

Reinfandt, Christoph: "Reading Textures." In: Martin Middeke & Christoph Reinfandt, eds. *Theory Matters: The Place of Theory in Literary and Cultural Studies Today*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016: 319-334.

Reading Textures

Christoph Reinfandt

TEXT AND TEXTURE

How does a text relate to the world? In order to (once more) tackle the time-honoured text-context-problem implied in this question, this chapter will introduce a theory of texture which aims at modelling the interface between text, reader, and world in its material, medial, and cultural dimensions. The notion of texture, I will argue, opens up an opportunity for mapping the variety of possible reading orientations both within academia (from hermeneutics to critical theory and beyond) and outside it (from reading for information or ideas on the one hand to reading for entertainment and escape on the other). As opposed to terms like “text” and “textuality”, the term “texture” more clearly addresses the dynamic interwovenness of material form and immaterial processes of signification by anchoring acts of reading in the differentiable layers of materiality and mediality in a given text. These bear traces of a text’s place in the world both in terms of production and reception, and of its cultural pre-formation through not only genres and discourses but also, quite fundamentally, media formats. While, on the one hand, texture is tangible as well as, by extension, visible and/or audible, so that the term clearly refers to the surface qualities of a text, a theory of texture would, on the other hand, be interested in how these surface qualities

C. Reinfandt (✉)
University of Tübingen, Germany

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2016
M. Middeke, C. Reinfandt (eds.), *Theory Matters*,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-47428-5_23

319

affect reading processes and, ultimately, meaning by drawing on cultural frames whose basic coordinates were paradigmatically established through modern print culture (cf. Thompson 52–63; Kovarik 13–105; Robinson 82–114). In this respect, two dominant cultural frames of modernity can be distinguished: Modern literature, with its reflexive and synthetic potential, established and worked through modern culture’s “romantic” dimension predicated on subjectivity and an acknowledgement of the difference(s) between mind, discourse and world. The writings of modern science, on the other hand, shaped modern culture’s “enlightenment” dimension predicated on objectivity and the idea(l) of transparent discourse. A theory of texture acknowledges the distinctiveness of these discursive macro-formations without losing sight of what they share, that is, a grounding in the evolving media conditions of modernity originating in print culture.

READING *TEXTURES*: FROM WORK TO TEXT REVISITED

The earliest definition of “texture” in literary studies was provided by the New Critic (and poet) John Crowe Ransom who distinguished ‘the prose core to which a reader or critic can violently reduce the total object [of a poem]’ from ‘the differentia, residue, or tissue, which keeps the object poetical or entire’ (Ransom 1938, 349; note here the as yet not fully articulated distinction between reader and critic). He later illustrated this distinction with an architectural metaphor which introduces the terms structure and texture: ‘A poem is a *logical structure* having a *local texture* [...]. The paint, the paper, the tapestry on the wall are texture. It is logically unrelated to structure.’ (Ransom 1962 [1941], 648, original emphases) This definition establishes important coordinates: The text at hand exists in two registers, that is, the actuality of the local texture of differentia, residue or tissue stored and displayed by means of writing and print on the one hand, and, on the other, the virtuality or potentiality of its logical structure which would, however, have to be construed by a reader (or critic). While Ransom as a formalist abstracts the register of actuality into the notion of “form” without paying attention to the medial conditions which make “form” possible in the first place, recent critics have added this dimension. As Sukanta Chaudhuri points out in his study of *The Metaphysics of Text*, ‘the material medium of the text contributes integrally to its meaning—hence each new material embodiment alters and extends that meaning’ (Chaudhuri 5); the register of virtuality, on the other hand, is expanded these days from its insistence on logical structure to comprise

the represented text [as] a conceptual, abstract being, separate from its material vehicle yet defining itself in material, even sensory terms: implicit locations, spaces, time-planes, relationships between the parties in the discourse (reader, purveyor, author *et al.*)—most basically the assumption of something spoken/heard or written/seen integral to any verbal exercise even in its most dematerialized and conceptual state. (Chaudhuri 5)

All this is not yet fully taken into account by Ransom, who merely distinguishes between two kinds of readings. On the one hand, there are readings operating within the confines of what the New Critics considered “normal”, that is, denotative, non-literary language use. Such hermeneutical readings read “through” the text in order to determine its meaning along the lines established in the “enlightenment” dimension of modern culture (objectivity, transparency of discourse, logic, structure) and thus fail to acknowledge the text’s status as literature. As Roland Barthes has pointed out, ‘[t]his conception of the text (the classical, institutional, and current conception) is obviously linked to a metaphysics, that of truth’ (Barthes 1981, 33). Literary readings, on the other hand, acknowledge a text’s status as a work of art or literature through paying attention to the text’s formal properties and the connotative layers of meaning opened up through its non-normal, poetic use of language, which is framed by the “romantic” dimension of modern culture (subjectivity, reflexivity, texture). For the time being, this conception of the text also remains linked to a metaphysics of truth, but through its different institutional framing it is a more subjective notion of truth to begin with, and it holds an opening for a self-reflexive deconstruction of the metaphysics of truth through its attention to form, which establishes a dynamic that replaces the “classical” arbiters of truth in a referential and thus metaphysical sense (the world, the author) first with the reader and then with the language of the text itself in a non-metaphysical sense.

Against this background, the distinction between work and text with its strong privileging of the artistic work with its richer connotative and potentially ambiguous meaning over the mere text with its insistence on a logical core that can be paraphrased is reversed in Roland Barthes’s essay ‘From Work to Text’ (1971). As Barthes famously points out, ‘the work is held in hand, the text is held in language’ (Barthes 1986, 57). While acknowledging that the work is, as Ransom’s notion of texture suggests, *materially* there, it is no longer seen as semantically richer than the text, but rather as ‘the Text’s imaginary tail’ (Barthes 1986, 58): the work ‘closes

upon the signified', it 'functions as a general sign' which 'represent[s] an institutional category of the civilization of the Sign' (Barthes 1986, 58–9). Just as the "Sign" is capitalized here in the sense of a pervasive semiosis and dissemination constitutive of culture, the "Text" too is capitalized in the sense of a pervasive textuality. Textuality, however, is in itself subversive: 'the Text is what is situated at the limit of the rules of the speech-act (rationality, readability, etc.)', it 'practices the infinite postponement of the signified' (Barthes 1986, 58–9). With this inversion, the notion of texture is in fact transferred from work to text, as Barthes's subsequent formulations clearly indicate:

The plurality of the Text depends [...] on what we might call the stereographic plurality of the signifiers which weave it (etymologically, the text is a fabric) [...] [I]t can be Text only in its difference [...]; its reading is [...] entirely woven of quotations, references, echoes. (Barthes 1986, 59–60)

Texture, in other words, is no longer something that is exclusively attended to in (critical) readings of literary texts: 'the Text does not stop at (good) literature' (Barthes 1986, 58). Instead, it is conceived of as an underlying principle of all texts, a principle, in fact, which poses a severe challenge to all reading processes as it (quite literally) *embodies* language. Like language, texture is, in Barthes's words again, 'structured but decentered, without closure', and it is thus an integral component of 'the epistemological privilege nowadays granted to language' in that it embodies 'a paradoxical idea of structure: a system without end or center' (Barthes 1986, 59).

How can this paradoxical foundation of culture be stabilized and domesticated by culture itself? At the heart of sociologist Niklas Luhmann's systems theory of modern society and culture we find an elaborate theory of communication media which addresses this question (cf. Luhmann 2012, 113–250). While acknowledging the primacy of language as a communication medium (cf. Luhmann 2012, 123–38), Luhmann goes on to describe how the foundational role language has for the emergence and evolution of cultural forms is increasingly boosted by its material assimilation into dissemination media, from writing through printing to the electronic media (cf. Luhmann 2012, 150–90) with their respective textures as embodiments of language. All these text(ure)s provide an ever-increasing number of occasions for communication, but unfortunately for Luhmann's understanding of modern society as consisting of communications which refer exclusively to themselves and to other communications in processes

of system formation and closure, this does not linearly translate into more communication and thus “more society”. Instead, paradoxically, communication in a particular instance becomes less likely to proceed and succeed, given the overabundance of alternative opportunities, leading to Luhmann’s counter-intuitive tenet of ‘the improbability of communication’ (Luhmann 2012, 113–14). This problem is in turn addressed by the emergence of yet another layer of mediality, which supplements language and dissemination media (writing, printing, electronic media) with what Luhmann succinctly calls ‘success media’ or, more technically, ‘symbolically generalized media of communication’ (Luhmann 2012, 120–3, 190–238). By taking recourse to Luhmann’s understanding of ‘meaning’ (*Sinn*; cf. Luhmann 2012, 18–28) as a foundational layer of mediality which supplements language with a communicational dimension—functionally, everything that safeguards and promotes the continuation of communication is meaningful (but possibly only in one particular systemic context after system differentiation has taken place, cf. Luhmann 2013, 1–165), while semantically meaning negotiates the relationship between actuality and potentiality (as part of the processes of self-observation and self-description in any given system, cf. Luhmann 2013, 167–349)—‘success media’ rely on symbolic generalizations which increase the likelihood of continuing communication in specific systemic contexts such as, for example, the economy, which relies on the constant negotiation of ownership symbolically generalized in money. While the functional orientation of meaning is fairly undiluted by semantic interference in the case of the economic system’s success medium money (to own or not to own, that is the question), the boundaries between the functional and the semantic dimensions of meaning become blurred in systemic contexts predicated on language and text, and this is where we can return to Barthes’s notions of “the Sign” (semiosis, dissemination) and “the Text” (textuality).

In the modern science system, for example, scientists and scholars “buy” reputation with the help of the success medium “publication”. To be accepted for publication indicates a worthwhile contribution to the ongoing negotiation of symbolically generalized truth, and this entails conventions—objectivity as a regulative idea(1), transparency of discourse, logic—framed by the ‘enlightenment’ dimension of modern culture. If these criteria are fulfilled, a mere text is promoted to the status of academic publication and processed accordingly, thus increasing connectivity in the system of modern science. Aspiring literary writers, on the other hand, “buy” reputation by publishing “works of art” which contribute to the

ongoing negotiation of symbolically generalized beauty, interestingness, aptness, or whatever symbolic preference value one would want to establish for modern art and literature. Here, the transformation from “text” to “work” can be described in terms of how a text places itself against the backdrop of the evolution of the modern literary system in both formal and thematic terms, and this entails conventions framed by the “romantic” dimension of modern culture (subjectivity, reflexivity). Following Ransom, only those works would qualify as textures which are at the same time semantically charged with various notions dear to the traditions of liberal humanism and, to a certain extent, Romanticism (though the latter exhibits an astonishing degree of awareness with regard to the linguistic and formal conditioning of these ideas from the beginning): Due to its rootedness in essentially unchanging human nature, literature is deemed to be of timeless significance; the literary text contains its own meaning within itself, it can (and must) be studied in isolation from contexts of any kind; individuality is something securely possessed within all human beings as their unique “essence”, the subject is antecedent to and thus transcends the forces of society, experience, and language; the purpose of literature is essentially the enhancement of life and the propagation of humane values, and against this background literary works should adhere to the following criteria of excellence: organic fusion of form and content, “sincerity”, showing and “enactment” rather than explanation (cf. Barry 16–21). Following Paul de Man, Nicholas Birns has called this formation—which ‘raises the poem’s meaning above ordinary life, making the text “symbolic” and metaphorical, and insists it has a coherent indissoluble meaning, making the text determinate and “resolved”’—the ‘resolved symbolic’ (Birns 11–44, 15).

If, however, as Roland Barthes suggests, the notion of texture can on the one hand be transferred from work to text, and on the other hand, as Niklas Luhmann suggests, the functionally differentiated communication systems of modern society resolve the symbolic in their own specific ways, a new inclusive but nevertheless differentiated perspective emerges: Faced with language and its embodiment in textures (Barthes: “the Text”) as instances of ‘a system without end or center’ (Barthes 1986, 59) that facilitates semiosis and dissemination (Barthes: “the Sign”), the symbolic generalizations of both modern science and literature ‘close [...] upon the signified’ (Barthes 1986, 58) in a way that turns the ‘*radically* symbolic’ Text into a ‘*moderately* symbolic’ text that is domesticated by its framing as the symbolically generalized communication medium of a particular system so that ‘its symbolics runs short, i.e. stops’ at the boundaries of that sys-

tem (Barthes 1986, 59, original emphases). A given text is thus positioned more or less precariously between its domesticating context in which it aspires to the condition of the “resolved symbolic” and the latent danger of being restored to the condition of the “unresolved symbolic” inherent in language and “Text”: As “Text” a given text can always be ‘restored to language’ (Barthes 1986, 59) in readings that follow the postulates of Barthes’s seminal essay and have since been adopted in literary and cultural studies in various guises on a poststructuralist/deconstructionist foundation (New Historicism, Gender Studies, Postcolonial Studies, ...)—and with impressive results. Their marked bias towards the ‘without end or center’ side of the equation, however, sometimes fails to acknowledge the ends and centres that are built into the communicative process at large and its sedimentation into social structures and cultural patterns.

What does this entail for an understanding of “texture” as something that is materially present and medially conditioned? On the one hand, it is clear that the notion of texture is at the heart of the ‘Theory of the Text’ as expounded by Roland Barthes in an essay following upon ‘From Work to Text’ in 1973:

[S]ignification is not produced in a uniform way, but according to the material of the signifier [...] and also according to the plurality which makes the enunciating subject [...] [I]t is a practice [...] not [produced] at the level of abstraction (langue) [...] but through an operation [...] in which both the debate of the subject and the Other, and the social context, are invested in the same movement [...]. No one can claim to reduce communication to the simplicity of the classical schema postulated by linguistics: sender, channel, receiver, except by relying implicitly on a metaphysics of the classical subject or on an empiricism whose (sometimes aggressive) ‘naivety’ is just as metaphysical. (Barthes 1981, 36)

To avoid this metaphysics of text—and here Barthes explicitly introduces the term “texture”—criticism should no longer exclusively focus on ‘the finished “fabric” (the text being the “veil” behind which the truth, the real message, [...] the “meaning”, had to be sought)’ and acknowledge ‘the fabric *in its texture*, in the interlacing of codes, formulae and signifiers, in the midst of which the subject places itself and is undone, like a spider that comes to dissolve itself into its own web’ (Barthes 1981, 39, my emphasis). On the other hand, it seems problematic to call on this basis for a change in the textural practice of criticism, which should, according to Barthes,

turn away from explicating ‘signification’ in favour of participating in the never-ending process of textual ‘signifiante’ (cf. Barthes 1981, 37–8) by ‘entering into the play of signifiers’ (Barthes 1981, 43). While it is true in principle that ‘[n]o language has an edge over any other’ so that ‘there is no metalanguage’ (Barthes 1981, 43), language is nevertheless put to different uses in different contexts with their respective symbolic generalizations, and the language of criticism, which partakes in scientific communication and thus observes the world including all its text(ure)s within a framework predicated on symbolically generalized truth, will lose its systemic functionality if it abandons this particular horizon of meaning and productivity in favour of Barthes’s notion of pervasive, non-differentiated textual ‘productivity’ (cf. Barthes 1981, 36–7).

So the text can no longer be taken ‘as if it were the repository of an objective signification [...] embalmed in the work as product’ (Barthes 1981, 37). Instead, the meanings ascribed to texts by criticism (and thus also the truth-claims of criticism) should be irresolvably plural in the sense of being acknowledged as contingent, dependent as they are on the text’s material existence in distinctive media formats (which affect both its formation and availability) *and* specific contexts of reception *including* the critic’s very own. This entails both an acknowledgement of the importance of philology along the lines of Jerome McGann’s numerous interventions (cf. McGann 1983; 1991; 2001), while philology’s traditional insistence on what Barthes calls ‘canonical signification’ (Barthes 1981, 37) should be questioned by bringing textual theory into a non-confrontational dialogue with literary theory as inaugurated by D. C. Greetham (cf. 1989, 1999). Conversely, the reductive insistence on the “canonical signification” of the “resolved symbolic” has long been left behind by the hermeneutic paradigm of ‘a specifically literary interpretation of culture’ in the trajectory from its original “turn to language” to ‘the meta-interpretive interests that played themselves out, in diverse ways, under the general banner of Theory’ (McGann 2009, 13). Against this promising background it seems that criticism’s first and foremost task is to spell out the implications of Barthes’s insight that the ‘theory of the text brings with it [...] the promotion of a new epistemological object: the reading’, which is in principle based on ‘the (productive) equivalence of writing and reading’ (Barthes 1981, 42) within (media-) historical and institutional frames that lend legitimacy and predominance to certain texts and readings by naturalizing and universalizing them as “canonical significations” in (of) specific contexts and periods.

READING TEXTURES: CON-TEXTU(R)AL INTERPRETATION

Why do we read a text? Traditionally, and outside the academy to this day, the idea prevails that we read a text in order to find out what it means, that is, what information is stored in it. This seems straightforward, but it is not. As we have seen in the preceding section, “canonical significations” along these lines turn out to be based on a textu(r)ally produced metaphysics of truth that enables readers to establish a ‘transcendental signified’ (Derrida 49) for every text within the parameters of context-specific symbolic generalizations. In this sense, the principle of the “resolved symbolic” identified by Nicholas Birns (cf. Birns 11–44) for the continuum of modern literature from Romanticism to modernism and its theorization in pre-Theory literary theory from hermeneutics to the New Criticism seems to be at work in all text-based communication unless it is deconstructed by the meta-interpretive interests of more recent theoretical developments. Currently, Roland Barthes’s call for an academic engagement with the new epistemological object of reading has yielded two results: While the surge of meta-interpretively interested literary theory aspiring to the condition of Theory has established conventions of “critical reading” and “suspicious reading” at the heart of the discipline, more recently a nagging sense that this kind of academic reading fails to fully engage with the full breadth of the cultural work of reading outside academia has come to the fore, and it has been argued that this lack should be addressed with the help of agendas for “surface reading” (Best and Marcus), “uncritical reading” (Warner), or, less confrontational and mediating between “critical” and “uncritical reading”, “reflective reading” (Felski 2009—on the merits of “suspicious reading” in spite of her former critique of it see Felski 2011b). Rita Felski even goes so far as to place this debate about *Interpretation and Its Rivals* (as the title of a 2014 thematic issue of *New Literary History* puts it) at the heart of a current era of ‘method wars’ following on the heels of the ‘era of high theory’ and the subsequent ‘entrenchment of historicism’:

What does it mean to read a text, scholars are asking, and are there other things we can do with texts besides interpreting them? Critics are debating the merits of close reading versus distant reading, surface reading versus deep reading, and reading suspiciously versus reading from a more receptive, generous or postcritical standpoint. (Felski 2014, v)

A theory of “*reading* textures” seems well placed to address these issues. Taking its cue from Rita Felski’s integrative concept of “reflective reading” (2009), it seeks to combine two distinct modes of observing textual practices in culture: On the one hand, an awareness of texture in academic reading practices takes seriously the literary studies/Theory heritage of suspicious or critical close reading in its first-order observations of texts. Here the central question is: *How* does a text mean? As this is the core competence that distinguishes the discipline of literary and cultural studies from other disciplines, it seems pointless and unproductive to forsake this distinguishing feature without need. On the other hand, these readings have to be supplemented and contextualized by second-order observations and emulations of non-academic (and non-literary) reading practices in a programmatic, cultural studies-induced acknowledgement of polycontextuality. Here the central question is: *What* does a text mean *for whom in which context*? And here techniques of “uncritical reading” and “surface reading” as well as the big data of “distant reading” (Moretti) prove invaluable as long as they are *not* practised from an exclusively “postcritical standpoint” which would surely undermine the precarious standing of the humanities in the current climate even further.

So what kind of “*reading* textures”, what kind of textures *outside the text*, are we talking about? Current theoretical offers begin on the micro-level of direct reader–text interaction, where texture, according to Eve Sedgwick’s *Touching Feeling* (2003), marks the interface between materiality and phenomenology in that it provides ‘an array of perceptual data’ (Sedgwick 16) which has a performative affective effect long neglected in its significance for all cognitive operations that follow in the reading process. Similarly, Peter Stockwell’s *Texture: A Cognitive Aesthetics of Reading* (2009) views texture as ‘the experiential quality of textuality’ on which ‘the aesthetic senses of value, attractiveness, utility and their opposites’ are built (Stockwell 14), and while these aesthetic dimensions are particularly pronounced in literary texts, they also seem to underwrite the metaphysics of truth (Barthes) and text (Chaudhuri) in an afterglow of the Gutenberg Galaxy when printed texts provided stability and reliability in terms of storage and distribution. In this sense, texture marks the point of intersection between texts as object and acts of reading as part of ‘[c]ommunicative practices [that] create a texture’ *outside the text*, establishing ‘a complex weave of bonds that tie together those who are communicating’ (Harper 196–7). Whether these bonds are instant or slow, ephemeral or permanent (cf. Harper 197) will in turn affect their efficacy in establishing “canoni-

cal significations” (Barthes) and “symbolic generalizations” (Luhmann) for specific practices and contexts, and one can safely assume that it is the more permanent bonds forged through the social ramifications of available media technologies which determine the relationship between textual culture and the history of the real on a broader scale. As Clifford Siskin has pointed out, it was the regime of print which established the doubling of a physical real and its virtual representations as the centrepiece of modern culture (as opposed to premodern assumptions about a metaphysical real “behind” a physical reality that was perceived to be virtual; cf. Siskin). These epistemological macro-textures surely mark the limits to which one can stretch the notion of texture, but they indicate the foundational role of text(ure) for culture, even to the current state of affairs where the virtual/textu(r)al representations of the physical real seem to have taken over as the ultimate reality principle, provoking calls for a new materialism (Coole and Frost), a new speculative realism (Gratton), or a renewed inquiry into modes of *existence* instead of representation (Latour 2013).

Reading, against this background, emerges as a “real” (that is, empirically observable) operation that marks a culturally formative dimension of observation as conceptualized in Luhmann’s radical constructivist approach to cognition (*Erkenntnis*): ‘[C]ognition is manufactured by operations of observing and by the recording of observations (descriptions). This includes the observation of observations and the description of descriptions.’ (Luhmann 2006, 245) While the representation of the observed in language and text remains categorically separate from reality, the operation of observation itself and the text(ure)s that describe it are part of the world and thus situated in textures outside the text in an ongoing process of contingent evolution. As Timothy Morton comments in this respect: ‘[W]hen you take an evolutionary view of Earth, an astonishing reversal takes place. Suddenly, the things that you think of as real [...] become the abstraction [...]. The real thing is the evolutionary process.’ (Morton 19–20) Representation and meaning emerge as abstractions of processes of signification which are real and situated in what Morton, in a terminology not too far away from the inclusive notion of texture presented in this chapter, calls “the mesh”:

Life forms constitute a *mesh* that is infinite and beyond concept—unthinkable as such [...]. Drawing distinctions between life and nonlife is strictly impossible, yet unavoidable [...]. There is no ‘outside’ of the system of life-forms. (Morton 24, original emphasis)

The abstractions of representation and meaning, however, make the unthinkable thinkable by drawing distinctions between what is represented and what is not (that is, actuality and virtuality) and establishing distinctions between this text(ure) and the next (or previous) one. In the process, texture lets ‘texts resonate across time’ (Felski 2011a, 575) more or less extensively, depending on the connectivity of their symbolic generalizations, and the embeddedness (naturalization/invisibilization/conventionalization) of their canonical significations, in short: context.

There is a kind of inbuilt agency here which makes a conceptualization of texts as non-human actors within the framework of Actor-Network-Theory (cf. Latour 2005) as suggested by Rita Felski (2011a, 581–8) quite plausible, and this in turn provides an opening for a new conceptualization of interpretation as ‘the construction of meaning through *networking*’ (Krieger and Belliger 7, original emphasis) which avoids the metaphysics of text and truth characteristic of traditional hermeneutics. Instead, interpretation includes ‘action and artifacts’ (Krieger and Belliger 8) and acknowledges ‘that language is not purely cognitive, but an activity’ that is situated and ‘dependent upon media’ (Krieger and Belliger 10). Or, as Steven Connor puts it in the *NLH* issue on *Interpretation and Its Rivals*:

Now interpretation is part of a general practice of putting-into-practice. [...] This new, expanded form of interpretation does not say what things say, but shows how they work, which is to say, how they might be worked out. [...] The purpose of playing the game is not to show what the game means [...], but to explore what it makes possible. [...] Interpretation has been drawn into a general performativity, in which informing interacts with performing [...]. Interpretation is no longer to be thought of as the solving of a riddle, or the cracking of a code [...], but rather the playing out of a game, the running of a program, the perfecting of a routine, the exploiting of a potential. (Connor 184–5)

And in this sense the ‘proliferation of new technologies can be seen as expanding rather than closing down interpretation’ (Felski 2014, vi), particularly with regard to the short-circuiting between functional and semantic dimensions of meaning (*sensu* Luhmann) that seems to be facilitated by computer technology: ‘Algorithms are the generalized symbolic media of the network age’, Krieger and Belliger suggest, ‘[m]oney, power, certification, knowledge, social capital, that is, the mechanism of social integration are being mediated more and more by algorithms’ (Krieger

and Belliger 12). This new regime of mediation seems to increasingly undermine the modern principle of functional differentiation into systems of communication with their respective symbolically generalized success media (on this potentially postmodern margin of Luhmann's theory of modernity cf. Baecker), even to the point where the postmodern emphasis on differences between closed systems will have to be replaced by 'a new paradigm of open networks' (Krieger and Belliger 7).

Under these conditions, *reading* textures become more deeply engrained with cultural practices of making sense beyond mere representation. The question is no longer 'what does an object mean, but what are the implications of what it might mean—what does what it means *mean*?' (Connor 186, original emphasis). Interpretation in Steven Connor's sense of 'explication as part of the complex maintenance of systems through intensified self-referentiality' (Connor 192) would then have to cover not only the traditional idea of human beings reading texts, but also texts reading texts (along the lines of theories of intertextuality), social systems reading texts (imposing their specific symbolic generalizations and canonical significations), and, more than ever before, machines reading texts, avoiding for the first time 'the costs of consciousness' that N. Katherine Hayles identifies as confabulation, slowness, and the inability of the modern self to fully come to terms with the complexity of the systems of which it consists and in which it is embedded (cf. Hayles 204–5). Against this background, Hayles points out that the 'important distinction with digital humanities projects' is between 'the capabilities and costs of human reading versus the advantages and limitations of nonconscious cognition'. Thus, for an ideal future in literary and cultural studies, she insists that by '[w]orking together in recursive cycles, conscious analysis and nonconscious cognition can expand the range and significance of insights beyond what either alone can accomplish' (Hayles 214).

A theory of texture matters in this context because it can provide coordinates for both conscious analysis and non-conscious cognition *and* for their cooperation. It does so by explicating the situatedness and media-conditioning of empirically observable acts of observation, description, and "reading" in both fields. Very much in line with Roland Barthes's insistence on 'the (productive) equivalence of writing and reading' (Barthes 1981, 42) this would have to cover first-order modes of observation (writing as reading the world) as well as second-order modes of observation (writing as reading human experience, intertextuality, conscious analysis of texts, text mining) in their respective social contexts and evolutionary/

historical trajectories—such as, for example, modern literature and modern science with their respective subjective or objective orientations of meaning (on this dimension of a theory of texture cf. Reinfandt 2011; 2013). With regard to the increasing interconnectedness of “convergence culture” (Jenkins) with its dissolution or reformulation of formerly constitutive differences and cultural hierarchies that comes with an increasing accessibility of (potentially) all text(ure)s, one may well speculate that the ‘evidential or hermeneutic paradigm’ (Compagnon 275; cf. Ginzburg) of modernity as the signature of a culture which did not have this kind of full access may be on its way out. But then again the (theoretically envisioned) full access to the digital archive facilitated by increasing digitalization will remain a random access even if machines manage to increase the quantity of processable data and the speed and quality of processing beyond the capacity of human consciousness, because—and this is crucial—every access is ultimately situated and never total. And this in turn calls for theories and methods to reduce the creative serendipity of yore (cf. Compagnon 273), even if the ‘unfolding is not in the direction of anything but greater complexity’ (Connor 193). Theory matters because it reduces complexity within its own remit, even if it ultimately adds to the complexity of the world.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Baecker, Dirk. ‘Niklas Luhmann in the Society of the Computer’. *Cybernetics and Human Knowing: A Journal of Second-Order Cybernetics, Autopoiesis and Cyber-Semiotics* 13 (2006): 25–40.
- Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995.
- Barthes, Roland. ‘Theory of the Text’. Trans. Ian McLeod. *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*. Ed. Robert Young. London/New York: Routledge, 1981. 31–47 (1973).
- Barthes, Roland. ‘From Work to Text’. Trans. Richard Howard. *The Rustle of Language*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1986. 56–64 (1971).
- Best, Stephen and Sharon Marcus. ‘Surface Reading: An Introduction’. *Representations* 108.1 (2009): 1–21.
- Birns, Nicholas. *Theory after Theory: An Intellectual History of Literary Theory from 1950 to the Early 21st Century*. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2010.
- Chaudhuri, Sukanta. *The Metaphysics of Text*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Compagnon, Antoine. ‘The Resistance to Interpretation’. *New Literary History* 45 (2014): 271–80.

- Connor, Steven. 'Spelling Things Out'. *New Literary History* 45.2 (2014): 183–97.
- Coole, Diana, and Samantha Frost, eds. *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*. Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2010.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976 (1967).
- Felski, Rita. 'After Suspicion'. *Profession* 8 (2009): 28–35.
- Felski, Rita. "'Context Stinks!'" *New Literary History* 42 (2011a): 573–91.
- Felski, Rita. 'Suspicious Minds'. *Poetics Today* 32.2 (2011b): 215–34.
- Felski, Rita. 'Introduction'. *New Literary History* 45 (2014): v–xi.
- Ginzburg, Carlo. 'Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm'. Trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi. *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*. Ed. John and Anne C. Tedeschi. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989. 96–125.
- Gratton, Peter. *Speculative Realism: Problems and Prospects*. London: Bloomsbury, 2014.
- Gretham, D. C. 'Textual and Literary Theory: Redrawing the Matrix?'. *Studies in Bibliography* 42 (1989): 1–24.
- Gretham, D. C. *Theories of the Text*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Harper, Richard H. R. *Texture: Human Expression in the Age of Communications Overload*. Cambridge/London: MIT Press, 2010.
- Hayles, N. Katherine. 'Cognition Everywhere: The Rise of the Cognitive Nonconscious and the Costs of Consciousness'. *New Literary History* 45.2 (2014): 199–220.
- Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York/London: New York University Press, 2006.
- Kovarik, Bill. *Revolutions in Communication: Media History from Gutenberg to the Digital Age*. New York: Continuum, 2011.
- Krieger, David J., and Andréa Belliger. *Interpreting Networks: Hermeneutics, Actor-Network Theory & New Media*. Bielefeld: transcript, 2014.
- Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Latour, Bruno. *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns*. Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2013.
- Luhmann, Niklas. 'Cognition as Construction'. Trans. Hans-Georg Moeller. *Luhmann Explained: From Souls to Systems*. Ed. Hans-Georg Moeller. Chicago/La Salle: Open Court, 2006. 241–60 (1988).
- Luhmann, Niklas. *Theory of Society*. Trans. Barrett Rhodes. Vol. 1. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012.
- Luhmann, Niklas. *Theory of Society*. Trans. Barrett Rhodes. Vol. 2. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013.
- McGann, Jerome. *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

- McGann, Jerome. *The Textual Condition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.
- McGann, Jerome. *Radiant Textuality: Literature since the World Wide Web*. London: Palgrave, 2001.
- McGann, Jerome. 'Our Textual History: Digital Copying of Poetry and Prose Raise Questions Beyond Accuracy Alone'. *Times Literary Supplement* 20 Nov. 2009: 13–15.
- Moretti, Franco. *Distant Reading*. London: Verso, 2013.
- Morton, Timothy. 'The Mesh'. *Environmental Criticism for the Twenty-First Century*. Ed. Stephanie LeMenager, Teresa Shewry, and Ken Hiltner. New York/London: Routledge, 2011. 19–30.
- Ransom, John Crowe. *The World's Body*. New York/London: Scribner's, 1938.
- Ransom, John Crowe. 'Criticism as Pure Speculation'. *Literary Opinion in America*. Ed. M. D. Zabel. 3rd ed. New York: Harper, 1962. 639–54 (1941).
- Reinfandt, Christoph. 'Reading the Waste Land: Textuality, Mediality, Modernity'. *Addressing Modernity: Social Systems Theory and U.S. Cultures*. Ed. Hannes Bergthaller and Carsten Schinko. Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2011. 63–84.
- Reinfandt, Christoph. "'Texture" as a Key Term in Literary and Cultural Studies'. *Text or Context: Reflections on Literary and Cultural Criticism*. Ed. Rüdiger Kunow and Stephan Mussil. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2013. 7–21.
- Robinson, Solveig C. *The Book in Society: An Introduction to Print Culture*. Peterborough/Buffalo: Broadview Press, 2014.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosovsky. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Siskin, Clifford. 'Textual Culture in the History of the Real'. *Textual Cultures: Texts, Contexts, Interpretation* 2.2 (2007): 118–30.
- Stockwell, Peter. *Texture: A Cognitive Aesthetics of Reading*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009.
- Thompson, John B. *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995.
- Warner, Michael. 'Uncritical Reading'. *Polemic: Critical or Uncritical*. Ed. Jane Gallop. New York/London: Routledge, 2004. 13–38.