

## The act of writing and the social network: the case of the 'raif community'

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As I have argued elsewhere, Robert Darnton's (1982) famous model of the 'life cycle' of an eighteenth century book (re-drawn for the seventeenth and twentieth centuries by Feather 2007) can help researchers to view texts as scenes of writing (McGann 1991) by explicating 'writing' as a complex of conventional actions carried out by social actors and meaningful within the context of their relationships to one another. One problem with this approach is that the 'life cycle' is an idealisation that does not necessarily reflect the circumstances of any given text even in the historical context that the model attempts to represent. In this paper, I will argue that computer-assisted social network analysis can offer a more flexible alternative to such generalised models where sufficient data is available. Moreover, I will suggest that such analysis can help the researcher to relate the local context of specific acts of writing to larger social structures, perhaps including the 'fields of production' theorised by Pierre Bourdieu (1983). This was indeed the motive for my study of electronic textual production in the rec.arts.int-fiction LISTSERV community of author-programmers, a research project that integrates social network analysis with thematic analysis with the intention of identifying the relationships between aesthetic position and position within a social network, and it is by reference to examples from that study that I shall make my case.