

Translating Texture

Data between Information Spaces

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Abstract

In information studies, we tend to think that data retains the same meaning as it moves from one information space to another. When a system changes its interface, or when data moves from one system to another, the data itself doesn't change. A library catalog record doesn't change when the catalogue interface changes, for example. Or does it?

In this keynote, I discuss how information spaces contribute to information meaning. I describe a project to translate some purposefully weird, experimental information collections from one kind of database implementation (a relational-style database) to another kind of database implementation (a graph-style database). I focus this translation project on the conceptual lens of texture: the relationship between elements in a composition. Describing the texture of a musical piece, for example, is a way of talking about how melody, harmony, and rhythm combine to produce a particular quality of sound. Here, I use texture to talk about how data and space combine to produce a particular quality of meaning. I ask: how can texture be maintained when data is moved from one information space to another?

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