



UC Berkeley School of Information

# Virtual Pollution

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**History of Information 103**  
**Geoff Nunberg**

**April 28, 2011**



## Itinerary, 4/28

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The problems of "rotten information"

The pervasion of hate speech

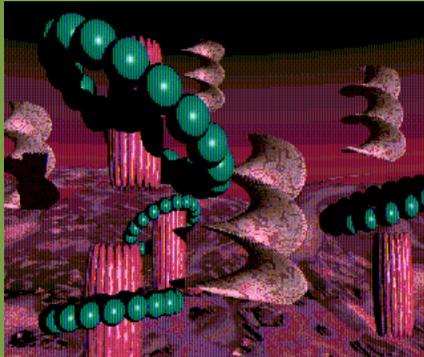
The porn problem – what's to be done?

A crisis in civility?

That's a wrap...



# Spatial Models of Electronic Discourse: "Cyberspace"



## The New Jerusalem, ca. 1992

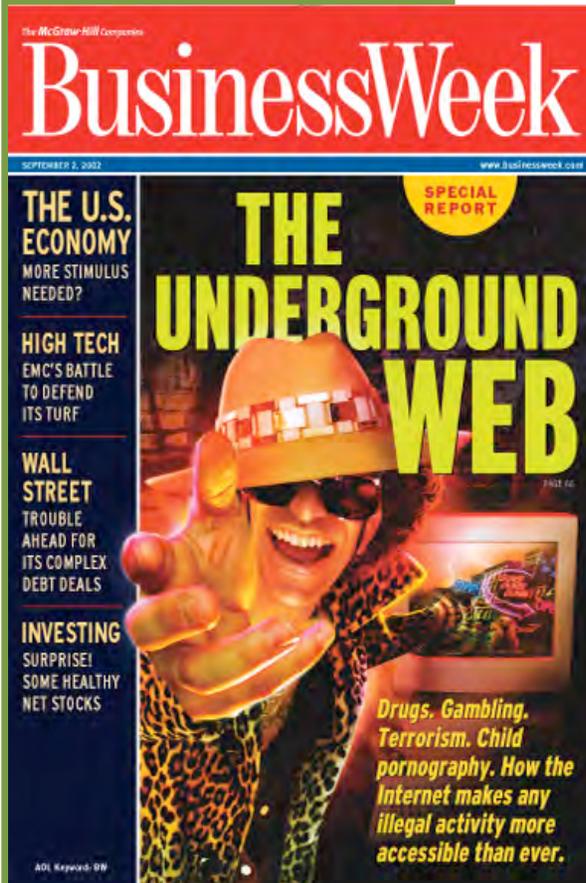
Cyberspace: A world in which the global traffic of knowledge, secrets, measurements, indicators, and alter-human agency takes on form: sights, sounds, presences never seen on the surface of the earth blossoming in a vast electronic night. . . . From vast databases that constitute the culture's deposited wealth, every document is available, every recording is playable, and every picture is viewable. The realm of pure information, filling like a lake.

— Michael Benedikt, Introduction to Cyberspace, MIT Press, 1991

Visualizations of cyberspace



# Cyberspace: The Morning After



## The virtual Bowery

[The Internet is] a place where crime is rampant and every twisted urge can be satisfied. Thousands of virtual streets are lined with casinos, porn shops, and drug dealers. Scam artists and terrorists skulk behind seemingly lawful Web sites. And cops wander through once in a while, mostly looking lost. It's the Strip in Las Vegas, the Red Light district in Amsterdam, and New York's Times Square at its worst, all rolled into one -- and all easily accessible from your living room couch.

"The Underground Web," *Business Week*, 9/2/02



# Varieties of "Rotten Information"

Problems of authenticity: fakes, hoaxes, forgeries, plagiarism, etc.

Problems of quality: reliability and "authoritativeness"

Problems of "pollution": pornography, violence, racism & hate speech, predators, incivility, etc.

Mary Douglas: "Dirt is matter out of place... Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is a system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements."

How to tell pollution from the merely "unacceptable"?



# A Racist Hoax

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## THE FRANKLIN PROPHECY

Recorded by Charles Coteworth Pinckney

Delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1787

"I fully agree with General Washington, that we must protect this young nation from an insidious influence and impenetration. The menace, gentlemen, is the Jews.

"In whatever country Jews have settled in any great number, they have lowered its moral tone; depreciated its commercial integrity; have segregated themselves and have not been assimilated; have sneered at and tried to undermine the Christian religion upon which that nation is founded....

. If you do not exclude them from these United States, in their Constitution, in less than 200 years they will have swarmed here in such great numbers that they will dominate and devour the land and change our form of government...



# A Racist Hoax

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"In whatever country they have lowered their integrity; have segregated; have assimilated; have subverted Christian religion u

. If you do not exclude them from the Constitution, in less than a century they will devour the land and change our form of government...

"I cannot find a single original source that gives the slightest justification for believing that the Prophecy is anything more than a barefaced forgery. Not a word have I discovered in Franklin's letters and papers expressing any such sentiments against the Jews as are ascribed to him by the Nazis — American and German." Charles Beard, *NY Times*, March 10, 1937.

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# Pervasiveness of Hate Speech

Google

Web [Show options...](#) Results 1 - 100 of about 1,800 for "pr

[The JEWS who Run Clinton and the USA](#)  
"I fully agree with General Washington, that we must **protect this young nation from an insidious influence** and impenetration. The menace, gentlemen, is the ...  
[www.biblebelievers.org.au/cllist.htm](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

[JewishPost.com - The Franklin Prophecy: An Anti-Semitic Hoax Gets ...](#)  
I fully agree with General Washington, that we must **protect this young nation from an insidious influence** and penetration. That menace, gentlemen, is the ...  
[www.jewishpost.com/.../the-franklin-prophecy-an-anti-semitic-hoax-gets-new-life-on-the-internet.html](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

[US Founding Fathers' Statements Concerning the Jews](#)  
... he declared: "I fully agree with General Washington, that we must **protect this young nation from an insidious influence** and impenetration. ...  
[www.scribd.com/.../US-Founding-Fathers-Statements-Concerning-the-Jews](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

[The Jews - 100 Facts](#)  
Fact #72 (11) — Benjamin Franklin: "I fully agree with General Washington, that we must **protect this young nation from an insidious influence** and ...  
[www.scribd.com/doc/28107776/The-Jews-100-Facts](#) - [Cached](#)

[Show more results from www.scribd.com](#)

[What were 3 factors that led to the holocaust? - Yahoo! Answers](#)  
Dec 15, 2009 ... "I fully agree with General Washington, that we must **protect this young nation from an insidious influence** and impenetration. ...  
[answers.yahoo.com](#) > Arts & Humanities > History - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

[Americans Wake Up: Zionists & Israel ruling America. | Facebook](#)  
I fully agree with General Washington, that we must **protect this young nation from an insidious influence** and penetration. That menace, gentlemen, is the ...  
[www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=10724195862](#) - [Cached](#)

[The Goldman Probe Is a Smokescreen | Republic Broadcasting Network](#)  
... agree with General Washington, that we must **protect this young nation from an insidious influence** and impenetration. The menace, gentlemen, is the Jews. ...  
[republicbroadcasting.org/?p=8165](#) - [Cached](#)

[Judenhass Quotes](#)  
"I fully agree with General Washington, that we must **protect this young nation from an insidious influence** and impenetration. The menace, gentlemen, is the ...  
[www.judenhass.com/quotes.html](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)



# Pervasiveness of Hate Speech

The screenshot shows a Google search for "protect this young nation". The search results include several links, many of which are cached versions of pages containing antisemitic content. The top result is from Wikipedia, titled "The Franklin Prophecy", which states that the prophecy is an antisemitic speech falsely attributed to Benjamin Franklin. Below this, there is a link to an ADL (Anti-Defamation League) page titled "The Franklin 'Prophecy' Modern Anti-Semitic Myth Making". The ADL page includes an introduction and a section titled "The 'Prophecy'", which discusses the history of the prophecy and its use as anti-Semitic propaganda. Other search results include links to "The Jews who Run Clinton and the USA", "JewishPost.com - The Franklin Prophecy", "US Founding Fathers' Statements Concerning the Young Nation", "The Jews - 100 Facts", "What were 3 factors that led to the holocaust?", "Americans Wake Up: Zionists & Israel ruling America", "The Goldman Probe Is a Smokescreen | Republic Broadcasting", and "Judenhass Quotes".

Google search results for "protect this young nation".

Results include:

- [The JEWS who Run Clinton and the USA](#) - "I fully agree with General Washington, that we must protect this young nation from an insidious influence and impenetration. The menace, gentlemen, is the ..."
- [JewishPost.com - The Franklin Prophecy](#) - "I fully agree with General Washington, that we must protect this young nation from an insidious influence and impenetration. That menace, gentlemen, is the ..."
- [US Founding Fathers' Statements Concerning the Young Nation](#) - "... he declared: 'I fully agree with General Washington, that we must protect this young nation from an insidious influence and impenetration. The menace, gentlemen, is the ...'"
- [The Jews - 100 Facts](#) - Fact #72 (11) — Benjamin Franklin: "I fully agree with General Washington, that we must protect this young nation from an insidious influence and impenetration. The menace, gentlemen, is the ..."
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- [Judenhass Quotes](#) - "I fully agree with General Washington, that we must protect this young nation from an insidious influence and impenetration. The menace, gentlemen, is the ..."

Wikipedia article: **The Franklin Prophecy**  
From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

"The Franklin Prophecy", sometimes called "The Franklin Forgery", is an antisemitic speech falsely attributed to Benjamin Franklin, warning

ADL (Anti-Defamation League) article: **The Franklin "Prophecy" Modern Anti-Semitic Myth Making**

Introduction

**The "Prophecy"**

**The Uses of the "Prophecy"**

**Documenting a Fraud**

This article, which thoroughly documents the history of the truth as the Franklin "Prophecy", appeared almost forty-five years after the 1954 issue of Facts, a publication of the Anti-Defamation League. The authors wrote "This 20-year-old anti-Semitic hoax is circulating almost sixty-five years after it was manufactured, the "Prophecy" is a staple of anti-Semitic propaganda. It can be found on a number of websites maintained by haters and hate-groups. The article is, therefore



# An Awkward Search Result

The screenshot shows a Google search for the word "jew". The search bar contains "jew" and the search button is visible. Below the search bar, there are several search results. The first result is "Offensive Search Results" from Google. The second result is "Jew - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia" with a snippet: "Discussion of the different history, beliefs, and cultural en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jew". The third result is "Jew Watch - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia" with a snippet: "According to its subject features an archive en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jew [ More results from Wikipedia ]". The fourth result is "Jew Watch" with a snippet: "Keeping a close watch on Jewish communities, organizations, monopoly, banking, and media control worldwide. www.jewwatch.com/ - 32k - Cached - Similar pages". The fifth result is "Jew Watch - Jewish Atrocities - Jews Against Jews" with a snippet: "Rabin was assassinated in 1995 by a right-wing orthodox Jew. Abraham Hecht has been quoted as citing Jewish scripture to justify the killing. ... www.jewwatch.com/jew-atrocities-jewsagainstjews.html - 8k - Cached - Similar pages [ More results from www.jewwatch.com ]". The sixth result is "Jew Watch - Jewish Atrocities - Jews Against Jews" with a snippet: "Rabin was assassinated in 1995 by a right-wing orthodox Jew. Abraham Hecht has been quoted as citing Jewish scripture to justify the killing. ... www.jewwatch.com/jew-atrocities-jewsagainstjews.html - 8k - Cached - Similar pages [ More results from www.jewwatch.com ]". The seventh result is "Judaism 101: Who is a Jew?" with a snippet: "other anti right dontblameme". The eighth result is "The World's Largest Jewish Photo" with a snippet: "A fun photo r to Jewish pe www.GinAnd".



# Google's Explanation

## Web

### [Offensive Search Results](#)

[www.google.com/explanation](http://www.google.com/explanation)

We're disturbed about these results as well. Please read o

If you recently used Google to search for the word "Jew," you may have seen results that were very disturbing. We assure you that the views expressed by the sites in your results are not in any way endorsed by Google. .... A site's ranking in Google's search results relies heavily on computer algorithms using thousands of factors to calculate a page's relevance to a given query. Sometimes subtleties of language cause anomalies to appear that cannot be predicted. ...



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*What would you tell Google to do?*



# Pervasiveness of racialism

Links to other racist sites:

**Fig. 1 (3 views).** A Dinaricized German from Heidelberg; although his face shows in exaggerated degree all of the criteria of Dinaricization, the great size of his cranial vault is unusual for Dinarics and implies the presence of unreduced Upper Palaeolithic factors. This individual might be called a Noric, since the Mediterranean element contained is unquestionably Nordic, and probably Nordic of the Corded variety.



**Fig. 2 (3 views).** A Noric from Berlin; the shallow nasion depression, and the great height and sillence of the nose are especially noticeable here. Norics are extremely common in eastern Germany.



**Fig. 3 (3 views).** A Noric Pole from Galicia western Poles.



Linking singles of European descent around the world... EURODATELINK

Sign Up Now It's FREE!

Search: Gender (Not Specified), Country (Not specified), go

Login: Nickname, Password, go

**Paul Fromm Stormfront.org**  
Coming to You Every Day  
12:00 AM EST  
"When you silence the Men of the Word,  
you will have to deal with the Men of the Sword."  
ONLY ON STORMFRONT RADIO

**WHITE PRIDE WORLD WIDE**

Stormfront Broadcast Radio - Monday, September 10

When radio call-ins activated: (214)-329-WPWW or Skype	Music Radio Tuneful Schedule EDT	Townhall Talk Schedule EDT
	5-7am - Downunder Radio- -7-9pm in E. Australia	8-10pm - Political Cesspool
	10pm - Old Timey Arrangements	12am - Paul Fromm
	11pm - Lycia's Celtic	1am - Jamie Kelso

Click Below to Hear the Stream Live:  
**Listen Live** Live NOW: Paul Fromm on the air "For Our People" from Port



# Why is racist speech a problem?

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How concerned should we be about racist speech?

Is there more racist speech than before?...

Or is it just more visible – like bad spelling?



# The Menace of Porn

**NEW YORK POST**

Last Updated: Wed., Apr. 27, 2011, 07:45pm

## City libraries say 'checking out' porn protected by First Amendment

By DOUGLAS MONTERO and BOB FREDERICKS

Last Updated: 9:03 AM, April 25, 2011

Posted: 1:54 AM, April 25, 2011

Like 2,583 people like this. Be the first of your friends.

Tweet 203

More Print

Shakespeare's plays, Einstein's theories -- and porn queen Jenna Jameson's steamy on-screen sexcapades.

New Yorkers can take their pick at the city's public libraries, thanks to a policy that gives a the most uncensored access to extreme, hard-core Internet smut this side of the old Time Square.

"What they're doing is publicly funding an appetite for the most debased fare available," said Catholic League President Bill Donohue. "It's not like a Playboy centerfold anymore -- it's far worse."

HOME ON AIR BLOGS PODCASTS PHOTOS EVENTS & CONTESTS

Internet porn a First Amendment right at Chicago libraries

### libraries Porn on L.A. Library Public Terminals Gets Serious Debate in City Hall

By Dennis Romero, Wed., Apr. 13 2011 @ 7:03AM

Categories: libraries

Share Like 1 Submit 2 Tweet 0 Digg

Ah, L.A. City Hall, always tackling the Big Issue. Like cat declawing and an Arizona business boycott that has no teeth.

And now the accidental, over-the-shoulder viewing of internet porn at public libraries is a matter of serious inquiry among city officials.

Yes, this was actually a major topic of discussion at the Arts, Parks, Health and Aging Committee meeting this week.

And what was done about it?

Why nothing, of course.



merrick\_mourie  
Not an L.A. library branch (but could be).



## The profusion of pornography

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Whereas pornography was once furtively glimpsed at dimly lighted newsstands or seedy adult theaters, today it is everywhere. It pours in over the Internet, sometimes uninvited, sometimes via eagerly forwarded links...

...Whereas children used to supplement sex education by tearing through *National Geographic* in search of naked aboriginals and leafing through the occasional *Penthouse* they stumbled across in the garage, today many are confronted by pornographic images on a daily basis. In a 2001 poll by the Kaiser Family Foundation, 70% of 15-to 17-year-olds said they had accidentally come across pornography online.

*Time*, January 19, 2004



# Dimensions(?) of the Problem

The Washington Times  
Originally published 04:45 a.m., September 29, 2009, updated 07:25 a.m., September 29, 2009  
EXCLUSIVE: Porn surfing rampant at U.S science foundation

Jim McElharr  
**Washington Takes Break From Porn Surfing to Bailout Wall Street**  
by Ann Coulter  
04/28/2010  
Democrats have decided that in order to prevent Wall Street from starting meltdowns, wrecking the economy and leaving the American taxpayer in a lurch, we need to give more oversight authority to the same government employees who were busy surfing Internet porn as private investors frantically tried to warn

**GOP ramps up attacks on SEC over porn surfing**  
AP Associated Press  
Buzz up! 281 votes | Send | Share | Print  
By DANIEL WAGNER, AP Business Writer – Fri Apr 23, 12:14 pm ET  
WASHINGTON – Republicans are stepping up their criticism of the Securities and Exchange Commission following reports that senior agency staffers spent hours surfing pornographic websites on government-issued computers while they were supposed to be policing the nation's financial system.

"More than 4 million Web sites worldwide show images of children being sexually exploited, said the U.N. investigator on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography... "

It is estimated that 100,000 sites contain child pornography."

"A total of 4.2 million websites contain pornography."

< 1% of Websites contain porn. Philip B. Stark. UCB, 2006 (100-200m sites in all)

*... But what do the numbers really mean?*



## How Porn Sites are Used : An Exception to "Winner Take All"

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### Distribution of User Volume Among Sites

<u>% of Sites</u>	<u>% of traffic</u>
	<u>All Sites</u>
.01	32.36
1	55.63
5	74.81
10	82.26
50	94.92

*Adamic & Huberman, 2000*



# How Porn Sites are Used : An Exception to "Winner Take All"

---

## Distribution of User Volume Among Sites

<u>% of Sites</u>	<u>% of traffic</u>	
	<u>All Sites</u>	<u>Porn Sites</u>
.01	32.36	1.4
1	55.63	15.83
5	74.81	41.75
10	82.26	59.29
50	94.92	90.76

*Adamic & Huberman, 2000*



# Responses to Rotten Information

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Institutional & organizational adaptations

Social change

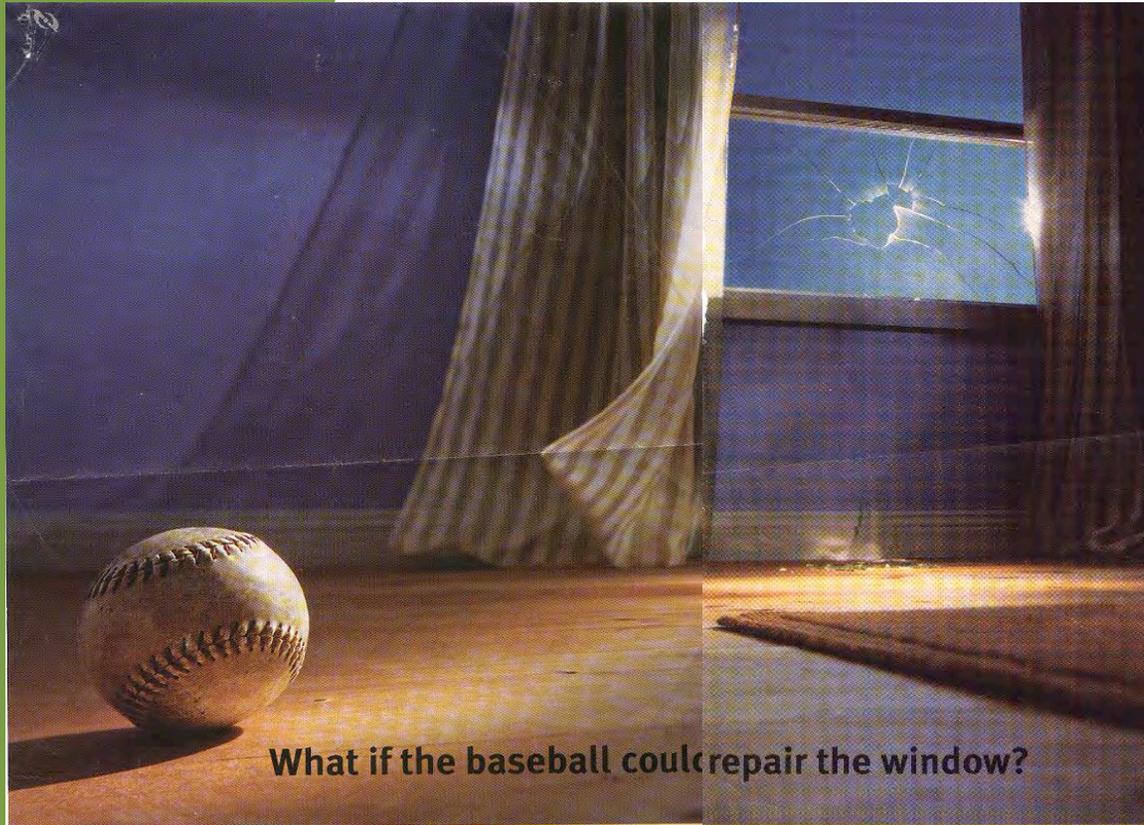
Appeals to market forces

Legislative and legal remedies

Technological solutions



# Technology to the rescue?



What if the baseball could repair the window?

The Internet caused the problem. It's only fitting it should also provide the solution.

myCIO.com is the world's first infrastructure application service provider. Rough translation, it fights Internet-related security problems via the Internet. ■ It gives your e-business managed protection 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Protecting from threats both inside and out. Anti-virus, security audits, firewalls, VPN, anything you need. ■ Cutting-edge products like McAfee, CyberCop, Gauntlet and PGP are customized to your company's exact needs, then managed remotely. ■ Need another reason to believe? myCIO.com is brought to you by Network Associates, the world's number one supplier of Internet security software. ■ Visit myCIO.com for a free trial. You'll see.

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# Filtering Frenzy

RemoteWebGuard  
We'll help you help yourself.

April 25, 2011 13:44 ET

**Addicts Seek Help as US Internet Porn Addiction Rates Reach Alarming Heights**

**New Web-Based Services Like RemoteWebGuard Help Addicts by Monitoring Online Behavior and Blocking Tempting Sites**



Ad for McAfee's GuardDog software



## Legal Solutions

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Children's Internet Protection Act:

Passed in 2001 -- 3rd attempt to regulate online porn



## Limits of Text Blocking

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Text unavailable (imaged, etc.)

Confusion with innocent text (cf site on St. Augustine)

Need to block IP numbers – collateral damage due to virtual hosting

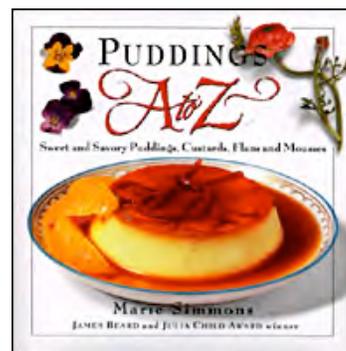
"Loophole" sites: translation sites, anonymizer sites, Google cache & images (classified as "pornography" by N2H2)

Inherent trade-offs of precision and recall



# Limits of Image Classification

Images found "Probably Objectionable" by WIPE (Wavelet Image Pornography Elimination / Detection).





## **Social, Economic & Institutional Responses to Internet Pornography**

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Libraries can regulate use by means of use policies, training and guidance, monitoring of logs, tap-on-the-shoulder policies, etc.

Rights of other patrons can be protected by privacy screens, etc.

Parents can assume responsibility for monitoring kids' surfing.

Providers can offer "greenspace" browsers for kids



# Social & Institutional Responses

Even porn can get old...



**MMORPG: World of Warcraft Blamed for Porn's Decline**

MMORPG's Notes

**Porn industry blames \$74m decline on the rise of online dating**



About 1 year ago [Stan Schroeder](#) 12 Like

**Facebook and MySpace are Killing Porn?**

7 retweet

Share 23

Buzz 0

email

share

**Porn Flounders, But Adult Novelty Business Booms**

Published: Tuesday, 27 Oct 2009 | 10:47 AM ET

Text Size



# The New Incivility

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## The Rise of Incivility

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"The happiest and most peaceful parts of the World Wide Web are the places where people are buying things. The nasty parts of the Web are where people are doing what the Founding Surfers intended: expressing themselves and forming communities. Have you visited cyberspace lately? As a friendly place to hang out, give me meatspace any day."

Michael Kinsley, *Cybercreeps Run Amok*, 2005



# The Rise of Incivility

## Technological explanations

...because email is such a casual means of communication, it privileges those who prize informality. What happened to "Dear Sir", "Yours faithfully... They died, you reply, but nobody bothered to tell you, granddad. Stuart Jeffries, *The Guardian*

...maybe banging out an e-mail is just so easy, compared with all the necessary elements of writing a letter, that the id can send out a half-dozen e-mails before the superego can stop it. Michael Kinsley

What "flamers" have in common with the digit-wagging driver, with the talk-show callers, is not just their aerobic exercise of the "freedom of speech." They belong, rather, to the growing uncommunity of people who now act with the protection of anonymity. Ellen Goodman 1999

Or is everybody just snarkier these days?



# The Rise of Incivility

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## A New Phenomenon?

So where did all the civility go?... I keep coming back to my long-standing hunch that it all began to go bad around 1965. That was the year that America, suddenly, became postmodern. Many venerable American traditions -- some wonderful, some horrible -- all vanished at the same time.

Stephen Carter, *Civility: Manners, Morals, and the Etiquette of Democracy*



## We've been here before

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Where else has technology interacted with social, political, and economic forces to produce outcome?

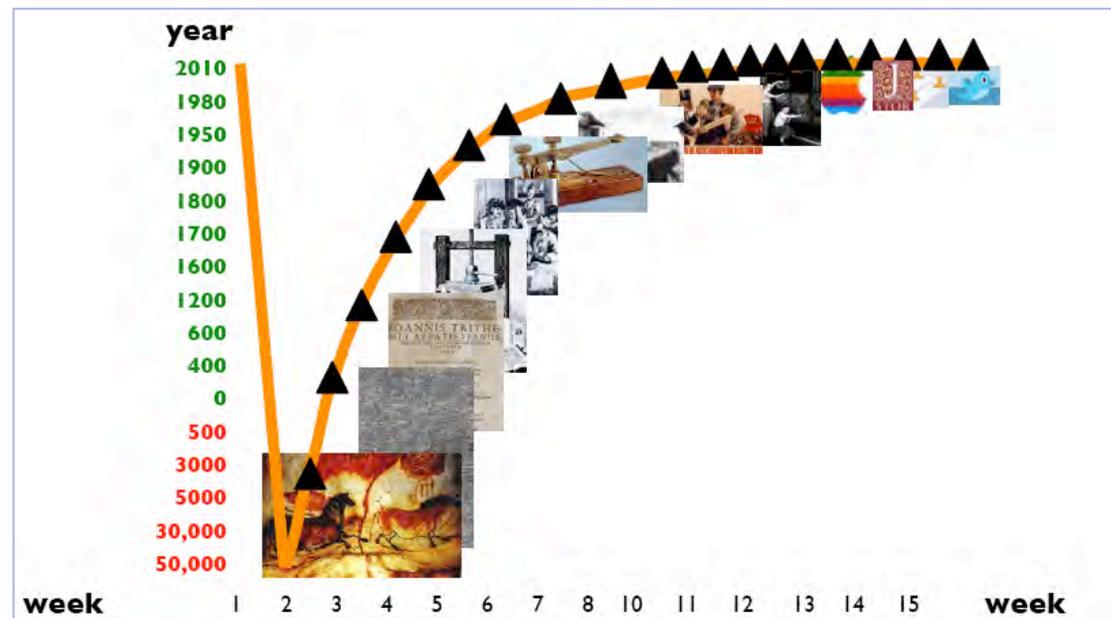


# We've been here before

Writing  
Print  
Telegraph &  
telephone  
Newspapers  
Advertising  
Propaganda  
Photography  
Radio & TV  
Computers  
Search  
Internet...

Where else has technology interacted with social, political, and economic forces to produce outcome?

Where hasn't it?





Good-bye and good luck