Montaigne would have no patience for the set of essays to which I offer this modest contribution, essays which remain complicit (he might bitterly complain) in the central evil of the civilized world: the endlessly recursive and unproductive cycle of words about words, or in short, the tyranny of commentary.

There is more ado to interpret interpretations than to interpret things, and more books upon books than upon any other subject; we do nothing but comment upon one another. Every place swarms with commentaries; of authors there is great scarcity.¹

Foucault, perhaps smiling wryly at the irony of it all, subjects Montaigne’s cantankerous claim to, of course, further commentary. “These words are not a statement of the bankruptcy of a culture buried beneath its own monuments,” Foucault claims in The Order of Things; “they are a definition of the inevitable relation that a language maintained with itself in the sixteenth century.”² The last qualification, the emphasis on the historical contingency of ways of knowing, resonates with his broader argument that in the premodern condition, the relation of language to the world is one of analogy, where resemblance stands unchallenged as the base for a written knowledge. In the premodern episteme, “the great metaphor of the book that one opens, that one pores over and reads in order to know nature, is merely the reverse and visible side of another

transference, and a much deeper one, which forces language to reside in the world, among the plants, the herbs, the stones, and the animals.”

Thus to know, we learn how to interpret, and to interpret, we learn how to read the world. And as Mary Franklin Brown puts it in a smartly articulated critique of Foucault in her study of medieval encyclopedism, “Foucault insists repeatedly that his archaeological method is not hermeneutic, that discursive practice, rather than the meaning of texts, is the object of his description. He is after, not hidden meaning, but visible practice.” Foucault’s analysis is an attempt to define commentary and gloss as the infinite proliferation of interpretation that justifies the “sovereignty of an original text.” He adds: “And it is this text, by providing foundation for the commentary, that offers its ultimate revelation as the promised reward of the commentary.” Thus, it is the “interstice occurring between the primal Text and the infinity of Interpretation” that accounts for the proliferation of interpretation, commentary, and gloss, which take writing to be a substantial part of the “fabric of the world.”

The profound influence of this view need not be belabored.

In recent years (new) German media theory has busied itself with the thorough de-textualization of this focus on discourse, text, and textual practices. Friedrich Kittler, for instance, took up Foucault’s archeological charge from the order of things in the world other than books and textual archives: the world of machines, circuits, and computers. And more recently still, Bernhard Siegert has zeroed in on the material affordances of discursive practices, such as paper, bibliographic practices, even punctuation.

3 Foucault, Order of Things, 39.
4 Mary Franklin Brown, Reading the World: Encyclopedic Writing in the Scholastic Age (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 89.
5 Foucault, Order of Things, 45.
techniques. Such approaches have adopted the name of cultural techniques (*Kulturtechniken*), a move which has turned away from the hardware-centric, techno-determinism of early German media studies back toward the humanities, restoring the human to the humanities and media practices more broadly. In this context, histories of knowledge, science, and media are understood more as ontologies than as discursive practices; they are nodes in “complex spatial and temporal knowledge systems” (a new spin on Kittler’s *Aufschreibessysteme* or “discourse networks”). In short, discourse is re-mobilized within interdependent networks of human and non-human actors, especially technical and technological objects and institutions (including the office, the shipyard, and the medieval university). As Thomas Macho has argued in a now canonical passage (for media theory, at least):

Kulturtechniken – wie Schreiben, Lesen, Malen, Rechnen, Musizieren – sind stets älter als die Begriffe, die aus ihnen generiert werden. Geschrieben wurde lange vor jedem Begriff der Schrift oder des Alphabets; Bilder und Statuen inspirierten erst nach Jahrtausenden einen Begriff des Bildes; bis heute kann gesungen und musiziert werden ohne Tonbegriffe oder Notensysteme. Auch das Zählen ist älter als die Zahl.

Cultural techniques – such as writing, reading, painting, counting, making music – are always older than the concepts that are generated from them. People wrote long before they conceptualized writing or alphabets; millennia passed before pictures and statues gave rise to the concept of the image; and until today, people sing or make music without knowing anything about tones or musical notation systems. Counting, too, is older than the notion of numbers.

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8 Parikka, “Cultural Techniques of Things that Matter.”

It is not surprising, then, that the second volume of the *Historisches Wörterbuch des Mediengebrauchs* makes the same claim about commentary: “Das Kommentieren ist als Gebrauch der Schrift älter als sein Begriff” (Commentary as a mode of writing is older than its concept). 10 But as is often the case in new German media theory, a capacious (one might say voracious) non-definition of media results in an ontological flattening of a (non-)concept. Matthias Bickenbach’s entry on *kommentieren* ranges from the earliest allegorical Greek Homeric commentaries to the noisy wilds of the YouTube comment section. A quick glance at the table of contents of the two volumes of the *Historisches Wörterbuch des Mediengebrauchs*, wherein *kommentieren* stands alongside *basteln* (tinkering), *programmieren*, *einloggen*, and *snapchatten*, reveals clearly enough that the focus on “cultural techniques” has entailed a concomitant commitment to presentism, even when at its most historical: they end up furnishing the pre-history of deeply presentist concerns (the digital, the computational, or, in short, media studies as a branch of information science). Hence, Wolfgang Ernst’s provocation that there are no medieval media (which now has a compelling reply by Erik Born). 11

While the study of ancient, medieval, and early modern commentary, as both practice and theory, may have much to gain from thinking through the possibilities of “commentary as cultural technique” or its role within Kittlerian discourse networks, such an approach must re-assert, on the one hand, the importance of historicism (Foucauldian or otherwise – which was after all precisely the point of Ernst’s provocation, as Born has argued); 12 on the other


12 “At the heart of Ernst’s argument for this claim is the conviction that different medial contexts demand different forms of analysis....
hand, Foucauldian essentialisms such as the “primal Text” and “the infinity of Interpretation” demand a more nuanced attention to the (historically contingent) hermeneutic techniques that give rise to and/or complicate the dialectical interplay of text, comment, and exegesis. An imbalance of attention to discursive practice, without the corrective force of the hermeneutic commitments that undergird commentary as an exegetical (even ontological) modality, would itself threaten to become a new kind of technological determinism: all hardware, no software.

At issue in the subsequent discussion are both the singularity of the “primal Text” upon which commentary, as the parasitic genre Montaigne would have us believe, would seem prima facie to depend, and the mode of reading that a particular twelfth-century commentary format requires. As I have argued elsewhere, textual hierarchies have long shaped the fluidity and mutability (the seeming “infinity of Interpretation,” in Foucault’s terms) of medieval commentaries, which were “occasional texts that rarely enjoyed the same textual authority, and hence stability, as the texts upon which they commented. Even among relatively stable commentaries securely attributed to known authors, complex and often inscrutable processes of accretion, deletion, and revision have generated seemingly chaotic patterns of interpolation and lacunae among their various redactions.”  

Here, however, I am interested in the “cultural technique” (if it may be designated as such) of textual lemmatization: the seemingly innocuous replication of the text commented upon within the textual flow of the newly authored commentary – a hybrid of the cultural techniques of reading and writing, which lemmatization is both and neither simultaneously. The lemma, a

Reserving the concept of media exclusively for modernity, and thereby rendering the Middle Ages a period of amediality, will remain a difficult sell for medievalists, even though, as Ernst argued, the manoeuvre could ultimately benefit medieval studies by helping sharpen the contours of the discipline” (Born, “Media Archaeology, Cultural Techniques, and the Middle Ages,” 113).

snippet of text in the commentary taken from the text commented upon, is not a premise to be “assumed” or “taken for granted” (one original meaning of lemma). The authorial and scribal technique of reproducing the target text is an act of seizure (λαμβάνω); it is also an act that authenticates (corrects, redacts, etc.) the “original” text even as it creates a new text that has an existence (and a Nachleben) distinct from its source.

This is not a new insight: it was a primary motivation for lemmatized commentaries from late antiquity on. John Magee, for instance, notes the report of Ammonius, an influential commentator upon the Aristotelian philosophical corpus from the late fifth and early sixth century CE, that the inherent difficulty of Aristotle’s Categories had given rise to so many corruptions in the manuscripts that he resolved to furnish lemmata in his own commentary that would replicate (and correct) the whole of it.14 And as Lorenzo Ferroni and Gerd van Riel have pointed out with respect to the lemmata of Proclus’s fifth-century commentary on Plato’s Timaeus: “Lemmas are peculiar texts, placed at the crossroads of two different, independent textual traditions that have to be studied independently from one another. They are the special areas where the two traditions appear to overlap. The demanding task of the editor is precisely to keep them separated, while being fully aware of the specificities of each one of them.”15

One of the central challenges of editing lemmatized commentaries is the proper reading (and where necessary, resolution) of lemmata. They simultaneously establish the grounds for interpretation within the commentary and index an external text that exists outside the commentary, both materially in other manuscripts and “ontologically” as the work of another author (excepting self-commentary, of course). Lemmatized commentaries


demand that readers, and editors, engage with two (or more) texts simultaneously. But what is the textual status of lemmata? What do they index? Text editors, medievalists in particular, will immediately sympathize with the complexities of this question: lemmata are rarely identical in all (or even many) respects to the familiar modern editions of the text under scrutiny. The sheer mutability and variability of the medieval manuscript evidence for authoritative texts – texts now so readily accessible in the comforting blue covers of Teubner editions, the orange covers of the *Corpus Christianorum*, and the similar philological assurances of the CSEL, MGH (etc.) – means that a given medieval copy would not necessarily have the status of the significant variant carrier worth reporting (from a Lachmannian perspective). The rigorous application of *eliminatio* in most editions of classical (and medieval) texts entails the suppression of medieval (and ancient) *lectiones variae* that are “insignificant” from an editorial standpoint, even if they remain of crucial importance for a given text’s *Nachleben*. Christina Thornqvist has highlighted this in her encomium to “insignificant errors of great importance”; she reminds editors that not all readers are interested in only the “best readings,” that the study of “the *Nachleben* of the text in question” can be greatly enhanced by making available to scholars readings otherwise disregarded as inferior.¹⁶

Marginal commentaries and scholia, in fact, often provide crucial and often unique testimony to otherwise lost stages in the tradition of a classical text (its variant readings, ancient conjectures, athetizations and interpolations, etc.). To give but one example, two scholia in some of the earliest layers of the Carolingian reception of and commentary on Martianus Capella’s *De nuptiis Mercurii et Philologiae* tantalizingly hint at an otherwise unknown manuscript witness to Ulrich Kopp’s (1836) conjecture – and, before that, Bongarsius’ reportatio apud Walthardum (1763) – of *bupaeda* for the uniformly transmitted reading *pubeda* at *De nuptiis* 1.31, with the

gloss: “alibi bupeda” (in another manuscript [this reads] bupeda).\textsuperscript{17} Over the course of the eleventh century and into the twelfth, as glosses on important school texts (such as Martianus’s \textit{De nuptiis}, Boethius’s \textit{Consolatio philosophiae}, and Priscian’s \textit{Institutiones grammaticae}, among others) moved out the margins generally preferred by their Carolingian readers and into the central columns of independent, lemmatized (sometimes called \textit{catena} or continuous) commentaries, the philological evidence contained within individual glosses is supplemented by the textual evidence of the lemmata that occasion them. It would be too simple, however, to suppose that the collected lemmata of a given commentary simply index a single manuscript that the commentator was reading, or, to put it in text critical terms, that the \textit{lemmata collecta} would be in every way equivalent to a \textit{codex descriptus}. While I cannot claim that no commentator worked in this way, rarely do lemmata uniquely track a single manuscript or even a single textual tradition. Moreover, it is often the case that cross-pollination across commentary traditions – independent of extant direct textual traditions – imports readings and variants already at odds with the text that may be in front of a given commentator.

I will illustrate the complexities of the material conditions and concomitant reading (and writing) techniques in twelfth-century lemmatized commentaries with examples from William of Conches’s unedited twelfth-century \textit{Glosulae super Priscianum}, a lemmatized commentary on Priscian’s monumental sixth-century Latin grammar, the \textit{Institutiones grammaticae}, which had replaced Donatus’s \textit{Ars minor} and \textit{Ars maior} as the standard grammatical textbook.\textsuperscript{18} I will dispense with the \textit{traditio textus} of William’s Priscian glosses rather summarily. The glosses survive in two (and

\begin{itemize}
\end{itemize}
perhaps three) recensions: (I) a *versio prior* probably composed by William in the early 1120s, which comments only upon *Priscianus maior* (i.e., books 1–16) and is now incompletely preserved in Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, San Marco 310 (henceforth *M*); and (II) a *versio altera* revised by William circa 1150 near the end of his career, which glosses both *Priscianus maior* (through the beginning of book twelve) and *Priscianus minor*, often known as the *Liber de constructione* or *Liber constructionum* (i.e., books 17–18), and is extant only in Paris, Bibliothéque nationale, manuscrit latin 15130 (henceforth *P*). Finally, there exists a possible third redaction in the Laud collection at the Bodleian Library, MS 67, which differs, sometimes considerably, from both *M* and *P*, but it is a short fragment of five folios that covers only *Institutiones*, 2.12–21.

It is likely that the *Glosulae in librum constructionum* as found in *P* were newly composed for the *versio altera* and were never revised. This for two reasons. First, in the *accessus* of the *versio altera*, William signals his revisions with some precision: “I have undertaken,” he writes, “in my old age to correct the incomplete *glosulae de ortographia* that I wrote in my youth” (*P*1ra); the *de ortographia*, strictly speaking, should be only the beginning of the *Institutiones* and it certainly does not include the *De constructione*. Second, in both the *prior* and *altera* versions, the glosses on *Priscianus maior* cross-reference books 17 and 18 with the caveat: “deo annuente uitam” (provided God allows me to live long enough), a disclaimer William often employs to indicate a work planned but not yet complete. Similarly, *P*’s *Glosulae in librum constructionum* anticipates its later discussions with the same formula: “we’ll talk about this later, *deo annuente uitam*." Perhaps William simply saw no need to scrub away the residue of his youthful attempt at a commentary and retained the caveats, knowing full well that the text was already complete. But I, for one, hold little hope of finding another version of the *Glosulae in librum constructionum*. And for the foreseeable future at least, *P* is the best we have.

Regrettably, *P*’s best is not very good. Throughout the work, the scribe – who was too often less than diligent in his duty, to put it charitably – is continually at loggerheads with his author. Consider, for instance, the following passage, thick with (doubtless) unintentional irony:

*P*88ra (ad *Instit*. 17.7): *Et notandum quod, quamuis omnis ditongus duas obtineat uocales, non tamen in omni*
utraque sonat, sed in quibusdam ultima tantum, ut ae, oe; in quibusdam utraque sed altera magis, ut au, eu. Si querat aliquis quare in istis utraque sonet, in illis altera tantum, dicimus quod u, que est ultima in istis, multos habet sonos. [...] Sed, quamuis una pronunciatur sola, tamen debet utraque scribi. Propter imperitos qui uolunt quicquid uident scriptum pronunciare, instituerunt moderni ut illa sola que ibi habet sonum scribatur, sed tamen ei uirgula que sit ditongi nota subscribatur.

Note that although every diphthong has two vowels, nevertheless both are not vocalized in each case. In some, only the last [vowel is pronounced], such as ae and oe; in others both are vocalized but one more than the other, as in au and eu. If someone asks why in the latter both are vocalized but in the former only one, we say that the letter u (which is the last vowel in the latter examples) has many sounds. [...] But even though [in the former case] only one vowel is vocalized, nevertheless it is proper to write both. For the sake of unskilled [readers], who suppose that they must pronounce whatever is written, modern practice has decided that only the vocalized vowel should be written, but a small stroke should be written below that vowel, which is the marker of the diphthong.

One wonders if the scribe wryly smiled to himself as he blithely, perhaps willfully, proceeded to collapse his diphthongs (highlighted in bold) within this very passage, despite his author’s deliberate plea that such a manner of writing was the mark of the imperiti, who want pronunciation to map orthography. I have elsewhere publicly aired my grievances with the scribe of P, and I will not repeat the complaints here.¹⁹ But the basic principle of suspicion (rather than charity) that P cannot but instill has left the lemmata in an especially difficult state. Given the regular absence of immediately recuperable accidence and semantics in lemmata (for reasons to be discussed presently), they create the perfect storm for scribal error.

In twelfth-century commentary traditions, there are three (or four) primary types of lemmata. First come localization lemmata, introductory lemmata of just a few words (often followed by “etc.”) that are not integrated into the syntax of the commentary; instead, these allow the reader to locate the passage under discussion, and they are followed by prolegomena akin to the theoria of the ancient commentary tradition: the doctrinal content of the passage together with any philosophical, grammatical, exegetical, etc., preliminaries that must be in place for a proper understanding of the commentary to follow. In the case of particularly thorny or well-trodden issues, these doxographical and doctrinal introductions can run to hundreds of words (or more); in more routine cases, they often consist of only a phrase or two that serve to set the stage. These can employ a variety of more or less standardized formulae: “haec est veritas rei” (this is the truth of the matter…), a hermeneutic formula; “fuit mos antiquorum” (it was the custom of the ancients…), a historicizing formula; “est igitur summa” (this is the summary…), a summarizing formula; “quasi” (as though) or “ac si diceret” (as if to say…), a succinct paraphrase formula; and finally “ne putaret (ali)quis” (so that no one think…) or “diceret aliquis,” (someone might say…), both common formulae for anticipating and thus precluding bone-headed interpretations. Once the stage has been set, there follow contextual lemmata: these are quotations of the original passage that transition from high-level sententiae back to the literal level of the text with the common twelfth-century expression

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“continuatio” (or sometimes the verbal phrase “continua sic”), which commence with a summary that illustrates the continuity and internal logic of the passage. This leads into the third set of lemmata, what could be called constrictual lemmata: the literal word-by-word (or phrase-by-phrase) commentary akin to the lexis of the ancient commentary tradition, often introduced by the formula “et hoc est” (and this is [what the author says]…). This level of commentary is most closely tied to the letter of the target text, though the word order of the original is often modified (sometimes radically) for the sake of grammatical clarity. (Not all passages have both the “continuatio” and the “et hoc est” formulae: sometimes the former inaugurates the literal commentary, and sometimes the theoría is followed immediately by “et hoc est”). Finally, there occasionally follows a fourth collection of lexical lemmata; these are not integrated into the syntactical or argumentative exposition of the passage but offer isolated comments on lexical oddities.

The complexity of lemmatized commentaries is further compounded, at least for the twelfth-century tradition, by the fact that the lemmata are treated by scribes as indices to external texts rather than as legible text per se; hence, they are not subject to the usual proprieties of standard scribal abbreviations. What this means in practice is that lemmata are often hyperabbreviated, keyed only by initial letters or syllables. This method of abbreviation is attested not only for lemmata but for other quotations (even occasionally texts other than the target text). For instance, a twelfth-century commentary on Plato’s Timaeus quotes a bit of well-known Boethian verse thusly: “que n exîne pepulert ìngî cause m ì o u i _ s f b l c” (quem non externae pepulerunt fingère causae / materiae fluctuantis opus / aerum insita summâ / forma boni liuore carens).21 Such quotations obviously rely on the intimate familiarity of the reader with the target of the otherwise inscrutable series of letters, which would seem more a word puzzle fit for the back pages of a literary magazine than a quotation in support of an argument (among the forty metra in Boethius’s Consolatio, which verses feature the following sequence of initial letters?). The inscrutability is, in the end, perhaps appropriate in this instance; after all, as John Magee has said of

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Boethius’s poetry in a study of his anapestic dimeters (acatalectic): “Boethius’ literary impulses a i t e i o c.”

But what happens when entire books are encapsulated with such puzzling abbreviations, as is the case for William’s *Glosulae super Priscianum* (taken here as a token of a type, rather than a special case)? One immediate implication is that the stability of the lemmata is further undercut by the impenetrability of their manuscript presentation. In the case of scribal copies of previously lemmatized commentaries, as must be the case for *P*, the opportunity for scribal error is further compounded because the correct reading cannot be reconstructed from the evidence at hand. The accuracy of the copy cannot be controlled by coherence of the “text” copied, and an external control is necessary (though judging by the surviving evidence, they were often not readily at hand). There is no way for a scribe to verify or correct the accuracy of hyperabbreviated lemmata save by checking the “text” against a manuscript copy of the text commented upon – and, of course, there is no guarantee that its reading will be the same.

A brief example of the complexities of this lossy compression (so to speak) will help to clarify the problem. Here are the collected lemmata from a single page of *P* (100v, chosen at random). In this example, I have eliminated duplicated lemmata and reproduce them continuously, in the order in which they are presented. Underlining indicates that the original text was marked (by underlining in the manuscript itself) as a lemma; the absence of underlining indicates that the text, although belonging to a lemma, was not marked as such in *P*. Italicization signals the expansion of standard abbreviations used in the lemmata, almost always particles, prepositions, or basic verbs or terms. This is followed by the same passage from Hertz’s edition (boldface type indicates the characters recuperable from *P*).

*P* 100v: *Itaque sunt no. sig.n. substantiam quae sunt infi. neces. qui. cum ge. con. in se no. su. Vnde quidam pu. ea esse pro. quia ac. pro. o. no. quomodo et pron. si promo. vo.

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esse fi, et ac. ci. lo. p. et significant so. su. sine qua. quantum in ip. vo. cum. su. no. gener. sit. spe. conf. ominium sub se spe. itaque uti. eis. ad. spe. inter. substantiae ut quis verba vero non pos. sig. ge. su. u. q. nec q. vel nu. p. idem quem. ad. fu. offi. ad. ad sig. qual. ver. sic eadem ac. ad. ge. eo. inter. quomodo igitur di. quis quae. no. su. sicut etiam ac. vel passi. dicimus quid agit cum de ad. lo. e. su. no. quid agit tur statut.


Two things are immediately clear. Firstly, nearly the entire passage is indexed in the collected lemmata and the syntax remains largely complete even as the word order changes radically (omissions do not affect the underlying sentence structure of Priscian’s original but
only truncate lists or abbreviate compound structures). Secondly, the sheer amount of compression is impressive. The 1190 characters of the original passage are indexed by a mere 280 characters in the abbreviated lemmata, a compression that exceeds more than 75% (though the term “compression” is misleading; most abbreviations cannot be expanded without recourse to the original).

The implications of this format are considerable. Firstly, in distinction to modern editions of such commentaries, in which the lemmata are resolved and printed as legible text rather than as alphabet soup, the lemmatized commentary in the twelfth century is relatively useless in isolation. It demanded the ready accessibility of a separate copy of the original, preferably in a separate manuscript, to read in tandem with the commentary to resolve its abbreviated lemmata. Flipping back and forth between two texts in a single manuscript would have been an inefficient reading method, especially since the lemmata (as here) often follow a modified word order, and that reordering is already part of the commentator’s interpretive gambit. It is perhaps for that very reason that most lemmatized commentaries (even on Plato’s *Timaeus*, which was short enough to be copied in the same volume as a commentary) are copied in manuscripts without the original text; in the case of Priscian commentaries, copying the whole of Priscian’s *Institutiones* in the same manuscript as a full lemmatized commentary was out of the question. Justin Stover has explored the implications and limitations of this format. While it may have had some success within “institutional” settings (“a school connected to an institution with a considerable library”), it was less useful for individual scholars or modest libraries, which may not have had a copy of the original at hand, rendering the commentary useless. “It was also unsuitable for larger classes, which in major intellectual centers, like Paris, could have hundreds of students in a single hall, where formats like distinct *quaestiones* and *lectiones* were more germane to the actual pedagogical situation.”

Secondly, in addition to the material conditions demanded by such a format, the textual conditions are no less complex. Let me offer a straightforward example that starts to hint at the intricacies involved, wherein variants in Priscian’s text suggest multiple interpretations of a single passage: William’s interpretation of

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P93ra (ad Instit. 17.17 [GL 3, 118.13–14]): [I] VERBA SVNT INDICATIVA, id est demonstratiuam, illarum PERSONARVM QVAE INTELLEGVNTVR PER\(^1\) NOMINATIVVM pronominis. Illam enim personam demonstrat hoc uerbum ‘scribo’, quam significat hoc pronomen ‘ego’. ACCIPIVNTVR ABSOLVTE, id est sine discretione personarum. [...] Quidam aliter exponent uersum istum sic: [II] VERBA ACCIPIVNTVR ABSOLVTE, id est sine discretione personarum. Sed quia de impersonalibus uerbis erat constans, addit: PERSONARVM\(^2\), id est uerba personalia. Sed ne aliquis putaret quod aliam personam significaret uerbum quam nominatius, et sic non posset cum illo intransitiue construi, subiungit: QVAE PER\(^3\) NOMINATIVVM INTELLIGVNTVR. Sed quia magis uidebatur de indicatiuis uerbis quam de alis modis quod facerent discretionem, subdit: ET SVNT INDICATIVA, id est indicatiui modi. Secundum hanc sententiam, unum solum ‘et’ habetur in serie litterae.

\(^1\) per scripsimus, pro \(P\)  
\(^2\) personarum scripsimus, personaliter \(P\)  
\(^3\) quae per scripsimus, quod po. \(P\)

[I] VERBS ARE INDICATIVE, that is demonstrative, of the PERSONS WHICH ARE UNDERSTOOD THROUGH THE NOMINATIVE OF THE PRONOUN. For the verb scribo [“I write”] demonstrates the same person as does the pronoun ego [“I”]. VERBS ARE ACCEPTED ABSOLUTELY, that is without the discretion of persons. [...] Some explain this sentence differently, as follows: [II] VERBS ARE ACCEPTED ABSOLUTELY, that is without the discretion of persons. But because this was true of impersonal verbs, he adds: OF PERSONS, i.e., personal verbs. But so that no one think that the verb signifies a person other than the nominative, and thus would not be intransitively construable with the nominative, he adds: WHICH ARE UNDERSTOOD THROUGH THE NOMINATIVE. But because this would seem more correct with regard to indicative verbs than the other moods in that they make a discretion, he adds: AND
THEY ARE INDICATIVE, i.e., they are in the indicative mood. According to this view, there is only one ET in the sentence.

The two explanations given here (marked as I and II) differ primarily in the syntax and semantics of “indicatiua.” The first explanation (I) places “indicatiua” in the main clause (“uerba sunt indicatiua”), which is construed as synonymous with “demonstratiua,” qualified by the objective genitive “personarum.” The second explanation (II), ascribed (as is often the case in commentaries) to anonymous “quidam” [some people], locates “indicatiua” in the subordinate clause and glosses it as “indicatiui modi,” while construing “personarum” as “uerba personalia.” These two different readings depend on whether the sentence has one “et” or two (Hertz prints only one but reports a manuscript with two). William’s default reading indicates that he presumably had two conjunctions in his manuscript(s) of Priscian, which forces a compound predicate: “Verba personarum […] et sunt indicatiua et absolute accipiuntur.” But William also knew an interpretive tradition that glossed the text with only a single “et” (as was printed by Hertz), which forces a compound relative clause: “quae per nominatiuum intelleguntur et sunt indicatiua.” Hence, as William notes, this second reading requires that “unum solum ‘et’ habetur in serie litterae.” But William’s commentary is under-determinative on this point. The meaning of “unum solum ‘et’ habetur in serie litterae” can only makes sense to readers who are following along in their own text of Priscian (which may or may not have two conjunctions).

William often reports such variants in the text of his commentary (“quidam libri habent” or “in aliquibus libris inuenitur…”), and as here, they often prompt a second interpretation, which William provides without passing editorial judgement on the “authenticity” of one or the other reading.24 But two reported variants occasion very different reactions, which also provide important hints as to how these commentaries may have

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24 E.g. (not an exhaustive list), P 86ra (Quidam libri habent QVEMADMODVM, quad sic legitur); 86rb (Quidam libri habent AVCTIORES SILLABAE LITTERIS, quod sic exponitur); 87ra (Quidam libri habent CAVSA METRI, quod patens est); 94ra (Quidam libri habent ENIM, quod ita continuatur); 100rb (Si habetur QVALITATES, sic expone).
functioned. If the *glosa*, as William of Conches reminds us elsewhere, is the tongue of the master speaking through the silent page to absent students, the two glosses below offer more interactive lessons. In the first, William notes that some manuscripts will have additional examples, and his response seems to imagine a classroom setting:

\[ P \text{ 98va (ad. *Instit.* 17.32 [GL 3, 128.19–129.1]): Si in aliquibus libris inueniatur hoc exemplum, ‘MILIA, ETC.’ reddatur et quicquid erit usque ad hunc uersum: RELATIVA AVTEM, ETC.} \]

\[ ^1 \text{inueniatur} \] inuenitur a. corr. \[ ^2 \text{milia, etc.] uide apparatum Hertzii (128.19). Virgil, *Aen.* 2.331 \]

If in some codices are found this example, MILIA ETC., let it and anything else there be recited until the sentence [that begins], BUT RELATIVES.

But might another more invasive response lurk behind *P*’s “reddatur” (recite it)? Might this hide the correct reading “radatur” (erase it)? Another variant in fact prompts William to encourage his readers to intercede in the manuscript tradition and correct an erroneous reading concerning the Greek term for *pronomina discretiua*, which Priscian says the Greek call *orthotonoumena*, because they preserve the correct (*orthos*) pitch modulation or accent (*neuma*). But, William continues, “if someone says to you ‘ortogomena,’ which means ‘right angle’ (‘gnomon’ means angle) you should not believe him, and if you find it written thus in a book, you should correct it.”

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This gloss seemingly anticipates two different ways that students would encounter the erroneous reading: either (1) it would be read aloud (“si aliquis dicit tibi”), presumably by a teacher lecturing on Priscian’s *Institutiones* from a text that, as William argues, is corrupted (it is hard to imagine encountering such a recondite term in any other context), in which case the student’s only recourse is to withhold belief; or (2) it would be encountered by the student within the text of a manuscript (“si in libro inueneris scriptum”), in which case William encourages direct intervention and the correction of the manuscript. Further compounding the complexities of this passage, however, are the scribal errors in *P*, which (again with unintentional irony) require the reader (or editor) to correct the text of *P* in order to properly identify the correction that is to be made in other surviving texts of Priscian.²⁶

²⁶ It is worth noting, however, that the occurrence of the term in the text of *Priscianus Maior* hardly fares better in *M* (72vb): Deinde exponit per graecum quid sit esse recti accentus sic: ortoneuma [scripsi, ortomeunia *M*]. Non ortogomena ut quidam autamant – sunt enim [enim *sup. lin. M*] ortogomena rectum angulum habentia
Another double reading likely lurks behind P’s puzzling lemmata and glosses on Institutiones 17.19: “manifestum autem, quod ipsius quoque positio nominatio, qua participium nominatum est, non bene servaretur, nisi post nomen et verbum poneretur participium, cum ex eis utrisque per confirmationem pendens ea pars accipiebatur, quomodo post masculinum et femininum eorum abnegativum neutrum” (but it is clear that the imposition of that naming, by which it was called a participle, would not be properly preserved unless the participle were positioned after the noun and the verb, since that part was understood to depend on both through confirmation, just as the neuter comes after the masculine and feminine as their negation). The question here concerns the reading “confirmationem,” which is printed by Hertz with no critical note. P’s comment on this passage vacillates rather confusingly between “conformatio” (conformity) and “confirmatio” (confirmation).


– sed ortoneuma est recta littera (orto enim rectum, neuma cantus uel modulatio). Vnde dicitur ortoneuma, id est recte modulata, id est rectum accentum habentia, ut dictum est. (Vnde etiam neuma uocatur [scripsi, uocantur M] cantus qui totus consistit in modulationibus.)
genus ponimus NEVTRVM, EORVM ABNEGATIVVM in ordine generum⁵, ergo multo magis post nomen et uerbum ponimus eorum confirmationem, id est participium.

¹ antecedentium scripsimus, accentium (centuum a. corr.)
² omni a. corr. P
³ pendens scripsimus, peren. P
⁴ conformatur a. corr. P
⁵ generum scripsimus, genetiui P

Petrus Helias’s Summa super Priscianum (from the mid-twelfth century), written with William’s commentary as both source and target of critique,²⁷ can offer us no assistance here, for his Summa rarely gets down in the trenches with William to wrangle with the word-by-word syntax of Priscian’s text (which may have been one of the primary reasons that the Summa supplanted William’s Glosulæ as a primary reference text). The passage, I think, gains focus if we suppose that William knew two readings, both “confirmatio” and “conformatio” (even though Hertz does not report such a variant in the direct tradition). Firstly, it makes good sense of the muddled phrase “sed habetur per conformationem,” since “habetur” is often used to signal a variant reading (as above: “unum solum ‘et’ habetur”). Secondly, and more importantly, it would explain the double gloss wherein the first [I] seems of offer a realis interpretation (“the participle derives its being (esse) from the noun and verb”), and the second [II] a vocalis interpretation (“the name of that part of speech, the participle, is taken from the noun and verb”). Thirdly, it also motivates the quick double summation: “quia ex eis confirmatur uel conformatur.” The question remains: which should be “confirmatio” and which “conformatio”? Since “conformatio” seems to lend greater support to the realis view and “confirmatio” pairs well with “abnegatio” in the vocalis view, I’m inclined to read (against P) “conformatio” first and “confirmatio” second, as well as to emend “Sed habetur per conformationem. Sic legatur” to “Si habetur per confirmationem, sic legatur.”

Inde enim dicitur participium quod capiti partem illorum antecedentium¹. Et subiungit quare: CVM EA PARS ACCIPIEBATVR PENDENS EX EIS. Ex eis enim esse

contrahit, et hoc PER CONFORMATIONEM, quia conformatur eis. Recipit enim a nomine genera et casus, a uerbo tempora et significationes. Si2 habetur PER CONFORMATIONEM3, sic legatur: CVM EA PARS, id est cum nomen illius partis ACCIPIEBATVR EX EIS partibus, id est ex nomine et uerbo. Sed quia duobus modis contrahit uox nomen a uoce – per abnegationem, ut nomen dicitur neutrum quia non est masculinum nec femininum, per confirmationem4, id est per proprietatem ex illa contractam quae nomine ipso exprimitur, ut pronomen quia ponitur pro nomine – ideo5, ut ostendat Priscianus quomodo ex illis nomen accept, subiungit: PENDENS6 PER CONFORMATIONEM7. Deinde per simile ostendit quod, quia ex eis confirmatur8 uel conformatur, post illa debet poni. SED QVOMODO POST MASCULINVM ET FEMININVM genus ponimus NEVTRVM, EORVM ABNEGATIVVM in ordine generum9, ergo multo magis post nomen et uerbum ponimus eorum confirmationem, id est participium.28

28 After coming to this conclusion independently, Anne Grondeux brought to my attention a parallel passage in Glosa Victorina (from the late eleventh or early twelfth century), which confirms the tradition of a double reading in this passage: CVM EX. Ostendit quae sit nominatio quae non congrue seruaretur. CVM, id est quia, EA PARS, id est nomen huius partis, scilicet collectionis participiorum, ACCIPIEBATVR, id est imponebatur, ita ut esset PENDENS EX VTRISQVE ETC. Et quia posset pendere ex utroque, sicut hoc nomen (nevrum) pendet ex masculino et feminino per abnegationem utriusque, addit, ita dico pendens, quod est PER CONFORMATIONEM, id est ita quod ipsum nomen confirmat ipsa participia habere naturam nominis et uerbi. Vel PER CONFORMATIONEM, id est ita quod ostendit significatum suum conformari ex proprietatibus nominis et uerbi. QVOMODO. Probab a minori quod haec pars debat esse post nomen et uerbum cum habeat utriusque confirmationem quia neutrum genus ponitur post masculinum et femininum cum sumat nomen ab utroque per abnegationem. Et hoc est QVOMODO NEVTRVM genus, id est collectio uocum neutri generis ponitur POST MASCULINVM ET FEMININVM, quorum EST ABNEGATIVVM, id est habet nomen, in quo notatur neutri proprietatem recipere, scilicet nec masculini nec feminini. Glosa
This is why [this part of speech] is called a participle: because it takes a part (“partem capit”) of the prior parts of speech. And he adds why: SINCE THAT PART IS TAKEN TO DEPEND ON THEM. For it derives its being from them, and this THROUGH CONFORMITY because it is conformed to them. For it receives from the noun gender and case, from the verb tense and meaning. If your manuscript reads THROUGH CONFIRMATION, read it as follows. SINCE THAT PART, i.e., since the name of that part, is taken from those parts, i.e., from the noun and verb. But because words derive from words in two ways – through negation, as the noun is said to be neuter because it is neither masculine nor feminine, and through confirmation, that is through the property derived from that which is expressed by the name itself, as the pronoun is so named because it is put “in the place of a noun” – for this reason, Priscian demonstrates how the participle accepts its name from them by adding: DEPENDING THROUGH CONFIRMATION. Then he uses a simile to demonstrate that, because it is confirmed by or conformed to them, it ought to be placed after them. BUT JUST AS we place THE NEUTER AFTER THE MASCULINE AND FEMININE, as it is the NEGATION OF THEM, when ordering the genders, so too after the noun and verb we put their confirmation, i.e., the participle.

In the end, our modern editions (my own included) of such hyperabbreviated lemmatized commentaries present to their readers texts very different than what their original readers would

have encountered. This is surely for the better. But when we consider the “cultural technique” of commentary – its material practices of abbreviation, collation, and even inky interventions by readers or auditors in the manuscript of the target text(s), and the network of textual variants, previous commentaries, and even tongues of other *doctores* that are assumed, assembled, and sometimes confused by both authors and scribes – we would do well to remember that our modern editions do not just sanitize, regularize, and reconstruct “texts within texts”: they fundamentally change the modes of interaction and the kinds of reading (and writing) techniques that the twelfth-century lemmatized commentary assumed. They threaten to flatten out and gradually erase what I have elsewhere called the “riotous contingency” of medieval commentary traditions. And isn’t this, at least in part, what attracts us to them in the first place?

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29 Hicks, “Editing Medieval Commentaries on Martianus,” 143.