Parallels: An Exploration Engine for The Discovery of Ideas

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ABSTRACT + CONCEPT

Parallels is a free, open-source browser-based platform for the creation, navigation and discovery of networks of ideas. It consists of two integrated components: 1) A tool for fluidly creating and remapping documents, and an associatively connected library comprised of the content people using the system decide to explicitly share.

Four principles guide its design:

- fluidity, remixability, connections and privacy-by-design

WHY?

Our daily digital experience is fragmenting into increasingly smaller moments and more diverse modes of interaction. Two trends make it difficult to holistically manage, connect and share the fragments of knowledge, or bits, which we create and consume:

- The shift towards collaborative versus individual modes of work
- The rise of centralized, cloud-based services

At the same time, open source experiments such as Linux, gh and Wikipedia demonstrate the benefits of sharing knowledge and the interdependence of ideas across open systems.

This project seeks to find the balance of a system design which benefits the modern knowledge worker, where data is assumed private and in control (ownership of its creation), while also encouraging the intentional publishing and sharing of ideas for the benefit of others.

To do this, our design seeks to:

- help visualize the associated nature and interconnectedness of ideas
- allow us to work in ways that support the holistic and associative way of thinking
- provide significant value over existing alternatives
- assume the content we create is private, yet encourages sharing to allow for
- the serendipitous discovery and connection of information

HOW?

Parallels features include:

- a tool for creating, navigating and remapping digital content
- an associatively connected library comprised of the content people using the system decide to explicitly share

Our library consists of two types of nodes:

- Remodels: models which skew privacy and which offer convenience yet are tailored for the benefit of others.
- Workspaces: models which benefit the modern knowledge worker, where data is assumed private and in control (ownership of its creation).

SEED USE CASES

- Extract the common functionality of these types of knowledge workers:
  - writer
  - visual artist
  - designer
  - blogger
  - journalist
  - filmmaker
  - teacher
  - researcher
  - facilitator

- Extract the common typology keywords:
  - data
  - sharing
  - collaboration
  - community

FLUIDITY

System is designed for experimentation and play by allowing fluid, physics-based reactive interaction across all of its functions. Responsive as musical instrument, seeking to enable a state of flow unlike current systems. Any action to be undone easily, which extends not just not on the document level, but across any action taken on the system level.

REMXIAIBILITY

Documents are maps constructed of bits, or pieces of digital content on an endless canvas. Bits can be shunted, reordered and remodeled into different combinations like digital Lego. Instead of organization through links and folders, documents are represented by boundaries of particular sections of the canvas.

CONNECTIONS

Semantic associations are the primary means of establishing document structure. These invisible connections, or parallels, between bits provide a system for creating relationships and establishing order. This also enables unique search, navigation, clustering and serendipitous discovery across user’s personal content, and that of content available on the network.

PRIVACY BY DESIGN

Data privacy is a not a bolt-on feature, but a core part of its design. All data is in hands of creator, unless explicitly shared through a system of granular publishing capabilities.

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