

# **Introduction to Data Visualization**

The greatest value of a picture is when it forces us to notice what we never expected to see.

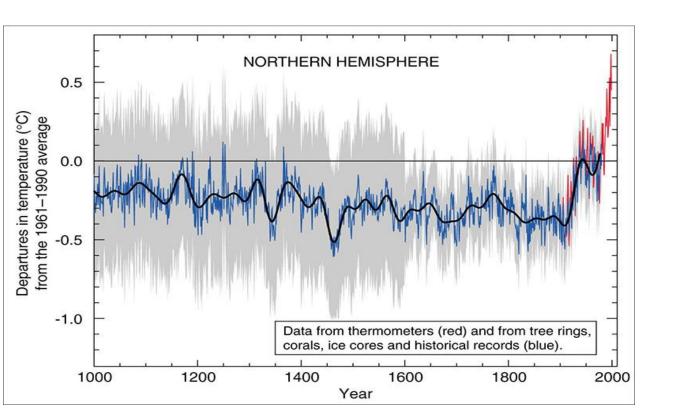
—John W. Tukey, Exploratory Data Analysis

Qualities of visualization Visualization wheel



# **Five Qualities of Great Visualizations**

- The Hockey Stick Chart: in the first years of the twentieth century, temperatures experienced a sharp rise
- It's a success story, because it has certain qualities:



- 1. Truthful
- 2. Functional
- 3. Beautiful
- 4. Insightful
- 5. Enlightening



# **Hockey Stick Chart Qualities**

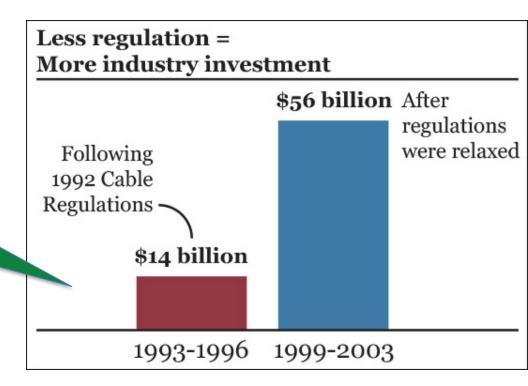
- *Truthful*, as it's based on thorough and honest research.
- Functional, as it constitutes an accurate depiction of the data, and it's built in a way that lets people do meaningful operations based on it (seeing change in time).
- Beautiful, in the sense of being attractive, intriguing, and even aesthetically pleasing for its intended audience – scientists, general public.
- *Insightful*, as it reveals evidence that we would have a hard time seeing otherwise.
- *Enlightening* because if we grasp and accept the evidence it depicts, it will change our minds for the better.



#### 1. Truthful

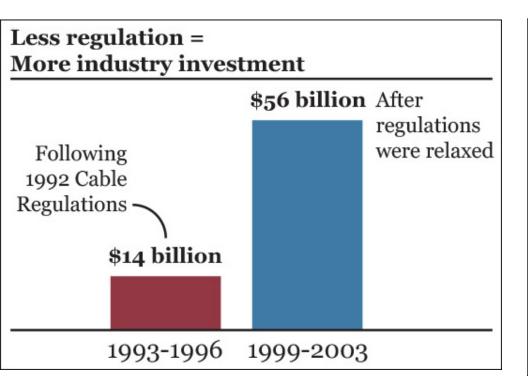
- Be aware of your actions when cleaning, summarizing and manipulating data and ensure you aren't
  - Misleading yourself (self deception) and your audience

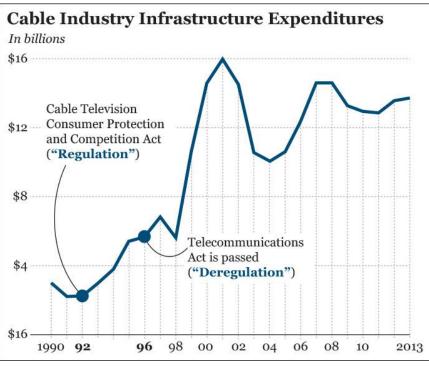
Can you tell what is fishy in 10 seconds?





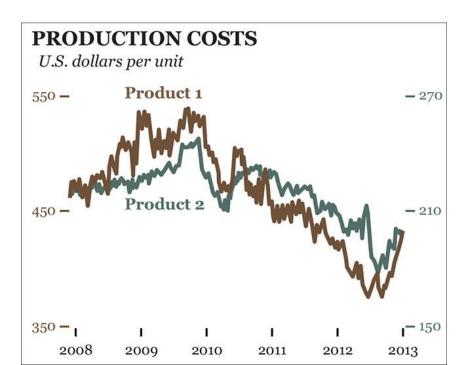
- You may not be lying, but you may not be telling the whole truth.
- Line graph with 1998 gives the complete picture.

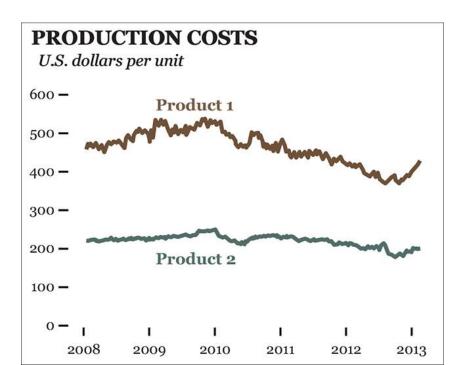






"If you double the axes, you can double the mischief.
Using two vertical axes and omitting zero from either
or both opens a statistical beauty parlor with many
cosmetic possibilities."--Gary Smith

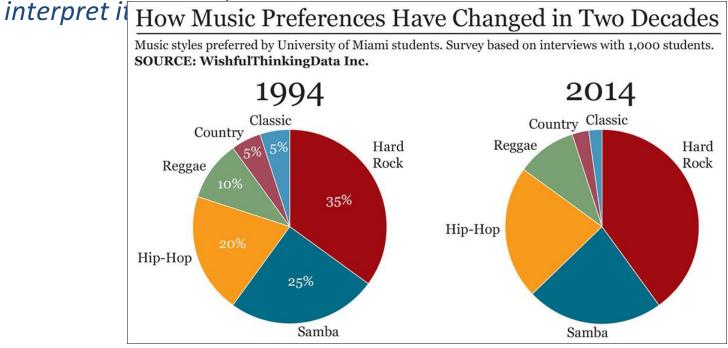






#### 2. Functionality

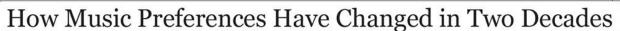
- If getting your information right is the most important step in creating any visualization, the second one is helping the audience interpret is the most important step in



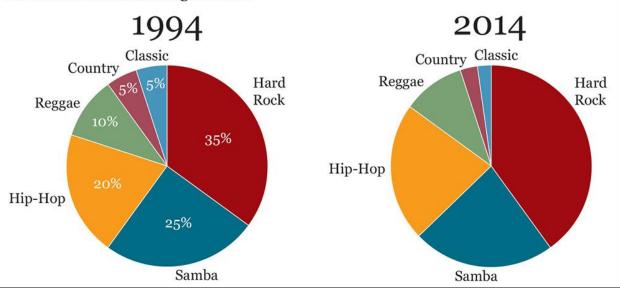
- Try to compare the popularity of hip-hop in 1994 and in 2014.
- Were country and classic music equally popular in 2014, too?



 A slope chart is much better to represent change between two points in time.



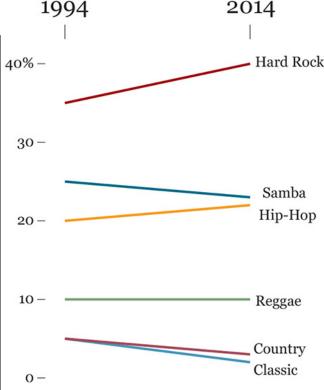
Music styles preferred by University of Miami students. Survey based on interviews with 1,000 students. **SOURCE: WishfulThinkingData Inc.** 



#### How Music Preferences Have Changed in Two Decades

Music styles preferred by University of Miami students. Survey based on interviews with 1,000 students.

SOURCE: WishfulThinkingData Inc.





#### **Beauty**

- What matters isn't if the objects of our creation are beautiful or not per se, but if they are experienced as beautiful by as many people as possible.
- "Art moves us because it is beautiful, and it is beautiful because it means something. It can be meaningful without being beautiful; but to be beautiful it must be meaningful." Roger Scruton

#### HOW CHICAGO CHANGED THE COURSE OF ITS RIVERS

Between 1889 and 1900, the newly created Sanitary District of Chicago changed the direction of the flow of the city rivers to improve the quality of the water citizens had access to.

#### Before 1889

Chicago sewage was discharged in the rivers, which flowed into Lake Michigan. The lake was Chicago's main source of drinking water.



#### After 1900

The Chicago River was diverted by means of control structures and new canals. Water started flowing to the Des Plaines River.



#### Illinois Atlantic Mississippi Ocean River

Gulf

#### As a result

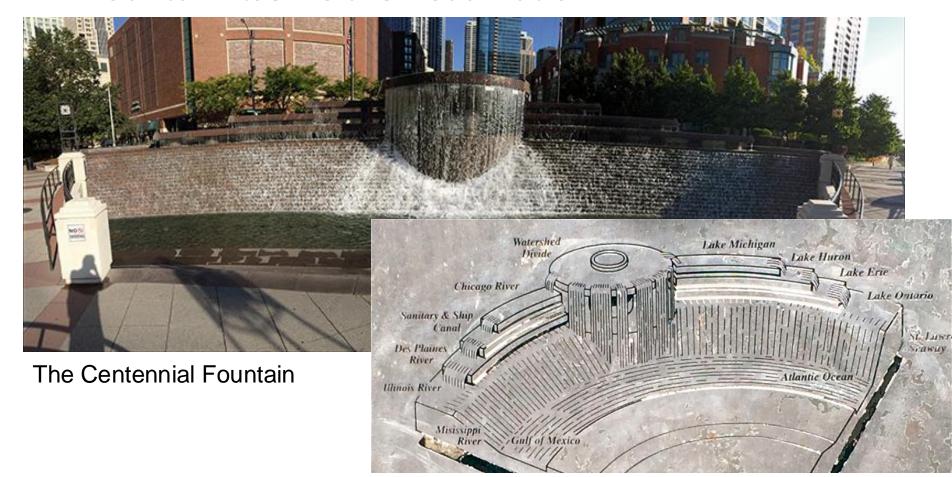
Water from rivers and lakes in the Chicago area flows in two opposite directions nowadays:

- 1 Lake Michigan flows into the Chicago River. The Chicago Area Waterway System connects the rivers of Chicago to the Mississippi through the Des Plaines and Illinois Rivers. The water ends in the Gulf of Mexico.
- 2 Lake Michigan also flows into Lake Huron, Lake Erie, Lake Ontario, and then into the Saint Lawrence Seaway, to end in the Atlantic Ocean.

(Maps have been greatly simplified for clarity.)



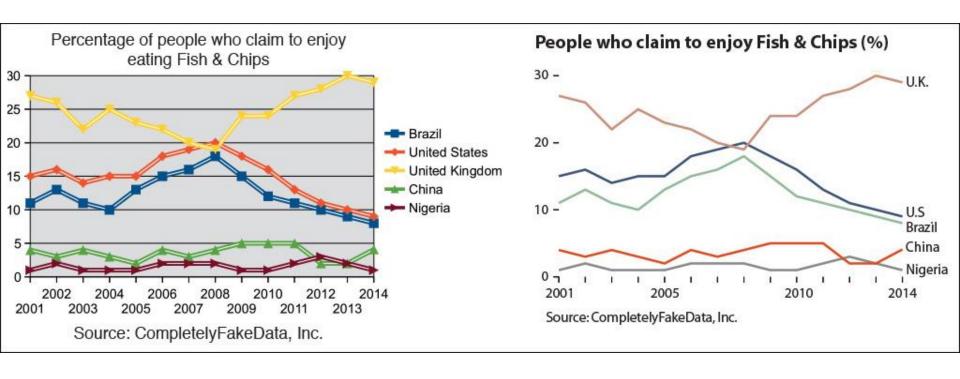
Fountain itself is the visualization



An explanation of how to "read" the fountain, part of its signage



Which chart is more aesthetically pleasing?

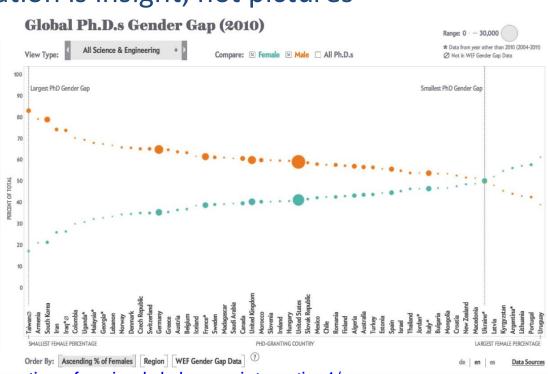




#### 4. Insightful

- A "eureka" or "a-ha" moment
- "The purpose of visualization is insight, not pictures"

Good visualizations are clear the path to making valuable discoveries that would be inaccessible if the information were presented in a different





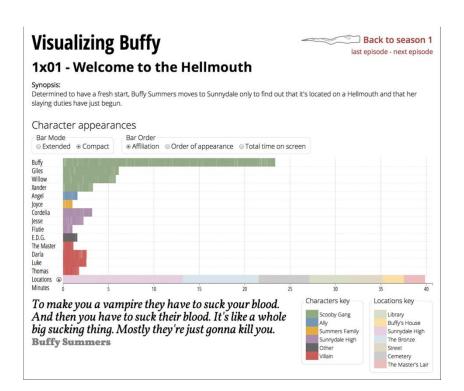
#### 5. Enlightening

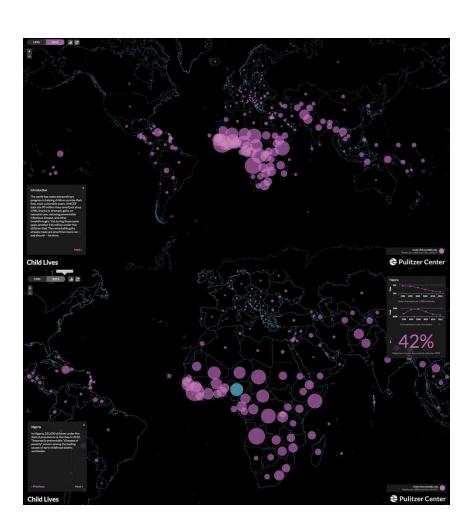
- A combination of the previous four, but with a social ethical responsibility
- The goal of any candid visual communicator is to give people access to the information they need to increase their well-being.
- Great visualizations change people's minds for the better.

 Some topics do matter more than others indeed because the state of more people.
 vs. Child Mortality



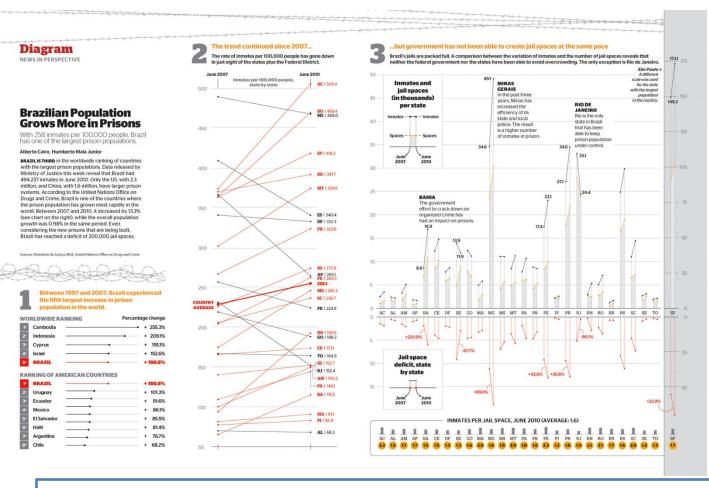
Doughnuts or Broccoli?







# The Beauty Paradox: Art and Communication



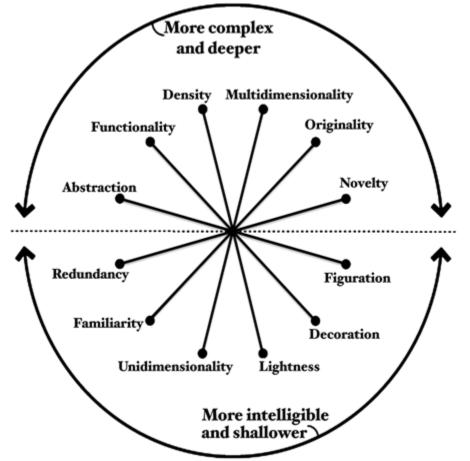
- 1. Too complex
- 2. Too abstract
- 3. Too far from the aesthetics a majority of readers expect ("ugly")
- 4. Too dense

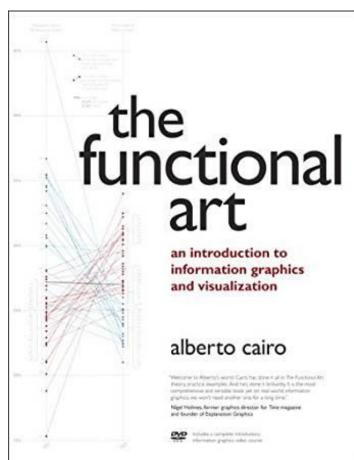
But, won a Malofiej Infographics Award -- SOCIETY FOR NEWS DESIGN



#### **Visualization Wheel**

- Six pairs of characteristics that are opposite to one another with:
  - the first characteristic falling in the complex and deeper region
  - the second characteristic falling in the more intelligible and shallower region





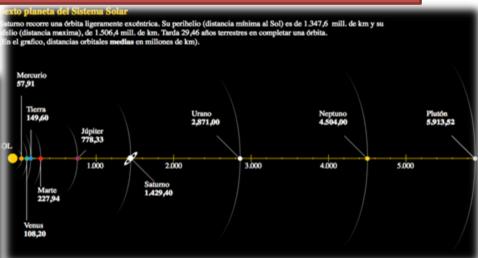


# Abstraction ←→ Figuration

 An information graphic is completely figurative when the relationship between the referent and its representation is perfectly mimetic.

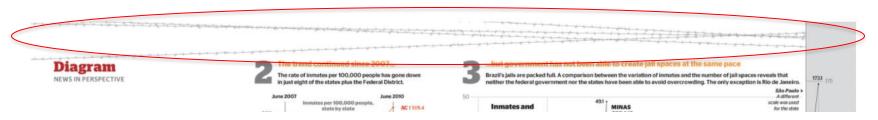
— Roxes and charts (abstraction) or real-world physical objects
NASA Cassini-Huygens Mission to Saturn—which one is figurative?







- Functionality ←→ Decoration
  - No embellishments (functionality) or artistic embellishments (decoration)



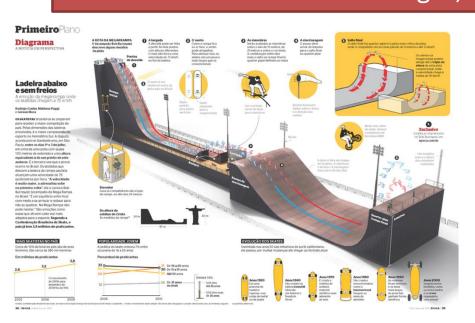
 Barbed wire is a non-functional visual element. It's not a bad decoration per se, but it can interfere with the information in a chart if not handled well.



# Density ←→ Lightness

- Must be studied in depth (density) or understandable at a glance (lightness)
- The amount of data it displays in relation to the space it uses.

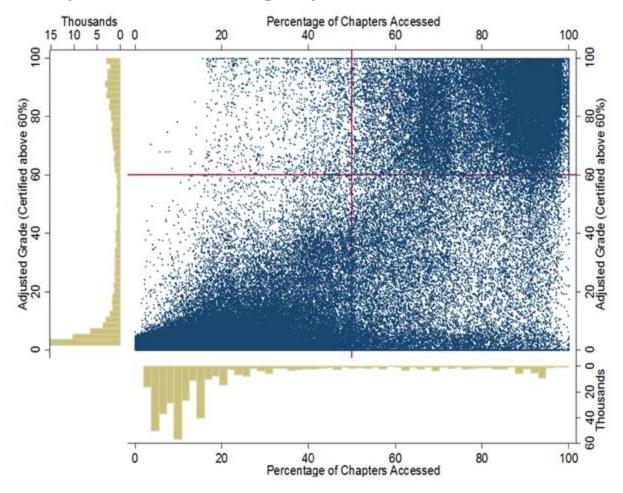
#### Which one is light, which one is dense?







An example of dense graphic

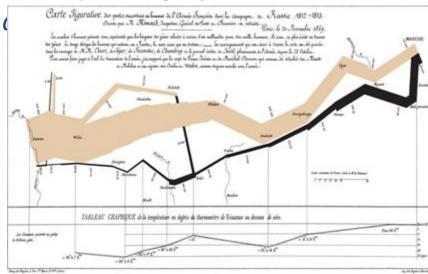




#### Multidimensional ← → Unidimensional

- A measure of two related variables: the number of layers of depth a graphic lets readers navigate, and the different forms it uses to encode the data.
- Different aspects of phenomena (multidimensional) or single or few items of phenomenal (unidimensional)
- Minard's Napoleon's March & Cairo's prison graphic are

examples for multidimensional





# Originality ← → Familiarity

- Novel methods of visualization (originality) or established and well understood methods of visualization (familiarity)
- Some graphic forms have become so common that they are almost as readable as text.
- The explosion of the use of information graphics and visualization in many areas has fueled a desire to innovate new graphical forms such as theme\_rivers (stream graph))





# Novelty ←→ Redundancy

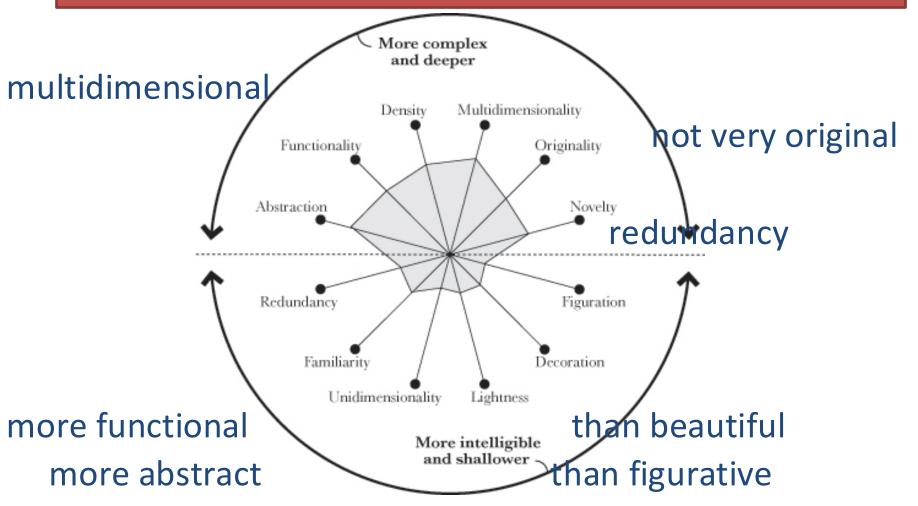
- Explaining each item once (novelty) or encoding multiple explanations of the same phenomena (redundancy)
- Striking a balance between novelty and redundancy is critical.
- Novelty is important to avoid boring your readers, but a certain level of redundancy is necessary if you want to be understood.



Realistic illustrations accompanied by redundant copy.



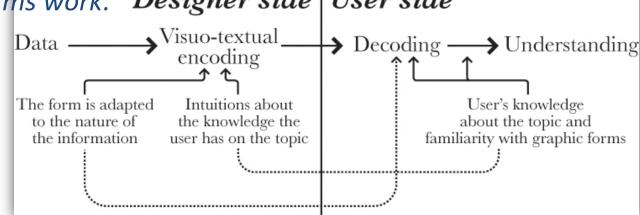
Brazilian prisons infographic using the visualization wheel





# Identifying your audience

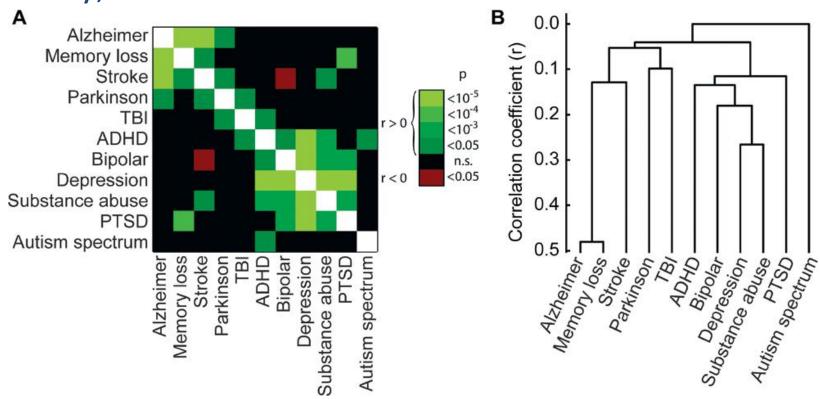
- The complexity of a graphic should be adapted to the nature of your average reader. (Sounds easy!)
- At least two factors influence the communication between a designer and an audience:
  - -How well the visual forms used to encode the information are adapted to the nature of the story the graphic should tell.
  - -The previous knowledge the user has about the topic & how those visual forms work. **Designer side** | **User side**





# Identifying your audience

 Try to figure out what these charts mean. It's not easy, is it?



B.C. Campbell and S.S. Wang, "Familial Linkage between Neuropsychiatric Disorders and Intellectual Interests," PLoS ONE 7(1): e30405. Accessed Feb. 23, 2012

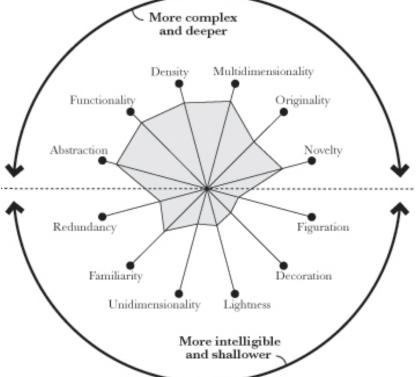


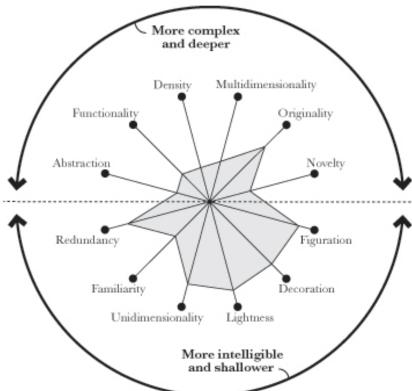
# **Engineers vs. Designers**

 Those who favor a rational, scientific approach vs. those who consider themselves "artists"

The wheel preferred by scientists and engineers

The wheel favored by artists, graphic designers, and journalists







### Have some fun with illusions

https://michaelbach.de/ot/

