Intimate Information: organic hypertext structure and incremental formalization for everyone's everyday tasks

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ABSTRACT

Much of our most important writing is written to ourselves and to our immediate circle of family, friends, and allies. This intimate or *nobitic* information includes not merely calendars and grocery lists, but also work for planning our future endeavors, as well as correspondence to our future selves and our progeny. Tinderbox is a tool for making, analyzing, and sharing notes — offers a range of representational tools ranging from conventional links and WikiLinks to prototype inheritance and spatial hypertext. People exploit this complex tool set to help discover and express the structure of everyday ideas; of particular interest is the problem of creating structure for work that has not yet been written and that will evolve in unexpected directions. The history of *constructive hypertext* and the success of early wikis provides invaluable guidance for structuring nobitic writing tools.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

H5.4 [**Hypertext/Hypermedia**]: Theory

General Terms

Design, Economics, Human Factors,.

Keywords

Constructive hypertext. Wikis. Nobitic. Personal information.

1. AMONG US

When we consider hypertext publishing or wikis or weblogs, we often assume that the intended audience is numerous and broad, but much of our writing has always been intended primarily for ourselves and our immediate circle. Some of this writing is mere functional ephemera – arranging schedules or making payments – but people of all walks of life [4] have long created and preserved a rich literature of social connection and personal memory [3]. In the late age of print, this literature took the form of journals, diaries, notebooks, sketchbooks, and family newsletters. On the Web, new genres emerge alongside electronic adaptations of familiar forms.

This *nobitic* writing (from *in nobis* — among ourselves) is frequently (and wrongly) dismissed because it is intimate and mundane: anyone can do it. Much treasured writing, from Cicero to Samuel Pepys to Anne Frank, is inherently nobitic. So, too, is the literature of scholarship: the papers that make up the *Letters* and *Transactions* of research address a natural audience that is seldom numerous.

2. CONSTRUCTIVE HYPERTEXT

When beginning a fresh journal or undertaking a new and speculative course of research, we do not know exactly what form and structure we will need, and cannot accurately anticipate the scope and structure the work will ultimately require. Structure is crucial to hypertext, and our former obsession with the Navigation Problem is now seen as the need for expressive hypertext structure [1]. Our uncertainty is even greater in wikis, where other writers may take shape the emerging. These are *constructive hypertexts,* and at their inception they contain the seeds of future structure (and little else). They are "versions of what they are becoming, a structure for what does not yet exist. [2].

Constructive hypertext has a long and troubled history in hypertext research. Early efforts frequently failed, either as a result of premature formalization [5] or the graffiti effect. The rhetorical habits of early discursive wikis provide instructive guidance for guiding the shape of constructive hypertexts.

3. REFERENCES

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