

Between visual art and visual text. Intermediality and hypertext: A possible combination for twenty-first century philology

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The birth of digital writing, characterised by a process of correction that implies the omission of the preparatory editorial phases of a literary text, has brought about an epochal change in the author-text relationship, now characterised, for the first time in literary history, by the disappearance of autograph documentation. This evident loss would seem to threaten the survival of twenty-first century philology, destined to operate despite the absence of the author's handwritten documents.

Will philological study still be possible, when autograph materials or preparatory editorial editions of a work are longer have available? Will the void of documentation decree the death of textual criticism as a historical, critical and literary discipline?

A positive solution to this cogent problem could come from a reevaluation of authorial philology and, more particularly, from the approach of genetic philology, which very often finds itself operating in the absence of autograph materials. Here, referring specifically to the genetic reconstruction of the text, as formulated by Gresillon,¹ according to which genetic philology, if taken as a speculative habitus and common research practice, can constitute a valid answer and a new possibility for future philological inquiry. When focusing on the "*avanttexte*", those cultural, historical and social requests that have contributed to the birth of the literary work, permits one to enter an author's writing workshop, reconstructing a compositional chronology through the investigation of all editions of the writer's works and all books contained in their library, of all the artistic and musical influences on their work, a philological investigation is carried out and a research product that proves to be emblematic for the study of the publishing history of texts and their compositional prehistory no longer based on autographs is obtained.

Applied to the medieval tradition – that is, with available autograph documentation – this genetic approach has rather favoured the rebirth of hypertexts. In his successful 1992 publication on the topic, George Landow accurately notes that

¹ Almuth Grésillon, 'La critique génétique: origines, methodes, theories, espaces, frontieres', *Veredas*, 8, 2007, 31-45; Michel Espagne, 'Philologie et critique génétique', *Genesis*, 30, 2010, 19-20; a recent return to these themes can be found in Adele Cipolla (ed.), *Digital philology: new thoughts on old questions*, Padova: Libreriauniversitaria.it, 2018. For general information on the Italian philological tradition, see Paola Italia-Giulia Raboni, *Che cos'è la filologia d'autore*, Roma: Carocci, 2010; Paola Italia, *Editing '900*, Roma: Salerno editrice, 2013; Paola Italia, *Editing Duemila*, Roma: Salerno Editrice, 2020.

the literary hypertext has gained notoriety, especially in the last decade of the twentieth century.² This period saw an explosion of online projects centred on the production of a writer or on a single work, tools that have, however, experienced limited success, both in the field of research and in that of teaching, many quickly reduced to obsolete references. It is likely that the intimate link between the hypertextual form and poststructuralist and deconstructionist theories, which Landow highlights,³ counts among the causes for the eclipse of the hypertext model. As Bassi effectively summarized:

Landow's main thesis is that in different areas of contemporary culture there exists a trend toward the transformation of the practice of writing, and that hypertextual technology and post-structuralist and deconstructionist literary theory, in particular, are moving in this direction, despite the fact that these are two very different fields of knowledge.

Here are some of the points in which, according to Landow, this convergence is articulated:

In both these fields there is a tendency to conceive of a text as something fragmented into a set of text blocks, the "nodes" of hypertext being comparable to the "Lexias" of Barthes' theory of reading (R. Barthes, *S/Z*, Paris, Seuil, 1970).

Between the building blocks of the text multiple relationships are established—a set of links or a "galaxy of signifiers" (R. Barthes, *S/Z*, Paris, Seuil, 1970, p. 11)—which help to describe the textual structure according to network models.

Each text block has relations both with blocks belonging to the same text, and with blocks belonging to other texts, thus activating intertextual mechanisms alongside the intra-textual ones. Both in deconstruction and in hypertextual practice, intertextual phenomena take on such an importance that they obscure the very boundaries of each text, producing an effect of mutual interpenetration between different texts, and dissolving the notion of textual unity.

The notions of "centre" and "periphery" are no longer applicable to the text as a whole, but reside in the eye of the observer, who can take any block of text as a temporary centre, as a starting point for exploring the textual universe. The roles of

² George Paul Landow, *Hypertext: the convergence of contemporary critical theory and technology*, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins U. P., 1992. Updates followed the original study: Idem, *Hypertext 2.0*, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins U. P., 1997; Idem, *Hypertext 3.0: critical theory and new media in an era of globalization*, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins U. P., 2006.

³ Paolo Ferri, 'Ipertesto, un nuovo spazio della scrittura', in George Paul Landow, *L'ipertesto. Tecnologie digitali e critica letteraria*, ed. and trans. by Paolo Ferri, Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 1998, 1-16.

author and reader come close to being identified. Both hypertext and various contemporary literary and philosophical theories attribute to the reader a privileged role of intervention on the text, while the author's subjectivity and "authority" dissolve and fragment along with the dispersion and decentralization of their texts.

The dissolution of the single author as an eminent authority over the text leaves room for a highly dialogical and interactive conception of textuality. Hypertext, which fragments the text and encourages forms of cooperative writing, would present itself as an ideal materialisation of a community of conversations inspired by the Bakhtinian concept of polyphony (and to the edifying philosophy of Rorty.⁴

Since, in more recent years, such a deconstructionist vision of literature has failed, the literary hypertext has encountered an unstoppable decline. Nevertheless, this digital structure lends itself very well to embodying the results of philological research and above all to formalizing the data derived from a philological-genetic study approach. In presenting the constellations of documents (books, non-literary texts, musical pieces, artistic or pictorial works) which revolve around the birth of a literary work, one risks assembling a jumble of materials, making their use unintelligible to the public. The hypertextual grid can best account for this harvest of materials and, above all, it is the only possible solution to guarantee a simplified and intuitive consultation.

With these considerations in mind, in 1998 the research group directed by Michelangelo Picone and formed by Susanne Bergius, Tatiana Crivelli, Emilio Speciale, Alessandro Zanoli, and myself, engaged in the realization of a hypertext edition on CD-Rom of Giovanni Boccaccio's Decameron. The project, which benefited from a subsidy from the Swiss National Fund for scientific research (FNS), aimed to provide a multi-level approach to the Decameron text, with the intention of satisfying the needs of a specialist as well as a general user. A prototype of the Hypertext Decameron can be consulted within the University of Zurich's internal network. Here I shall briefly reproduce the main lines of this project.

Functioning as a preparatory reading, this modern-day *accessus ad auctorem* provides an introduction to the individual narrative units (days, novellas) as well as a profile of the members of the brigade (*brigata*) and the protagonists of the novellas. Further details are reserved for critical essays. Unpublished contributions, developed specifically for the present edition of the Decameron, as well as previously published articles, are joined in this section by studies of historical importance for the exegesis of the Boccaccio's text (for example the Discorso storico sul testo del "Decamerone" of Ugo Foscolo). Specific observations of a linguistic, historical, interpretative and philological nature, intended to facilitate the

⁴ Irene Greif, *Computer-supported cooperative work: a book of readings*, San Mateo (CA): Kaufmann, 1988; Michael Bachtin, *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo*, Moscow: 1929 and Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the mirror of nature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979 all three quoted in Bruno Bassi, *L'ipertesto e il futuro della scrittura*, <http://www.brunobassi.it/scritti/lipertestoeilfuturodellascrittura.html>, 1993.

understanding of the text, can be found in the explanatory notes, which can be viewed via links.

This hypertext project approaches the analysis of the text from various points of view. The narratological study favours the main categories of space and time (space and time of the narrators, space and time of the narrations, historical or fictitious geography, etc.), to which commentary cards are accessible through hypertext links. In terms of rhetorical analysis we chose to refer to the classification of Giovanni Pozzi,⁵ and therefore to distinguish between themes, or stereotypes of a narrative nature, and topoi, or stereotypes of an enumerative nature. Symbols of the popular and literary traditions, such as the mirror, the glove, the ring, etc., fall into the first class; in the second are traditional descriptions based on the categories of contiguity and coincidence, like the *locus amoenus*, the catalogue of beauties, etc.

The elaborate structure of the Decameron's narrative also makes it necessary to catalogue the principal *figurae elocutionis*. Particular attention is given to the areas of "figurative language", meaning those lexemes and/or syntagms in which the literal meaning seems to overlap an additional value, connoted allusively in a metaphorical-symbolic sense (for example, the obscene value which the technical terms of the liturgical ceremonial assume in the novella of Alibech, I, 5). Finally, the compositional mechanisms that draw the space of literary creation between tradition and innovation have been investigated through an intertextual approach.

The variety of testimonies involved allowed us to identify different categories, for which the team oversaw the computerization of the materials in order to offer full-text readings. In particular we distinguished between: 1) Sources: works identified by the critics as the texts on which the author based his own invention (for example, Novellino LI for Dec. I.9); 2) Intertexts: materials that present semantic or syntactical analogies with the Decameron and with which Boccaccio's text therefore engages in a true dialogue; 3) Analogues: works that, due to their wide cultural circulation, can be considered reference texts, in a broad sense, for the Decameron, but for which a direct dialogue cannot be established; 4) Documents: documentary evidence (historical or literary texts) which illustrates specific aspects of the Decameron's narrative.

To underscore the textual relationships within Boccaccio's entire literary production, provided links give access to the inter-text sites in question. In order to define more clearly the context of Europe's reception of the Decameron and its subsequent transmission, the project assembles two sections, one dedicated to literary translations and other rewritings, which gather quotations and reworkings of single episodes or of the larger structural model of Boccaccio's collection. Studies of the Decameron's iconography demonstrate the re-elaboration of themes and motifs, similar to those found in intertextual mechanisms. This project therefore distinguishes, within its iconographic section, between intertexts, i.e. those figurative motifs present in Boccaccio's artistic memory which leave traces in his writing, and illustrations meant to represent the collection of short stories. In

⁵ Giovanni Pozzi, 'Temi, topoi, stereotipi', in *Letteratura Einaudi*, dir. by Albero Asor Rosa, III: *Le forme del testo*, 1. *Teoria e poesia*, Torino: 1984, 391-436, particularly 391-395.

addition, the project also includes some significant cinematic transpositions of the work, important also for the history of the Decameron's continued transmission into the twentieth century. If figurative art is without doubt a primary component of Boccaccio's inspiration, music also played a fundamental role in the clever articulation of the frame of the century of novellas. The hypertext therefore dedicates a specific section to the study of ballads (sources, transpositions, scores, etc.).

The Textual Tradition section offers a set of variants to the text of the Decameron, through the comparison (*collatio*) of five of the most significant witnesses in the rich tradition of the work. The manuscripts and prints considered for the preparation of the critical apparatus are reproduced digitally, to guarantee the immediate verification of the *varia lectio* as well as to facilitate further analyses and assessments by the reader. A particular focus is given to the upper branches of the Decameron's *stemma codicum*, namely the autograph Hamilton 90 (B), preserved at the Berlin Staatsbibliothek and dated to the last thirty years of the fourteenth century; to the Laurenziano Pluteo XLII 1 (Mn) of Florence's Laurentian Library, dated to 1384 based on the inscription by Francesco d'Amaretto Mannelli; and to the Italian Parisian 482 (7260) (P) of the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris, copied in the 1360s by Giovanni d'Agnolo Capponi. Nor does the hypertext neglect the print testimonies: included are Deo Gratias (DG), princeps dated to the years 1470/71, of Neapolitan or Florentine origin according to scholars; and Giuntina, published in Florence in 1527. To facilitate their use and intelligibility, it seemed appropriate to accompany each of the five witnesses with illustrative materials.

The bibliography collects critical studies and descriptions, including available editions (facsimile, diplomatic, diplomatic-interpretative). The table indicates the succession of materials in witnesses, while paleographic and codicological features are presented in the description. The Notes include commentary that proposes heterogeneous observations of bibliographic, critical, paleographic and codicological character. Finally, the section Other Witnesses presents the complete list of manuscripts identified as bearers of the Decameron text and of the main editions through the end of the sixteenth century, thus providing an historical overview of the work's patrimony and the locations of print and digitally reproduced codices.

The hypertext includes also a bibliographic database, which collects information on editions, translations and critical studies and enables the user to search thematically through the corpus by means of customized "subject" or "search key" functions.

Although focused on the Decameron's exegesis, the Hypertext Decameron also has its ideological roots in Barthes's deconstructionist theory. In his presentation of the Hypertext at a 2001 conference in Certaldo,⁶ Crivelli emphasizes this debt, stating:

⁶ Tatiana Crivelli-Teresa Nocita, 'Teatralità del dettato, stratificazioni strutturali, plurivocità degli esiti: il "Decameron" fra testo, ipertesto e generi letterari', in *Autori e lettori di Boccaccio*.

The first, simple association that comes to mind is that between the notion of hypertext as “a collection of portions of the text”, or lexicon, and the structure constituted in minimal units of the collection of novellas, which, by its nature, proposes an ideal narrative fragmentation, offering at least one hundred distinct parts, or textual units, on which to reconstruct.

A few years before, in 1994, under the guidance of Massimo Riva, Brown University began the implementation of its Decameron Web portal.⁷ Online since that date, the site, coordinated by Riva and Michael Papio, is still a crucial reference point for studies and updates on Boccaccio, revealing itself to be of the utmost utility not only for scientific research, but also as an excellent educational resource. Departing from deconstructionist theory, the Decameron Web instead seems oriented towards cognitivism, and its purpose moves away from the interpretation of the text, central in the Hypertext Decameron, toward the comprehension of the text, its declared goal.

The guiding question of our project is how contemporary informational technology can facilitate, enhance and innovate the complex cognitive and learning activities involved in reading a late medieval literary text like Boccaccio’s Decameron. We believe that the new electronic environment and its tools enable us to revive the humanistic spirit of communal and collaboratively “playful” learning of which the Decameron itself is the utmost expression. Through a creative use of technology, our project provides the reader with an easily accessible and flexible yet well-structured wealth of information on the literary, historical and cultural context of the Decameron, thus allowing a vivid yet rigorously philological understanding of the past in which the work was conceived. At the same time, our project is meant to facilitate the creative expression of a multiplicity of perspectives which animate our contemporary readings. By reconciling in a collaborative fashion the reader’s freedom with a sound cognition of serious, scholarly achievements in the study of the Decameron, our project is also an example of how new technologies can provide an innovative pedagogical medium for a fulfilling educational experience based on a literary text that is open to a variety of cultural interests and levels of learning.

In the case of both the Hypertext Decameron and the Decameron Web, the compositional history of the work and that of its dissemination are exemplified by an exhibition of typologically diverse materials, such as images, sounds, videos, which allow us to contextualize the literary text through a multidisciplinary creative process and to reconnect it to the very important and popular field of intermediality studies. In the Decameron Web, the Arts section treats more closely the text’s relationship with music, visual arts and cinema; sections on History, Society, and Religion act as a framework for the text, while the Literature section presents a

Atti del Convegno internazionale di Certaldo, Certaldo, 20-22 settembre 2001, ed. by Michelangelo Picone, Firenze: Franco Cesati editore, 2002, 209-233. The first description of the project can be found in VV. AA., ‘Per un “Decameron” ipertestuale: nuove tecnologie per un classico del Medioevo’, in *Rassegna Europea di Letteratura Italiana*, 11, 1998, 121-125.

⁷ *Decameron Web*: https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/

series of insights into the synthetic form of the critical apparatus. "Fortuna," "amore," and "ingegno" are the key topics analyzed in *Themes & Motifs*, to which we might add "brigata" and "plague," supporting elements of the narrative construction of the frame, and the subject of wider treatment in the homonymous sections. An important aspect, emphasized by the authors, is that of sharing in the realization of the project, which encourages the implementation of the materials by the user, thereby envisioning the hypertext as a collective product that, as in Landow's reflection, abolishes the distinction between creator and user, rather encouraging the interchangeability of these roles.

Most importantly, this corpus and its basic structure are conceived as a point of departure for a wide range of collaborative activities which will enhance the project's future growth according to the interests and contributions of the virtual community of students, teachers, scholars and readers of the Decameron. To this end, all of our users are warmly encouraged to make full use of these materials and to participate actively in the site's expansion. Please feel free to send us your comments, ideas and, if you like, even contributions to be added to what is already here.

In 2008, the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities (MiBAC) inaugurated the *Viaggi nel testo* portal, which brings together, under the scientific direction of Amedeo Quondam, the biographical and literary profiles of nine canonical authors of Italian literature (Dante Alighieri, Francesco Petrarca, Giovanni Boccaccio, Baldassarre Castiglione, Ludovico Ariosto, Torquato Tasso, Ugo Foscolo, Alessandro Manzoni, Giacomo Leopardi).⁸ The materials are designed as a 'Journey through the life, places, and historical and cultural contexts of the major Italian writers, with access to complete works in digital text format', presented in hypertext format. Ideological and theoretical concerns are disregarded, so much so that the project includes no online presentation other than the brief lines mentioned above, which describe the contents in a concise way, but do not provide a theoretical frame of reference within which to place the initiative. Landow's model of the hypertext created a historical legacy still at play even today through the act of browsing the web, a shared experience at every social and cultural level, which seems to be the true inspirational modality of the portal. The MiBAC project responds to an urgent need for updated educational tools and means for scientific consultation.

The hypertext dedicated to Boccaccio,⁹ re-proposes the three standard sections utilized in the profile of each literary figure: Biographical itinerary, Textual itinerary and Thematic itinerary. These sections are actually superimposable on the standard Life, Works and Poetics sections of traditional print biographies. The novelty of the MiBAC hypertexts is therefore determined by the size of the "information card", imposed on us as authors, which is limited to 2000 characters and for this reason can be displayed on a single screen. The card itself was the unit, or Barthesian "lexia", for the articulation of our critical-literary reasoning. Brevity, communicative efficacy and speed were the qualities we sought in this display,

⁸ <http://www.internetculturale.it/directories/ViaggiNelTesto/index.html>

⁹ <http://www.internetculturale.it/directories/ViaggiNelTesto/boccaccio/index.html>

conforming to the communication methods of the World Wide Web, which also constituted a model for the mixing of typologically heterogeneous reference materials such as sound, text, and image within our literary hypertexts. As Finnemann points out,¹⁰ this is perhaps the key element for a re-evaluation of the hypertext as a cognitive model and a popular tool:

A framework for distinguishing different sorts of heterogeneous digital materials has been presented here. The hypothesis is that hypertextual linking is both a major source of the messy-ness of big data and a means to characterize and classify non-parametric data resources. Thus the notion of hypertext will be revalidated and utilized in the analysis of heterogeneous digital collections.

To Finnemann's exhortation of the hypertext as the best technical platform for the representation of multimedia reality, we might add, in the case of literary hypertext, the importance assumed in recent years by the intermediality study approach in the epistemological analysis of artistic and literary phenomena.¹¹

The success of this research on intermediality is such that a precise categorization and definition of terminology would be preliminary at best. In this vein, Rajewsky's theoretical approach to the subject is important, because it offers a specifically literary perspective of interest in the current analysis.¹² According to Rajewsky, it is possible to recognize at least three subcategories of intermediality:

1. Intermediality in the more narrow sense of medial transposition (as for example film adaptations, novelizations, and so forth): here the intermedial quality has to do with the way in which a media product comes into being, i.e., with the transformation of a given media product (a text, a film, etc.) or of its substratum into another medium. This category is a production-oriented, "genetic" conception of intermediality; the "original" text, film, etc., is the "source" of the newly formed media product, whose formation is based on a media-specific and obligatory intermedial transformation process.

2. Intermediality in the more narrow sense of media combination, which includes phenomena such as opera, film, theater, performances, illuminated manuscripts, computer or Sound Art installations, comics, and so on, or, to use another terminology, so-called multimedia, mixed media, and intermedia. The intermedial quality of this category is determined by the medial constellation constituting a given media product, which is to say the result or the very process of combining at least two conventionally distinct media or medial forms of

¹⁰ Niels Ole Finnemann, *Hypertextual relations in digital born materials. Hypertext and time. Towards a genre analysis of heterogeneous digital materials*, paper presented at Web Archives as Scholarly Sources, Aarhus, Denmark: 2015.

¹¹ For a definition see Klaus Bruhn Jensen, 'Intermediality', in *The international encyclopedia of communication theory and philosophy*, ed. by Klaus Bruhn Jensen and Robert T. Craig (Editors-in-Chief), Jefferson D. Pooley and Eric W. Rothenbuhler (Associate Editors), Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Published, 2016.

¹² Irina O. Rajewsky, *Intermedialität*, Tübingen/Basel: Francke, 2002; Ead., *Intermediality, intertextuality, and remediation. A literary perspective on intermediality*, in *Intermedialités*, 6, 2005, 43-64.

articulation. These two media or medial forms of articulation are each present in their own materiality and contribute to the constitution and signification of the entire product in their own specific way.

Thus, for this category, intermediality is a communicative-semiotic concept, based on the combination of at least two medial forms of articulation. The span of this category runs from a mere contiguity of two or more material manifestations of different media to a “genuine” integration, an integration which in its most pure form would privilege none of its constitutive elements.

3. Intermediality in the narrow sense of intermedial references, for example references in a literary text to a film through, for instance, the evocation or imitation of certain filmic techniques such as zoom shots, fades, dissolves, and montage editing. Other examples include the so-called musicalization of literature, transposition d’art, ekphrasis, references in film to painting, or in painting to photography, and so forth. Intermedial references are thus to be understood as meaning-constitutional strategies that contribute to the media product’s overall signification: the media product uses its own media-specific means, either to refer to a specific, individual work produced in another medium (i.e., what in the German tradition is called Einzelreferenz, “individual reference”), or to refer to a specific medial subsystem (such as a certain film genre) or to another medium qua system (Systemreferenz, “system reference”). The given product thus constitutes itself partly or wholly in relation to the work, system, or subsystem to which it refers. In this third category, as already in the case of media combination, intermediality designates a communicative-semiotic concept, but here it is by definition just one medium – the referencing medium (as opposed to the medium referred to) – that is materially present. Rather than combining different medial forms of articulation, the given media-product thematizes, evokes, or imitates elements or structures of another, conventionally distinct medium through the use of its own media-specific means. (pp. 51-53).

Evidently the third intermedial mode – the mode that reconstructs the links between different artistic products, such as images, sounds and videos – is precisely the form of intermediality put to use in the hypertext. The rule governing associations of this type is based on the theory of literary intertextuality, which transposes itself onto the digital sphere, gaining terms of reference which go beyond the typology of writing to invade the musical, visual and filmic fields.¹³ By reappropriating this intertextual hermeneutic mode and applying it to different typological materials in order to create the literary hypertext, that linkable text which has as its object the analysis of a single work of literature or the complete production of a writer, we are able to meet a wider array of pedagogical and research needs.

¹³ Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes: la littérature au second degré*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982; Umberto Eco, *Lector in fabula*, Milano: Bompiani, 1979; Alfonso Bernardelli, *Intertestualità*, Roma: Carocci, 2013.

As for the reader's experience, the hypertext offers the more familiar and intuitive type of information transmission represented today by the World Wide Web. At the same time, it adheres to the innovative and popular intermedial approach in the study of contemporary literature and art. In philological terms, the need to reconstruct the compositional process of a work and an author is met, revealing the mechanisms of literary creation through a collection of heterogeneous materials, according to the principles of genetic philology. The legacy of the philological tradition in the digital age seems perfectly suited to this latter approach, particularly when, as is already the case nowadays, a text written on the computer eliminates a work's preparatory documentation, replacing it instead with in a continuous and incessant overlapping of signs, at every transitory phase of creation, of which no trace remains.

In light of these last considerations, the hypertextual model now appears to be unencumbered by the link to deconstructionist theory first enumerated in Landow's 1992 reflection, which predicted its rise in the last decade of the twentieth century, but failed to foresee its quick decline with the abandonment of this literary approach. Thus, the hypertext now presents itself for rediscovery as a versatile and eminently functional platform for the study of literary documentation, the model of representation most capable of expressing contemporary multimedia reality and guaranteeing the survival of philological studies in a genetic-compositional sense, even when works on paper disappear permanently from the philologist's desk.

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