



UC Berkeley School of Information

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

Geoff Nunberg
School of Information

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"



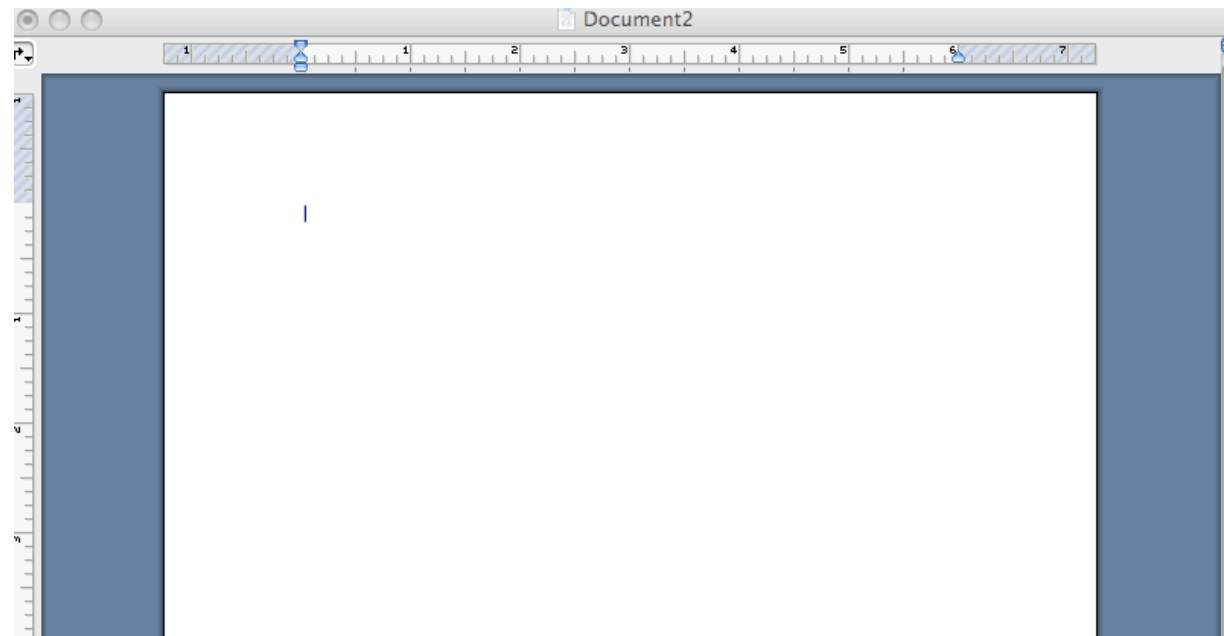
The Usefulness of Looking at Breakdowns

Cases where agents' internalized assumptions or rules become dysfunctional.

Cf breakdowns conversational turn-taking, desktop & page metaphors



The Usefulness of Looking at Breakdowns



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[Jew Watch - References - Gentile Observations of Jews - Benjamin ...](#)
... Jews are Asiatics, are a **menace** to this country if permitted entrance, and should be excluded by this Constitutional Convention." - **Benjamin Franklin**, 1787, at ...
www.jewwatch.com/jew-references-gentile-benjamin-franklin.html - 6k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

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... Jews are Asiatics, are a **menace** to this country if permitted entrance, and should be excluded by this Constitutional Convention." **Benjamin Franklin**, ...
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[Quotes from the Illuminate](#)
... Rothschild family and brought to North America by **Benjamin Franklin** and Alexander ...
"The real **menace** of our ... in the British War Cabinet, assured the **Jews** of the ...
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... Jews are Asiatics, are a **menace** to this country if permitted entrance, and should be excluded by this Constitutional Convention." **Benjamin Franklin**, ...
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... Jews are Asiatics, are a **menace** to this country if permitted entrance, and should be excluded by this Constitutional Convention." **Benjamin Franklin** RESPONSE (1 ...
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[If Jews Are Really Persecuted - Why?](#)
... published his diary in which he said: "Dr. **Benjamin Franklin**, a venerable ... "This greater **menace**, gentlemen, is the Jew!" In whatever country **Jews** have settled ...
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[Satan's Kids! And the German Connection! - Part 2 of 4](#)
... with an impression so deep that it is not effaced." From Albert Smythe's "WRITINGS OF **BENJAMIN FRANKLIN**", New York ... **Jews** are Asiatics, are a **menace** to this ...
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[Were America's founding fathers anti-Semites?](#)
... **BENJAMIN FRANKLIN**: I fully agree with General Washington, that we must protect this young nation from an insidious ... The **menace**, gentlemen, is the **Jews**. ...
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[Google: An explanation of our search results](#) - Nov 17
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Discussion of the difference between **Jewish** religion and ethnicity, with notes on the **Jews'** history, beliefs, and culture.
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[Judaism - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)
According to **Jewish** tradition, the history of Judaism begins with the Traditional Judaism maintains that a **Jew**, whether by birth or conversion, ...
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[Jew Watch - Jewish Controlled Press](#)
Here are some quotes from a magazine for **Jews** called "Moment". It is subtitled "The **Jewish** magazine for the 90's" These quotes are from the Aug 1996 edition ...
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[Judaism 101: Who Is a Jew?](#)

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Which religion is the best for you? Find out with the religion test.
QuizRocket.com/religion-test



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...



Interpreting Rankings

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 of Print Discourse

Spatial models rest on the mode of print
circulation

Distinction between public and private

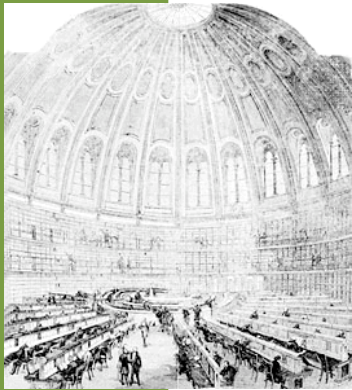
Correlation between diffusion, accessibility
& reputation

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

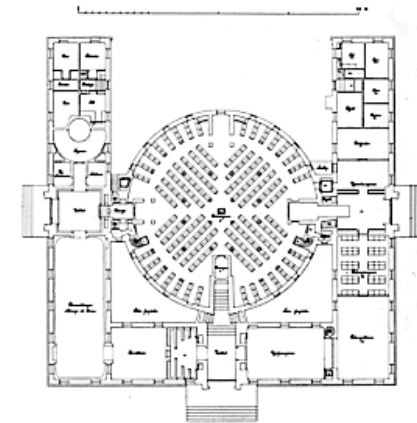
Smirke, British
Museum Reading
Room, 1851



Pelz/Casey Reading Room,
LOC, ca 1898



Labrouste, Bibliothèque
Nationale 1868



Asplund, Stockholm City
Library, 1928



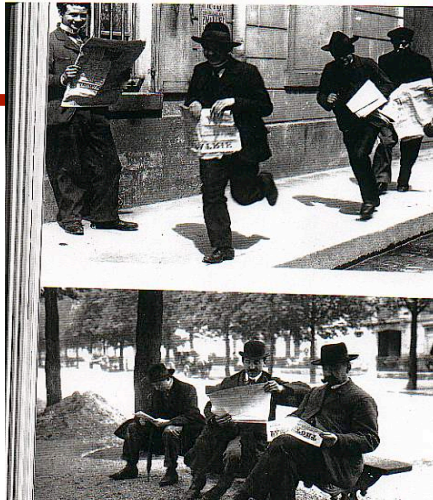
Modeling Discourse Space, The Form of Collections



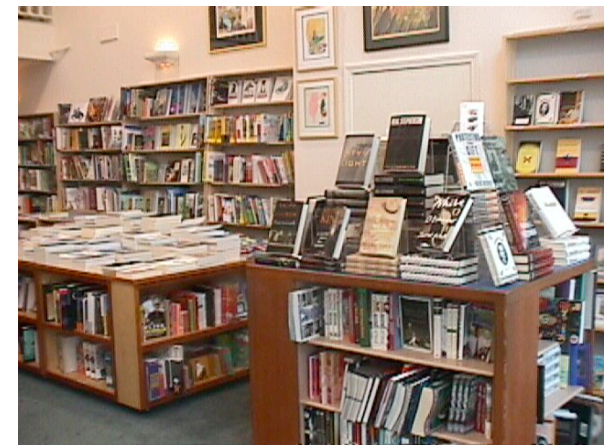
D. Perrault, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 1994



Formal Correlates of Metrical Space: The Book as a Public Presence



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

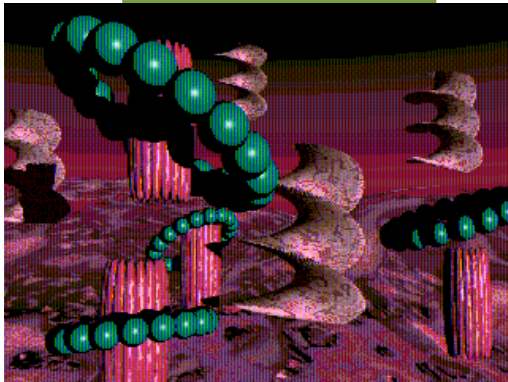
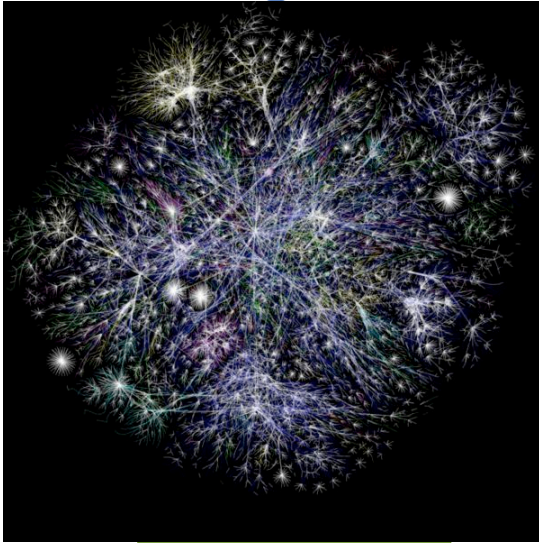


Spatializations of Electronic Discourse

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

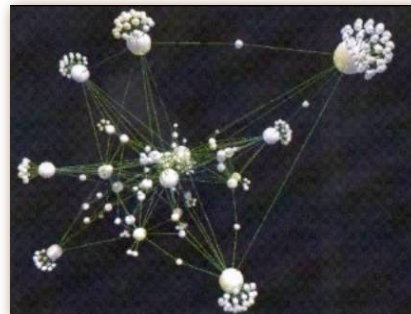
Spatial Models of Electronic Discourse: "Cyberspace"



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





Visualizing Cyberspace

Double Space

by Graham Burchell

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

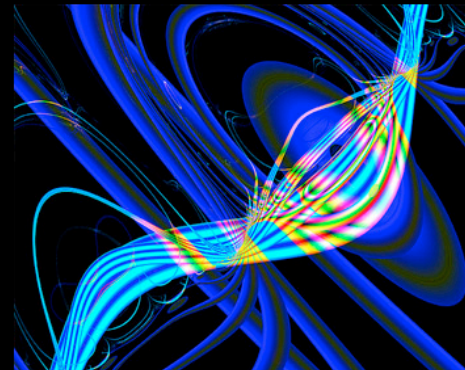
may stream into view with a rush
of non-existent air, as a train, a tailed comet

hauling a long poem or snippet of prose
along invisible band-width.

Mutated phish with murderous teeth
burp bubbles of sewer 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,





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.

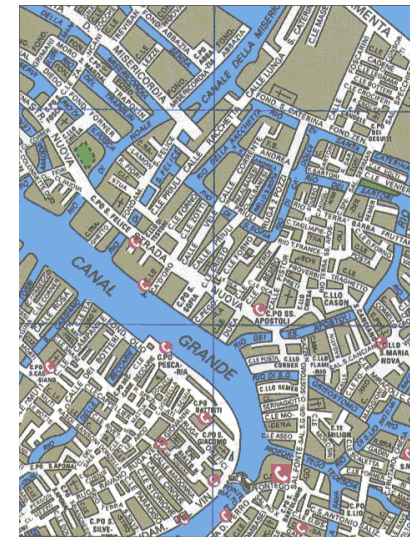
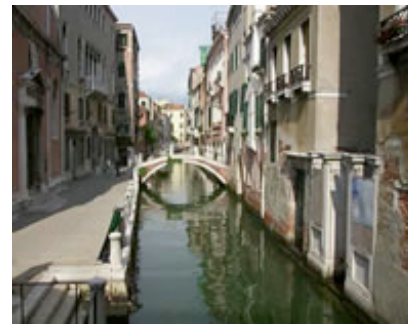
"The Underground Web," *Business Week*, 9/2/02



The Internet as a Public Space



The Internet as an Inner City



The virtual rialto



When Rankings “Work”

Web Images Groups Directory News
Searched the web for **ford**.

Official Ford Site
www.forddirect.com Get Fast Quotes on Ford Car & Truck Customize Options - Find a Dealer

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The corporate website for Ford Motor Company and its vehicle (car and truck) and service brands, featuring investor, career, news, and media information. ...
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Description: The foundation's goals are to strengthen democratic values, reduce poverty and injustice, promote...
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Research Shop Own News From Main Street to mountain trails, Ford has engineered a way to get you there and back with confidence and in amazing comfort. ...
Description: Official site for Ford's cars and minivans, trucks, and SUVs. Includes in-depth information about...
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... Find out why a Ford Racing victory at the speedway means more advanced technology

Page 1 results:

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- Ford Foundation
- Gerald Ford
- Henry Ford
- Harold Ford Jr.
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- Ford's Theater



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 **Sinatra**
By: [Frank Sinatra](#)
Including: I've Got the World on a String, My Kind of Town, Goin' Out of My Head, and more...
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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_list_of_singles_and_albums_recorded_by_Frank_Sinatra](#) - 90k -
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[Frank Sinatra Discography](#)

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[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. ...

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[Frank Sinatra : Discography : Rolling Stone](#)

Frank **Sinatra** music review, the latest videos, photos and music news about your favorite artists.

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[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, ...

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9/11 intercept fighters stand down

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Searched the web for **9/11 intercept fighters stand down**

Results 1 - 100 of about 1,250

[911Timeline.net - 911 Censorship In America](#)

... from the 8:52 take-off to the time they reached the WTC at **9:11** ... The two or three USAF F-16 **fighters** ordered from Langley to **intercept** American Airlines ...
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[911Timeline.net - The Most Comprehensive Minute By Minute ...](#)

... between 9:03 and 9:26 to **intercept** American Airlines ... 66) **9:11** am: The two F-15 Eagles from Otis Air ... vectored to Washington DC Why were these **fighters** headed to ...
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[The Stand Down That Is Not Acknowledged. 2 July 2002](#)

... less than credible, but a plane can **intercept** even without ... saying that half the scramble-ready **fighters** were taken off readiness three days before **9/11**? ...
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[Pt. 12: Broadening Our Perspectives of 9/11 - min-by-min Timeline](#)

... and that a "NORAD spokesman, said its **fighters** routinely **intercept** aircraft" (Boston ... the standard operating procedures were not adhered to on **9-11** ...
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[Were Stand-Down Intercept Orders Given On Morning Of 911?](#)

... to make the decision to shoot **down** flight 77 on **9-11-01** ... Corps Major Mike] Snyder, the NORAD spokesman, said its **fighters** routinely **intercept** aircraft ...
[www.rense.com/general17/werestanddown.htm](#) - 31k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

[NORAD 911 Stand Down Math by Mark Elsis](#)

NORAD 911 **Stand Down** Math. ... Wednesday, September 11, 2002 NORAD'S Response Times (Official) **Fighters** Were 8 ... of their top speed in trying to **intercept** UA 175 ...
[www.mycountryrightorwrong.net/NORAD911StandDownMath.htm](#) - 9k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

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... only TEN MILES from the Pentagon -- on the morning of **9-11**. ... Major Mike] Snyder, the NORAD spokesman, said its **fighters** routinely **intercept** aircraft. ...
[www.natural-person.ca/pdf/Stand-Down_Orders_Given_911.pdf](#) - [Similar pages](#)

[The Lie Won't Stand](#)

... 11. For 50 minutes on **9-11**, in direct contravention of established policy, no **fighters** were scrambled to **intercept** two outstanding ...
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... and When They Don't

Search on "9/11 intercept fighters "stand down":
What is going wrong?

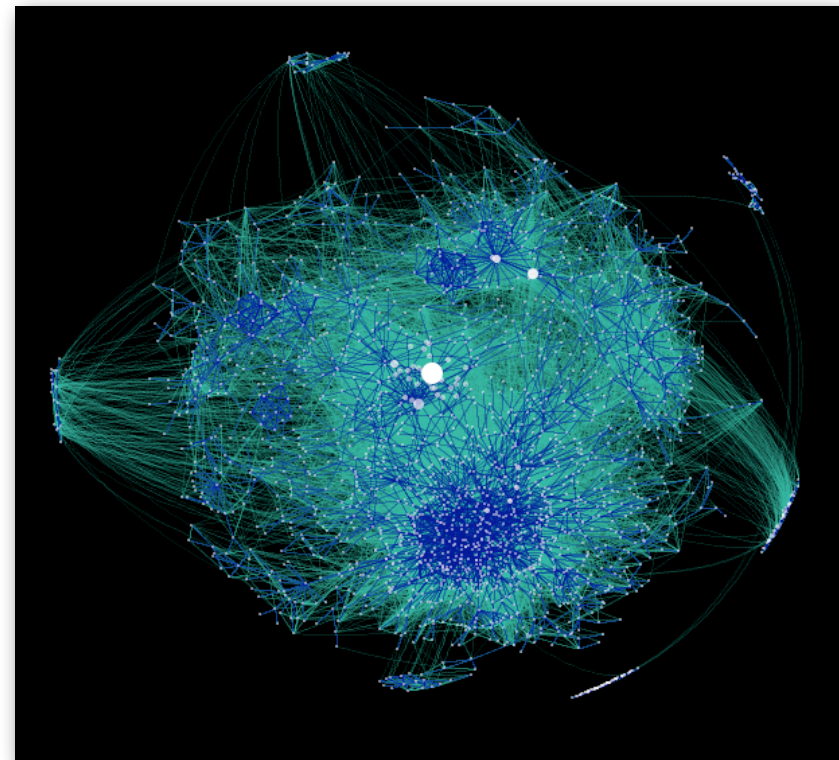
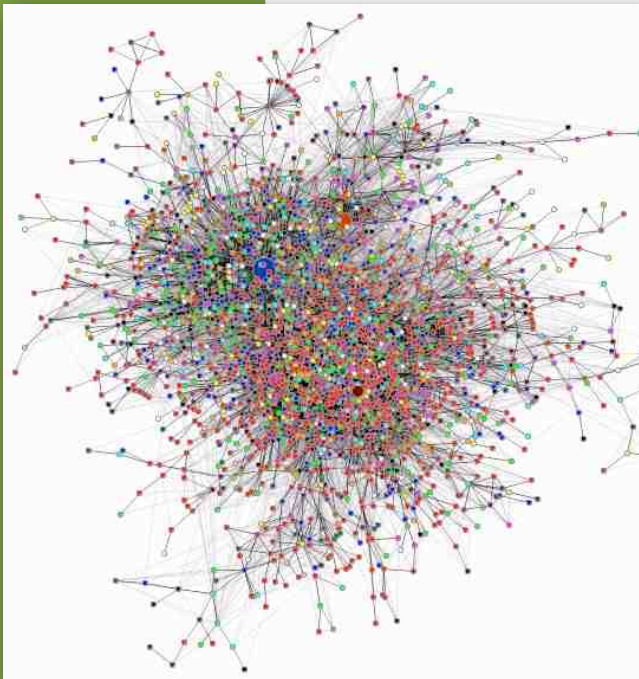


The Epigraphic Web

Book-writing and wall-writing (epigraphy)
Cf talk about "sites," "posts," "go to," "visit,"
etc.



The Internet as Public Space: Visualizing the "Blogosphere"





The Internet as "Megacommunity"

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 web sites 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

Google Web Images Groups News Froogle Local^{New!} more »
"roland barthes" Search Advanced Search Preferences

Web Results 1 - 100 of about 341,000 for "roland barthes" [defr]

Roland Barthes: Mythologies
Set of lectures, by Tony McNeill, on Barthes' view of postmodern literature, art, mythology, and semiology.
orac.sund.ac.uk/~os0tmc/myth.htm - 65k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

Roland Barthes
... Roland Barthes was born in Cherbourg, Manche. After his father's death in a ... Roland Barthes: Un regard politique sur le signe by LS Calvet (1973); ...
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PopCultures.com | Theorists and Critics | Roland Barthes
Texts by and about Roland Barthes. ... Roland Barthes (abstracted from the Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers by John Lechte); Roland Barthes ...
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Semiotics
... Basics of Semiotics, Roland Barthes, Paul Bouissac ... Roland Barthes; Ron Burnett; Sonesson Pictorial Semiotics; Sonesson Photography ...
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en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roland_Barthes
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ROLAND BARTHES THE DISCOURSE OF HISTORY, translated by Stephen ...
ROLAND BARTHES THE DISCOURSE OF HISTORY, translated by Stephen Bann.
Comparative Criticism, 3 (1981): 7-20. Pagination, superscripts, and accents are not ...
www.clas.ufl.edu/users/pcraddoc/barthes.htm - 38k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

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Omnigooglization, 2

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"garcia lorca" [Advanced Search](#) [Preferences](#)

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

[Federico Garcia Lorca in CyberSpain](#)
Brief biography, plus text of "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias".
www.cyberspain.com/passion/lorca.htm - 13k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

[Federico García Lorca](#)
Five poems and a short introduction to the life and work of Lorca.
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[Pagina de Federico Garcia Lorca](#) - [[Translate this page](#)]
... Federico **García Lorca** es de ningún partido político, pero un artista moderno es, por definición (se piensa al concepto del 'arte degenerado'), ...
home.tiscali.be/ericlaermans/cultural/fglorca.html - 12k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

[Federico Garcia Lorca: ROMANCE SONAMBULO](#) - [[Translate this page](#)]
... 4. ROMANCE SONAMBULO. A Gloria Giner ya Fernando de los Ríos. Verde que te quiero verde. Verde viento. Verdes ramas. El barco sobre la mar ...
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[Federico Garcia Lorca](#)
Biography of Spanish dramatist and poet Federico **García Lorca**, plus links to all of his works currently in print.
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[FREDERICO GARCIA LORCA. POET. ARTIST. MARTYR](#)
Federico **García Lorca**, Poet, Artist, Martyr of the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939.
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[Federico Garcia Lorca](#)
Brief biography, plus selections of his poetry from "Lorca's Grave", "Recycled Words", and "Blow, Man, Blow!".
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A Racist Hoax

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.



Racism on the Web

“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-Qaeda-rific" 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...

[http://www.ischool.berkeley.com/~nunberg/
phenomenology.pdf](http://www.ischool.berkeley.com/~nunberg/phenomenology.pdf)