

## Vanishing Viewpoints, Disappearing “Cite” Lines

This exercise applies the metaphor of a vanishing perspective point in the visual arts to the problem of “news” and “reporting” in all media. The exercise is amusing and instructive at the individual level, but it’s more provocative as a group project.

Assign groups to track a news story for two weeks. Let’s say a new pharmaceutical-in-development shows promising experimental results in battling Parkinson’s Disease. Or perhaps astronomers have noticed an unstable star on the verge of collapse. The designated groups track the story for x-number of weeks across specified news-reporting organizations, platforms, and targeted web searches. In my experience, classes have almost without exception found the following.

1. A droning sameness of news coverage, irrespective of the story, identical language used across different networks and platforms
2. Only perfunctory follow-through even from the original reporting source
3. The story is never resolved and, indeed, simply vanishes into the oblivion of media static. Most sources are never further cited.

This exercise, thus, deploys a conceptual wordplay to invoke a real-world problem. Moreover, as the entire project is about language and the crisis of knowledge in the age social media, its implications are clear to the students in real time.

Of course, occasionally the project does track a story to a purposeful end, but helping students discover these patterns of representation, misrepresentation, and non-representation is central to this enterprise. Most importantly, the Vanishing Viewpoints, Disappearing “Cite” Lines project is about the ontology of research and what it means to investigate a problem.