
Introductory Essay on the Textual Configuration and Interpretational Act

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Introduction

It comes to near to stating the obvious that every study in the domain of human science shares one object in common: texts. That's because Hans-Georg Gadamer, in his *Truth and Method* (1975), put emphasis on the importance of texts saying that "the understanding and the interpretation of texts is not merely a concern of science, but obviously belongs to human experience of the world in general"¹. His acknowledgement seems to bear relevance to one of his main theses of the work: the human sciences knows its own research method different from that of the natural sciences². As we admit the specific methodology in the human sciences after Gadamer, it remains another question: how we establish the relevancy for texts as research objects? In fact, the research objects are materialized in different materials and serve to researches in different ways which may be also different from a domain to others. This paper has a perspective to present a rough outline for the consideration on texts, especially on the basis of a concept we call "textual configuration" in relation to our interpretational acts.

1 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, second, revised edition, translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, continuum, 1989, p. xx.

2 In the first chapter of his *Truth and Method*, giving an example of Geisteswissenschaften (human sciences), Gadamer explains how the idea of Geist (spirit), established in accordance with the natural sciences, tries to detach itself from the natural sciences (*ibid.*, pp. 3–8): "the specific problem that the human sciences present to thought is that one has not rightly grasped their nature if one measures them by the yardstick of a progressive knowledge of regularity. The sociohistorical world cannot be raised to a science by the inductive procedure of the natural sciences. [...] [The] ideal [of historical research] is rather to understand the phenomenon itself in its unique and historical concreteness." (*ibid.*, p. 4)

I. Taxonomy of texts

The name of Gérard Genette, French critic of literature, should be mentioned to open our first chapter of this paper. We know that he contributed much to develop the important theoretical bases of narratology, i.e. study on narrative. Different from many narratologists, however, whose concerns remain in the structure of narrative texts, Genette explores also positively outer narrative space. Thus, in the beginning of his *Palimpsest* (1982) Genette classifies transtextual relations in five types, such as “intertextuality”, a relation between a text and “paratexts”, “metatextuality”, “architextuality” and “hypertextuality”.

For the French critic, “intertextuality” is conceived of “a relation of co-presence between 2 or more texts, that is to say, eidetically and more often than not, by the actual presence of a text in another one³”; second transtextuality consists of a relation between Text and “paratexts”, which are embodied by following factors: “title, subtitle, insert title; prefaces, post-faces, foreword, and so on; marginal notes, foot notes, end notes; epigraphs; illustrations; advertising strip, jacket⁴” (*ibid.*, p. 10) and more; and this type of transtextuality represents “one of the places privileged by its pragmatic dimension of a work, that is to say, by its action over the reader⁵” (*ibid.*, p. 10). “Metatextuality” is a relation traditionally called “commentary, which binds a text to another one that we talk of, with no needs to quote (or call) it or even name it⁶” (*ibid.*, p. 11), he even names this third feature of transtextuality “critical relation”. Two other transtextualities, “architextuality” and “hypertextuality”, are not figured out in the schema of our version of “textual configuration”, Genette describes the former as “the entire set of categories—types of discourse, modes of enunciation, literary genres—from which emerges each singular text⁷” (*ibid.*, p. 7), and the latter as the products of “any relationship uniting a text B (‘hypertext’ or ‘original text’) with an earlier text A (‘hypotext’ or ‘imitative text’) upon which it is grafted in a manner

3 « [...] une relation de coprésence entre deux ou plusieurs textes, c’est-à-dire, eidétiquement et le plus souvent, par la présence effective d’un texte dans un autre. » (Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes La littérature au second degré*, coll. « Point Essais » 257, Éditions du Seuil, 1982, p. 8 [translation mine])

4 « [...] paratexte : titre, sous-titre, intertitres ; préfaces, postfaces, avertissements, avant-propos, etc. ; notes marginales, infrapaginales, terminales ; épigraphes ; illustrations ; prière d’insérer, bande, jaquette, et bien d’autres types de signaux accessoires, autographes ou allographes, qui procurent au texte un entourage (variable) et parfois un commentaire, officiel ou officieux, dont le lecteur le plus puriste et le moins porté à l’érudition externe ne peut pas toujours disposer aussi facilement qu’il voudrait et le prétend. » (*ibid.*, p. 10)

5 « [...] sans doute un des lieux privilégiés de la dimension pragmatique de l’œuvre, c’est-à-dire de son action sur le lecteur [...] » (*ibid.*, p. 10)

6 « [...] on dit plus couramment « commentaire », qui unit un texte à un autre texte dont il parle, sans nécessairement le citer (le convoquer), voire, à la limite, sans le nommer : [...] » (*ibid.*, p. 11)

7 « l’architexte, [...], c’est-à-dire l’ensemble des catégories générales, ou transcendantes — types de discours, modes d’énonciation, genres littéraires, etc. — dont relève chaque texte singulier. » (*ibid.*, p. 7)

that is not that of commentary⁸ (*ibid.*, p. 13).

His point is to bring classified categories of textual relations to redefine his own classification and to make a theoretical proposition in the study of narrative. Based on this classification, the GCOE sub-leader in research division, Professor Kazuhiro MATSUZAWA of Nagoya University, integrates the classification to the philosophy of interpretation, *hermeneutics*, to study comprehensive process of understanding text. The process will be described as follows: in the first step, writer makes drafts or manuscripts as “pretexts” and elaborates them to a “Text” through the process of interpretation of his own drafts or manuscripts. In this act of generating a text, writer mobilizes the “tacit cultural context”, as knowledge acquired through cultural experiences or conventional habits, consciously or unconsciously. We may affirm the process by the existence of manuscripts of authors; it happens sometimes that scholars find five or six versions of manuscripts or proofs for one page, as in the case of Gustave Flaubert, novelist in the middle of 19th century in France.

Established and entered in the public domain, the “Text” embodies with “paratexts” such as advertising strip, pagination, or others as we mentioned above, normally shorter than the main “Text”. It happens sometime that preface may be longer than the main “Text”, and it finally comes to form different volume, as we know in the case of preface to an omnibus of French poet Charles Baudelaire, written by Jean-Paul Sartre under the title of *Baudelaire*. With regard to “paratexts”, Genette illustrates a remarkable example of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*;

“We know that at the occasion of the delivered prepublication, this novel had been provided with titles of chapters which mention the relation of each of their chapters to an episode of *Odyssey*: ‘Siren’, ‘Nausicaa’, ‘Penelope’, and so on. When the novel come out in book, Joyce takes away these insert titles, by a ‘capitalissime’ meaning however. These removed sub titles, but not forgotten by critics, do they attach to the text of Ulysses? This embarrassing question, that I dedicate to the advocates of the enclosed nature of text, is typically in the paratextual order. With this regard, the pretext like rough drafts, sketches and diverse plans, they may also work as a paratext.” (*ibid.*, pp. 10–11)

Through the act of reading and interpreting, reader will find and establish underlying relationships with other texts on the basis of their “tacit cultural context” again; we call the relationships “intertextuality”, the concept proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin and the term coined and developed by Julia Kristeva in her *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (original title is *Séméiôtiké: recherches pour un sémanalyse*).

8 « [...] toute relation unissant un texte B (que j’appellerai hypertexte) à un texte antérieur A (que j’appellerai, bien sûr, hypotexte) sur lequel il se greffe d’une manière qui n’est pas celle du commentaire. » (*ibid.*, p. 13)

9 « On sait que, lors de sa prépublication en livraisons, ce roman était prévu de titres de chapitres évoquant la relation de chacun de ces chapitres à un épisode de l’*Odysée*: « Sirènes », « Naussica », « Pénélope », etc. Lorsqu’il paraît en volume, Joyce lui enlève ces intertitres, d’une signification pourtant « capitalissime », Ces sous-titres supprimés, mais non oubliés par les critiques, font-ils ou non partie du texte d’Ulysse? Cette question embarrassante, que je dédie aux tenants de la clôture du texte, est typiquement d’ordre paratextuel. » (*ibid.*, pp. 10–11)

Reader may not be satisfied with simple acts of reading; he or she may also produce texts on the “Text” as “metatexts”, which are considered as expression of reader’s personal interpretation. This is what we do in our everyday life; remember that what we’ll do after reading a novel or watching a film, we talk on the novel or on the film to share your simple impression to your friends or criticize them. This process of interpretation should be recurrent, and the reading act enables readers to evolve their interpretation because of this recurrent nature of texts. Thus we call the process of interpretation “hermeneutic circle” based on philosophical tradition to say the circular process of our understanding texts.

For textual agents, like writers and readers, “tacit cultural context” serves as backgrounds for each agent to generate or to interpret texts. Consciously or unconsciously, the “tacit cultural context” is sure to help us understand texts and share their interpretation with others. In other words, the term would be synonym to that of “horizon” As we look by now, the concept of “textual configuration” gives a general explanation on whole process concerning genesis and interpretation of texts.

II. Hermeneutic circle and textual configuration

As you see in this figure 2, every component remains the same as in the first schema, but this figure represents and puts emphasis on the circular process of interpretation. Writers, especially after the printing press technology was introduced to the production of texts, they use proofs to elaborate their works. Methodology may be changed from one writer to others. Flaubert, French novelist, makes whole manuscripts first, then sends them to the press to gets the proof, then revises them, makes modifications and even writes and inserts new passages. For Honoré de Balzac, who managed his own press, proofs serve him as writing tool, he sends his manuscripts to his press as soon as he wrote a chapter or a passage in order to refine the proof; and sends them back to the press, then he repeats the process even after the work is published. These process, varies from a writer to others, explains well the existence of “hermeneutic circle” on writer’s side, in which writer interprets his own text by act of reading repeatedly to elaborate the text. We know, of course, another cases where we see indifference in respect to proofs on writer’s side, as in case of Jean-Paul Sartre, another French novelist or philosopher, who writes his text in the famous cafés of Deux Magots, Flore or others in Paris, and sends manuscripts to the press, and gives them to those who wants to have them, without working on proofs.

Before the printing press, in the era of transcription, things are totally different of course. In the Middle Age of Europe, write to dictation plays an important role, and we know many cases in which we don’t know who wrote the text: the most famous examples will be the Arthurian cycle, the Tristan legend cycle or the Reynard cycle. In these cases, it is difficult or even impossible to rebuild how the “hermeneutic circle” played the role in the textual genesis, however as I mentioned previously, it would be probable to think that a writer or a speaker of text modifies the text, even after the first appearance to public; the idea would be proved by the fact that we know

many variants for a work. I take an example of *the History of Reynard the Fox*, which contains about 30 branches focusing on a fox named Reynard or Renart. The work is estimated to be written around from the fourth quarter of 12th century to the first quarter of the 13th century by different authors: Pierre de Saint-Cloud, Richard de Lison and other unknown authors. It gained the large popularity in the western Europe world, so that Geoffrey Chaucer, famous English novelist in the 14th century, used the material in his *Canterbury Tales* (“The Nun’s Priest’s Tale”). Even in the 19th century a fabulous German writer, Wolfgang von Goethe, rewrote it under the title of *Reineke Fuchs* (1846).

In respect to the French tales, we know 14 almost full manuscripts of the work, and 16 fragments today. Edgard Martin, a French specialist of the studies on the Reynard cycle, attributed to the 14 manuscripts the abbreviation in capital letters from *A* to *O* and assigned to the fragments the small letters *a* to *q*. The German philology regrouped them in three “family” by numbers of branches: alpha, beta, and gamma. And the manuscripts that were not regrouped in three families called “composite”. This regroupment is fully accepted today as the basis of the study, and each family has its critical edition. Here we have three different versions of *the History of Reynard the Fox*.

As we looked briefly, we may say that the concept of “hermeneutic circle” on writer’s side bears relevance to the production of texts. In the printing press era, proofs give evidence to the existence of the process; and even in the time when we did not know that technology, writers had produced various manuscripts, of course that might not to elaborate a single text, but, in any way, what we read today for those ancient works is one of the products that scholars have studied on those surviving manuscripts. Introducing this concept to a study on texts does not restrict the study in the narrow domain of “author’s intentions”, but spreads its domain wide up to the socio-material conditions of a text, as context of its generation and its production.

III. Recontextualization

In fact, regarding the concept of “recontextualization”, I want to draw your attention to the prospects that we could refine it around the discussion held by Michel Foucault, French philosopher, in his *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), especially through the discussion on the concept of “enunciation”.

Trying to give definition to the term of “enunciation”, Foucault fleshes out four “functions” of “enunciation”, following his terminology: a) the referentiality, which means that a text has a specific referentiality like Saussure’s binary concept of *signifier / signified* (some might prefer to call *referring / referred*), b) the subjectivity, which means that a text supposes certain subjectivity but an author, c) the context, which means that a text should not be understood by itself, but its context should be taken into the consideration, d) the materiality, which means that a text is always supported by a material and the material forces various kinds of restriction to a text when the text is represented.

Among four functions, Foucault insists on the materiality of text. Foucault's perspective resides in pointing out an importance of the institutional aspect of texts. However, I want to accentuate the functional aspect of his discussion. The materiality of text, as a function of "enunciation", in Foucault's view, guarantees a text to be copied and repeated in the real world; it also enables a text to form a network with other texts where the textual identity is established (or effaced). Furthermore, the materiality of text is NOT conceived by Foucault as "a substance, a support, a place and a date", but as "more than the place and date of its appearance" (FOUCAULT, p. 104). It consists rather in "*possibilities of reinscription and transcription*" (*ibid.*, p. 103); and "an enunciation may be *begun again* or *re-evoked*, and a (linguistic or logical) form may be *reacutalized*, the statement may be *repeated*—but always in strict conditions" (*ibid.*, p. 105). Thus we may consider the materiality of text, after Foucault's arguments, as what supports the recurrent function of text, what assures us to interpret a text even long after it was produced.

If a text has the recurrent function by nature, and if we may read a text repeatedly, the identity of text should be established in any way. With this respect, Foucault argues for pages to justify the importance of textual materiality, and lists up different cases where the status of textual identification comes into question. For us, let's take an example of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997) written by J. K. Rowling. It's the first novel of the Harry Potter series, composed of 7 novels in total; the series are translated in 67 different languages, and they have sold 4 hundred million copies in the world, including translations¹⁰. Furthermore, the series have been made into movies and won a far bigger market, as you all know. Then comes a question: each copy of the first novel of the Harry Potter series should be considered identical text or different one? The answer is positive for Foucault, even if every material condition, such as ink, papers and others in use, is all different in fact. In addition, based on the Foucault's arguments, we may even assure the identity of 67 different translated versions of the novel, because "if the information content and the uses to which it could be put are the same, one can say that it is the same statement in each case" (*ibid.*, p. 104).

In fact, we have good reasons to conceive Foucault's idea of textual materiality as relevant to our newly introduced concept of "recontextualization". As we have mentioned in previous part of this talk, the concept asks a process to be repeated, and Foucault's idea resides in the recurrent nature of texts. We may go further not to indicate their similarity, but to be aware of the consequences resulting from an extension of the idea. We want to refer again Foucault's arguments on the term of "enunciations", even if we could not review all of them here.

After pointing out a feature of textual analysis, which "is addressed to specific forms of accumulation that can be identified neither with an interiorization in the form of memory nor with an indiscriminating totalization of documents" (*ibid.*, p. 122), Foucault presupposes three conditions in the analysis of texts: 1) *remanence*: which means that texts "are preserved by virtue of a number of supports and material

10 Harry Potter the Official Site: <http://harrypotter.warnerbros.com/harrypotterandthehalf-bloodprince/>

techniques [...], in accordance with certain types of institutions [...], and with certain statutory modalities [...]" (*ibid.*, p. 123). If any text survives today, that is because it receives favors of supporting materials like form of the book and of institutional support like the library, and under the strict modalities or rules for each text. 2) *additivity*: Foucault says that "the types of grouping between successive statements are not always the same, and they never proceed by a simple piling-up or juxtaposition of successive elements" (*ibid.*, p. 124). The types of texts will be changed in passing of time; then we should always presuppose changes of corpus to study and describe on texts. 3) *recurrence*: "every statement involves a field of antecedent elements in relation to which it is situated, but which it is able to reorganize and redistribute according to new relations" (*ibid.*). With such instability, a text derives from preceding texts, which are presented "as an acquired truth, as an event that has occurred, as a form that can be modified, as material to be transformed, or as an objet that can be spoken about, etc" (*ibid.*).

Thus, the recurrence of text turns out to be a presupposition in the textual analysis. Note that, in Foucault's discussion, the recurrence does not mean an unchanged process of interpretation, but a text can always be interpreted on the basis of preceding corpus of texts, which welcomes new texts continuously. From this perspective, two other presuppositions, *remanence* and *additivity*, proposed by Foucault might also take account of our concept of "recontextualization".

The Foucault's arguments remind us of a thesis proposed by Marshal McLuhan in his *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man* (1964): "The medium is the message". For McLuhan, a medium is not a mere container of a message, but a medium itself has its own features to affect human beings and their society or ways of thinking. In fact, we may recognize same discussion in Walter ONG's *Orality and Literacy: the technologizing of word* (1982) or in *the Printing press as an agent of change* by Elizabeth L. Eisenstein (1979). We may compare those thesis closer to that of Foucault. A text has its own features, through reflections on which we may refine our objective: what the text is and how we study it.

Additional remark

The concept of "hermeneutic circle" has its long tradition in the history of philosophy, judiciary or religions, especially of Christianity. I have no plan to track back its entire tradition, but just to present you a recent discussion on the matter, made by Paul Ricœur, another French philosopher. Ricœur discussed "hermeneutic circle" in his *Time and Narrative* (1985), and proposed a hermeneutical model composed of 3 steps; the model is limited to the domain of literature, but I believe that the process he describes holds relevance to other domains.

Before he describes the 3 stages of his hermeneutical model, summarizing the discussion held by school of "Reception Theory", Ricœur presents a presupposition around the hermeneutic threefold task by "understanding", "explanation" and "application". He says:

“A literary hermeneutics will, therefore, reply to these three questions: in what sense is the primary undertaking of understanding entitled to characterize the object of literary hermeneutics as an aesthetic one? What does reflective exegesis add to understanding? What equivalent to a sermon in biblical exegesis and to a verdict in juridical exegesis does literature offer on the level of application? In this triadic structure, application orients the entire process teleologically, but primary understanding guides the process from one stage to the next by virtue of the horizon of expectation it already contains. Literary hermeneutics is thus oriented both *toward* application and *by* understanding. And it is the logic of question and answer that ensures the transition to explanation.” (RICŒUR, pp. 173–174)

I draw your attention to the last two phrases, where we come to know his argument that the logic of question and answer carries forward our exegesis, understanding to explanation. This dynamism of interpretation allows the process of comprehension to circulate. That’s how the hermeneutic circle is introduced to his discussion. If he distinguishes 3 stages for his circular model of interpretation, it is on the basis of this dynamic process that he assumes. Each stage will be realized by act of reading, on which he says:

“The passage from the first reading, the innocent reading—if there is one—to the second reading, a reading at a distance, is governed, as we stated above, by horizontal structure of immediate understanding. This structure is not simply staked out by the expectations stemming from the dominant tendencies in taste of the epoch when a text is read or from the reader’s familiarity with earlier works. This horizontal structure gives rise, in turn, to expectations of meaning that are not satisfied, which reading reinscribes within the logic of question and answer. [...] The third reading brings about this effect by redoubling the logic of question and answer that governed the second reading. What, it asks, were the questions to which the work was the answer? Yet this third “historical” reading continues to be guided by the expectations of the first reading and by the questions of the second reading. The merely historicizing question—what did the text say?—remains under the control of the properly hermeneutical question—what does the text say to me and what do I say to the text?” (p. 175)

Thus, described as a progressive process from the innocent first reading through the second reading at a distance, then up to the third “historical” reading, the hermeneutic circle evolves our comprehension on text. However, we are to remind that we assume also the existence of same process on writer’s side. Does writer follow the same procedure as reader? If not, how we assume it? The question remains to be answered. Furthermore, is it possible that we ensure coherency between the concepts of hermeneutic circles? and what about the relation between hermeneutic circles and Foucault’s arguments? That’s how we can pile up questions through the discussion on the “textual configuration”.

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Web Sites

Harry Potter the Official Web Site: <http://harrypotter.warnerbros.com/>