THE WORLD OF TEXTS: INTERTEXTUALITY

The previous chapters have represented written texts (although they may appear to come from nowhere and to travel to everywhere) as always being contexted in the lives of the people who read and write and located in social spaces within which the texts circulate. The typification of genre draws participants together in recognizable activities and contexts crystallized by the genre. Even someone scratching an X on the ground where a hole is to be dug potentially evokes a history of maps (and even tales of pirate treasure)—or at least draws on a history of worksite inscription practices to identify specific places to be acted on.

Each new text can relate to prior texts in other ways. Sometimes the text may directly and self-consciously identify other texts it builds on or sets itself against; sometimes the reference is more implicit, but intentional; and sometimes the relation is entirely submerged, relying on familiar textual traditions and cultural resources.

Intertextuality is this relationship among texts, and it forms a separate domain or location within which texts can act. That is, intertextuality is both a resource activated in texts and forms a playing field upon which texts can assert their place, meaning, and consequence. The more deeply we understand the intertextual resources we inevitably draw on whenever we write, the more we will be able to manage, deploy, and position our writing with greatest clarity and intent upon this history of texts and how the readers may perceive those prior texts. And the more we understand how the texts we read also rely on prior texts, we can understand with greater clarity what they are trying to accomplish on which playing field, and whether we are satisfied with the kinds of intertextuality they construct.

INTERTEXTUALITY IS LIKE AND UNLIKE OTHER SPATIAL AND TEMPORAL NOTIONS OF CONTEXT

Texts are to some extent like interactions mediated in speech. A series of letters may serve in a friendship or a business relationship much as a series of turns in a conversation, so that each new utterance relies on and speaks

to the previous ones and sequentially is part of the temporal unfolding of arrangements, relationships, and activities. But texts endure beyond our fading memories of previous conversations, and so we can look at them to refresh our memories, and we can refer to them as enduring artifacts in our new statements. We may even quote them. If memories of our readers differ, we can produce the prior letters, if we have saved them. Thus as texts add up into an archive they become a binding resource on the current moment, locating current events within a documentable space of prior texts.

Texts outside the immediate interchange may also come to be treated as relevant, becoming accountable facts within the interactional situation. We may introduce a prior contract that encumbers current negotiations. No matter what current participants in the negotiation wish, they must now recognize and respect the terms of the prior contract. Or, in another situation, we may refer to a shameful family secret revealed in a letter that Aunt Rosie sent us. Of course we could mention Aunt Rosie's spoken comments or could even suggest our respondent go speak to Aunt Rosie—but the enduringness and circulation of documents means that Aunt Rosie's divulging of that secret cannot be denied or radically misconstrued or misremembered. These circulating documents, both contract and personal secrets, may even be seen and read by numerous people not part of the original or the current communicative interaction unless we burn them or otherwise keep them hidden.

Networks of documents grow and circulate, and become mutually accessible, particularly after the inventions of print, cheap paper, and widespread literacy. Libraries, mass printings, and the transformative ease of digital communication and the World Wide Web means that there are extensive sets of documents that can be brought to bear on any new circumstance, written or spoken. Texts become accountable to wide bodies of prior texts which are deployable as resources.

The status of the intertext, nonetheless, remains tied to social and institutional arrangements that value texts and how texts become intertwined with social arrangements. Consider, for example, the history of the relation of oral and written contracts. Before writing, all agreements were oral. When writing entered the picture, writing was only used to remind people of spoken agreement. The written document only eventually gained the status of an enforceable contract as business law became a matter of record, and business records established accountability for business practices. Now spoken contracts have a much more dubious status and are harder to enforce, and all major agreements are reduced to writing, with the written form taking legal priority over any oral understandings (Tiersma, 2010).

With the coming of the Internet we now recognize a virtual world consisting of digital communications, representations, and interactions, yet this virtual world has been growing since the inception of literacy, as people started to orient toward collections of texts as significant parts of their worlds, to which they might appropriately respond with more texts. Texts bind together groups of people who have access to, interests in, or responsibilities toward particular kinds of documents. People in academic specialties are expected to be familiar with the literature of their fields so as to be able to contribute to that literature and apply it to cases where their expertise is called on. Lawyers need to keep up to date on the latest rulings as well as prior precedents and laws so as to have maximum resources in their own pleadings and to be able to counter the deployment of these texts by their opponents. Stamp collectors and aficionados of the fictions of Thomas Pynchon each have their bodies of texts that help form the substance and interactions of their socio-literate worlds. For millennia, pervasive intertextuality shaped the world of religious scholars devoted to sacred texts and commentaries; similarly, now pervasive intertextuality has come to remake the world of increasingly large numbers of people in economically advanced societies. Institutions of law, bureaucracy, government, corporations, finance, health care, science and social science, social welfare, academic research, entertainment, journalism, and publishing—to name just a few—transform our here and now lives in relation to deep archives of records, files, and knowledge. Through the work of intertextually-guided professionals, these archives become relevant for who we are, what we do, and how we are to be treated in the current moment. Over a century ago we recognized the formation of large white-collar workforce and more recently we have come to call ourselves the information society. The requirements for education and high levels of literacy have increased for those who wish to participate fully and establish high levels of agency in this new way of life. Everyone needs to be able to move through realms of texts as adeptly as they navigate the physical world, perhaps even more adeptly.

Bodies of texts not only provide a terrain against which new utterances may emerge, they have their own rhythms of temporality. Documents from the deep past may be rehabilitated and made immediately relevant, as when an ancient law or a philosophic argument is brought from the recesses of forgotten archives to be claimed to rule in a current case. Different domains have different relevancies for documents of different ages, and how prior texts may be recalled and made relevant to the moment at hand. Arguments may evolve slowly or rapidly based on whether significant, slowly maturing statements appear perhaps only several times in a century, or financial trades are transmitted and responded to in micro-seconds.

EXTENSIVENESS AND SHAPE OF INVOKED INTERTEXT

When we now write, our activity is likely to be already deeply embedded in one of the well-established activity systems relying on a robust intertextual infrastructure. This intertextual infrastructure contributes to defining the current moment as well as to the immediately relevant bodies of texts that need to be explicitly and implicitly considered in framing our response. A lawyer preparing contractual documents for a client must take into account the law and precedents for the nation and local jurisdiction that specifically regulate the kind of transaction being engaged. Even though none of the laws may be explicitly mentioned in the contract, the terms of the agreement must be in conformity with the provisions of the law, and lawyers would be well-advised to be mindful of the opportunities the laws provide for creating favorable terms for the client. Litigation precedents and rulings might also help guide the drafting of the document so as to be effective if it were to come to court. The contract also should be well positioned against the relevant business and financial documents that define the client's financial situation, obligations, plans, and wishes.

On the other hand, the lawyer need not attend to, nor in any way make the contract responsive, to many documents, both near and far from the matter at hand. In a real estate transaction, neither a newspaper description of the neighborhood the property is located in nor the history of the property itself is likely to be relevant to the effective contract—unless another lawyer does a great deal of work to establish the legal relevance to the case, perhaps to indicate the property has a different owner or contains toxic substances that are liable to legal regulation, thereby bringing it into the relevant intertext. Even less likely to bear on the case is the owner's childhood schoolwork or medical records. The lawyer needs to be careful in intertextually locating the contract in a complex textual world, but a fairly defined one. Although the law now rules life, it rules life primarily from the page, and anything that would come to notice to the law must wind up in the network of legally admissible documents that the law would consider relevant.

Although in a less compulsory way, philosophic arguments exist in a network of texts and anyone attempting to advance a new argument with any hope of credibility, even in an oral forum, must take into account a canon of prior authors that have puzzled over the question at hand. If the argument occurs among trained philosophers the expectation will be quite explicit, as the writer will be expected to take into account Aristotle's and Locke's positions, if the field has deemed that in fact Aristotle and Locke are the most relevant authors for the issue. Training in the field explicitly requires induction into the canon of texts deemed relevant and in the appropriate ways of framing issues, positioning one's views and arguing for new claims in the on-going discussions over the accumulated wisdom registered in

the intertext. The training is equally in what texts and modes of argument are not germane. Even in non-expert, daily life discussion of philosophy, the more one is familiar with the kinds of objections and considerations posed in the history of philosophy, the better able one is to frame views and anticipate objections—as well as to solve problems that drive one to philosophize.

In an even less rigorously intertextually organized domain, every newspaper story is framed against the unfolding stories of the previous days, the longer flow of reported events likely to remain in the memories of the newspaper-reading public, and the stories of competing papers. Public documents and reports, academic research, or private papers may become relevant and referred to, or viewed as inappropriate or uninteresting to the news and therefore to be ignored—depending on readers' expectations and reporters' attempts to construct relevance. While neither law nor professional judgment may hold the newspapers accountable to awareness of the relevant intertext and the boundaries of the relevant, public memory, credibility, and interest will.

Every genre and activity system carries with it relevant intertexts to be drawn upon and to which they are held accountable. This may always be expanded by textual work that argues or insinuates the relevance of unanticipated documents, and parts of the anticipated intertext may be similarly excluded by authorial intent and strategy. Whole new intertextual systems may be made relevant, as when the affliction of a celebrity movie actor with a dread disease links health news with entertainment news for as long as the star holds the public attention and uses his or her celebrity to give attention to curing the disease. Also the magic of foregrounding and backgrounding as well as strategic remembering and forgetting, may change the apparent shape or immediate relevance of the intertext, varying according to the degree of inspection and compulsoriness of intertextual accountability.

It should be mentioned as well that each domain has its common practices of referring to and citing the intertext. Academic fields often foreground parts of the intertext through explicit citation following the differing conventions of various fields for footnotes or works cited, as specified in style guidebooks. Less explicit, though, is which parts of the intertext are left entirely in the background as "general knowledge" of the field, no longer attributed to any author. Also less explicit are the practices of representing material from the intertext, whether from extensive quotation and comment, paraphrase, summary, or just the passing use of a term originated by another author. Non-academic professional domains, such as law, accounting, and journalism, have their own regulations and practices of identifying the relevant intertexts through citation or explicit linking of documents. Some domains, at the other extreme, leave the intertext entirely

implicit, as folk tales borrow freely from each other, remind us of other folk tales, and capture a world-view resonantly expressed across many texts.

THE INTERTEXT AS A VIRTUAL THEATER OF ACTION

Texts originally were fully integrated into daily non-textual activities, as cows and sheep were tallied in the meadow and barn and tax collectors carried their lists as they traveled the land. To some extent this is still true as the express delivery messenger carries an electronic device to one's doorstep, to be signed and inscribed at the moment of delivery of a package. But texts increasingly have retreated to the counting house, government office, academic library, the internet and other sites where texts can be readily collected, inspected, contemplated, and processed in the presence of other texts, apart from the realities represented, analyzed, or directed by the texts. Within such indoor worlds of reading and writing, calculation, contemplation, and design, the most immediate realities to be contemplated are those inscribed in other texts. Within the intertextual world, the world outside the page only becomes accessible and relevant when inscribed through the typical and accepted procedures of the activity system related to the intertextual field. Thus for the operations of physical and biological reality to enter into the discourse of science they must be observed, collected, and inscribed by acceptable procedures of experiment, observation, or other legitimized methods. Then they are usually further processed from the initial textual form as raw data into charts, tables, data bases and other textualized and textually processed aggregates. When we are talking about the environment and climate change, we are most immediately talking about data bases, climate models, equations, scientific papers, policy reports and other inscriptions produced, stored, consumed, and contemplated indoors. The warmth of a sunny day is only relevant insofar as it is recorded and brought indoors in a format that can be handled in the textual world. Chapter 9 of this volume provides more detailed treatment of how we can inscribe realities into our texts and link our texts to others to establish an intertextual domain of inscribed meanings.

In the inverse process, those documents that are most likely to be integrated with our material, experienced world—such as architectural drawings used to construct buildings or standards for automobile fuel consumption and exhaust— are likely to have spent much time indoors being produced and processed among other texts. Even the principles by which we conduct our personal relations are pervaded by the textual work of psychologists, sociologists, and health researchers that have led us to monitor and guide our behavior in new ways. The world of texts, and now what we call the virtual world of information, has thus changed the basic social and material landscape on which we live our lives.