

## The future of literary thinking

Here is Terence Hawkes, writing in 1987, towards the end of his short Editorial for the very first issue of *Textual Practice*. He has been describing the many disciplinary and cultural fields in which the new journal may hope to engage in its special new form of analysis, and he concludes: 'For if we live in a world in which texts of all kinds surround, penetrate and determine our lives, we need at the very least to know how they operate, to what end, and on behalf of whom.'<sup>1</sup>

*TP* task in hand: 'to know how they operate', these piercingly all-pervasive textual things. In 1987, it's fair to say, the present was terrifying and textual. And the future, meanwhile, was implicitly listless and thinkless. Implicitly, because nothing remotely identifiable as 'literary thinking' appeared on the radar or the agenda. *Textual Practice*: not a trace of the literary or the thinking in that name. In the *Practice* an echo, still, of Marxism—or a distant claim to connection. *Thinking*, meanwhile, if worth doing or acknowledging, would be something that only really happened in (French) philosophy. It wasn't what literature did or the way that literature worked. Looking at literature could still just about pass muster as a sort of antecedent activity to the current project. It is recognised in Hawkes's piece as the source of the newfound focus on texts—what he doesn't call (because turns had yet to be invented) the textual turn. But literature has no primary place for *TP*. As part of a very long sentence, Hawkes says:

the effect of new theory, and the pondering of major social, historical and political issues it evokes, has been to establish and foster a fundamental and greatly extended notion of 'textuality': the perception, deriving from the study of literature, that a culture's significant activities involve a process which may fruitfully be conceived in terms of the production and consumption, the reading and writing of 'texts'.<sup>2</sup>

'Deriving from the study of literature': did you spot it before it was gone? To have referred, in this subordinate context, to 'literary thinking' (*what?*), as if such a thing might have a future, or for that matter a past or a present, or as if it might be something worth invoking or inventing or otherwise alluding to, would have been—to say the least—a little embarrassing.

But that was a long time ago. At some point since the 1980s *TP* must have tipped over, backwards or forwards, to come to a time now in which, so it seems, we can take it as read and written that a future of literary thinking exists, out there for the imagining or making, and perhaps in the pages of *Textual*

*Practice* itself. Times have changed! Turns have turned! And texts are something else!

Let's look forward to many more years of literary thinking in the pages of *TP*. Thirty more—or, in an old language and a new text: XXX. Many happy returns!

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<sup>1</sup> Terence Hawkes, 'Editorial', *Textual Practice* 1:1 (1987), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Hawkes, p. 1.