

Visible Language

the journal of
visual communication
research

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funded research developing a systematic framework called the *Pictorial Trapezoid*, which offers greater control in producing new pictures with generative AI, and describing how an AI might be trained for semiotic precision in distinct research contexts

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A New Model

Mike Zender

Change

Many of you may have followed the dust-up surrounding *Design Studies* this past summer. Just as that unfortunate disagreement happened, a mature author, researcher, and contributor to *Visible Language* asked about getting immediate open access for a forthcoming manuscript. His grant agency required open access and the research subject was timely so we were sensitive to his request. However, *Visible Language* has operated under a hybrid model where subscribers get access to articles immediately and everyone else has access after a one-year embargo, so this request would require an exception. We agreed on a temporary measure to meet his need but the two simultaneous events launched us on a reevaluation of our publishing model in light of a thorough examination prevalent publishing models. We did not like the picture.

The publishing world is moving to fully Open Access. (OA) Open Access proponents seem to have honorable aims including making knowledge freely available to everyone. Forget for a moment that many OA proponents work in Universities where students pay for knowledge acquisition or in government agencies that are supported by laws. We at *Visible Language* share OA proponents' honorable aims. We certainly think knowledge is a great benefit and our hearts are committed to its widest possible dissemination. That's why we publish.

If OA proponents are pushing for an eventual future where nearly everyone publishes everything for free that system exists already and it's called the internet. We are all familiar with the generous diversity of quality there. Perhaps someday in an AI mediated world a search and rating algorithm will facilitate finding quality work in the free-for-all. I'm not sure who will pay for that system, perhaps the equivalent of Google ads. Then we'll need funding to buy the ads to push our work to the top of the AI results. I for one will be happy to miss that world.

For now, we must rely on the quality and authority that comes from publishers. Lots of recent articles bring that system into question. Just this week the journal *Nature* had to retract another article. Something about cold fusion (again). Our world seems to be devolving in the trustworthiness dimension.

Journals used to be housed mostly in trusted institutions like Universities and Societies whose role was both validating quality and ensuring dissemination. These direct sources of validation published articles and bore the costs. Today we mostly have publishers as third parties who may publish a stable of journals covering an immense variety of topics. I'm going to steer clear of blaming the money-making associated with this to avoid devilish divisions on the evils of money. Suffice to say, publishing is work and work is seldom free, especially very good work.

Regarding payment, the trend has become for authors to pay publication fees to publishers to cover costs. This we oppose. It limits publication to those who can afford it. This seems completely opposed to aim of Open Access but seen the other way around, that is, the only ones with access to distribution of their work are those with resources. What about the poor or unfunded researcher with interesting but novel findings? Pay-to-publish stratifies the publishing world into the rich and powerful and everyone else. Sorry, that's not a model for us.

Disliking the current picture, we imagined alternatives. We applied for and received funding to conduct a research study to look at what designers want from *Visible Language*. That study is reported in this issue by D. J. Trischler's article immediately preceding this one. In response to our preliminary research findings and current events, this summer we sketched several different approaches to an improved publishing model. We reimagined a centralized peer-review system much like the Associated Press, which would vet manuscripts and offer them to publishers to pick up and disseminate for a fee. We imagined authors being paid and supported by on-line adds and/or "likes" similar to YouTube channels. We dreamed of a user-centered system where users are pinged about a new manuscript of potential interest and if, after reading the Abstract, they read the full article either the individual or their institution is charged a small fee. We conceived alternatives, and more, we shared our ideas with peers. After that and considerable internal deliberation, we winnowed to new model for *Visible Language* based on the past but fit for the future.

Visible Language staff has decided to move back to the direct model where the experts do both vetting and dissemination. We plan to form a consortium of four or five peer institutions to jointly publish *Visible Language*. Thanks to publishing systems such as OJS, our costs including printing are low enough that if each institution contributes a very few thousand dollars annually the journal will be sustained. Each institution would have a seat on the journal governing Editorial Board as an Associate Editor, and equal say in everything from the direction of the journal to articles published. Specifically, we propose that:

- each supporting institution will have a functional seat for one of their faculty/leaders on the *Visible Language* Editorial Board as an Associate Editor;
- the *Visible Language* Editorial Board will maintain complete editorial control of the journal: guide the journal's direction, review articles, plan issues, solicit contributions, etc.;
- each institution will be recognized as a member of the consortium and Editorial Board which directs *Visible Language* with their logo/name on the journal back cover;

- the Editor in Chief will come from one of the consortium institutions, perhaps on a rotating basis, perhaps with 3–5-year renewable terms, elected by the Board;

- UC and UCPress, not-for-profit institutions, will still "own" and publish *Visible Language* as the host institution and professional publication administrators;

- during formation taking about one year, the Consortium will re-write the journal's charter to reflect the new model;

- the University of Cincinnati will enter into collaborative agreements (or other suitable legal documents) with each institution to formalize the consortium.

- once the Consortium is formed, the journal's direction will be determined by the new *Visible Language* Editorial Board.

We believe this model, if it works, has several advantages. It makes the journal sustainable and independent, not beholden to any individual funder or single special interest. It ensures diversity of perspective within unity of purpose, and the potential for diversity of region, language, and culture for a truly global perspective. It provides ample energy with different Associate Editors representing different interests. It broadens access to alternate networks to enrich intellectual quality and rigor. It provides a continual pool of successors to become the next Editor in Chief. Consortium institutions may include research institutes and professional firms of high stature potentially strengthening the integration of theoretical and professional Design knowledge.

There are potential downsides inherent in any diverse body which will require wisdom, tact, some skill to manage. Fortunately, we have independent publishing professionals at UCPress to help us navigate and operate. Our current contract with UCPress (an in-house contract) stipulates that VL is totally controlled by the Editor and Editorial Staff at the UC School of Design. UCPress provides expert advice and publishing/hosting services on contract, nothing more. *Visible Language* has its own financial accounts. When the new Consortium is formed, these lines of authority and accountability will continue to be clearly stipulated.

We're excited at this evolution of *Visible Language*. We think it could become a model that others can adapt that might help to solve some of the problems that pervade scholarly publishing today. We look forward to having the consortium in place by the first issue of 2025.

Stay tuned.

Mike Zender, Editor, *Visible Language*