

Chapter 9

Practical Issues With Modern Marginalia

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ABSTRACT

This chapter concludes the book and presents issues apropos to marginalia and annotation that warrant further consideration. In particular, the chapter addresses privacy concerns surrounding public annotation and other related ethical problematizations that accompany the use of web annotators. The chapter discusses the dilemma posed by the use of web annotation over digital writing spaces, such as blogs and personal websites, and its encroachment on the right to public and private discourse on the web.

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INTRODUCTION

There is a natural inclination to want to interact with a text as we read, and this book has presented compelling evidence that marginalia is a worthwhile and beneficial habit. And indeed, readers have always known this to be true. Sometimes, we value marginalia because it represents an authenticity that the printed or digital word simply cannot achieve. Just recently, the original manuscript to Bruce Springsteen's 1975 classic song, "Born to Run", fetched \$250,000 in a Sotheby's auction. The tattered pages, torn from a spiral notebook, resemble a stream of consciousness style of writing, complete with Bruce's handwritten scrawls, strikethroughs, and inserted words that demarcate a furious exorcism of the budding musician's thoughts. And although this seems like an outrageously lavish purchase for the anonymous buyer, it might not have been; the same manuscript sold for a mere \$197,000 only a few years earlier. There is a strong market that exists for musicians and their original manuscripts; Bob Dylan sold the first draft of his 1962 hit song, "Blowin' in the Wind" for \$324,500, and later, set a record with the auction of his draft manuscript for "Like A Rolling Stone", written on a hotel letterhead stationery, which sold for \$2.045 million in 2014. Granted, artists like Dylan, The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, and Bruce Springsteen likely can garner plenty of money from the sale of all sorts of memorabilia, but there is something special about these handwritten drafts that speaks to our valuation of originality. And it is not just musicians. Working drafts of celebrated books, stories, and poems regularly are auctioned for hundreds of thousands and even millions of dollars. In fact, we even cherish the annotations of authors who revisit their own works after they have achieved notable success. This was the premise behind a 2013 charitable event that raised money for the English Pen Writers' Association, in which authors such as J.K. Rowling annotated a first edition copy of *Harry Potter* to include comments on the author's own writing process and reflections on her authorial choices. Clearly, we value marginalia. Perhaps this is because it represents a humanistic quality in texts – it reminds us that the text originated with a human, not a typewriter or word processor. It shows how writing is fluid and evolving. Marginalia pulls back the curtain and gives us a peek into the thought process of our favorite authors, musicians, and poets. And as we move from the role of reader and assume the role of an annotator, we become empowered. We take a seat at the table next to the author when we annotate a text. Annotation gives us a voice. But as I discuss later in this chapter, this becomes problematic in several ways.

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