

A Descriptive Classification Generator for Electronic Editions

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Introduction

Electronic scholarly editions which mimick conventional models of scholarly editions as prescribed by different theoretical and methodological schools provide denotative models (Geertz, 1993, p. 93) which thrive on the otherness of the digital medium but re-emphasize the computational aspect of the 'computer-based' (Steding, 2002), 'Computergestützte' (Kamzelak, 1999), or computer-assisted scholarly edition. The isomorphism between the digital and the print medium aimed at by the application of computational techniques to the praxis of scholarly editing confirms what we already know. What is interesting, however, is not the degree to which the computer can assist the editor in digitizing, creating, and publishing an edition, but the intentional artefacts which are built by using the computer as a modelling tool (Smith, 2002). They are instrumental in two crucial activities of humanities research, that is, the discovery of meaning and the making of meaning. As products of (experimental) modelling, their purpose is 'to achieve failure so as to raise and point the question of how we know what we know' (McCarty, 1999), 'what we do not know', and 'to give us what we do not yet have.' (McCarty, 2004, p. 255) This paper will address the role of experimental modelling and the assessment of exemplary models of scholarly editions in the development of a useful classification, typology, and description of electronic editions.

Classification

As psycholinguistic research has shown, categorization is innate in human cognition (Giannakopoulou, 2003) and involves the formation and use of patterns in a self-maximizing system (deBono, 1978, pp. 25-43). Operations which can be

classified under this scholarly primitive are naming, labelling, classifying, cataloguing, indexing, sorting, etc. Categorizing as a mind process can result in the production of formalized instruments such as bibliographies, indexes, catalogues, classification schemes, and taxonomies for which advanced subject analysis is needed. For the most part, however, it remains a culturally determined mind tool particularly where it is used for the selection of usefulness. This means that categorizing is not determined by how the world is, but tries to develop convenient ways in which to represent it (Hacking, 1999, p. 33).

Traditions and Typologies

Textual scholarship is fragmented by the development of different theories, methods, and praxes which are based on a diversity of attitudes and perspectives (author, language, audience, function, format, etc.). This becomes especially clear when studying current typologies and classification schemes for scholarly editions. Heinrich Meyer (1992) surveyed the literature on textual scholarship in Germany in the twentieth century and listed more than forty names for different types of editions that were used. As he argued, the 'ausgabentypologische Terminologiewirrwarr' (Meyer, 1992, p. 17) is the result of a methodological pluralism both inside and across editorial traditions.

As a consequence, there is no one theoretical paradigm for textual scholarship across all traditions, periods, languages, and authors and there is no one universally applicable taxonomy of editorial types. Moreover, the existing taxonomies are seldom internally consistent in their applied perspective. The simplified representation in the German school, for instance, offers a taxonomy which runs from the archive edition over the historical-critical edition to the study and the reading edition (Kanzog, 1970, pp. 9-44). Where 'archive edition' denotes the archival function of this type of edition and hints at the extent of the documentary set presented, 'historical-critical' refers both to the method used to create the edition and the format in which that edition comes before the user. The study-edition and reading edition, on the other hand, identify the envisioned function of the product and its intended audience in their naming. In the Anglo-American tradition, the copy-text edition refers to a specific theory of establishing a text whereas the types of scholarly editions David Greetham mentions in his *Textual Scholarship. An Introduction* mainly refer to the format or appearance of the edition, such as 'parallel print edition', 'variorum edition', or 'type facsimile edition', or to a combination of format and method such as 'Eclectic Clear-Text Edition with Multiple Apparatus'. (Greetham, 1994, p. 383)

The least useful typology of scholarly editions is based on the publication medium. Here we have print edition, hybrid edition, and electronic edition. Especially this last one is often presented

as a meaningful class while it is widely used to name almost anything which is available in an electronic format. A sad example is, for instance, the édition électronique of the correspondence of René Descartes which is nothing more than a 35 page MSWord file which has been made available online http://classiques.ugac.ca/classiques/Descartes/correspondance/descartes_correspondance.doc .

Electronic editions

With respect to the classification of electronic editions, it becomes difficult to maintain the application of conventional typologies and taxonomies, or ignore them altogether. The danger of a normative typology and hence a rigid theoretical frame for textual scholarship is that it establishes its principles firmly without allowing the advancement of its theories, methodologies, and practices. However, as a scholarly discipline, scholarly editing should be interested in both. Especially when, in the case of electronic scholarly editing, exemplary modeling is employed as a scholarly method to generate electronic editions rather than the epigonous application of rigid theory and method to the electronic edition.

Classification Generator

For reasons of identification and bibliographic research on electronic editions (Lavagnino, 1996; Dahlström, 2002; Kirschenbaum, 2002; Van der Weel, 2005), there is a need for some integrated scheme by which editors of electronic editions can describe their edition according to several parameters. With the classification generator which we propose here, we believe we have developed a tool which can be of aid to that purpose.

The classification generator is an on-line tool which allows the editor to input the details of the electronic edition atomized in meta-information on the edited text (language, period, genre) and information on the edition via a user-friendly form. The latter minimally contains details about method, intended audience, content, format, encoding, technology, function, and functionality of the edition. Once the edition is described according to these parameters, a descriptive classification code is generated that can be included in the published edition. This classification code is an alphanumeric string that exactly describes the electronic edition from multiple perspectives. The classification generator serves at least three goals. First, it liberates the field of electronic scholarly editing from the conventional text-editorial theories with their rigid and inconsistent prescriptive typologies. Instead the classification generator atomizes the different facets of the electronic edition and presents the sum total of this documentation as a description of the product. Second, the user confronted with an electronic

edition gets a detailed description of the kind of electronic edition one is using on inputting the classification code in the classification generator. Third, the codes derived from the classification generator can be of use for an (analytical) bibliography of electronic editions. The description of an improved re-release of an electronic edition will generate a different classification code which could be collated against the codes of other releases of the same edition.

A last feature of the classification generator is the option to register an edition's classification code together with a formal bibliographic description in a database. This database will allow theorists of electronic scholarship and bibliographers of new media to perform interesting forms of analysis on its contents.

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