

Dr. Katherine D. Harris	
--------------------------------	--

Theorizing the Digital Edition:
Textual Theory to Consider Before Getting Started

WHAT IS A BOOK?

McKenzie, D.F. “The Book as an Expressive Form.” *The Book History Reader*. Eds. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery. New York: Routledge, 2002. 27-38.

[N]on-verbal elements of typographic notations have expressive function in conveying meaning. (31)

WHAT IS TEXTUALITY?

McKenzie, in *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, works from “textual criticism”:

[which is concerned with] getting the right words in the right order; on the semiotics of print and the role of typography in forming meaning; on the critical theories of authorial intention and reader response; on the relation between the past meanings and present uses of verbal texts. It offers an illustration of the transmission of texts as the creation of the new versions which form, in turn, the new books, the products of later printers, and the stuff of subsequent bibliographical control. (21)

David Greetham, in *Theories of the Text*, offers a definition of textuality that integrates economic, psychological and political theoretical styles with literary criticism:

It is, on the one hand, a place of fixed, determinable, concrete signs, a material artefact, and yet, on the other, an ineffable location of immaterial concepts, not dependent at all on performance transmission. It is, on the one hand, a weighty authority with direct access to originary meaning, and, on the other, a slowly accumulating, socially derived series of meanings, each at war with the other for prominence and acceptance. It is a place inhabited only by a sole, creative author who unwillingly releases control to social transmission, and it is also a place constructed wholly out of social negotiations over transmission and reception. (63)

WHAT IS A TEXT/WORK?

McGann, Jerome. *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1983, 1992, 2nd printing 1996.

To determine the physical appearance of the critical text—indeed, to understand that what is involved in such an apparently pedantic task—requires the operation of a complex structure of analysis which considers the history of the text in relation to the related histories of its production, reproduction and reception. We are asked as well to distinguish clearly between a history of transmission and a history of production. Finally, these special historical studies must be imbedded in the broad cultural contexts which alone can explain and elucidate them. (122-23)

McGann, Jerome. *The Textual Condition*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991.

Both the practice and the study of human culture comprise a network of symbolic exchanges. Because human beings are not angels, these exchanges always involve material negotiations. Even in their most complex and advanced forms—when the negotiations are carried out as textual events—the intercourse that is being human is materially executed: as spoken texts or scripted forms. To participate in these exchanges is to have entered what I wish to call here “the textual condition.” (3)

The inquiry is grounded in the thought that texts represent—are in themselves—certain kinds of human acts. (4)

But the work of knowing demands that the map be followed into the textual field, where “the meaning of the texts” will appear as a set of concrete and always changing conditions: because the meaning is in the use, and textuality is a social condition of various times, places and persons. (16)

WHAT IS AN AUTHOR?

Shelley, Percy B. *A Defense of Poetry*. (1822).

[W]hen composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conception of the poet. (504)

WHAT IS AN ARCHIVE?

Derrida, Jacques. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Trans. Eric Prenowitz. Chicago, U of Chicago P, 1996.

In *Archive Fever*, Derrida suggests that the moments of archivization are infinite throughout the life of the artifact: [T]he technical structure of the archiving archive also determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event. (17)

Our search for teleological conclusion to our own existence predicates the search for an origin. Derrida describes this feverish search as “*mal d’archive*”:

It is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive, right where it slips away. It is to run after the archive, even if there’s too much of it, right where something in it anarchives itself. It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, *an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement*. (91–emphasis added)

The unstable future according to the open archive produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future. (68)

The concept of the archive shelters in itself, of course, this memory of the name *arkhē*. But it also *shelters* itself from this memory which it shelters: which comes down to saying also that it forgets it. (2)

WHAT IS A HYPERTEXT?

Benjamin, Walter. “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” *Illuminations*. Trans. Harry Zohn. NY: Harcourt Brace, 1968.

Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence. (220)

The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. (221)