

Sketchy Truth

Somewhere in between the
good news and the bad news
lies the truth

(A concept for a cartooning application on mobile devices)



Andrew François
Doctor of Creative Arts
2013

University of Technology, Sydney.

CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student

Production Note:
Signature removed prior to publication.



Acknowledgements

My tireless supervisors Theresa Anderson and Kim McCauley, you both showed me the path again-and-again, after so many procrastinatory whims and much creative angst. Thank you so much for the kindness and understanding. Thanks must also go to Paul Ashton for his support.

To all my colleagues at UTS, in both the web team and Institute for Interactive Media who have waited as long as I to get through this process, I appreciate your encouragement, support and leniency.

Along the way, I have collected the assistance and advice of friends and associates: Justin Mclean, Peter Withers and Damian Huxtable. No doubt, there are many others. Thank you all.

Above all else, I need to acknowledge the enormous gift of support my beautiful wife has graciously bestowed upon me. It has not been easy working through the birth of two babies and building a young family with two active little boys. I hope you can forgive me for those times I was absent, and those times I was absent minded. I owe you “longtime!”



Table of Contents

CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of illustrations	vi
Abstract	x
Introduction	1
The journey.....	1
An identity and production crisis.....	5
A note about the presentation format.....	10
About the title	12
What is SketchyTruth?	14
What is a cartoon in SketchyTruth?	32
A rough sketch.....	32
Cartoon power	38
Cartoon metaphor	39
Cartoon cartography	42
Cartoons encode	45
Cartoons explain	48
Everyone is an artist on the network.....	55
Why SketchyTruth?	61
The news is broken	61
Enter the citizen cartoonist.....	72
Drawing on a diversity of opinion,.....	77
can a wise crowd fix the news?	77
Making the news visible.....	80
Amplification through simplification	85
Opening the Black Box and wrestling complexity	94
Cartoon confectionary and Petty contraptions	101
Particles of truth	106
A pathway into tacit knowledge	108
Life in the middle zone: Cartoons to navigate intersubjective space	114
Drawing it together	118
The sketch	118
The frame	119
The future.....	121
Appendix	123
A: Design directions	123
Audio recording transcription with my research supervisor 26 July 2006.....	123
Concept development (notes and sketches).....	127
B: War and Peace: Stuff-Art99 Online interactive cartoon	131
Synopsis Short	131
Synopsis Long	131
C: SimAssessment (2005): virtual classroom and student assessment simulator	135
D: Web sites that challenge the mainstream news.....	138
Week in review < http://www.weekinreview.org >	138

Media Lens < http://www.medialens.org/ >	140
OhmyNews < http://english.ohmynews.com/ >	142
FAIR < http://www.fair.org >	143
Newsmap < http://marumushi.com/projects/newsmap >	144
Storyful < http://storyful.com/ >	145
News360 < http://www.news360app.com >	147

List of illustrations

TIME magazine cover celebrating online user generated content.....	30
The rough and sketchy style of Bruce Petty would suit mobile touchscreen input.....	33
Visual puns rely on current contexts and events for their meaning, like this wartime newspaper cartoon.	35
Panels from <i>Understanding Comics</i> exploring the definition of a cartoon.....	37
An insight into cartooning the news: <i>Drawing conclusions</i> aggregates and summarises the thoughts and opinions from cartoonists working for the Age newspaper.	40
Narrative imagery from ancient Egypt on the Narmer Palette Circa 3100 BC.	45
Ancient Roman visual story telling in the style of Ancient Egypt on the <i>Bembine Tablet of Isis</i> , Circa 1st Century.	46
Visualising time, space, identity and community: Dugong and fire dreaming, Crocodile and fire dreaming	47
Do you see it or read it? Typographic word pictures subvert the picture superiority effect.	48
Replacing images with text labels significantly increases the mental effort required to understand a scene.	49
Cartoons and statistics help reveal social divisions in <i>Life in Los Angeles</i> , 1971.	50
Cartoon faces replace words in the <i>Wong-Baker FACES Pain Rating Scale</i>	51
IKEA furniture visual assembly instructions.	51
Assembly instructions for a Kyocera hand coffee grinder, Japan (digitally scanned from original product packaging).	52
Pioneer plaque, 1972-73, NASA. Engraved plate attached to the Pioneer 10 and 11 spacecraft, designed to communicate pictorially to potential extraterrestrial life about the human species.	52
Universal symbols make orientation in public transport hubs easier.....	53
+ <i>addtoany</i> , website sharing widget is a way to quickly share links, media and information online.	56
<i>Simple Net Art Diagram</i> : Art online occurs at the point where concepts are shared and information is manipulated (M.River & T.Whid Art Associates.....	58
We are becoming the device and the device is becoming us. As smart phones and devices augment our lives the distinction between our real selves and our avatars is blurred.....	59

The same song, but different words: News slogans from around the world.	60
The news media and the public relations industry both play a role in reframing political ‘facts’	61
@RBReich via Twitter 28 July 2011.....	63
Paradoxical? Lofty and unsubstantiated claims are typical of commercial news publishers advertising for new subscribers.....	66
@andracula via Twitter, 02 February 2011.	68
The press becomes the ‘press-sphere’ involving sources and contribution beyond the reporter or editor. .	74
From a feature newspaper article exploring the role of editorial cartoons.....	81
In interface design, simplicity plays a part in usability.....	86
Cooking as a process is well suited to ‘wordless’ communication in visual instructions.....	87
In a motor vehicle instrumentation display, complex mechanical variables are distilled down to the most important forms of information representation.....	89
The symbol is not the thing; this is not a pipe.....	89
London’s famous underground rail map demonstrated that—in the right context—graphical simplicity was more important than accurate scale.	90
The universality of symbols is a powerful tool in cartooning.....	91
<i>A Transparent car</i>	97
This portrayal of a complex female ‘contraption’ makes a sexist joke meaningful (Petty 1986).....	98
Bruce Petty reminds us that money is complex and that its value and meaning is determined by many components (Petty 1983).	98
<i>Bullet Feudalism, Japan (how-it-works manual)</i> (Petty 1978).	103
<i>Holidays</i> (Petty 1978).....	104
<i>Science</i> (Petty 1967).....	104
<i>Sydney</i> (Petty 1967).	105
<i>University of Technology Sydney, Bruce Petty</i>	105

A Symbolic Head, Arthur Merton, 1879. A phrenological view of the mind and its function mapped out in terms of human traits and endeavour.....108

[Figure 1] *Influence Ripples*, A model for the spread of ideas online.....110

[Figure 2] *Influence Ripples + Social Media Fragmentation*.....111

[Figure 3] *The five rings of information*.....112

[Figure 4] *The five rings –Remixed as overlapping influence ripples.*113

Geoffrey Hook’s cartoon invokes multiple layers of meaning.....117

(*Apple App Store banner graphic 2011*)121

Still frame: *War and Peace*.....132

Early prototype screens for SimAssessment showing cartoon students and teaching mentor.136

Four basic emotional states (plus neutral) displayed by students’ faces in response to assessment.....136

Face and hairstyle variations create a range of visual indicators.137

NewsMap visualisation of Google news.....144

The news
Just came in
From the Country of Keck
That a very small bug
By the name of Van Vleck
Is yawning so wide
You can look down his neck.

This may not seem
Very important, I know.
But it is. So I'm bothering
Telling you so.



Abstract

SketchyTruth aims to explore through user-generated cartoons the hidden ‘truths’ between news headlines.

In an increasingly visual culture cartoons are centrally positioned to act as decoders of mediated information laden with public relations and political spin. By reframing the news through cartoon drawing in an online, interactive and social context we will be able to uncover meaning in reportage that current forms of news transmission cannot do.

A conceptual model is proposed for collaboratively reflecting upon the news and its social effects. It seeks to leverage the power of distributed knowledge and harness collective wisdom in reconstructing an alternative picture of the news.

The conceptual model discussed in the exegesis forms the basis for SketchyTruth – a concept for an application on smart mobile devices. Citizen journalism and social media are recast into a visual alternative – ‘citizen cartooning’. It examines the intersubjective space in between the good news and the bad news, where conversation and contemplation thrive. Citizen cartoonists will be invited to reinterpret, remix and repackage the news.

In visual confections where the whole is much more than the sum of its parts, an aggregate cartoon interpretation of the news may actually help us see the issues beyond the headline more clearly.

Images can serve as tools for making sense out of the complexity, social variance and uncertainty in the news networked information space. In a mobile digital world of conjecture, confluence and confection, a world of relative truths, the cartoon image can act as our guide and beacon.

