

Perpendicular Angel Design

Organizing and simplifying, one illumination at a time

An Event Apart Seattle 2017: Design for Real Life

Posted on [April 7, 2017](#)

Eric Meyer has been speaking on the subject of making our designs more human and more robust for a number of years now, through discussions about designing for crisis. This year his talk was about Design for Real Life. [He co-authored a book with the same name with Sara Wachter-Bettcher](#), and it stands as one of the most important books in the field of User Experience Design.



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

.@meyerweb kicks off after lunch with Design for Real Life and 20,000 pages of the Code of Federal Regulations in the US #AEASEA

5:18 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

200,000 pages (80 linear feet of shelf space), a printout is 80 feet tall. #AEASEA That's a lot!

5:19 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

The Windows 10 source code is 40,000,000 lines of code, that's 267 feet of printout, or roughly 2-3x bigger than the legal code #AEASEA

5:20 PM - 4 Apr 2017

1



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

Google has estimated that their entire app suite is 2 billion lines of code. 2.5 miles (4km tall) of paper stacked #AEASEA

5:21 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

The entire web is unestimated - but the legal code is tiny in comparison (and we think of it as big!) #AEASEA

5:21 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

The systems we work on are unimaginably complex and we unleash them on our users often w/o forethought #AEASEA

5:22 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

What do unit tests for new laws look like? #AEASEA

5:22 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

Even without unit tests, there's a lot of back and forth between gov't entities, citizens, etc. #AEASEA

5:22 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

We often design what is easiest or what seems like a good idea at the time #AEASEA

5:23 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

The AWS S3 outage in February was a code change 1 person pushed. #AEASEA

5:23 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

What's the level of responsibility there, when something is fragile or we cause harm? #AEASEA

5:23 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

What's the level of responsibility there, when something is fragile or we cause harm? #AEASEA

5:23 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

This isn't just infrastructure, it's also design. "On this day" shows memories from previous years on the same day on Facebook #AEASEA

5:24 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

In 2014 their interaction was very bad because it wasn't thought through - hurt a lot of people #AEASEA

5:25 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

Now they offer ability to filter out people or time frames, but it's very difficult to find [#AEASEA](#)

5:26 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

A potentially disasterous decision they've made: Any "memory" is any post where anyone is tagged even if it wasn't their post [#AEASEA](#)

5:27 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

Facebook doesn't seem to have thought about how labeling someone else's post as a memory of yours [#AEASEA](#)

5:28 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

We tend to think of our users as an undifferentiated mass. [#AEASEA](#)

5:28 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

We tend to think of our users as an undifferentiated mass.

#AEASEA

5:28 PM - 4 Apr 2017



jared bishop

@bishopart

Follow

Our users are individuals. Not a homogeneous group. @meyerweb

#aeasea

5:29 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

We tend to think of our users are being a whole crowd just like us, which they aren't. But we don't internalize that fact #AEASEA

5:29 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

Human brains take shortcuts whenever they can, so we have to be cognizant of cognitive limitations #AEASEA

5:29 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

Human brains take shortcuts whenever they can, so we have to be cognizant of cognitive limitations [#AEASEA](#)

5:29 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

Human brains take shortcuts whenever they can, so we have to be cognizant of cognitive limitations [#AEASEA](#)

5:29 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

It is not an easy task to push past it. We want a reward like donuts. Unless we have celiac, then donuts are frustration and pain

[#AEASEA](#)

5:30 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

Don't try to understand hating the taste of chocolate. Try to understand that some people feel different from you and that's OK

[#AEASEA](#)

5:32 PM - 4 Apr 2017

1

1



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

Don't feel pity because someone doesn't like chocolate. It's not a problem to be fixed. It's an example of diversity #AEASEA

5:32 PM - 4 Apr 2017

1 1



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

(A lot of what @meyerweb is saying is true of disability — it's not a problem to fix, it's a life different from yours!) #AEASEA #a11y

5:34 PM - 4 Apr 2017

5 16



Stephanie

@seaotta

Follow

It's important to realize how incredibly diverse humans are & it's ok to not like things that others like. #aeasea

5:34 PM - 4 Apr 2017

1



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

Mother's Day is coming soon. Facebook advertises it. It's a very difficult holiday for many people #AEASEA

5:35 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

All that spam about the holiday someone hates is incredibly painful. We know how to filter it out - most people don't #AEASEA

5:36 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

"Brands, please stop." You don't have to shove something potentially painful in someone's face AS A BANK. #AEASEA

5:37 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

The paradox: we can't pretend that the universe revolves around us. users absolutely feel like the universe revolves around them #AEASEA

5:38 PM - 4 Apr 2017

1



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

The paradox: we can't pretend that the universe revolves around us. users absolutely feel like the universe revolves around them #AEASEA

5:38 PM - 4 Apr 2017

1



Josh Vickerson

@joshvickerson

Follow

“We design for millions, but every one of those actions are intensely personal.” - @meyerweb #aeasea

5:38 PM - 4 Apr 2017 · Belltown, Seattle



David Watson

@caughtexception

Follow

We can't let the world revolve around us, even when designing for folks who assume it revolves around them. #aeasea

5:38 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

We're partially responsible for this feeling of personal immediacy. People are a large amount of commonality & a mass of difference #aeasea

5:39 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

Fundamental collision is technology vs human psychology. The past decade has changed it #AEASEA

5:39 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

Our users are bringing entire worlds into unguarded spaces
[#AEASEA](#)

5:40 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

We are shaping lives in ways small and large [#AEASEA](#)

5:40 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

This is a lot harder than the job we thought we signed up to do. But it's the job now. [#AEASEA](#)

5:41 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

We have a responsibility to make good choices about design through technology and not cause harm [#AEASEA](#)

5:41 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Stephanie

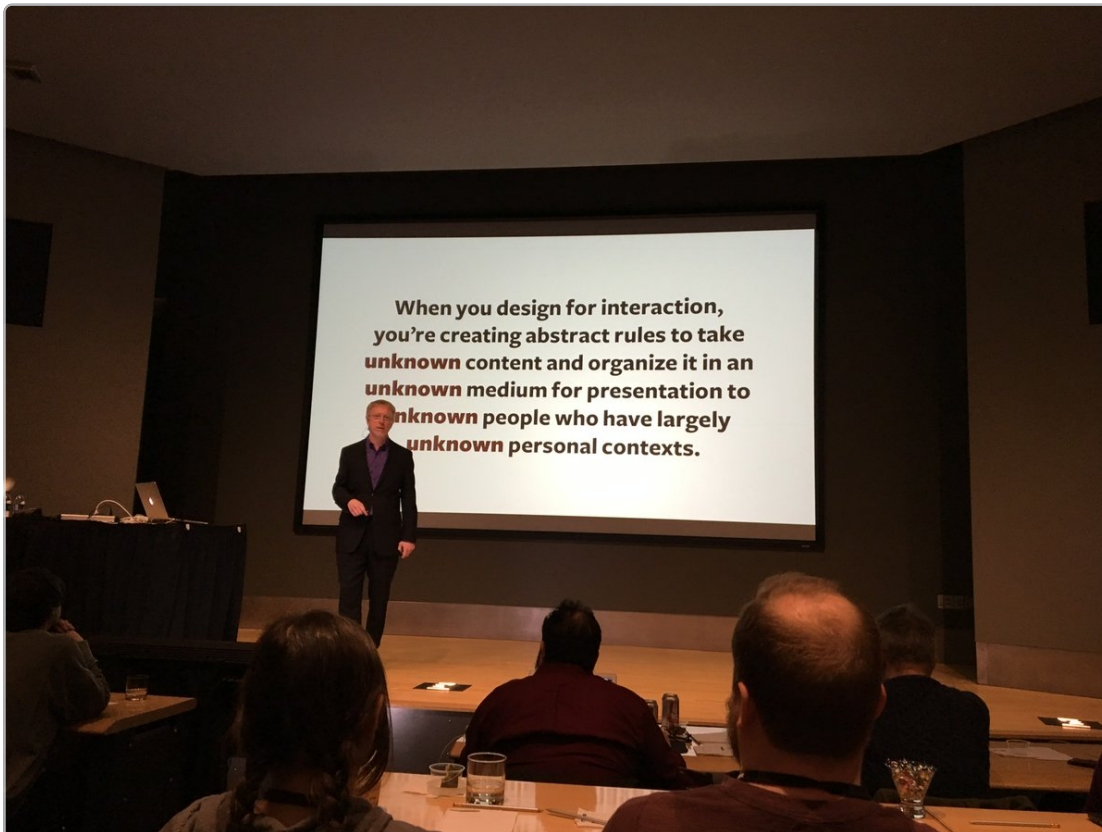
@seaotta

Follow

All of your design decisions will not be perfect. That's not human.

[#aeasea](#)

5:42 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

Unknowns we work in. [#aeasea](#)

5:42 PM - 4 Apr 2017

1

1



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

We can't make the promise to provide tools that are totally harmless. But we have to try [#AEASEA](#)

5:42 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

Maybe you fly JetBlue a few times and then have a really bad flight - you probably don't abandon forever [#AEASEA](#)

5:43 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

Build up goodwill so when you stumble, your users are more likely to be forgiving [#AEASEA](#)

5:43 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

Stress-testing your work will make it stronger [#AEASEA](#)

5:44 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

Look at the designs through the eyes of someone in crisis. (Look up [@meyerweb](#)'s talks from last year if you didn't see.) #AEASEA

5:44 PM - 4 Apr 2017

Here's one of them:

Eric Meyer: Designing for a crisis



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

"I don't have users in crisis, how does this apply to me?" #AEASEA

5:45 PM - 4 Apr 2017



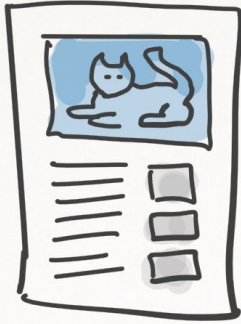
Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

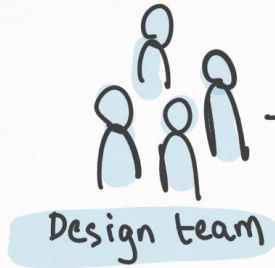
“Most users trying to adopt a pet aren’t doing it in crisis”.
But what if you’re giving up a pet? That’s crisis-like [#AEASEA](#)

5:46 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Designing for crisis PET ADOPTION SITE

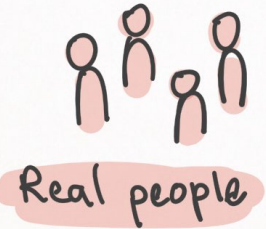
→ People in crisis needing to give up a pet have to fill out a 75-field form



Design team

Oh it weeds out people who aren't serious

↓ BUT REALLY



Real people

They are in crisis. Why would they have time to fill this out?

LEADS TO



Abandoned Pets

CHECK YOUR ASSUMPTIONS



Krystal Higgins
@kryshiggins

Follow

Adding friction to weed out low value leads? Be careful, your desired audience may also get weeded out - @meyerweb #aeasea

6:04 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

The 75-step form someone needs to fill out to give up a pet might actually be in a family crisis. The form becomes a filter [#AEASEA](#)

5:46 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

Is it easier to abandon an animal than fill out your form? [#AEASEA](#)

5:47 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

“Crisis” doesn’t necessarily mean life-or-death, it can be a layoff, or something else going on. Might not involve a site they’re on [#aeasea](#)

5:48 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

Crises: lawyers in ethical crisis, student a credit short from graduating, many other examples [#AEASEA](#)

5:57 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

“Your stuff expands to fill your available space” - human psychology feels the same way. Your biggest stress is the biggest stress
[#AEASEA](#)

5:57 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

Wordpress has an error message, “Cheatin’ uh?”. That’s it. How... helpful. [#AEASEA](#)

5:58 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

It’s uncommon for ppl to get it, has to do with permissions, and has spawned 7 years of discussion [#AEASEA](#)

5:59 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

This bug is still open. It did lead to a change, with a tiny bit of more data. [#AEASEA](#)

5:59 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

“It never ceases to annoy me to be unjustly accused of something I’m not doing.” Don’t burn users’ goodwill. #AEASEA

6:00 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

At the bottom of every wordpress.org page is their motto: code is poetry. This doesn’t feel poetic. #AEASEA

6:02 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

A designated dissenter to question assumptions - what are we assuming and what if it’s wrong - can help #AEASEA

6:02 PM - 4 Apr 2017

More about the Designated Dissenter and a bunch of other concepts from their book are explained in Sara and Eric’s article on A List Apart, [Design for Real Life](#).



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

Can we think about how this design decision might backfire in certain contexts and can we make it better? #AEASEA

6:03 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Stephanie

@seaotta

Follow

The role of designers is to ask: Have we thought about this, what are we assuming? Have we thought about the design backfiring?

[#aeasea](#)

6:04 PM - 4 Apr 2017

1 1



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

Pokémon Go: uses cultural touchstones as pokestops. History: good. National borders: ugh. Minefields: bad! [#AEASEA](#)

6:04 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

Pokémon Go has a ton of pop ups of warnings. How much responsibility to the designers have for their players behavior?

[#AEASEA](#)

6:05 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

Not legal responsibility. Personal ethical responsibility. It's not enough to be checking legal responsibility [#AEASEA](#)

6:06 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

Twitter puts hashflags (icons next to hashtags) on terms. How can they go wrong? [#aeasea](#)

6:07 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

Copy design to try to prevent yourself from embarrassing yourself or your users when your assumptions are wrong can save you [#AEASEA](#)

6:14 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

Microsoft has a great series of pdfs activities and things for inclusive design. How do we make x-box gaming available to everyone? [#AEASEA](#)

6:14 PM - 4 Apr 2017

2



Rebecca Watson

@RVivusArtDesign

Follow

Designing for the real world - check your assumptions at the door. Embrace inclusive design. [@meyerweb](#) [#aeasea](#) microsoft.com/en-us/design/i...

6:16 PM - 4 Apr 2017

2



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

If your only connection to the rest of the world is through gaming and you're a quadriplegic, Microsoft wants to make that possible [#AEASEA](#)

6:15 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

We have a responsibility to be aware and act on the effects our designs have on people [#AEASEA](#)

6:16 PM - 4 Apr 2017

1



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

Our system design decisions, copy, visual design, experience design all together. We change lives [#AEASEA](#)

6:16 PM - 4 Apr 2017

1



Josh Vickerson

@joshvickerson

Follow

“You never know what seemingly trivial interaction will be anything but trivial.” - [@meyerweb](#) [#aeasea](#)

6:17 PM - 4 Apr 2017 · Belltown, Seattle

1

1



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

It may be trivial to most, but the change can be anything but trivial for one person. We want those to be profound positive changes
[#AEASEA](#)

6:17 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

The internet is a road. We're not building roads. We're designing communities around the roads [#AEASEA](#)

6:17 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

"I have yet to enter a city where there were no traffic laws." Different rules in different zones. We're defining the structures [#AEASEA](#)

6:18 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Laura Steele

@laurabsteele

Follow

A crisis moment I think about working in the auto & dealer industry is those who just want a vehicle after a car accident [@meyerweb](#)
[#aeasea](#)

6:19 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Anne Gibson

@perpendicularme

Follow

Build wisely because we can help each other or hurt each other because helping is the much better approach #AEASEA

6:19 PM - 4 Apr 2017



Krystal Higgins

@kryshiggins

Follow

Sketchnotes from @meyerweb's talk "Design for Real Life" #aeasea - kryshiggins.com/sketchnotes-fr...

6:30 PM - 4 Apr 2017

3 5

DO THAT SOCIAL MEDIA THING



This entry was posted in [Conferences](#) and tagged [Aeasea2017](#), [design for real life](#), [empathy](#), [meyer](#) by [Anne Gibson](#). Bookmark the [permalink \[http://www.perpendicularangel.com/2017/04/an-event-apart-seattle-2017-design-for-real-life/\]](http://www.perpendicularangel.com/2017/04/an-event-apart-seattle-2017-design-for-real-life/).