

The Poem

He Wrote

With His

Life

THE POEM HE WROTE WITH HIS LIFE

— Austin Meredith

“My life has been the poem I would have writ,
But I could not both live and utter it.”

Signature Edition

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Following the death of Jesus Christ there was a period of readjustment that lasted for approximately one million years.

-Kurt Vonnegut, THE SIRENS OF TITAN




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Thoreau at prayer



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What we're up to

There's an adage in press offices, "News is something that someone, somewhere, wants to keep out of the paper. All this other stuff is advertising." In putting together this chronology/contexture of the life and times of Henry David Thoreau, my test for inclusion of various 19th-Century news items could not be "Did HDT hear about and react to this event" because use of such a criterion would have rendered the context of his life unintelligible to those readers without excellent memories and previous lengthy study in the historical background. My test has been "Is this the sort of detail which would have been of interest to HDT, or is there some Thoreau enthusiast, somewhere, who will be irritated by having their nose rubbed into this?"

Our story is an inner one. This is a biography of Henry David Thoreau's mentality. We are here laying hold as much as possible of outward events, where they have been preserved, in order by means of them to situate the life of his soul.

Thoreau commented on November 17, 1850 that if a person should neglect to read the DAILY TIMES, government would need to go down on its knees to him, as that would be the only treason in those days. He was fulminating against a lackey political press and against a government preoccupied with vicious trivia, but, also, he was fulminating against us. For as he pointed out on April 1st of the next year, we are not a religious people but we are a nation of politicians. We do not read the Bible but do heed the ministrations of the orators in our daily papers. "But how many of these preachers preach the truth." In his early sermon "WHAT SHALL IT PROFIT" Thoreau would declare

"Read not the Times. Read the Eternities."

So one way to conceptualize this thing I have thought to do is to create the kind of non-news paper of which Thoreau would approve. —Instead of a recyclable newspaper a "God's-eye Newspaper," if you will, looking down upon this planet with more complete information that had been available locally at a particular time, in which the editor might function more or less as the deity's arched eyebrow. What I offer that we should do is take the materials in the chronologies of this contexture, as they are developed and amplified, and create an on-call, real-time, interactive new type of retrospective "newspaper," rememberable rather than forgettable because correctable instead of dispensable. I would propose that we utilize the font styles of the letterhead of the LONDON TIMES of Thoreau's 1850s period, and entitle our electronic retrospective newspaper, ETERNAL TIMES. Under the logo, we might carry as our motto

"READ NOT THE TIMES. READ THE ETERNITIES." — Henry David Thoreau.

It is an adage, that "yesterday's newspaper wraps today's garbage." That's a no-brainer because obviously we know things today that we didn't know yesterday. But do you suppose it inevitable, that yesterday's newspaper is only useful for wrapping up today's garbage? —Or, is that an artifact of the manner in which we have been dropping yesterday's newspaper into the dustbin of history? I would suggest that the reason is, that nobody had ever taken the trouble to keep yesterday's newspaper up to date. But what if we went to that trouble? What if yesterday's newspaper were somehow to be kept up to date with what we have more recently been learning about yesterday? If we took the trouble to do that, we'd need to use something else to wrap up our garbage, because today's copy of yesterday's newspaper would contain hot info about yesterday, that simply hadn't been available yesterday. Granted, in the era of paper, in the era of yellowing newsprint, there was no way to keep yesterday's newspaper up to date — but this is not the era of yellowing newsprint, this is the era of the ever-refreshing computer screen. Electronic "newspapers," efforts such as this one, **can** be kept up to date!



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I offer that the key concept here is the concept “newspaper.” The chronology files of the Kouroo Contexture are intended not to be a **newspaper** of the times, but a **newpaper** of the times. So, how does this **newpaper** differ from an existing **newspaper**? Our newspaper of today as we have learned to use it and lose it, is perused once and then is of value at best as a frozen record or as a wrapper for an individual portion of fish and chips. It had been a snapshot of a particular day in our national life, but in it everything is and will ever remain frozen in terms of what little we knew then about what was currently going down, and what we could conceive then, and what our values were then. The problem with this “newspaper” approach is that on a particular day, such as today for one fine instance, we have not yet learned everything we need to know about today’s events and we are being constrained by our current mindset and all our current blind-spots. We only ever know, on a given day, what we have been able to find out as of that date and what we have been able to accept as of that date. Unfortunately life, which must be lived forward, is understandable only backward. We will have a much better appreciation of today’s news on this anniversary one decade from now and then we will have a somewhat different appreciation of today’s news as of this anniversary one lifetime from now. So, you see, the difference between a newspaper and a newspaper is that in an internet newspaper of the sort that I have been creating in this Kouroo Contexture, we continue to update the news of today in accordance with what we find out only later, and in accordance with what we can conceptualize only later, and in accordance with what we come to value only later. Today’s newspaper is a mere snapshot of today. Tomorrow’s newspaper, by way of radical contrast, is a constant work-in-revision, one that never winds up carpeting the birdcage not only because it is never pressed onto enormous rolls of the cheapest possible woodpulp using biodegradable soy-based inks, but also because is constantly and forever being reworked to incorporate our better second thoughts and hindsight and growing experience.

The time of Thoreau’s life roughly corresponded to the period in the life of the United States of America, in which we were passing from a belief, that **our success had demonstrated that we USers had discovered a superior idea of the nature and function of government, and that this superior idea was destined to sweep all other ideas of government from the face of the earth**, to a somewhat different but somewhat similar belief, that **our success had demonstrated that we USers were of a superior race and that this superior race, or our advantaged segment of this superior race, was destined to sweep all other races from the face of the earth**. One of my objectives is to explore how Thoreau understood, and how he dealt with, this transition in the legitimation structure of his compatriots. To what extent was he aware that we were undergoing this transition? How did it sadden him? In what mode did he conceptualize it?

In anthropology now, the term “thick description” refers to a dense accumulation of ordinary information about a culture, as opposed to abstract or theoretical analysis. It means observing the details of life until they begin to coagulate or cohere into an interpretation.... I’d like to see thick description make a comeback. Apart from sheer sensuous pleasure, it gives you the comforting feeling that you’re not altogether adrift, that at least you have an actual context to enter and real things to grapple with. The protectors of the environment are a powerful group in the United States. Perhaps they should extend their concern to the country of the imagination.

— Anatole Broyard, New York Times Book Review, “About Books: Rereading and Other Excesses,” March 3, 1985.

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We have all noticed that one of the strategies employed in the creation of the canon of established “great literature,” and of “greatness” in general, is to insist that the literature “stand on its own feet” *sui generis*, that is, that its content can be surrounded only by the howling wilderness of the recipient’s ignorance of its context. This is not just a matter of taking the easier path, it is a matter of outlawing the harder path. My reaction is that, when someone says something, what is said is meaningful in contrast with the myriad other things which the author might have chosen to say instead, but which the author did not choose to say. Which indicates that, if you have no idea what the range of possibilities available to the author were, then the author was speaking a language which you have not yet learned, and you may of course memorize what the author said but you are fooling yourself if you suppose you will begin to understand it. If you think that there is some sort of irreducible commonality to all this culture stuff, so that the alternative possibilities are omnipresent, and so that the alternative possibilities that occur to you when you read the canonical text must be identical with, or must at least be an accurate subset of, the alternative possibilities that were available to the author, then what colors are the skies on your planet? In other words, get real. In other words, you are to literature in general what the fundamentalist is to the Bible. Your motto is, whether you know it or not, “Impoverished reading is the only reading.”



“A text without a context is a pretext.”
— Robert Walter Funk¹



We tend to disregard, in our ignorance and our wilfulness, the role a historical text actually played within the context of its origin, and read into it the meanings which we currently need to obtain. This is termed the problem of “eisegesis,” for which the solution is defined to be “exegesis,” allowing the document to speak on its own terms. The new and novel uses which a text may serve are properly somewhat constrained, when one has properly taken into consideration previous uses of that text, and when one has been required to state explicitly that those previous uses were mistakes and to specify clearly and precisely the manner in which the previous users were mistaken. It is my expectation that the siting of the [WALDEN; OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS](#) document within this context of its eight successive versions, within the context of Thoreau’s journal and his other writings, within the context of his life, within the context of life in New England in the first half of the 19th Century, will create a new standard in exegesis.

Stanley Cavell has pointed at occasions on which we are capable of recognizing that we are not only **reading** WALDEN but that we were from the first **already** reading it. “The only book we are to be given is this one, and it is now passing in front of us, **being** written as it were.” My gloss on his profound remark would be to comment that I see many readers, in their consumption of WALDEN, supposing falsely that this activity in which they engage is utterly separate from the production of WALDEN, which was something done once for all and by somebody else. “Dead white man producer-of-cultural-materials vs. yours truly the 20th-Century consumer-of-cultural-materials” or something like that. Well, I say there has to be a payoff of some sort, or people wouldn’t be willing to believe something so stupid as that. What’s the payoff? “Follow the money,” as Deep Throat once said in a Washington parking-garage. In a real world in which reading is a form of writing, I would offer, to suppose otherwise can only be explained as offering the benny of the reader’s enabling himself or herself to shirk real responsibilities. We are dealing with an author who has not painted “No Admittance” on his gate. He would gladly tell us all he knows and then some. How different from our usual experience, what an utterly terrifying situation! —Hell, if we’re not careful we might find out something we need not to know.

1. Robert Walter Funk. JESUS AS PRECURSOR. Sonoma CA: Polebridge Press. Revised edition, 1994



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How to deal with this? —Oh, yeah, easy. Where the author has failed to paint a “No Admittance” sign, we will paint one for him, by pretending something stupid, like that there is a great gulf fixed between him and us, between his production of his text and our consumption of his text, between his writing of it and our reading of it, between putting something of value into a book and getting something of value out of a book, between the 19th Century and the 20th Century, between being mere history and being actual, between being dead and being alive.

So one way to look at this textspace which I have created is to view it as a prolonged attempt to pin [WALDEN: OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS](#) to the detailed 19th-Century context of Thoreau’s life in this universe and simultaneously to violate all barriers between Thoreau’s life in his context and our own lives in our own contemporary universe. Again and again this transgression will be equivalent to going “Hey, like, it’s the same universe, so get real! This is not a feel-good piece of escapist literature for a day at the beach that you’re dealing with here, folks.”



“The inheritance from the master becomes, not only his additions to the world’s record, but for his disciples the entire scaffolding by which they were erected.”



— Dr. Vannevar Bush, “As We May Think,”
The Atlantic Monthly, September 1945

Thoreau’s writing heads for openness rather than closure. Therefore, in interpreting what he has to offer in a passage, the first rule is that one must in some way, while explicating, preserve the openness of his comment and entirely forego seeking to demonstrate one’s mastery by replacing that openness by one’s own definitive interpretation with closure. The reason for this is clear: there’s only one window of opportunity for communication and that opening is an opening that snaps shut the instant one’s audience is able to decide whether or not they “agree with you.” The instant your audience decides that you are “wrong,” they’ve stopped thinking about what you are attempting to offer to them, and they’ve gotten 100% of the benefit they are going to be able to get. But, —and this is seldom recognized— even assent is a cheap and shoddy thing at best. The instant your audience decides that you are “right,” they’ve likewise stopped thinking about what you are attempting to offer to them, and they’ve likewise gotten 100% of the benefit they are going to be able to get. This is because both disagreement and agreement function as techniques for the avoidance of thought. What the effective communicator composes, therefore, are verbal performances and text strings which effectively interfere with such techniques of avoidance. Thoreau well knew this, and trained himself in the construction of prose remarkable for the lucid obscurity and penetrable impenetrability of its open-endedness. Effective commentary upon a Thoreauvian trope thus either demonstrates the lucidity of Thoreau’s obscurity while leaving it obscure (as one might do in the case of a parable such as the hound, the bay horse, and the turtledove) or else replaces a 19th-Century obscurity which due to the passage of time has become archaic and has quite lost its lucidity with a more current, and hopefully even more comprehensive, up-to-the-minute 20th-Century trope which is also marked by the characteristic Thoreauvian penetrable impenetrability.



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I.A. Richards has quipped somewhere, that a book is a machine to think with. I would offer that although this has not always been obvious to all, this has always been quite literally true, and that the truth of such quips will be made obvious to all, once it has become a standard part of one's acculturation to accumulate not less than a thousand hours of experience in working with one or another of those capable books which we are coming to refer to as computerized textbases. For a computerized textbase, as an extension and elaboration of book technology, is nothing if it is not a machine to think with. In 19th-Century book form, as William C. Johnson, Jr. has explained,

A reading of WALDEN can follow only one well-marked path, though it must admit other paths exist, and venture occasionally off its course, if only to come back with a clearer sense of where it is going. There will be readings of Thoreau's masterpiece for as long as it stimulates and challenges us. But readers must chart their own most promising course. Thoreau admonishes each of us to "find and pursue **his own way**," and not the way of someone else.... At the outset, I ask only the reader's seriousness and patience (no small request) and perhaps a willingness to accept Thoreau's version of the perennial saw that one must first become lost in order to be found, that is, to find oneself.

I have belatedly looked into a textbook titled LITERATURE IN AMERICA and have learned from this heavy stack of glossy, clay-coated paper that WALDEN, since it is a book, is like other books. It is not only rectangular in shape like other books, but, it is a "piece of literature," to be evaluated not in terms of its subject matter but by COMPARISON and contrast with other such "pieces of literature." Much, it turns out, has been written about WALDEN as a parody of the captivity-and-escape narrative genre, as a parody of an economics treatise or a gardening book, as a parody of a book of the seasons, and even, perceptively, as a parodization of autobiographical writing. Nothing, I think, however, has been written about WALDEN as a parody of a book, that is, as a takeoff on the very idea of literature or on the very idea of creating an American literature.

WALDEN is, in the terminology of Robert Frost, an extended metaphor: "one thing in terms of another." The one thing is a spiritual thing, difficult to present because so intimately obscure and difficult to receive because inordinately dangerous. The another thing is a physical thing, ostensibly a book, rectangular just as other books, ostensibly about a retreat to a shanty on a pond, a retreat from danger to a spiritual safe haven. It is not about American literature, or about literature in America, in the sense that that heavy stack of glossy, clay-coated paper is about that or in any other sense, and an attempt to make it seem so is an evasion of it.

What one learns through such studies is worth not knowing.

I seek to reappropriate the reading, not the site of the reading. (I once watched as a geodesic pod was being airlifted by a Sikorsky flying crane, to a remote and pristine wooded lot, that had been constructed on a ruinous flatland among industrial wastes. This is my model for the sort of reappropriation of WALDEN; OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS which I envision.) Part of the impact which I hope this contexture will have will be the lifting, as if by cable from a helicopter hoist, of WALDEN out of this context of literature in America in which it has been situated by generations of professors, and the relocation of it to a silent forested lakeside site of the mind, where we can again look out across its own vistas.



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During the years in which this textbase was unpublished, I occasionally encountered a snide question from editors who wanted not to have to look at it, as to “when it would be finished.” I would be put to the embarrassment of having to explain, as they turned away, speaking into their silence and literally to their retreating backs, that it is a mistake to suppose of anything of this nature, that it could ever be “finished,” or that it needed to be in some sense “finished” before publication could be considered. How could they comprehend that the erections with which they were familiar and on the basis of which they were passing judgment were puny, and easily handled? Even *MOBY-DICK*, a mere book rather than a textbase, was unfinished, cf. Chapter 32:

But I now leave my cetological System standing thus unfinished, even as the great cathedral of Cologne was left, with the crane still standing upon the top of the uncompleted tower. For small erections may be finished by their first architects; grand ones, true ones, ever leave the copestone to posterity. God keep me from ever completing anything.

But then, in its day, for reasons such as this, *MOBY-DICK* was anything but well-regarded by America’s editors and publishers.

To paraphrase the poet Wallace Stevens, such a computer textbase offers those who cannot live in 19th-Century Concord, itself, a chance to live at least in “the description of the place.” Is it honorable and honest, to live in the description of the place rather than in the place itself? Well, one might allege with some justification, we always *do* do this! What is dishonorable and dishonest about the preoccupation of the current generation of Thoreau scholars with 19th-Century Concord is not so much their attempt to pretend to themselves that they are living in the description of another place at another time rather than in the place they are actually living and at the time at which they are actually living, as it is that they are making a rather poor job of it. All too often their imagination of 19th-Century Concord amounts to the masturbation fantasy of a world in which non-white people and non-male people are present as topics of conversation, in order to give white males something to condescend to, and in regard to which to express—to each other—acceptable and correct and benign attitudes of tolerance and understanding, attitudes which reveal for the benefit of other white males that we white males are really fine people. So I would want to point out that this contexture’s preoccupation with another place and another time does not subsist in a vacuum, but exists as a valuable corrective, constantly defeating by its very elaborateness and complexity a simplistic tendency which we possess. In the elaborate Concord described in this contexture, people are hanged for curious crimes, people commit suicide for the most understandable of reasons, males and females occur side by side, whites and non-whites occur side by side, etc. The opportunity for self-congratulatory fantasization is, if anything, much reduced. The opportunity for people to read about Thoreau’s oration upon the execution of John Brown to a rather select group of Concordians without needing to recognize, for instance, that just down the street some other select Concordians were at that same moment hanging and burning an effigy of John Brown — that is the sort of thing which is much reduced.



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What does a text do?

Michael Hanne, in 1994 in his *THE POWER OF THE STORY: FICTION AND POLITICAL CHANGE* (Providence RI: Berghahn Books), juxtaposed several texts which have had controversial histories of reception due to what is widely thought to be their intervention, intended or unintended by their authors, in major political events of their times, in an inquiry into the relationship between writing and the making of history:

- **1852:** Ivan Turgenev's *A SPORTSMAN'S NOTEBOOK*, a text which supposedly sponsored Tsar Alexander II's emancipation of the serfs of Russia. Hanne argues that it was not by including but by omitting from his portrayal of serfdom those peasant serfs who were in private hands or were settled on state lands (who in fact were the major groups of Russian serfs of the period), concentrating instead upon types of serfs who were merely marginal to the system of serfdom, that Turgenev was able to generate sympathetic responses from conservative as well as progressive readers. His neglect to suggest any specific solutions to serfdom was what enabled the Tsar to contemplate the serfs in a tranquil manner and to see this publication as an ally to his plan of strengthening autocracy through a controllable appearance of reform.
- **1852:** Harriet Beecher Stowe's *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN*, a text which "became, itself, an actual subject of dispute between Northerners and Southerners" (page 93), with its sentimentalist depictions of American slaves polarized readers who were abolitionists and readers who were pro-slavery, thus contributing to the "massive redistributions of dichotomies which always occur around the beginning of a war, whereby the old oppositions are ... largely suppressed in favour of the construction of that massive new ideological opposition between 'Us' and the new 'Other,' i.e. the Enemy" (page 107). Had such dichotomies not been establishable "the Civil War could not have occurred" (page 107).
- **1933:** Ignazio Silone's *FONTAMARA*, a text which, among European and American readers, achieved political influence in the 1930s as a literal, factual chronicle of peasant resistance against fascist suppression under Mussolini (whereas Italian readers read the novel more metaphorically, as part of a familiar and accessible folk-tale tradition, while 3rd-world readers such as those in India and Brazil tended to appropriate the novel for their own social and political struggles while generally ignoring its Italian background).
- **1962:** Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *ONE DAY IN THE LIFE OF IVAN DENISOVICH*, a text which, when endorsed by Nikita Khrushchev for his own limited political ends, unleashed a host of consequences far exceeding what Khrushchev had been envisioning.
- **1988:** Salman Rushdie's *THE SATANIC VERSES*, a text in regard to which the author had proclaimed but two weeks prior to its publication that "it would be absurd to think that a book can cause riots," which in fact resulted in his having to go into hiding to avoid being killed.

Including two texts from Thoreau's period, he included no mention of Thoreau's texts, presumably because in the present state of Thoreau scholarship their potential for controversy in reception has been masked to him.

How are we to determine in what manner and to what extent literature has influenced political decisions and happenings such as the supposed abolitions of serfdom in Russia and of slavery in the United States, the popular resistance to fascism in the Europe of the 1930s and 1940s, the eventual repudiation of labor camps in the Soviet Union, and the recent surge of Islamic fundamentalism? Hanne failed to discover anywhere in these controversial books any precise description of the features of the political realities they supposedly have conjured; instead, he found such works tended to be atypical, sentimentalized, ambiguous, or deeply metaphorical. How, then, have they been of direct influence? Hanne was drawn to investigate the often unpredictable multiple uses to which a literary work may be put at specific times: "My interest is in seeing what sorts of meaning large numbers of people of quite varied educational and economic background have found in certain fictional texts at moments of acute historical –and sometimes personal– stress" (page xx). Precisely what Roland Barthes would have



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discarded as the obvious—the “readerly” text, the text that everyone seems to be able to follow—is what for Hanne has been a fascinating point of entry. The obvious “readerly” text that Barthes would have discredited as the mythified “work” is none other than “the story” itself. Accordingly, it is the apparent accessibility, graspability, and portability of the story that gives rise to the most complicated power conflicts. The interest of the story does not lie in its transformability into a palimpsest-like “text” in the poststructuralist sense for a select audience; rather it lies in the story’s apparent closure and apparent reducibility to something readily recognizable, usable, and thus mobilizable at moments of social crises by its less critical and more general readership: “on some occasions, it is a relatively **closed** reading that has given the work its political sharpness, its subversive quality. (As the interactional psychotherapists and guerrilla fighters know well, an apparently **reductive** intervention may be most effective at inducing change)” (page 32). Instead of an avant-garde “production” of the text, therefore, it was the often erroneous or misguided “consumption” of the text that constituted Hanne’s object of investigation, for, as he commented, “the impact of several of the works I study resulted from the fact that readers in large numbers **read** them as conveying vital new information about social and political conditions, even if subsequent readings make clear that they mirrored reality in a distorted or incomplete manner” (page 25). Instead of the notion that fiction causes political change, or vice versa, fiction is now understood as a special kind of player in history — a pawn at some moments, a joker at others, but all in all “a kind of Trojan horse, whose subversive force only bursts out once the work has gained initial admission to its readers’ mental world” (page 56). Fiction is always armed with possibilities (i.e., potential and power) that are never fully controllable by politicians. As is shown in the case of Rushdie, the manner in which a work can become enmeshed in or maneuvered by political happenings may never be fully anticipatable even by its author.

I would suggest that Hanne has allowed for the return of historical materials in literary readings, demonstrating how the making of history is by no means straightforward or separable from the literary. In fact, the old question of literariness—what makes literature literature—receives an unexpected new formulation in this book which reimagines literariness as a “slippery” kind of encounter between fiction and history, but as an encounter one could know to exist only if already in its grip. If “close reading” is what Hanne advocated, he advocated not only the close reading of texts but also close reading of the slippages and interactions of these texts with history, slippages and interactions that ultimately constitute such texts as not only literary but also historical events. I am interested in extending this sort of reading to Thoreau’s texts as well.

The Present is Multimedia Hypertext, the Future Transclusion

We have been cherishing our cultural treasures, but not adequately. They are, in some cases, in tatters, due to lack of proper mending. Upon close inspection streaks of tarnish are apparent. Some of our inheritance has been forever lost while much of it lies utterly unappreciated except by specialists.

The reason for this neglect is apparent. We have lacked a technique by which individuals could accept responsibility for caring for and for carrying forward our common heritage. The best of which we have been capable, to date, has been the scholarly apparatus by which source texts and collected editions are recirculated in canonical form through the marketplace.

That neglect is about to be corrected. The name of the correction apparatus is the Stack of the Artist of Kouroo. Technically, to provide a very brief overview, the apparatus for properly cherishing our cultural treasures, mending their tatters and polishing away their tarnish, is an outgrowth of computer database technology temporarily known as a “hypertextspace” in order to cope with the temporary presence of an conceptual model known as “the filesystem made up of folders containing files.” This conceptual model amounts to a misconception but it is one that is at present being taken for granted. Although it’s actually not what you want or need, presently you are taking this granted:



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"By and large, institutions and social structures and climates of opinion are not the results of what people want and believe, but of what they take for granted."

— Ernest Gellner, 1956



This entirely inadequate conceptual model, hypertext, will disappear early in the 21st Century, and at some point soon to arrive we will be able to dispense with such a buzzword in favor of the terminology "nodes and links."² The important, lasting element involves no popular and temporary substitute-buzzwords such as "hypertextspace," but involves instead that in this new sort of technical apparatus, the source texts are to be "viewed" through serieses of consciously and carefully selected "filters."

For an instance, hypothetically, the Sermon on the Mount. The source texts for this cultural treasure ought to be photographed and the photographs digitized and inserted into such a resource as the Kouroo contexture as exceedingly detailed images. Each such image ought to be provenanced by a careful record of where the originary source materials are stored, precisely who has access to them, under what circumstances they may be accessed, and under what circumstances and with what technology the stored images, publicly available across the Internet, have been captured.

The second layer of the contexture, in this hypothetical case of the Sermon on the Mount, would consist of a rendition of the marks upon these source manuscripts, into a standard Koiné Greek character set. Each such rendition ought to be provenanced by citing the scholar who has made the interpretation, and when and where and how the extrapolation has been made. The scholar's notes upon his or her extrapolation ought to be stored in an attached "ancilia" file.

Anyone who cares to do so will be entitled to set up a supplementary rendition file, in competition with this rendition file when it exists. The requirements would be only that such a contributor completely provenance the supplied alternative rendition, and attach his or her own "ancilia" file arguing the justifications for this and attempting to make clear the shortcomings of the other renditions.

The third layer of the contexture ought to be a hypertext-linked set of filters attempting to resolve any discrepancies which appear within the selected source documents. Again, anyone who desired to expend the effort ought to be welcomed into the fray to sponsor his or her alternative reading with an alternative file of arguments and justifications. The technical term for the computer software which makes this sort of thing possible is "transclusion." By transclusion a document may be brought forward and forward, and interpreted and reinterpreted in successive layers, and remain a view of the same originary document in such a manner that any revisions made in the original file automatically update all subsequent reinterpretation files.

The fourth layer of the contexture ought to be a hypertext-linked set of filters applying language-translation rules to the consolidated Koiné Greek base text, in order to transform it into equivalent Latin, modern Greek, English, Hebrew, a reconstructed Aramaic, and other languages. Attached to each such translation filter ought to be a complete provenance, indicating the translator and the circumstances of the translation. Also attached would of course be an argumentation folder providing space for the citation of the reasons pro and con for the various language-transformation rules applied. As before, anyone should be entitled to enter the fray by providing a competitive translation-filter.

2. We should dismiss the current buzzword "multimedia" in the same breath with this buzzword "hypertext." All this concept means is that for a long time we've been stuck with an entirely inadequate publication system known as "printing," in which sounds and images have been vastly more difficult to render than were written words. All "multimedia" means is that these limitations of the publication technology, its biases in favor of the written word, are now being eliminated. —But such a systematic bias in favor of the written word was never tolerable in the first place!



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If for instance I should come to the conviction that the version of the Lord's Prayer preserved in these materials should no longer be translated in accordance with the metaphor of obligation, as in "forgive us our debts," and should no longer be translated in accordance with the metaphor of trespass, as in "forgive us our transgressions," but, in the post-Darwin era, should be reinterpreted in terms of a new paradigm which has now become available and generally understandable, the paradigm of "interference behavior" which is not species specific, then what I should do is provide to the Stack of the Artist of Kouroo a supplementary translation in which I offer an additional layer of filtering, a layer in which "debts/transgressions" is altered-without-being-altered so it appears in this view ("view" here is a technical term) to read "interferences with the lives of others":

Forgive us the manner in which we interfere with the lives of others to the extent, and only to the extent, to which we are able ourselves to forgive others for the manner in which they interfere with us, our desires, our agendas. Be only as generous with us as we are able to be with other of your creatures.

Again, I must attach to this proffered new filter module an arguments file in which I take my best shot at explaining why translations once considered to be normative are no longer the best available. In this file, in the cited instance, I should describe how the conceptions of the theory of evolution have now come to permeate out consciousness, so that we desire to correct a previous narrowness which we have come to term "speciesism," so that this new "interference behavior" trope in the Lord's Prayer allows us to construe that we have obligations toward non-humans as well as toward humans.

Those who are making use of this contexture will need to make use of it by a careful comparison of the various competing filters which it offers for the source documents. They will need to decide, for instance, whether they want to slip my filter into the stack of filters through which they view the Lord's Prayer, or not. This they will do as part of the same procedure by which they decide whether to use the koine-greek2english-english filter or the koine-greek2american-english filter, etc.³

3. Of course, there are those whom this would confuse. Institutionalists such as those who benefit from the authoritarian "religious" hierarchies, and from the established "educational" systems and their controlled disciplines, who have a need to forestall general confusion, will desire to maintain their own authorized gateways to such materials, in which the filters considered appropriate for their institutionalized subjects are pre-imposed and in which the filters considered inappropriate for their institutionalized subjects are pre-dispensed-with.

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Making this big world be a smaller one

In [John Guare](#)'s 1990 play *Six Degrees of Separation*, when a well-to-do couple get involved with a young hustler one of the characters comments "I read somewhere that everybody on this planet is separated by only six other people. Six degrees of separation. Between us and everyone else on this planet.... A native in a rain forest. A Tierra del Fuegan. An Eskimo. I am bound to everyone on this planet by a trail of six people. It's a profound thought.... How every person is a new door, opening up into other worlds."



Actually, this concept of six degrees of separation had been imagined during the first years of this century by Guglielmo Marconi, the creator of wireless distance communication. Then this idea was explored in the form of a short story in 1929, by [Frigyes Karinthy](#) in "Chains." Then in May 1967 a Yale psychology lecturer, [Stanley Milgram](#), published "The Small World Problem" in *Psychology Today*, the burden of which was that when group of 160 people chosen at random were asked to forward a folder through 1st-name acquaintances and then through their own 1st-name acquaintances until the folder might arrive at its eventual destination—a specific person in a Boston suburb—the average of the chains of intermediate acquaintances was 5. Then on the basis of this small study, the above play was written, and in 1993 there was a movie version which you may have seen.



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The 1967 research has in 2011 been replicated at the University of Milan. The study base this time was a tenth of the world's entire human population, but because it was conducted by means of [Facebook](#), the calculation required only one month. What this larger more recent short Milan statistical study reveals is that the average number of links between any two human beings on this planet is not 6, but somewhere between 4 and 5.

We can demonstrate mathematically that networks of linked nodes can be radically simplified, by the technique of the creation of carefully chosen and arranged master nodes. A few such shortcuts can, for instance, provably take an inefficient Internet mail routing procedure in which the average message is bouncing from node to node four times before successful delivery, and transform it into a supremely efficient mail routing procedure in which the average message is bouncing from node to node only three times before successful delivery, thus exponentially improving the efficiency of that algorithm.⁴

What relevance does this have here, in regard to this “Stack of the Artist of Kouroo” contexture? Am I setting out to enable some trivial cocktail-party game, such as “Six Degrees of Henry David Thoreau”? That Thoreau knew Hawthorne who knew President Pierce who fell off a particular horse in Mexico, thus giving Thoreau and the horse two or three degrees of separation? —Not at all. Also, I am forever encountering folks for whom even a one-link chain stretches things to their breaking point. I think I can fairly caricature these “Thoreau aficionados,” including many of the members of The Thoreau Society, by describing them as having a desire to gaze admiringly into Henry’s eyes (they have among them, for instance, folks who will vehemently and indignantly proclaim to you that Henry’s eyes must have been blue). They typically mistrust what I am up to because I am not confining myself within their world of gazing-admiringly-into-his-eyes but instead am perniciously attempting to look out through Henry’s eyes —critically— upon the world he encountered that he attempted to describe for us and attempted to provide advice and counsel for — in order better to understand that world in order better to understand the advice and counsel Henry was struggling to provide. I’m looking at 2-link chains, 3-link chains, 4-link chains, and they don’t get this; I seem to them to be attempting to commit the sin of distracting the gaze of their base, the Thoreau admirers, *away* from their 0-link connections with their imaginary playmate.

We have a great problem of communication within this disparate culture of ours. In this culture of ours, when you approach someone to have a serious interaction, you never can know in advance what sort of communication you will be able to accomplish. What words in the English language does this person you are approaching know, and what words such as “serendipity” will this person mistake for some other word such as “sublimity,” thus totally evading the serious intent of your communication? Will this person know of the existence of Harpers Ferry as a town in West Virginia, will this person know that West Virginia is different from Virginia but has only been separated since our civil war, and if not then how much can you say to this person about Captain John Brown and the prospect of race war? The recommendation that the mathematicians make is that if some node is more or less randomly chosen as a primary node, and intimate connections are drawn from this node to various other nodes which are otherwise greatly isolated in the network, then the entire network can be drawn much more tightly together. Cultural communications problems can be greatly eased.

It used to be, that this function of nodes of common knowledge was accomplished by a standard education in which all educated persons could be presumed to share. At one time all educated persons, for instance, could be expected to know a bit of Latin and a bit of Greek, and to be able to maintain at a minimum some sort of discourse on the *ILLIAD* of Homer, the *ODES* of Horace, etc. At a later time all educated persons could be expected to know of a set of classic works of literature, such as [Nathaniel Hawthorne](#)’s *THE SCARLET LETTER* and [Edgar Allan Poe](#)’s *THE PURLOINED LETTER*, whether they had or had not actually cracked open any such books. That function of the classic texts has however now been largely destroyed in the process of multicultural education. Don’t get me wrong, I’m glad we now have multicultural education — yet this improvement has not only been opening up our culture, it has also been tearing our culture apart into subcultures which have become unable to mutually recognize one another.

4. For examples of this, please consult the article by Dr. Steven Strogatz and Duncan Watts in the June 4, 1998 issue of [Nature](#). The examples they have chosen for analysis are the quarter of a million movie stars listed in the Internet Movie Database (the popular pastime called “Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon” is based upon this), the electricity-delivery grid covering the western portion of the USA, and the 282 neurons that coordinate the functioning of the *Caenorhabditis elegans*, one of your simpler worms.



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Thus this database or contexture. Its purpose is to draw us all back together, by taking this one person, more or less randomly chosen, about whose life and works we happen to know a very great deal, and making this one person accessible as a primary link and node between all other nodes of our cultural existence. By creating Henry David Thoreau as everyone's little brother, we can use Henry David Thoreau as our intermediary, one to another, and hopefully create a culture which has not only the benefit of being multicultural but also the benefit of being again cohesive and intelligible.

Well, that's the plan. Can you do your part, will you help make this happen?



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In regard to transclusion

The library is dead, long live the library. In some strong central sense, what has been true of the Talmud is now going to be true of the Internet:

It is incumbent on every scholar to add to the Talmud and to contribute to the work, although it can never be finally completed.

- Adin Steinsaltz, *THE ESSENTIAL TALMUD* (NY: Bantam, 1976, page 273)

It is to be understood that the capabilities of the computer software include the capability of taking the specified source document(s) and the specified filter(s) and automatically generating a resultant screen display in “final” form, more or less according to the manner in which, when one picks up a printed copy of the Bible, the scholarly apparatus and the publishing industry have collaborated to create a printed page in the “final” form. The difference is that the new technology enables the interpretation process to become more sophisticated and more democratic and more problematic.

We are going to raise a generation of readers who are vastly more demanding, and less tolerant of interpretations silently proffered by anonymous others. They are going to be asking “why just this way?” and they are not going to be put aside with general remarks about authority and legitimacy. For them our cultural treasures will constitute a field of play. Their readings will be in transcriptions prepared “on the fly” by the application of serieses of filters to selected source document files made available by live links over the Wide World Web.

And all this will cost less than the present book-publishing apparatus, and will be paid for in real time by the accessing of use charges. In the new database technology it will be possible to move in either direction along a link. For instance, if, in perusing the works of Thérèse of Lisieux, one comes across a reference to the Lord’s Prayer, it will be possible at that end of the link to explore the complete prayer in the format in which it was familiar to her, but at the other end of the link, it will be possible to consider also, not only what use Thérèse of Lisieux made of the prayer, but any comment made about the prayer by any other person. For one would be able to generate a long list of links from the prayer node to any number of cultural figures who have left commentaries upon the prayer, inclusive not only of Joseph of Copertino but also of a young theology student in Georgia who would later assume the revolutionary name “Steel” - Joseph Stalin. Or, for that matter, [Christopher Columbus](#), or [Nicolas Copernicus](#) (sometimes what people fail to say being as revealing as what they do say).

A text which is a mere monument to a battle which has been fought is not, of course, as interesting as a text which constitutes a continuous site of contestation. (Which is why, I suppose, I selected the Lord’s Prayer as my illustration - for its continuing subversive potential.) But without this hypertextual ability to identify the other commentators, commenting upon such texts has been very much like the traditional image of the samurai battle in the fog, with sword slashes to the left and sword slashes to the right but never any awareness of whether one has cut into friend or foe. Within the hypertextspace, by virtue of this new technological capability to follow links and identify one’s fellow extrapolators upon a text, this ages-old fog lifts. One may view the piles of dismembered commentaries which surround each contested cultural site. One may watch as the current generation takes its stances and goes through its moves.

But enough of this military metaphor!

I have found, personally, that by studying a particular document in great detail (I have done this, for instance, in regard to THE BOOK OF JOB, and in regard to [Henry Thoreau’s WALDEN; OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS](#)), one may put oneself in the position of having a touchstone with which to evaluate many other sources. If one knows a very great deal about THE BOOK OF JOB one may come to understand a whole lot about the spirit of Carl Gustav Jung, who once ventured an extrapolation upon this topic. And, if one knows a great deal about WALDEN, one may come to understand a whole lot about the spirits of various Americans who have had their own encounters with this work, such as Professor [Burrhus Frederick Skinner](#), without going to the trouble of studying their other works in any great detail. Touchstones are of great importance as educational “navigation devices,” and our polyglot society presently suffers greatly from the lack of such common cultural denominators.



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Perhaps in conclusion I should point out what the new scheme means, for the concept “source document.” At the present time there are any number of copies of a source document. A scholarly edition of [WALDEN; OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS](#), for instance, such as the current Princeton edition, may be printed off in 100,000 equivalent copies, and go out to 100,000 different users, each of whom may mark up their equivalent-original copy. In the future, there will be only one source file for this document, and everything else, every use, every citation of a fragment, will be a “view” through “filters” into this one original in real time. Thus, if in the future we should ever uncover a manuscript version in which [Thoreau](#) has marked up the “stick/stock” typographical ambiguity in his parable of the Artist of Kouroo, so that “stick” was preferred over “stock,” or “stock” over “stick,” we could apply that correction as a primary filter to the one source document, and that correction would propagate over the entire world’s utilizations of that passage in WALDEN. Automatically, immediately. I have just explained transclusion to you without the use of technical words.

The mechanism by which such updates would be handled would be voluntary subscription to an automated Email notification system. Each time such a correction was made in a source document, all persons accessing that source document would be automatically and immediately notified by an Email message:

You have been accessing the “Artist of Kouroo” parable in the “Conclusion” chapter of [WALDEN](#) by [Henry Thoreau](#) and have subscribed to its automated Email notification list. Please be advised that the scholar responsible for that source document has on DATE supplied an emendation to that document, altering “stick/stock” into “stick.” Refer to ___, ___, and ___ hypertext links. To cancel your subscription to the automated Email notification list for this document, send a return message consisting of the one word “UNSUBSCRIBE,” and nothing else, in the subject line.



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In this new technological setting, the important distinction will not be the one between the original and the copies, in regard to such a concept as “authenticity,” but will be the one between, on the one hand, the source file and the various “views” which are taken through “filters” of said source document, and on the other hand the various disconnected, unascrbed “copies” which may from time to time be made by various individuals for various private purposes. This distinction, rather than being based upon such a concept as “authenticity,” will be based upon the concept of “maintenance.” The important distinction to be made will be the distinction between what is being maintained and what is not. For instance, if what I am writing contains a link to the concluding chapter of WALDEN,

WALDEN: There was an artist in the city of Kouroo who was disposed to strive after perfection. One day it came into his mind to make a staff. Having considered that in an imperfect work time is an ingredient, but into a perfect work time does not enter, he said to himself, It shall be perfect in all respects, though I should do nothing else in my life. He proceeded instantly to the forest for wood, being resolved that it should not be made of unsuitable material; and as he searched for and rejected stick after stick, his friends gradually deserted him, for they grew old in their works and died, but he grew not older by a moment. His singleness of purpose and resolution, and his elevated piety, endowed him, without his knowledge, with perennial youth. As he made no compromise with Time, Time kept out of his way, and only sighed at a distance because he could not overcome him. Before he had found a stock in all respects suitable the city of Kouroo was a hoary ruin, and he sat on one of its mounds to peel the stick. Before he had given it the proper shape the dynasty of the Candahars was at an end, and with the point of the stick he wrote the name of the last of that race in the sand, and then resumed his work. By the time he had smoothed and polished the staff Kalpa was no longer the pole-star; and ere he had put on the ferule and the head adorned with precious stones, Brahma had awoke and slumbered many times. But why do I stay to mention these things? When the finishing stroke was put to his work, it suddenly expanded before the eyes of the astonished artist into the fairest of all the creations of Brahma. He had made a new system in making a staff, a world with full and fair proportions; in which, though the old cities and dynasties had passed away, fairer and more glorious ones had taken their places. And now he saw by the heap of shavings still fresh at his feet, that, for him and his work, the former lapse of time had been an illusion, and that no more time had elapsed than is required for a single scintillation from the brain of Brahma to fall on and inflame the tinder of a mortal brain. The material was pure, and his art was pure; how could the result be other than wonderful?

PEOPLE OF
WALDEN

CANDAHARS?

KALPA?

ARTIST OF KOUROO



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and the word “stick” or the word “stock” is within the context of my hypertext anchor, and my link is a “live” or “maintained” link, then when the consortium of scholars responsible for that source document provides an additional filter by which “stock” is to be glossed as “stick,” I will receive an Email message notifying me of this update - and the text I am citing will, in addition, in my own particular usage of it, also receive the indicated update. How I proceed from that point forward will depend entirely upon the manner in which I react to the proffered update. I may, for instance, well disagree with what the assigned scholars have done with the text, and choose to differ with their newly revised text by constructing my own “retrofilter” by which their “stick” gets altered back again for my views into “stock.”

As may well be imagined, some will be annoyed at this level of scholarly interaction, whereas others, real scholars, may be thrilled. One of the fringe effects of such technology will be that those who are very serious about their participation in our cultural project will, by virtue of their continuous participation, drift toward the center of the endeavor, while those who are unable to sustain interest and momentum will drift into the backwaters. But this is only as it should be.

I would now like to give one concrete example of how this will work out, for the electronic publication of scholarly monographs and reviews of such monographs. In the future, if one publishes a new biography of [Henry Thoreau](#)'s mother [Cynthia Dunbar Thoreau](#), all persons who have been willing to pay for access to that biography will be tabulated, and if a scholarly review is subsequently made of that biography, an Email message will automatically go out and get itself deposited into the mailbox of each such person. The message will provide information as to how to access the review: who prepared it, who vetted it, and what is the charge for access to it if any.

The economies of publication in such a low-cost broadcast medium should be such as to provide, generally, an improved level of remuneration for scholarly authors, at a lower general charge for access. At present, for instance, we may need to pay \$2.⁵⁰ to obtain a copy of a newspaper's literary supplement containing a review we need to access (assuming, of course, that we ever learn of the existence of this review we need to see, which of course at the present time is quite problematic), whereas in the future we should be able to access that review alone, without the cost of accessing other reviews in that issue in which we have no interest. Electrons and photons are less bulky than, and cheaper than, and more readily recycled than, paper and ink.

Nodalization, Levels of Granularity, Incorporation by Reference: Data Chunking

First I'm going to make some comments about the alphabet, then I'm going to make some comments about the dictionary, then I'm going to make some comments about the encyclopedia, or what the encyclopedia should have been. This will have to do with nodalization and with levels of granularity.

What I will write here will seem at first to be mysterious, until you grasp the big picture. Then it will be just obvious.

1. How did our alphabet come about? In the process of developing a technology for the semi-permanent record of our evanescent vocalizations, way back when (thousands or tens of thousands of years ago) we divided off our utterances into separate “words” (we called these inventively separated standard units) and then divided off our “words” into “letter” symbols representing the syllables or phonemes of our vocalization. We then memorized that list of symbols in an arbitrary sequence which became known as the Alpha-Beta after the first two symbols in this arbitrarily sequenced list, “A” and then “B.” We had modularized our vocalizations at a very basic level of granularity. This was helpful, even long before the invention of moveable, reusable metal type rendered this level of granularity mandatory.



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Nowadays, instead of the low-tech alphabet, we have the high-tech computer font library. If you were to carefully enough investigate your computer's software, you would discover that there is a place in your software at which specifications are stored for the translation of an "065" code (which your computer uses but which you never see) into the letter shape "A" which appears on your monitor, and likewise for an "066" code which gets projected onto your monitor as the shape "B," and so on and so forth. There are various techniques for displaying these shapes sometimes as capitals "A," "B," sometimes as lowercase "a," "b," sometimes as *italic*, sometimes as **boldface**, sometimes as underlined, sometimes as LITTLECAPS, sometimes as Times New Roman, sometimes as Helvetica, sometimes as tiny font, sometimes as huge font, and so on and so forth. —But the thing is, it's all modularized at this level of granularity and then it gets incorporated by reference through various filters.

Notice now that nobody ever gets accused of plagiarism, for using a letter of the alphabet that someone else has already used!

2. This is not very interesting, so far, but notice that the same thing that has happened at the level of the alphabet has happened again at the next higher level, the level of the dictionary. — Again we have a level of granularity at which things have gotten modularized, words being expandable into definitions of words. We look in the dictionary and find out that the distinction between a "fry-pan" and a "skillet" was originally that a frying-pan had a long handle so that you could hold it over the live coals of your fireplace while a skillet had three legs so that you could set it in and above these coals.

Of course, in our dictionaries we use the arbitrary sequence into which we have put the alphabet, to keep track of where we have put the words and their definitions. Our dictionaries start with words like "aardvark" because "a" is arbitrarily at the start of our alphabet, and finish up with words like "Zulu" because we have arbitrarily assigned the "z" to be the omega to our alpha.

Notice now that nobody ever gets accused of plagiarism, for reusing a word that someone else once had used!

3. The same thing that has happened at the level of our alphabet and at the level of our dictionary has happened again at the next higher level, the level of the encyclopedia. — Again we have achieved a level of granularity at which things have gotten modularized, topic words being expandable into general chunks of contextual knowledge. When we want to know what "Spectroscopy" is, if we have no idea what it is, the first thing we generally do is go look in this encyclopedia, in the section for all the topic words that begin with the letter "S."

Notice now that we are entitled to say that [Henry Thoreau](#) was born on July 12, 1817, even though we weren't there (in fact weren't even alive yet, have no way to know about firsthand) — we don't ever get accused of plagiarism for recycling this general cultural stuff that we find out about merely by looking it up in one or another encyclopedia!

4. Over and above the level of granularity known as the alphabet, and the level of granularity known as the word, and the level of granularity known as the encyclopedia article, we scholars have a level of chunking which we refer to as "the quotation," for instance what I offered a few pages back:⁵

It is incumbent on every scholar to add to the Talmud and to contribute to the work, although it can never be finally completed.

- Adin Steinsaltz, *THE ESSENTIAL TALMUD* (NY: Bantam, 1976, page 273)

We get away with this plagiarism by the accepted convention known as citation of sources. Credit is given where credit is due. If one is interested enough, one can go obtain this volume *THE ESSENTIAL TALMUD* and turn to page 273. But the point is, this is another level of granularity at which we get data chunking.

Now I'm ready to make my point. Books are said, significantly, to be conversations with other books. At present the technology which enables our books to be conversations with other books is the technology known as the quotation, backed up by the technology known as the learned footnote, the learned endnote, and the learned bibliography. Our word processing software application modules enable us to generate these footnotes and endnotes and bibliographies, or if not, we purchase a separate program such as EndNote to supplement our inadequate word processor.



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But that's merely the inadequate present. In this Kouroo database we are experimenting with an entirely new technology, offering exciting new possibilities of data chunking and incorporation by reference. Take a look in the `/kouroo/transclusions` directory, in order to inspect the data chunks!

Now hear me, I suppose this to be the future — and I suppose that it works. Ten years from now we're all going to be doing all our scholarly work this way, and we won't have any patience at all with any other older technique of research or communication. (Well, wait and see whether this prediction is accurate.)

What you see when you look in the `/kouroo/transclusions` directory is the future. In our scholarly future just about everything is going to be data-chunked in this manner, and included in one or another transclusions directory somewhere maintained by one or another scholar — so that the materials can be accessed and used by other scholars by means of the technique of incorporation by reference.

5. Recently a “plagiarism detector” has been devised by Walter Stewart and Ned Feder. The program is very simple. It merely compares, by a brute force approach, all 30-character strings in a suspect document with texts from which that document might have been extrapolated. This program was used to test Stephen B. Oates's *WITH MALICE TOWARD NONE: THE LIFE OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN* and a number of 30-character matches were found with various of the books listed in his bibliography. It was found that Oates had failed to place quotation marks around, and had failed to attribute a source for, many phrases such as “silk hat, kid gloves, and patent leather shoes.” I think I should state up front, for the record, that the research contexture which has here been constructed would by design and intent fail any such 30-character-string tests for matches with the works referenced in `/kouroo/bibliography`. Were faithful preservation to be accepted as the very hallmark of plagiarism, then — I have not been over the past decade creating a research tool — have not been engaging myself in the proper preparation of source documents — but instead I have been indulging in the most gratuitous and laborious plagiarism.

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Shall we consider hypertext to constitute a new form of punctuation?

It isn't a new problem, to find a place in a text. These buttons, for finding a place in the text, are on the edge of the Gutenberg Bible:



Steven Johnson has asserted, on page 110 of *INTERFACE CULTURE*, that “The link is the first significant form of punctuation to emerge in centuries.” I think I can speak to this topic. In an extended sense, the sense in which our pairs of “quotation marks” and (parentheses) and [brackets] and {braces} and –matched sets of dashes– and the insertion of short blank spaces between words and the marking off of sententiae by their beginning with a Capital and ending with a punctus (period or question mark), constitute punctuation, certainly the hyperlink, when



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properly done, also constitutes punctuation. The reason for this is that in order to properly utilize the hyperlink, it is necessary first to nodalize one's materials. In a hyperlinked textbase, the source anchor for a link and its associated button are in one **node**, and the destination anchor for that link is in another **node**. (This may not yet be obvious to everyone, simply because the links we are presently establishing tend to be retrofitted links within pre-existing materials which have not originated in nodal form because created well before this linking technology became available. Once we have gotten past this initial, introductory phase in our utilization of this new capability, it will become obvious to everyone that a prior requirement of hypertext linking is this necessary text nodalization.) Quotation marks and parentheses and brackets and braces and matched pairs of dashes and the insertion of short blank spaces between words and the marking off of sententiae by their beginning with a Capital and ending with a punctus greatly help us nodalize our text and therefore keep track of our multiple threads of meaning. Hyperlinks help us nodalize our text and therefore also help us keep track of these multiple threads of meaning. Therefore these two manifestations both definitely fall within the same category, delimiters, which we might as well refer to by redeployment of the rubric **punctuation** since within a very short period of time this new tool is going to become quite as helpful and quite as necessary as these little intratextual squiggle delimiter notations which we had previously been conventionally referring to as "punctuation."

Considering hypertext as punctuation will assist us in incorporating into our word processing software the necessity that in the future hypertext anchors are to be positioned within pairs of delimiters, which express the prior and subsequent extent of the anchor. Such delimiters will be essential, so that in the future when we click on a source anchor it will instantly illustrate itself in reverse video, and so that when the destination anchor material appears on the screen the extent of the destination anchor will instantly illustrate itself also in reverse video.

Hypercontext

I'm going to coin a buzzword now, in order to make a point. Hypertext is inadequate, because it is merely the idea of easier text switching. It is a mere dull improvement in the efficiency of solving an old, old problem. Sometimes we have had to look up a footnoted reference in a bibliography at the back of a book, and then we have had to go up three floors in a slow library elevator, in order to achieve a text switching that we can now effect virtually instantaneously by merely clicking on a button. That's great as far as it goes, but it is also a no-brainer. Notice what it's led to. Hypertext initially required that we scan large amounts of text into the computer. This has led unimaginatively to the mere recreation in electronic form, of copies of existing books. Instances abound, and today's scholars are taking **great pride** in such tasks. Everybody and her brother now have projects to copy existing books into the computer — it's work that needed to be done. These copies of existing books are regarded as accomplishments:

- Benjamin Franklin, *EXPERIMENTS AND OBSERVATIONS ON ELECTRICITY* [London, 1751] (Palo Alto CA: Octavo Digital Rare Books, 1998); from the Warnock Library.
- Robert Hooke, *MICROGRAPHIA* [London, 1665] (Palo Alto CA: Octavo Digital Rare Books, 1998); from the Warnock Library.
- Helmar Jungbans, *MARTIN LUTHER: EXPLORING HIS LIFE AND TIMES, 1483-1546* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1998); sponsored by IBM.
- *LETTERS OF DELEGATES TO CONGRESS, 1774-1789, volumes 1-25*, edited by Paul H. Smith (Summerfield FL: Historical Database, and Washington DC: The Library of Congress, 1998).
- John Merbecke, *THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER NOTED* [London, 1550] (Palo Alto CA: Octavo Digital Rare Books, 1998); from the Bridwell Library.
- *MICROSOFT ENCARTA AFRICANA COMPREHENSIVE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF BLACK HISTORY AND CULTURE*, edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Anthony Kwame Appiah (Seattle WA: Microsoft Corporation, 1999).
- John Milton, *AREOPAGITICA* [London, 1644] (Palo Alto CA: Octavo Digital Rare Books, 1998); from the Bridwell Library.
- Isaac Newton, *OPTICKS* [London, 1704] (Palo Alto CA: Octavo Digital Rare Books, 1998); from the Warnock Library.



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- THE PERFORMING ARTS IN COLONIAL AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS, 1690-1783, TEXT DATABASE AND INDEX, edited by Mary Jane Corry, Kate Van Winkle Keller, and Robert M. Keller (NY: University Music editions, 1997).
- Samuel Johnson, A DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ON CD-ROM, edited by Anne McDermott (NY: Cambridge UP, 1996); the first (1755) and fourth (1773) editions.

Well, I don't consider that all this is very much of an accomplishment — unless you consider that also, using a Xerox machine to make another copy of something is a great accomplishment! What I suggest is that, having created mere hypertext, we need now to begin a new universe. Let's create **hypercontext**. Not text switching but context shifting. There's something new and important under the sun. The next generation of hypertext is hypercontext.

Hypercontext requires that we alter the granularity at which we do our work, by paying careful attention to what is required of a node in a network. My Kouroo contexture is an experiment to resolve the issue, "What, ideally, should a node on the Internet look like?" Network nodes should look like those in this contexture. Why? — Because having created the reusable modules called alphabetic characters, having created the reusable modules called words, having created the reusable modules called properly formed sentences and quotable paragraphs and reprintable papers and chapters and monographs, we now need to create the reusable modules called "network nodes" or "contexts." This reusability will add immeasurably to the old dialog of books with books. No more text switching in a library, now we will do context shifting, hypercontext, in a **contexture**.⁶

Hypercontext and Transclusion

Back in the bad old days, computer programs placed heavy reliance upon a simple command known as the go-to. You'd write a few lines of code and get to line 172 maybe, and then you'd loop back to do something over again by writing a line that called for your program to "go to" some previous line, such as line 125 above. — Well, we quickly learned that this quick-and-dirty approach to computer programming resulted in computer programs that were buggy, unintelligible, unreliable, and simply unmaintainable.

On the internet, right now, we're still at that "go to" stage. Essentially what hypertext amounts to is a bunch of unmanaged, unmanageable, unintelligible go-tos!

The result is, on the web, we have what is known as a "navigation" problem. No wonder we have a navigation problem!

Various people in Computer Science at Brown University are presently engaged in crafting what are known as "navigation aides," which, if they work at all, will somewhat crutch that problem.

The advice I would give to unimaginative folks like them is, don't crutch problems — eliminate them.

I have done away with this hypertext navigation problem entirely, and I have done this merely by developing a new kind of button called the hypercontext button. When you click on a hypercontext button, since you don't go anywhere, you can't get lost.

What happens when you click on one of my hypercontext buttons is, the text element with which you are working stays right there on your screen in front of you, while the surround of this text element alters. The hypercontext button simply transitions you from one "view" of your dataset, to another specified view.

6. "Defining" something is one way to understand what it is. For example, a radio is a device that transfers imperceptible electronic signals into audible sounds. However, another way to understand what something is is to describe how it fits into the world. So, a radio can also be described as a device that, without wires, brings you sounds from far-away places. A contexture for a work of art, such as WALDEN, would be a description of the context in which it appeared and in which it functions — how it came to be created, who its audience was and how they received it, and how subsequent generations have made use of it as cultural material.



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For instance, if while you are looking at a data element as it pertains to the life of Ralph Waldo Emerson, you click on a button labeled “Margaret Fuller,” nothing happens to that data element. It stays right in front of you, in its facticity. However, suddenly, rather than it being positioned within the life and career of Emerson, it comes to be positioned within the life and career of Fuller.

What you know and honor as “hypertext” amounts to mere text hopping — you hop from text to text, big freaking deal. By means of a link, a go-to, you hop indiscriminately from one file in a filesystem to another, or from one pointer at one place in a file to another pointer at another place in that file. My transclusion buttons, by way of radical contrast, offer context shifting. When you press one of my buttons you transit, not merely to another text, not merely to another location, but to another context — to a different point of view. That’s magic. It’s important.

For instance, suppose you are reviewing a data module, a “context” if you will, which deals with a meeting of the Town and Country Club in a particular hotel in downtown Boston (the [Parker House](#) at 60 School Street, to be precise) on a particular Saturday (April 7, 1865, to be precise), attended by a particular set of persons, at which specific topics were discussed. Suppose that the context within which you were inspecting that data module was the context of a chronological history of that hotel, which later would be the hotel at which John Wilkes Booth would stay just before going to Washington to assassinate Abraham Lincoln, and even later would be the hotel which simultaneously was employing, as busboys, Ho Chi Minh and Malcolm X.

Having found that “data module” or “context” within that chronological history of that hotel, suppose that you determine that what you need to do is make yourself more familiar with one of the topics that had been discussed at the Town and Country Club on that particular Saturday evening. The topic about which you need to learn more is 19th-Century race prejudice, because at that meeting [Waldo Emerson](#) has just blackballed the application of Frederick Douglass for membership on the grounds that Douglass was not the sort of gentleman with whom they sought to associate themselves.⁷ So, what you do is, you press the button that instances that topic, race prejudice, and suddenly you are looking at that same data module but — you are no longer looking at it within the context of a chronological history of the Parker House Hotel. You have made a context shift, and you are now looking at that data module dealing with that meeting at that hotel at that date, but this meeting is set within the context of a chronological history of incidents of race prejudice in America. You have become able to compare and contrast that particular instance of race prejudice with others going on within the same timeframe elsewhere in America, and with instances occurring before that point in time, and with instances occurring after that point in time.

Hypertext is mere hype. Hypertext is a buzzword for the computer novice. Hypertext is like that old indiscriminate computer-programming go-to command. All that your “hypertext” does is cope with a defective paradigm, the paradigm known as the filesystem.

7. An indignant letter-writer to the [New York Times](#) pointed out, in the September 21, 2008 Sunday issue, that the story of Emerson’s having “blackballed” Frederick Douglass for membership in the Saturday Club is a great exaggeration. This story goes too far! Although Douglass did submit an application for membership, true, and Emerson did object to his membership, true, and the application was rejected, true, Emerson also commented at the time (May 2, 1849) that **of course** no-one was ever to be blackballed simply for the unfortunate circumstance of being born black, since that sort of blackballing would be unfair to such a victim of birth circumstances, and such invidious racial discrimination would speak poorly of any white man who exhibited it: “With regard to color, I am of the opinion that there should be no exclusion. Certainly, if any distinction be made, let it be in the colored man’s favor.” Therefore —the author of this indignant letter indignantly concluded— Emerson **cannot accurately** be said to have “blackballed” Douglass’s application for membership! (A similar situation was described in an OP-ED opinion piece in that same edition of the newspaper. Nicholas D. Kristof described the attitude of certain Democratic voters he had interviewed in rural Oregon, who would not even **dream** of voting against Barack Hussein Obama for President on the basis of the color of his skin — no, they were going to vote against him because they have **heard rumors** that he might possibly, conceivably, perhaps, maybe have at one early moment been a Moslem rather than what he now claims to be, a Christian. They will vote against him not because of his race but because of a suspicion as to his religion. As good non-racist Christians they would rather vote for John McCain, who although he is a Republican, has honestly stayed as far away from church as is humanly possible: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/21/opinion/21kristof.html>)



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When computerization was implemented, it was implemented on the presumption, made by some stupid programmer, that what was of importance was **storage**, and it was implemented on a metaphor of office file cabinets, which have drawers, within which are file folders, within which are documents, which have pages, on which are paragraphs. If a paragraph on a page in a document in a file folder in a drawer of a file cabinet mentions another paragraph on another page in another document in another file folder in another drawer of another file cabinet, then in order to look at that other paragraph you need to physically go to another location and open another drawer and etc etc etc. Well, that filesystem paradigm is of course simply stupid, and stupidly limiting.

I offered that that filesystem paradigm was simply stupid, and stupidly limiting, but, historically, it has had its reasons. When computers were first being introduced, people who knew office procedures had to learn to cope with this new office device. They coped with this new office device, the computer, by a process known as “emulation.” In our offices we had had, for a long time, card punches and card sorters and card printers and card files and pieces of accounting machinery of that ilk. So the first controlling user-interface paradigm that we created amounted to getting these new computers to “pretend” that they were merely the old card punches and card sorters and card printers and card files. The new electronic computer was caused to “emulate” the old mechanical process. This was of course inefficient and limiting, but the important thing back then was to train the user to use the new electronic equipment. Emulation, for the time being, made this transition easier.

That era is past. Nowadays, people are more familiar with computers and their capabilities than, actually, they are familiar with the manual arrangements which the computers superseded. When we say “window,” nowadays, people think immediately of a rectangular image on a monitor — they no longer think immediately of a glass-filled aperture in the side of a building. When we ask someone “Do you do windows,” they know we mean do they know how to use MicroSoft Windows 95, or Windows 98, or Windows ME, or Windows 2000, or Windows NT, or Windows XP. They do not imagine that you mean “Will you get out the Windex pretty please and wash my windows for me, on both sides, and without putting nasty streaks on them?”

Why is that old “filesystem” paradigm now so stupid? It is stupid because it does not understand what our problem has become. Our problem is no longer storage of information, a problem which has long since been most efficiently reduced: our problems now are 1.) access to information and 2.) maintenance of information.

Hypertext is merely a way to defeat that stupid filesystem paradigm. Hypertext merely improves the **efficiency** of your hop from a paragraph on a page in a document in a file folder in a drawer of a file cabinet that mentions another paragraph on another page in another document in another file folder in another drawer of another file cabinet, to that other location and that other document *et cetera et cetera ad infinitum*. If that stupid filesystem paradigm had not existed, then this crutch we know and adore as hypertext would never have needed to have been invented.

Hypertext is hype. Hypercontext is not hype. Hypercontext is not a mere buzzword. Hypercontext is not a crutch, designed belatedly to help one cope with that stupid filesystem paradigm — which should never have been shoved down our throats in the first place. Hypercontext is a way to solve real problems, problems of 1.) access to information and 2.) maintenance of information.

Transclusion

I have already explained to you how hypercontext solves the problem of access to information. Now I need to explain to you how hypercontext solves the problem of maintenance of information.



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That data chunk, dealing with a meeting of the Town and Country Club in a particular hotel in downtown Boston on a particular Saturday, attended by a particular set of persons, at which specific topics were discussed, a data chunk which you encountered as part of a chronological history of a particular hotel in downtown Boston, **does not exist** as part of the history of that hotel. Likewise, it **does not exist** as part of that chronological history of race prejudice in America. It exists alone, by itself, in only one place, and what you saw in those two contexts merely amounted to two identical **transcluded images** of it. Thus, if you were to learn some interesting additional detail having to do with that particular meeting of that particular group, such as that [Henry Thoreau](#) had not attended because the cigar smoke at these rich banquets disgusted him, and decided to add that detail to the data chunk, you would need to add that detail **once**, in **one** place. Instantly that modification would propagate through the entire immense database, replicating itself within every one of the literally hundreds of contexts within which that data module was displaying itself.

For instance, if that “data module” or “context” happened to mention that James Russell Lowell protested at Emerson’s blackballing of Douglass, threatening to resign from the club, but then did not do so, then that incidental elaboration which you had made, that Thoreau had not attended because of the cigars, would have become part and parcel of the contexture’s thumbnail biography of the life and times of James Russell Lowell.

Transclusion is a text technology that makes use of tried-and-true good programming techniques. Good programmers create good limited defined discrete subroutines, that become known, debugged entities, and then install these good standard subroutines in what is known as a Call Library. The call library of the Kouroo project is the /kouroo/transclusions directory. Every thing in that transclusions subdirectory is a discrete defined data module, and is available to be called out and used in any number of different contexts. It is these transcludable standardized data modules, which make the hypercontext buttons work. Transclusion is my implementation technique. As a good programmer creates a significant library of standard calls, I have created a significant library of humanities data objects.

The Navigation Metaphor

Navigation is an inappropriate metaphor. When the user is sitting in front of a computer screen, clicking with a mouse, he or she actually isn’t going anywhere.

What is happening is, one is selecting the view one prefers to take of the materials in one’s database. It is as if one were looking out the window of one’s car, and selecting which pair of sunglasses one wanted to wear today: “Shall I wear the pink ones, and allow red objects to stand out in my field of vision while green objects become dimmer by way of contrast, or shall I wear the green ones, and allow green objects to stand out in my field of vision while red objects become dimmer by way of contrast?”

If one isn’t going anywhere, how can one get lost?

Yet people who hop from lilypad to lilypad in the Internet pond now report a chronic condition, which has acquired a name: “getting lost in cyberspace.”

It’s all so unnecessary! Implement a more appropriate user-interface metaphor: hypercontext.

But what will we term the new Internet, after we have brought context switching to the Internet by way of data chunking, transclusion, and hypercontext? What will we term the new Internet, in which we don’t have navigation problems any more because we aren’t going anywhere, we are merely taking new and improved views? We’ll call it the Viewnet. The bumpersticker motto for our crusade can be:

“From the Internet to the Viewnet”



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The Storage Metaphor

“Filesystem” is a storage metaphor. It would be appropriate for us to be using a storage metaphor as part of our user interface, if storage were our present problem. Get this, storage used to be our problem, but is no longer our problem. Storage has become cheap. Now our problem is finding what we have stored, in among the just huge amounts of information which we have in storage.

Therefore we should demote the filesystem metaphor, out of our user interface. Filesystems are for programmers to worry about. Users should not have to worry about, or know about, filesystems. Filesystems are a mere implementation technology.

The user interface should consist of the taking of views. It is by means of a view that we exclude materials from consideration which would merely distract us. It is by means of a view that we include material for consideration, which would be of assistance to us. When we decide on an appropriate view, we are neither going somewhere else, nor retrieving materials from storage. What we are doing is, we are deciding on an appropriate view, period paragraph.



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Optimization through recursion and iteration

The modularization of the Kouroo database, and the manner in which the “data modules” or “contexts” are fitted together and taken apart and fitted together recursively through repeated iterations, allow the data materials to undergo what has been termed “simulated annealing”:

[C]onsider the process of annealing a piece of metal to temper it. What could be a more physical, less “computational” process than that? The blacksmith repeatedly heats the metal and then lets it cool, and somehow in the process it becomes much stronger. How? What kind of an explanation can we give for this magical transformation? Does the heat create special toughness atoms that coat the surface? Or does it suck subatomic glue out of the atmosphere that binds all the iron atoms together? No, nothing like that happens. The right level of explanation is the algorithmic level: As the metal cools from its molten state, the solidification starts in many different spots at the same time, creating crystals that grow together until the whole is solid. But the first time this happens, the arrangement of the individual crystal structures is suboptimal – weakly held together, and with lots of internal stresses and strains. Heating it up again – but not all the way to melting – partially breaks down these structures, so that, when they are permitted to cool the next time, the broken-up bits will adhere to the still-solid bits in a different arrangement. It can be proven mathematically that these rearrangements will tend to get better and better, approaching the optimum or strongest structure, provided the regime of heating and cooling has the right parameters. So powerful is this optimization procedure that it has been used as the inspiration for an entirely general problem-solving technique in computer science – “simulated annealing,” which has nothing to do with metals or heat, but is just a way of getting a computer program to build, disassemble, and rebuild a data structure (such as another program), over and over, blindly groping towards a better –indeed an optimal– version.

– Daniel C. Dennett, DARWIN’S DANGEROUS IDEA:
EVOLUTION AND THE MEANING OF LIFE. NY: Touchstone,
Simon & Schuster, 1995, pages 57–58

The traditional data-reprocessing procedure, in which thoughts get copied into notebooks which are then written into books, is a process which is iterative, but which does not allow for recursive improvement. In that process the data materials get taken apart too completely to allow for gradual improvement through this “simulated annealing” procedure. Such is not the case in regard to this Kouroo hypercontexture. This simulated annealing process will enable the Kouroo hypercontexture to bob back up like a cork after every attack based upon some discovered temporary inaccuracy or omission. Success is inevitable, the only variable in question being the number of recursive iterations that will be required before all opposition collapses, and the dismissive story of the academics transitions from “Austin’s stuff is just shit, he’s wrong and evil” into “Austin’s stuff is just so obvious, so derivative — why, he’s come up with nothing we didn’t already know about.”



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Name Space

For some time it has seemed to me that the manner in which I have been thinking about history and about historicizing has been somehow different, from the manner in which others have been thinking about this subject. It occurs to me to attempt to describe my new manner of thinking, which is somehow different, and give this difference a name. It seems to me that I am thinking about the data elements that go together to create a historical account, in a manner that is more or less mathematical, and that my new manner of thinking ought therefore to be characterized as more mathematical than the usual sort of historical thinking. I have therefore decided to take a page from the book of Topology, and term my new way of thinking “Name Space.”

Topology is considered to be a branch of mathematics. Topological thinking differs from other forms of thinking, in that it is organized around holes. The key categorization one may make, in topology, between objects of different shapes, is how many holes they have. Donuts, coffee mugs, and human beings, for instance, in topology, are similar in that a donut has one hole through it, a coffee mug has one hole through it (the hole in its handle), and a human being has one hole through him or her (the alimentary canal). Name Space might also be considered to be a branch of mathematics, because it differs from other forms of thinking about the objects of history, in that it is organized around the proper nouns and the common nouns and the collective nouns that these objects contain. For instance, a “data module” or “context” pertaining to Friend Moses Brown appearing before the town meeting of Providence, Rhode Island during August 1774 to influence their attitudes toward the international slave trade, the elimination of slavery locally, and the freeing of existing local slaves, would be conceptualized in Name Space as a loose bag of information, marked by the names “Friend,” “Moses Brown,” “Providence,” “Rhode Island,” “New England town meeting,” “international slave trade,” “slavery,” “manumission,” and “abolitionism.” These names would mark the ligature points or nodes at which this particular loose bag of information would intersect with, or tie to, other particular loose bags of information marked by one or more of these same names. For instance, this particular module of historical information might be given the name “aug1774_MosesBrown,” and stored in a computer’s filesystem under that name, and take part along with many other modules marked by the name “Moses Brown” to constitute and create a biography of Friend Moses Brown the person. To create and constitute such a biography, all these modules would be drawn out in accordance with their before/after chronology, into a string of modules arrayed in time sequence from before to later, from the day of Moses Brown’s birth for instance as the first module to the day of his death as the last module.

In my conceptualization, the various “data module” or “context” are not spatially discrete, but interpenetrate, the only clear points in the data swarm being the names by which these various data modules mark and organize themselves. What I do, mentally, is reach into this name space and grab a name and use it as a handle, and tug and twist on that name, and whirl the name space around my head three times like a dead cat held by its tail, and draw the name space out into a new “ n degrees of separation” chain in which everything in the name space depends upon that one point in the data swarm at which I have grabbed the interlocking data elements.

Well, in what I have written above, I have made a sincere effort to describe the manner in which I have learned to think about the elements of a historical account, and have attempted to describe the manner in which I am thinking differs from anything I have ever heard, about how various other scholars think about this sort of mental activity. My attempt to create the concept “name space” may help you understand what it is I conceive that I am doing, and may help you grasp that the manner in which I am currently thinking is somehow different from the usual -- and is offered to you in that spirit. Perhaps you also can find this new way of thinking to be useful.

Using (vs. abusing) our memories of Thoreau

There is now a book of LINCOLN SAYINGS, by a Fehrenbacher husband-and-wife research team, that has taken the “Honest Abe” oral tradition and, as a guide to the authenticity of the various materials, sorted them all out, into A-B-C-D-E categories. How does one deal, for instance, with the question as to whether or not President Lincoln **actually** said to someone, when informed that his one solitary aggressive, results-achieving general, Ulysses S. Grant, had a drinking problem, “Tell me what brand of whiskey and I’ll send it to the other generals”?⁸

8. The Fehrenbachers accept this one as probably genuine but query whether Lincoln would have claimed such a jest as “original.”



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Recently, research on memory phenomena has been pointing up just how much our minds simply invent in our constant search for plausibility, and has been warning us that notes jotted down soon after the fact are generally more accurate, if less interesting, than memories filtered through this haze of reconstruction. Thus, to most direct quotations recorded within days of their utterance the Fehrenbachers award an “A,” while similar indirect quotations (summaries or paraphrases of Lincoln’s words) receive a “B.” Most of the direct or indirect quotations which were not reported until weeks or years later receive a gentlemanly “C.” There are, however, a good many exceptions, with some contemporary Lincoln sayings as well as many later attributions receiving “D” or “E” scores owing to implausibility, or to the known or suspected unreliability of the recorder, or to factual errors or inconsistencies in the quotation or its context, or to the 2nd-hand nature of the transcription.⁹

These evaluators have positioned any Lincoln trope about the authenticity of which there was more than average doubt in a category “D,” and any quote that probably was fabricated to serve some later purpose, in a category “E.” Most of these “D” and “E” scores are explained, and these explanations provide us with a trenchant cram course in the perils and pratfalls of such recordkeeping. Asked why on earth they would have bothered to consider some of the more dubious quotations, the Fehrenbachers responded accurately that this Lincoln-As-Legend has been virtually as impactful on American culture as was the historical wartime commander-in-chief. Although no serious Lincoln scholar would now credit, for instance, the claims of the renegade Catholic priest Charles Chiniquy as to Lincoln having said this or that about Jesuits causing our Civil War and then plotting his assassination, such assertions do instruct us as to the politics of quote attribution. No-one would be likely to challenge the “E” assigned to the spiritualist Nettie Maynard, who quoted tidbits passed on to her by the spirit of Lincoln during her seances, but such factoids tell us very much about what the pundits of our collective, national memory have been trying to accomplish with these collections of memories and pseudomemories of Lincoln.

The files 1862.fm through 2009.fm in the /kouroo/life/years directory have been created at least in part as a repository for such factoids and pseudo-factoids about the life of Thoreau, so we can diligently explore the contexts in which various reports have originated.

9. The same has of course been done with the various traditions about Jesus, with a group of scholars known as “The Jesus Seminar” sitting around casting votes by means of colored beads, as to whether a logon is to be considered as authentic, probably authentic, possibly inauthentic, or an unlikely fabrication based merely on later church needs.

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“You aren’t helping us *understand* the *meaning* of history!”

Somebody, it may have been Ernest Gellner, has suggested that since time is a trick God uses to keep everything from happening all at once, the job of the writer of history is to help us see through this trick:



“The relationship between past and present is not, as Edmund Burke had taught, a noble partnership: rather, it is the relationship of con-man and dupe.”

— Ernest Gellner, May 1986



There are three classic cons that go along with being one of these historians-for-hire: FUTURISM, PRESENTISM, and PASTISM. When you become skilled to commit one of these sins you have made yourself employable. The historian who refuses to play God needs to hold onto his or her day job. If you refuse to explain everything from God’s all-seeing perspective you’ll find yourself writing history on you own hook and entirely for free, without institutional nurture — and without readership (it isn’t merely the sponsors who require these cons — that would be too easy, it’s also the audience).

- FUTURISM sometimes travels under the name Whiggism. One finds one or another excuse to present history as a progress from an inferior past condition to a superior future state. This is a real crowd-pleaser. You attach yourself to some interest group and predict its inevitable triumph, as in the case of Marx (or doom-da-doom-doom, as in the case of Spengler). The historians whose appeals lie in what they purport to explain to us about our future are pseudo-historians — in fact no historian has ever succeeded at telling us anything about our future.
- PRESENTISM is when you parse the details of the past as being a prefiguration of the problems of the present. The Old Testament has been considered, for instance, by Christians after they stole it from the Jews, to amount merely to a series of prefigurations of the Messiah Jesus Christ. Whatever was going down in the past, the presentist historian who knows how it all came out can reverse-engineer the thingie by cherry-picking historical details, to reveal that that outcome was predetermined. However the mental landscape is being configured in the present era, that present mindset is retrojected into the past, so that Spartacus is transformed from yet another ancient guy who wanted to own slaves rather than be himself a slave, into a freedom fighter with an agenda of the elimination of bondage. Likewise, the US civil war was all about the elimination of race slavery. When you are good enough to do presentism, you are good enough to teach a High School civics class. The bias known as presentism constitutes itself out of an ignorance of the manner in which and the extent to which conceptual structures have drifted over the centuries. It creeps into our thinking when we presume that one or another of our present conceptual categories constitutes a universal normative given, and thus utterly fail to grasp some very other manner of thinking of some past era and culture.
- PASTISM is the pretense that life can be lived backward, and can best be “understood” backward, when it can only be lived forward and cannot ever be understood at all (this is the historian pretending to be God, and describing this universe through God’s own eyes that not having any eyebrows can see past present and future laid out flat like a row of snapshots; another term that might be used to characterize this misleading tendency would be “posteriority”). This is the failure to note the obvious fact that nobody can ever be sure what the future holds in store, on a planet where the primary determinant of outcomes is always chance. Pastism, or posteriority, is a rejection of the openness of things. An example would be the sentence “Charles Goodyear, who would invent the vulcanization of rubber, was born on December 29, 1800” — for heaven’s sake, it was merely an infant that was born in New Haven, Connecticut on December 29, 1800! A birth cannot say anything about chemical experiments and accidents that would not take place in Springfield, Massachusetts until 1839. Show me a person who in 1800 knew that there was even going to be an 1801, and I’ll show you a person lacking in



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imagination. To write the history of 1800 in such a manner is to erase the key fact of 1800, that it was open in the direction of 1801 (that would be more or less like trying to write about Antarctica under the pretense that it's not open to the sky). Use of the phrase "who would" (as in "who would invent the vulcanization of rubber," above) indicates to me that we are receiving a telegram from the future, and since there are not telegrams from the future, what this phrase reveals to me is fraud. To write history in such a manner is to cater to an audience that demands the fiction that through the study of history they are "understanding" a course of events, that they are importing "meaning." This is pandering.

Yes, I do understand that since I am reluctant to commit these three errors, nothing that I write about history is ever going to be even minimally acceptable. I'm fighting this battle knowing that I am going to lose. "You're not a historian, you're a mere *chronologer*!" —Any history that deviates from chronology deviates from truth. No, it's hard not to go there, but I'm not going to willingly go there. "You aren't helping us understand the *meaning* of history!" No, we're simply not going there, but I'm sure you'll be able to hire a historian to help you with your little problem — they're gladly a dime a dozen.

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How ARRGH, the “Automated Research Report Generation Hotline,” happened

This hypercontext computerization project has for well over a decade encountered the greatest hostility, and stonewalling, from reference librarians across the nation (sordid details upon request). The consensus of opinion at present seems to be that if we are ignored long enough, we will go away. Therefore, a reporting feature has been added, and a website www.kouroo.info has been created.



This reporting feature we have named the ARRGH, or “Automated Research Report Generation Hotline.” Since the costs of this are negligible, there is no reason why such a service cannot be entirely free of charge. When we are contacted by email to kouroo@kouroo.edu by anyone with a request for information, we simply press a button and, usually overnight, generate an Adobe Acrobat .pdf file and place it on this website for perusal. It is hardly an optimal situation (Acrobat flattens the careful layering of the database) but it will do for now. The temporary objective of such a hotline can be simply stated: this is not only a service that is needed, it is publicity. The research librarians of our university libraries at present clearly are creating themselves as an obstacle rather than as a solution; therefore in their own best interest they need to be helped to avoid unplanned obsolescence. Well, as we all know, in this real world there is nothing that will bring an apparatchik up to speed more wonderfully than terror — the default seems to be, to allow these marginal folks to become aware that unless they make wild improvements in their present levels of expertise and responsiveness, they are going to be replaced one-for-all by a helpful computer robot, what we here nickname ARRGH, that does its data mining entirely for freebies. We are going to give them a wholesome need to get on board with both feet, before their bosses notice their little attitude problem and challenge them to venture out into the real world to flip burgers for a living.



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How this “newpaper” happened

This thing began as a simple research list of the quotations I was using in regard to Thoreau’s attitude toward time and eternity –what a historian would term a *hyponymema*¹⁰– and then it had to be expanded to include his comments on sound and silence after it became evident how strong a link Thoreau had established between these intellectual and sensible images. And then various events from Thoreau’s life had to be added, which various influence studies by various academic scholars had found to be of significance in the development of his thoughts –such as the death of his brother and his rejection as a suitor– in order to try to figure out where and how Thoreau’s attitudes toward time and sound, silence and eternity began to develop. The files grew and grew, naturally, until at some point it became obvious that what was being created had primary value as a volume to be read alongside the JOURNAL in which our author has been so cozy about his life details. It was beginning to become more and more what Roland Barthes, in S/Z for instance in the early 1970s, had termed a “writerly” text, the sort of text that an imaginative and nonconforming reader –yo!– must produce as part of the act of reading, when confronted with something that is considered to be somebody else’s “finished work” — and I began to feel prouder and prouder of it, or more and more amazed at it. It might have been given the title *ELECTRIC WALDEN* for brevity, or *HOW TO BE THOREAU IN 45 LESSONS* for cuteness, or *CONCORD USA: THE 19th CENTURY ELECTRONIC VILLAGE* in order to exploit local cupidity, or *TEXT AND CONTEXT OF WALDEN* to be lit-critical, but finally I titled it *THE POEM HE WROTE WITH HIS LIFE* because I wanted to foreground the highest use to which this record might be put by members of its intended audience.

Once in his life a man ought to concentrate his mind upon a remembered earth, I believe. He ought to give himself up to a particular landscape in his experience, to look at it from as many angles as he can, to wonder about it, to dwell upon it. He ought to imagine that he touches it with his hands at every season and listens to the sounds that are made upon it. He ought to imagine the creatures there and all the faintest motions of the wind. He ought to recollect the glare of noon and all the colors of the dawn and dusk.

— N. Scott Momaday, *THE WAY TO RAINY MOUNTAIN*, 1969

A remark about the “hypertext nonlinearity” of this work, and about my awareness that this will be perceived by some as constituting an offensive lack of structuredness: There were advocates of linearity and imposed structure in the 19th Century. These advocates, in general, unsympathetically attacked Transcendentalist writings for their lack of a linear imposed structure, and gave the Transcendentalist writers fits. For instance, Margaret Fuller was reduced to longing for “a thread long enough to string on it all these beads that take my fancy”¹¹ because such a thread simply was not going to be granted to her by any contemporary audience. To cite Fuller’s description of such form-bound people, “They were accustomed to an artificial method, whose scaffolding could easily be retraced, and desired an obvious sequence of logical inferences. They insisted there was nothing in what they had heard, because they could not give a clear account of its course and purport.”¹² We have a record of this in, for instance, Margaret Fuller’s delivering a defense, years in advance, against such current charges as that she “never solved the problem of form for herself and never found the best vehicle for her expression” and that her form was “self-consciously literary, episodic, and rambling.”¹³ She longed for a gift that was never to be granted, to her or to any other Transcendentalist writer, in their lifetimes, the gift of “ample field and verge enough to range in and

10. That is, I am following Plutarch’s approach to the writing of history and Wilde’s approach to the rewriting of history: before you begin to establish connections between events, you must put them in the sequence in which they happened; and, “the one duty we owe to history is to rewrite it.”

11. Fuller, Margaret. *SUMMER ON THE LAKES*, in 1843. Boston MA: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1844, page 242.

12. Fuller, Margaret. “Emerson’s Essays” in Fuller, Arthur B. (ed.) *LIFE WITHOUT AND LIFE WITHIN*. Boston MA: Brown, Taggard, and Chase, 1860, pages 193-4.

13. Allen, Margaret Vanderhaar. *THE ACHIEVEMENT OF MARGARET FULLER*. University Park PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979, pages 118, 170.

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leave every impulse free, and abundant opportunity to develop a genius, wide and full as our rivers, flowery, luxuriant and impassioned as our vast prairies.”¹⁴ —But now we have nodes and links, to use to defeat those who would seek to impose irrelevant structure. And for those who want easy reading, well, we’ve got that too! As [Waldo Emerson](#) wrote in his journal on February 17, 1824:

Pliny’s uncle had a slave read while he eat [sic]. In the progress of Watt & Perkin’s philosophy the day may come when the scholar shall be provided with a Reading Steam Engine; when he shall say Presto – & it shall discourse eloquent history – & Stop Sesame & it shall hush to let him think. He shall put in a pin, & hear poetry; & two pins, & hear a song. that age will discover Laputa.

PLINY

I really think that this chronology —although I suppose it must contain some glaring errors since I am typing this material without the aid of a proofreader and am typing it from the pages of secondary and tertiary sources such as biographies in which even I can note numerous factual discrepancies— will represent an order of magnitude improvement in historical scholarship. All too often I note that current scholars are betrayed into influence speculations in which they suppose that later events influenced earlier ones. A classic, of course, is J. Danny Quayle’s recent explanation of why George Herbert Walker Bush had reneged on his famous “read my lips” no-new-taxes pledge, as due to the unanticipated expenses of the war against Saddam Hossein — when in fact our President’s lips had moved, and he had dishonored his pledge, not only prior to any of these expenses but also even prior to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, had dishonored it at a time when his administration was still granting massive secret “agricultural loans” to their boys in the Iraqi army for the manufacture of nerve gasses.

14. Fuller, Margaret. “American Literature.” PAPERS ON LITERATURE AND ART. NY: Wiley and Putnam, 1846, Volume II, pages 123-4.



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This “contexture” database and the Quaker Peace Testimony

I, Austin Meredith, who am preparing this “contexture” database, although a former Marine infantry officer, am now an adherent of the Quaker Peace Testimony. I have come to regard human warfare not merely as distressing and unnerving, but as inane and inept. My primary agenda in preparing war materials for the internet, such as the records in regard to the “Pax Romana” at <http://www.kouroo.info/kouroo/trends/war/RomanBattles>, the Chinese civil war of the 19th Century between Christians and Buddhist/Confucians (the largest civil war in history) at <http://www.kouroo.info/kouroo/places/war/ChineseCivilWar>, and the WWII records at <http://www.kouroo.info/kouroo/trends/WorldWarII>, has been to promote the Peace Testimony of the Religious Society of Friends in a manner in which it has not heretofore been being promoted. It is my suspicion that our existing literature on pacifism, in general, and in regard to our Peace Testimony in particular, is a literature that presently is consumed only by those who are already persuaded of the wrongness of the war impulse. That is, it is merely a literature that “preaches to the choir” endlessly, and therefore is a work product that is entirely without influence in the world. I have been struggling to create something entirely different — the sort of corrective literature that is actually going to be consumed by some of those who are intrigued with war and have gone out to the internet to revel in its “pornography of violence.” I can remember how I was before I joined the Corps, I can remember how I raptly consumed the “[Ballantine Books](#)” series on the battles of WWII, such as CASSINO. People like my young-manhood self are the audience, I consider, that we must learn how to influence. I need to hook them, suck them in, by providing them with the details of horrific events which they currently seek (but in such manner as to portray such horrific events not merely as intriguing but also as stupid, nauseating, cruel, horrifying). This aspect of the contexture is straightforward advocacy. I want to portray the Peace Testimony not as something that is too good for this real world, not as something that real men will shun as womanly and weak, but instead as something that is even more of a real option than this endless “Let’s Give War A Chance” nonsense that we hear everywhere. Thus I use the opportunity of a particular day in history, [December 16, 1967](#), to present a real war poem, written by a pilot Captain Howard John Hill who had been shot down over North Vietnam and taken to the infamous “Hanoi Hilton” prison compound, that is so hopelessly impoverished, as poetry, and so hopelessly impoverished, as thinking, as to boggle one!

Beloved heritage is ours
To fondly cherish evermore.
By God’s own hand sweet Freedom’s flower
Was planted at our nation’s door.

Warm blood of men enriched the soil
In hope it blossom-filled would thrive.
Though tyrants sent fierce weeds to foil
And hamper growth, it still survived.

The blooms will wither not nor die;
Some men will crave the fragrant air.
Unyielding Resolve reigns on high
With Duty calling those who care.

Much-needed care cannot be sloughed;
A few must bear the load for all.
From sun-soaked shores to windswept bluffs
We few will answer Duty’s call.



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We need a traveling companion

As I recollect, it was in about 1988, two full decades ago, that –after having successfully pioneered the copying of an old typesetting tape of the King James Bible into straight ASCII text and burned it onto a CD-ROM, and after having belatedly realized that technological advances of this sort were immaterial unless someone could somehow be induced to access the electronic results– I began to muse on the prospect that, as [Dante](#) had used [Virgil](#) as his guide through *INFERNO*, *PURGATORIO*, and *PARADISO*, we might with benefit use [Henry Thoreau](#) as our guide through the known and unknown universe of our own divine comedy.

We live in an educated age – at least people generally read and write. We live in a religious age – at least people attend various worship services and seek “a religious experience.” But we no longer study our Scriptures as we should. This is a problem in all religious traditions, but in particular, to my own mortification, Quakers don’t study the Bible. We find ourselves encouraged to peruse a whole lot of quasi-religious stuff such as what my monthly meeting’s “reading club” is currently sitting around reading to each other on a series of Thursday nights, M. Scott Peck’s *THE DIFFERENT DRUM*, but after our childhood indoctrination or immunization we no longer pay much attention to our traditional stuff.

The result is that we are shallow. For instance, we are quite unable to read [WALDEN; OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS](#) as it was written: not only do the greater number of Thoreau’s allusions to the Hindu spiritual tradition escape us, but also even his allusions to the dominant spiritual traditions of New England. I offer that at least part of the problem of our unfamiliarity with our heritage is that in this era we no longer have an adequate “persona” to guide us in our religious wanderings. We need a *READER’S GUIDE TO PROFOUND LITERATURE*. When a tired traveler takes a Gideon BIBLE out of a dresser drawer in a Duluth motel, and flips through it, scripture is encountered directly, as a “writing” severed from all context, or worse, this tired traveler has an image of the member of the Gideon Society who placed that Gideon in that drawer. The image we tend to have (which may be false!) is that of a spiritual molester – it is the image of some self-righteous businessman who is trying to salve his tired soul by saving others’ souls. Consequently, resistance to the sacred words puts the tired traveler to sleep. Our Bibles have become pillow books, pillows, pills.

But as the image of [Virgil](#) once guided [Dante](#) over the supernatural terrain of the *INFERNO*, might not the image of [Thoreau](#) be a suitable guide for us through the texts of the sacred scriptures?

We may any day take a walk as strange as [Dante Alighieri’s](#) imaginary one to *L’INFERNO* or *PARADISO* (MLJ 29: 242-43; MS only).

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As [Dante Alighieri](#) once allowed the image of [Virgil](#) to guide him over the supernatural terrain of the *INFERNO*, let us allow the image of Thoreau to guide us beyond the strangeness of, beyond our estrangement from, our sacred texts.



It is a matter of what is significant to us. Auto repair instructions are currently being put on CD-ROM for a number of reasons centering around the concept of accessibility. We might be as willing to do this for our scriptures as for our repair manuals, for they are no less significant to us. Now that the technology is available, putting the scriptures of the world on CD-ROM—at least one English translation of the books of the BIBLE, and

the *BHAGAVAD GITA*, and the *FOUR BOOKS* of China, and the *QUR'AN*, etc.— would be no stunt. It would not be in the same league with using a microscope to inscribe the Lord's Prayer on the head of a pin as was popular in my youth. It is a vital project.

Just as this is more than just a technological project, to demonstrate that it is possible to use modern technology to create a new kind of scholarly journal that is cumulative from issue to issue, it can be more than just a literary or historical project in academia. Yes, I am well aware that no-one who is presently unwilling to muse on Scripture out of a bound book will be **eager** to scroll through the same words on a computer screen! There is much more to this than technology or literature or history: we can use [Henry Thoreau](#) as a persona to guide us in our religious readings, in such a manner as to make ourselves eager to scroll through them on the screen. The linkage is utterly simple: Thoreau loved all these old books with the most sincere passion, and we all love Thoreau. Although our disk of religious writings will serve the purposes of a study of an interesting and almost contemporary life, Thoreau's life, it can in fact have other uses, devotional uses. For our Thoreau was not merely a poet or nature watcher, or merely an Emerson clone.

When Thoreau cries "Blake! Blake! are you awake?" at the Worcester, Massachusetts railroad depôt he is of course attempting to speak like a man in a waking moment to a man in his waking moment and he is of course summoning his definition "Morning is when I am awake and there is dawn in me" which he derived from his reading of the *VISHNU PURANA* in early 1850: "All intelligences awake with the morning." He is suggesting to his friend Blake of Worcester that his two observations of maternal behavior at the train station are something that we will need to stand on tiptoe to understand and something that we will need to devote our most alert and wakeful hours to. What I am adding to Thoreau's insistence on alertness is my own insistence that, for these intricate studies into our best thoughts, we **must** utilize the most advanced and capable computer hardware, operating systems, applications software, and multimedia hypercontext contextures. —We need all the help we can get, so our task will not be **quite** beyond our abilities.

Frederick Garber commented, in his *THOREAU'S REDEMPTIVE IMAGINATION* in 1977, that "Thoreau was bathing himself in the concrete, hoping that the pressure of all those facts would somehow, by their quantity if nothing else make them light up into truths (page 170). Ignoring all the mixedness of these metaphors, and pushing away the image of Jimmy Hoffa's body in its concrete bath (one of the rumors of what happened to him), I would express a similar hope for this Kouroo project. Perhaps, when two or three other people have contributed as much material to this textbase as I have contributed, connections utterly unexpected and unexpectable will begin to show up. It is, at the least, an experiment that's not been tried.

Hyppolyte Taine wrote that the truly original artist would find the courage to work with the materials of his or her local environment, whatever these might be. Well, my local environment, for the past quarter century of workaholic days, has been the computer, and the materials with which I have been working have been computer architectures, operating systems, and application software packages. Just as Thoreau the surveyor created Walden, as a place in the American literary landscape, out of what had been a mere boundary line on a plot map (and, arguably, created even the idea that there should be an American literary landscape), I'm now, within our computer horizon, trying to create a literary landscape, and trying to create Kouroo as a place on this landscape. The problem with our computer science is not that it is too scientific, but that it is inadequately artistic. See, I'm merely trying to do what Thoreau did. And now let us see what this will mature into.

A word of warning: Henry Fielding commented upon his chapter headings, counseling us to use them as "bills of fare." If we don't like his menu we may skip his meal. Precisely the same may be said of the hypertext buttons now coming into use, except that in the case of hypertext, skipping becomes the default condition by which one is to avoid a surfeit of the fare. You shouldn't even try to be complete in your examination of this contexture, for you'd just bloat yourself.

Like [Herman Melville](#) and Geoffrey H. Hartman, I am not good at concluding¹⁵ (in fact I don't even **believe** in conclusions):

I now leave my cetological System ... the draught of a draught.

— MOBY-DICK

I now “leave” my contextual system, like Richard Rogers’s *Centre Georges Pompidou* in Paris, in the appearance and in the reality of a system under construction — as a dynamic structification ought to be “left,” for circulation among research scholars, in the spirit of Mark Twain:¹⁶

Anything but subscription publishing is printing for private circulation.

To date much of the work in this contexture has, of necessity, been my own. However, it is intended that this become a public contexture. To steal one of Annie Dillard’s phrases, such a contexture as a public wiki would be a “fabrication of a billion imaginations all inventing it at once.”¹⁷

All right now, scholars, here is the tool so research yourself raw!

You can research in your house
You can research with a mouse
You can research in your socks
You can research eating lox
You can research here or there
You can research everywhere.

15. CRITICISM IN THE WILDERNESS. New Haven CT: Yale UP, 1980, page 131.

16. Letter, Samuel Langhorne Clemens to William Dean Howells.

17. LIVING BY FICTION. NY: Harper and Row, 1982, pages 36-44.

