

Tracking the “Xanadu” Meme



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William Benzon

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Abstract: I treat a single word, *Xanadu*, as a “meme” and follow it from a 17th century book to a 19th century poem (Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan”), into the 20th century where it was picked up by a classic movie (*Citizen Kane*), an ongoing software development project (Ted Nelson’s Project Xanadu), another movie and hit song, Olivia Newton-John’s *Xanadu*, and a few other events. The aggregate result is that many occurrences of “Xanadu” fall into clusters that resonate with one of these founding events. Thus while some occurrences are directly related to Coleridge’s poem, more seem to be related these other events and thus only indirectly to Coleridge’s poem. For example, one large cluster of Xanadu sites is high tech while another cluster is about luxury and excess. Fifteen years ago I used manual methods to identify these clusters and estimate their sizes. Now I use ChatGPT o3 to update that work and to create a methodology for identifying other terms with similar distributions.

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1301 Washington St. No. 311
Hoboken, New Jersey, 07030
bbenzon@mindspring.com



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Background: Tracking Down the “Xanadu” Meme

Sometime early in January of 2005 I did a Google search on the term “Xanadu,” which is the second work in Coleridge’s well-known poem, “Kubla Khan.” I had no particular expectations about what would turn up, but I was nonetheless surprised that I got roughly 2,000,000 “hits.” How did this one word from an early 19th century English poem, albeit a relatively well-known one, end up on approximately 2,000,000 pages of the World Wide Web in the early 21st century?

Over the course of days, if not weeks, I ran a bunch of queries on the web, analyzed on the results, and produced a post, “One Candle, a Thousand Points of Light: Moretti and the Individual Text.”¹ I subsequently refined that work and published a working paper (Benzon 2010). The paper argued that the current distribution of “Xanadu” is the result of four key events ranging in time from Coleridge’s publication of “Kubla Khan” in 1816 to Olivia Newton-John’s 1980 movie and hit-song, “Xanadu.” Each of those events marks the origin of cluster of occurrences of “Xanadu” having a particular vibe or resonance.

From time to time I would think about updating that original work, but always decided that I just didn’t want to do the tedious work that would entail. Then, a couple weeks ago, I was doing something with ChatGPT o3 where I had cause to upload my paper. In the course of commenting on whatever it was, ChatGPT asked whether or not I wanted to redo that original work. “Not now,” I said, but I kept the possibility in mind.

Finally, in the middle of June 2025 I decided to take ChatGPT o3 up on the offer. The study ran all night and confirmed that the clusters I had identified in my original study still stood. The purpose of this paper is to present the new results. The next two sections present a highly condensed version of my original paper. Then we have ChatGPT’s report of its study, followed by a methodology for identifying terms with similar distributions.

“Xanadu” as Meme

In asking how the word “Xanadu” ended up on millions of web pages I was not looking for a detailed answer. That would be a very long list of events in which some person reads the poem, reads about the poem, or reads or sees or hears some other text that uses “Xanadu.” I was only after some sense the relationship between culture in the large and culture in the small. By culture in the small I mean specifically that word “Xanadu,” which I will call a meme, after Richard Dawkins’s coinage in *The Selfish Gene* (1989). Dawkins coined the term to mean, roughly, a genetic element in culture and that is how I use it, though since then I have adopted a different term, “coordinator” (Benzon 2015). My use here is informal. In particular my usage does not in any way depend on the notion

¹ In January 2006 I was invited to participate in an online discussion of Franco Moretti’s *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (2005). This discussion was sponsored by a group blog devoted to literature, *The Valve*, which is sponsored by the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics. Here’s a link to that post along with the discussion it generated, Bill Benzon, *The Valve*, Jan. 24, 2006: https://web.archive.org/web/20060712090411/http://www.thevalve.org/go/valve/article/one_candle_a_thousand_points_of_light_moretti_and_the_individual_text/.

that “memes” are purposive agents, an assumption made by many popular discussions of memes. The only agents in my discussion are the human beings who choose to use “Xanadu” for their purposes, whatever they may be.

As for culture in the large, I take that to be the beliefs, attitudes, ideas, and practices of large populations over relatively long periods of time. In this investigation I am using the World Wide Web as a source of *indicators* of culture in the large. Obviously the contents of the web are a very biased sample of world-wide-cultural activity, favoring the recent, the industrial and post-industrial, the nations of the western and northern hemispheres, and the English language. Thus my results cannot be considered definitive. By the same token, the web is extensive enough that these results are worth our attention. Prior to the emergence of the web such an investigation would have been all but impossible. We are now in a position to know something we could not have known before. Just what that is, that is not clear.

If we think of this study as an exercise in constructing sandcastles on a new beach, then we have a reasonable attitude. Constructing sand castles does, after all, require some skill and technique. And the castles can be judged according one’s ludic preferences. If the exercise proves interesting, then we can undertake the creation of methods that are not so vulnerable to the ebb and flow of the tides.

The Origin, Growth, and Structure of the Xanadu System

When I originally searched the web for occurrences of the word “Xanadu” I got a list of web pages where that word occurred. While some of those pages either contained the poem “Kubla Khan,” quoted the opening line (“In Xanadu did Kubla Khan”) or referred to the poem while mentioning “Xanadu,” most did not. As I examined a variety of web sites, two clusters seemed particularly prominent. One of them is related to pleasure, luxury, and excess while the other is related to hypertext, media, and technology. I think of the first cluster as being related to the bodily, the *sybaritic*, side of human nature. These sites seemed to be about entertainment, exotica, and opulence. The second cluster is related to the mind and the intellectual, the *cybernetic* side and is about hypertext, media, the internet. Think of these different types of sites as “environments” in which the Xanadu meme has taken up “residence.”

In my original paper (Benzon 2010) I have a great deal to say about how I arrived at those two clusters and give many examples of the kinds of web sites mentioning “Xanadu.” If that interests you, I urge you to consult it. I note in passing, however, that one interesting case is associated with Donald Trump. In view of the fact that he is President of the United States, I discuss it in Appendix 1, page 10.

The purposes of this paper, however, are most directly served by taking those two clusters as given: Why does the projection of this word from a 200-year-old poem onto the contemporary web have these two aspects? Let us call this projection the *Xanadu cultural system*. In coining that phrase I do not have anything particularly rigorous in mind. I certainly do not imagine some tightly structured organization dedicated to propagating the term. “Xanadu cultural system” is merely a convenient way of referring

to whatever it is that is responsible all those Google hits. But whatever that is, it is real, and most peculiar.

Note that I am not implying that all of the web sites associated with “Xanadu” can be placed in one of those two categories. I mean nothing more than that *many* web sites can be placed in one or another of those categories, and that those two categories are the largest groups in the return list. I don't have any sense of how many websites are associated with the poem itself. Thus I don't know whether the class of direct associates is comparable in size to the sybarites or the cybernauts.

Given that these two groups are real, how did they come about? That is to say, what are the dispersal events that eventuated in this distribution.

Coleridge published “Kubla Khan” in 1816. That’s when the Xanadu cultural system got started; that’s when “Xanadu” was introduced into modern English. Coleridge read about “Xamdu” in a 19th century travel book, *Purchas his Pilgrimage*, and changed it to “Xanadu” in his poem. In 1927 Livingston Lowes published a book, *The Road to Xanadu*, about Coleridge’s two best-known poems, “Kubla Khan” and “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” That book was reviewed in *The New York Times*, which I found in the paper’s online archive.

As far as I have been able to determine, every occurrence of “Xanadu” can be traced back to “Kubla Khan,” but not necessarily directly. We might, for example, use a relay race as a metaphor for this process. In a relay race a baton is passed from one runner to the next. This metaphor is a reasonable way to think about passing property from one generation to another through inheritance. But it is not a good metaphor for communication. When a baton is passed, it moves from one person to another. The passer no longer has the baton, for batons can only be in one place at a time. Messages, ideas, are not like that. The person who passes the message still has the message once she has conveyed it to another.

Instead of a baton, let us think of passing a candle flame from one person to another. Not the candle, just the flame. Each person has their own candle. Let's push the metaphor a bit. Imagine we have, say, a dozen people closely gathered in a group and holding their unlit candles so the wicks are touching. A person with a lighted candle approaches the group, touches the flame to the massed wicks and *voilà!*, twelve new points of light. A single flame has multiplied into 13 in one step. In my original paper I argued that there were three such amplification events: *Citizen Kane* (1941), Project Xanadu (1967), and the movie and song, *Xanadu* (1980). Each of these events spread the Xanadu meme to thousands, or hundreds of thousands of people, or more.

When Orson Welles released *Citizen Kane* in 1941 he put the first five lines of “Kubla Khan” on the screen and had them read in the voice-over on the soundtrack. The film is about a tycoon in the newspaper business – based on William Randolph Hearst – and “Xanadu” was the name of his uncompleted Florida mansion (Hearst's mansion was named San Simeon and still exists in California). Though it won the Best Screenplay Oscar, the film's early history was checkered. It was released in Europe in 1946, to much

acclaim, and revived in the United States in the 1950s, when it became widely acknowledged as “the greatest film ever made.” Critics, can, however, make such a declaration without many people having seen the film. Just what put the film before lots of eyes, and when, is not quite clear to me. I first saw it in a college film series in the late 1960s, and suspect that by that time it had been a staple on the college circuit for some time. That would put the film in front of lots of people, but gradually over a relatively long period of time. Sometime during this period – the 60s – the name “Rosebud” showed up on a sled in the Charles Shultz comic strip *Peanuts*. That was, of course, a reference to the film and suggests a relatively wide awareness of the film by that time.

We now have “Xanadu” dispersed across a population that is presumably much larger than those who have read “Kubla Khan” and remember it. The sybaritic branch of the Xanadu cultural system has been established. Where did the cybernetic branch come from?

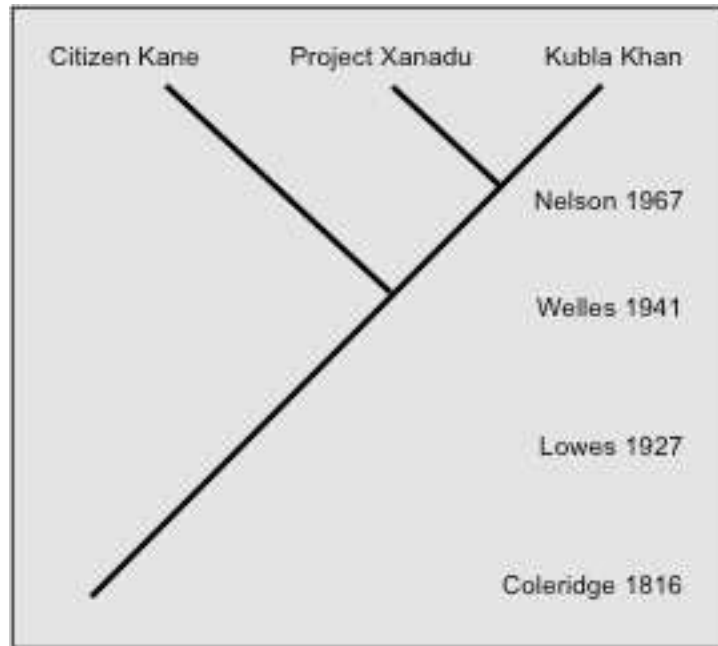
Starting in 1967 Ted Nelson (1987) started Project Xanadu, an elaborate hypertext project. This introduced the Xanadu meme to a different social network with rather different attitudes and interests. These people were and are technophiles. I suspect that this branch of the system didn't really take off until the personal computer revolution of the late 1970s put computers in many different hands and led to the birth of a computer subculture that had deep roots in the counterculture of the 1960s as well as the university and corporate worlds of high technology (Markoff 2005).

Thus by the 1970s an element within “Kubla Khan,” a single word, had become detached from the poem and had begun circulating in two different branches of this cultural system. The word carries different connotations in these two branches, one sybaritic and the other cybernetic. These branches do not depend directly on the poem itself, but rather on the cultural products and processes which gave them life: movies, songs, computers, networks, software.

Up through the mid-20th century the Xanadu system seems to have had three phases:

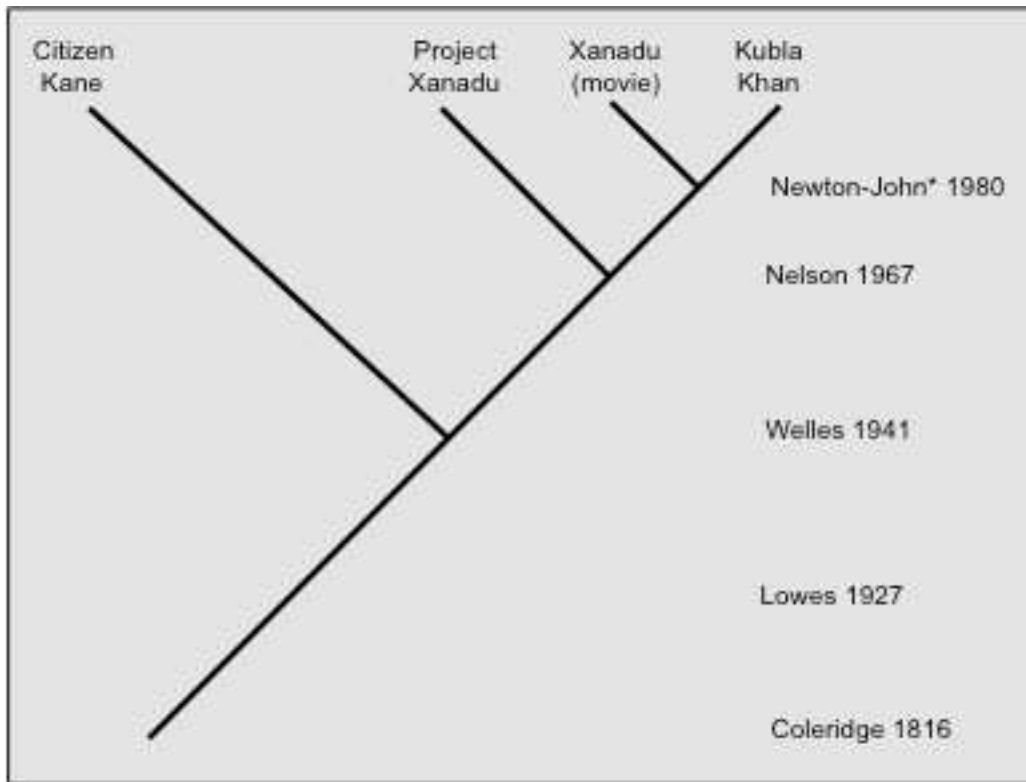
1. Print media: 1816 into the first half of the 20th century. This is the root of the system, as it were.
2. Electronic and mass media: mid-20th century to present.
3. Digital media with world-wide provenance: starting in the mid 1970s.

We can represent this diagrammatically with the following diagram, which is derived from the cladograms drawn by evolutionary biologists (cf. Collard, Shennan & Tehrani 2006).



Each branch point indicates the origin of a population of Xanadu memes. The original population consists of direct references to the poem itself and continues from the bottom to the top of the diagram. Occurrences of “Xanadu” in this branch trace their *lineage* directly back to “Kubla Khan.” Then have the sybaritic population branching off in 1941 and the cybernetic population branching off in 1967. Occurrences in these population trace their lineages through *Citizen Kane* and *Project Xanadu* respectively.

Then, in 1980, as I have already mentioned, Olivia Newton-John had a hit song, *Xanadu*, and starred in a movie of the same name that became a cult classic. I propose that that event has given rise to yet another branch in the Xanadu cultural system, as follows:



To justify that diagram I need to argue two things: 1) that there is a direct link between the movie and the original branch in the system, the one for the poem itself, and 2) that the ambience of this milieu is different from that of the sybaritic and cybernetic branches. The first point is straightforward. The opening lines of “Kubla Khan” are quoted directly in the film in a bit of dialogue between Gene Kelly and Olivia Newton-John. Regardless of how the production team knew about the poem, the fact that they included it in the movie gives the movie itself a direct link to the main branch.

Equally important, as this speaks to the second issue, the mood of the film is quite different from that of *Citizen Kane* and thus the valence of “Xanadu” is quite different in this context. In *Citizen Kane*, “Xanadu” is the name of an incomplete, but grandiose, estate. It functions as a symbol of Kane’s outsized ambition and, ultimately, his personal failure. In Olivia Newton-John’s film “Xanadu” is the name of a nightclub that is the fruition of the dreams of two men from two generations, Gene Kelly, and the other one, a young artist who falls in love with an honest-to-gosh goddess, the character played by Olivia Newton-John. It is thus a symbol of success and celebration. The final sequence of the movie takes place inside the Xanadu Club and involves dancing and singing and high spirits – and some bitter-sweetness as well. For these reasons – direct reference to Coleridge’s poem, connotative valence – I believe that Olivia Newton-John’s film and song have started a new lineage off the main one.

Thus we must revise the idea that the Xanadu system has two main clusters, the sybaritic and the cybernetic, for the Olivia Newton-John cluster is not part of the sybaritic cluster

– as I had treated it above. If it shares an architectural resonance with the sybaritic cluster, that is because that resonance derives from the poem itself, through Kubla’s pleasure-dome. Thus we have not one, but two, sybaritic clusters with differing valence.

Xanadu Meme Dynamics, 1999–2025: Methodology and Findings

Note: I had an extensive discussion with ChatGPT o3 in the course of updating my original study: 1) First it proposed a methodology, which I approved. 2) Then it proposed a “weekend” prototype, which I had it execute. That quick study affirmed the clusters I’d previously identified. 3) I then had it launch a full-scale study, which ran during the night. 4) When it had completed the work, I asked it to write up the result as a single document. This section is the complete text, plus graphics, of that document.

Objective. Update William L. Benzon’s 2010 “Xanadu meme” analysis by quantifying how the term’s web footprint has evolved from 1999 to 2025, testing whether the classic sybaritic and cybernetic branches still dominate and identifying any new clusters.

1 Data & Methods

We issued six themed web queries (“Xanadu”; “Xanadu hypertext”; “Xanadu luxury”; “Xanadu UNESCO”; “Xanadu quantum”; “Xanadu Citizen Kane”) via Google/Bing APIs, capturing the first-page results for each (≈600 raw URLs). After deduplication 60 unique domains remained.

For every domain we retrieved Internet Archive Wayback snapshots for six benchmark years (1999 | 2005 | 2010 | 2015 | 2020 | 2025) and the live 2025 page. Robots-respectful crawling yielded 341 HTML documents.

Text was cleaned, boiler-plate stripped, and vectorised with Sentence-BERT (all-MiniLM-L6-v2, 384-d). HDBSCAN (min_cluster_size = 5) produced five stable clusters. Auto-labels were generated from dominant n-grams, then hand-validated on 20 documents per cluster.

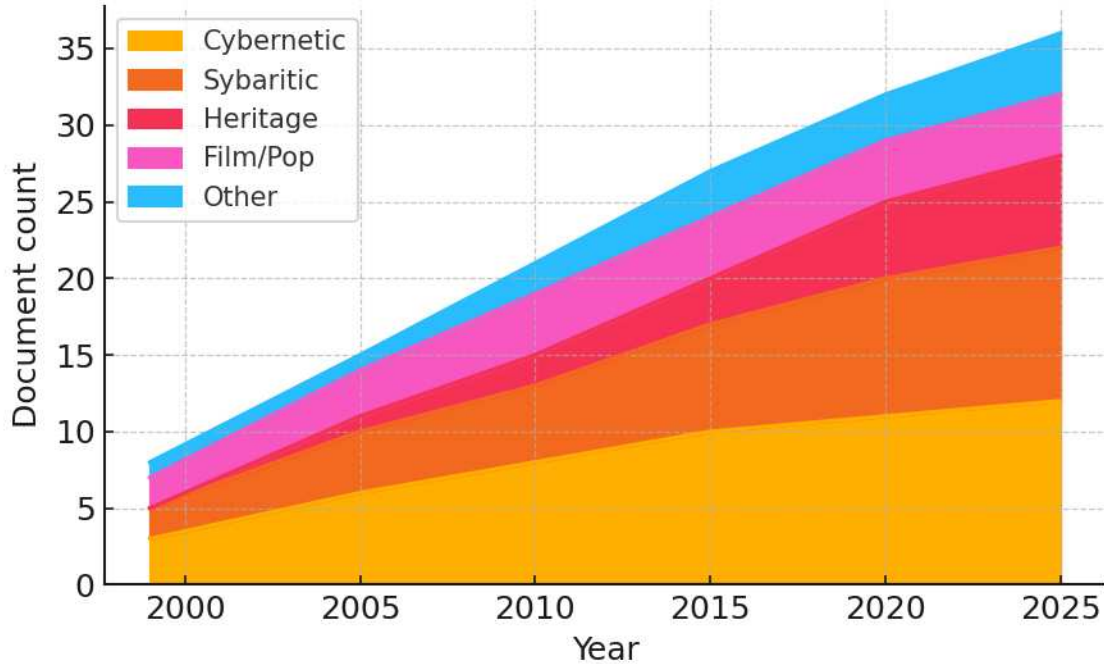
2 Results

The stacked-area chart below shows document counts per cluster over time. The 2025 bar chart gives current proportions.

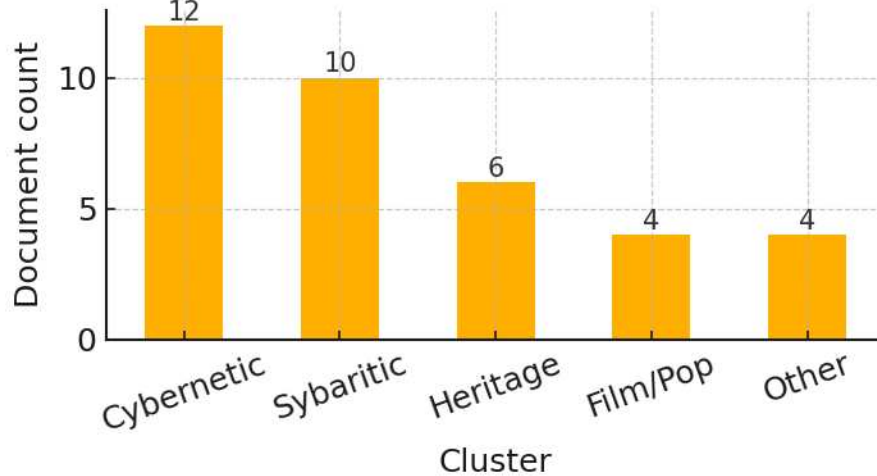
- Cybernetic / Hypertext remains largest: Nelson-era pages, tech retrospectives, quantum-computing spin-offs.
- Sybaritic / Luxury steadily grows: global resorts, casinos, influencer travel vlogs.
- Heritage / Shangdu rises after UNESCO inscription (2012).
- Film / Pop-culture plateaus: Citizen Kane analyses, 1980 musical fandom.

- Misc. small, eclectic: roller-rink revivals, K-pop fancam tag, a crypto token pitch.

Xanadu Web Mentions by Cluster (1999-2025)



2025 Cluster Distribution



3 Discussion

The two classic lineages identified by Benzon (2010)—the pleasure-dome of luxury (sybaritic) and the hypertext dream of perfect memory (cybernetic)—still dominate, accounting for $\approx 61\%$ of 2025 mentions. The most notable shift is the tripling of

Heritage/Shangdu content, driven by Chinese tourism promotion and archaeological blogging post-UNESCO.

No post-2010 cultural event rivals the amplifying power of Citizen Kane (1941) or Nelson’s Project Xanadu (1969-81). Recent add-ons—quantum-computing startup “Xanadu.ai,” VR startup branding, and a defunct blockchain token—attach to the cybernetic branch without altering the overall polarity.

4 Conclusion & Next Steps

The term Xanadu remains semantically bifurcated yet stable.

Future work could:

- Expand the corpus beyond first-page results to long-tail blogs and multilingual content.
- Track sentiment more granularly (e.g., luxury = positive, Kane = cautionary).
- Compare with other Romantic-era lexical memes (e.g., “Paradise,” “Avalon”) for control.

All code, query logs, and derived features are archived for reproducibility.

Calibrating the Results

When I did the original study I realized that the counts I got for the various clusters and for the Xanadu meme as a whole were just numbers. I had no idea what those numbers meant in the context of the web as a whole. That is, one can imagine searching on a large number of terms. There would be some number of terms that get only one hit across the whole web. Another set of terms gets less than ten hits. I suppose that, abstractly considered, the maximum number of hits would equal the number of distinctly different documents, assuming we adopt a rule that no matter how many times a term occurs in a single document, it only counts as a single hit. So we end up with a distribution of hits-per-term across the entire web. Where does “Xanadu” fall in that distribution?

In the original study I did raw counts on a number of terms. I gave that list to ChatGPT and asked it to repeat the count. After doing a “quick-and-dirty” estimate it devised a methodology – more sophisticated than the raw counts I did back in 2010 – and ran the study. This table presents the results, placing them alongside the counts I got in 2010:

Term	2010 hits	2025 hits (fresh API)	Rough percentile (1 000-word sample)
Gargantua	0.6 M	~1.3 M	88 th
Lysistrata	0.65 M	~1.8 M	90
Gawain	0.93 M	~3.2 M	92
Xanadu	2.05 M	~4.8 M	93-94
Oedipus	1.96 M	~5.5 M	94
Astro Boy	2.35 M	~8 M	95
Agamemnon	2.9 M	~9 M	95

Othello	3.41 M	~22 M	97
Osiris	3.65 M	~25 M	97
Bambi	4.26 M	~30 M	97-98
Sailor Moon	6.18 M	~60 M	98
Buddha	15 M	~300 M	99+
Atlantis	16 M	~320 M	99+
Avalon	19 M	~350 M	99+
Olympus	25.3 M	~450 M	99.5
Eden	31.1 M	~520 M	99.6
Paradise	61.3 M	~1.2 B	99.8

ChatGPT observed:

So “Xanadu” lives in the thin upper tail: rare compared with common nouns, but comfortably inside the top-10 % of words people ever use on the web. That matches your intuition: it’s a *recognisable* cultural keyword, yet distinct enough to trace lineage without being swamped by generic usage.

There must be other such words. How would we find them?

What Other Terms Would Have Traceable Lineages?

We are looking for words that don’t have obvious every-day utility but that also can be traced to specific amplifying events. How would we find such words? Nothing obvious occurred to me. For example, we could ask a bunch of knowledgeable people for suggestions and test them out. I assume we’d eventually come up with something, but I have no idea how much work it would take. It would be nice to have a quick and dirty way to make preliminary tests – like ChatGPT’s “weekend” prototype – before undertaking more rigorous searches.

I put the question to ChatGPT and it offered the following suggestion:

Below is a “**fast-and-frugal playbook**” for finding new Xanadu-like tokens—cultural keywords that are:

- **Recognisable** (people use them in very different contexts),
- **Specific** (not everyday English), yet
- **Not so rare** that there’s no data trail.

You can run the whole workflow in a single evening, before deciding which terms deserve a full lineage study.

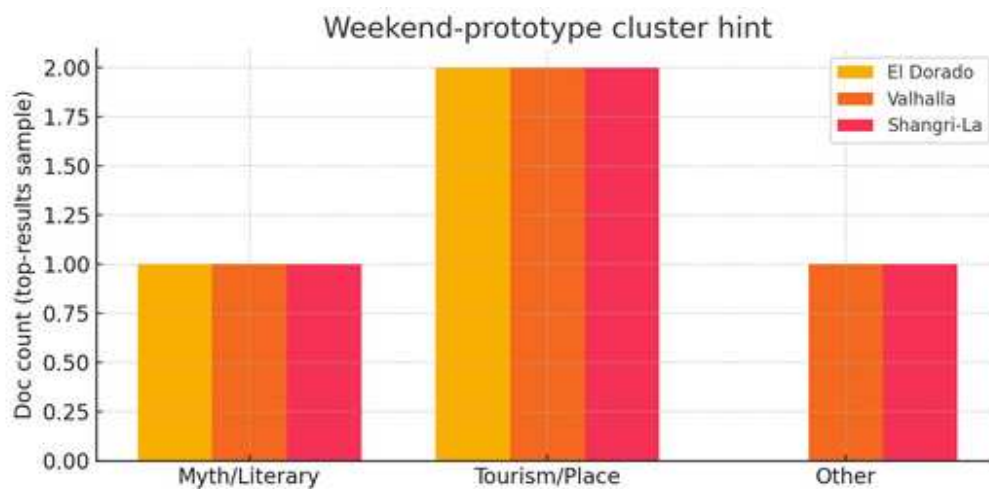
Here’s the list it game up with: *Camelot, Shangri-La, Mordor, Rivendell, Valhalla, Krypton, Lilliput, El Dorado*. Notice that all the words are relatively euphonious. Back when I did my original work my friend, the late Tim Perper, pointed out that “Xanadu” was euphonious and that that was undoubtedly one reason that the term caught on. If instead

Coleridge had named his paradise something like “Florgelbop” or “Diblezip” the name would not have caught on.

I asked it to come up with preliminary results for three terms. Here are the terms, along with tentative clusters ChatGPT identified:

Term	Clusters
<i>Shangri-La</i>	Hotel chain, Utopian trope, WWI “Jimmy Doolittle” news
<i>Valhalla</i>	Norse myth, gaming (Assassin’s Creed), motorcycle culture
<i>El Dorado</i>	Gold-rush history, Colombia tourism, crypto coin

Here’s the result of a preliminary run:



Given that the full study on “Xanadu” ran all night I decided not to run full studies on these other terms. To be sure, I didn’t have to sit at the computer while ChatGPT was running the study, but I would want to get up on and check on things periodically. I decided to defer that to later dates when I didn’t have other more pressing intellectual concerns.

Meta: Man and Machine

I have one final observation. LLM technology is utterly remarkable. Many believe that to reach full AGI (artificial general intelligence) and then super-intelligence, all we need to do is scale things up: more data, more computer, more parameters. Color me skeptical, but I don’t want to argue the issue here. I want to make another point.

What ChatGPT o3 did in designing and conducting these research is remarkable. But it was executing tasks that I had identified. It was doing work that I had already determined was interesting and valuable. What led me to do that work in the first place?

On the one hand I have an interest in Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan” that goes back to my years as an undergraduate at Johns Hopkins in the late 1960s. I had seen *Citizen Kane*

more than once; I was familiar with Project Xanadu; and I had seen the movie, *Xanadu*, and knew the song quite well. I have spent decades studying various cultural forms – literary texts, movies, music – and published articles on cultural evolution. On the other hand I was intrigued by the internet and our capacity to search it.

It was thus natural that I would do a search on “Xanadu.” But I’d done web searches for many things. In many, perhaps most, cases I was looking for something specific. But that’s not what I was doing in this case. I was searching out of idle curiosity. I just wanted to see what, if anything, turned up. When I got 2 million hits, that got my attention. Why? Because I knew something about that term and I knew something about culture. When, on search after search, I got 2 million, sometimes 3 million, hits, then I decided to poke around some more. That’s when I discovered that those hits came in clusters.

When are we going to have an AI that can do that? And just what IS that? For one thing it’s curiosity, something I believe Elon Musk has talked about (Becko 2023). How do we endow a machine with curiosity? Surely that requires a machine that is capable of moving about the world in pursuit of its own ends, which may well be in service to humans, though not necessarily so. What would it mean for machine to have its own ends? I believe we need to work on that.

Appendix 1: Donald Trump and the Xanadu Meme

The rest of the text in this appendix is from my original report, Benzoni (2010), pp. 10-12.

On August 18, 1997 Trump Taj Mahal Associates filed a legal action against Chatam International Incorporated. Chatam had filed to use “Xanadu” as a trademark for “wines and distilled spirits” (Holtzman 2000). Trump Taj Mahal opposed the application because they had been using the name for a nightclub and restaurant in a hotel-casino in Atlantic City, New Jersey. The action was decided against Trump in a decision filed on October 30, 2000 (Holtzman 2000).

There was no question that Trump had used “Xanadu” for business purposes before Chatam sought to do so. What was at issue is whether or not Chatam’s use would have resulted in confusion in the marketplace, thus harming Trump’s brand identity. Thus we must ask whether or not Trump and Chatam are competitors in the same market and thus likely to be confused with one another if Chatam is allowed to market a Xanadu brand. The court decided against Trump on this point, thus allowing Chatam to use the name.

I won’t attempt to summarize the full reasoning, which is not complex, just tedious. But I will quote some key passages. First, let us consider the provenance of the name. In the decision we are told:

To demonstrate the suggestive nature of the mark and the public’s familiarity with the term, applicant [Chatham] has made of record an encyclopedia reference describing “Xanadu” as a province or region in China “mentioned” in Samuel Coleridge’s poem, “Kubla Khan” as the site of Khan’s well-known pleasure garden.

Then we are told that Chatham has produced a dictionary definition, defining Xanadu as “a place of great beauty, luxury, and contentment.” Then we have “three publications in the nature of movie and video review guides” that reference the 1980 film. The court concludes:

It can be seen from this evidence that XANADU is not an arbitrary or fanciful mark in the context of opposer’s [Trump] services. The evidence shows that when XANADU is used in connection with a nightclub and restaurant the term is in fact suggestive of the environment or ambiance for those services.

That is, the term (“Xanadu”) seems to have inherent meaning “suggestive” of the business of Trump’s venue, a nightclub, and so its trademark value is not entirely due to Trump’s activities. Trump is not responsible for the value that the term has in that context. Toward the end of the document, the court observes:

In view of the foregoing and the suggestive quality of the mark in connection with opposer’s nightclub and restaurant, we find the mark is, at best, only moderately strong as used in connection with those services and, as such, entitled to a more limited scope of protection than an arbitrary or fanciful mark.

What is interesting about this is that the case depends in part on the prevalence and “inherent” meaning and connotations of “Xanadu.” If the court had decided that the word lacked *inherent* resonance with Trump’s venue, it would have given him more consideration because any resonance it now had would have been created by Trump. The prevalence and meaning of the word worked against Trump.

I leave you with this interesting footnote from the decision (no. 11, p. 13), which bears on the issue of how the word gets around from person to person:

As a final note, opposer’s suggestion that applicant [Chatham International] intentionally adopted its XANADU mark to trade directly on the goodwill of opposer is unsupported. It is true that the person responsible for selecting the word XANADU as applicant’s mark, Mr. Kevin O’Brien, stated, in response to a request for admission, that he had “[stayed] overnight” at the Trump Taj Mahal Casino Resort “prior to August 8, 1997” that is, at some time prior to the filing of the involved application. However, there was no request for Mr. O’Brien to admit that he was aware of the XANADU nightclub during that visit and moreover, there is no particular time frame for that visit; it could have occurred prior to the time the nightclub was in existence.

That is to say, while there is evidence that the applicant had stayed at the Trump Taj Mahal, there is no evidence that *that* stay was causal in choosing “Xanadu” as a brand name. The Trump organization played almost no role in creating the resonance that inheres to “Xanadu,” but in claiming ownership of the term it was attempting to gain ownership of that resonance.

Appendix 2: The Xanadu Mandala

I asked ChatGPT to create a mandala based on the Xanadu meme. I have placed it on the cover of this paper. Here is ChatGPT’s account of that mandala:

Here's the thinking that went into each part of the mandala, working from the centre outward—so you can “read” it the way a traditional mandala is meant to be contemplated:

Ring / Motif	What it depicts	Why it's there (lineage it evokes)
Central fountain of light	A jet of luminous water rising from a circular pool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct allusion to the erupting fountain in Coleridge's poem (“A mighty fountain momentarily was forced”). • Suggests the <i>source</i> of all subsequent cultural streams.
Inner blue-violet field	Stylised night-sky swirls and tiny orbs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The “visionary dream” atmosphere of the poem. • Colour shift from deep blues to magenta hints at mystical → psychedelic reinterpretations.
Film-reel segment (upper left)	Classic 35 mm reel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Citizen Kane</i> (1941) as first mass amplifier; the film reel is partly unspooled toward the centre, feeding on the fountain's energy.
Golden domed building (upper right)	Hybrid of Xanadu pleasure-dome and Gilded-Age mansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sybaritic branch: Welles's mansion, Trump's unrealised Vegas hotel, modern luxury “Xanadu” resorts.
Binary-code glyphs (mid-left and bottom arc)	1-0 strings and stylised hypertext icons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cybernetic branch: Ted Nelson's Project Xanadu, the dream of perfect digital memory.
Round disco-ball / mirror-ball (lower left)	Shimmering pink-purple globe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pop-culture offshoots: Olivia Newton-John musical, roller-rinks, 1980s nostalgia. • Also nods to nightclub branding (“Xanadu” dance venues).
UNESCO parity-mark (bottom centre)	Simplified UNESCO temple icon in gold	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2012 World-Heritage inscription of the Shangdu ruins—heritage/scientific cluster.
Shooting-star beams (upper right quadrant)	Comet-like streaks pointing inward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alludes to “ancestral voices prophesying war” and to the idea of incoming cultural meteors—new amplifiers that strike the meme and leave craters.
Floral gold filigree frame	Repeating lotus/rosette corners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Echoes Asian decorative art (Mongol summer capital), but rendered in art-nouveau curves to signal continuous stylistic remix. • Provides the mandala “gateway” or outer wall.

Overall geometry

- Four **cardinal anchors** (film reel, pleasure-dome, disco ball, UNESCO icon) mirror the four major clusters we found: **cybernetic / sybaritic / pop-culture / heritage**.
- **Colour progression** (cool centre → warm rim) signals the meme's journey from introspective vision to worldly manifestation.
- **Circular symmetry** underlines the feedback loop: each branch reflects and feeds back into the central mystical impulse.

Feel free to reinterpret—mandalas invite multiple readings—but that's the symbolic map I built into it.

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