Lust, Touch, Metadata:
Meaning and the Limits of Adaptation

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ABSTRACT
Adding and removing links carries great rhetorical weight. Modern hypertext tools often treat links as metadata and use metadata to provide navigational access. To view links or metadata as extrinsic information applied to an underlying document may no longer be a viable strategy.

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1. LINKS AND OTHER METADATA: ADDED ON, OR BAKED IN?
The earliest hypertext literature sometimes viewed links as an extension or enhancement of documents. Just as books in a library remain integral creations even though they have become components in a collection, the Memex trails of Bush and the *recorded items* of Engelbart's AUGMENT stand on their own, and mean what they say, without needing to take into account the volatile web of citation and commentary that might grow up around them.

This perspective, interestingly, has often been revived within that portion of the Semantic Web effort that Marshall and Shipman [9] characterize as *Taming The Web*.

> The Semantic Web is an extension of the current Web in which information is given well-defined meaning, better enabling computers and people to work in cooperation. [6]

Significant hypertextual structure has been hard to find in the

vernacular Web [11]. Contemporary Web design favors juxtaposition in graphic design (collage) over juxtaposition through hypertext design (montage). The eloquent spatial relationships and imagery of the contemporary Web design are seldom explicit in the markup; semantic Web proponents envision adding information as metadata while skeptics question whether writers will actually create trustworthy metadata. In this view, the Web page is the reality, and metadata decorate the human-readable Web page in order to facilitate machine understanding.

2. INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE: THE LINK AS LEAN-TO
Just as much discussion of a Semantic Web envisions adding metadata to notionally-independent Web pages, Information Architecture (IA) often envisions links as ornamenting and extending notionally-independent pages [12]. IA often treats links as instruments, a means to allow readers to navigate clearly and correctly in order to solve well-formed problems and to accomplish explicitly-formulated tasks. IA's emphasis on the instrumental role of the link has given rise to a strange anomaly: while the profession of the architect arose in the 19th century as an effort to reconcile the forces of Art and Engineering, the rhetoric and role of the information architect has consistently striven to control and discipline the creative staff [4]. Even more than the Semantic Web, this approach reveals the heritage of the collector and the library: Documents carry meaning, links are apparatus along the path.

3. LUST & THE TOUCH OF THE LINK
Elsewhere in this volume, Richard E. Higgason contributes a fine close reading [7] of Mary-Kim Arnold's hypertext short story, "Lust" [1]. Higgason emphasize the content of the lexia while paying less attention to the work's link structure. Here, I would like to examine primarily the structure of this story's links and the way the links themselves create a layer of meaning that is inseparable from (but not represented in) the story's writing spaces. Higgason starts from what the text says; I start from what the text does not say and from the gaps between texts which links span.

"Lust" begins, of course, with its title and its suggestion of craving and desire. The prologue reinforces our expectation:

> Nearly naked
> this summer night
> sweet and heavy
> he comes to her.

As the story unfolds in 38 spaces joined by 141 links, the reader may naturally seek to resolve the sexual tension this opening suggests. The opening, which goes on to observe that the couple "speak of the child/ and the summer sun/ with words that yield/ to the touch" reinforces the sensual promise and raise urgent questions. Who is this child? Is it the child whose conception we are about to witness? There is a knife, but there are no answers.

"Lust" invites us to take a hand, to seek the secret center, the good bits, but readers will find this revelation elusive. The numerous links from the opening page introduce a tangle [2], and though we find no text links on subsequent writing spaces, we recognize that the "words that yield to the touch" of the first page allude to Joyce's unmarked links in *afternoon [8]* .

We struggle to solve the maze, we push against its boundaries. Try as we may, we do not discover the longed-for consummation and resolution: they are not present in the text. "Lust" is, literally, a story of frustration.

I believe that this reading of "Lust" is integral. It does not detract from other readings, but the other readings are toned by the frustration this reading creates. What matters here are the structure of links and the silences of the nodes, the gaps between and within the written texts. What we remember may be our quest to find what Arnold never wrote (see, also [10]).

4. ADAPTATION : PROBLEMS OF MEANING

If we attempted to construct an adapted or personalized version of "Lust" by removing some of its links to clarify its tangled link network, the result would not merely adapt the work. It would distort "Lust" fundamentally to remove the frustration reading. We might as well simplify *Romeo and Juliet* by removing that distracting fellow Mercutio, or trim Lancelot out of *Morte d'Arthur*.

This is not merely a difficulty raised by artistic works: often, the structure of an argument *is* the argument, and trying to simplify that structure damages the argument or excises its rationale. A legal exposition, for example, typically is concerned less with the general principle of law (which may be little more than platitudes), than with the number and nature of its exceptions. It is not interesting to say that speech is free or torture is wrong. The meanings of "free" and "torture" inhere in exception, and any attempt to simplify the exceptions away may lead to disaster.

The trajectory by which we arrive at our conclusion may, in the end, mean more than the conclusion itself. This is undoubtedly the case in drama, of course, but it is also critical to a wide range of scientific and mathematical discourse. A chemical synthesis that proceeds directly from starting materials to its destination by a direct and straightforward path is of very moderate interest, but a synthesis that begins at an unexpected starting point, or one that heads off in unexpected directions before suddenly arriving at the target compound is bound to astonish and delight its readers.

5. LINKS AND ATTRIBUTES

This line of argument suggests that one common form of adaptation — removing links from the paths available to "novice" readers — may prove risky . Structure is often inherent to the argument, not merely a framework added to rationalize or represent a shapeless set of facts. Modifying the structure without carefully considering the trajectory of the argument can lead us to weaken, or contradict, the underlying message.

This hazard might appear to apply only to adding and removing links from a hypertext, but recent developments in hypertext environments suggest that links and other metadata stand, in this arena, on an equal footing. Indeed, in the contemporary Web and in a growing array of hypertext tools, links are metadata and metadata create links.

In Tinderbox [5], *agents* represent persistent queries; in effect, they are multi-tailed, intensional links. The destinations of an agent are the result of a retrieval query against a node's content, links, and its associated attribute-value list. Agents frequently translate declarative metadata into a link:

> Name: PictureAgent
> Query: File(*.jpg)|File(*.gif)

Conversely, Tinderbox and Storyspace [3] writers have always used links as a convenient method for asserting metadata. When reading in the library, for example, we may create a writing space that describes each source, and then link the source to each note that depends on it. That these links provide navigational access is a secondary value; the linkage provides a fast shorthand that connects notes to their source even though we may radically revise the work's organization. The link is metadata.

Where metadata are immediately and transparently transformed into navigational connection, and where links are created to provide metadata, then simplifying the link structure or adding extra metadata take on unexpected rhetorical importance. In any case, it seems prudent to clearly distinguish between links and metadata provided by the author and those added (or removed) by external agency.

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