PROJECT 1:

A WEBSITE OF MISINFORMATION

CSE100/INFO100 Fluency with Information Technology

Introduction

Historical Context

What does it mean to have "photographic proof" of an event? Twenty years ago, photographs were taken at face value. A photograph could serve as evidence for what it pictured: certain people or things had been in a particular place, together, at a particular time, doing particular activities.

What does it mean to publish valid and authentic papers? Factual reports and accounts of current events? For many, many years traditional publishing houses [for books, research journals, government documents, and magazines] have used well-established criteria for validating and authenticating the materials they print. A publishing house print or media signature carried meaning about the level and rigor of review for the content – with some imprints conveying greater rigor (e.g., The MIT Press, NPR) than others (e.g., *The National Inquirer*).

This world of twenty or more years ago, while far from being perfect, did have the benefits of being able to validate content at a glance. That's the upside. The downside

was the barriers to publication. If your ideas were not "accepted" or "validated" by the various review boards, your options for publication and dissemination could be limited. A case in point: Albert Einstein's original paper on relativity was turned down by numerous scientific and mathematical journals.

Enter the Digital Age, the Internet and the World Wide Web. Technology provides unprecedented opportunities for self-publishing and freedom of expression. If Einstein was alive today, he could post his findings on relativity on a Web site and his ideas would instantly be available to billions of individuals across the globe. That's the upside. But, with unchecked self-publishing comes the downside of content that has never been edited to check for authenticity, for completeness, etc. How is the typical user who down loads a page from the Web to distinguish between the careful considerations of a scientist like Einstein and those of an amateur science fiction writer? Or if the user is looking for travel information or stock recommendations or whatever you wish to fill in here, how is the user to know that information is current, accurate, and complete? With the advent of digital images that can be easily manipulated (and as you will experience in lab), even photographs that previously might have served as "supporting evidence" are called into question.

In the world we live in today, where the opportunities for self-expression are seemingly endless, how do we discriminate between truth and fiction? Information and misinformation? What are the ethical limits on how content should be manipulated? Project 1 is designed to help you experience first hand the issues surrounding authenticity and self-expression. Remember that on the Web, the motivation for publishing misinformation does not always have to be intentional misdirection. Many, many sites contain inaccurate information that is published with the best intentions.

Now fast forward to September, 2001 where technology and terrorism crossed paths on U.S. soil: all of it broadcast, live, for a global audience.

The Current Situation

Since September 11th of last year our world has been turned upside down by surreal events that defy imagination. Two of the world's tallest buildings reduced to rubble and thousands killed. The story itself seams unreal to those of us who hear of it from afar. It is only those who visited Ground Zero in the weeks after the attack who could truly

understand the enormity of the destruction and the inability of any medium to truly capture the horror. During those frantic months which have produced, quite literally, BILLIONS of words of information and thousand upon thousands of pictures, two patterns have emerged that are neither tied together, nor totally separate.

First: Information is disappearing.

Out of concern for National Security, thousands of web pages and web sites have gone dark-pulled from the WWW for various reasons. Information that has traditionally been publicly accessible by any citizen is being pulled, not only from web sites, but from libraries and government installations. Read **The Information Wars** at http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/2002/09/graham.htm for more details.

Second: Misinformation is spreading like wildfire

Misinformation, little white lies, selective dissemination of facts, while not new, has been brought into the limelight because of the global attention surrounding 9/11. Not only do counter-intelligence agencies use the media to broadcast reports that may or may not be completely factual, but the average person now has the same opportunity.

Project Overview

In this project, your challenge is to create a Web site of "misinformation" that *appears* as authentic as possible to the user.   That is, while the content of your Web site will be questionable, everything else about your Web site should convey the opposite. The only limitations to your topics are these:

- The topic must be one in which misinformation could present serious difficulties to those who believe it. For example, a site about a new drug that will reduce all affects of sun damage to the skin and help the user avoid skin cancer completely. You cannot simply produce a "joke" site that would not convince any user of its validity.
- The topic must be one on which people will not already have a strong opinion or extensive knowledge that would tip them off. For example, a site that claims that smoking has never had any negative effects on the population will not be considered very mis-informative. [However, you might be able to make a convincing argument if you pull a number of statistics and Tobacco Company reports to support a lesser claim.]

Overall steps [These will be broken down into 2 parts for submission. Read those directions carefully]:

(1) Locate a digital photograph that is public domain or copyright free from an online or other source (you can take your own digital picture if you have access to a digital camera).

(2) Using Adobe Photoshop (or some other image design software), modify that photograph in a subtle but significant way.

(3) Create some text, "the story", to support your modified image.

(4) Put your text and image together on a Web site that appears as authentic as possible.

(5) Test your Web site with at least two individuals to see how successful you are at conveying the authenticity of your "fictional" content.

(6) Publish the results of your tests along with a summary of your findings.

The content of your website of misinformation should permit comfortable viewing by everyone in the course. If you're unsure about the "tastefulness" of any particular content, it is probably a good idea to talk with your instructor or TA first, or choose something else. Here are some possible ideas:

- Create an image that places a currently extinct animal in a location/point in time when it would already have been extinct. Provide new documentation that supports the image and "proves" the animal still exists.
- Create a site that supposedly includes "missing information" from September 11th that could have been removed out of concern for national security.
- Add a well-known landmark (e.g. the Space Needle) to a different cityscape (e.g., San Francisco) and create a Visitor's site for that landmark or city. Provide enough information that will back up the picture's claim.
- Create home page for a fictitious product, company, special interest group, city, or school.

Assignment 1 provides practice for searching for public domain or copyright free images online as well as information about what constitutes copyright of an image on the Web. Assignment 2 provides web content evaluation techniques that you can use when it comes time to test your site.

IMPORTANT!!!

The Web site should be in your Dante web space (public_html or student_html), but should be in a separate directory (folder) within that web area.   Create 2 new directories within your public_html. **Name one directory info1a; name the other directory info1b.**

The page(s) you will create for Part A should be placed in your info1a directory. The page(s) you will create for Part B should be placed in your info1b directory. *DO NOT create any files with names that begin with "index", such as index.html, index.htm, etc in either of the folders.* Use the exact spelling and capitalization given on the directories above so people (such as course staff!) can find your sites easily. Other file names within the two directories can be whatever you choose. Make sure the directory and the files in it all have general Unix Read permissions (you will know if they do not when you try to look at your web page on line and receive a "permission denied" message).

Once the due date has come and gone, do NOT alter your files again in any way. Files with a modification date later than the due date will be considered late, and your freebie will be used. Files that are modified more than 24 hours after deadline will not be graded. Any changes you make between the due date and receiving your grade for that project piece will eliminate any position you may have to question the grade. Once Part A is complete, you should not need to touch the files in the info1a directory again. If you need to make copies of those files to modify and use for part B, do so and place them in the info1b directory.

Objectives

- To design and implement a Web site using HTML
- To manipulate a photograph in Adobe Photoshop (or some other photo manipulation program)
- To experience first hand the ease with which "misinformation" can be made available online
- To become aware of and systematically explore the "cues" that users may use to assess the content of a Web site
- To conduct user testing to evaluate your Web site

- To reflect on the challenges for misinformation online
- Ultimately, to become an appropriately cautious user of online information

Copyright and Fair Use of Text and Images

Images and other files and content on the Internet are protected in the same way as print materials and photographs. Use of digital images for purposes of alteration and display on the Internet has limited coverage under the conditions of fair use.

See the Four Factor Fair Use test at:
[http://www.utsystem.edu/OGC/IntellectualProperty/copypol2.htm] and the readings assigned for Assignment 1.

Public Domain items are those in which the copyright has been lost, has expired, or the author of the work makes no copyright claims to reproductions or enhancements of the work. Photographs taken by Federal Workers and posted on Federal Government sites are public domain. Photographs posted on City, County, and State sites have varying copyright policies but tend to fall in line with Federal copyright guidelines. **ALWAYS** note the copyright policy of **ANY** site you visit, regardless of its status as a commercial, non-profit, government, or educational site.

If you use an image of a person for reasons of making a profit, you are responsible for obtaining permission from the person or their heirs. If you use a trademark image, you must also get permission.

Please Recall the Class Policy on Cooperation and Collaboration

It is valuable to work with a friend or classmate when learning a new application or working out a problem. However, the work that you perform in FIT100 for a grade must be your own work unless "working in groups" is explicitly allowed. The Projects involved in FIT 100 are NOT intended to be group projects. It is OK to run ideas and scenarios past your friends or classmates, but the solution you create should be based on what is inside your own head. One way that you may collaborate is to connect to a classmate's project as one of the "sources" that back up your information. In other words, you may do a misinformation site on smoking and your classmate / friend may decide to do their site on a fictitious organization that does smoking research!

Part A: Due Thursday, October 17th, 11 PM

What to do

(Hint: read through all of these items carefully before beginning):

1. Using the Web searching skills you developed in Assignment 1, find an image in the public domain or that is "copyright free" and note the source of your image. *Be able to quote from the web site the content that tells you, in no uncertain terms, that you are able to use the image for this project*.

2. Decide how you will modify the image and use it in a Web site of Misinformation.

3. Using the HTML skills developed in the labs, create the beginning of your Web site. Include:

   a. A title *(use a title tag AND a heading tag to note the title bar at the top as well as the title in the main part of the page)* for your Web Site clearly identifying it as a Web site of misinformation.

   b. Your title should also include near it a "bogus" Web site logo that you create using additional features of Adobe Photoshop or any other image creation software.   The logo should be something obvious that alerts a user that the site is filled with misinformation. Ex. "Bogus Website" or "Website of Misinformation".

   c. Paragraph 1: A short description of the intended nature of your site (what you intend to do for your project).

   d. The unmodified image. *Make the text flow around it using the appropriate tag attributes.*
   NOTE: If you decide later to use more than one image (e.g. an altered animal image and a second landscape image where the animal will be placed), then you must make sure BOTH are public domain or that you have permission to alter both.

   e. Paragraph 2 should state your source for the image(s). Make sure to include a statement of proof that the image(s) is in the public domain (or that you have permission to use and alter them). Your proof may be an excerpt from the site's copyright policy or email from the owners themselves giving you permission. However, you MUST include this information. Just saying that you have permission or that the pictures

are in the public domain is not enough. Consider the information you provide as a legal argument that you would point to if approached about the legality of your use of the image.

f. Paragraph 3 should describe the "true" context of the image(s). What do the image or images really depict? Where did they come from? (Give the link to the site where the image is found or to the image directly)

g. Paragraph 4 should describe the "fictional" context of your image(s) once modified. In other words, a description of how you **intend** to modify the image. (**Note:** You do not need to modify the image until Part B.)

h. Links to 3 other sites what will help to authenticate your Web site of Misinformation. (These might be other bogus sites (such as a classmate) OR they might be sites of similar content that help to validate your page). You will have to make the judgment on how well they support your bogus content.

i. Add the following piece of code to the very bottom of your HTML page. Place is immediately ABOVE the </BODY> and </HTML> tags in your source code:

```
<script type="text/javascript">
        <!-- begin comment to hide JavaScript

                document.write("Last updated: ")
                var modified
                modified = document.lastModified
                document.write(modified)

        // end comment to hide JavaScript. -->
</script>
```

You do not need to know what the tags and code mean at this time. What this code will do is display the date your HTML file was last modified on the web page for us. You will learn HOW this works in the next section of the course.

Turn-in procedure:

1. The deadline for making changes to your initial site is: **Thursday, October 17th, 11 PM.**

2. **After this time, make no changes whatsoever to your page**, or it will be graded as late. Changes made more than 24 hours later will mean your site is NOT GRADED.

3. Browse to your web site using Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator. Print it off, from the web browser. This will confirm to YOU that your files are in the public_html directory in your Dante account.

4. From the browser, print out the HTML source for the site. (Go to **View > Source** to see the HTML)

5. Staple all pages together, write your name and section on the first page, and bring them to the next lecture (Friday). Late papers will not be accepted.

Grading Criteria:

1. By the deadline, a Web site conforming to the description of the required content, turned in according to the proper procedure.

Part B: Due Thursday, October 24th, 11 PM

Details

1. Using the Photoshop skills you learn in lab, modify the image(s) as described in Part 1A. Don't be afraid to try other features of Photoshop, etc. while you are at it!

2. Make a copy of the part 1A web page to modify. Do NOT modify the original file. The copied file should be renamed something like part1b.html and placed in your info1b directory along with copies of images used. In your web site, you may create additional files as needed. They should all be within the **info1b** directory. *Do not create any files with names that begin with "index", such as index.html, index.htm, etc*.

3. Do whatever you can to make the new page look authentic. This includes:
   a. Replace the original image with the modified one.
   b. *Remove* the text describing the "true" context of the image and write text to reinforce the authenticity of your modified image, etc (minimum of 2

significant paragraphs). In other words, add your "story" to go with the image on the page.

You may also want to add additional links, etc. Remember what you learned about evaluating a Web sites and work on "improving" some of those features in your Web site. For example, consider how you can use fonts, colors, spelling and grammar, presentation, textual content, and vocabulary to further enhance the "credibility" of your image.

4. Using the more advanced HTML skills you developed in later HTML labs, continue to refine your Web site of Misinformation as follows:
    a. Add a mailto link to your email address.
    b. Use styles in at least a couple of places. It's OK to also use the older ways of formatting text, but styles are the future of HTML, so show us you know how to use them.
    c. Use tables to format your page in a professional manner.

5. Create a separate Web page in which you reflect on the problem of misinformation. Keep this in the same directory (info1b), and call it **disclaimer.html**.
    a. On this "disclaimer" page, provide a disclaimer for the quality of information on your Misinformation Web site. In other words, let the audience know that the information is bogus and done for a class project.
    b. Provide a discussion of the ethical issues concerned with conveying the accuracy, completeness and validity of the information you are presenting. What are the issues surrounding the publication of so much "information" by so many people on so many different topics? What are the responsibilities of those who publish information and those who seek information on the Internet? This discussion probably needs at least two significant paragraphs to be sufficient.
    c. Include a link from this page (the disclaimer page) back to your Web site of misinformation.
    d. Add the following piece of code to the very bottom of your HTML page. Place is immediately ABOVE the </BODY> and </HTML> tags in your source code:

```
<script type="text/javascript">
        <!-- begin comment to hide JavaScript

                document.write("Last updated: ")
                var modified
                modified = document.lastModified
                document.write(modified)

        // end comment to hide JavaScript. -->
</script>
```

You do not need to know what the tags and code mean at this time. What this code will do is display the date your HTML file was last modified on the web page for us. You will learn HOW this works in the next section of the course.

Testing your website:

6. How effective is your Web site of misinformation? Find out by trying it out on some unsuspecting visitor! This is a form of experimentation, a typical tool in many disciplines.

    a. **Create a copy of your part 1b Web Misinformation file.** Keep the page in the info1b directory, and call the new file something like **main.html.** On this copy, remove the misinformation title and anything else that gives hints that the page is bogus. Link this test page to your disclaimer page.

    b. Show this version of your Web site to two individuals; ideally, people who do not know you've been working on this project. After they have looked at it for a while, have each visitor rate your Web site according to the evaluation criteria table you used in Assignment 2 – source, currency, verifiability, and so forth. Create a table of the user evaluations of your site.

    c. Summarize the results. Include the table and your summary on your disclaimer page. The summary should be at least one paragraph.

    d. Write a final paragraph on your disclaimer page discussing how effective your Web site was at establishing the credibility of misinformation. How you could have improved the credibility of your site, especially if you had more advanced knowledge of HTML or programming?

Turn-in procedure:

7. The deadline for making changes is: **Thursday, October 24th, 11 PM.**

8. **After this date, make no changes whatsoever to your site**, or it will be graded as late. Changes made more than 24 hours later will mean your site is NOT GRADED. [If a grade is given and you make changes after that time, no arguments can be made as to why a particular grade is given.]

9. Browse to your web site using Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator. Print it off, from the web browser. This will confirm to YOU that your files are in the public_html directory in your Dante account.

10. From the web browser, print out the HTML source for the site. Do this for the bogus page and disclaimer page. (Go to **View > Source** to see the HTML)

11. Staple all pages together, write your name and section on the first page, and bring it to the next lecture (Friday). Late papers will not be accepted.

Grading Criteria:

1. How well your site meets the requirements named above, in a technical/HTML sense. The quality of your modified image.

2. How well your site meets the requirements for content. This refers to the persuasiveness and coherence of your misinformation (**at least 3 means to enhance the authenticity of your Web site should be used-see the criteria from the readings for Assignment 2**).

3. The care taken in conducting and writing up the visitor experiment, and the thoughtfulness of your discussion on the disclaimer page.