RESISTANT SPECTATORSHIP AND CRITICAL INFORMATION LITERACY

STRATEGIES FOR OPPOSITIONAL READINGS

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OVERVIEW

Theorizing Resistant Spectatorship

A Resistant Reading of Google Search

Libraries and Critical Information Literacy

THEORIZING RESISTANT SPECTATORSHIP

RESISTANT SPECTATORSHIP OVERVIEW

Stuart Hall's "Encoding/Decoding" model (1973)

Three positions a reader may take in relation to a mass media text:

- Dominant

- Negotiated

- Oppositional

RESISTANT SPECTATORSHIP

Dominant position:

A media text is interpreted according to the meaning intended or preferred by its creators, resulting in limited misunderstanding between the message and the reader because they share an acceptance of the dominant ideology.

RESISTANT SPECTATORSHIP

Negotiated position:

The reader chooses to distance themselves from the text in some ways but not others, meaning that both dominant and oppositional elements come into play—the basic premise of an argument may be accepted, but the reader is not willing to accept it in full and modifies the meaning in some way that is reflective of their own self and interests.

RESISTANT SPECTATORSHIP

Oppositional/Resistant position:

The reader resists the text and refuses its intention, by deconstructing, reconstructing, or outright rejecting the message of the text as it is received and supplying their own interpretation. The intended message is understood but is opposed, and the reader substitutes and creates their own meaning from the text.

This position is most significant in terms of one's agency, as it entails the active interruption of a hegemonic narrative on a small scale.

RESISTANT SPECTATORSHIP REVISIONS

Manthia Diawara on the resistant spectatorship of African American audiences (1988).

Viewers bring their own personal and cultural histories when they engage with film, and are able to refute stereotypical portrayals and symbolic violence towards African Americans in popular Hollywood films.

RESISTANT SPECTATORSHIP REVISIONS

bell hooks on African American women's practice of the "oppositional gaze," applying a Black feminist perspective to resistant spectatorship (1992).

"As critical spectators, Black women participate in a broad range of looking relations, contest, resist, revise, interrogate, and invent on multiple levels."

RESISTANT SPECTATORSHIP IMPLICATIONS

Resistant spectatorship offers a unique lens through which to view the problems of information literacy and how to critically engage with information.

It provides a more fully illustrated picture of how people receive information and media, beginning with the premise that when one interacts with a text, they do not passively accept the message and instead may choose to reinterpret, substitute, or entirely reject it based on their experiences and understandings.

A RESISTANT READING OF GOOGLE SEARCH

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CONTEMPORARY INFO ENVIRONMENTS

Increasing commodification and consolidation of major media sources

Technological solutions to information discovery positioned as "neutral" by their creators

Information discovery and use relegated to one omnipresent company with its own priorities, interests, and responsibilities to shareholders

Information no longer a public good; has instead become a commercial product distributed through corporate channels
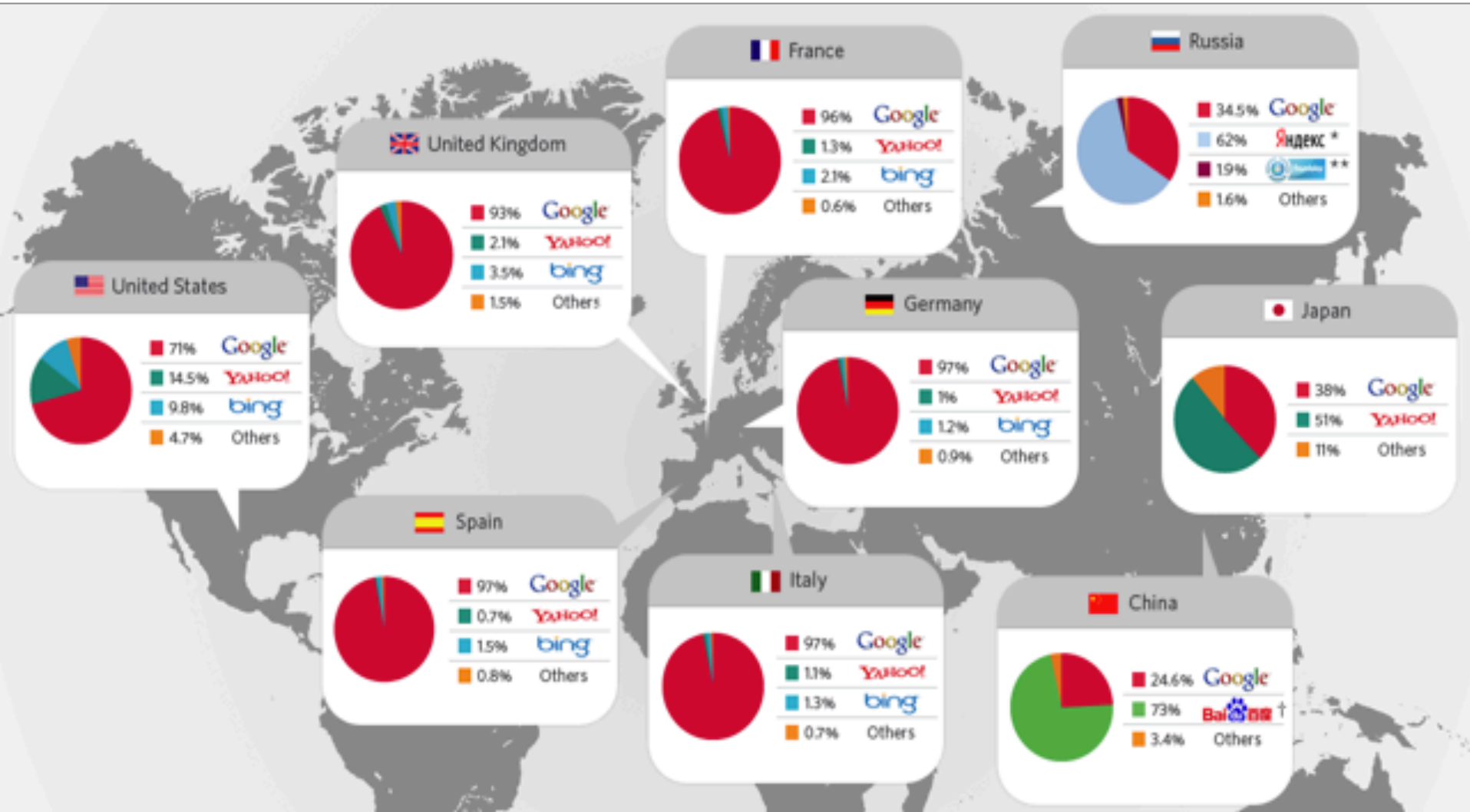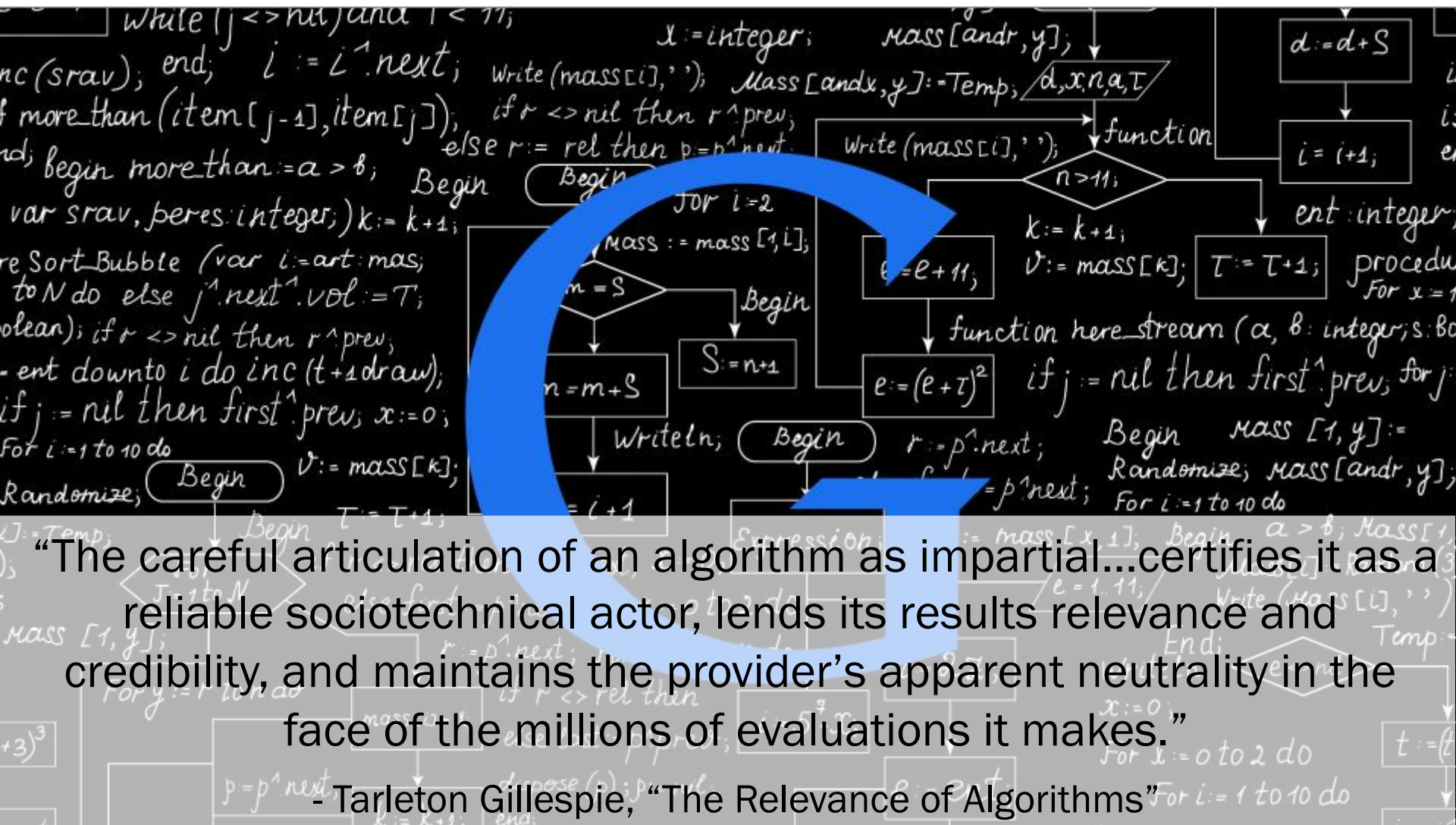
THE ATTENTION ECONOMY

"The consumer in the attention economy produces value for capital through attention, primarily serving as a commodity that is attracted by and sold by advertisers such as Google or any other company that relies on page views, clicks, or other forms of online attention that rely on accumulation."

- Jonathan Beller, *The Cinematic Mode of Production*

SEARCH ENGINE MARKET SHARE, 2010

CONSTRUCTING NEUTRALITY BY ALGORITHMS

"The careful articulation of an algorithm as impartial...certifies it as a reliable sociotechnical actor, lends its results relevance and credibility, and maintains the provider's apparent neutrality in the face of the millions of evaluations it makes."

- Tarleton Gillespie, "The Relevance of Algorithms"

CONSTRUCTING NEUTRALITY THROUGH DESIGN

"Rendering web content (pages) findable via search engines is an expressly social, economic, and human project—in which this goal is turned into a set of steps (algorithm) implemented by programming code, and then naturalized as 'objective.'"

- Safiya Noble, "Google Search: Hyper-visibility as a Means of Rendering Black Women and Girls as Invisible"

GOOGLE AND DATAVEILLANCE

Google search's purpose is not information provider, but advertising platform

Success reliant on mass surveillance of users' clicks, searches, and online patterns, amassing huge amounts of data to refine algorithms and sell user interests to advertisers

Data collected across multiple platforms: search, Gmail, Google Maps, Google Docs, YouTube, etc.

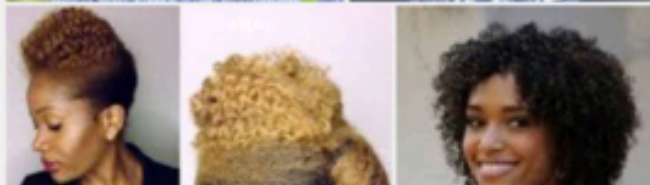**Rosalia**
@BonKamona
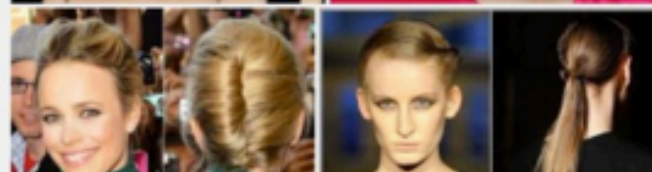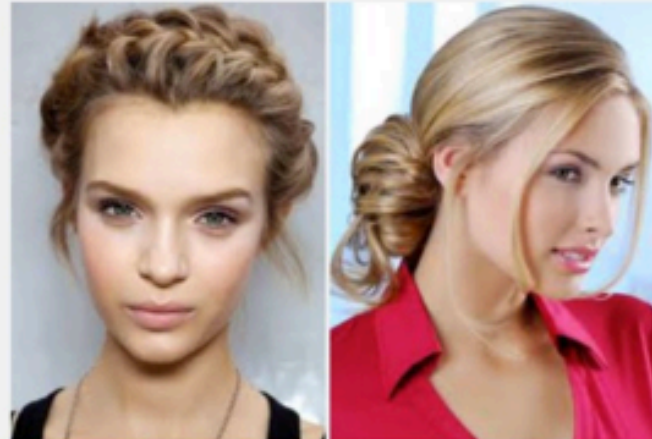
I saw a tweet saying "Google unprofessional hairstyles for work". I did. Then I checked the 'professional' ones 🙃🙃🙃

unprofessional hairstyles for work

professional hairstyles for work

Google's attempts to render visible and control various branches of life and culture internationally, from putting remote areas online via satellite to driverless cars, are positioned as humanitarian projects yet serve to extend their dominance to industries and locations entirely new to internet-oriented companies.

CRITICAL STUDIES OF GOOGLE

Google Search and Google Images
The representation of Black women and girls is hypersexualized and destructive (Safiya Noble, 2012)

Google Ads
Black-sounding names are associated more often with ads implying arrest records than White-sounding names (Latanya Sweeney, 2013)

Ads for high-paying executive jobs appear more frequently for male account-holders than women (Amit Datta et al., 2014)

Google's Autocomplete Function
Autocomplete suggestions for different groups perpetuate racist, sexist, and homophobic stereotypes (Paul Baker & Amanda Potts, 2014)

LIBRARIES AND CRITICAL INFORMATION LITERACY

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LIBRARIES

Libraries act as sites of resistance as well as enforcers of cultural norms. This tension can be seen through library space, staff, programming, collections, and educational efforts.

INFORMATION LITERACY (IL)

Introduced in 1970s as a competency to be instilled in citizens to create a productive workforce (Zurkowski, 1974).

The term "information literacy" originated in the private sector, positioning industry as taking primary responsibility to produce both information and the skills of information literacy within the populace.

Despite this, IL has come to be adopted most widely by educational institutions and has directed many goals and activities of academic libraries.

AN ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTION OF IL

"A new 'information literacy' is necessary for liberation from the oppressive effects of the institutionalized public media."
- Cees Hamelink, "An Alternative to News" (1976)

Information Literacy as a mind set to be developed by individuals to counter the effects of information provided by hegemonic forces, as opposed to a characteristic to be cultivated so that they may more effectively function within society to maintain the status quo.

CRITICAL INFORMATION LITERACY

Critical IL "engages learners with the broader social and cultural contexts of information questioning" while fostering "a personal approach to learning, drawing from the learner's past experiences to develop their ability to critically construct, shape and negotiate knowledge, practices, and identities."
- Alison Hicks, "Knowledge Societies: Learning for a Diverse World"

CRITICAL INFORMATION LITERACY EXAMPLES

Examining library classification systems and subject headings to show how information organization is rife with white, patriarchal assumptions and systemic discrimination (Drabinski, 2008)

Using zines or other counterculture sources to make marginalized viewpoints more widely heard (Gisonny & Freedman, 2006)

Teaching the economics of scholarly communication by asking students to jot down whenever they encounter a paywalled article and reflect on the barriers that these costs create (Warren, 2010)

CONCLUSION

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FINAL POINTS

Resistant spectatorship recognizes that information seeking is inherently situated within raced, gendered, and classed environments. Information is never encountered on generalizable and depoliticized terms.

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Critical IL puts the ideas behind resistant spectatorship into practice by encouraging learners to understand and be able to resist hegemonic information structures according to one's personal and cultural identities.

FINAL POINTS

Resistant spectatorship recognizes that information seeking is inherently situated within raced, gendered, and classed environments. Information is never encountered on generalizable and depoliticized terms.

Critical IL puts the ideas behind resistant spectatorship into practice by encouraging learners to understand and be able to resist hegemonic information structures according to one's personal and cultural identities.

The current information landscape can and must be resisted. This will only happen when librarians, students, and other information users work collectively to understand and undermine dominant information modes.

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