The etymology of editing (from *edere*, “to put forth”) reveals that sharing and dissemination are essential elements of the editing process, and although scholarly editors have occasionally seemed more invested in establishing the hermetic perfection of their texts than in opening texts up to their readers, the impulse of the scholarly edition has always been outward. The audience for big expensive print editions of relatively obscure works of literature has long been limited to the libraries that could afford them or to the scholars who ferreted them out of dark corners to reveal their significance to other scholars (and ideally to their students in the humanities as well). But what sort of sea change does the social dynamic and scholarly milieu undergo when a new online audience of critics and students discovers an archive as detailed as the William Blake archive\(^1\), as diverse as Romantic Circles\(^2\), or as rich as the Networked Infrastructure for Nineteenth-Century Electronic Scholarship (NINES)\(^3\)? And who exactly comprise that audience; and what kinds of texts most interest them; and how do they read and make sense of digital editions? These are big questions, and even fifteen years after “The Rationale of Hypertext,” we don’t really have all the answers; in fact, Peter Shillingsburg has observed that after almost twenty years of diligent digitizing we still do not even have a standard idea of how we want to do digital editing\(^4\).

\(^1\)<http://www.blakearchive.org/blake/>. Web. Sept. 2010
\(^3\)<http://www.nines.org/>. Web. Sept. 2010
Hitherto, scholarship on digital editions has not inquired very far into the kind of readers electronic editions are intended to attract. There is, however, an admirable open-mindedness about the kinds of criticism that a digital edition is capable of inspiring. In encouraging editors to think about the kind of reading assumed or forced by digital editions, I hope here to remind textual scholars that we still to a certain extent lack a sense of how digital editions are to be used, both by researchers and in the classroom, and to suggest ways in which the inclusiveness of digital editions and digital archives, combined with their illustrative capabilities and ready links to library holdings, may serve to introduce readers to the principles involved in the study of material texts. I also want to suggest that although the digital archive is a relatively new form, with its own sets of material constraints, we can learn from the experience of past organizations that engaged in similarly ambitious textual recovery and editing in the medium of print, and that an understanding of the challenges faced by the nineteenth-century Early English Text Society in collaborating on, editing, and disseminating newly-rediscovered medieval and Early Modern texts might speak to the social dynamic of our own scholarly editing practices.

Material bibliography is an area of study that might seem at odds with digital formats, but it is in many ways at the heart of the digitization enterprise, as the electronic edition can convey a wide range of historical and contextual matter and is moreover capable of placing the raw material for textual and bibliographical analysis in visual form directly in the reader’s control. The desire of librarians for new ways of conserving books and space goes back to the mid-twentieth-century microform projects, which comprised the first of many attempts since then to grapple with the problems of material storage and access, sacrificing some image quality as a result. In one sense, digitization might be
similarly said to put another barrier between the reader and the physical book, but it is probably more accurate to say that readers now can see more examples of page design and typography than ever before. Digitization also allows access to historically underrepresented works to an even greater extent than microforms and even libraries for, although the opening of the literature canon predates digital editions, it has particularly been furthered by the creation of digital archives of previously unavailable books.

Although the most idealistic rhetoric surrounding the creation of digital archives has concerned the democratizing effect of access to texts, the visual archive has also revealed the diversity of historical books with regard to design, and may have even more research potential than the searchable texts which have formed the focus of the digitizers’ energies. Many of the most prominent sites are free, or at least free for most academics: from the sprawling Internet Archive⁵ and Project Gutenberg⁶ through archives like the still open but more professional Digital Scriptorium⁷ and NINES, to sites like Chadwyck-Healey’s Early English Books Online (EEBO)⁸ and Gale’s Eighteenth-Century Collections Online (ECCO)⁹ that are accessible only through a library or subscription. The best of these have rich collections of images. In EEBO, students in undergraduate Shakespeare courses have access to visual representations (however rough) of the diverse quarto playbooks of the early seventeenth century; the scarcity of primary documents for classroom use is no longer a reason to dismiss the necessity of a thorough historical understanding or to assume an ahistorical typographical immutability of literary texts.

The usefulness and possible uses of digital texts for criticism do not need to be rehearsed

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here, although there is certainly room in current scholarship for an article that describes the social impact of digital editions and archives on the kinds of scholarship that are now being practiced.

It is true that for the most part, as Peter Shillingsburg suggests in “How Literary Works Exist,” “students and critics” practicing this kind of scholarship will continue to comprise the main readership for digital editions. It would be wrong to argue that this is a limited audience, though; books have always been limited in their readership, in one way or another; moreover, besides critics and students and the interested general public (who might be more numerous than we think, especially for celebrated doubly gifted writer/artists such as Blake and the Pre-Raphaelites), we should count bibliographers and editors among the readership for digital editions as well. A new generation of textual scholars is developing, encouraged by associations such as the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing (SHARP) and by the diverse possibilities and less prescriptive atmosphere of digital editing to try their hands at making editions. Because current scholarship is temperamentally inclined to resurrecting non-canonical texts, and therefore in many cases these editors are attempting works that exist in limited forms (even sometimes in single editions), their practice obviates the complex issues surrounding the synthesis of multiple versions of a canonical work into a single eclectic or perfect text—the enterprise which has traditionally been the Grail of textual scholarship. Indeed, influenced by the school of Jerome McGann and enabled by the copious storage capacities of the digital environment, digital editors are quite content to display as many versions as we can access and scan. This was certainly the case for me when I chose to edit William Morris’s *Ordination of Knighthood* for the William Morris
Online Edition\textsuperscript{10}, the \textit{Ordination} has only one manuscript and two printed versions, of which one was printed by Morris himself. Indeed, for many in the new generation of editors, we are not so much “editing” as we are creating editions, and we are making archives rather than forming eclectic texts.

It is even possible that, as the hitherto carefully conserved print archive is injected into the more public digital sphere, as images of manuscripts, incunabula, and the fine press movement become commonplace and as typographical masterpieces and previously ephemeral works of popular culture and pulp are alike archived and shared, the rare book itself is being demystified. It is an intellectual environment in which any scholar, and any informed student, can now be an editor or curator. We are deeper inside these texts than we have ever been, and literary scholars count more editors among our numbers than ever; \textit{nous sommes tous éditeurs}. This is partly a function of technology: the major research libraries have become more accessible with cheaper travel, and the conversion of texts into digital form is now a fairly straightforward process. But much of this new interest in textual recovery and editing has also to do with the rise of new disciplines. Cultural Studies’ political shift of focus to non-canonical works was the earliest impetus for this spread of editorship, while the rise of the study of Book History and its associated interdisciplines has given rise to a broader awareness among historians and literary scholars of the sociology and socialization of texts, in the process making researchers more aware of the book as an artefact of past ways of seeing the world.

There exists a rough parallel to our historical moment in the early work of the Early English Text Society (EETS), founded in 1864. At midcentury, Frederick Furnivall began to exercise his tireless genius for social organizing on the creation of an ever-

expanding catalogue of Old and Middle English texts, with the aim of introducing Victorian readers to their national medieval cultural heritage. Though the nationalistic tone of its editors is not mirrored in our own era of humanistic, inclusive canon extension, the EETS in its early years is exemplary of the social dynamic of scholarly editing, and may afford us some useful ways of thinking about the intersection of readership, editing, and material bibliography. In a way, the EETS and similar enterprises in the nineteenth century (such as Furnivall’s Chaucer Society, the Ballad Society, and the Camden Society) represent in a print medium the kind of mushrooming interest in editing and textual recovery that the electronic medium has sparked. They, too, sought to fill in the gaps in the historical record, especially those to do with works that had been neglected by reason of déclassé associations with the domestic and the low; they, too, worked at a feverish pace to put as much material as possible before the public eye; and they, too, discovered surprising new resources of editorial expertise to fill the need.

The number of people interested in publishing medieval English literature at midcentury may or may not be surprising, given the Victorian taste for all things medieval, the Victorian curiosity about the everyday life of the past, and the tireless Victorian work ethic. What is certainly worthy of note is that a large number of the readers of medieval literature were the very scholars and amateurs who formed the audience for the works that the Society was producing (it was, for example, a great coup when W. W. Skeat’s edition of “Peres the Ploughman’s Crede” was put on the syllabus for a senior English class at the City of London School in 1867\(^\text{11}\)). The communication circuit was in many ways a circular one. Anthony Singleton remarks that “Curiously, while EETS found readers in short supply, editorial workers were comparatively

abundant …. Over sixty different people were identified as editors on the title pages of its publications, and the assistance of a significant number more was acknowledged within their various prefaces and introductions” (113). The collaborative methodology of the Society is reflected, for instance, in the large volume on *English Gilds* (1870); when the editor, Toulmin Smith, died, his daughter Lucy Toulmin Smith took over the editorial duties, including in the apparatus a lengthy exchange between her father and Lujo Brentano debating the degree and quality of the guilds’ radicalism. The social networks that informed the output of the Early English Text Society are illustrated in the *Gilds* volume, with its two editors and major collaborator; similar social networks now drive the big online editorial projects. The executive council of NINES alone numbers twenty-seven scholars as of February 2010.

Just as the current interest in creating electronic texts has led to a great variety of kinds of editions in terms of the amount of detail included, and the quality and extent of textual emendation, so the early days of the EETS saw a diverse and prolific output from amateur and professional scholars alike. Several of the early editions of the society would eventually have to be re-edited, and some of the EETS’s contributors and advisors recognized early on that the Society’s inconsistent practices would lead to uneven results. Henry Bradshaw, librarian of Cambridge from 1867 to 1886 and one of the foremost textual scholars of the age, was in close contact with Furnivall while the latter was working on the Early English Text Society’s publications. In a letter of August 1867, he reveals his uneasiness, writing to Furnivall that “until some of you begin to edit books, there is no chance for any of us learning anything”¹². But Furnivall never saw himself as an editor, and wilfully chose not to understand: in a letter to Bradshaw dated February

8th, 1871, he modestly claims that “you’re the man to edit Chaucer, if only you will. I’m the man to print the texts”\textsuperscript{13}. Bradshaw recognized that even if Furnivall was pretending simply to publish medieval manuscripts as he found them, it was impossible for Furnivall to avoid making decisions of an editorial nature. Even if print could faithfully mimic the textual peculiarities of a manuscript, there could be no mere reprinting of the manuscript. There were bound to be errors in copying, and there would always be editorial judgements imposed upon the text—precisely the sort of errors and actions that can be reversed if necessary over time in editions published digitally.

Furnivall and the Early English Text Society were aware from the start of the physical limitations imposed upon their project by the print medium. The EETS was able to adopt a number of idiosyncratic characters, such as the occasional crossed ascender for \textit{h} in the Hengwrt manuscript of Chaucer, but other problems of textual fidelity remained, and there were many dissenting views about how the Society’s texts should appear: David Matthews describes how, in 1869, Furnivall fortunately rejected as ahistorical suggestions that EETS books be printed in black-letter, like type facsimiles\textsuperscript{14}. The producers of modern editions have the advantage over their Victorian counterparts not only of the availability of digital facsimiles, but of a comprehensive array of characters and fonts. This will be an important innovation; the exigencies of nineteenth-century page design had a lasting effect on the way we now imagine some of these medieval texts. The placement that we now find natural for the “bob” in \textit{Sir Gawain and the Green Knight}, for instance, stems from Richard Morris’s 1864 edition of the poem: in the unique manuscript and in the 1839 Bannatyne Club edition, the bob is placed directly to

\textsuperscript{13} Prothero, qtd. Benzie, page 165.  
the right of the line preceding the four-line “wheel,” while editions after Morris have adopted his placement of the bob on a line of its own preceding the four-line wheel. It is hard to quantify the effect of such alterations on the reading experience, but such effects undoubtedly exist. Richard Morris’s first great volume for the EETS, giving for the first time all the poems of the British Library manuscript Cotton Nero A.x., is now only a footnote to scholarship on the *Gawain* manuscript; the poems had eventually to be re-edited. But many of Morris’s readings have been retained; and as the example of the bob in *Gawain* attests, Morris is a silent partner who needs to be acknowledged in all future editions as a major factor in the transformation of the text on its way down to us. His influence is considerable.

It is possible that modern digital editors are more like Furnivall than like Bradshaw or Morris; we are “printing” (creating digital archives), rather than “editing,” and our primary criterion is accessibility rather than a polished, responsible scholarly text (that crossed-ascender *h* would trip up most digital searchers). But we do have the advantage of being able to give the reader a more complete archive, and letting him or her decide which historical text is the most appropriate to the purpose, even if not all those texts are searchable (our other important criterion for digital editions). In the days before hypertext, Chaucer scholars had the Chaucer Society’s *Six-Text Edition* (1868) of the *Canterbury Tales*, edited by Furnivall himself. Printed on often-brittle pulp paper, the edition offers parallel texts of six important manuscripts. Until the advent of electronic editing and the *Canterbury Tales Project*, there would be nowhere else to make six major manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales* speak to each other in one place. The text (unlike certain of the more notorious publications of the EETS, especially the earlier ones) does keep relatively close to the originals. It is still not a completely faithful transcript,
however, and the use of square brackets denotes an editorial willingness to intrude that is unacceptable in a work that was meant to be used in an authoritative way by still other editors without access to facsimiles of the originals. But the impossibility of facsimile reproduction meant that transcription was a necessary evil, and so editorial intervention and error, the idiosyncrasies of scribal culture, and the restrictions of available type meant that the Six-Text Edition would be an edition rather than an archive.

The Early English Text Society relied upon a network of scholars and amateurs whose reach exceeded their grasp, since the technology did not exist to create the kind of archive that would have been suited to Furnivall’s eclectic, inclusive temperament. A letter from Bradshaw to Furnivall conjecturally dated December 1874 reveals Bradshaw’s essential sympathy for Furnivall’s difficulty: “I am afraid bibliomania is a grievous thing, if one takes any special fancy. But [sic] I confess I like exhausting a matter if it is to be done”\(^{15}\). Even Bradshaw, as exacting an editor as the Victorian period would produce (so exacting, in fact, that he rarely finished his projects), recognized that the archive needed to be as complete as possible because editions would need to acknowledge other states of the same text and similar problems in other texts. What Jerome McGann calls the “radial” reading experience offered by hypertext editions speaks to not only the establishment of texts and apparatus, but to the historical material state of texts as well. In *The Textual Condition*, McGann describes radial reading as occurring when the book sends its reader to other books in order to make sense of what it says\(^{16}\). Radial reading is not only about becoming familiar with allusions and sources, but is as much a bibliographical practice as a critical one; in practising it, readers simultaneously fend off a prescriptive

\(^{15}\) Bradshaw, Henry. Letter to Frederick James Furnivall. [December 1874?]. MS. Correspondence of Frederick James Furnivall. Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino.

understanding of texts as super-historical entities and open themselves up to sympathy with alternative textual and bibliographical states. Likewise, the apparent bibliomania of the EETS’s researchers was not only about book-fetishism, exploration, and completism; the impulse to recover and edit texts was an impulse to share and to connect them. The Early English Text Society’s output thus relied upon its members’ access to the institutions that held the books they were editing; without the British Museum reading room or the Oxford and especially Cambridge connections, the largely amateur EETS would have been on the outside looking in. An important lesson of the nineteenth-century Early English Text Society’s exuberant project of textual recovery is that open access to both digital and print editions is essential to future textual scholarship.

The Early English Text Society is still going strong. Many of its works are now available in the Middle English Compendium\(^1\), but although on the surface one might imagine that the digital archive will be the EETS’s solution to the problems of textual representation and access that Furnivall faced in those anarchic early days, there still exists some hesitancy about relying solely on digital editions. Peter Robinson writes that

> the EETS board has so far (to my knowledge) refrained from an absolute declaration that all future EETS editions will be prepared and published in digital form. And frankly, it would be irresponsible for the board, or any similar agency, to issue any such edict at present. Before any such declaration could be made by a major editorial group, we would need to satisfactorily address the two issues on which this article focusses: we would would need to establish an overwhelming agreement within the community that digital editions are indeed the way to go;

and we would need to have tools available so that any editor who had the skills to make a print edition could make a digital one instead.¹⁸

Robinson illustrates how far the EETS has come organizationally from its amateur roots, evoking an organization for which textual scholarship has become more rigorous and scientific, and less hasty. The new EETS has also long since abandoned any hyperbolic claim to a broad readership; medievalists alone are now its bread and butter, and its editors are all professionals. In spite of the fact that many of its works are now available in the Middle English Compendium, the debate within the EETS is thus also about the control of texts. I am not using “control” in a pejorative sense here; I am not sure that it is authoritarian to want to establish and share the best text of any work, and neither am I willing to state unreservedly whether digital editions are, as Robinson says, “the way to go.”

But the current Early English Text Society’s misgivings about moving into a digital format certainly suggest that the question of the physical form of texts remains as much an issue in the twenty-first century as it was in the nineteenth¹⁹. Where the nineteenth-century EETS tried to represent scribal characters with special sorts and editorial emendations with italics and square brackets, the twenty-first-century editor can scan and reproduce the page of the original work, edit the text, and justify the emendations later if necessary by reference to the readily-available facsimile. Grappling

¹⁸ Robinson, Peter. “Current issues in making digital editions of medieval texts—or, do electronic scholarly editions have a future?” Digital Medievalist 1.1 (Spring 2005). Web

¹⁹ When SEENET (the Society for Early English and Norse Electronic Texts—<http://www.iath.virginia.edu/seenet/>) or the publishers of the complete texts of Johan Daisne’s novel De trein der traagheid (according to Vanhoutte 2009) still put out their work only in the form of CD-ROMs, that is a conscious decision on their part, made in order to maintain control over the edition and the material. They are not isolated editions, any more than any undigitized print edition is truly isolated; they are simply not linkable except in the form of bibliographical citations. Linking to them just takes a little longer, and requires more physical work.
with the issue of completeness, John Lavagnino observes that “Today, it would often be more economical to reproduce an author’s manuscript photographically rather than to set it in type, but this is almost never done except in publications intended for scholars; in microfilms and printed facsimiles of authors’ manuscripts, all intended for study rather than reading.” What Lavagnino says here about manuscripts probably applies to print editions, as well, and since he wrote those words (in 1996), photographic reproduction and scanning has become even easier. But we have to think about where our editions end: are we going to simply print every edition, every state of every text? This method suggests an overwhelming proliferation; but it is useful because it is capable of getting readers thinking about the authority of texts. If students begin to question the fixity of even the most rock-solid and reputable editions, that can only be a good thing. Readers schooled in the fluid online textual environment respond readily to the notion of multiple texts, even if they will not—and should not—read them comprehensively. It cannot be a bad thing when even the most casual student readers come to realize (as they will, when the digital archive exposes them to the cross-historical existence of print editions) that the text they are studying in the digital Middle English Compendium was edited in the nineteenth century by an amateur editor.

The process that Randall McLeod calls “transformission” takes place in editing just as it does in the process of printing and in the originary act of writing down. Texts are performative, each text manifesting in individual, nearly irreproducible forms at different times, and this is especially true of texts that exist in medieval manuscript, as the EETS’s editors found when they tried to re-present their originals for a Victorian

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readership using the existing tools of print. One of the greatest strengths of the digital edition, besides its searchability, is its ability to display and to juxtapose visual cues, not so much for “study” as Lavagnino says (after all, unless one reads the book upside down one will always be “reading,” even if for much bibliographical work the physical book is still the essential thing), as in support of charting the changes a page and a text undergo from edition to edition. Rather than suggest that there is some kind of aura implicit in the “original” embodiment of a text, I want to recommend here a practice not unlike genetic editing, minus the sense of linear progress that the creation of genetic editions is sometimes made to serve. Readers inevitably develop a stronger historical sense as they engage with wider radial reading in past bibliographical forms. A sense of history is evoked when the reader recognizes differences in typography, page design, illustration, and original spelling at different times in the text’s history; the digital text has more in common with the three-dimensional book than we think. The visual cues of illustration are the most obvious avenue for this kind of immersion (as, for instance, Sidney Paget’s illustrations of Sherlock Holmes instantly, viscerally, evoke for us the prim, grimy, gas-lit London of the 1890s). But a different, even deeper sympathy for past social history is triggered by reading and viewing texts in their contemporary typography, spelling, and punctuation. On a related note, it is deceptive to suggest that readers need to be eased into their task by an edited text that has been utterly cleansed of accidental or even substantive alternative readings. For a generation of readers forced by the limitations of cell phone technology into adopting creative spelling and grammar, the variant spellings adopted by a Shakespeare quarto’s printer to eke out his lines should pose very few problems.
Lavagnino calls this approach “localist,” and comments that it might end up in the utter repudiation of editorial projects\textsuperscript{21}. That criticism is valid; indeed, this is as close as I will come to arguing that, with broader access to the visual archive, books (and readers) will no longer need the interference of editors at all. But it is also true that the past necessity of scholarly editing has its origin at least in part in the fact that these works were out of print and needed to be made accessible; perfecting the text is a relatively recent innovation. Hoyt N. Duggan describes the value of the \textit{Piers Plowman Electronic Archive} as consisting in more than its textual content:

fifty-four electronic transcriptions and facsimiles—perhaps none of them ever serving as a traditional reading text—will offer scholars not only new ways to study the text and the textual tradition of the poem but also possibilities for gaining fresh insight into other aspects of late medieval literary culture … It matters little that no one is ever likely to want to \textit{read} all fifty-four documents.
Many will want to \textit{use} them.\textsuperscript{22}

Remember, too, that we have another reason for wanting to preserve diverse historical versions of the works of major and even minor authors: certain editions, even with typographical or translational or editing flaws, carry a cultural weight all their own: beyond these fifty-four individual textual performances of \textit{Piers Plowman}, I am thinking of John Dryden knowing Chaucer through Speght’s edition, or John Keats knowing Dante through the Cary translation, or T. E. Lawrence’s experience of Chaucer in the Kelmscott edition. A lot of interpretive latitude can be opened up or closed off by the knowledge of which particular edition of Shakespeare was considered standard by a

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, page 69.
writer like Charles Lamb. The archive is capable of capturing texts at diverse historical moments as they were known by diverse historical readers, and we are closer than ever to being able to compare, side by side, the texts that different historical readers have read, in the transformed texts in which those readers knew them. Far from representing a “narrow documentary historicism”\textsuperscript{23}, the interpretive possibilities of this approach are considerable.

Both the creation of archives of bibliographical images and the practice of radial reading militate against the notion of typographical fixity—when readers can compare multiple editions of texts, they rapidly come to recognize that variations are common, even in the machine-press period. The ideal of a possible definitive text is rapidly receding: the special summer 2009 special issue of Digital Humanities Quarterly is on the theme of “Done” – and as Matthew Kirschenbaum wryly observes in the introduction, it’s very hard to know when to define a digital edition as finished, both in terms of getting the searchable text right and of providing all significant states of the text. Confusing hybridity and misleading ahistoricity lie in wait for the digital edition as well: what are we to make of the visual cues of an edition of As You Like It that comprises the Folio text and a modernization in HTML, complemented by facsimiles of the play as it appeared in each of the four folios, for which the portal page is headed by an historically remote illustration from Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke’s Shakespeare’s Works of 1868\textsuperscript{24}? We can only conclude that the Cowden Clarke illustration is purely decorative. But perhaps one of the strengths of the electronic edition is its very accretive and eclectic


nature, not only because it helps readers to understand the diversity of texts and, in doing so, leads us to think about, to distrust, and even to usurp the actions of the editors whose authority we have so long taken for granted. If it is hard to tell when the process of adding texts to the archive is “done,” then the process of editing is likewise ongoing. The EETS editors, with a daunting material archive before them, understood this, and therefore they, knee-deep in the sociology of texts, were less in awe of the authority of the scholarly print edition than we are.

The digitized image of the book, then, points beyond itself to the book in three dimensions and further to the communication circuit, to the social circumstances of the book’s production, and to its reception. The sociology of texts cuts to the heart of one last uncomfortable dilemma that might undercut the practice of editing. I do not wish here to call the textual authority of authorial intention into question; but it must be acknowledged that much recent scholarship, especially in the field of the history of print culture, has been devoted to recovering the many forces that influence the printed versions of our received texts: friends and family members, amanuenses, copy editors, compositors, publishers, bowdlerizers, reviewers, and the spectre of a fickle disapproving public. As Morris Eaves argues,

when it becomes evident that individual authors are composing works as members of social groups, editors lose the great advantage of the author’s individual body and especially the author’s mortality in determining when the progressive movement toward “final intentions” and “definitive editions” ends. The relatively well-defined individual lifetime is replaced by the much more nebulous lifetimes of societies and languages. Good examples appear under our nose every time a text reminds us that authors are socialized individuals. But
theories of editing have been highly reluctant to acknowledge, much less value, the shaping influence of socialization, collaboration, and historical processes on the landscape of editing. 

As editorial theory and a consciousness of historical textual instability filters down from scholars experienced in the tradition of editing, to scholars in the field of book history, and then on to their students—that is, as all readers of literature become editors—we might begin to re-internalize this sense of the complex sociology of texts, and to adopt it as a conscious or unconscious part of our reading strategy. This is a different kind of dead author, an author not replaced but augmented by our understanding of the way the writer’s words are mediated by a circle of collaborators by turns silent and obtrusive. A bibliographical headnote acknowledging the physical circumstances of textual production is a necessity for digital editions, because it points towards the three-dimensional book; because it recognizes the material contribution of those who transmitted and transformed the text; and, most important of all, because it acknowledges that the reader has more need than ever before to access the information to make sense of the multiple textual histories that comprise or stand behind the digital archive.

I do not mean here to faithfully reiterate the seductive claims made by, for instance, George P. Landow in the early days of computer editing, for the liberating effect of hypertext, nor even to suggest that radial reading in a hypothetical digital Library of Babel will somehow make every reader into a self-conscious maker of editions. Digital archives linked by hypertext exercise their own material constraints upon

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the reader, as Ian Small has suggested. I am more interested here in the way in which readerly engagement with the archive might serve to lead readers and editors back to the physical book, which after all is still relatively familiar territory, with traditions of display and formatting that are still reminiscent of the digital text. Many of the small practices of editing remain the same, moving from online to print: readerly annotation of digital editions is just like the traditional practice of footnoting or marginalia, while the “exhibit” function of NINES is similar to the act of curating an exhibition of books or arranging a filing cabinet. Finally, as Gabriel Bodard and Juan Garcés maintain, the apparatus criticus and the footnote—the most important material interventions by the editor into the text—will remain essential parts of traditional textual scholarship, since “They provide the basis and infrastructure of critical discourse and thus disclose one important feature of critical practice and open up one crucial possibility. What this reveals is, of course, that criticism is fundamentally a communal enterprise.” Indeed, it has always been so; and it illustrates how, in a practical sense, very little changes on the social level when textual scholarship moves to the digital realm; the production of editions and archives is still carried out in conference with other editors and readers past and present, just as it was for Furnivall and Bradshaw in the nineteenth century.

Not only, then, does the editing process still have a hermeneutic face, but it also occurs in a shared space—the performative space of the material text, published in multiple print and digital forms, acted upon (and acted out) by multiple readers. As Alan Galey puts it, “Designing an edition, digital or otherwise, is not a straightforward process

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of tool-building, but a creative act bound up with the cultural history of a text—something interface design shares with dramatic adaptation”28. This kind of melding of editorship and readership is not a new idea; when Peter Shillingsburg outlines his ideal conditions for online textual editing, interactivity is one of his central themes, and he calls for readerly annotation and comment on digital editions. If moving the reader into the performative space of the text in this way seems problematic, we have only to remember that editors have always been readers first, and that collaboration has always been inherent in textual scholarship, in the form of the social dynamic of scholarly editing; as the naturally collaborative “weak” model of authorship; and even embedded in the complex communication circuit itself. There is no reason why the digital edition should be restricted to presenting a single text as minimally as an eclectic print edition must, just as there is no reason why we should now defer to the authority of a single editor.

The expansion of the digital record thus has many useful consequences for the study of the history of the book and of material bibliography itself. At the most basic preliminary level, the use of visual images allows for research that will adequately prepare scholars and students to interact with the physical book itself. In the long term, we can look forward to the kinds of digital textual scholarship that Peter Shillingsburg and Jerome McGann have long envisioned: a network of comprehensive, modular, peer-reviewed scholarly editions, complemented by a complete archive of images of every print edition (or at least every major edition) of every book. The medium term is equally exciting, however, as our editors can inform their theoretical approaches with recent

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scholarship in the sociology of material texts, creating a model of readerly engagement and a generation of reader/editors who will be neither overawed by the authority of print nor seduced by the hyperbolic claims made for the electronic edition. Our theories of editing will continue to evolve, but unlike Furnivall’s Six-Text Edition, the archives and genetic editions that our scholarly networks are now establishing will provide solid bases for our editorial practice, because they will take material bibliography into account and allow readers to see the historical documents for themselves.