Designing Digital Editions

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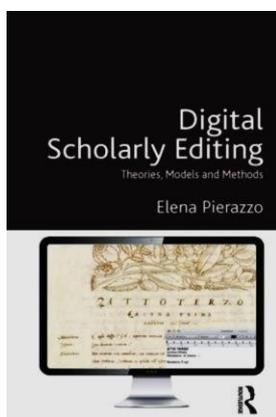
Elena Pierazzo*, Digital Scholarly Editing: Theories, Models and Methods.* Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2015, 252 pp. ISBN: 978-14724121193

The development of new projects and technologies in digital scholarly editing during the past twenty years has created the need for periodical overviews and critical reassessments of the field. *Radiant Textuality* (2001), by Jerome McGann; *From Gutenberg to Google* (2006), by Peter L. Shillingsburg; the volume co-edited by John Unsworth, Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, and Lou Burnard, *Electronic Textual Editing* (2006); and the volume co-edited by Marilyn Deegan and Kathryn Sutherland, *Text Editing, Print and the Digital World* (2009), are four influential examples of previous attempts at synthesizing and rethinking the problems of editing for the digital medium. Elena Pierazzo's *Digital Scholarly Editing* (2015) is a timely addition to this list, as new approaches—including social editing and crowdsourcing experiments as well as interactive visualization methods inspired by games—attempt to move scholarly editing beyond the print-based paradigm and beyond earlier models of digital remediation. Pierazzo engages the field with a similar strategy, offering not only a critical summary of practices and theories of digital editing, but also an original intervention on the problems of creating, publishing, and maintaining complex scholarly editions in digital form. She takes up the challenge of advancing textual and digital scholarship, placing her work in dialogue with that of David Greetham, Hans Walter Gabler, Kathryn Sutherland, Geert Lernout, Peter Robinson, Allen Renear, Michael Sperberg-McQueen, Neil Fraistat, Julia Flanders, and others.

Informed by Pierazzo's long-time involvement with the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) and by her own work on critical and genetic digital editions in Italian, English and French, the book weaves together the theoretical and the methodological in ways that will be relevant for anyone who wishes to learn about the very practical aspects of making digital editions. Chapters 1-4 discuss the history and theory of digital editing, reviewing some of the debates that have shaped the field, while chapters 5-8 deal with the methodological problems of designing, publishing, using, and sustaining digital scholarly editions. In both instances, the author provides critical overviews of textual studies that resituate the theories and methodologies of scholarly editing within current digital practices and tools. Throughout the book she demonstrates how digital editing has impacted on the fields of textual scholarship and scholarly editing, including genetic, critical and documentary editing. Although this impact is finally assessed as "a radical evolution (but not revolution) of print-based editing" (208), the work clearly underlines the transformative effect of digital methods across the entire ensemble of editorial practices: "the innovative elements are truly transformative, involving as they do formats, methods, roles, heuristics and hermeneutics of editing" (208).

Editing texts for the digital medium—presciently conceptualized by Jerome McGann as the "rationale of hypertext" twenty years ago—has indeed revealed many of the assumptions built into print-based forms of editing, often bringing into sharp focus many things we did not know about the texts we were editing. One of the consequences of digital editing has been an increased awareness of the editorial act as a modelling practice forced to come to terms with the multidimensional nature of texts (see, for instance, the detailed discussion and the accompanying diagrams and tables in Chapter 2, 37-64). If this may seem obviously evident once you have to tag textual structure and textual content for computer processing, it may feel less obvious when editing takes the form of facsimile reproduction. But as Elena Pierazzo shows, even facsimile representation—through a specific set of mimetic conventions—is in fact modelling its object according to the particular affordances and constraints of production and reproduction media (93-98). The digital documentary edition, like the critical edition, contains its own editorial models for encoding, retrieving, and displaying images and text. The TEI module for textual transcription, which enables the spatial mapping between inscribed surface and textual transcription, or the infamous markup-based concept of text as an Ordered Hierarchy of Content Objects (OHCO) are two further instances of such modelling: in one case the encoding is designed to capture the topography of text as spatial inscription; in the other it aims to segment and represent structural hierarchies, such as paragraphs and other types of internal division according to formal or semantic criteria. As Pierazzo mentions, TEI offers the possibility of combining textual and documentary encoding, thus making it possible to conceptualize and present the relations between document inscription and textual transcription in new

ways—a good example being her own prototype with one of Marcel Proust's notebooks in which the encoding is used for translating the genetic spatial ramification of writing events into a temporized animation.

This return to the document—favoured by the capabilities of storing and processing large numbers of digital facsimile images—has changed the ecology and economy of scholarly editing. Vast and complex networks of textual witnesses and editorial versions have resulted in the publication of large-scale archives-in-progress in which the documentary, the genetic and the critical are brought together in flexible, variably linked and searchable structures. The medium changed the editorial message by transforming print-based methodologies, including those that determined the material and conceptual relation of critical apparatus to its source text. Images and transcriptions can be placed in new sets of relations: "The diplomatic edition alongside the facsimile provides the reader with a simplified, mediated interpretation of 'what's on the page'; therefore instead of being made redundant by the presence of the image, it represents a sort of map for the understanding and the navigation of the image" (80-81). The concept of topographic transcription as a textual mapping of the digitized document is another instance of editing as textual modelling. The data modelling required for automated processing of both facsimile and transcription adds an additional layer to the layers of textual representation. Taking advantage of the modularity of the digital medium, the modelling of bibliographic and linguistic codes can happen at various levels of granularity: from the macro-textual level of literary form and bibliographic unit to the micro-textual level of word and character. The act of marking up the text for processing emerges as a specific digital method for defining its structure and the relations among its parts, even if this means losing (bibliographic or verbal) information that implies overlapping hierarchies (61-64).

Digital editing shows that solving editorial problems is also addressing the fundamental (and intractable) problem of the ontology of text. How far are textual strings dependent upon a particular material documentary instantiation? What is the textual relation between the materiality of language and the materiality of writing or the materiality of printing? When paying attention to the minute particulars of inscribed surfaces in order to abstract those features that will form the basis for a new textual representation, the editor has to keep asking the question: what is a text? Since textual transmission always results in textual variation, the editor is faced with the dilemma of creating a textual representation that is part of the endless social process of creating textual variation. A critical textual representation emerges from a process of collation across textual witnesses using particular methods to represent, describe and account for variations while, at the same time, adding itself as yet another textual instantiation to the archive of transmitted textual witnesses. The use of computers as tools for collating documents and processing text but also for publishing and displaying text has revived many old

problems in the various sub-disciplines of textual scholarship. Pierazzo rightly points out how editorial acts are riddled through and through with interpretation, from the low-level "objective" transcription of textual marks in the document to high-level decisions concerning the nature of the work, including inferences about intentionality or about social and historical form. Making the editorial process itself available for examination is a necessary condition for accountability, which "is at the base of any rigorous scholarly method and provides other interested parties with the tools for verifying the work done, testing it and then agreeing or disagreeing with it" (98).

The second half of the book (103-191) contains an extremely informative discussion of the fundamental issues in designing editions, illustrated throughout with examples from ongoing digital editions. These four chapters address questions of production workflow, standards and models for publication (including hybrid publication), the uses and preservation of digital editions. After breaking down the various aspects into five major features (purpose of the edition; needs of the users; nature of the documents; capabilities of the publishing technology; costs and time [107]), Pierazzo goes on to examine the limits and advantages of the approaches of "computer-assisted philology" and "digital philology" (109-117). To the challenging problem of integrating editorial and computational skills in scholarly digital projects she suggests a "third way," that is, an approach that "attempts to build small tools rather than big workstations, in such a way that with a small amount of configuration they could be combined and customised to serve a specific editorial work" (116)—the kind of approach taken, for example, by the EU-funded project *Interedition* (http://www.interedition.eu/). Pierazzo's discussion of the XML TEI standard in this production context (117-122) highlights the scholarly value of its complex taxonomy of textual features, whose guidelines have been developed to maximize interdisciplinarity and interoperability, thus making it an intellectual and technical achievement for a large community of researchers from diverse fields.

The discussion in chapter 7, "Using Digital Scholarly Editions", is particularly illuminating, given the complexity of many editorial projects and the need to produce editions that are intelligible and usable by different types of users—from the scholarly expert to the student and to the general reader. Of crucial importance for communicating the content and structure of the edition is the development of user interfaces that embody not only certain web design principles but also the actual results of the textual research. Traditional skeuomorphic principles and visual metaphors should give way to the development of new affordances that become research tools and overcome the still dominant page paradigm (161-162). As editors improve their knowledge of the audience and contexts of use of digital scholarly editions, they become aware of interface design as part of their editorial intervention: "As digital editions are all different and do not follow the same publication structure, the design of meaningful interfaces becomes a fundamental vehicle for the deliv-

ery of the scholarly discourse. The way a text is displayed, the way the searching and browsing facilities work, how easy it is to access certain functionality with respect to others; all of this contributes to the rationale of the edition" (164).

Emphasizing the mutual implication of conceptual and technical aspects in digital editions, *Digital Scholarly Editing* is an invaluable resource for thinking through the problems of editing in digital media—from reading the document to modelling the text to designing the interface. The strong unity of each chapter also indicates that this will be a useful book for introducing and teaching a number of fundamental concepts to those who are new to the field. Its systematic and nuanced presentation of current debates in the fields of textual scholarship and digital editing; its extensive theoretical discussion of the problems of modelling texts; and its careful examination of practical methods for doing digital scholarly editing make this book an indispensable reading for digital scholarly editors, including those who are about to start their first digital edition, but also for anyone who wishes to understand how critical editing and the uses of critical editions are changing as we rethink textual structures and forms for digital processing.