Chapter 16

Ted Nelson: A Critical (and Critically Incomplete) Bibliography

Henry Lowood

16.1 Introduction

Devoting time to serious bibliographical matters as a tribute to Ted Nelson may seem like a quaintly out-of-tune and bookish, if not totally misguided project. It is easy to pigeon-hole Ted's work as belonging to a generation of adventurous and creative writers and editors active during the 1960s who began to find that traditional print media constrained the expression of their ideas. Marshall McLuhan and the *Whole Earth Catalog* come to mind. Indeed, *Literary Machines* opens with the declaration that it is "a hypertext, or nonsequential piece of writing." Each reader of this book has confronted the difficulties imposed by non-linear writing on the linear medium of print.

And yet, there is no way around the fact that most of Ted's work has been published on paper. This fact alone does not produce a particularly difficult problem for bibliography. The difficulty is rather that many of his important writings appeared in ephemeral or semi-published formats, ranging from conference proceedings and magazines of every ilk to self-published books that were produced anywhere and nowhere – at least from the perspective of libraries such as my own that tried desperately to acquire copies. As a result of the vagabond nature of the Nelson oeuvre, few libraries own more than a few of his published works, and several of his most important texts, such as the earliest editions of *Computer Lib/Dream Machines* and *Literary Machines* have achieved almost legendary status for being difficult to lay hands on. So where are we to turn for the texts?

Thus, this bibliography. At least it is a start. My goal has been to put together a complete picture of Ted Nelson's body of work as expressed in publication, including selections from ephemeral and non-print media. It has not been easy. As the

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former bibliographer of the Society for the History of Technology, I adopted and long held to the habit of requiring visual inspection of texts that appeared in my bibliographies. Until this project, I had little reason to abandon this practice. Academic publication practices are easy to trace. It turns out that a number of Ted's publications have followed different paths to readers. Since they have often eluded library catalogs and on-line databases, I have had to trust sources such as c.v. entries, footnotes, and Web traces more than I would like. As a compromise with my earlier bibliographic rule, I have included most of what I have found, indicating works that I was unable to inspect with an asterisk preceding their entries in this bibliography. I ask that any readers who may have access to these texts to contact me. I will produce a revised version of this bibliography someday, if revisions are necessary as a result from any such contacts. Ted's work is worth it.

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