

The Dimension of the Text

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The theoretical point I want to make was inspired by Hans Walter Gabler's genetic edition of James Joyce's *Ulysses*: I want to show that, despite the theoretical claims that have been made for genetic editions with three or four dimensions, editions can be linear or unidimensional without losing crucial information.

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing was right: literature is an art of the *nebeneinander* and texts are by their very nature linear. Unlike two-dimensional paintings or three-dimensional sculptures, texts are, like music, daughters of time. Naturally there are a number of exceptions such as some of Mallarmé's poems or so-called "concrete" poetry in general, or even some modernist and post-modernist prose works that exploit the possibilities of the two dimensions of the written or printed page. But the point about these exceptions is that they foreground and thus presuppose the essential linearity of both the writing and the reading act.

Let us begin with an example from expository prose. When Jacques Derrida published his startlingly original book *Glas*, in which he juxtaposed in one textual space an essay on Jean Genet with a philosophical treatise about Hegel, no critic suggested that the philosopher wrote both columns at the same time, or that he first wrote the first line or first sentence of one column to jump to the first line of the other one, alternately writing a line or sentence in each. Even in the case of this overwhelmingly novel format, we can only presuppose the existence of a classically linear writing act which is, in the case of Derrida, usually based on a series of seminars that I at least cannot imagine as having been delivered in two simultaneous voices. The more cynical among Derrida's readers may conjecture (as I do) that the philosopher first wrote one essay and then the other, and only then, discovering that they were of approximately the same length, adjusted the font and typography to make sure that the text on Hegel and the one on Genet ended at roughly the same time, or better, in this case, at roughly the same place (or page). The