

Statement to the Senate Commerce Committee by  
Theodor Holm Nelson, Distinguished Fellow, Autodesk, Inc., and Director  
of Public-Access Xanadu, 15 September 1989.

I am grateful for this opportunity to represent my company and the aspirations of many people in the computer field. I think I speak for a large number of sophisticated computer people and others concerned with communication in the world of tomorrow.

## TITANIC CHANGE

We stand at the threshold of a titanic change in the use and availability of the written word, a new era of electronic literature.

I am not talking about "data bases," as we already see them in commercial use, for those have reached roughly the limit of their usefulness. The kinds of searching, flipping and scanning that they make convenient are useful in many ways to researchers, both academic and commercial, but they are difficult and largely irrelevant to the main uses of the written word: learning, study, finding out different points of view, browsing and skimming.

Nor am I talking about "videotext," a collective term for various low-grade services that have been devised for people who are basically uninterested in the written word.

Nor am I talking about the alleged joys of "CD-ROM," the selling of computer disks with a lot of stuff on them for desktop use.

Nor am I talking about "electronic mail," the increasingly popular use of computers to push letters back and forth between users at high speed, permitting individuals to exchange many communiques a day.

Nor am I talking about "teleconferencing," which in its current form is like long electronic scrolls to which different people add comments.

Nor am I talking about "bulletin boards," computer storage systems used to hold and forward materials placed on them by random outsiders.

I am talking about the coming hypertext revolution. Hypertext, I believe, is not just the latest fad in computerdom. It is the next step in civilization, and it represents a quantum step in the use, delivery and meaning of the written word comparable to that offered by Gutenberg's printing press.