The Phenomenology of Cyberspace; or, Should We Capitalize "Web"?

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i141
Search Engines
Nov. 26, 2007
The Phenomenology of Cyberspace

**Phenomenology**: The study of "phenomena": appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience.... Phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first person point of view.

—Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy
The Phenomenology of Cyberspace

What mental models do we construct to make sense of online discourse & the tools we use to order, diffuse, and retrieve it?

How do those models shape our perceptions of how online discourse works -- and when it doesn't?
The Usefulness of Looking at Breakdowns

Cases where perception and reality clash in dysfunctional or disturbing ways; e.g.,

- perceptions of problems of "pollution" (pornography, racist speech, etc.)
- Interpretation of search-engine results
- The web as an agent in the formation of "public opinion"
The Usefulness of Looking at Breakdowns

Cases where agents' internalized assumptions or rules become dysfunctional.

Cf breakdowns conversational turn-taking, desktop & page metaphors
The Usefulness of Looking at Breakdowns

Why can't I move the cursor?
We apologize for the upsetting nature of the experience you had using Google...
We apologize for the upsetting nature of the experience you had using Google...
We apologize for the upsetting nature of the experience you had using Google...
A search-engine breakdown?

Why is the “jew” result disturbing?
A search-engine breakdown?

Why is the “jew” result disturbing?
Is the search engine doing “the right thing”?
A search-engine breakdown?

Why is the “jew” result disturbing?
Is the search engine doing “the right thing”?
Where does the problem lie?
A search-engine breakdown?

Why is the “jew” result disturbing?
Is the search engine doing “the right thing”?

Where does the problem lie?

Assumptions about:
Algorithms & intentionality
How Google's algorithms work
What a high Google ranking means
How the Web is organized...
PageRank relies on the uniquely democratic nature of the web by using its vast link structure as an indicator of an individual page's value. ...But, Google looks at considerably more than the sheer volume of votes, or links a page receives; for example, it also analyzes the page that casts the vote. Votes cast by pages that are themselves "important" weigh more heavily and help to make other pages "important." Using these and other factors, Google provides its views on pages' relative importance.

http://www.google.com/technology/
Spatializing Discourse

Discourses are understood by reference to spatial models

Texts as places
  Cf "above" and "below"; "elsewhere."
  "Where does Marx say that history repeats itself?"

Conception of the public sphere/public space
  "The public sphere is comprised of any and all locations, physical and virtual, where ideas and feelings relevant to politics are transmitted and exchanged openly." (W. Lance Bennett and Robert M. Entman)
Spatial Models of Print Discourse

Properties of the space of print discourse

1. Spatialization into center and margin, inside and outside, "scene" and "obscene" (topological space)
2. Commonality/objectivity: general agreement on picture of discourse
3. Canonicity: Core & periphery — all elements of all subdomains are ordered wrt "centrality" of membership (metrical space)

Canonicity permits "essentialist" abridgement:
Spatial models rest on the mode of print circulation

Distinction between public and private

Correlation between diffusion, accessibility & reputation

The more famous/highly reputed a text is, the more widely it is diffused and the more accessible it is (over both space and time).
Modeling Discourse Space: The Form of Collections

Smirke, British Museum Reading Room, 1851

Pelz/Casey Reading Room, LOC, ca 1898

Labrouste, Bibliothèque Nationale 1868

Asplund, Stockholm City Library, 1928
Modeling Discourse Space, The Form of Collections

D. Perrault, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 1994
The newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbors, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life... creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations. -- Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities.
The Book as a Public Presence
Spatializations of Electronic Discourse

Electronic discourse disrupts print spatializations
- Blurring of public & private
- Accessibility no longer correlates with reputation & authority
- Absence of indications of material boundaries of documents & collections
- Space is effectively infinite, unbounded
Electronic discourse supports multiple spatializations... unconstrained by material form of documents or mode of distribution...

People talk about the Web in terms of different -- and sometimes inconsistent -- spatial models
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
Cyber space – rather like real space, but without stars or moons.

It’s warmer – a tang of electricity and a nose of new plastic hangs in the void.

It’s a space more graphite than black; a perfect emptiness riddled with energy where the occasional line of hypertext, scrambled into glyphic goo may stream into view with a rush of non-existent air, as a train, a tailed comet hauling a long poem or snippet of prose along invisible band-width.

Mutated phish with murderous teeth burp bubbles of severed gas sounding bubble you, bubble you, bubble you into the cosmos of no depths or shallows.

In that same space, cookies rotate slowly like lost cells in an ocean.
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
The Internet as a Public Space
The Internet as an Inner City

The virtual rialto
When Rankings "Work"

Chronological list of singles and albums recorded by Frank Sinatra...
Where a song is listed as (by X), or (instrumental), Sinatra does not feature. Number indicates highest chart position on combined Billboard charts. ...
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chronological...
Cached - Similar pages - Note this

Frank Sinatra Discography
Find the best Frank Sinatra Discography on the Internet.
www.starpulse.com/Music/Sinatra_FrankDiscography/Index/P3150/1/ - 41k -
Cached - Similar pages - Note this

Nancy Sinatra Discography
Find the best Nancy Sinatra Discography on the Internet.
www.starpulse.com/Music/Sinatra_NancyDiscography/Index/P14250/1/ - 25k -
Cached - Similar pages - Note this

Frank Sinatra Sessionography
I like Frank Sinatra's music - who doesn't! I used Brian, my discography ... A real Sinatra discography is a tremendous undertaking that I am not up to. ...
home.earthlink.net/~stavaja/7/Frank.html - 5k - Cached - Similar pages - Note this

Frank Sinatra: Discography: Rolling Stone
Frank Sinatra music review, the latest videos, photos and music news about your favorite artists.
www.rollingstone.com/artists/frank/sinatra/discography - 166k -
Cached - Similar pages - Note this

Frank Sinatra Discography and Music at CD Universe
Low prices on Frank Sinatra discography of music at CD Universe, with top rated service, Frank Sinatra songs, discography, biography, cover art pictures, ...
www.cduniverse.com/search/xx/music/artist/Sinatra,+Frank/a/Frank+Sinatra.htm - 17k -
Cached - Similar pages - Note this
... and When They Don’t

Search on “9/11 intercept fighters “stand down”: What is going wrong?
The Epigraphic Web

Book-writing and wall-writing (epigraphy)
Cf talk about "sites," "posts," "go to," "visit," etc.
The Internet as Public Space: Visualizing the "Blogosphere"
notions of "commons" and "community"

Cf. James F. Moore (Berkman Center), on "the global consciousness of the second superpower":

The Internet and other interactive media continue to penetrate more and more deeply all world society... The collective power of texting, blogging, instant messaging, and email across millions of actors cannot be overestimated. Like a mind constituted of millions of inter-networked neurons, the social movement is capable of astonishingly rapid and sometimes subtle community consciousness and action... the emergent democracy of the second superpower is alive with touching and being touched by each other, as the community works to create wisdom and to take action.... .
The Internet as Public Space

A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace

Governments of the Industrial World, you weary giants of flesh and steel, I come from Cyberspace, the new home of Mind. On behalf of the future, I ask you of the past to leave us alone. You are not welcome among us. You have no sovereignty where we gather.

We have no elected government, nor are we likely to have one, so I address you with no greater authority than that with which liberty itself always speaks. I declare the global social space we are building to be naturally independent of the tyrannies you seek to impose on us. ...

...You have not engaged in our great and gathering conversation, nor did you create the wealth of our marketplaces. You do not know our culture, our ethics, or the unwritten codes that already provide our society more order than could be obtained by any of your impositions.

John Perry Barlow, Electronic Frontier Foundation, 1996
Lower-Casing the Internet?

Effective with this sentence, Wired News will no longer capitalize the "I" in internet. At the same time, Web becomes web and Net becomes net. Why? The simple answer is because there is no earthly reason to capitalize any of these words. Actually, there never was... a change in our house style was necessary to put into perspective what the internet is: another medium for delivering and receiving information. That it transformed human communication is beyond dispute. But no more so than moveable type did in its day. Or the radio. Or television.

Wired, 8/16/04

(Cf "the Shire," "the Coast")
(Cf also earlier capitalization of "the Radio" and "the Cinema.")
How Spatial Metaphors Can Lead Us Astray in the Digital World

Faulty Analogies: Cf the debates over internet filters

While Mr. [Paul] Smith emphasized the burden the law put on adults who have to request unblocking, Justice Stephen G. Breyer said: "What's the burden in asking? I grew up in a world where certain materials were kept in a special place."

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... *Bus. Week*
How Spatial Metaphors Can Lead Us Astray in the Digital World

Faulty Analogies: Cf the debates over internet filters

“Why do underage children have access to porno websites on computers in the children's library section? Isn't this the same as having pornographic material available on the shelves for them to check out?”

— Complaint made to Sacramento Public Library

"[Libraries] are simply declining to put on their computer screens the same content they have traditionally excluded from their bookshelves."— Solicitor General Ted Olson, arguing CIPA case before Supreme Court, 3/4/03
Analogies to Print Space:
Issues of "Accessibility"

[Pamela Paul asserts] that increased porn supply on the Internet (260 million pages of it, by her count) creates increased demand. Review of *Pornified*, NYT, 9/11/05

Cf Blaise Cronin expert report in CIPA case: "It is estimated that 100,000 sites contain child pornography."
Cf Ocala, Florida Star Banner, which quotes a spokesman for the US Customs Service.

"Pages of commercial pornography, like spam, continue to not only grow at an alarming rate, but spread to new countries as they join the internet," said Mike Gallagher, senior vice president of product development at Secure Computing. "These millions of pages of pornography may create serious liability and productivity problems for employers around the world," he added.
Analogies to Print Space: Issues of "Accessibility"

The changing significance of an "international reputation"...
The "finite" web: Fears of English Hegemony...

“The Web is the ultimate act of intellectual colonialism.” Director of Russian ISP, 1999

“Nearly 70 per cent of the world's Web sites are in English, at times crowding out voices and views.” Kofi Annan, 12-Jan-04

Why the confusion of Google Print and Google search engine?

Why the perception of "crowding out"?
The “Omnigooglization”
of the Web

1st 50 Google hits for “Roland Barthes”:
44 English, 4 French, 1 Spanish, 1 German
Omnigooglization, 2

Web Images Groups News Google Local More

Search | Advanced Search

Results 1 - 100 of about 268,000 for "garcia lorca"

Federico Garcia Lorca
Brief biography, plus text of "Lamento de Ignacio Sanchez Mejias".
www.cyberespan.com/pasion/lorca.htm - 13k - Cached - Similar pages

Federico Garcia Lorca
Five poems and a short introduction to the life and work of Lorca.
boppin.com/forca/- 8k - Cached - Similar pages

Pagina de Federico Garcia Lorca [Translate this page]
...Federico Garcia Lorca es de ningún partido político, pero un artista moderno es, por definición (se piensa al concepto del arte degenerado), ...
home.loc.al.wisc.edu/fernando/tinta/lorca.html - 12k - Cached - Similar pages

Federico Garcia Lorca: ROMANCE SONAMBULO [Translate this page]
...4. ROMANCE SONAMBULO, A Goya Giner y Fernando de los Rios, Verde que te quiero verde. Verde viendo, Verdes ramos. El barco sobre la mar ...
home.loc.al.wisc.edu/fernando/tinta/lorca/romancero_gran/romance_sonambulo.html - 5k - Cached - Similar pages

Federico Garcia Lorca
Biography of Spanish dramatist and poet Federico Garcia Lorca, plus links to all of his works currently in print.
www.imaginacion.com/moonsuck/cls/d07.html - 16k - Cached - Similar pages

FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA, POET, ARTIST, MARTYR
Federico Garcia Lorca, Poet, Artist, Martyr of the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939.
www.guerrillas.com/cap/gil/1936/lorca.html - 9k - Cached - Similar pages

Federico Garcia Lorca
Brief biography, plus selections of his poetry from "Lorca's Grave", "Recycled Words", and "Blow, Min, Blow".
members.aol.com/mwpress/lorcablo.html - 4k - Cached - Similar pages

Done
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, by objecting to its restrictions; have built up a state within the state; and when opposed have tried to strangle that country to death financially, as in the case of Spain and Portugal.
“Prophecy” was probably concocted by William Dudley Pelley, American Nazi, in the early 1930’s. First appeared on Feb. 3, 1934 in *Liberation*, weekly journal published in Asheville, NC

"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.
Ascribing Intentionality: The "Bias" of Google News

What's up with Google News? The CBS report has been all the buzz in the MSM and in the blogosphere since it broke a little after 10am today. But as of 7pm EST, there is no link to any coverage of the report on the Google News home page. And there's not a single link to the CBS story on Google's Top U.S. news stories. ...

Hello, Google news? Reader William Schultz says: "Looks like a biased news search algorithm in Google News." Yup. (Roger Simon noticed the Google News omission earlier in the day.) Michelle Malkin, 1/10/05

You've got to hand it to "al-Qaedarrific" online news aggregator Google News: they are consistent.... Google News once again shows its bias early Thursday morning, leading its "top stories" coverage of a possible U.S. troop drawdown in Iraq with an article from an organization called the World Peace Herald, with the headline, "U.S. plans Iraq Troops cuts as revolt rages." The article is written with the decidedly "Bush Lied, People Died!" far left tone one would expect...http://confederateyankee.mu.nu/archives/107298.php
Ascribing Intentionality: The "Bias" of Google News

Small conservative Web sites such as Useless-Knowledge, Men's News Daily, Michnews and ChronWatch turn up in disproportionate numbers when clicking on news about John Kerry... By contrast, a search on George Bush or George W. Bush typically results in a fairly neutral, evenly balanced set of results from both sides of the political spectrum, with many of the same small conservative sites showing up to sing the president's praises.

What's going on? Have Google's search results been hijacked by Fox News?

http://ojr.org/ojr/technology/1095977436.php
Is there "a spatial model" of the Web?

The essential heterogeneity of electronic discourse...
Is there "a spatial model" of the Web?

The essential heterogeneity of electronic discourse...