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Hypertext and Electronic Publishing in Nonprofit Organization, Voluntary Action and Philanthropy Studies

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Abstract

Computer networking is making it possible to think about completely new ways of organizing and contributing to knowledge in scholarly disciplines. One of these new ways is hypertext, which still lacks a general model or metaphor, but which generally involves electronic links between different texts. This paper proposes an applied model of hypertext termed TESH (Traditional-Established Scholarly Hypertext). Traditionally, publishing has been viewed as a constitutive activity of scholarly communities of peers who have for more than three centuries exchange communications with one another by letter, memorandum and most importantly, through scholarly, scientific and academic journals. In TESH, an indefinite network of electronic databases are linked so that each manuscript (article, review, commentary) is "posted" somewhere online along with embedded hypertext links and assigned at least one anonymous review by an on-line editorial board. A model TESH-publishing project is outlined and discussed.

Introduction

The first version of this paper, written in 1992, was an effort to initiate a new line of dialogue and discussion regarding applications of hypertext within scholarly disciplines. One of the key questions raised by these new developments was the extent to which future research-oriented publishing will be in some

electronic form. If so, will we continue to equate "high status" publication with exploitation of academic markets by commercial publishers? Or, is it possible to revisualize academic publishing as essentially cooperative enterprises carried out by nonprofit commons of researchers pooling their resources? (Lohmann, 1992) Will we continue to operate in a world in which university-based faculty and universities collectively give much of their best work away only to buy it back at inflated prices from publishers whose added values consist primarily of editorial, copy editing and layout services? Or can we foresee a world in which individual investigators and their institutions copyright their own materials and make them publicly available for any suitable scholarly use, as a recent study by the Association of Research Libraries suggests. (Cummings, et. al., 1992)

The best (or at least the safest) answer is to allow for both possibilities: Clearly, there is a limited but very real commercial market for published work in this area, and – if current trends in the publishing industry continue – that market may take electronic form before too long. It is not unreasonable to predict, for example, compact disk (CD-ROM) versions of the entire Jossey-Bass library sometime in the future.

Unless one is willing to make the seemingly foolish assumption that the size of markets perfectly predicts scholarly quality, however, it is also relatively easy to see that there will continue to be significant quantities of scholarly output in this – and other – fields which is judged to be scientifically interesting but which fails to attract large enough audiences to justify the risks of commercial publication. Although the price points may be dramatically different, this will be as true with respect to electronic publication as it is with paper publications. Much discussion of the issues involved is still needed, however.

Much of work in most scientific and humanistic disciplines falls within such a category, for example: Most undergraduate students, practitioners and general interest readers (who make up the largest audiences of potential buyers) can be assumed to have little interest in anything other than the schematic results of the

kinds of arcane debates and convoluted discussions which most interest researchers and scholars working at the far reaches of any particular field. In most cases, a CD-ROM library of nonprofit "books", perhaps supplemented by a commercial "information" service for updated statistical tables may serve the purposes of the former group nicely. Thus, one might conclude that commercial publishing of electronic books on nonprofit organization, voluntary action and philanthropy studies will present at least a partial future.

For specialized groups of a few dozen to a few hundred researchers in locations around the world, however, the situation is quite different. Proposals, counter-proposals and debates over myriad issues are the focus of major scholarly attentions at any given time. Moreover, one (or more likely, several) paradigms are continually at issue, being formulated and reworked almost continually. Discussions initiated in one conference setting are continued at the next and thrashed about in various contexts in the interim. For such groups, the process of scholarly discussion and debate is at least as important as the ensuing scholarly products which interest others.

While commercial publication has met a variety of other needs of this latter group – including the legitimate status needs of aspiring and contending disciplines and of individuals building careers – it also has serious shortcomings. Commercial publishing currently fails to provide fully satisfactory solutions for this audience on a number of counts including the high costs of purchasing the range of needed materials which are quickly dated, long prepublication delays, and "artificial" (i.e., non-scholarly) limitations on both the size of individual manuscripts and the number of manuscripts published. Who among us has not been pre-emptively told by a commercial publisher to "reduce your manuscript by 10%" completely independent of content considerations?

Noncommercial on-line electronic publication of the type proposed in this paper has the potential of serving the needs of the audience of academic peers far more adequately by making a

broader range of material available to the entire commons of interested researchers at lower cost, in a much more timely manner, and in more accessible form.

This paper offers a conceptual model of an electronic, on-line publishing project for a particular disciplinary or sub-disciplinary commons of researchers and scholars, based upon use of the existing internet, and in particular, the World Wide Web with its opportunities for multi-site hypertext. This model, labeled Traditional Established Scholarly Hypertext (TESH), proposes creation of an international nonprofit scholarly publication commons of nonprofit organization, voluntary action and philanthropy researchers through adaptations of existing scholarly practices to an electronic environment.

Text, Collection, *Oeuvre*, and Canon

A first step in outlining any model of scholarly communication and hypertext is discovering some way to talk sensibly about the conversations and documents of which scholarly communications are composed. Four terms are particularly interesting in this context: text, collection, *oeuvre* and canon. A **text** is a collection of related signs, possibly combined with a collection of related images (pictures, graphs, tables, etc.). As one highly influential typology, three primary types of text are identified by the Standards Graphical Markup Language (SGML): articles, monographs and those objects like conference papers and pamphlets, which I will call "fugitive documents".

Articles appearing in the main journals of our field - **NVSQ**, **Voluntas** or **NML** – are examples of the first type of text. Published books are examples of the second type, and mimeographed, photo-copied or laser-printed papers distributed at a conference session like this one would be examples of the third type of text. Although existing systems for dealing with the first and second types are at least partly in place, reliable or dependable methods for dealing with the third type often prove highly problematic. Thus, creating a manageable inventory of

fugitive documents, particularly conference papers, could be one of the principal initial advantages of the proposals made here.

A **collection** is simply a set of related texts. One familiar collection, for example, is the conference proceedings. Another is the individual journal issue. And a third is the edited book volume known to publishers as a collection.

Borrowing from literary studies, the output of texts by a single author (or group of authors might be termed their *oeuvre* , and the recognized works of all members of a scholarly commons their **canon**. At present in our field there are no notable collections of the *oeuvre* of a single author, and the updated lists of the Yale Working Papers represents one of the few attempts to record a more-or-less integrated group *oeuvre* .

The possibilities of electronic publishing open up new and entirely unprecedented possibilities for handling the *oeuvres* and canon of a field like this one. On-line archives of the entire *oeuvre* of individual scholars like David Horton Smith, Jon Van Til and Robert Bremner are both possible and practical at this very moment. In this, I am thinking not only of their "published" texts (articles and books) but the many conference and working papers that often form such valuable building blocks along the way. Who has not had the experience of thinking long and hard on a problem, only to discover at a later date that someone had already derived a better solution years, or even decades, ago?

Canon As Electronic Universe: The TESH Model

At the level of the canon, it is already possible to visualize an electronic universe in which all the conference papers, working papers, journal articles, book chapters, book manuscripts and other works of the canon of nonprofit organization, voluntary action and philanthropy studies published in the wake of Tocqueville are available online. Indeed, the recent announcement by the Library of Congress of their intent to pursue creation of an electronic library of the published works in their collection makes this possibility very real indeed.

My real purpose here is not to propose the possibility of an electronic canon for our field or to announce movement in that direction. The main outlines of those possibilities are already clear. My real purpose is to propose that we begin to consider the potentials of hypertext integrations of the nonprofit canon as it becomes available. In particular, I wish to propose a model of hypertext which I call Traditionally Established Scholarly Hypertext (TESH), as the basis of the creation of an international system of electronic scholarly archives of monographs tied together by hypertext links through the World Wide Web; and creation of on-line systems of peer-reviews, conference listings, abstracts, electronic conferences and other features.

The TESH model assumes that hypertext applications cannot be fully described at present, and our understandings of the possibilities can be expected to grow and change in coming years, based both upon experience and upon changing technology. Such changes, however, are likely to occur as adjustments within an already apparent paradigm of electronic publishing that emerged in the earliest days of the internet, and has already been well-tested in a variety of scientific fields. Researchers and scholars in the social sciences in general, and nonprofit organization, voluntary action and philanthropy studies in particular, lag far behind in exploiting the potentials of this medium. However, even minimal efforts to make use of it will be amply rewarded – ARNOVA-L is one of a number of examples which can be cited here.

The TESH model is premised, on the assumption that colleges and universities begin to adopt the suggestions of the recent Association of Research Libraries/Mellon Foundation study alluded to above. It is also assumed that the present system of electronic finding aids – including electronic editions of Current Contents, regularly updated CD-ROM bibliographies, etc. – will remain in place and be refined. These comments further assume that something like the present internet – in the form of easily accessible electronic linkages between (theoretically) all colleges and universities – will remain in place.

Although the field is expanding rapidly, the **canon** of nonprofit organization, voluntary action and philanthropy studies is still relatively small and manageable, in comparison with other academic fields of interest. This should make it feasible to initiate an electronic publishing system like the one proposed here with minimal difficulty. Once established, hypertext links of the type proposed here are author-generated, and largely independent of size. Thus, the concept of a hypertext canon is equally as workable for research projects of a few dozen or thousands of researchers.

Hypertext and Scholarly Tradition

There is a good deal of attention in the computer literature today about hypertext. (See attached bibliography) The concept itself is often elaborately presented, but the essential characteristics of hypertext constitute, in my view, an electronic labor saving device for doing which scholars have always had to do: designating links between the texts they are currently working on and other, related texts prepared in the past. What are footnotes and bibliography/reference sections if not primitive, mechanical hypertext links? To use another computer term, are they not pointers which direct the attention of interested parties to other texts which are, in the view of the writer, related?

The rather straightforward insight that teachers, researchers and scholars have been working with mechanical forms of hypertext for centuries carries with it a number of additional insights which are anything but straightforward: It follows from the above, for example, that one can use these traditional means -- footnotes and reference lists -- to iteratively trace a rather complete outline of an entire science. Each reference in a list points in turn to a text which contains its own reference list, which points to still other texts, and so on. Moreover, each list will be to texts earlier in time, as well as more far afield.

Ultimately, one can trace the complete history (and canon) of any particular scientific or scholarly field in this way: Just follow the footnotes! While preoccupation with the canon have occupied

literary scholars for centuries, social scientists have often been content to use only the most recent and relevant texts of their canon to frame present works. This is usually justified with some notion of progressive science, whereby most recent work subsumes and moves beyond earlier work. In the social sciences, where the works of Plato and Aristotle are frequently cited alongside those of Machiavelli, Vico, Marx and Weber, Parsons and Marshall, such progressive assumptions must be viewed with at least some suspicion. However, in the paper and ink world of scholarly publishing, there simply is no practical way to adequately handle the long and variegated pedigrees which particular concepts and ideas develop.

Today's enormous computer storage devices when combined with internetworking and hypertext techniques have the capability to render astonishing new forms of genuine mastery of the full range of this type of conceptual complexity in the social sciences practical for the very first time. We have already begun to move in this direction. A first wave of initiatives in electronic publishing has produced a large number of electronic journals that have sprung up in the past five years. Just this year, commercial publishers have begun issuing CD-ROM versions of books in significant numbers and the Library of Congress has proposed an initiative for creating a vast, international electronic library.

As the Library of Congress proposal makes clear, it is already possible to visualize one vast, worldwide library of electronic storage devices tied together by an internet and accessible to students and scholars everywhere. It is only a relatively small step further to imagine this library as composed of sets of inter-relating texts, rather than the autonomous physical volumes of an existing library. Creating such links, while maintaining the traditional autonomy of a text only requires a kind of unique new document within this *interlibrary* that ties together, in some type of intelligible order an entire set of related references in a way which enables an interested user to make use of these connections.

Some of these tasks can be done using already existing computer indexing procedures: If all the texts were on-line, it

should be a simple indexing task, for example, to locate all of the published references to "class" within nonprofit organization, voluntary action and philanthropy texts. However, the task of separating those which use the term in a Marxian sense from those which use it in a Weberian sense, for example would seem to call for the addition of some level of scholarly and interpretive skill and an entirely new type of electronic document -- conforming in some respects, perhaps, to the concordances of theologians.

As a first level of development, papers and manuscripts representing the products of nonprofit organization, voluntary action and philanthropic research should be made available by authors/copyright holders on-line at a variety of different institutions with internet access. This availability would constitute "publication" in one important sense. Along with this a system of electronic on-line peer review such as that outlined by Harnad (1990, 1994) will be necessary for quality control and error-correction. This system should ideally include all existing conference papers, programs and abstracts, articles, book chapters and monographs on the subject, as well as special publications like the CPVA abstracts.

Authors of papers could -- concurrently with presentation at meetings and conferences-- make their papers available online through site-specific publicly accessible caches based upon Gopher or WWW servers. At the same time, conference organizers and editors of occasional paper series might assume the additional responsibility of making on-line listings of their offerings available, complete with URL's (Universal Resource Locators) for locating them. The principal requirements of this level are internet-accessible hard disk space and the time and energy of "uploading" word processing texts to those disks. Portions of these developments are already in place in psychology, chemistry and other disciplines.

To move beyond merely re-creating the present scholarly publication system in electronic form, however, the resources of the World-Wide Web might also be utilized to "link" these on-line

resources in a variety of traditionally recognized ways: Embedded HyperText Markup Language (HTML)* statements in program listings made available in an ARNOVA electronic archive of conference program listings, for example, could "point" to authors' papers on different archives. Selecting a particular citation from a conference listing would immediately (in a matter of seconds) bring a copy of the full text of that paper to the viewer's workstation from the remote archive. Similarly, the text retrieved could contain two levels of HTML-based links: Internal embedded text notes – whether numbered endnotes or Harvard-style author-date-page listings in parentheses – could be linked by HTML statements to the appropriate full citations and/or supplemental discussions at the end of the text. (The built-in variability of type sizes, page lengths, etc. would seem to preclude "footnotes" at the bottom of pages.) Similarly, embedded links within the notes or accompanying citations list, reference listings or bibliography could similarly "call up" in turn those texts.

Such citations would have to conform to some standard notational form, such as the URL's of present e-mail and WWW communications on the internet. This simple skeleton (which models the existing presentation/publication process in most essentials) would give both the inexperienced reader and the established researcher full access to the literature of the field. Moreover, specific software adapted to these purposes – Gopher servers, Fetch, Mosaic, etc. – and search aids – Archie and Veronica servers, et. al. – are already in place on the internet

The principal additional requirement posed by this stage would be preparing HTML-rich documents. Embedding HTML statements in ASCII (text-only) documents is an easily mastered skill for anyone accustomed to manuscript preparation, and word processor modules to facilitate the task can be expected in the near future.

* HTML is a subset of Standard Graphical Markup Language (SGML), widely used by printers, and is easily learned by anyone familiar with the basics of copy editing -- which probably includes most authors of journal articles and books .

The resulting electronic system of publishing would have a number of built-in advantages: It would, for example, make it possible for researchers to present their work to relevant groups of colleagues more frequently than the current format of annual conference permits. Such a system would also offer individual instructors or research groups at any internet-connected institution the opportunity to create their own on-line readers incorporating the latest available work – something like the present copy center course pack – simply by putting together a separate HTML document (or "page") in the form of a Table of Contents with embedded links.

Space-Independence

A major advantage of moving toward such a system of electronic publication would be that it overcomes many of the regional, national and geographic boundaries and distance limits of the present paper-bound system in relatively cost-effective ways. This would also "level the playing field" to some extent, by allowing those at distant or less well-funded institutions to participate more fully in the collective enterprise of research. The World Wide Web truly is an international system, whereby distribution of a paper from Australia to West Virginia is as simple, straightforward and timely as distribution from San Francisco to Berkeley.

In addition, Web publication on the Internet would also significantly expand the possibilities of presentation beyond the limits of paper and ink. "Notes", for example, could as easily contain photographs, full-color artwork or illustrations, or even audio /video excerpts of collected "data" from meetings, interviews, etc., as the more conventional text and tables. Imagine, for example, an archive on board meetings with 30-second to 5-minute video clips illustrating various forms of board behavior linked to the latest research findings on boards.

On-line hypertext would also enable a broader range of types of scholarly publication: Commentaries, for example, in which particular scholars offer their thoughts on the meanings of a range

of works would be much more feasible (and publishable) than at present. Various forms of index, from the simple to the highly sophisticated, also become feasible: A simple Veronica* search, for example, might uncover all of the on-line manuscripts making reference to "nonprofit management". Or, someone might create an index in which empirical research reports are linked to the INDEPENDENT SECTOR typology of tax-exempt entities.

Finally, it should be possible on this basis also to build genuine reference libraries of the classic texts that make up the canon of nonprofit organization, voluntary action and philanthropy studies. Relevant works by Aristotle, Plato, Augustine, Benedict, Maimonides, Tocqueville, the Statute of Charitable Uses, Andrew Carnegie, Adam Smith, Cotton Mather, Emerson, and many others are already in the public domain and await only suitable electronic preparation. CD-ROM versions of some of these works have already begun to appear, but in light of the above, appropriately offered on-line versions would seem to be more appropriate.

Conclusion

Since this paper is an attempt to initiate a dialogue, I have made no serious effort here to locate or discuss the downsides or limitations of the use of hypertext in a system of on-line scholarly publishing. My purpose here is admittedly polemical and partisan. I assume that there are plenty of practical people within ARNOVA willing and eager to point up the hazards and limitations of what I am suggesting. I leave it to them to do so. (Therein, perhaps, lies one next step in the dialogue I proposed at the beginning.) Although there may be plenty of pitfalls associated with movement toward an international system of on-line publication using hypertext, I hope I have also made clear that there are enormous opportunities and possibilities which might open up through this avenue. Let us continue to explore both.

* Veronica is the name of a type of public domain search software used on the internet to query Gopher servers.

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