Marco Heiles
The Medial Determination of German Edition Philology

If we want to know what the "Future of Philology" will be, we need to know what the term "philology" means. Ten years ago, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht tried to answer this question in his well-known book, "The Powers of Philology." Gumbrecht divided philology into five core areas: "Identifying Fragments", "Editing Texts", "Writing Commentaries", "Historicizing Things" and "Teaching."[1] As Gumbrecht needed a whole book to cover all of them, I will focus on just one, the process of editing a text, or edition philology, and approach it from the perspective of my own discipline, Medieval German Studies or *Altgermanistik*.

1. Edition philology in the eyes of media theory: Data selection

In terms of media theory, we can understand edition philology as a technique of transferring data from one (the initial) medium to another (the target medium). In the case of an edition in the field of medieval studies, the initial and final mediums belong to completely different media systems. Therefore, edition philology is dependent on the inner logic or structure of both the initial and target media systems. This dependency is often described as "Strukturdeterminiertheit der Medien,"[2] which we might render here as *medial determination*.

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[1] Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *The Powers of Philology: Dynamics of Textual Scholarship* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

[2] Christine Putzo, "Das implizite Buch: Zu einem überlesenen Faktor der Narrativität. Am Beispiel von Wolframs *Parzival*, Wittenwielers *Ring* und

The initial media system of all editions in medieval studies is the manuscript book in its medieval appearance. A manuscript is an analogue material medium; it is made to store textual information, which can be one or more texts, over a long period of time. But it is not limited to that. In its unique appearance, given in layout, paratexts and especially materiality, it offers a huge amount of implicit data, from which an experienced scholar can gather information about the origin and history of the manuscript, its scribes and users etc. In fact, the amount of the implicit data in this analog medium is infinite, which is why it is impossible to make an exact copy. And in the manuscript-media-system such an exact copy was not in any way intended, in most cases not even for the textual content.[3] Each manuscript is a unique and complex object made for a special purpose and adapted to the needs of the foreseen user. Edition philology needs to handle these special features of the manuscript system. If exact copying is not possible, we need to choose which data should get transferred into the target media system and which do not. The history of edition philology is, therefore, a history of selection criteria.

These selection criteria depend, of course, on the target medium, which ideally allows exact copying and mass publishing. Only information that can be represented in the new medium can be transferred. In other words, if your typewriter or your computer's font does not allow you to write a straight s (ſ), you will not be able to represent it, even if you would like to.

Prosaromanen Wickrams," *Wolfram-Studien* 22 (2012): 288.—For this term see also: Joachim Knape, "Katastrophenrhetorik und Strukturdeterminiertheit der Medien: Der Fall des 11. September 2001," in *Medienrhetorik* (Tübingen: Attempto, 2005), 231-262; Joachim Knape and Dietmar Till, "Deutschland," in *Geschichte der Buchkultur*, vol. 6, *Renaissance*, ed. Alfred Noe (Graz: Akademische Druck und Verlagsanstalt, 2008): 287.

[3] There are, of course, exceptions, especially for sacred texts, where a strict religious regulation, say, for the writing of the Hebrew bible, makes an expansive literal transcription possible. But this is not the case for vernacular texts, which were regularly adapted to the local dialect and other special needs of the foreseen user.

2. The theoretical superstructure: Which data is relevant?

2.1 The Age of Idealism

We cannot understand an edition in medieval studies as just a dead medium—it is much more than that. It is a work of one or more individuals, and they are the ones who define most of the selection criteria, depending on the goals of their edition and their own under-standing of knowledge and literature in general and medieval manuscripts in particular. These editors choose which data is relevant and worth transferring—but how do they make these decisions and how do media systems influence their decisions? I will give one (simplified) example:

Altgermanistik as a science was founded in the first half of the nine-teenth century, when scholars like Georg Friedrich Benecke (1762-1844) and Karl Lachmann (1793-1851) were working on their first editions of the *Nibelungenlied*,[4] Hartman von Aue's *Iwein*[5] or the collective works of Wolfram von Eschenbach[6] and Walther von der Vogelweide.[7] This was an age of Idealism and Romanticism, which subsequently colored the thinking of German medievalists and their terminology and categories. But what does this mean exactly?

In the times of Lachmann and Co., the media system "printed book" was already more than 200 years old and it was extremely successful. It was so successful that it forced other systems to change. The advantages are clear: book production with a printing press on paper is relatively cheap. A printed book, like every codex, allows nonlinear reading and it produces identical copies with an automatic index, i.e., the page numbers, which make it easily searchable and comprehensible. The printing presses produced a continuously growing amount of books—of new books—and around 1800 the data processing system that is the university had to react. Friedrich Kittler describes the situation as follows:

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[4] Karl Lachmann, ed., *Der Nibelunge Noth und die Klage* (Berlin: Reimer, 1826).

[5] Karl Lachmann and Georg Friedrich Benecke, eds., *Iwein: Der Riter mit dem Lewen getihtet von dem Hern Hartman Dienstman ze Ouwe* (Berlin: Reimer, 1827).

[6] Karl Lachmann, ed., *Wolfram von Eschenbach* (Berlin: Reimer, 1833).

[7] Karl Lachmann, ed., *Die Gedichte Walthers von der Vogelweide* (Berlin: Reimer, 1827).— For Lachmann, cf.: Marina Münkler, "'durch unverdrossene tüchtige Arbeit': Karl Lachmann (1793 - 1851) als Philologe," *Zeitschrift für Germanistik* 20, no. 1 (2010).

> Because, unlike parchment codices, printed books are storage devices having no possibility of erasure, there was, around 1800, (to quote Fichte) "no branch of knowledge on which a surfeit of books is not available." As a result literature and science had to revamp their transmission and receiving techniques: away from the literalness of quotes from the scholarly elite, and rhetorical mnemonics, towards an interpretative approach which reduced the quantity of printed data to its essence, in other words to a smaller quantity of data.[8]

To understand what Friedrich Kittler means we have to remember how a university functioned in the early modern era. The university is based on the liberal arts for which rhetoric was the traditional system of data processing. The students learned the texts by heart (or if not the whole text, then at least short parts of it), the important sentences, latin *sententiae*. (And they produced collections of theses sentences and then commentaries on them.) With a growing amount of books and texts, this system was no longer useful. A new system was needed which could reduce the amount of data more effectively. So texts were reduced to their *Sinn*, the sense of the text. From a postmodern perspective, the problem of this system seems to be that there is no objective authority and that everyone could find his or her own *Sinn*. That would produce a lot of *Sinne*, but that was not the case. The *Sinn* of a text is strictly dependent on the author of the text: *der Sinn muss dem Geist des Autors entsprechen*. Accordingly, the author became the most important figure in the field of literature. The author became the a priori of literature—before that, God had been in this position—and interpretation became the only way of reading.

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[8] Friedrich Kittler, "The History of Communication Media," *Ctheory: Global Algorithm* 114, no. 30 (1996), http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=45. "Weil gedruckte Bücher, anders als Pergamentcodices, Festwertspeicher ohne jede Löschmöglichkeit sind, gab es um 1800 (nach Fichtes Wort), keinen Zweig der Wissenschaft mehr, über welchen nicht sogar ein Überfluss an Büchern vorhanden" gewesen wäre. Literatur und Wissenschaft mussten ihre Sende- und Empfangstechniken folglich umstellen: weg von der Buchstäblichkeit gelehrten-republikanischen Zitate oder rhetorischer Mnemotechniken und hin zu einer Interpretation, die gedruckte Datenmengen auf ihren Sinn, eine kleinere Datenmenge also reduzierte." Friedrich Kittler, "Geschichte der Kommunikationsmedien," in *Raum und Verfahren: Interventionen*, Jörg Huber, et al., eds., (Basel: Stroemfeld/Roter Stern, 1993): 179f.

Lachmann and the other inventors of German Philology followed this agenda strictly in their definition of the selection criteria for editions of medieval texts. They wanted to find a way back to the medieval authors and their thinking (*Geist*). This is why they tried to reconstruct the original authorized text, which, in their eyes, was the only medium that could show this *Geist*. (Accordingly, the edition would allow the reader to communicate directly with the medieval author.) As they were used to authorized, identical printed books, they could not recognize the manuscript book as a medium in its own right, it was just seen as a deficient predecessor to their ideal medium, the printed book, and inhibited an undistorted communication between the ingenious author and the reader. So Lachmann looked for *Fehler* (errors) in the manuscript texts, produced a stemma and combined the different texts and his own conclusions on how the author would have written—in the author's *Geist*—a new text. So Lachmann's system produced—and is still producing—imaginary, ideal texts, of which we have no evidence that they ever really existed in the Middle Ages.[9]

2.2 Edition theory in a digital world

Times—and media systems—have changed since Lachmann and so too did German edition theory. Today's media system is dominated by the computer and the Internet, or as Friedrich Kittler would say, the Turing-machine and the fiber optic cable. The computer is the universal medium and can incorporate all other media systems. Not only can we save, distribute and process written language with the computer, but we can also do this with audio and video records, images and so on. Information got (apparently) detached from its materiality: we are just saving digital numbers somewhere in the "space" and everybody can access them through the Internet. The problem of the early eighteenth century of processing of huge amounts of information in the form of text is no longer a problem for us. We can easily use full text search engines. In this system, *Sinn* and *Geist* are no longer used.

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[9] But this system and even more its material impact, the editions, still exert an influence on and interfere with German medieval studies today, especially in practical work and teaching. In fact, most of the editions we use for academic teaching are editions written in the *Geist* of Lachmann.

At the same time, the diversification—and then, later, unification—of the media system made us aware that we are using media and that every medium is following its own rules. Since the second half of the twentieth century, we could see that there was something like the Gutenberg-Galaxy and that there had to be something before and after the Gutenberg-Galaxy. For the first time, scholars had been able to see the manuscript culture as its own culture, and now they are attempting to understand this culture. And this is what I would like to call the medial turn in edition philology. That is, the fact that edition philology has become aware of the medial determination of its subject. This thinking has found its (final) manifestation in a series of essays on edition theory in the 1990s. In 1990 Stephen Nichols, an American scholar for medieval French literature, published a special issue of the journal *Speculum* with the title "New Philology,"[10] which had a great impact on the German debate on edition philology.[11] The way "New Philology" (or, as Nichols called it as a reaction to the critics in 1997, "Material Philology"[12]) understands manuscripts and produces editions is completely different from the traditional *Textkritik*. "Material Philology" sees manuscripts not as a bunch of errors, but as a material witness of its time. Here, the manuscript is seen as a historic object and, as such, deserves to be edited for its own sake. There are no *Fehler*, and there are, to quote Bernard Cerquiglini,[13] no variants, because medieval literature production itself *is* variance. The manuscript itself, and not an idea of its text, is both the basis and goal of the edition.

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[10] "The New Philology," ed. Stephen Nichols, special issue, *Speculum* 65, no. 1 (1990).

[11] Cf.: Karl Stackmann, "Neue Philologie?," in *Modernes Mittelalter: Neue Bilder einer populären Epoche*, Joachim Heinzle, ed. (Frankfurt a. M./Leipzig: Insel, 1999); Jan-Dirk Müller, "Neue Altgermanistik," *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft* 39 (1995); Martin Baisch, *Textkritik als Problem der Kulturwissenschaft: Tristan-Lektüren*, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006).

[12] Stephen G. Nichols, "Why Material Philology? Some Thoughts," in "Philologie als Textwissenschaft: Alte und Neue Horizonte," ed. Helmut Tervooren and Horst Wenzel, special issue, *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie* 116 (1997).

[13] Bernard Cerquiglini, *Éloge de la variante: Histoire critique de la philologie* (Paris: Seuil 1989).

3. *The intuitional basis or the limited availability of medieval manuscripts*

The influence of media systems on edition philology is not limited to the possibilities of the target medium and its impulses on media and edition theory. It has even more practical effects. Should somebody want to make an edition based on medieval manuscripts, he or she first needs to have access to them. And this could be very puzzling, as Johann Jacob Bodmer, one of the pre-idealistic predecessors to Lachmann and me, once stated in 1748:

> Mein Verlangen ihn [the famous Codex Manesse, at the time known as codex 7266 of the bibliothèque du roi in Paris, now Heidelberg, cpg 848, M. H.] einzusehen wachete darüber von neuen auf, und schien mich desto heftiger quälen zu wollen, je weniger Hoffnung verhanden war, daß ich es jemals würde zufrieden stellen können. Indem ich mich in den Gedanken mit eitlen Anschlägen, wie ich meines Wunsches theilhaft werden könnte, herumschlug, gönnete mein Glück mir die persönliche Bekanntschaft des eben so freund-schaftlichen als gelehrten Herren Canonicus und Profess. Schöpflin von Straßburg […]. […] Meinen Wunsch zu befördern, fügete das Schicksal, daß der Hr. Prof. Schöpflin in absonderlichen Geschäften eine Reise nach Paris thun mußte, wo es ihm bey seiner persönlichen Gegenwart um so viel leichter war, die Sache nach meinem Verlan-gen auszuführen. Der Monarche erlaubte durch eine Lettre de Cachet, daß der Codex nach Straßburg an den Hrn. Prof. Schöpflin, und von da weiter nach Zürich an den Hrn. Canonicus Breitinger und mich geschickt würde. Wir erhielten ihn durch Ihre Excellenz den Hrn. De Courteille, Ihrer Königl. Majestät Abgesandten bey den Löbl. Cantons.[14]

Long story short: Bodmer needed permission from the French king himself, the owner of the manuscript, to get access to it. The well-known editors of the early nineteenth century did not complain about such problems. The library system in Germany had changed since the mid-eighteenth century. The royal and principal libraries developed from a baroque court library, under personal ownership and control of the prince, to a 'public' state library to finally an independent institution under the control of a librarian, who is now a *Staatsbeamter*

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[14] Johann Jacob Bodmer, ed., *Proben der alten schwäbischen Poesie des dreizehnten Jahrhunderts aus der Manessischen Sammlung* (Zürich: Heydegger, 1748), iii-iv.

(civil servant).[15] At the same time, these former court libraries and the university libraries could incorporate huge clerical library collections as a result of the suppression of the Jesuits in 1773 and the secularization of the German monastery due to Napoleon's *Reichsdeputationshauptschluß* (German mediatization). Completely new databases became available for (university) scholars, which were understood as part of the state now, too. The access to manuscripts became more and more institutionalized and less dependent upon chance and personal connections.

These observations on the first decades of German edition philology in the field of medieval studies show that, because manuscripts do not lose their physical properties even in post-manuscript media systems, access to them is limited locally and (therefore) even socially. Every manuscript has normally a fixed localized position, a certain place in a certain shelf in a certain library in a certain town, and has therefore to be handled carefully under conservational restrictions. Manuscripts are under the control of libraries and social institutions, which collect, preserve and control knowledge, most of the times in its material form: the book. Even if in a modern public library this notion of "control" means to allow access to as many people as possible. There are, of course, also other social institutions, which restrict the access to manuscripts—a university, for example, might be one such institution—but I do not wish to write a social history of German edition philology here.

4. Today's Challenges and the Future of Philology

I have based my thoughts on the future of philology on an analysis of the medial determination of German edition philology in the field of medieval studies, because I hope we can detect how edition philology will change in the coming years by, firstly, understanding how media systems influence edition philology and, secondly, how or in which direction today's media system will develop.

Future trends are visible today and, in my opinion, German edition philology in the field of medieval studies faces two huge challenges.

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[15] This development proceeded until the end of World War I, as the names of the libraries can tell us: The *Bayerische Staatsbibliothek* in Munich was originally named *Hofbibliothek*, since 1829 *Hof- und Staatsbibliothek* and since 1918 *Staatsbibliothek*. Cf.: Uwe Jochum, *Kleine Bibliotheksgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2007), S. 116ff.

Firstly, the changing of the target medium of edition philology: the digital born edition will supersede the printed edition.[16] Secondly, the new role of institutions like libraries; the media-driven theoretical debate seems, by contrast, to have reached its climax in the late 1990s, and it is perhaps no coincidence that this is when the dot-com bubble reached its climax and burst. Today's media system sets new requirements for editions: editions should be machine readable and processable; all data should be accessible online and, above all, editions should allow collaborative work or rather be open for user generated content. We need to allow other editors/users and their computers to work with and rework our editions. Therefore, we need new working and data standards like the XML mark-up standard developed by the *Text Encoding Initiative*[17] and we need new legal standards to accompany such developments. Digital editions ought to be under a free Creative Common License,[18] which is especially necessary for facsimile scans. And this is the point where libraries become important. Libraries do not only control the access to the physical manuscript, they are also the ones who scan the manuscripts, who claim the rights to the pictures of the manuscripts and who publish these pictures. Libraries are more and more taking on the function of classical editors: they transfer selected data from the medium manuscript into another medium, in this case a digital picture, and publish it. In a few or more years, every medieval manuscript with German text will be published in this form. Together with good manuscript descriptions, these digital scans will at once obviate the need for a lot of classical text editions, especially when newly developed Optical Character Recognition tools are able to recognise medieval scripts, which will at least be possible for strictly standardized book scripts like a *textualis formata*. Moreover, these easy and freely accessible huge databases will allow a new group of people from outside the established and institutionalized academic world to work with this huge database, assuming the data is under free creative commons license and thus not just accessible to a financially supported, academic elite. Perhaps these new actors will change the idea of an edition completely and give new impetus to the theoretical debate on edition philology.

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[16] There will be printed editions for reading in the future, but every printed edition will hopefully be based upon a digital edition.

[17] http://www.tei-c.org/

[18] http://creativecommons.org/

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