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Reviews

Website of the week

Hypernotes

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Academics like to shore up their publications with footnotes, tables, and long lists of references. But editors worry that general readers find this scholarly paraphernalia more of a nuisance than a help, cluttering the page and obscuring the line of argument. One solution for journals that have an electronic version, such as the *BMJ*, is to put the full version—including these extras—on the web.

Chris **McManus**, who won a Wellcome Trust prize designed to enable a professional scientist to write a popular science book, has done something similar for *Right Hand, Left Hand: The Origins of Asymmetry in Brains, Bodies, Atoms and Cultures* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2002). Believing that this sort of thing should be scholarly but not academic, he decided not to include the footnotes that he wrote during the book's preparation. Instead, he created an electronic equivalent, hypernotes, which can be viewed at www.righthandlefthand.com. As well as the notes themselves, the html version has pop-ups and links to other sites—footnotes to the footnotes, if you like.

Hypertext theorists (see

<http://alpha.qmw.ac.uk/~english/cbl/project/fivestanding/hype/hyper-text.htm>) contrast the inflexible linearity of conventional text with the multisequential way in which hypermedia are experienced. They argue that, in hypertext, the traditional roles of author and reader as teller and listener become less clear. Hypertext readers, continually presented with chances to diverge and opportunities for supplementary information, must choose the narrative themselves. Footnotes, Endnotes, and the Experience of Reading Hypertext (<http://vp.engl.wvu.edu/landow/reading.html>), which is itself a kind of online footnote to the journal *Victorian Poetry*, observes that the footnotes of scholarly articles perform a primitive version of the same function in an environment of paper and ink. They allow the reader to decide, mid-sentence, whether to leave the main text for more information or continue reading. In evolutionary terms, the footnote is an ancestor of the hypertext link. Perhaps it is now under threat from **McManus**'s more flexible and better adapted hypernote.

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