

Amanda Gluibizzi, *Art-on-Campus: Mash-up at OSU*

The Hottie and the Nottie

When I was younger and would look at *Glamour Magazine* in line at the grocery store, I would automatically flip to the back to look at the DOs and DON'Ts because that was the best part. Even today, I begin my morning with a glance at the blog *gofugyourself* before the New York Times because it's snarkier and more fun and often features more astute criticism. It's a truth of *Schadenfreude* that we *like* to see other people's mistakes – among other things, they help us learn not to make our own – and thus for this presentation I shall begin with what's not and proceed to what's hot.

In the realm of academia, not much could be less hot than a text-heavy power point presentation unless it's a text-heavy power point presentation that is read aloud to an audience that can very well read what's on the screen. As Edward Tufte points out in *The Cognitive Style of Power Point*, what we write in such a slide and read out from said projection often lessens the impact of what we're trying to convey. And it gets even worse when the auto-content wizard is brought in to work his magic. Thus, I will try to avoid cold fishness by featuring only slides with images, aiming to stir up a simmer of interest.

So, *The Hottie and the Nottie*: Last year Paris Hilton released a movie titled “The Hottie and the Nottie.” It's rare to find a single phenomenon that simultaneously embodies Saussurian binary opposites (i.e. hottie and nottie, do and don't) and all at age 27 besides.

But perhaps Paris is an overachiever. And perhaps informational web sites are as well, existing as DOs in our minds and good intentions and presenting the DON'Ts to the public. This includes even those we so affectionately call "home."

The OSU Libraries home page, which is currently undergoing rethinking and revision and is thus eligible for a thorough critique, is a good example of the simultaneity of hot and not. We feature up-to-the-moment library technologies, such as federated searching, WebCat local, wikis and blogging, but the site is so packed full that the content actually becomes invisible. The fault here is not with intent, lack of content, or laxness, but with DESIGN. When asked for my feedback as a representative of the visual learners and historians on campus in preparation for the re-design, I mentioned that there are way too many words here, some of which repeat other words on the page in function or meaning – such as listing both reserves by professor and reserves by class – and some of which might not mean anything to a first-time visitor, such as the link for the Knowledge Bank. This doesn't mean, as some people thought, that I think there is too much READING in the library – in fact there is never enough – but rather that there are too many letters on the page and that when faced with a web site full of text, people tend to tune the letters out. Other issues include the drop-down menus, which are very sensitive and can actually conceal important navigational parts of the site when triggered, as when this drop-down menu conceals the central tab for our database searching. And just last week I received a complaint from a user who told me that the search box in the middle of the screen is sufficiently different from the rest of the site in design and color that he thought it was a pop-up and kept trying to turn it off. This isn't an unknowing, first-time, or

moronic library user, but rather one who responded to the visual clues that we laid out for him and acted in exactly the opposite way from the one he was meant to.

Of course, library web sites have much information, some of which is very complex, to try to administer to as many people as possible, so designing them is difficult, but it's a sorry state of affairs when you can find information more easily on the "Sweet Keira.net" fan site than you can at a university library page. We are library fans, but we don't always create good library fan sites. It is the complexity and amount of information we are purveying that make it absolutely essential that our sites are designed with the user in mind. And as art librarians this becomes even more pertinent when we are designing library pages for visual learners and for the very people who study and teach web and information design. Our pages are constantly critiqued for their design qualities or lack thereof, either in the classroom, or through the absence of use: it is important to keep our constituents in mind and to advocate for them. The possibilities of web 2.0 technologies, or any versions of the web in the future, will not reach our patrons or mean much to them if they are unwilling to look at what we're providing in the first place.

So let's take a look at some design don't traps into which library sites often fall. Again, I must make clear that I am not critiquing the content of the sites or their intentions, but rather the design of them.

Akin to the power point with too much writing is the web site with long lists of options without navigation. We often fall into this problem when we compile lists of artists or

new books for our patrons. How can they know what to look for when they may not be certain what they're looking *at*? There is a way to manage this problem: identify the topics or categories included in the list, separate its contents accordingly, and then link to the categories. This may sound familiar, and it should: This is exactly what happens on our library shelves (we don't organize all of the books in the library alphabetically by title but rather by broad categories that divide into smaller categories), and it would make sense to use such ideas on our web sites, as well. Lists on web sites bring up a related problem, and one that happens more than we would suspect: too often we put vital information at a place on our sites where a patron would have to scroll down to find it. Although undergraduates have proven themselves to be intrepid users of the internet and early adopters of the latest technologies, I don't think we can rely on them to look for information and services if we've hidden them from them. Follow one of the golden rules of newspaper layout design: important information goes above the fold. Analogously, important information on the web needs to show up in the initial page view or it risks being ignored.

Other design issues relate to the way that sites can be navigated or the ease with which we can read them. As coding has become more sophisticated and links can be associated with images and icons as well as with hypertext, it has become counterintuitive to include a logo or an icon that does not link back to the home page of a site or aid the user in navigating through the content. For example, it would be helpful if clicking on this map of Manhattan took the user back to the homepage, or even better, if one could click on different neighborhoods to navigate the content. Unfortunately, the logo does neither and

becomes an empty symbol and merely a space-holder rather than a functional object. There is no reason that an image or an icon can't do the job of a word when they show up on a web site. Think about online shopping: when you find something you like at Amazon.com, you can click on the title or on the picture. Either link takes you to the same place: more information about that item. The site is designed that way because people are attracted to images and remember what things *look like* more easily than what they're titled; Amazon gives its visitors as many ways as possible to get to the point where they can find what they want so that they can buy it. It makes sense to follow its example: offer our users every opportunity to find what they want, visually, textually, and etc. Remember, too, that far more of our users are trained to use Amazon than they are to use the library web site. Co-opting its design and ease of use isn't selling out; it's just good business sense. As the title of a recent graphic design monograph suggested, it's the "Difference between Telling and Selling."

Another thing that commerce sites have learned is to avoid backgrounds. Sites that use hyperactive backgrounds detract from the information that is really important – and may not work with ADA accessibility. The background here visually competes with the content of the site and makes it hard for the user to determine what is more important: the occupants of the site or the wallpaper? The same is true with animation. Even those well-meaning animated elements that call attention to new features or services can end up acting as yet another neon sign competing for attention in Times Square. The visual cacophony makes it so that we can't see ourselves think. And a particular pet peeve of mine is the overuse of fonts to suggest that the information included is "old" or

“authentic”, such as the font Tempus Sans for ancient Egyptian letters or Viner Hand as a stand-in for Shakespeare’s handwriting. This is design literalism, which will drive any of your design or architecture patrons crazy, and is hard to read to boot.

The reason that attention to design becomes very important for web 2.0 technologies is that they are open to public consumption and manipulation. In the past, a web site could be put up and there was no way outside of formal surveys for users to tell us that it wasn’t working for them. Wikis are manipulable. Blogs allow for comments and easy editing by their authors. We are past the stage where a site can remain unchanged for long if users want it to work differently; we’re now at the moment of the “right to remix.” (The Beastie Boys compared it to pies sitting cooling on a windowsill waiting to get sampled.) This is the point at which web 2.0 capabilities become exciting to use. They offer the internet in the way we thought it could look, work, and be used when it was first coming into being, not simply as a digital version of a print material. We now go beyond what print can do; we are no longer restricted to linear ways of reading or discovery which makes for real possibilities of new material presentations.

I began to think of web 2.0 technologies seriously when I stumbled upon the fact that nowhere in Ohio State’s web presence was there a way to find out what art exists where on campus. This is especially problematic because one of our American art history classes requires students to do a research project about these objects and the university archives is the only place that has some – but not all – of the information about them, and even that is not entirely up-to-date. Because instruction and reference are, of course, part

of my position and because at Ohio State outreach for librarians is defined as contact with students, faculty, and people who aren't related to the university, I started to wonder if the art library shouldn't sponsor some kind of walking tour of the art on campus. My initial thought was a pamphlet, but that would require production costs if I wanted it to look at all acceptable, environmental costs in terms of paper and ink for 50,000 people, and there is always the question of where to house it and how to disseminate it. For those of you who are familiar with The Wexner Center or my predecessor Susan Wyngaard's writing about it, you know that the art library is hidden in plain sight on campus, making for wonderful quiet study space for our patrons but also meaning it is impossible to find for people not in the know. Obviously, the costs of paper pamphlets were simply too high. My next consideration was to put the list on our web site, but I didn't want it to be a static list of people, work, or locations that would fall into one of the design DON'Ts that I hate encountering as a librarian. I realized that if I wanted interaction, simultaneity, and the potential for a rich user experience, I would need to use more current technologies.

This is where our art-on-campus mash-up comes into play. When I approached our library IT representatives about the possibility, they were excited to try it out because it was a way to learn about the technology while doing something useful. What we are building is a google map that is mashed with coordinates of the art on campus (<http://library.osu.edu/sites/finearts/map/#>). Its initial screen shows a map with the layout of the street, but it also offers the visitor the opportunity to look at a satellite image of the campus, which makes sense first because so much art is associated with buildings and not

with city streets and second because at a football-focused school like Ohio State, people navigate according to the stadium. We tried to keep in mind the design DON'Ts and attempted to avoid them: out of the box, the template featured a blue color scheme. We went with a grey and scarlet theme that is easy to read and related to the rest of the OSU brand. Everything here is visible at a glance from the initial view of the page; again, in the original template, the names of the artists ranged all over the site, which meant that scrolling down was necessary to see all of the artists who were included. Important, too, is that the active part of the site – the map – is on the left-hand side. Originally, the map was above the list of names, but that's not necessarily intuitive to navigate, particularly because the names and the map seemed to have no visual connection with one another. Since English-speakers read from the left to the right, we decided that it makes sense that the action happens on the left. However, the right-hand column is not *inactive*, which is also important. When you rest on a name, the box darkens and the corresponding pin on the map lights up, making the connection clear. Linked from these pin locations are the names of the artists who are featured on-campus at OSU with a picture of the work. This is important because most people don't even realize they're walking past art even if it looks distinctly different from its surroundings. (In a startling recent example posted on youtube, the web site klara.be and the artist Luc Tuymans conducted an experiment in which the artist hung one of his paintings on an Antwerp street for 48 hours. Only 4% of passersby even noticed it, which is a shame, because Tuymans are going for seven figures now.) Another reason to include images is that since campus art is often context specific, the work is not always recognizable within the artist's oeuvre. Even a person familiar with twentieth-century art may not recognize Barbara Kruger's mosaic installation at our

business school, for example. Clicking on her name or her pin location causes a small photo of her work to pop up, along with the building name with which the piece is associated. What made my boss even happier, though, is the link which directs the viewer to a readymade keyword search of the library catalog. In the future, we hope to link out to video content if some exists for the artists and their work and may set up a Flickr page so that users can submit their own photos of the art they've seen and we can share the images we've taken.

Even though this map is still being built, there has already been quite a lot of interest in it. What was intended to live on the art library page will now most likely find a home on the OSU libraries main page. Art history faculty are already asking about it, and the chair of our art department has expressed interest in making it as visible as he can, which could mean a link from the School of Art page, as well. It is a way that the art library can contribute to the cultural life of the school beyond just a collection sitting on the stacks, which is something that is important to me. I want us to be seen as a vital and active member of the community, and the map is a good way to start. Additionally, since it is web-based, we will reach far more people than just those on campus. Not many people know, for instance, that OSU has a Bierstadt or a Bellows on campus, and in the instance of the Bellows, there is no digital image available online. When I asked for permission to use a photograph of it for our map, I was told that the school often gets inquiries about its appearance, but it hasn't had a space to make an image available. So the map allows us to contribute to the life of the campus, to the greater knowledge about George Bellows, and perhaps to add to the scholarship of people we may never see. Web 2.0 technologies

didn't create such an opportunity – the content did – but they did make it possible to offer it in such an interesting and user-friendly way.

Sadly for us, however, by the time I finish this presentation web 2.0 may already be what's not hot. On the 13th of February, *Wired* columnist and science fiction writer Bruce Sterling gave a presentation called “The Brief but Glorious Life of Web 2.0” in which he claimed that web 2.0 is dead. However, I don't think that should be looked at as a problem. The next big thing is always around the bend. Fortunately, art librarians have great content to play with.