

ONLINE

Students Fret Over Facebook's Public Listings

This month Facebook made an announcement that, at first glance, seemed innocuous: The social network decided to make "limited public search listings" available to people who weren't using the Web site.

What that means is that search engines like Google and Yahoo will now be able to locate any Facebook users who haven't designated their pages as "private." Philip Fong, a Facebook engineer, wrote on the company's blog that search-engine links would show only the names and thumbnail photos of users: "We're not exposing any new information, and you have complete control over your public search listing."

But even that information is too much, says the *Cornell Daily Sun*. In a fierce editorial, the student newspaper at Cornell University accused Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook's founder, of invading the privacy of his site's faithful patrons:

"At an age when most of us are just trying to enjoy college, it's unfortunate that we have to be so conscientious about our every move—and that Zuck feels the need to play the role of Main Cop. It's the latest in a string of indications that Facebook isn't the plucky upstart of a cultural phenomenon it was three years ago."

The editors worry that Facebook's new policy will make it easier for employers to scrutinize students' pages. Certainly, some students and alumni might be less than thrilled to know that the bare bones of their Facebook entries might soon be Googleable. But previous privacy scares haven't seemed to drive students away from Facebook.

—BROCK READ

'Walking Into a River of Alligators'

Few campus officials have stepped into harder jobs this year than J. Brice Bible. In April he left the University of Tennessee at Knoxville to become chief information officer at Ohio University, whose information-technology department was reeling from a string of all-too-public security breaches and snafus that cost several staff members their jobs.

"I was literally walking into a river of alligators," says Mr. Bible in a new interview with *Computerworld*, "but that's not always a bad thing."

Shortly after assuming the Ohio post, Mr. Bible made headlines by announcing that the university was banning peer-to-peer software. Now, he says, he's set the institution on a five-year plan to restructure the IT department. The general idea is to break down divisions between department offices so that problems don't fall through cracks, and, of course, to get more money.

He notes that because of the security troubles, there was an unexpected benefit: the president, provost, faculty members, and students all wanted to discuss information technology. "Do you know how many CIO's," he asked, "would give anything to get their university leadership and students and faculty engaged in a substantive conversation about their dreams and visions for IT?"

—B.R.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

<http://chronicle.com/infotech>

Marginally Better: Software Uses Side Notes to Turn Books Into Discussions

Adding notations to digital texts creates a new conversation among students and teachers

BY BROCK READ

THIS FALL, a student in Trevor Dodge's "Seven Deadly Sins" course asked the professor a tricky question about Dante's *Inferno*. Why does a work so obsessed with the afterlife make such infrequent use of words like "God" and "Lord?"

As she made the inquiry, the student at Pacific Northwest College of Art, highlighted a specific paragraph deep in the poem's eighth canto—a rare instance in which Dante actually did "praise and thank my God."

That kind of close reading was a thrill for Mr. Dodge, an assistant professor of liberal arts at the college, in Portland, Ore. For the student made her comment not by waving her hand for attention or posting to a Deadly Sins blog, but with a new piece of free, open-source software that lets students and scholars mark up digital copies of books, making notes right alongside relevant passages. It is a program, designers and teachers hope, that can turn a text from an isolated object into part of a flowing conversation.

The software, called CommentPress, owes its origins to a humble but hallowed tradition of scholarship: the margin note.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who coined the term "marginalia," constantly scribbled in the white spaces of his books. Pierre de Fermat famously spoke of his last theorem in a margin note. To this day, scholars and students still jot down comments and questions on the edges of their textbook pages.

With CommentPress, released in July by the Institute for the Future of the Book, designers have endeavored to help digital books

■ **To see books** annotated in CommentPress software, and learn more about the program, visit *The Chronicle's* Web site at <http://chronicle.com/infotech>

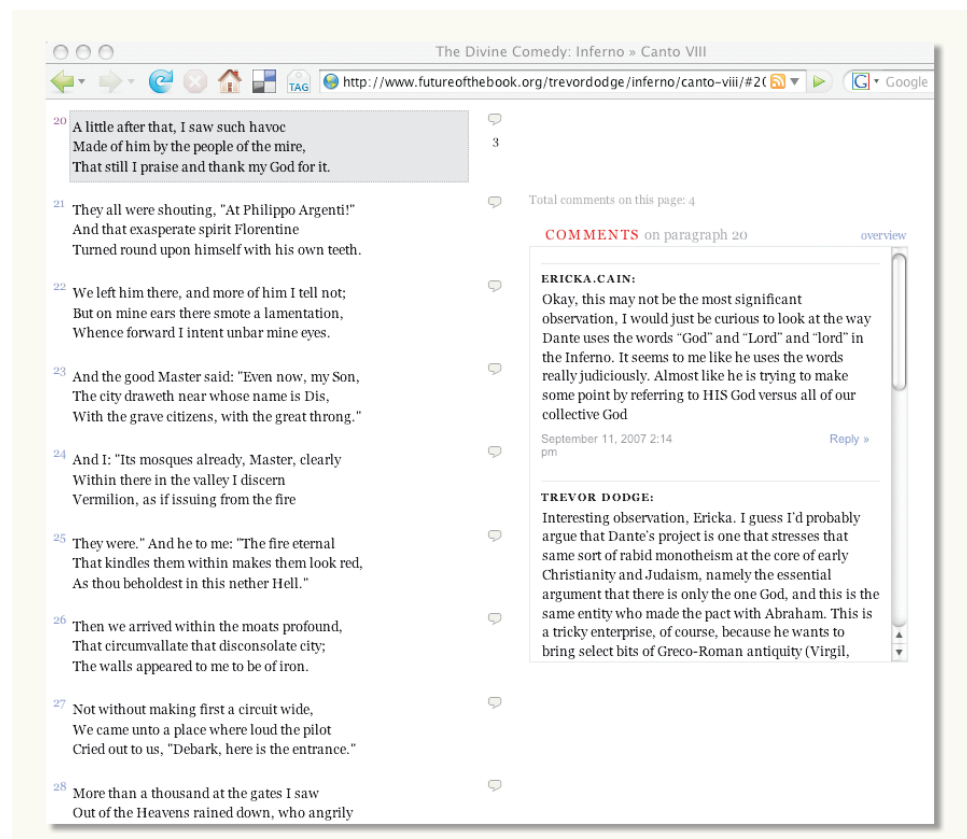
capture the immediacy and interactivity of the margin note. "Text is meant to be a conversation," says Ben Vershbow, an associate director at the institute, which is sponsored by the University of Southern California but is based in Brooklyn. "We've tried to create a reading environment that is more dynamic than you'd usually find on a Web site."

DIFFERENT FROM DIGITAL BOOKS

The program—a template used with WordPress, a popular open-source blogging program—lets any scholar convert a book or paper into a digital text that can be analyzed and commented upon by many readers.

That stands in sharp contrast to digital books, some of which come strewn with hyperlinks that let readers simulate the experience of moving from footnote to footnote, but don't let readers interact.

Traditional blogs let authors excerpt from books and then provide space beneath



CommentPress allows readers of electronic texts to write shared margin notes, like these in *The Divine Comedy*.

the text for readers to add their own comments. But CommentPress's innovation, according to Mr. Vershbow, is to "slightly rejigger the hierarchy of discussion, by putting comments next to text." While a blog might support one linear conversation, he says, CommentPress lets readers pull out multiple strands of text to start their own distinct discussions.

In a very real sense, articles and books published in CommentPress have margins. The main text takes up only a fraction of a Web-browser window; the rest of that space is devoted to a field for comments and, often, a table of contents. When a reader clicks on a paragraph on one side of the screen, comments pertaining to that paragraph pop up alongside it.

The formula seems simple, but the Future of the Book Institute has spent considerable time refining it. The institute's first digital book—*Gamer Theory*, by McKenzie Wark, a professor of media and cultural studies at New School University (*The Chronicle*, July 28, 2006)—was arranged as a series of digital index cards, each with its own comments field.

That came across as rather fragmented, however. So Mr. Vershbow moved to "virtual pages" with margins for comments. The format was a much smoother read, he says, and CommentPress was born.

'MORE RICH AND NUANCED'

Almost immediately after the tool was released, it got its first real trial: Researchers at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor used it to post online the complete text of "University Publishing in a Digital Age,"

a report compiled by Ithaka, a nonprofit organization. Creating the digital version took "the better part of a day," says Shana Kimball, electronic-projects editor for Michigan's scholarly publishing office, but it required little more than pasting sections of text into a WordPress blog.

"Providing so many points of entry really gives the possibility of a much more rich and nuanced conversation," she says.

Ms. Kimball admits that the technology can have drawbacks: "There's the possibility of really diffusing the conversation." CommentPress offers only very basic tools for sorting comments, so larger, more freewheeling debates could become hard for readers to parse. Mr. Vershbow says that the tool is best-suited to "small, focused communities" that can keep discussions on track.

But the software could be ideal for literary-criticism courses like Mr. Dodge's, in which professors ask students to perform tight textual analysis. When the student in his class asked about Dante's sparse use of "God" and "Lord," Mr. Dodge was able to do something traditional margin notes would never allow: He started a discussion, musing on the conflicted views of religion in the text. A few days later, another student chimed in with her own thoughts.

Such cross talk is just what Mr. Vershbow hoped to inspire. It is a spirit nicely captured by Roger Sperberg, a technology blogger who happened upon *Gamer Theory* more than a year ago. "What the author has to say," Mr. Sperberg wrote, "is almost immediately broadened into what the book has to say."