

The Future of the Digital Scholarly Editor

Interpretation, Subjectivity and Presence?

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EVEN THE MOST STUBBORN AND CONSERVATIVE EDITOR will have trouble denying that digital technologies are becoming a key instrument in textual analysis. In the last decades, different kind of digital editions have been developed that deal with text in various ways. Initially, early digital editions simulated to a large extent the design of print editions, some of them being nothing more than a digital version of a printed work.² The architecture of the book, which long has been “an organising principle and fixed point of reference”,³ proved difficult to let go.⁴ Recent years, however, witnessed the development of digital scholarly editions that deal with textual analysis in innovative ways.

In the article “Call me digital”, Jennifer Howard describes this “new wave” of textual scholars.⁵ The application of new digital technologies to traditional scholarly editing tasks produces new findings, but also new forms of presenting these findings to the public. These innovations are not limited to changes in design and visualisation, although that might have been the case in the beginning. However, even these apparently superficial features already require a technical encoding that questions the complete underlying methodology. Edward Vanhoutte makes a similar point when he notes that “the evaluation [of scholarly digital editions] is based on the presentational features and qualities of the digital edition instead of on the theories of the text and textual criticism which are expressed in the encoding”.⁶ Even relatively simple text encoding forces us to make editorial decisions and rethink basic notions. The technological innovations, and the possibilities that come with them, have far-reaching implications for the activity of the textual editor. The editor is now concerned not only with carrying out textual research but also with presenting his or her results in a suitable format.

If we assume that the computer can be used as a “modelling tool”⁷ in scholarly editing, the focus of the editor could turn to other aspects of textual analysis. A perspective that presents promising possibilities is that of genetic criticism. This approach to text has “*process* rather than [...] *product*”⁸ (Shillingsburg and Van Hulle forthcoming, emphasis in original) as the main focus. Moreover, genetic criticism “abandons the fixed text in favour of a reproduction of the flow of writing”.⁹ This makes the digital edition a publication platform par excellence, because it provides the possibility to represent the creative writing process in original ways. It is clear that these developments influence the role of the editor of a scholarly edition,¹⁰ although the specific implications remain unclear. Whether the edition combines traditional approaches or rather presents an entirely new perspective on the text, it implies a reconsideration of the labour and activity of the editor.

² VANHOUTTE, E. “Traditional editorial standards and the digital edition.” In: *Learned love*. Proceedings of the emblem project utrecht conference (November 2006). The Hague: DANS Symposium Publications 1, 2007, p. 159.

³ VAN DER WEEL, A. *Changing our textual minds: towards a digital order of knowledge*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011, p. 2.

⁴ MCGANN, J. “Coda. Why digital textual scholarship matters; or, philology in a new key.” In: *The Cambridge companion to textual scholarship*. Edited by Neil Fraistat and Julia Flanders, 274-288. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 279.

⁵ HOWARD, J. Call me digital. *Chronicle of Higher Education* 52:24, 2006, p. 14.

⁶ VANHOUTTE, E. “So you think you can edit? The masterchef edition.” Keynote address at the Annual Conference and Members’ Meeting of the TEI Consortium (October 12th, 2011). <<http://edwardvanhoutte.blogspot.be/2011/10/so-you-think-you-can-edit-masterchef.html>>.

⁷ VANHOUTTE, E. Op. cit., 2007, [s.p.].

⁸ SCHILLINGSBURG, P. and VAN HULLE, D. “Text and textual orientation to text, revisited.” (forthcoming).

⁹ MARTENS, G. “What is a text? Attempts at defining a central concept in editorial theory.” In: *Contemporary German editorial theory*. Edited by Hans Walter Gabler, George Bornstein, and Gillian Borland Pierce, 209-232. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995, p. 221.

¹⁰ Cf. SARGENT, M. G. “Manuscript textuality.” In: *The Cambridge companion to textual scholarship*. Edited By Neil Fraistat and Julia Flanders. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 234.

One of the main objectives of my research project is to determine to what extent the digital medium influences or changes the role of the editor in scholarly editing. I focus on a genetic orientation to text and, more specifically, the editorial interpretation of the endo- and exogenetic processes of writing. In addition, I intend to investigate how the computer can be used as a modelling tool to assist in this type of research.

This article takes an exploratory step toward the analysis of the role of the editor. It establishes a conceptual theoretical framework based on a number of traditional editorial theories, particularly on the concept of editorial interpretation. I consider three perspectives of this concept: the possibility of editorial objectivity, the desirability of editorial presence, and what this implies for the presentation of findings. As such, the article will give an indication of the complexities of this new type of research. The conclusion takes the discussion a step further by considering several implications for the editor of a digital edition.

Since this article is only a first exploration of the field, its findings are preliminary. Nevertheless, they already illustrate to what extent the issues at stake are connected and intertwined. The findings also show that a (re)formulation of some theoretical principles does not suffice: the application of such principles to practical cases often results in unforeseen difficulties. Moreover, digital technology offers a wide variety of possibilities: the appropriate choice for a certain text is not necessarily suitable for another. Therefore, the article concludes with a number of suggestions for further research aimed at both theory and practice.

Throughout this article, the terms “endogenesis” and “exogenesis” will be used. According to Dirk Van Hulle, they can be seen as “two movements” in “the processing of extratextual material”.¹¹ This article will use the definitions by Pierre-Marc de Biasi as presented on the Lexicon of Scholarly Editing:¹² “[e]xogenetics designates any writing process devoted to research, selection, and incorporation, focused on information stemming from a source exterior to the writing”.¹³ Endogenetics is “the process by which the writer conceives of, elaborates, and transfigures pre-textual material, without recourse to outside documents or information, through simple reformulation or internal transformation of previous pre-textual data”.¹⁴

Different Editions, Similar Issues?

From hybrid editions that combine print and digital, to “dynamic repositories of textual knowledge”, “critical archives”, “knowledge sites”, or “arsenals”:¹⁵ several attempts have been made to reinvent the scholarly edition as a concept. David Greetham distinguishes nine different scholarly editions,¹⁶ and Heinrich Meyer even identifies over 40 different types.¹⁷ Naturally, these various forms each have their

¹¹ VAN HULLE, D. *Textual awareness: a genetic study of late manuscripts by Joyce, Proust, and Mann*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004, p. 7.

¹² The Lexicon of Scholarly Editing (LSE) is an initiative of the European Society for Textual Scholarship and the Centre of Manuscript Genetics (University of Antwerp). It aims to establish a lexicon of different disciplines and editorial traditions and “to gather existing definitions for every entry in the lexicon”. As such it would “provide an international and interdisciplinary forum for the theory and practice of textual scholarship in Europe” (see <<http://uahost.uantwerpen.be/lse/>>.)

¹³ DE BIASI, P.M. What is a literary draft? Toward a functional typology of genetic documentation. *Yale French Studies* 89, 1996, pp. 43-4.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 42-3.

¹⁵ ROBINSON, P. Current issues in making digital editions of medieval texts – or, do electronic scholarly editions have a future? *Digital Medievalist* 1, 2005. <<http://www.digitalmedievalist.org/journal/1.1/robinson/>>; MASSAI, S. Redefining the role of the editor for the electronic medium: a new internet Shakespeare edition of *Edward III*. *Early Modern Literary Studies* 9.3 / Special Issue 12: 5, 2004, p. 1-10. <<http://purl.oclc.org/emls/09-3/massre.htm>>; SHILLINGSBURG, P. *From Gutenberg to Google: electronic representations of literary texts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 101-2; PRICE, K. “Electronic Scholarly Editions.” In: *A Companion to digital literary studies*, edited by Susan Schreibman and Ray Siemens. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007, p. 40.

¹⁶ GREETHAM, D. *Textual scholarship: an introduction*. New York: Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, 1994, pp. 347-72.

¹⁷ MEYER, H. qtd. in VANHOUTTE, E. *Op. cit.*, 2007, p. 158.

own implications for the role of the editor. In some cases these implications are significant: the social edition model of Timney et al. assumes a community of editors rather than a single editor.¹⁸ Others, such as Massai (2004) and Gibbs (2011), also refer to the idea of volunteer contributors. By contrast, the computer has also been considered simply another publication platform that requires only a slight adaptation of existing editorial practices.¹⁹

However, the traditional editorial practices do not offer a single theory, either. Indeed, Vanhoutte writes that the “practices of editing texts from different periods are governed by different sets of dominant and challenging theoretical paradigms”.²⁰ Even if we focus on a specific period, “textual scholarship is further fragmented by the development of different theories and methods based on author-, language-, audience- and text-specific criteria”.²¹ In a forthcoming article, Peter Shillingsburg and Dirk van Hulle distinguish in further detail six editorial “orientations” to a text. They propose that this orientation determines the theory and method of the editor, and consequently influences the shape of the edition.

The approach of Shillingsburg and Van Hulle is interesting because the field of textual scholarship is usually presented by means of a description of three major traditions: the German school, the Anglo-American school, and the French school. To make matters more complicated, these schools each have a slightly different classification of editorial concepts.²² Therefore, it would be productive to focus on the attitude or orientation of an editor towards a text, notwithstanding the school he or she belongs to.

Another reason for this approach is that the traditional schools considered each other’s perspectives as well and indeed influenced one another. Sigfried Scheibe writes for instance how the French notion of *avant-texte*, from the model of genetic criticism, has influenced the German editorial theory. Admittedly, he questions its editorial use,²³ but he does acknowledge the importance of the study of the writing process. It allows the editor to “see the concrete development process —that is, to be able to retrace and comprehend it; the editor must also interpret it— that is, to be able to describe and present it”.²⁴

This last remark brings us right to the core of the issue. Although Scheibe’s words date back to 1971 when the article was first published in Germany,²⁵ they are still relevant for the editor of digital editions. As previously noted, text encoding implies more than a transcription: the editor encodes simultaneously his or her interpretation of the endogenetic process. Besides, there is no longer one evident format to present the encoding. The editor now disposes of a variety of options to present the text, the creative processes that preceded (and superseded) it, as well as his or her knowledge and understanding of it.

The task of the digital editor could be limited to transcribing and presenting a text in an objective way, preferably together with digital facsimiles and other material. This would allow the user of the digital edition to examine the text herself, independent of the editorial interpretation. Consequently, the editor would disappear: no longer would his or her presence cast a shadow over the text. However, the idea of presenting a text in an objective way is problematic and arguably impossible.

¹⁸ SIEMENS et al. Toward modeling the social edition: an approach to understanding the electronic scholarly edition in the context of new and emerging social media. *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 27:4, 2011, p. 18. doi:10.1093/lc/fqs013.

¹⁹ KAMZELAK, R. qtd. in VANHOUTTE, E. Op. cit., 2007, p. 160.

²⁰ VANHOUTTE, E. Ibidem, 2007, p. 157.

²¹ Ibidem.

²² Ibidem, p. 159.

²³ SCHEIBE, S. “On the editorial problem of the text.” In: *Contemporary German editorial theory*. Edited by Hans Walter Gabler, George Bornstein, and Gillian Borland Pierce. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995a, p. 194.

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 195.

²⁵ SCHEIBE, S. “Zu einigen Grundprinzipien einer historisch-kritischen Ausgabe.” In: *Texte und Varianten. Probleme ihrer edition und interpretation*. Edited by Gunter Martens and Hans Zeller. München: CH Beck, 1971, pp. 1-44.

The tension between an editor's interpretation and an objective presentation of the text has always been an issue in scholarly editing. In his seminal article "Record and Interpretation", first published in Germany in 1971,²⁶ Hans Zeller discusses the balance between subjectivity and objectivity in scholarly editing. He explores the "potential for objectivity, and its limits"²⁷ and argues for an awareness of the "ineluctably subjective element" in scholarly editing.²⁸

In the following paragraphs, I will discuss this subjective element according to the main editorial schools. I start by discussing the views on editorial objectivity and to what extent it is possible. Subsequently, I discuss the presence of the editor and to what extent it would be desirable. Finally, I consider several implications for the presentation of text in a digital scholarly edition.

The Possibility of Objectivity

Zeller is clear in identifying objectivity: "the only objective thing is the original manuscript itself".²⁹ He defines this extant material encountered by the editor as "record" (*Befund*) and separates the record itself from the treatment (*Deutung*) of the record, that is the description and interpretation. Zeller rightly notes that "the more necessary the separation [of record and interpretation], the more difficult it is to accomplish".³⁰ However, he argues that the subjectivity of the editor is also "the prerequisite for understanding and insight".³¹ It is essential that the editors pursue objectivity inasmuch as this is feasible, and at the same time be clear about their methodology and standards used by making their decisions known and verifiable.

In fact, this last point is often presented as one of the major advantages of digital scholarly editions: since they (can) include every version of a text as well as the facsimiles, the work of the editor can be verified. As I mentioned before, this inclusiveness was further explored to the point of questioning the purpose of the editor altogether.

In short, Zeller recognises that the editor cannot avoid subjectivity or interpretation. He does advise the editor to refrain from interpreting the text and not "point out [...] relationships, if he or she cannot explain how they function".³² Similarly, Van Hulle and Shillingsburg suggest that textual critics "restrict their speculation about intentions".³³ They propose that editors offer "narrative explanations" instead, which readers then can disagree with (*ibid.*).

It seems that regardless of the medium, the issue of interpreting material remains problematic. The traditional editorial theories offer a number of principles as guideline, but when editors wish to include a wider variety of material in a digital edition, including library books or an author's (alleged) sources, the issue re-emerges. When working with pre-textual material, the editor's expertise and knowledge about the author's work methods might interfere with his or her professional judgement.

²⁶ ZELLER, H. "Befund und deutung. Interpretation und dokumentation als ziel und methode der edition." In: *Texte und Varianten. Probleme ihrer edition und interpretation*. Edited by Gunter Martens and Hans Zeller. München: CH Beck, 1971, pp. 45-89.

²⁷ ZELLER, H. "Record and interpretation: analysis and documentation as goal and method of editing." In: *Contemporary German editorial theory*. Edited by Hans Walter Gabler, George Bornstein, and Gillian Borland Pierce. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995, p. 19.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 43.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 22.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 50.

³³ SCHILLINGSBURG, P. and VAN HULLE, D. "Text and textual orientation to text, revisited." (*forthcoming*).

Scheibe is clear on the subject:

It is impossible to reconstruct what the author only thought [...]. The editor is 'only' a scholar who understands, describes, and represents the development process of a work and who reproduces the "Text" of historically determined versions of the text in their own form [...]. The editor can only to a limited extent determine what the author actually wanted and why.³⁴

³⁴ SCHEIBE, S. Op. cit., 1995a, p. 205.

The sources used by a writer, such as his or her library books, could provide a fascinating illustration of the connection between the endogenesis and the exogenesis of a literary text. In Scheibe's editorial model, a writer's sources would fall under the "paralipomena", preparatory materials or "the preliminaries to an author's composition that lack as yet a certain 'textual structure'".³⁵ This definition might not cover the concept completely, but it does illustrate the complexity of this type of material. In addition to regular editorial tasks, an editor is required to indicate the degree of certainty in identifying relationships between different kinds of material. In short, it is an exemplary illustration of how the concepts of record and interpretation persist in a digital environment.

³⁵ Ibidem, p. 194.

According to Gunter Martens, editorial interpretation is twofold and relates to understanding the "textual meaning" as well as "genetic interpretation" of a witness document.³⁶ It follows that a reliable edition represents "both aspects of a literary text: [t]he static and the dynamic".³⁷ Martens concludes that textual genesis "allows us to study directly in the transmitted materials the author's flow of thought and chains of association",³⁸ but he does agree that this is "a complex concept of text".³⁹

³⁶ MARTENS, G. "What is a text? Attempts at defining a central concept in editorial theory." In: *Contemporary German editorial theory*, edited by Hans Walter Gabler, George Bornstein, and Gillian Borland Pierce. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995, pp. 217-8.

³⁷ Ibidem, p. 222.

³⁸ Ibidem.

³⁹ Ibidem, p. 223.

This complexity presents itself when the editor decides which material to include in the digital edition. Indeed it is tempting to include the complete *dossier génétique*, and owing to digital technology it is a genuine possibility. As Béatrice Didier notes, we are inclined to think that an edition should be as exhaustive as possible, because there seems to be no good reason to withhold a particular text from the user.⁴⁰ Moreover, why should you limit the material to the conventional manuscripts, typescripts, and printed works? In *Textual awareness*, Dirk van Hulle explains:

⁴⁰ DIDIER, B. "Présentation." In: *Éditer des manuscrits*. Edited by Béatrice Didier and Jacques Neefs, Saint-Denis: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 1996, pp. 11-2.

Before the author can process extratextual information in his writings, he has to look it up in an encyclopaedia, read articles, newspapers, books, be sensitive to his environment, and so on, in order to register, absorb, and process the things he wrote down. [...]. Documentation is often left unused or changed so thoroughly during the endogenetic incorporation that it ends up disappearing. But these transformations are precisely the reason why the study of this vague transition zone can be valuable, in particular for the interpretation of modernist texts.⁴¹

⁴¹ VAN HULLE, D. Op. cit., 2004, p. 7.

Naturally, this challenges the readability —and usability— of the edition. Would users be able to discover and examine this "vague transition zone" by themselves? If not, would the presence of an editor who provides guidance through the material be desirable?

A Desired Presence?

The title of the article “Give us Editors!” suggests that the answer to that last question is positive, and indeed the author Greg Crane argues that the presence of an editor should be felt: “the point is not to vanish — to vanish is to deceive and to imply a transparency that simply does not exist. Rather editors must provide the clearest possible account of their own biases”⁴². In that respect he supports the previously discussed statements of Zeller and Martens. Didier, on the other hand, compares the scholarly editor to a medieval artisan with no desire to be present or acknowledged, but whose motivation comes from stubborn devotion to his trade: “*Nous invoquerons alors le soin avec lequel les artistes du Moyen Âge sculptaient des gargouilles qui par leur situation demeuraient invisibles au public*”⁴³. This implies that objectivity and subjectivity are not an issue, because the edition is inseparably linked with the personality of the expert-editor. On the other hand, the editorial manipulation of Nietzsche’s work to suit Nazi-ideology illustrates the risk of a blind faith in the editor’s best intentions.⁴⁴

If we follow this argumentation, no edition should be seen as “definitive”. As one of the many editors of Shakespeare’s plays, Sonia Massai⁴⁵ finds that idea liberating:

I am no longer expected to even suggest that my edition is definitive or that it recovers the author’s original intentions [...]. Paradoxically, instead of the much-predicted death of the editor, the shift from print to the electronic medium has boosted my confidence to reclaim my rights as a proprietary editor over my own text.

She suggests that the digital edition be considered as a critical archive that holds not only multiple versions of a work but also multiple editions.⁴⁶ Implicitly, this approach emphasises that an edition is created on the basis of the editor’s knowledge and interpretation.

As a consequence, the user will always be conscious of the editor’s presence. This consciousness is not, as Zeller calls it, “undesirable”⁴⁷. In fact, it only emphasises that the presented text is the result of “the interpreter’s understanding of the text”, and that this understanding can be “independent of the individuality of the author”⁴⁸. Similarly, Scheibe writes that the editor’s invaluable knowledge of the author’s work method “enables the editor to determine the functional relationships of the individual witness documents [...] to one another, and thus to analyse precisely the interrelated process of writing and revision”⁴⁹.

The presentation of the endogenesis of a text would then be of interest to readers not because of the famous “awe-inspiring view into the poet’s workshop”,⁵⁰ but rather because it makes the “aesthetics of production and reception” comprehensible.⁵¹ In the same vein, Hans Walter Gabler stresses that the text is a process and every version a temporary state.⁵² Taken together, the theories of Gabler, Martens, and Zeller imply that not the edited text but the critical apparatus containing the textual variants constitutes the core of an edition. In any case they consider this the best way to convey “a textual process into a scholarly presentation *in print*”⁵³.

⁴² CRANE, Gregory. 2010. “Give us editors! Re-inventing the edition and re-thinking the humanities.” In *Online Humanities Scholarship: The Shape of Things to Come*. University of Virginia: Mellon Foundation 3. <http://cnx.org/contents/5df82a16-bb60-4ab2-8277-a61894c801ab@2/Give_us_editors!_Re-inventing_> (last accessed on September 24, 2015).

⁴³ DIDIER, B. Op. cit., 1996, p. 12. “Let us then recall the gargoyles, carefully sculpted by the artists of the Middle Ages, that remained invisible to the public because of their positioning.” (my translation).

⁴⁴ Cf. MÜLLER-SIEVERS, H. Reading without interpreting: German textual criticism and the case of Georg Büchner. *Modern Philology*, 103(4), 2006, p. 504.

⁴⁵ MASSAI, S. Redefining the role of the editor for the electronic medium: a new internet Shakespeare edition of *Edward III*. *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 9.3 / Special Issue 12: 5, 2004, [s.p.]. <<http://purl.oclc.org/emls/09-3/massrede.htm>>.

⁴⁶ Ibidem.

⁴⁷ ZELLER, H. “Record and interpretation: analysis and documentation as goal and method of editing.” In: *Contemporary German Editorial Theory*. Edited by Hans Walter Gabler, George Bornstein, and Gillian Borland Pierce. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995, p. 22.

⁴⁸ Ibidem, p. 19.

⁴⁹ SCHEIBE, S. “Theoretical problems of the authorization and constitution of texts.” In: *Contemporary German editorial theory*. Edited by Hans Walter Gabler, George Bornstein, and Gillian Borland Pierce. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995b, p. 172.

⁵⁰ MARTENS, G. Op. cit., 1995, p. 144.

⁵¹ Ibidem.

⁵² GABLER, W. “Introduction: textual criticism and theory in modern German editing.” In: *Contemporary German editorial theory*. Edited by Hans Walter Gabler, George Bornstein, and Gillian Borland Pierce. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995, pp. 5-6.

⁵³ Ibidem, p. 9, emphasis mine.

Implications for Presentation

This brings us to the issue of representation. Recent years have witnessed an increasing interest in and the availability of “drafts showing the flow of writing, the existence of different versions of a work, and the availability of extensive documentation of textual genesis in plans, sketches, and variant fair copies”.⁵⁴ Theoretically, this material makes it easier to represent “the unity of opposites within a text manifest”.⁵⁵ As mentioned above, the digital edition has often been introduced as a medium that facilitates the representation of a large variety of material. However, digital technologies do not automatically solve the complex problems of representing the genetic processes of a text.

Martens acknowledges that “the editorial representation of the complex process documented in draft manuscripts” is a difficulty for the genetic approach to text.⁵⁶ Didier’s question illustrates this: “*si le commentateur se met à faire le récit de la genèse, il sort de l’édition proprement dite, et ce serait plutôt le rôle d’une préface; mais alors, cette genèse, comment la laisser présente, sensible, à chaque ligne de la transcription?*”.⁵⁷

John Bryant argues that “editing any particular fluid text will require an imaginative rather than formulaic approach in order to lure readers into textual fluidities and facilitate their reading”.⁵⁸ In other words, the characteristics of a literary work (including its genetic dossier) determine the shape of the edition. In Bryant’s digital editions of Herman Melville’s *Typee* and *Moby-Dick*, he inserts a “revision narratives” in the reading text.⁵⁹ In the editorial commentary of his digital edition, Bryant writes that the editor should not make concessions to the readability of the text. He states that a complex reading interface is something the user can get accustomed to.⁶⁰

His approach is similar to what Zeller proposed in 1971, namely to abandon the idea of a clear reading text and return indeed to the specific markings and references in a text that indicate editorial activity.⁶¹ Zeller emphasises the usefulness of an integrated apparatus. In this manner, the user is engaged or encouraged to collaborate with the editor and is at the same time continuously aware of that editorial shadow. Consequently, he argues, “text and apparatus in modern editions form, or should form, an integrated whole”,⁶² especially when dealing with many (authorised) versions of a text. The diacritic signs are not a distraction but a signal to the reader to engage in the interpretation of the text.

Zeller’s view is supported by Martens, who argues that the subdivision between text and apparatus should be abandoned in favour of “the genetic representation of the total transmission of the work”,⁶³ because this would make the reader directly aware of the interrelation of the static and the dynamic [of text].⁶⁴ This presentation of a text is indeed a challenge to read and demands a “considerable effort” of any user.⁶⁵

The Marburg edition of Georg Büchner’s oeuvre is a good illustration. Following the German editorial theory described above, the apparatus is integrated in the edited text, visualised by means of diacritical marks. Additionally, the text contains references to the sources that Büchner used. The edition was nevertheless received with much criticism, not necessarily for its visual aspects, but mostly for the fact that the editors had chosen to include references they were uncertain of. According to Helmut Müller-Siever’s review of the edition, the editors’ analysis of Büchner’s quotations “is just one possible view among many and as such

⁵⁴ MARTENS, G. Op. cit., 1995, p. 222.

⁵⁵ Ibidem.

⁵⁶ Ibidem, p. 145.

⁵⁷ DIDIER, B. Op. cit., 1996, p. 18. “If the editor begins to write the narrative of the genesis, he leaves the actual edition and it would be rather a preface; but then, how to allow this genesis to be a logical presence in every line of the transcription?” (my translation)

⁵⁸ BRYANT, J. *The fluid text: a theory of revision and editing for book and screen*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002, p. 143.

⁵⁹ SCHILLINGSBURG, P. and VAN HULLE, D. “Text and textual orientation to text, revisited.” (forthcoming).

⁶⁰ BRYANT, J. “Combined introduction to a fluid text of *Typee*.” In: *Herman Melville’s “TYPEE”*. Edited by John Bryant. Rotunda: University of Virginia, 2006, p. 3.

⁶¹ ZELLER, H. Op. cit., 1995, p. 41.

⁶² Ibidem.

⁶³ MARTENS, G. Op. cit., 1995, p. 61.

⁶⁴ Ibidem, p. 225.

⁶⁵ Ibidem.

does not belong among the presuppositions of critical text constitution”.⁶⁶ The references are often tentative, yet the editors preclude any other interpretation by including the references in the edited text as if they were established. The Marburg editors claim to have followed Zeller’s separation of record and interpretation, and their edition’s inadequacy only demonstrates the discrepancies between theory and practice.

Müller-Siever suggests that this could have been prevented or at least forestalled in two ways. First, the editors should have collaborated more closely with scholars from outside their field, so as to “acknowledge the existing body of scholarship”⁶⁷ on the subject they were unfamiliar with. Second, they should have been clear about the consequences of their editorial difficulties. This would have been a “productive way to invite readers into the ambit of editorial decisions”.⁶⁸ In the same vein, Bryant remarked that “the fluid-text editor [cannot] succeed without enlisting the help of book designers, computer whizzes, publishing firms, literary critics and historians, teachers in the classroom, and poets”.⁶⁹

Another issue is the visualisation of editorial suggestions. Zeller and Martens are in favour of including the apparatus in the edited text, in order to demonstrate more effectively the complex processes of writing. Martens agrees that the editor should “recapture the variability of the text in the edition whenever possible”, because in the corrections and revisions becomes visible the “process of textual formation”.⁷⁰

The different types of pretextual material illustrate this process all the more, so it is reasonable to include them as well. However, Müller-Sievers criticises the Marburg-edition for integrating the editorial references in the edited text, and thus obscuring the boundaries between the record and its interpretation. A possible solution can be found in the previously discussed design of Bryant’s fluid-text editions. Another example is the website *Melville’s Marginalia Online*, in which each reference is highlighted and explained in a specific editorial commentary or essay. However, the latter takes the sources as a point of departure, rather than the texts by Melville.⁷¹ A combination of both perspectives would present a compelling case for the genetic orientation to text. It would shed new light on the intellectual surroundings in which a text is created and thus on the workings of the author’s mind. The books a writer consulted constitute the external factors that influence the earliest stages in the creation of a text: they are part of the “social dynamics that influenced a work” (Shillingsburg and Van Hulle, forthcoming).

Conclusion

This article set out to present a short state of the art concerning the role of the editor in scholarly editing. It focused thereby on editorial objectivity, the “presence” of the editor in an edition, and what this implies for the shape of the edition. The following paragraphs will use these points of view to reflect briefly upon the role of the editor of a “digital” edition.

The present findings suggest that the role of the editor is still relevant today. The possible inclusion - or integration - of a variety of relevant material in a digital edition requires the interpretation as well as the presence of an editor. As Vanhoutte⁷² writes,

⁶⁶ MÜLLER-SIEVERS, H. Op. cit., 2006, p. 513.

⁶⁷ Ibidem, p. 518.

⁶⁸ Ibidem.

⁶⁹ BRYANT, J. Op. cit., 2006, p. 153.

⁷⁰ MARTENS, G. Op. cit., 1995, p. 216.

⁷¹ For an elaborate discussion of MMO, see the third issue of *Ride* (forthcoming).

⁷² VANHOUTTE, E. Op. cit., 2011, [s.p.].

[...] it is in the record of variants that scholarly editors expose themselves and are explicit about their choices. It is a delicate balance, as it involves an ‘expert-editor’ who presents his or her interpretation of the text, while simultaneously leaving enough room for the user to explore and interpret relationships.

To date there has been little agreement over the preferred way of digital editing. The existing traditional theories of different editorial schools do specify the role of the editor, but most of the reference works on which the conventional theories are based do not yet take into account the digital aspect. From the literature discussed above it follows that the optimal design of a digital edition depends on the nature of that particular text. Moreover, the shape of the edition is influenced by a number of aspects, such as the editor’s knowledge of the author’s life and work methods, and the editor’s orientation to text.

The digital edition seems especially well designed for a genetic orientation to text, since it offers more opportunities to present the author’s “process” of production as well as the contexts in which the production takes place. According to Martens, “[o]nly a complex concept of text that expresses the combination of fixedness and unlimited motion, of syntagmatic closure and paradigmatic polyvalence, can do justice to the artistic nature of text”.⁷³ If the digital medium allows for a more effective representation of this complex artistic nature, the editor remains important in presenting the material and guiding the user through the edition. In doing so, he or she will probably be confronted with original issues and challenges, in addition to or in combination with the familiar issues.

⁷³ MARTENS, G. Op. cit., 1995, p. 221.

Digital technologies can facilitate a number of editorial tasks. For instance, text collation becomes easier with the help of software, and transcribing as well as text encoding could be delegated to volunteers or contributors. On the one hand, this suggests a move away from the traditional concepts of “Record and Interpretation” as described by Zeller. On the other hand, if the analysis of the endogenetic writing process can partly be outsourced, the editor’s principal focus could turn to the material that cannot be easily analysed by a software programme. The case of the Marburg edition of Büchner illustrates that pretextual (or extratextual) material can be of considerable interest to the editor, and can be of additional value for the genetic analysis of a literary text. However, it would raise the issues of interpretation and presence to a new level.

The current article has only presented a short overview of the field. Despite its exploratory nature, it offers some insights into the complexity of the issues and has posed a number of questions in need of further investigation. We have seen that the creation of a digital edition is influenced by the nature of the text and the editor’s orientation. Further research might concentrate on the issue of the user of a digital edition. To what extent does the intended audience affect the shape of a digital edition? How do editors create a digital edition that is potentially of interest to a larger community of users, while at the same time produce a product that meets the traditional scholarly standards outlined above? Again, the collaboration with parties outside the field of textual scholarship could result in practical solutions.

It seems that editorial scholarship has evolved beyond creating general rules for editorial work as strict as those once defined by the different editorial schools. However, this article demonstrates that it remains paramount to ground the practice in a solid theory. Van Hulle and Shillingsburg conclude as well that it is “even more important [...] to be aware of the distinctive elements and priorities”⁷⁴ in order to understand and respect other traditions and approaches, and make a scientifically sound and consistent edition. Indeed, an openness and understanding of methods can also be beneficial for creating even better editions.

⁷⁴ SCHILLINGSBURG, P. and VAN HULLE, D. “Text and textual orientation to text, revisited.” (forthcoming).

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