**PIERAZZO — Disciplinary**

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**Disciplinary Impact: The Effect of Digital Editing**

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In 2003 Peter Robinson asked ‘where we are with electronic scholarly editions, and where we want to be’; more than 10 years later we may ask a similar question: Where are we, and where do we want to go? Rather than asking exactly this, however, I would like to address the question from a different angle—namely, what has been the impact of the digital in scholarly editing in more than 20 years of practice, and in which ways may this impact the future? This approach will allow us also to reflect in general on the impact of the digital in humanities disciplines more generally, by considering textual scholarship as a case study.

A first caveat on this analysis: textual scholarship is not really a discipline. One could call it an inter-discipline or a super-discipline: we edit, and do so with similar approaches, within many of what we consider to be the traditional disciplines, such as, for instance, history, English, French, German, theology, philosophy, and art history. Most disciplines in fact have to deal with old documents, and therefore they have to edit them to study and make them available for scholarship. In spite of the many national and disciplinary differences, there are similarities in all the approaches adopted; furthermore, all of these disciplines have been affected by the impact of the digital.

Within the past 20 years, all scholarly editions have in a sense become digital: all editions are in fact prepared on a computer; some use a very basic nonspecific setup such as word processor and standard image viewers; others are prepared with the help of sophisticated ad-hoc software, using markup and various combinations of scripts and algorithms. Let us consider the former case first. One cannot overestimate the impact of the availability of affordances such as copy and paste, digital images, and emails on the work and workflow of a textual scholar; these possibilities are transformational on the one hand, but they do not question the substantial heuristics of the textual scholarship—or not a great deal. The same cannot be said for those editors who have experimented with more innovative digital methods such as automatic collation, text encoding, and phylogenetics, among others; instead, the engagement with these methodologies brings into question some of the most established heuristics of textual editing, and it is claimed here that such innovations are building a methodological divide within textual scholars. Let us consider, for instance, automatic collation: this requires the editor first to transcribe all the witnesses of a given textual tradition in order to be able to compare them, a practice substantially unknown to traditional textual scholarship where collation is conducted by transcribing only one witness in full and then recording only the variants of other witnesses in various ways. Automatic collation is not an editorial method per se, but it is one first, necessary step of phylogenetic as well as other editorial digital methods (Andrews and Macé, 2013). The transcription of all witnesses is indeed a costly activity, and perhaps it is not the most exciting either, resulting in a much more detailed collation with respect to the one done manually; both aspects of this constitute a problem for the textual scholarship community: the transcription is stigmatized because it is resource-thirsty, and the (over)accurate collation because it does not distinguish between ‘proper’ errors, innovation, readings, and orthographic variants, with the risk, it is feared, of the reconstruction of an unreliable genealogical network of relations (Howe et al., 2012). According to Andrews (2013), however, the problem for traditional editors is not as much that variants and errors are not distinguished, but the fact that they refuse to consider that with the new digital method they might not need to be distinguished, since they refuse to consider the change in the heuristic of the discipline as worth having. A similar case happens with text encoding: while the use of text encoding is a new introduction to editing as a result of digital methods and it does seem to bring a different approach to the way we understand and edit texts (Cummings, 2008; Price, 2008), it is also refused as ‘too techie’, and the requirement for editors to learn the TEI seems beyond the reach of editorial work (Bree and McLaverty, 2009).

In spite of this skepticism and drawback that have so far prevented the majority of textual scholars from embracing digital methods, new generations of textual scholars are indeed trained in digital tools and are therefore understanding and editing texts in these new ways. Universities, research centres, and various networks organize one event after the other, where mostly graduate students and young researchers are trained in the use of TEI, collation tools, and other formalisms. One example of this trend is represented by the ‘Marie Curie’ DiXiT ITN; within this network, 12 Early Stage Career Researchers (PhD students, more or less) and five Experienced Researchers (postdoc) are being intensively trained in all aspects of digital editing. The network offers courses every six months for the whole duration of their fellowship; furthermore, such trainings have been offered openly also to people outside the DiXiT Network. Once the experience of DiXiT is over, the impact of these 17 researchers (to which we have to add all the external participants in the training and camps) in the academic market for textual scholarship could be very strong: we are talking about small numbers, but in a super-discipline such as textual scholarship that counts only handfuls of practitioners within each national and disciplinary community, that effect could be really transformational. It will also be interesting to see in future years how many of these newly trained digital editors will remain for the longer term in the traditional disciplines where they began, or if, because of this digital experience, they will end up more on the digital humanities job market instead. A survey of the career plans and aspirations of the DiXiT fellows conducted for this paper might give us some indications.

What could be the consequences of this situation at a disciplinary level? The methodological gap (people who engage with digital methods and people who do not) will be magnified and enhanced by a generational gap; the result of this situation could bring textual scholarship to the breaking point. This is what happened in the field of linguistics: the impact of digital technologies has transformed the methods and heuristics of linguistics beyond recognition, to the point that a new label had to be created: computational linguistics. Is this the scenario that we envisage for digital editing? A similar disciplinary divide seems to be happening within paleography (Stokes, 2009) and doubtless can be also observed for, say, musicology and history, to name a few.

As I have argued elsewhere (Pierazzo, 2015, forthcoming), digital editing is not a new discipline—not yet, at any rate. It is certainly evident that in digital scholarly editing there are at least as many elements of continuity as there are of innovation. The innovative elements are truly transformative, involving as they do formats, methods, roles, heuristics, and hermeneutics of editing. Yet the purpose of editing remains the same—that is, the presentation of historical documents in ways that are meaningful for a group of users according to a documented and sharable methodology. For this, we may conclude that digital scholarly editing is a radical evolution (but not revolution) of print-based editing, as if in a Darwinian pattern of evolution a few steps have been jumped all at once. However, what is interesting to ask here is if the elements of continuity will be enough to keep the discipline together, so to speak, or will the innovative methods otherwise continue to widen the divide between traditional and digital? The answer to this question depends on the willingness of the traditional disciplines to engage with the new methods, but also from the attitude of digital humanists/editors to keep the dialog open with them. This is ultimately one of the biggest challenges of the digital humanities of the next few years: the relationship with the traditional humanities and their more or less peaceful coexistence. The paper will therefore present an analysis of the impact of the digital within scholarly editing using measurable indicators obtained by surveying the field, outlining patterns and trends that may help us assessing the consequences of such an impact. Such indicators include the number of early career researchers attending annual training events such as the DHSI and MMSDA, the number of digital-oriented papers at conferences like the ESTS and the STS in the past five years, and, in contrast, the number of print editions published by print publishers such as Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, Brepols, and Brill during the same period.

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