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Questioni

THE PRIMACY OF THE DOCUMENT IN EDITING

HANS WALTER GABLER

The German textual critic Gunter Martens once posed the question: «What, in editorial terms, is a text¹?» To this, I would put the counter-question: «What, in editorial terms, is a document?»

As long as all transmission and all editing was bound up in the same material environment of ink and paper, the document was not an issue – it was ‘transparent’ because it was as material as everything else in the environment. But as the virtualisation of scholarly editing progresses, the question arises and should be answered. Conventionally, documents are text carriers and text witnesses; also, documents of close authorial provenance are taken to be guarantors of authorisation, as well as the material referents for given versions of texts. Documents are, all in all, traditionally seen as the material substratum of textual transmission. For of course (and leaving oral transmission aside), it is true to say that without documents there would be no texts. Yet the counter-current of another generalisation (this time leaving book and manuscript collecting aside), immediately relegates documents to the secondary place we conventionally assign them. Accordingly, it is similarly true to posit that cultural interest, and specifically editorial interest, in transmission has always in the first place been directed towards texts.

¹ Gunter Martens, «Was ist – aus editorischer Sicht – ein Text? Überlegungen zur Bestimmung eines Zentralbegriffs der Editionsphilologie», in *Zu Werk und Text. Beiträge zur Textologie*, ed. S. Scheibe and C. Laufer, Berlin 1991, pp. 135-156. Meanwhile, in «Sul compito critico dei filologi editoriali. Tesi per un concetto allargato della critica testuale», published in the previous number of this journal (3, 2006, pp. 60-74), Martens has carried his theoretical reflections further. I take pleasure in joining the international and inter-methodological discourse on fundamentals in editorial scholarship that *Ecdotica* has furthered since its inception, true to the radical sense of its name.

Now, in terms of transmission, documents play a twofold role. They embody whatever is transmitted; yet as material bodies, they are themselves perishable. Consequently, the cultural practices of transmission, and specifically those of editing, originate from an awareness of the mutability of documents, and have been invented and developed to stay the effects of their decay and loss. But this also means that transmission and editing have always divorced text from documents: text can only be transmitted and edited by being lifted off one document and inscribed upon another. Traditional editing therefore leaves the documents as documents behind (they could go into the waste-paper bin, or be used in bindings of newer volumes, as in medieval libraries; or library holdings could be weeded out because the contents of books had been microfilmed or digitized). Even so-called documentary editing cannot, and does not, avoid transposing text from one document to a second, however 'diplomatic' the coded references back to the first, or original, document be in their design.

Moreover, as for looking to facsimile reproduction as an alternative to 'diplomatic editing': isn't it true that facsimile editions tend only marginally to be considered *editions*? Or as editions only to the extent that they are bolstered by paratexts – and among such above all by transcriptions: for transcriptions can actually allow us *to read* what in the facsimile can merely *be seen*? An important reason for marginalizing the facsimile edition is probably that it, precisely, does not lift off text from the document. As a matter of fact, the marginalizing of the facsimile edition seems to me to be a symptom of the marginalizing or even, as it were, erasure of the original document in traditional editing, or at the very least of its downgrading to the auxiliary role of text carrier.

Yet original documents possess features which no edition one might imagine could exhaust, since they are in truth unamenable to editing. An original document is an autograph, and thus uncopyable and unreproduceable. As an original, it has the autograph quality of a painting (the *Mona Lisa* of past discussions comes to mind)². Conversely, it is an allograph – to use a pairing of terms made current by Nelson Goodman³ – in respect of its text alone (*Hamlet* is *Hamlet* wherever read). As a document, it is unique. An original document is in fact unique in every respect save that of the intelligibility of its text.

In the material medium of paper and ink, the editing of the intelligible text has been developed as an art of the impossible – as the art of

² For reference to the debate, see David Greetham, *Textual Scholarship. An Introduction*, New York 1992, pp. 342-343.

³ Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art. An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*, Sussex 1968.

actually divorcing the undivorceable, namely text from its material support. Yet this art has been practiced, and has been practicable, ineluctably on the condition that the text divorced from its support of origin be re-inscribed onto a target material support. Re-imaging, by contrast (as for example in the mode of facsimile reproduction), cannot therefore in a strict sense be subsumed under the notion of editing, since, as said, the autograph as autograph is unamenable to editing. Consequently, the increase of facsimile reproductions in printed editions that one actually has been witnessing in the more recent past, poses a nice problem. Such facsimiles seldom rise above the status of illustrations; but even if and when they do, the edition's text – lifted off the very document facsimiled – is granted precedence over the document reproduction.

Yet even in this seemingly inescapable dilemma, one can begin to discern potentials, even though these would appear unrealised, if not indeed unrealisable, in the material medium of paper and ink. The facsimile lends the original a virtual presence. This virtuality is what a computer-based edition can (and already frequently does) properly realise, because it realises that virtuality dynamically. It can do so because the edition exists in the electronic medium, that is: because, with the advent of the electronic edition, as we should recognise, scholarly editing has been predicated on a medium shift.

But this may lead – and in my view should lead – to a deeper, and more radical, enquiry, and to genuine reconceptualisations in both theory and practice. I would emphasize that we ought to question the validity of perpetuating the orthodoxy of viewing 'text and document' in that hierarchical order. What I propose, instead, is a re-definition, by inverse ordering, of this hierarchy – an inversion applicable not merely to the explorative practice of electronic editions, but ultimately to our conceptualising of 'documents' and 'texts' throughout in scholarship and criticism. The document need no more be defined as a function of the text, as, implicitly or explicitly, in traditional editing. On the contrary, the text should be seen fundamentally as a function of the document. For, after all (and as said), it is documents that we have, and documents only. In all transmission and all editing, texts are (and, if properly recognised, always have been) constructs from documents. For to edit texts critically means precisely this: to construct them.

This brief theoretical sketch⁴ may serve as a background to reflecting a little on my current practice. I have over the past years turned increas-

⁴ It has boiled down to essentials the argument in my contribution «Das wissenschaftliche Editieren als Funktion der Dokumente», *Jahrbuch für Computerphilologie*, 8 (2007), pp. 55-62.

ingly to the field of manuscript editing; and in this, my initial concerns have been to explore writing processes in authorial drafts. It is in the nature of the cultural practice of writing that draft manuscripts are the documents of origin, and thus of original inscription, of any text surviving in transmission – whether or not, as the original sources of and for the writing, they themselves happen to survive or not. Where they do, they may give rise to all sorts of fascinating analyses, questions, and problems. One of the questions, and at the same time problems, arising in consequence of any successful analysis of a draft, is this: can draft manuscripts be edited – as opposed to: can texts be edited from them – in ways, and by methods, that do justice to the evidence they give of the processes of writing and thinking that went into their becoming the (auto)graphical images we perceive them as⁵? A practice of *critique génétique* may guide us in tracing the processes of their inscription, and the dynamics of their coming into being. Commonly, such practice results, first and foremost, in a natural-language critical discourse, serving to «re-animate the manuscripts in their temporality» (as Almuth Grésillon phrased it in a paper given at the ESTS conference in December 2006 in London)⁶. Commonly, too, support tends to be given, in the practice of *critique génétique*, to a critical discourse by means of representational renderings of manuscripts through image, transcription and meta-textual coding: that is, by renderings that we would by convention call ‘editorial’ and ‘edited’. However, as practitioners of *critique génétique* would often be the first to admit: in contrast to the critical discourse itself that they accompany, such conventionally editorial and edited representations of manuscripts are incapable of conveying the dynamics and temporality of the manuscript writing with immediacy, that is: without resorting to the abstractions of the editorial meta-discourses of sigla, symbols, diversifying typography, or footnoting. This shortcoming gives rise to at least three further questions: first, how, and just how, communicable is the analytical perception of the manuscript-page image and its life in the dynamics of time? Second: is it possible, or is it even valid, to seek an editorial approach to mediating that perception? And (thirdly): if so, just what modes of critical approach would the

⁵ The German editorial mode of *Handschriftenedition* is generally claimed to be a viable method of editing manuscripts. It is my contention however, that it is (and, on paper, must remain) a specialised practice of editing texts from a specific kind of documents, namely (authorial) manuscripts.

⁶ The title of her keynote address to the conference was «Genetic Criticism, the Notion of *avant-texte* and the Question of Editing» (Publication forthcoming in *Variants* 7).

manuscript-page image in its turn sustain, in consequence of a dynamically vitalized editorial rendition?

My initial assumption, as you will be aware, is that of Daniel Ferrer, who once remarked: «the draft is not a text, or a discourse; it is a protocol for making a text»⁷. Thus, when I look at – for example – two pages from James Joyce’s initial (disjunctive) draft for the “Circe” episode of *Ulysses*, my first concern is not to figure out what text the pages articulate. It is rather to find out how, as pages, they were successively filled⁸. This means to analyse the patterns of ink and pencil on paper in terms of their inscriptional characteristics (that is: palaeographically), of their absolute positioning (that is: topographically), and of their relative positioning (that is: bibliographically). By themselves, however, the conjointly palaeographic, topographic, and bibliographic tracings, while necessary, are not sufficient. The goal of ascertaining the order in which the manuscript pages were filled, can ultimately be reached only in conjunction with progressively discerning and distinguishing the units of writing by deciphering and successfully reading them as segments of intelligible text – that is, to progress, loop by loop, from document to text in ever finer steps of granularity. In other words, I assume that seeing the document, analysing (and possibly interpreting) the processes of writing through which it was filled, and reading (and possibly interpreting) the text that ultimately results from the writing, are distinct activities; and that these activities, moreover, must of necessity proceed in this order: from document, to writing, to text. This means, emphatically, that, in terms of my theoretical proposition, I am putting the horse of the document properly before the cart of its eventually emerging text. But it still leaves open the question whether it be possible and of interest, as well as both appropriate and rewarding, to explore modes and methods of editing manuscript writing.

At the beginning of any enquiry, we bring ourselves face to face with the manuscript page, or pages. They present themselves to our view in their totality, which as such we can perceive, but not initially make sense of (be it but for the fraction of a second, or perhaps for considerable lengths of time). Endeavouring to get, as it were, under the surface of the totality,

⁷ Daniel Ferrer, «The Open Space of the Draft Page: James Joyce and Modern Manuscripts», in G. Bornstein and T. Tinkle (eds.), *The Iconic Page in Manuscript, Print, and Digital Culture*, Ann Arbor 1998, pp. 249–267 (261).

⁸ The double-page opening I shall here be considering in several visualisations may be called up in an internet browser (preferably Mozilla Firefox) as <<http://www.hypneri-etzsche.org/demo/navigate.php?sigle=VA-19,62-63>>.

we begin to analyse and interpret: to discern, to distinguish, to read. For such critical analysis, we need to have the image of the manuscript before our eyes in the original, or else in a mode of visual reproduction. Of such modes, the digital image on the computer screen is but one option; the computer is not, as such, essential to our seeing and ‘understanding’ the manuscript page. Its power, rather, lies in its mediating potential: the computer challenges us to deploy it as the medium both of the editing process and of editions – or in other, and quite radical words: to think (and to continue to think) of manuscripts and books, of texts and works, as residing firmly in the material realm of paper and ink, but to reassign their scholarly editing and their editorially mediated presentation in editions to the electronic and virtual medium.

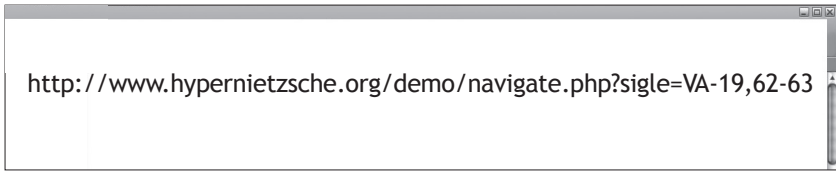
The extent and complexity to which the computer can mediate and be the medium in which the scholarly edition exists, depends on the extent and complexity of our editorial input. In terms of digital images of manuscript pages, I suppose we all delight in their presentational quality. But inputting superior images is only a first step. Where the electronic medium increasingly develops its potential is in the facilities it offers for enriching the editorial discourse around the manuscript images – a discourse which we then also immediately recognise as functionally derivative of, or in other ways dependent on, the digital images initially uploaded into the electronic medium. Consequently, what we do is to create an environment of editorial discourses around the digital images of manuscripts by writing back into the medium the records of what we have analysed and interpreted: discerned, distinguished, and read. As editorial discourses, our protocols of analysis may take many forms, and often many forms simultaneously.

Confronted with a manuscript image like the one of the double-page opening I have chosen as my example, we would all, I suppose, stage our analysis as a dialogue in which we would move forward by steps of logical reasoning. I have elsewhere performed such a descriptive analysis and endeavoured to interpret the significances and meanings of the traces of manuscript writing of these two pages⁹. My present concern is with the ways in which I write back the record of my observations and of my understanding into the virtual framework that holds the manuscript image, in the first place.

Working entirely on the surface of that image, I can cut it up, to begin with, by layering it in segments – and perhaps set these off in differ-

⁹ Hans Walter Gabler, «For *Ulysses*: A Once and a Future Edition», *Variants*. The Journal of the European Society for Textual Scholarship, ed. H. T. M. Van Vliet and P. M. W. Robinson, 2002, pp. 85-105 (87-100).

ent colours. This yields a display to highlight, first, the fact that the two pages were filled by being inscribed in different topographical areas, somewhat randomly spread over the two-page space.



[click: Facsimile 'D'Iorio, colour']

This spatialising I might, secondly, temporalise: that is, infuse some degree of process dynamics into my record.

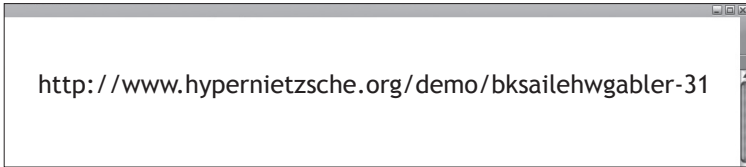


[go into 'wide' mode, click into the empty space, and keep clicking until the page is filled]

What you see, however, is merely the suggestion of a dynamising of virtual records to visualise the time/space processes of manuscript writing. For it is an entirely visual protocol of the document. It processualises the manuscript image, but as yet none of its textual inscription. Yet it is the inscription to which, in the face of manuscripts, we desire to penetrate – and which, in some measure, we have actually already penetrated in order even to obtain our visual protocol. To mediate our perception of the textually intelligible inscription, we change the mode of our protocol: we resort not to visual-only re-imagining, but to transcription.

The transcriptional protocol is dominantly textual; but it is at the same time decidedly document-dependent. Clearly, and in terms of the hierarchical order I advocate, the text established in transcription is a function of the document. Hence, as transcription, that text retains, or may retain at the will of the transcriber, a visual dimension. Advisedly, when going electronic, the transcriber should see to it that the digital infrastructure relied upon performs, or is honed to performing, the visualisations desired as functional and communicative.

HYPER¹⁰ is the digital infrastructure I am resorting to in my practical work. It has, as you may be aware, carried over from the realms of editing on paper, standard conventions of transcription which, not surprisingly, are distinguished as ‘diplomatic’ and ‘linear’. Applying these to areas of inscription/transcription in my Joyce example yields the following:



[choose ‘synoptic’; toggle, at will, the levels of change in each column]

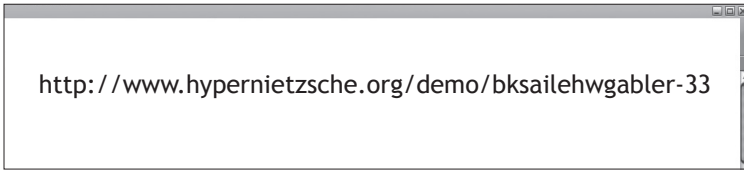
In parallel columns, the system calls up a linear transcription (left) and a diplomatic transcription (right). The linear transcription represents the (end) result of the writing over the given stretch of manuscript. The diplomatic transcription, by contrast, endeavours to convey the process of the writing in the manuscript. Its stacked lines of text, its boxes and arrows are schematized indications of levels and topographies of inscription in the manuscript.

This becomes directly perceptible if, in place of the linear transcription, we call up in the synoptic display the image of the manuscript in the left of the parallel columns. We immediately see from the image (to the left) what the arrangements in the diplomatic transcription (to the right) are designed to indicate – and we perceive at the same time that the representation of the manuscript in the diplomatic transcription is indeed schematized. Its visual reference is an important element, but clearly the diplomatic transcription is already a distinct abstraction from the document. Such abstraction, obviously, is carried a step further with the linear transcription. It no longer demands, or requires at all, the visual reference back to the manuscript image.

In other words: the editorial process of lifting text from the original (in this case, from its virtual proxy) and re-inscribing it, already sets in with the diplomatic transcription. Yet what the coexistence in the electronic medium of the manuscript – visually, as image, and textually, in a diplomatic transcription – now allows us to consider are the gains

¹⁰ See Michele Barbera, «Hyper. The Software Architecture», Paolo D’Iorio, «Nietzsche on New Paths», and my own «On HYPER», as PDF downloads under the rubric *About the HyperNietzsche Project* on the HyperNietzsche homepage, <<http://www.nietzsche-source.org>>.

to be drawn from thus simultaneously conjoining these modes of editorial record and protocol. This is a direction taken with the design, in HYPER, of a mode of so-called 'ultra-diplomatic' transcription.



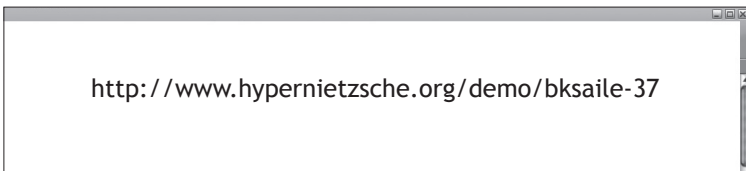
[choose 'wide' mode, then *click* 'fit page in window'; then the magnifying-glass icon in left column; then move the magnifying-glass tool over the facsimile]

Whereas the diplomatic transcription remains a digital replica of a presentational mode time-honoured on paper, it is the electronic medium only that enables the ultra-diplomatic transcription. Just seeing the screen effect of the magnifying glass over the image suggests sufficiently the potential of the electronic medium to convey the close interdependence of visualising and reading the document. In the ultra-diplomatic transcription, the interpenetration of image and text becomes truly essential to the editorial mediation of the document. Under the auspices of the primacy of the document, radical advances in manuscript editing properly speaking seem conceivable from sounding to its depths the interdependence of image and writing by way of the 'ultra-diplomatic' approach.

Finally: I said above that, at the other end of the scale of transcriptions, the 'linear' transcription has more or less, as it were, severed its ties with the document. This puts us seemingly back to where we were in the times of solely paper-and-print editing, left with a transcription as simply the first stage of a text-only editing. But this is not quite where I wish to leave the matter. For one thing, linear transcriptions in the electronic medium (and in terms of the options that the HYPER infrastructure provides), do not offer merely *the* (end) result of the process of writing in a given document. Just as its diplomatic transcription can be stratified into successive levels, so, for one given document, may linear transcriptions be generated as representing the result of the writing successively valid at these distinct levels. The proposition of the 'primacy of the document' takes on a new aspect: from the electronic re-capturing of the real (that is, materially existing) document, the electronic medium allows us virtually to generate notional, and hence also virtually conceived, 'sub-documents'. These 'sub-documents' are defined

by, and represent, the distinguishable states of composition reached in the course of the successive filling of the real document. We may, in turn, 're-materialise' them by, for example, printing them out separately; or enter them into a collation tool for further detailed analysis. It will be a beauty of manuscript editing in the electronic medium to be able to fold out the levels and stages of a compositional progress as distinct and separate integral texts in support of critical discourse.

Conceiving of a real draft document as the telescoping and superimposition of a series of virtual sub-documents may at last serve as a stepping stone towards modelling genetic editing from more than one document, or specifically: from a consecutive series of material records of composition. For the following representation, I superimposed the several textual states available of the encounter of Stephen Dedalus with his dead mother, the scene initially drafted in the manuscript from which this discussion has taken its departure.



[choose 'wide' in the tool bar and the 'diplo.' rider; then *click* through the layers at will; or *pre-click* the multi-colour display button in the toolbar, and choose a colour display at will]

The textual states come from a series of documents from first draft to first edition, and I combined them as one set of data in one file. Naturally, I tagged the state of each individual document as one layer of composition and revision. The computer programme, equally naturally, encounters and handles each tagging level as one in a series of successive layers inscribed as if on one document. This notional document is the virtual focus of the genesis of the text which is in reality spread over a series of material documents. The computer, of course, is wholly unconcerned about any distinction between material reality and logical construct. All it can be geared to is a document, which in its terms is altogether virtual, anyhow. Therefore, constructing from the material evidence of real documents a composite virtual document and granting it logical primacy in terms of the electronic mediation of the editorial construct ensures the viability and success of the task of genetic editing.

But this, as I suddenly discover, is a place where I have been before, some 25 years ago, when I defined just such a logical document for James Joyce's *Ulysses* to focus the novel's composition in terms of its textual development. I saw the text Joyce wrote as freely floating over and between the documents on which it rested. I defined it as a 'continuous manuscript text', which I deployed as the edition's copy-text to construct from it our edited text of Joyce's novel. Projecting this continuous manuscript text back onto a virtual, or logical, document, termed for convenience the 'continuous manuscript', was simply a heuristic prop to our textual procedure¹¹. Virtual document or not, it was, in terms of the over-all rationale, patently a function of the novel's text as it emerged in composition. Today, advocating the primacy of the document as I do, I would re-rationalize the edition. Beginning from the 'continuous manuscript', I would grant it over-all primacy, subsuming under the primacy of the virtual document the primacies of all the materially extant documents. The text as presented in our edition, both as genetically stratified and as a reading text critically edited, would consequently be understood as a set of document functions comprehensively deriving from the continuous manuscript posited, and rendering it in multiple profile. In terms of the *Ulysses* edition, of course, these are no more than a few momentary self-historicizing remarks. What consequences, on the other hand, may follow from the range of considerations here developed about documents and texts, about their relation and about some modes of their presentation and representation in the electronic mode in the future, will yet require much thought and pragmatic development.

¹¹ James Joyce, *Ulysses. A Critical and Synoptic Edition*, Prepared by Hans Walter Gabler with Wolfhard Steppe and Claus Melchior, 3 vols. New York 1984 (III, pp. 1894-96; 1901).

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