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Recognition Monday: John Carroll Named Honorary Fellow

May 4, 2015 awards, Honorary Fellow, John Carroll, Summit

STC is proud to announce John Carroll as a 2015 Honorary Fellow. John will be accepting the honor at the 2015 [Technical Communication Summit](#).

His citation reads:

For your lifelong contributions to technical communication through your research into human-computer interaction and the concept of minimalism in documentation, and for your dedication to teaching the next generation.

Check out Nicky Bleiel's interview with John Carroll below, then be sure to [register for the Summit](#) so that you can see him accept his award in person!

Below is a transcript of the interview:

Nicky Bleiel: John Carroll is best-known among technical communicators as "The Father of Minimalism," a title he earned as a result of his popular book, *The Nurnberg Funnel*.

Currently he is a Distinguished Professor of Information Sciences and Technology at Penn State, as well as Director of Penn State's Center for Human-Computer Interaction.

He will be speaking at the STC Summit in Columbus, Ohio, this June and will be inducted as an Honorary Fellow of the Society during the opening session, as well.

Today, John is joining me to discuss his Summit talk, "Minimalizing Mobile Interactions," as well as his thoughts about receiving this honor from STC.

Thanks so much for joining me, Professor Carroll.

John Carroll: Thank you, Nicky.

Nicky: I know your introduction made it sound like – "he wrote *The Nurnberg Funnel* in 1990. *Something magical happened.* Now, he is a professor at Penn State, a Summit speaker, and an STC Honorary Fellow."

But a lot of work happened in between. You've written or contributed to 10 other books and over 100 papers on a wide variety of subjects, including usability, collaborative learning, user experience design, knowledge management, human-computer interaction, and cognitive science. You've been very busy.

John: I have, but in some ways, it does seem like something magical happened. Maybe it wasn't just one thing, but a series of magical things that have happened to me and kept happening down the years.

Of course, we're talking about the information design work that went on at the IBM Watson Research Center a very long time ago – How many years ago was that? About 35 years ago.

Subsequently, as you mentioned, I've gotten into a lot of other things. I've always been blessed or magical in that I've always encountered great colleagues and great students. That's still true. It has never slowed down, and I don't see it slowing down soon.

Nicky: This year is no exception. You have a lot of things going on this year.

John: Yes. In fact, I would say, in a lot of ways, the last year or two has been another peak for me.

I have eight PhD students. They're really terrific ones. Three post-docs. They are just outstanding. We've been getting a lot of work done. They keep me racing, because there's just one of me, but there's quite a few of them. [laughs]

Nicky: I believe I read that you have eight papers accepted at the Association for Computing Machinery conferences.

John: Yes. Two of the conferences I've oriented to a lot over the years are the ACM CHI Conference – Computer-Human Interaction – which is what everybody else calls "Human-Computer Interaction," but for ACM, the computer comes first.

Then, their conference CSCW, which is "Computer-Supported Cooperative Work." I think the official title now also incorporates social media, but the acronym doesn't include it. The conference has shifted heavily to social media.

Nicky: You are absolutely keeping busy. It all sounds very exciting. Tell me a little bit about your Summit talk and how it relates to your current research.

John: What I'm going to talk about at the Summit is...my strategic thinking was to try to connect the minimalist thinking that is my identity in STC, I guess, with mobile platforms and mobile technology, which is one of the focuses of my current work.

Not unusually for researchers today in Human-Computer Interaction, I'm fascinated by the ability of people to, in effect, carry their personal computing with them everywhere they go, all



the time, and opening up horizons for new kinds of applications that monitor your health, and arrange interactions and exchanges with other people — communication 24/7 — and all these other possibilities that were, I think, to a great extent not even dreamed of 35 years ago.

Nicky: Yes, and I think part of the reason that minimalism has had a resurgence is because mobile and minimalism go together, because we're talking about compressed time, compressed space, all sorts of things.

John: Exactly. Where, I guess, we had the option — although it might not have been a great idea — to have very busy, complex interfaces in the desktop era with large, high resolution displays, as displays have shrunk and devices have shrunk, we're forced to be minimalist.

We're forced to get to the point and focus on what the user wants to do and has to know about.

Nicky: Right. Actually, you and I talked in 2013. We did an interview about revisiting minimalism. You recently revisited minimalism in an article published last year in the *International Journal of Design for Learning*, titled, "Creating Minimalist Instruction."

There is interest in the subject of minimalism and its origins, as you mentioned earlier. Your work at the TJ Watson Lab remains.

John: Yes, that's a nice way to put it. I guess I'm coming to terms with the fact that I'm an older person.

People are asking me to reminisce. It's funny; I've been in the field a long time. I think early on we sensed that something very important was happening. You referred to magic earlier.

I think the people who had the opportunity to join the HCI area in the '70s and the early '80s really got a chance to participate in a magical moment that was a total change in the design of information and possibilities for human interaction and transformed all human work. Just amazing things.

The thought occurred to me, even when I was still relatively young, that someday I would be reminiscing about this. That day has definitely come.

Nicky: It's not just reminiscing. It's sharing your wisdom about all of it.

John: I definitely agree with you that it's still relevant but the article in the, what was the full name of it? "The International Journal of Learning...?"

Nicky: "...of Design for Learning."

John: "...Design for Learning," which, by the way, it's an online journal and really was a wonderful experience to work with those guys.

That was definitely a reminiscence oriented project. They had gone out and recruited people who had made contributions 10, 20, 30 years before. They even have a little timeline of how ideas emerged in that area over the decades.

It's fun to revisit it. I think, of course, it's not just reminiscing. I think when we look back at the past, we might be in a position to extract meaning that we could never see close up.

Nicky: Absolutely. I want to let everyone out there know that article is online, so if they'd like to read that before the Summit, they could download it and take a look at it.

Speaking of minimalism, your groundbreaking work in minimalism is part of the reason you'll be inducted as an STC Honorary Fellow at the opening session of the Summit in Columbus, Ohio, along with Dr. Temple Grandin.

Previous Honorary Fellows include Alan Alda, Tim O'Reilly, Vinton Cerf and Robert Kahn, Tim Berners-Lee, and Edward Tufte, among many others. We're thrilled to honor you as one of the luminaries who have achieved eminence in the field of technical communication.

John: The honor is mine. I looked at the list of the people who've got this award. It's staggering to me to be part of that group.

Nicky: It's well deserved, Dr. Carroll.

John: Thank you.

Nicky: Thank you so much for joining me. I look forward to your talk in Columbus, and also cheering you on as you receive your honor.

John: It will be great to see you and many other friends at STC. I'm looking forward to it, too.

More about John Carroll and Related Reading:

John Carroll's STC Summit Session: "Minimalizing Mobile Interactions"

John Carroll's web page and Penn State directory listing

Wikipedia entry

"Minimalism Revisited: An Interview with John Carroll" *STC Intercom* (Login required)

"Creating Minimalist Instruction" *International Journal of Design for Learning*

"The Disappearance of the Instruction Manual" *Popular Science*

John M. Carroll is Distinguished Professor of Information Sciences and Technology at the Pennsylvania State University. His research is in methods and theory in human-computer interaction, particularly as applied to Internet tools for collaborative learning and problem solving, and design of interactive information systems. Recent books include *The Neighborhood in the Internet: Design Research Projects in Community Informatics* (Routledge, 2012), *Creativity and Rationale: Enhancing Human Experience by Design* (Springer, 2012), and *Innovative Practices in teaching Information Sciences and Technology* (Springer, 2014). Carroll serves on several advisory and editorial boards for journals, handbooks, and series. He is editor of the *Synthesis Lectures on Human-Centered Informatics*. Carroll has received the Rigo Award and the CHI Lifetime Achievement Award from ACM, the Silver Core Award from IFIP, the Goldsmith Award from IEEE. He is a fellow of AAAS, ACM, IEEE, the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society, and the Association for Psychological Science. In 2012, he received an honorary doctorate in engineering from Universidad Carlos III de Madrid.