I. A large and fast-growing field
Origins according to Darnton, “What is the History of Books?”
• Reception studies in literary theory: e.g. Hans-Robert Jauss, *Aesthetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik* (1977)
• Material bibliography, practiced by bibliographers, but also librarians and book dealers (esp. in U.K.); cf. D.F.McKenzie
But also:
• Oral literature studies: Milman Parry, Eric Havelock (1930s-)
• Communication studies: Marshall McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy* (1964); Walter Ong
• Greater awareness of material forms of texts due to the rise of electronic media (1990s-)
From 1980s a field with international representation called history of the book, esp in early modern Europe (e.g. Robert Darnton), with journals, conferences and learned societies. Since 1990s development of the history of reading.

II. Major themes—the many aspects of the making and transmission of texts
• History of technical practices, but without technological determinism (affordances)—writing, printing, different media
• “Authorship” reconsidered as a collective process (including correctors, editors, printers etc); authorial intentions constrained by funding and practical needs
• Readers “make” books too by imparting meaning to a text
• Role of censorship, market and circulation
• What can we learn from the book as object to shed light on these major questions of cultural history and literary theory.

History of the book as a part of cultural history; a toolkit of methods and questions with which to enrich the study of literary texts, intellectual history, the history of popular culture and social history.

III. Key aspects of a historical approach:
Change over time: awareness of antecedents
Complexity of context: avoid technological determinism
Focus on primary sources: close reading of texts, of books as objects (Houghton!), attention to actors’ categories