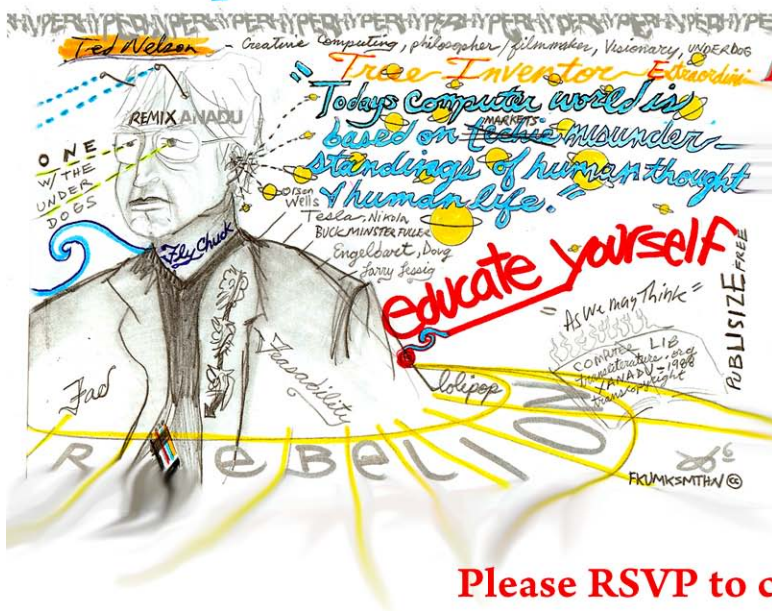


The computer world could be completely different



A postgraduate & ECR masterclass with Ted Nelson

founding designer,
Project Xanadu

Tuesday 5 April 2011
12.45-2.30
Room EW 302
(Hawthorn Campus)

Please RSVP to cwilson@swin.edu.au

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The Institute for Social Research, Swinburne University of Technology, and the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation, invite you to a masterclass with information technology pioneer Ted Nelson.

The computer world could be completely different

Fish, they say, aren't aware of water. Most people, including computer scientists, don't notice the hidden assumptions and traditions that have structured today's computer world and digital documents. These assumptions push the real problems into the laps of users and programmers. (Note that at this level, Windows, Mac and Linux, Iphone and Android are all the same).

Almost nobody notices the consequences of this locked cosmology -

- FILES -- lumps of data payload with short names. What is "metadata"? Data which is not in the payload -- a silly distinction.
- HIERARCHICAL DIRECTORIES -- don't allow a file to be in more than one place, annotated or checked off, and don't notice when a file is moved.
- LUMPDOCS -- it is assumed that one document = one file; this forces a crude model of publication and pushes the problem of change management to the user.

- THE PUI (PARC User Interface, often called "The Modern GUI") turns the computer into a paper simulator, throwing away document structure (the original overlay links of Engelbart and others) in favour of cosmetics (fonts). Designed for secretaries and now imposed on the whole world, the PUI traps the user -- proletarianized, no longer allowed to program -- in a world of application prisons.

- WALLED DATABASES. There is no available way to represent, and keep records about, the complex interwoven tangles of real life. Everything has to be simplified and connections have to be cut in all directions. Why?

- ONE-WAY HYPERTEXT -- the ayatollahs of the World Wide Web say that two-way links are too difficult. Translation: they don't know how to do it.

People are satisfied, or intimidated, because they don't know anything else is possible.

There is no right or wrong computer world; what is wrong is that there is only one computer world, with no other choices.

We will consider some alternatives.

Theodor Holm Nelson is an American designer, generalist, and pioneer of information technology. He coined the terms "hypermedia" and "hypertext" in 1963, and is also credited with first use of the words micropayment, transclusion, virtuality, interwingularity and dildonics. He is the most important computing visionary of our time. The main thrust of his work has been to create a different kind of electronic document which allows many forms of connection, instead of the "paper simulation" of Word, PDF and the World Wide Web. Nelson founded Project Xanadu in 1960, a project that has inspired a whole generation of computer programmers, hobbyists and developers. The effort is documented in his 1974 book *Computer Lib/Dream Machines* and the 1981 *Literary Machines*. He has just published an autobiography, *Possiplex*.

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