

Carla G. Spinillo

Introduction

Information visualization, a design challenge

Dear readers

It is with great pleasure that I present you the 23rd volume of IDJ!

This first issue of the volume—the IDJ 23.1—brings a number of articles on a topic of great importance to information designers: the visualization of information. Making information ‘visible’ is to transform data into meaning. For that, pictorial, verbal and schematic modes of representation have been merged so as to communicate a variety of contents through diagrams, graphs, maps, charts and infographics.

Information visualization is a communication strategy, and as so, it is a design challenge. It has been a challenge faced not only by today’s designers, but also by the pioneers of information visualization designs. If we dared to draw a timeline of the history of information visualization, we would have such a comprehensive line of contributions! It would range from ancient zodiac diagrams, medieval genealogical trees, to today’s interactive infographics and augmented reality charts/diagrams. A number of contributors would also stand out in the information visualization timeline. Among them, we might point out pioneers such as Priestley, an experimental chemist who developed early biographical timeline diagrams in the 18th century; Playfair, a political

economist who developed statistical charts at the end of 18th century and early 19th century; and Minard, a civil engineer, who deserves our recognition for the outstanding design in 1869 of the March of Napoleon in the Russian Campaign of 1812. And let us not forget the nurse Florence Nightingale, who was a pioneer in the information visualization of social statistics data in 19th century, designing early polar area diagrams. Nurses, engineers, economists, chemists among other professionals set the ground for information visualization designers, making information visualization possible as a professional practice today.

Information visualization is not only a challenge for professional practice, but also for information design research. Empirical as well as theoretical studies on this field have been conducted in academic institutions worldwide. How are information visualization artifacts understood by people? What information should be visualized? How to design useful information visualization artifacts? What media should be employed to make information visible? These are some of the questions that researchers endeavour to answer, and which, in many ways, remain unanswered. Isabel Meirelles and Katherine Gillieson have accepted this challenge by organizing the first event on information visualization: ‘The Information+ Conference’, which took place in Vancouver, Canada (2016). The event was the first

forum for discussing ideas and sharing experiences on the topic, both from the perspective of information design research and practice. As a way of recognizing the invaluable contribution of the Information+ Conference to the field of information design, and the leading roles of Isabel Meirelles and Katherine Gillieson, we have invited them as guest editors of this special issue of IDJ.

I believe that the views on information visualization matters brought out by the authors of the articles featured herein, as well as the research outcomes/results

reported in this issue, will present a challenge to you too, IDJ readers, whether you are a professional designer or a researcher.

Wishing you all a pleasant reading!

Dr Carla G. Spinillo
The Federal University of Parana, Brazil
IDJ General editor