

Outlaw advertising?



It's hard to imagine a world without advertising. But that's the story Inger Stole, a professor in the Institute of Communications Research in Urbana, tells in her 2006 book, "Advertising on Trial: Consumer Activism and Corporate Public Relations in the 1930s" (University of Illinois Press).

As the nation's population grew in the 1930s and the first seeds of consumer culture began to sprout, a nascent truth-in-advertising movement arose in the United States. Stole writes that these early reformers saw advertising as "flawed" and "undemocratic" because of its dependence on emotion instead of factual product information. But the fight between reformers and advertisers was never really fair in the first place because those profiting from advertising bought their ink by the barrel and owned the new radio broadcasting airwaves to boot.

"The media basically did not write or say much about the issue," Stole says. "Thus, most people were unaware of the issues at stake." The advertisers, publishers and broadcasters didn't take any chances, though. They used new-fangled corporate relations tools and even charged the reformers with being communists to defeat the do-gooders.

In 1938, Congress passed the watered-down Wheeler-Lea Amendment, and Stole writes: "Advertising never again faced a direct challenge to its legitimacy." Stole says it didn't have to be that way then, and it doesn't have to be that way today. In her view the reformers had a good point because commercial speech does not merit Constitutional free-speech status.

"In our self-governing society, the role and nature of advertising and commercialism should be determined by the citizenry," she writes. "If we want, we have the power to regulate it back to a way we find more suitable to the way we want to govern society." In that brave new world, "Cut to commercial" would be replaced by "Cut the commercial."

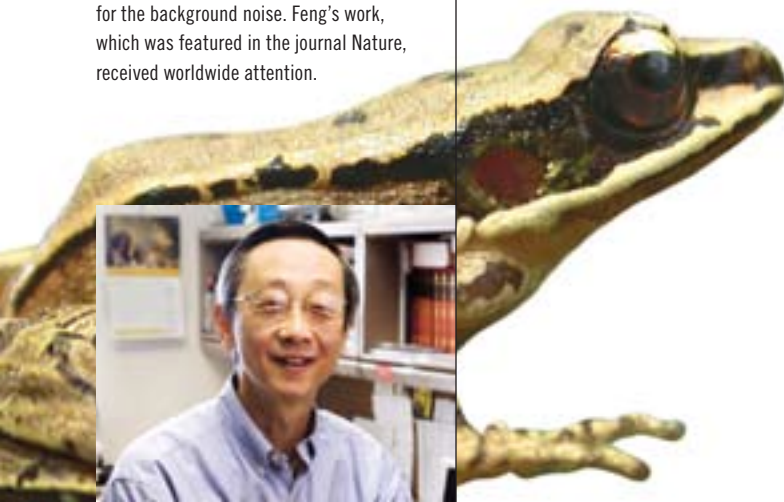


Reporting by Craig Chamberlain, Urbana News Bureau

URBANA

Ultrasonic communication

High-pitched, bird-like calls from a frog? Rare, concave-eared torrent frogs also hear and respond to sounds, the first documented case of amphibians communicating like bats, whales and dolphins. The frogs studied live in Huangshan Hot Springs, a scenic mountainous area west of Shanghai that is alive with noisy waterfalls and wildlife. Albert Feng, a professor of molecular and integrative physiology who also has an appointment at the Beckman Institute, and his colleague Kraig Adler at Cornell University believe that the frogs have evolved to compensate for the background noise. Feng's work, which was featured in the journal Nature, received worldwide attention.



URBANA

Nine books and counting

A book mentoring project coordinated by WILL radio gets preschool children excited by reading and puts books in their homes. Volunteers from community organizations visit classrooms once a month to read a book and do a related activity with the children. Each boy and girl gets a copy of the featured book, building a personal home library of nine familiar volumes. Repetition helps children realize that print has meaning. The Young Learners Initiative involves Head Start kids in Urbana, Savoy and Rantoul.



URBANA

Awarding literary talent

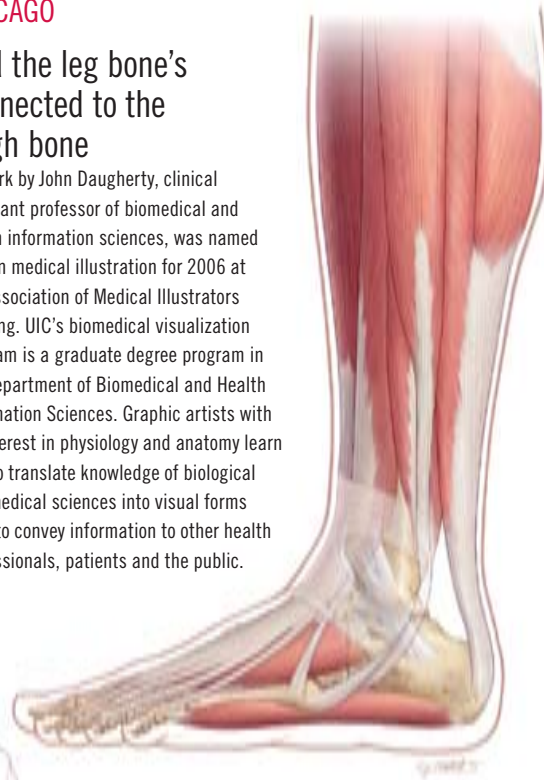
Tyehimba Jess, an assistant professor of English, was one of 10 U.S. writers to win the 2006 Whiting Writers' Award, a prestigious literary honor given annually to writers of exceptional talent and promise. Jess is a prolific writer of fiction and poetry. He won the 2004 National Poetry Series award for his first book, "leadbelly," published in 2005.



CHICAGO

And the leg bone's connected to the thigh bone

Artwork by John Daugherty, clinical assistant professor of biomedical and health information sciences, was named best in medical illustration for 2006 at the Association of Medical Illustrators meeting. UIC's biomedical visualization program is a graduate degree program in the Department of Biomedical and Health Information Sciences. Graphic artists with an interest in physiology and anatomy learn how to translate knowledge of biological and medical sciences into visual forms used to convey information to other health professionals, patients and the public.



For genius C-U is the place

From the flat Nebraska night to the critical care unit's whitescape, from an ancient bird migration site to the folds and fissures of the human brain, place figures prominently in Richard Powers' latest novel, "The Echo Maker."

Remarkably to some, Powers, the 2006 National Book Award winner, author of nine novels and winner of a MacArthur "genius award," nests in Urbana-Champaign, where he earned his degrees, served as writer-in-residence and now holds the Swanlund Endowed Chair of English. Born near Chicago, Powers spent five teen years in Bangkok and has lived in Boston and Holland. Friends and critics rib him for hanging around the rural Midwest. Wouldn't a big city be more appropriate for a writer a "New Yorker" reviewer described as "one of our most lavishly gifted writers"?

The writer counters that he has to live in the heartland: "It keeps me attached to the themes that infuse all of my books. This place gives me the whole world in a nutshell. This combination of simple and complex, of rural pragmatism and international excitement, is great for a writer. It keeps me stimulated without being overwhelmed, supported without being sequestered."

Sometimes Powers bikes in a few blocks to the Beckman Institute for Advanced Science and Technology, where he is a member of the cognitive neuroscience group and keeps a fold-up cot hanging on the wall of his office. Lying on that cot, nearly flat as the land around him, Powers dictates his work into his tablet PC and edits it with voice and stylus.

"I love working near the laboratory activity at the Beckman, the chance to meet researchers or walk around eavesdropping on all kinds of scientific work. Life here is like having a home in the city and one in the country—the best of both worlds."

By Andrea Lynn, Urbana News Bureau



URBANA

Material girls and boys?

Research by Dan Cook, professor of advertising in Urbana, shows that children's culture and consumer culture have become virtually indistinguishable. Cook says that some of the most effective marketing generates interest in a product by the child while also giving parents the message that not getting the product is denying the child's self-expression or empowerment. Taking an active and critical posture toward media and consumption can help parents combat the influence of advertising.

Urbana business administration professor Lan Chaplin looked at the value that children in three age groups placed on consumer goods versus non-materialistic sentiments such as "being good at sports." Materialistic values drop between the ages of 12 and 18 after an early rise between the ages of 8 and 13. Chaplin also found that children with lower self-esteem valued possessions significantly more than children with higher self-esteem.

