The Internet: Social Dimensions

History of Information 103
Geoff Nunberg

April 28, 2015
The Social Web
The rise of "virtual community"
The interpenetration of online & off
Political discourse online
Virtual Pollution: porn, hate speech, and incivility
Valediction
The rise of "virtual communities"
Cyberspace: The New Jerusalem

...imagine a world in which our sense of identity and community truly cohabitates the real and virtual realms. In the future, communities formed by ideas will be as strong as those formed by the forces of physical proximity. Kids will not know the meaning of nationalism. ... Local governance will abound. A united planet is certain... Already today, belonging to a digital culture binds people more strongly than the territorial adhesives of geography - if all parties are truly digital.

Nicholas Negroponte in Wired, 1997
Predictions that Internet/Web will decentralize authority
permit ground-up social & political organization
Create "virtual communities"
   Cf the "virtual corporation," "smart mobs," moveon.org, etc., which are said to facilitate direct democracy
**What’s Real and What is Not**

When “virtual” = real...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Real</th>
<th>Not</th>
<th>??</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>banking</td>
<td>machine</td>
<td>museum</td>
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<td>journal</td>
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<td>library</td>
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<td>community</td>
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<td></td>
<td>reality</td>
<td>friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>house tour?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The Rise of “Virtual Communities,” I

1978-79: Early MUDS (Multi-User Dungeons) enable players of text-adventure games to interact & team up.

1979 > Early BBS’s (Bulletin Board services) allow users to connect via modem to a common server & post messages.

1980: USENET → “poor man’s ARPANET” to allow users to exchange email & software.

1990: First MOOs ["MUD Object Oriented"] created at Xerox Palo Alto Research center.
The Rise of “Virtual Communities,” II

1985: Stewart Brand & Larry Brilliant found the BBS The WELL (Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link), which becomes an influential “virtual community” providing email, forums, etc.

1986: Matchmaker dating service begun as text-based BBS, adding to groups like soc.singles, etc

1995 Craig Newmark founds Craigslist in San Francisco for posting of local events; by 2000, expanded to 9 cities.
“Spam is the shadow history, the negative space, of the concept of community online” Finn Brunton

1971: sysadmin “abuses” MIT time-sharing system w/ “to all” msg: THERE IS NO WAY TO PEACE. PEACE IS THE WAY.”

5/1/1978: “Proto-Spam” message sent to 593 addresses on ARPAnet, DIGITAL WILL BE GIVING A PRODUCT PRESENTATION OF THE NEWEST MEMBERS OF THE DECSYSTEM-20 FAMILY

Early 1980’s: Users of BBS and MUDs take to repeating “spam” & bits of Monty Python routine to annoy other users or drive newbies out of the discussion.


By mid-1990’s, AOL is selling mailing list of 37m for $50k

Responses: harassment & vigilanteism, parliamentarianism, authoritarianism
The Beginnings of Social Networking Sites

1997: Slashdot created to provide user-generated “News for nerds.” Becomes wildly popular antecedent of blogs.

1997 Sixdegrees.com founded, social networking site that achieved 1m members and anticipated Friendster, MySpace, LinkedIn & FaceBook etc.
The growth of social networking services (SNS) has evolved from dating-oriented, static, "profile-centric" systems to "media-centric" platforms and later to "location-centric" (LBS) systems. Later SNSs added dynamic features such as status updates, tweets, microblogging, etc. Marking and displaying relationships (friends, MS "top 8," followers, etc.) became prevalent.
The complications of “community”
The complications of “community”

“Community” usually implies rich interaction around common interests

Online interaction creates or strengthens groups organized around significant common interests; e.g., sexual orientation, political activism, medical conditions…

But "community" is also used for almost any kind of group formed online… so long as it's judged positive
“Community” usually implies rich interaction around common interests.

Online interaction creates or strengthens groups organized around significant common interests; e.g., sexual orientation, political activism, medical conditions…

But “community” is also used for almost any kind of group formed online… so long as it’s judged positive…

Community can be the warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships, or the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships. Most important, …unlike all other terms of social organization (state, nation, society, etc.) it seems never to be used unfavourably…

Raymond Williams
“When we examined our community in New York, we found that some property managers weren’t providing a quality, local experience to guests,” the company said in a blog post. The removed landlords controlled a total of 2,000 rooms.

“There is no place for anonymity in a trusted community.”
Varieties of Online Community

Relation of online media to social groups

- Supports
- Amplifies/extends
- Transforms
- Creates

But Facebook etc. blur boundaries
Reproducing Offline Social Divisions

What distinguishes adoption of MySpace and Facebook among American teens is not cleanly about race or class, ... The division can be seen through the lens of taste and aesthetics, two value-laden elements that are deeply entwined with race and class. It can also be seen through the network structures of teen friendship, which are also directly connected to race and class. And it can be seen through the language that teens – and adults – use to describe these sites....

danah boyd
Reproducing Offline Social Divisions

Cheesy or creative; classy or boring?

'MySpace is for the riff-raff and Facebook is for the landed gentry.'

'MySpace just seems like the other side of the tracks.'

*Do social media always reproduce offline categories?*
1998 Moveon.org founded to militate for moving past Clinton impeachment hearings. In 2003, becomes important channel for opposition to Iraq war, major source of funding for antiwar candidates.

2002 Meetup.com founded to facilitate offline meeting and networking of interest groups. During buildup to campaign, it becomes an important source of grassroots political organization for Howard Dean campaign, later for Kerry & Edwards.
Is the Internet a Community?

Cf. James F. Moore (Berkman Center), on "the global consciousness of the second superpower," March 2003:

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 new electronic independence recreates the world in the image of a global village." Marshall McLuhan

“The power of elites to determine what [is] news via a tightly controlled dissemination system [has been] shattered. The ability and authority to distribute text are now truly democratized” Hugh Hewitt
Online Political Discourse
Claims about online political discourse

The internet

Broadens access to information
Broadens the opportunity to speak.
Increases the number of information sources, bypassing media "gatekeepers" or official censors.
Offers information about a wider range of topics, and more information and opinion on any given topic.
Provides more reliable ways of checking or interpreting information, and gives citizens more opportunity to verify information.
Claims about online political discourse

The internet

Restricts the exchange of information and opinion to a more closed, like-minded group (silo effect)

Exposes people to more information that is misleading, inaccurate, extreme, inflammatory, etc.;

Eliminates the guidance that the traditional media provided.

Widens the divisions between the informed and ill-informed sectors of the public.
Polarization and the "Siloing" of Political Discourse

Online discourse facilitates "siloing" of political discourse…

But siloing has independent offline roots

Polarization of political language on the Internet mirrors polarization of elite/activist views and the increasing importance of elective associations (geographical, occupational)

Number of Americans living in landslide counties:
1976: 26%
2008: 48%
Figure 1: Community structure of political blogs (expanded set), shown using utilizing a GEM layout [11] in the GUESS[3] visualization and analysis tool. The colors reflect political orientation, red for conservative, and blue for liberal. Orange links go from liberal to conservative, and purple ones from conservative to liberal. The size of each blog reflects the number of other blogs that link to it.

Lada Adamic & Nathalie Glance, 2005, "Divided They Blog"
traffic is also polarized

Figure 4.4: This figure maps traffic among the top 50 political Websites, as of May 2006. Liberal- or Democratic leaning sites are in blue; conservative- or Republican-leaning sites are in red. Self-declared neutral or nonpartisan sites are in gray.
Partisan Differences in Homophily among Twitter followers

## Polarization by gender?

Sites with highest pct of male readers tend to be conservative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Blog</th>
<th>Male readership (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>DailyKos.com</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Instapundit</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Eschaton (Atrios)</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Michelle Malkin</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Crooks and liars</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Little Green Footballs</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Powerline</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>RedState.org</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Wonkette</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Andrew Sullivan</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Kevin Drum</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Hugh Hewitt</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
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</table>
# What you tweet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Republicans</th>
<th>Democrats</th>
<th>African-American</th>
<th>Starbucks fans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pelosi</td>
<td>lgbt</td>
<td>niggas</td>
<td>net</td>
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<tr>
<td>obamacare</td>
<td>suicides</td>
<td>songz</td>
<td>...</td>
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<td>stimulus</td>
<td>homophobia</td>
<td>betta</td>
<td>sms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>liberty</td>
<td>veggie</td>
<td>dats</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>patriots</td>
<td>baggers</td>
<td>finna</td>
<td>virus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taxpayer</td>
<td>rwnj</td>
<td>weave</td>
<td>restart</td>
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<tr>
<td>dads</td>
<td>inequality</td>
<td>flocka</td>
<td>recipes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taxpayer</td>
<td>wingnuts</td>
<td>bruh</td>
<td>oatmeal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trillion</td>
<td>mandela</td>
<td>boondocks</td>
<td>tasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>naacp</td>
<td>argh</td>
<td>jeezy</td>
<td>espresso</td>
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<tr>
<td>socialism</td>
<td>cinema</td>
<td>brothya</td>
<td>pumpkins</td>
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<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td>mas</td>
<td>ole</td>
<td>delish</td>
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<tr>
<td>libs</td>
<td>horrifying</td>
<td>str8</td>
<td>columbia</td>
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<td>leftist</td>
<td>rights</td>
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<td>tyranny</td>
<td>hysteria</td>
<td>..smh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>imam</td>
<td>sexuality</td>
<td>pastor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pennachiotti & Popescu, 2012
Effects of the Internet

The Internet potentially amplifies and enhances all forms of social organization

… But doesn't eliminate basic conflicts and oppositions…
The Internet in Public Life

A new public sphere or the death knell of the old one?
"Branded content" & the future of campaign advertising
Resolved, The net effect of the Internet will be to create a new public sphere and democratize public life.
Participation in online political discourse
Participation in online political discourse

Does the net level the informational playing field? Initially, those with access tend to be younger, college-educated, male, white...

Curves of access are flattening...

But among those with access, older users are more likely to be daily users...

![Chart showing online activity by generation and age]

But how much does access/daily use predict political engagement?
Political Participation Online

Percent on Internet and by Connection Type by Socio-Economic Level

Big SES Gradient:
44% in 1st to 99% in 5th

Courtesy of Henry Brady
Reinforcing Social Divisions

Percent on Internet and by Connection Type by Age Categories

Big Age Gradient: 90% to 32%
Political Participation Online

Percent Using Social Networking Sites by Socio-Economic Level

Social Networking Less Stratified by SES:
18% in 1st to 33% in 5th
Political Participation Online

Percent Web Political Acts and Social Networking by Socio-Economic Level

Web Political Acts Much More SES Stratified than Social Networking:
11% in 1st to 65% in 5th
political activity online mirrors offline

Political activity is highly correlated with income, whether that activity takes place online or offline.

The proportion of adults within each income category who have participated in two or more online/offline political activities within the last twelve months.
Political Participation Online

"Winner take all" effects: Zipf's Law distributions
(note: Most influential bloggers are journalists etc.)
Internet doesn't level political participation or access to political information within society…
But it may broaden participation & information flow among political classes…
And does facilitate lateral connections & organization
Virtual Pollution
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
Cyberspace: The Morning After

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"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"?
"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...
THE FRANKLIN PROPHECY
Recorded by Charles Coteworth Pinckney
Delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1787

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"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.
Pervasiveness of Hate Speech

Google search results: "protect this young nation from an insidious influence"

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 imperation. The menace, gentlemen, is the ...
www.biblebelievers.org.au/clipper.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 ...

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 imperation. ...

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/29077776/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 imperation. ...
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 imperation. That menace, gentlemen, is the ...
www.facebook.com/group.php?id=10724196862 - 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 imperation. 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 imperation. The menace, gentlemen, is the ...
Pervasiveness of Hate Speech

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

The Frankfurt "Prophecy" Modern Anti-Semitic Myth Making

Introduction

This article, which thoroughly documents the history of the term the Frankfurt "Prophecy", appeared almost forty-five years ago. The 1954 issue of Facts, a publication of the Anti-Defamation League's "The "Prophecy" The Uses of the "Prophecy" Documenting a Fraud"
An Awkward Search Result

**Jew**

Keeping a close watch on Jewish communities, organizations, monopoly, banking, and media control worldwide.

**Jew Watch**

According to its site, the Jew Watch features an archive of anti-Semitic material.

**Jew Watch - Jewish Atrocities - Jews Against Jews**

Rabin was assassinated in 1995 by a right-wing orthodox Jew. Abraham Hecht has been quoted as citing Jewish scripture to justify the killing.

**Jew Watch - Who is a Jew?**

A fun photo of a Jew with a razorblade.
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. ....
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. . . .

What would you tell Google to do?
Why is racist speech a problem?

How concerned should we be about racist speech?
Is there more racist speech than before?...
Or is it just more visible – like bad spelling?
Porn in the Library!!

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

By DOUGLAS MONTERO and BOB FREDERICKS
Last Updated: 8:09 AM, April 25, 2011
Posted: 1:54 AM, April 25, 2011

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 patrons the most uncensored access to extreme, hard-core Internet smut this side of the old Times Square.

“Whatever 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.”
The profusion 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…

…Whereas children used to supplement sex education by tearing through *National Geographic* in search of naked aboriginals … 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
"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 econtain 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"

Distribution of User Volume Among Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of Sites</th>
<th>% of traffic</th>
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<tr>
<td>.01</td>
<td>55.63</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>74.81</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>82.26</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>94.92</td>
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Adamic & Huberman, 2000
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<td>94.92</td>
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Adamic & Huberman, 2000
Responses to Rotten Information

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.
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
Children's Internet Protection Act:
Passed in 2001 -- 3rd attempt to regulate online porn
Limits of Text Blocking

Text unavailable (imaged, etc.)
Confusion with innocent text
Need to block IP numbers
"Loophole" sites: anonymizer sites, Google cache & images
Inherent trade-offs of precision and recall

Precision = $\frac{R}{N}$
Recall = $\frac{R}{M}$
Limits of Image Classification

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

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

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

Facebook and MySpace are Killing Porn?

Porn Flounders, But Adult Novelty Business Booms
“Since the nineteenth century, every new form of communication has multiplied the opportunities for unwelcomed intrusions on our persons and privacy…

*GN  Ascent of the A-word* 2012

“The serenading troubadour can now thrum his throbbing guitar before the transmitter undisturbed by apprehensions of shotguns and bulldogs,” 1884
...there are no more assholes walking the earth than there used to be when they went by other names. But it’s fair to say that [the age] has created a host of new occasions for acting like assholes and new ways of performing assholism... In their power and ubiquity, digital technologies introduce hitherto unimaginable possibilities for being uncivil and inconsiderate: cyber-bullying, tweeting or checking your mail in the middle of a meeting, posting anonymous defamations about an ex-boss or ex-girlfriend..., lurking and trolling on blogs and discussion lists, and all the other forms of misbehavior that new media have given rise to.

*GN, Ascent of the A-word* 2012

The repeal of reticence...
Being public and being "in public"

Redefining social categories

"the technological constraints and affordances of a site will shape user practices and...social norms will emerge over time." Ellison & Boyd

“it is often difficult for two users who both call each other a friend to know if they are talking about the same thing” (Fono & Raynes-Goldie 2006)

Or is it?

"Drama implies something not to be taken seriously, … while the adult-defined 'bullying' connotes childishness or immaturity to teenagers." Marwick & Boyd
We've been here before

Where else has technology interacted with social, political, and economic forces to produce outcome?
We've been here before

Where else has technology interacted with social, political, and economic forces to produce outcome?
Where hasn't it?
Looking Backwards

Which classes were most/least valuable?

Which readings were most/least valuable?

How could assignments be improved?

Other suggestions....
Good-bye and good luck