Pollution in Digital Space!!

Geoff Nunberg
Quality of Information
Infosys 218
9/13/06
1. Review of assignment

2. “Pollution” -- hate speech & porn; the spatialization of discourse

3. Responses to pollution
What makes for rotten information?

“Information” associated with a certain order of communication

So long as the order “works” (more-or-less), local failures and anomalies can be tolerated or dealt with and the conceptual framework seems to be transparent.

But when the order is disrupted, by technological or other means, anomalies and breakdowns come to assume an aspect of crisis.
Varieties of Rotten Information

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

Problems of quality: reliability and “authoritativness” --
Varieties of Rotten Information

Problems of “pollution”: pornography, hate speech, subversive writing, etc.

Mary Douglas: "Dirt is matter out of place."
Forms of Polluted Discourse

Pornography/violence

Racist Speech

Other “unacceptable” discourses: how to tell pollution from samizdat?

Is pollution a worse problem in digital discourse than in print?

What are appropriate responses to pollution?
Forms of Polluted Discourse

Pornography/violence

Racist Speech

Other “unacceptable” discourses: how to tell pollution from samizdat?

Is pollution a worse problem in digital discourse than in print?

What are appropriate responses to pollution?
"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.

"For over 1,700 years, the Jews have been bewailing their sad fate in that they have been exiled from their homeland, as they call Palestine. But gentlemen, did the world give it to them in fee simple, they would at once find some reason for not returning. Why? Because they are vampires, and vampires do not live on vampires. They cannot live only among themselves. They must subsist on Christians and other people not of their race.

"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...

http://www.jewwatch.com/jew-references-gentile-benjamin-franklin.html
Pervasiveness of Racist Speech

Jew Watch - References - Gentile Observations of Jews - Benjamin

... Jews are Asians, are a menace to this country if permitted entrance, and should be excluded by this Constitutional Convention." - Benjamin Franklin, 1787, at ... www.jewwatch.com/ references-gentile-benjamin-franklin.html - 6k - Cached - Similar pages

Who Runs USA today? Palestinians won't get their independence ...

... Jews are Asians, are a menace to the country if permitted entrance, and should be excluded by this Constitutional Convention." - Benjamin Franklin, ... www.radicalislam.net/islam/english/thread/fnklin.htm - 65k - Cached - Similar pages

What Washington & Franklins said about Jews

... Jews are Asians, are a menace to this country if permitted entrance, and should be excluded by this Constitutional Convention." - Benjamin Franklin, ... www.missionofislam.com/mwo/userald/fsbk.htm - 31k - Cached - Similar pages

Quotes from the Illuminat

... Rothschild family and brought to North America by Benjamin Franklin and Alexander ...

"The real menace of our ..., in the British War Cabinet, accused the Jews of the ...

www.missionofislam.com/mwo/illuminati.htm - 66k - Cached - Similar pages

Fourwinds10.com - News - History > Zionism - What Would The ...

... Jews are Asians, are a menace to this country if permitted entrance, and should be excluded by this Constitutional Convention." - Benjamin Franklin, ... www.fourwinds10.com/.../G-contami/2004/07-04-2004-what-would-founding-fathers-say-about-bombing-iraq.html - 12k - Cached - Similar pages

WHAT THEY SAID

... Jews are Asians, are a menace to this country if permitted entrance, and should be excluded by this Constitutional Convention." - Benjamin Franklin RESPONSE (...

www.geocities.com/Athens/Cyprus/8816/what_they_said.html - 24k - Cached - Similar pages

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 ...


Satan’s Kids! And the German Connection! - Part 2 of 4

... an impression so deep that it is not effaced." From Albert Snyde’s “WRITINGS OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN”, New York. ... Jews are Asians, are a menace to this ...


Was 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: ...

adusa.com/fathers.htm - 6k - Cached - Similar pages

Why are Jews persecuted for their religion?

www.jewwatch.com/ references-gentile-benjamin-franklin.html - 6k - Cached - Similar pages
Pervasiveness of Racist Speech -- Search on "Jew"

Google search results for "Jew".
“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.
Why is racist speech a “problem”? 

How concerned should we be about racist speech? Is it a worse problem now that before? How? What is the fear?
Pornography and Propaganda in Print Discourse

Cf 18th c. French "libelles"
The dangers of pornography

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 (Paris Hilton, anyone?)…

Porn doesn't just give men bad ideas; it can give kids the wrong idea at a formative age. 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. Older teens may be aware of the effects of such images: 59% of 15-to-24-year-olds told the pollsters they believe seeing porn on the Internet encourages young people to have sex before they are ready; 49% said it promotes bad attitudes toward women and encourages viewers to think unprotected sex is O.K. *Time*, January 19, 2004
2000 OCLC study: 7.1 million unique Web sites (projects to 11 million unique sites as of September, 2001). 68,000 "adult" sites (projects to 100,000 in 2002)

Lawrence and Giles, 1999: 1.5 billion pages in publically indexable Web; 1.5% of servers contain "pornographic" material (est. 100,000 servers now). Search engines taken together reach 50 percent of indexable Web.
Issues of "Accessibility"

Much made of these figures. 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.

[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

20 million view adult pages… are apparently hosted on sites in the United States or Canada. NRC study, 2002
Distribution of sites & traffic on the Net: "Winner Take All"

Distribution of User Volume Among Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of Sites</th>
<th>% of traffic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Sites</td>
<td>32.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.01</td>
<td>55.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>74.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>82.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>94.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

source: Adamic & Huberman, 2000
How Porn Sites are Used: An Exception to "Winner Take All"

Distribution of User Volume Among Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of Sites</th>
<th>% of traffic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All Sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.01</td>
<td>32.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>55.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>74.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>82.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>94.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

source: Adamic & Huberman, 2000
Responses to Rotten Information

Institutional & organizational adaptations
Appeals to market forces
Legislative and legal remedies
Technological solutions
“The remedy for the abuse of digital technology is more digital technology.”
Feeding the Filtering Frenzy

Ad for McAfee’s GuardDog software
Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA)

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

As condition for receiving E-rate discounts & grants under Lib. Services & Technology Act, mandates that schools & libraries must certify they are using a "technology protection measure" that prevents patrons from accessing "visual depictions" that are "obscene," "child pornography," or (for minors) "harmful to minors."

Bill provides for unblocking of sites for "bona fide research or other lawful purposes."

Challenge brought by ALA, ACLU, several other plaintiffs; heard by three-judge panel in March, 2002.
Social & Institutional Responses to Internet Pornography

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.
"[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

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.
"The relevant forum for analysis is not the library's entire collection, which includes both print and electronic media..., but rather the specific forum created when the library provides its patrons with Internet access. Although a public library's provision of Internet access does not resemble the conventional notion of a forum as a well-defined physical space, the same First Amendment standards apply."

Three-judge federal panel, in overturning CIPA, June, 2002

Cites Rosenberger v. Rector & Visitors of Univ. of Va., which holds that a state university's student activities fund "is a forum more in a metaphysical than a spatial or geographic sense, but the same principles are applicable"
The Spatialization of Discourse: Shifting Conceptions of "Cyberspace"

Cyberspace: presences never seen on the surface of the earth blossoming in a vast electronic night. . . . A place, one place, limitless; entered equally from a basement in Vancouver, a boat in Port-au-Prince, a cab in New York...

The Underground Web... a place where crime is rampant.... Thousands of virtual streets are lined with casinos, porn shops, and drug dealers. .. all easily accessible from your living room couch."

Cf talk of "sites," "wander/visit/go to," "surfing," etc.
The Spatialization of Print Discourse

Spatialization of written texts

“As I have argued elsewhere..."
"Where does Marx say that history repeats itself?"

Spatialization of discourse: the public sphere/public space
“Öffentlichkeit” as the “public sphere”

Cf inevitability of spatial metaphors in conceptualizing discourse

“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)

The notion of “the public” rests on a spatialization of discourse that is supported by the modes of print production and circulation

“The press created the public” G. Tarde
The Spatialization of Print Discourse

Images of public sphere in print forms and institutions ("institutions littéraires");

Cf. the notion of the "térso"

Libraries, anthologies, dictionaries, in a word "treasuries" [térsoirs], alongside of encyclopedic collections, delimit a vast territory on which are cast the signs required for knowledge, the expression of identities, and communication among the members of the group.

-Alain Rey, "Les trésors de la langue," 1986
The Properties of Public Space: Topology

1. A continuous, bounded space, with inside and outside.

   Boundedness lends significance to inclusion/exclusion, presence and absence, "scene" and "obscene" (H. Lefebvre)

   Boundedness of spatial conception reproduces the distinction between public and private

   Boundedness permits the pretence of comprehensiveness/exhaustive enumeration of public discourse…
Formal Correlates of Topological Space: The Form of the Book
Models of Public Space: The Form of Collections, 1

Library of the Escorial, 1543

E-L. Boulée, plan for the Bibliothèque du Roi, 1785

Labrouste, Bibliothèque Ste. Geneviève, 1851
The Form of Collections, 2: The classical version

Smirke, British Museum Reading Room, 1851

Labrouste, Bibliothèque Nationale 1868

Pelz/Casey Reading Room, LOC, ca 1898

Asplund, Stockholm Ci Library, 1928
The Form of Collections, 3: Postmodern Interpretations

D. Perrault, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 1994
The Properties of Public Space, cont.

Canonicity: All elements of all subdomains are ordered with regard to "centrality" of membership (i.e., discursive space is metrical, not just topological)

E.g., canonicity of words in a dictionary, newspaper stories, authors, etc.

Canonicity permits essentialist abridgement.

Cf sense of "library" and "bibliothèque" to denote comprehensive publication series & catalogues.

News summary, small dictionary as image of large, etc.

"If the lexicon of a language is indeed something like that of a circle, then... if one moves away from the center in concentric circles, the result should be a faithful image of the total lexicon." Henri Béjoint, *Tradition and Innovation in English Dictionaries*, 1992
3. Commonality/objectivity of public space ("a common place"/ un lieu commun).
Supported by modes of circulation
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*.

[Britain] has become a nation of readers. --Samuel Johnson, 1781
The Book as a Public Presence, 2
How Spatial Metaphors Can Lead Us Astray in the Digital World

Imputations of topological space: Analogies to material institutions:

“Why do underage children have access to pornographic 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?”

"I grew up in a world where certain materials were kept in a special place."
Imputations of metrical space: 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.... Not every idea will take hold in the big mind of the second superpower—but the one that eventually catches fire is started by an individual.
The Internet -- Piazza or Souk?
It's Just the 'internet' Now

Effective with this sentence, Wired News will no longer capitalize the "I" in internet.

Why? The simple answer is because there is no earthly reason to capitalize any of these words. Actually, there never was.

True believers are fond of capitalizing words, whether they be marketers or political junkies or, in this case, techies. If It's Capitalized, It Must Be Important. In German, where all nouns are capitalized, it makes sense. It makes no sense in English.

... in the case of internet, web and net, 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.

This should not be interpreted as some kind of symbolic demotion. Think of it more as a stylistic reality check.

But now, by lowercasing internet, web and net, Wired News is simply giving the medium its proper due.
When Google Supports the Idea of Internet Community – and when it Doesn’t

("Google takes advantage of the uniquely democratic nature of the Web")
"The press created the public." (Tarde)

Still true, in virtue of the interpenetration of materially anchored public institutions and digitial discourse.

But "the public" may not be a useful notion for large parts of digital discourse:

Blogs: Public or "in public"?