

## Cheap Tricks Revealing Profound Truths: How to Sell Your Soul and Keep It, Too.



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### **Abstract**

Part of alt.chi's mission is to encourage alternative approaches to the design of user interfaces. I've had the good luck of convincing Wall Street repeatedly to implement unusual interfaces, and the great pleasure of having TextArc (a text analysis tool) mistaken for fine art while CodeProfiles (a commissioned artwork) was mistaken for a debugging tool. They were all generated using an alternative design approach that helps blur the line between tool and toy, enlisting perceptual techniques that might easily be called "cheap tricks:" techniques directed at impossible-to-ignore mechanisms in early vision.

I will run (quickly!) through a "Knowledge Acquisition Pipeline," a framework that helps my students and me focus on early vision to find appropriate "tricks;" but more important--it guides the way toward their redemption. Respecting the later, more meaning-fostering stages in the pipeline leads one to bind the techniques tightly to the final semantic intent. This strips them of the tawdry sheen of eye-candy, using them instead to create evocative living stand-ins for complex ideas and processes.

Demos throughout may capture your eyes, and with luck will illustrate the principles.

### **Bio**

W. Bradford Paley uses computers to create visual displays with the goal of making readable, clear, and engaging expressions of complex data. He did his first computer graphics in 1973, founded Digital Image Design Incorporated ([didi.com/brad](http://didi.com/brad)) in 1982, and started doing financial & statistical data visualization in 1986. He has exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art; he created TextArc.org; he is in the ARTPORT collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art; has received multiple grants and awards for both art and design, and his designs are at work every day in the hands of brokers on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. He is an adjunct associate professor at Columbia University, and is director of Information Esthetics: a fledgling interdisciplinary group exploring the creation and interpretation of data representations that are both readable and esthetically satisfying.