



UC Berkeley School of Information

Course Introduction

Infosys 218
The Quality of Information
Paul Duguid, Geoff Nunberg
8/28/07



Today

Course Concept (GN & PD)
Course Content (PD)



Plastic Sofas and Poodle Skirts

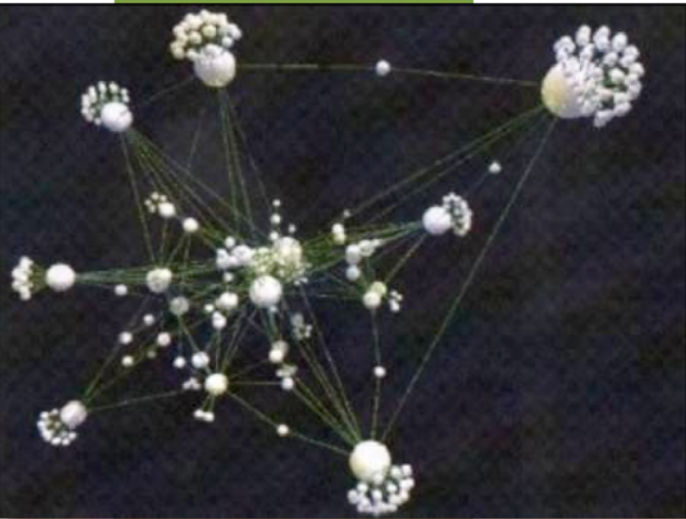




The New Jerusalem

Cyberspace: A world in which the global traffic of knowledge, secrets, measurements, indicators, entertainments, 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





The New Jerusalem

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

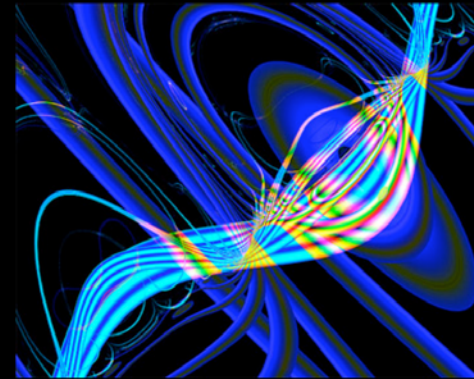
may stream into view with a rush
of non-existent air, as a train, a tailed comet

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

Mutated phish with murderous teeth
burp bubbles of sewered 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 Information Explosion

There is an incredible amount of information available through the Internet but finding something useful is a frustrating experience. The Internet allows you to access information on tens of millions of computers worldwide, and brings the prospect of a global repository of knowledge, mostly free...

While putting information out on to the Internet is easy, the problem is finding the right piece of information when you need it. And here is where we need new technologies to help us sift huge amounts of information.... finding a specific piece of data can be a mammoth chore. What is needed are specific tools that can carry out searches with a certain amount of artificial intelligence - an approach that takes into account the less focused aspects of conducting searches. Such tools are the key to unlocking the potential of the Internet.

Tom Foremski, "Overloaded on the Internet,"
Financial Times, 11/8/94



Cyberspace: The Morning After

As access to the Web has widened, legitimate information has been subsumed by a deluge of vanity "home pages," corporate marketing gimmicks and trashy infomercials. Anyone who has ever used a search engine to find a specific piece of information on the Internet will cringe at the familiar litany of disappointment. It is impossible to know where information comes from, who has paid for it, whether it is reliable and whether you will ever be able to find it again. A student looking for information on the Internet about, say, World War II, cannot know whether a given "page" has been posted by a legitimate historian or by a Holocaust revisionist.

Brian Hecht, "Net Loss," *The New Republic*, February 17, 1997



Cyberspace: The Morning After



[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



Cyberspace: The Morning After

Cyberspace, to its early denizens, was supposed to be a prelapsarian world, ... full of sweetness and light and universal siblinghood. ...

Well, have you visited cyberspace lately? Of course you have. And of course the Internet has vastly improved life for anyone likely to be reading this. But as a friendly place to hang out, give me meatspace any day. There is commerce aplenty, but that's not the problem. 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. Why is the tone of conversation on the Internet, especially about politics, so much lower than in the material world?

Michael Kinsley, "Cybercreeps Run Amok," *Washington Post*, 7/24/05



The Perils of Cyberspace: “Rotten Information”

Concerns over

Pornography and graphic violence

Racist and anti-Semitic sites, etc.

Bomb-making and drug sites

Pirated software and term papers for sale

Scams and market manipulations

Incivility and vulgarity

Pseudonymous defamations ~ unsubstantiated rumor

Porosity of institutional boundaries/authenticity...

Reliability of information...

Not to mention...



Eroding privacy



"On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog."



Eroding privacy



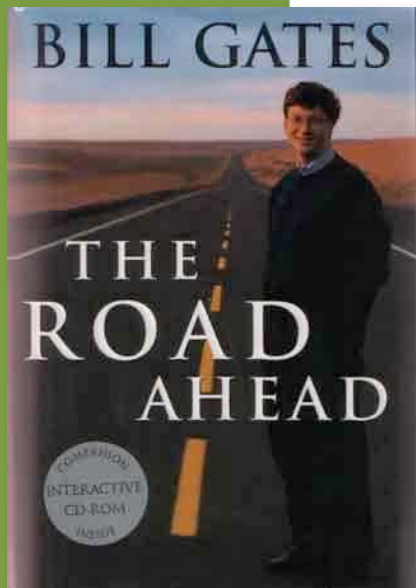
"On the Internet, ~~nobody~~ knows you're a dog."

everybody knows what brand of dog food you buy."



Growing Pains?

Simply a bump in the road ahead?





Technology to the Rescue?

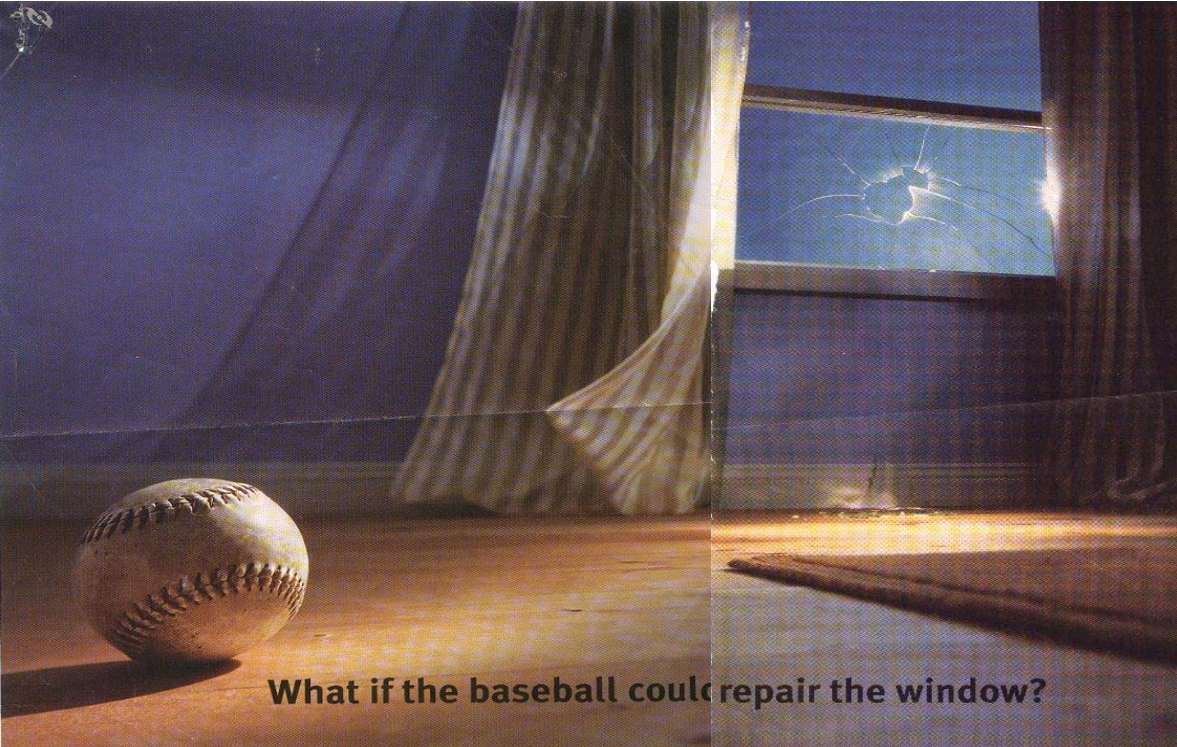
“The remedy for the abuse of digital technology is more digital technology.”

Computer technology generated the information explosion and will also be the key to taming it, with an innovation called hyper media. Hyper media could be to student research what the microwave oven is to cooking - a way to save time and trouble. Hyper media puts onto a computer disc entire books, pictures, audio and video tapes, census data, newspaper and magazine files. The innovation: everything is indexed. That eliminates the drudgery of library research, following threads of information from separate sources. ... Hyper media may put the world at the command of the student.

St Louis Post-Dispatch, 1/7/90



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
Your Chief Internet Officer

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.



Complicating the Picture

The five approaches to rotten information:

Technological fixes

Market solutions

Institutional adaptation

Legal remedies

Social accommodation



Questions for the Course

What makes information rotten?

Failures of:

Reliability

Authenticity

Authoritativeness

Filters and boundary-maintenance (pollution)

“Civility” (the rules of civil society)



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What are the sources of these breakdowns?



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How have these issues been dealt with in the past?



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What are the technological, institutional, social, and educational challenges that RI poses? (“information literacy”)