend to suggest it to next year's chair.

I also received an email from a friend telling me her paper was accepted, but assigned to a poster session. She added, "I guess I just don't have very good luck with AEJMC." I'm not sure how the notion came about that poster sessions were for papers that were 'less than' those presented in panel sessions. I assured my friend that this was certainly not the case this year. As a research chair, I received many notices from AEJMC stating that poster sessions were NOT to be filled with papers receiving only low scores. This division, at least, deliberately assigned some of the "best" papers, according to Z scores, to a poster session. Furthermore, poster sessions will have discussants this year, so authors can have the added benefit of another reviewer's comments.

Speaking of reviewer's comments, serving as research chair was a fascinating and valuable experience. Reading judges' comments on papers that were not mine taught me a lot about what reviewers look for. It was useful to see different reviewers make the same comment about a paper. While the process isn't perfect, it was reassuring to see people who care deeply about the quality of research in our field putting much time and thought into providing authors with helpful reviews.

PF&R

That's Entertainment

by Loret Gnivecki Steinberg, R.I.T., Rochester, NY

PF&R Chair

A few years ago, I was walking back to my office when I saw a professor in a classroom — standing on his desk. He had balloons on his head. One red sausage circled his brow and a blue one made an arc over his hair. He said something about “little Johnny” with a pronounced, artificial accent. He was teaching photography, but all I noticed, and remembered, were the balloons and the desk. Now, I wonder what the students remember. Each of us has grappled with the blurring lines between entertainment and the delivery of information. Some of us will try almost anything to get, and keep, students’ attention. We try to present information to kids who learned the ABC’s from Big Bird and developed their concept of the universe from *Star Wars*.

I can still hum a sing-song that helped me recall a list — kingdom, phylum, sub-phylum, classes, orders, family, genus, species, variety — for a high school biology test. I typed it just now with the tune running through my head, yet I can’t explain what each of those terms represent. And that’s my concern. On our Vis Comm email discussion group last week, Thom Gillespie (Indiana University) announced a new media

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of a subject’s relative importance?*

workshop, promising fun, several times, as an enticement. Paul Lester (Cal State Fullerton) responded — “Cute. But when are you going to team up with journalists and use this interactive medium to tell stories of social import? Sorry. I guess I don’t feel silly.” Both of them raised important issues. But my first thought was of the professor with balloons on his head. And then I remembered one of my favorite examples of “news you can use”: a full, front page, lifestyle section piece on candles. The story included a large picture of burning candles, and text about candles becoming popular. At least two paragraphs detailed how to light a candle. Another cautioned not to leave candles burning if you leave the house. So, what is “entertainment”? What is “news you can use”? And what does “new media” have to do with any of this?

There’s a serious problem to be addressed: at what point in making content more enjoyable, or even palatable, does the process itself skew the relative importance of subjects and content? One only has to think of *CNN Headline News* (or any tv news broadcast): *260 people died today in a monsoon ... a little girl was misplaced by the Florida Department of Social Services ... six celebrities are celebrating birthdays today ... tv star _____ (fill in the blanks) is trying to get pregnant...* The anchor maintains the same sparkling, palatable, entertaining twinkle throughout. Everything gets essentially the same treatment. The smile doesn’t change and the news keeps coming, in

tasty, equal bites. No wonder the audience is confused. We say we want to use new technology to reach new audiences in new ways. But how do we avoid making everything merely *fun*, presented in sugar-coated doses that obscure or misrepresent what’s important? I don’t think any of us are adverse to silliness, and sometimes serious topics can be effectively addressed in entertaining ways. But my question is: how does technology or method of delivery affect an audience’s perception of a subject’s relative importance?

A.D. Coleman recently said that instead of the “information age,” he would call this the “age of data.” Absorbing bits of information and understanding their relevance in a deeper context are just not the same. We have to find a new way to reach and engage audiences. It’s not just a matter of getting someone’s attention — but of helping them understand, and care about, complex issues and events. Can we use new media with eloquence, relevance and meaning when we’re talking to an audience more comfortable with entertainment?

Some have succeeded. Steve Hart’s “A Bronx Family Album” is a moving interactive CD that students frequently see as a hopeful use of new media. Pedro Meyer’s “I Photograph to Remember” demonstrates that voice and words can bring photographs to life, yet allow viewers to pause and experience the impact of individual images. *Journal-e* offers opportunities for using new media to tell stories of importance as well as silliness. Our real challenge, though, is to use these methods to reach a broad audience — say, the kind that reads a newspaper or magazine, or sits in front of the tv, or surfs the web a couple of hours a day.

We also have to ask how we encourage tomorrow’s media professionals to use technology. We have to question how new media are being used to attract younger audiences. What is actually communicated? The teacher who’s fun to be around may not be the one who teaches us the most. If we ourselves can’t find better ways of holding students’ interest than by using new media to produce different kinds of fun and entertainment, students are not likely to develop new methods of making the news interesting and compelling to the next generation.

I’ve noticed that when I lecture *sans technology*, more students tend to take notes than when I employ interactive CD’s, the Internet and other *entertaining* media, which I do frequently. I’ve come to think that the way we deliver content with new technologies needs to be examined from this perspective. Sometimes, serious topics need to be treated seriously. Is anybody else concerned about how students learn material, in relation to the form or technology involved in presenting it? Is anyone doing research about the entertaining presentation of serious material and audience perception? If we are the gatekeepers and the mappers of the world’s visual terrain, how are we describing the paths in front of our audiences? (In darker moments, I think of Temple Grandin’s slaughterhouse chute designs, intended to make animals more comfortable as they proceed to their death.)

Yesterday, I picked up a copy of Neil Postman’s book, “Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business.” It was published way back in 1985, but I think it’s going to make good, and relevant, summer reading.

Technology

If You Build It ...

by Keith Greenwood, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK

Co-Webmaster

If you build it, they will come ... but only if they can find what they're looking for. The ghostly, often quoted line from the popular film *Field of Dreams* seems to apply to web sites, too. If you build it, they will come ... won't they? Well, OK, they'll come if you publicize the site and let people know it's there, or if there is an obvious reason to visit the site for information.

Unfortunately, some web site builders out there seem to believe that building the site is enough for people to come and stay and maybe even keep coming back. If the content is truly useful and compelling, that

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that not only organizes information
but makes sense to users visiting the site.*

might be true. But if you want me to come back or even stick around the first time, you'd better make it easy to find what I'm looking for.

Web site design can be tricky. The designer has to look at the information that should be on the site and figure out how to best divide it into sections. Which parts should go together? Which section would include *this* page? Will anyone even be looking for *that*? Designers try to come up with a scheme to organize information that will go on the site. News sites separate news and sports. Academic sites separate the faculty directory from the degree requirements. And so on.

Good designers, on the other hand, try to come up with a scheme that not only organizes information but makes sense to users visiting the site. The navigation goes beyond "That's the way I found it in the file drawer," and tries to reflect what a visitor to the site really wants to find. News is grouped in sections, such as local and national. Degree requirements are categorized by majors or areas of concentration.

How many of you have ever gone to a technology support site to find a software update or download a new driver for a particular device? Did you find what you were looking for? Easily? Some companies make it simple, and those are the sites I like to go back to. Other companies seem to view finding the software you want as a quest to be undertaken. To reach the final reward, you must tread through fields of false hope and decipher mystical clues that direct you not to software support but to a news release posted in the company's virtual press room, which contains the only link to the update you want.

I'll be fair here. Some web sites are put together by multiple groups of people who might not be in the same department or even on the same continent. It's easy to point fingers at the web design people for not having that file or link where you think it should be when some other group, which is responsible for updating a section of the site, didn't

bother to tell anyone else the information was there. Think back to the last time you said, "Gee, it would have been nice to have been told that," and you'll know what I mean. Still, it's a problem to be solved, not an excuse for accepting things that don't work.

That said, this is my wish list of items that people could incorporate into their web site navigation.

Put yourself at the user's mouse. End user retention services might be the name of the department in your organization, but the rest of us call it support. Think like a user who's coming to your site and think about what they're looking for.

Put links where users are going to look for them. If that means linking to the same file from more than one place, then do it. Who knows, you might even be able to look at the traffic data and discover which of the ways to get there is most common for your users. That might tell you something to incorporate into the next design.

Try to find a way to get me there quicker. I remember something from a few years ago called the "Three Click Rule," which said it shouldn't take a user more than three clicks to get to the information they want. I don't know if we're more patient now that we've gotten more used to the web, but I get the feeling some people think I've got nothing better to do than burrow 10 layers deep into a site to get to a software patch or find a course description. Again, think like a user.

Keep an eye on what other people are doing. For those of us who design and maintain a site all on our own, such as our course sites or perhaps departmental sites, that's pretty simple. We know when there are changes that need to be reflected in the site or new information to add. For the other guys though, that's a little harder. Keep an eye on the parts of the site another department is responsible for. Develop a contact in that department and start letting them know about changes to your part of the site. You can build that into a relationship that ultimately benefits us all.

So, do I practice what I preach? I try to. I'm sure the sites I've worked on could be better and perhaps a bit more intuitive. I'm sure people have expected to find information in an area of a site I never thought they would visit. It's not an exact science, but helping people find what they want is how you get them to come back.

That said, I think there could be more information on the VisCom site (<http://jmc.ou.edu/viscom/>). We've got links to AEJMC's national office and to upcoming convention information. Contact information for the officers is on the site, and so are calls for papers, projects, etc. I'd like to see more under the resources category. We've received some great links to sites that can be used in teaching and research. There are a lot of examples of projects people have created, but there are not a lot of links to sites that would help us teach. Do you have on-line presentations that explain concepts or teach skills that you'd like to share? Would you like to share a syllabus or two for a course? Those are the kinds of links I think are missing from the resources area of our site. If you'd like to submit links or send a file, you can submit it to me, at kgreenwood@ou.edu, or to co-webmaster Michael Kennedy, at michael.kennedy@zu.ac.ae.

Gould from page 1

The Median Isn't the Message. *Bully for Brontosaurus*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1991, pp. 473-478.

I'm sure McLuhan would not have quibbled with Gould's twist on his well-known phrase. After Gould was diagnosed with a rare form of abdominal cancer in 1982, he penned this piece – probably his best-known essay – on statistics as a way of knowing. He learned from the medical literature that the condition he had was incurable and that the median mortality rate was eight months after diagnosis. In this piece, Gould moves readers from an all-too-common reaction and misinterpretation: 'I will probably be dead in 8 months' to a sophisticated decoding of what "median mortality of 8 months" signifies, based on his technical knowledge of the strengths and limits of statistics. According to Gould, we too often perceive abstractions like averages as "hard realities" when within biological populations, variation is the real message.

The result is a provocative essay on statistics as a powerful tool for making mathematical abstractions (generalizations) that describe groups, but also on some of the limits, recontextualizations, and qualifications that must be considered whenever we are trying to determine if and how a statistical

measure is meaningful for a particular individual's case in changing circumstances. At the time, Gould entered an experimental treatment program and survived his illness. In fact, in the end – twenty years later – he died from a different condition.

Seeing Eye to Eye, Through a Glass Clearly. *Leonardo's Mountain of Clams and the Diet of Worms*. New York: Harmony Books, 1998, pp. 57-73.

Here, Gould exposes an assumed way of seeing as one tied to an historical and social context. His question, relevant to visual communication: how should we draw marine organisms? Obviously, the natural way – as if we're in the water with them, viewing at their level. Reviewing the history of illustration, Gould suggests a shift in what was considered the "obvious" and "natural" point of view. Most illustrations of marine organisms prior to the popularization of the aquarium depict organisms washed up on shore or on top of the water. As Gould puts it: "I believe that we can identify one of these admittedly small but 'obviously' permanent and universal modes of seeing as, instead, a direct legacy of the mid-nineteenth century aquarium craze, and therefore not much more than one hundred years old as a Western way of knowing" (65).

Later, he wrote of his interest in the ways in which humans 'know' nature. In our interdisciplinary field of visual communication – which blends the humanities and social sciences but remains unclear as to how to make them complementary – we may take inspiration from Gould's efforts.



Viewpoints

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