MAS 961 · Designing Sociable Media

Lec # 3 · Visualizing conversations

readings

- McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics.* chapters 4 & 5.
- Small, David. [Navigating large bodies of text](). IBM Systems Journal Vol. 35, No. 3&4, 1996.
- Tufte, Edward. *Envisioning Information.* (will be on reserve in Rotch, available in other libraries at MIT & Harvard).

assignment

1. Please read the McCloud chapters and the Small paper. Glance through the Tufte book, looking in particular at the chapters on small multiples, color, and time. These readings will be quite useful in helping you think of alternative approaches to the design section of this assignment.

2. Observe conversations in various real world situations - at schoo l, in stores, at parties, over dinner.

3. Using one such conversation as a basis, draw an abstract representation of it. Think about what you want to show: who is there? what was said? non-verbal communication events (glances, gestures, surroundings etc.) How do you want to use space - to show the temporal evolution of the discussion? the key points? relative status of the participants? the setting? Given your choice of things to depict, how do you want to use graphics - shapes? color? symbols? words? Use this as an exercise both in thinking about what is important about conversations and in pushing the way you think they might appear when visuallly depicted.

4. Design a representation scheme for an online discussion, such as a newsgroup. Use this representation to draw 2 different discussions, each one from a different newsgroup or mailing list. This representation may or may not be directly related to the sketch you did of a real-world conversation, but you should be thinking about the same questions. In addition, because these conversations

are so textually laden - and so sparse on other detail - you may well want to incorporate some or all of the text itself into your design.

Some notes: Do your work in a medium that allows you to freely experiment. Paper is fine - but do scan (or photograph, if large) your work and make it available online, even if at a low resolution. You may want to think about a representation that changes over time - in which case you have the additional challenge of depicting at least a sketch of how this happens (a flip book? tranparent layers?)

Please submit the URL of your critique and sketch online by Monday evening. Copies of the readings are available outside the classroom.