Examining Paratextual Theory and its Applications in Digital Culture

Nadine Desrochers
Université de Montréal, Canada

Daniel Apollon
University of Bergen, Norway

A volume in the Advances in Human and
Social Aspects of Technology (AHSAT)
Book Series

Information Science
REFERENCE
An Imprint of IGI Global

Managing Director:	Lindsay Johnston
Production Editor:	Christina Henning
Development Editor:	Austin DeMarco
Acquisitions Editor:	Kayla Wolfe
Cover Design:	Jason Mull

Published in the United States of America by
Information Science Reference (an imprint of IGI Global)
701 E. Chocolate Avenue
Hershey PA 17033
Tel: 717-533-8845
Fax: 717-533-8661
E-mail: cust@igi-global.com
Web site: http://www.igi-global.com

Copyright © 2014 by IGI Global. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or distributed in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, without written permission from the publisher. Product or company names used in this set are for identification purposes only. Inclusion of the names of the products or companies does not indicate a claim of ownership by IGI Global of the trademark or registered trademark.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Examining paratextual theory and its applications in digital culture / Nadine
Desrochers and Daniel Apollon, editors.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-4666-6002-1 (hardcover) -- ISBN 978-1-4666-6003-8 (ebook) -- ISBN 978-1-4666-6005-2 (print & perpetual access) 1. Content analysis (Communication) 2. Digital media. 3. Paratext. 4. Authorship. 5. Genette, Gérard, 1930---Influence. I. Desrochers, Nadine, 1971- editor of compilation. II. Apollon, Daniel, 1951- editor of compilation.
P93.E93 2014
401'.4--dc23
2014007795

This book is published in the IGI Global book series Advances in Human and Social Aspects of Technology (AHSAT) (ISSN: 2328-1316; eISSN: 2328-1324)

British Cataloguing in Publication Data
A Cataloguing in Publication record for this book is available from the British Library.

All work contributed to this book is new, previously-unpublished material. The views expressed in this book are those of the authors, but not necessarily of the publisher.

For electronic access to this publication, please contact: eresources@igi-global.com.

Preface

A THRESHOLD TO THE WORK AT HAND

This book brings a variety of perspectives to the examination of the potential uses and expansions of paratextual theory in digital culture. We knew from the beginning that our approach would be interdisciplinary; our own backgrounds and current fields of study made it so *de facto*. More than a necessity, it was also a wish, because we believed the current state of research on or around the paratext warranted the hypothesis that Gérard Genette's (1997) framework could be used as a shared language which would allow us to benefit from the knowledge and methods of a wide range of disciplines.

The process by which this book was published is a familiar one. Following our call for chapters, extended abstracts were reviewed by the co-editors and invitations to submit full chapters were sent. Full chapter submissions then went through a double-blind peer review process, each chapter receiving two evaluations, as well as editorial comments, no matter whether the final decision was to include the chapter or not.

The copy-editing process was much more complex. The publisher, IGI Global, designed the look and feel of the book; its copy-editing services cover typesetting and layout, the creation of the index, as well as the processing and formatting of all references, but not the more minute linguistic work. We are both native French-speakers, and so we hired Tracy Pettit, of TransSigma Translations, to copy-edit the book. She is based in Canada, but the choice was made to let the authors decide whether they preferred to see their work edited according to American, Canadian, or English standards. Amanda Cossham, Principal Lecturer, Open Polytechnic of New Zealand, came on board as an eleventh-hour ally and made further revisions to such paratextual elements as the table of contents, introduction, preface, and acknowledgments, as well as to chapters 5, 8, and 9.

In IGI Global's publication process, proofs are sent to chapter authors and editors at the same time and returned within a few days; there may therefore be, at times and in places, variations in the copy-editing practices or standards, as authors may have suggested changes while being unaware of the editors' or other contributors' choices, and vice-versa. It is in the hopes that the reader will overlook these variations that we explain the process.

The book begins with the foreword by Blaise Cronin. It is a true threshold to this book, as it shows the paratext's prevalence in our lives, and its role in our understanding and appreciation of myriad objects and content, as well as the importance it has gained as an object of focus in the academic realm. Following this and our introduction, the first section of the book, "Contextualizing Paratextual Theory in Digital Culture," brings together chapters that offer the reader an overview and analysis of some of the transitional issues brought on by the shift from print to digital media and show how Genette's heritage (and influence) may foster fresh and interdisciplinary approaches to understanding digital content.

Although this book proves that the paratextual framework is now applied to many objects in many disciplines, what do the numbers say? In chapter 1, “The Context of Paratext: A Bibliometric Study of the Citation Contexts of Gérard Genette’s Texts,” Fredrik Åström delivers a bibliometric survey of scholarly citations of Genette’s texts and theories. This reveals how the work of Genette and, more specifically, the notion of paratext, have spread from the domain of literary studies to other fields through the use of the term “paratext” in citational material in several languages. Astonishingly perhaps, Åström finds that the two—the concept and the inceptor—are not always linked or co-occurent in the scientific literature. Åström’s findings help us map the influence of Genette and of paratextual theory and to trace how this influence expands in disciplinary scope as the theoretical framework is applied not only to printed works, but to a wide range of objects.

In chapter 2, “The Margins of Bookishness: Paratexts in Digital Literature,” Yra van Dijk takes a post-structuralist stance to analyze a wide spectrum of works spanning a few decades. The author shows how the nature of paratexts has changed considerably, yet seems to create a continuum with earlier literary traditions. On the one hand, paratextual features have been incorporating more and more facets and functions made possible by the Internet; on the other hand, they often also retain literary, artistic, or strategic functions previously established in other media. Drawing upon Derrida’s *parergon* concept, the author demonstrates how the fluid and ambivalent relationship between paratext and text in electronic literature is characterized by various patterns of paratextual contraction and expansion. These patterns of change, the author argues, should be understood as reflecting not so much a disruptive avant-garde but a more subtle evolution, in fact, of rather traditional artistic and literary strategies.

In chapter 3, Janez Strehovec examines Web-based and media-based works from a slightly different angle. In “E-Literary Text and the New Media Paratexts,” Strehovec endeavors to broaden Genette’s print-based notion of paratext and apply it to e-literary texts in order to discuss how paratextual elements may affect—or even transform—the digital reading experience. Expanding on Wolfgang Iser’s reader-response model, the author analyzes various works and advocates a new, comprehensive model that accounts for more complex interactions between what he calls the “hybrid reader-viewer-listener” and works of e-literature. Emphasizing more poietic than mimetic aspects, this new model shows how e-literary practices depart from “storytelling-as-we-know-it” and move from an already rich reading experience to an all-encompassing sensory experience. However, these new and technically sophisticated or complex works may, as the author points out, require new skills in order to be fully understood or appreciated. Strehovec therefore calls for the fostering of a new approach to e-reading skills and new media literacy.

But what, then, of digital content partly ruled by non-human processes? Anna Nacher closes the first part of the book by looking at Google Maps mashups in her chapter titled, “Mashup as Paratextual Practice: Beyond Digital Objects (in the Age of Networked Media).” Here, the scholar (also the user) is confronted with less of a fixed text than a fluid object, which makes the distinction between text and paratext appear almost irrelevant since, as she puts it, “content seems secondary to the modes of circulation.” In her view, the paratext does not present the content in a canonic form, but rather becomes the vector which allows this content to be carried across platforms and media, thereby shaping and reshaping it, even as it collides and meshes with other content through a series of transformations. These processes confront the user with questions of authorship, setting the stage for the next section and following chapters. Nacher adopts what might be deemed a post-human stance, emphasizing the novelty of aggregates that mix human and non-human aspects. She proposes to re-center the discussion about paratext on human activities dealing with what she calls the “complex materialities of the medium” and the rich “semio-technological apparatus enabling the circulation of digital content across different media platforms.”

Section 2, “Questioning the Source: Authorship, Ownership, and Appropriation” focuses on what is perhaps the thorniest element of Genette’s theory, especially in digital culture: the status and function of the Author, as expressed through the various processes (or absence thereof) of “authorization” or “authorial sanction.”

Opening this section is a chapter titled, “Paratexts and Documentary Practices: Text Mining Authorship and Acknowledgment from a Bioinformatics Corpus.” Here, Nicholas M. Weber and Andrea K. Thomer explore the immaterial economy of indebtedness to scientific authority and collaboration, as well as the value of authorship in scientific electronic publishing, as seen through the lens of acknowledgments and authorship statements in a bioinformatics corpus. The authors find that these paratextual items constitute an information-rich “‘ledger’ where debts are acknowledged, previous works are cited, and advances in knowledge are claimed.” Additionally, they argue that systematically mapping the fragmentary information resulting from documentary practices in bioinformatics offers unique insights into “what knowledge is claimed within an entire discipline” and how such epistemic developments may be concretely linked to observable patterns of collaboration. The tendency in bioinformatics to acknowledge not only individuals but also funding and even research tools may herald significant changes in the economy of knowledge.

But will regimes of indebtedness and acknowledgment save the Author? In chapter 6, “Digital Paratext, Editorialization, and the Very Death of the Author,” Marcello Vitali-Rosati revisits the post-structuralist outlook on the death of the Author, foretold since the early days of the French Nouvelle Critique. When it comes to contemporary digital texts, however, observed textual and editorial practices, he argues, are far from epitomizing a post-authorial condition. On the contrary, Vitali-Rosati shows how the paratext inherent to certain forms of online editorial practices, including such elements as templates, plays a new role in how we access, how we “open” digital objects, and how the coherence of the reading act is more than ever linked to the concept of “actor”—whether this actor is writer, reader, search engine, or even website. In these digital “editorialization devices,” the author sees signs that “editorialization” has replaced the traditional authorial function; and since such editorialization devices can be interpreted as paratext, Genette’s framework can reveal both their potential and limitations.

Transmedia narratives may offer a privileged outpost from which to scrutinize the disappearance of proprietary authorship. In Chapter 7, “Get Out of My Sandbox: Web Publication, Authority, and Originality,” Barbara Bordalejo addresses the tension between fanfiction and authorship in transmedia narratives and born-digital texts. She discusses divergent views of what can be borrowed, taken, or used as inspiration in works of fiction derived from existing works, as well as how this is being impacted by digital media. The appropriation of text (such as a character’s name and personality) and paratext (here, the source code) creates complex dynamics where indebted homage and assertions of “proprietary authorship” collide. Beginning with the analysis of Nick Montfort’s “Taroko Gorge,” a born-digital poem and “Python poetry generator” (Montfort, 2011), and Jasper Fforde’s *The Eyre Affair*, which the author uses as an example of transmedia narrative, Bordalejo explores the implications of what she considers to be the combined effect of several processes such as: the increased blurring, even upheaval, of the distinction between what is “within” and what is “outside” a text; the vanishing significance of the traditional notion of authorship; and the new modes of textual production and distribution.

If the Author disappears, is there a replacement in sight? An obvious candidate may be the community of users who together co-construct complex (as well as social) digital objects. In Chapter 8, “Iterations and Evolutions: Paratext and Intertext in Fanfiction,” Heather L. Hill and Jen Pecoskie explore the dynamics of reading and writing in online fanfiction sites using the *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy as a case study. Building upon Roland Barthes’ view of texts as a “tissue, a woven fabric” (1977, p. 159), the authors show how a computer-mediated discourse analysis of the intertextual and paratextual dimensions of online fanfiction reveals interlaced patterns of influence that shape both the reading and writing experiences. The authors argue that the paratextual architecture of fanfiction should not be understood as a set of devices external to the narratives published on the sites which solely mediate the information exchange between authors and readers, but rather, as they put it, as "integral to the creation" of fan-created content. The authors therefore posit that the central function of the paratext in fanfiction is bound by the fact that the "community is not only formed of a passive readership, it is enmeshed in the evolution of individual narratives in the form of reviews and comments." The paratext becomes the strands from which the text is woven.

Section 3, "The Digital Paratext and its Objects: Case Studies," offers a collection of object-specific analyses that apply the framework in methodical ways to a broad array of digital objects, thereby showing the ever-expanding relevance of the framework.

Inherited and seemingly sacrosanct devices from the print era may, judging from previous chapters, be hijacked and submitted to a harsh repurposing in digital culture. In Chapter 9, "Bridging *The Unknown*: An Interdisciplinary Case Study of Paratext in Electronic Literature," Nadine Desrochers and Patricia Tomaszek explore the paratextual elements of a work of electronic literature, *The Unknown*, in order to show how paratextual theory can serve as a common ground when scholars from various traditions seek to share objects of study. Combining approaches from literary studies and information science, the authors perform "qualitative content analyses and close readings of the table of contents, titular apparatus, comments hidden in the source code, and other paratextual elements, in relation with the narrative." They find that the work's paratextual content exhibits "inconsistencies and contradictions, both in terms of the use of the paratextual structure and of the information conveyed." When analyzed from a perspective that combines paratextual theory, literary functions, and information-sharing practices, the use made of the paratextual elements studied here certainly seems to defy the theory's tenets. Nevertheless, the authors find that Genette's nuanced treatment of non-functional or not-fully-functional paratexts can support a more open interpretation of the findings and that the framework offers an invaluable "lexicon" in the assessment of these paratextual elements' "role and efficiency as identifiers, organizational components, and information providers, as well as their literary effect."

Obviously, as was the case in print culture, paratext in digital culture is an intrinsic part of the production of cultural goods. In Chapter 10, "Melodrama Remediated: The Political Economy of Literary Database Paratexts," Katherine C. Wilson analyzes the transformation of theatrical paratexts, which she first establishes as distinct from literary paratexts, especially when remediated in digital form. Wilson focuses on the digital transformations of a specific type of published play—not a print artifact of high culture, but rather "a cheaper, nineteenth-century, English-language 'Acting Edition'"—being repurposed, as emphasized by the author, "not for producing theatre, but for studying old drama." Examining the shift from print to digital acting editions through "partly visible protocols" which she calls "actuating marks," the author endeavors to reveal the new political economy underlying such remediation. Focusing in the last part of her chapter on how "cultural-material practices [are] affecting the production and circulation of cultural texts in the digital age," she concludes that "paratexts reflect not only *meaning,* but also inherited and emerging *means of production,*" thereby giving a more literal and commercial meaning to the "transaction" (Genette, 1997, p. 2) negotiated by the paratext.

This leads us to consider the seemingly inextricable jungle of paratextual devices and tactics found on streaming platforms. In Chapter 11, "The Functionality of Paratexts on YouTube," Thomas Mosebo Simonsen explores the variety of paratextual devices and strategies that shape YouTube's visible and audible architecture, made all the more complex by the fact that these paratextual devices may be either "auto-generated by YouTube or created by its users." To bring some clarity to the medley of individual paratextual elements, the author proposes a double, site-specific classification of these paratextual elements, based on the analysis of a sample of YouTube pages. These classifications first distinguish between user-generated content and non-user-generated content, then between spatial and temporal categories. On the basis of this classification, Simonsen argues that the paratextual elements' illocutionary force, seen by Genette as "the ability to perform what they describe" (Genette, 1997, p. 11), can be extended to mean the ability to "mak[e] the audience perform an action." This may then provide a viable axis and model for the interpretation of the functions of digital paratext as key aspects in a "culture of visibility," on YouTube first, but perhaps also on other platforms.

This "culture of visibility" could certainly be analyzed and nuanced when measured against the exacerbated and antithetic tensions at the heart of the online pornography industry, where illusion and fantasy are built on the constant juxtaposition of the seen and the unseen. Chapter 12, "The Pornographic Paratexts of Pornhub" is an analysis by Rebecca Inez Saunders of, in the author's words, "the evolving paratextual elements of the popular porn site Pornhub." Saunders "considers how its evolving virtual frames interact with the visual texts it displays—online porn films." The author proposes to reconceptualize certain aspects of Gérard Genette's theory by studying the relationships between content, discourse, ownership, and metadata on the Pornhub site. Namely, she addresses the issue of the stabilization of paratextual features during the short history of what she calls a "sexually explicit digital environment." On the basis of her exploration of what she deems to be "Pornhub's aggressive paratext," she argues that the "transient, inconsequential films featured on Pornhub derive their value not from their status as individual texts, but as an insignificant part of an infinite and highly significant whole." Addressing the particular issue of the organization of the large amount of content on Pornhub, she concludes that the "volume of pornographic material made possible by digitization has led to an even greater focus on excess in a genre already founded on hyperbole."

The "frame" concept reappears in the study of the fluid and interactive platforms of video games. Indeed, it is featured in the title and as the core proposition of Annika Rockenberger's chapter, "Video Game Framings." Starting with an auto-ethnographic description of her encounter with the first-person shooter game *BioShock Infinite*, the author develops her own "ad-hoc terminology" which reflects her grounded method approach. Rockenberger then submits Genette's nomenclature and definitions of paratext to a thorough review and critical media-theoretical analysis. The results of this reassessment are then weighed against the preliminary findings from the author's video game analysis, leading her to conclude that a mere application of Genette's original definition of paratext to video games fails to account for central constitutive elements of gameworlds, and that further work is needed to clear up a certain conceptual and theoretical confusion. The reader will reap the benefits of Rockenberger's meticulous analysis at the end of the chapter, which offers a more directly applicable conceptual outlook on what may be termed "paratext" in video games.

Video games can also be building blocks in the making of complex digital objects which, when apprehended as the sum of their parts, have been coined "transmedia narratives." The multiple and sensory experiences associated with these objects shift our focus to digital readers of such narratives, who are being offered much more than a core "text." In Chapter 14, "Thresholds of Transmedia Storytelling: Applying Gérard Genette's Paratextual Theory to *The 39 Clues* Series for Young Readers," Amy Nottingham-Martin builds on Genette's theory in order to offer a paratext-based model for the analysis of transmedia works. Her analysis may also enable fresh and necessary insights into the study of new literacies, since, as the author states, transmedia storytelling calls for "sophisticated reading and interpretive practices"—an issue raised in an earlier chapter by Strehovec. Using Scholastic, Inc.'s *The 39 Clues* as a case study, Nottingham-Martin analyzes the structure of this multimedia work and the highly integrated enmeshment of its various paratextual items and processes. The author contrasts Genette's author-centric and problematic construct of a passive reader with what she describes as a new breed of reader who "does not passively receive the messages of the paratext, but actively consumes and responds to them."

The book concludes with Section 4, "From the 'Book as Object' to the 'Digital as Object': A Nod to the Industry," a section that takes a market-oriented and professional look at the progression of the ebook and reading devices industry.

Although it may seem paradoxical, the ebook is perhaps one of the most puzzling objects to assess from a paratextual point of view. While it most readily anchors itself in the past, it needs to look to the future in order to establish its relevance against the ever-expanding onslaught of digital offerings. As Patrick Smyth observes in his chapter, "Ebooks and the Digital Paratext: Emerging Trends in the Interpretation of Digital Media," the paratextual system as we know it from Genette's work has undergone considerable change in the book-to-ebook migration. The author therefore explores and assesses these new paratextual conventions through Genette's five primary dimensions (spatial, temporal, substantive, pragmatic, and functional; see our introduction to this book for a discussion of these dimensions, as well as Genette, 1997, pp. 4–13). In his view, this framework still offers highly pertinent, even "necessary" tools for the interpretation of digital texts. This deference notwithstanding, Smyth does not limit his approach to a simple transfer of Genette's five dimensions to ebooks but also shows that the context of social interactions surrounding the ebook and the aforementioned fluidity of digital texts both call for an extension of the paratextual frame. While the paratextual apparatus of the current ebook formats draws heavily on pre-digital references, "there is no guarantee" the author argues, "that the form of the ebook will remain stable, and new modes of reception, facilitated by their own paratextual conventions, may rise to replace it."

Corey Pressman would most likely agree. His chapter, "Post-book Paratext: Designing for Haptic Harmony," brings the reader into what he calls the "nascent post-book era," where designers, rather than simply imitating a conventional form, become the artists of the new scriptoria, the Gutenbergs of a new revolution. Post-book encounters with the text redefine the reading experience and are, according to Pressman, intrinsically linked to hand-held technologies—ebook readers, phones, tablets—and their plethora of apps for accessing various formats of online and offline electronic content. The author contrasts the ethos of the printing era rooted in "fixity, social isolation, and authority" with the new emphasis on "orality, fluidity, and social communication." In his view, what he calls the "digital post-book experience" is associated with the complex reshaping of the paratextual structure of digital content. Such reshaping involves the elimination of traditional paratextual devices used in printed books and, as he states, "the opportunity to reintroduce elements of the pre-print orality, continuing what scholars have noted as the development of a 'secondary orality' instigated by radio and television." Post-book professionals may have to acquire new skills and evolve from being "editors," as we knew them, to becoming "interaction designers," as the author terms this new profession. Here, then, we come full circle: together, the traditional and the disruptive (discussed in our introduction in reference to the work of Jack Goody) reinvent, rather than extend, the text-and-paratext foundations of inscribed meaning.

We believe this industry outlook is important because we want this book to speak not only to scholars and students from a broad range of academic disciplines, but also to professionals working in various fields.

It is our hope that professionals from the fields of digital design, database development, library science, social media, and all other aspects of digital culture may also find compelling tools and concepts within these pages. The chapters in this collective work cover topics of interest in bibliometrics, communications studies, cultural studies, digital arts, digital humanities, knowledgebase and database design, information architecture, information behavior, library science, literary studies, new media studies, and scholarly communication, to name but a few. They offer competing concepts and frameworks, tackle issues linked to the digitalization and remediation of printed texts and documents, question the materiality of digital culture and the validity of authorial sanction in the digital context, ponder the future of authorship and ownership, study the intricate status of paratextual elements in heterarchic modes of production, expose information-sharing practices in the digital age, and present bibliometric measures. Their objects of study come in formats as diverse as ebooks and e-publishing, metadata, citations, digitalized content, transmedia works, video games, social media platforms, mashups, born-digital literature and, at times, hybrid forms as well. Together, therefore and perhaps most importantly, they meet the primary objectives of this book: to examine, reassess, and extend Gérard Genette's paratextual theory in order to provide a shared conceptual toolbox for the interdisciplinary study of digital content, the design of digital objects, and, more broadly, the current reflection on digital culture.

In truth, we think the expression "digital culture" is bound to fade as a more commonsensical lexicon takes shape; this lexicon will likely do less to betray our unease at the implications of the "digital revolution" and more to reflect our growing understanding of what has already, and irrevocably, become part of our *modus operandi*. As the digital dust settles, it remains to be seen whether the "thing" that makes cultural objects "present" will still be known as "paratext"; but we can cross that threshold when we get there. For now, let this preface—peritextual in the printed version of this work, but perhaps epitextual to the digital reader—be our authorial sanction of this book and our willingness to attest to the fact that Genette's theory is alive, well, and living in the chapters presented *herein*, if the reader is holding a physical book, or *therein*, if the reader is looking at this preface as a standalone digital file; for such are the considerations the political economy of modern scholarly publishing brings to our digital paratext.

Nadine Desrochers
Université de Montréal, Canada

Daniel Apollon
University of Bergen, Norway

REFERENCES

Barthes, R. (1977). *Image, music, text* (S. Heath, Trans.). Glasgow: Fontana/Collins.

Genette, G. (1997). *Paratexts: Thresholds of interpretation* (J. E. Lewin, Trans.). New York: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511549373

Montfort, N. (2011). *Who grabbed my Gorge* [Blog post]. Retrieved January 8, 2014, from http://nickm.com/post/2011/07/who-grabbed-my-gorge/