"Le carte immateriali. Filologia d'autore e testi nativi digitali" Pavia, 11–13 dicembre 2023

The conference *Le carte immateriali. Filologia d'autore e testi nativi digitali* ["Immaterial Papers. Authorial philology and Born-digital Texts"] was held 11–13th December 2023, at the Aula Magna of the University of Pavia. It represented the last event of the initiative *Autografestival. Il Festival delle scritture a mano*, organized to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the *Centro per gli studi sulla tradizione manoscritta di autori moderni e contemporanei* (Centro Manoscritti). The conference was conceived with the intention of examining in depth the issues related to the preservation and management of what, in her recent and acclaimed book, Emmanuela Carbé defined as *digitale d'autore*,[1] with which the Manuscript Centre has begun to deal since acquiring archives of the *Pavia Archivi Digitali* (PAD) project (2021–2022). As its creator, the Italian journalist Beppe Severgnini, recalled, PAD was launched in 2009 with the aim of preserving and managing the digital materials produced by contemporary authors. It is no coincidence that the first national conference on the preservation and management of born-digital materials was held precisely in Pavia, considering that, as pointed out by Giuseppe Antonelli, President of the Centro Manoscritti, the University of Pavia proposes itself as one of the driving centres of the new season of studies calling for a more systematic investigation of the relationships between literary writing and digital technologies. Indeed, in the face of the increasingly pervasive use of digital media for writing activities, the need to analyze the transformations that have affected the forms of expression developed by authors and, therefore, the history of literary production is urgent. For this reason, Professor Antonelli (University of Pavia) opened the conference with a presentation in which he referred to some of the main milestones in the history of literary word processing in Italy, testifying to the use of computers for writing activities for more than forty years.[2] In spite of this, in Italy the path towards

1. Carbè 2023.
2. The first two Italian works written entirely by computer to be published were *Storia della Filosofia Greca: I presocratici* by Luciano De Crescenzo (Mondadori 1983) and *Dio e il computer* by Roberto Vacca (Bompiani 1984).

the definition of methodologies useful to overcome the critical issues linked to the management of archives containing digital materials is still almost at the beginning, and only a few institutions have begun to deal with the problem in a systematic way. The conference in Pavia thus served as a fundamental moment to highlight the urgency of the work to be done, which is also outlined as a commitment to the community: in fact, postponing the adoption of strategies that allow for the adequate preservation of born-digital authorialrecords would mean risking the irreparable loss of a large portion of our cultural memory. As observed by Annalisa Rossi, superintendent for the archives of the Lombardy Region, these reflections become necessary also considering that the digital medium implies a confrontation with a form of materiality that requires spaces other than the linear metres of shelves and, in some ways, more assiduous curatorship. In fact, as Christopher (Cal) Lee (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) has pointed out, digital materials require an approach that can overcome the problem of technological obsolescence and the loss of data integrity, so as to preserve their persistence in a context of continuous technological evolution and not to compromise access to information. Therefore, in order to be able to continue studying the archives of contemporary intellectuals, the traditional tools of archivists should be combined with more in-depth analysis on the nature of digital materials, supports and platforms used by authors, as well as a theoretical and methodological approach adapted to the specific characteristics of digital materials: in fact, since we are facing a new paradigm, the primary question becomes one of method.

In Italy, an interesting study on the definition of born-digital author materials preservation workflow was conducted within the pioneering *Pavia Archivi Digitali* (PAD) project; in this regard, as described by Lucia Giagnolini (University of Bologna/University of Pavia), a transformation of the original workflow has recently become necessary to solve some critical issues, such as the use of proprietary software, and to simplify the nature of the system. In the new workflow, elaborated in March 2023 and based on the reference model for an *Open Archival Information System* (OAIS), all phases of archive management are brought together within a single application integrated with open-source software libraries and equipped with an integrated suggestion system to facilitate the work of the operators, also with a view to a handover. On the international front, Justine Mann (University of East Anglia) described the activities of the project *New Ways of Collecting, Collaborating and Curating: Towards a Centre for Contemporary Poetry in the Archive*, coordinated by the British Archive for Contemporary Writing, which aims to promote interdisciplinary and

collaborative methodologies for archiving and managing the digital author materials in the archives of some emerging poets. In addition, similarly to PAD, the project aims to raise authors' awareness of the issues related to the management of born-digital materials. Brenna Edwards (Harry Ransom Center) and Callum McKean (British Library) also spoke on the topic of the acquisition and management of archives containing digital author materials, respectively describing the evolution of the procedures implemented by the Harry Ransom Centre and the British Library.

The born-digital archives acquired in recent years in Italy and elsewhere have shown that one of the problems for those who intend to do authorial philology of born-digital texts is the overabundance of materials: in fact, given the ease with which bits are archived, with no space limits, dozens of versions of a work are also preserved. Therefore, we are already in the era described by Paola Italia and Giulia Raboni as a future in which texts would no longer be made of paper but of bytes and pixels, and for which it would be necessary to think of a new philology,[3] which, for example, also requires a confrontation with elements external to the author's will, such as the ranking algorithm, whose rules, even if unknown to the writer, can influence the creative act; in fact, in the phase preceding the actual writing, authors often document themselves through search engines. This element was highlighted very clearly by Federico Milone (University of Pavia), who described some specificities of a philological analysis conducted on the files of the novel *Sirene* (Einaudi 2007) by Laura Pugno, who gave her archive to the Centro Manoscritti in 2023. In particular, Milone observed that, in addition to an early draft of the novel, datable to April 2005, the archive also contains documents in which there are materials of a different nature, found during a documentation phase carried out through search engines at least as early as January 2005. Added to this is the fact that, as already observed by Jacques Derrida, whereas previously the author's interventions left a kind of scar on the paper, in the era of word processing the traces of the writing process evaporate immediately.[4] However, in the light of today's perspectives, Laurent Alonso, Aurèle Crasson, Jean-Louise Lebrave, and Jeremy Pedrazzi (*Institut des textes et manuscrits modernes*) presented the results of a forensic analysis conducted on some of Derrida's floppy disks containing files relating to the novel *Le Toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy* (Editions Galilée 2000), through which they attempted to reconstruct the relationships between the files and, more generally, the creative process of

3. Italia-Raboni 2010, 35.
4. Cfr. Bowlby 2005, 19–32.

the author, who, for fear of losing the data, multiplied the copies of the texts he worked on; in this way, a redundancy was generated that also spread to different media. In a similar way, Lamyk Bekius (University of Antwerp) presented the results of a study conducted on Herman de Coninck's floppy disks, which were given to the Letterenhuis in 1998, and on the Word documents related to Bart Moeyaert's trilogy *Het hele heaven* (Querido 2020). The work made it possible to access the files and their metadata and, therefore, to investigate the relationship between the content of the analogue texts and that of the files, where possible, and the phases of composition of the texts, through the identification of textual blocks modified or deleted by the authors or the presence of files that testify to the structures originally conceived for the edited volumes. In the Italian context, on the other hand, forensic analyses were conducted on some floppy disks of Franco Fortini, hosted by the Humanities Area Library of the University of Siena. In particular, among the elements highlighted by Emmanuela Carbé (University of Siena), was the effort to identify strategies to extract data from the often very complex mappings offered by the *finder.dat* file, created by Mac computers and available because Fortini's floppy disks were formatted in DOS. In this way, for example, it was possible to recover a date, November 6, 1996, which testifies to a modification made to the files two years after Fortini's death; this is not surprising because the computer was also used by the author's wife, who carried out a considerable operation to save the materials. In general, the projects described have pointed out the importance of paying more attention to the specific materiality of born-digital texts and the need to begin to desire knowledge of elements such as the software used by authors or the data contained in storage media. Perhaps this might not change the critical interpretation of literary texts, but who can ensure that the files do not contain versions or textual forms lacking correspondence in other analogue testimonies? Furthermore, Bekius's talk allowed us to reflect on the importance of the temporal dimension in literary studies. This was made possible through the description of a keystroke logging experiment conducted on the materials relating to *Mondini*, a short story by David Troch, by means of *Inputlog*, a tool developed at the University of Antwerp that allows all types of keyboard input and mouse movements to be recorded, in combination with a timestamp, thus returning a detailed temporal dimension of the writing process. In this sense, the frontier of nanogenesis, which places the author's movement in the text at the centre by means of the sequentiality of writing actions, could enrich genetic investigations and hypotheses on the writing process, making it possible to answer new questions, for instance

concerning the days on which the writing sessions of a text took place. In *Mondini*'s case, this involved eight days, during which thirty writing sessions were recorded, lasting a total of approximately twenty-seven hours.

The transition from analogue to digital also involved a great deal of communicative material; however, while there is a willingness to recognize the full dignity of the e-mail archive, at the same time a culture of conscious custody of this source has not been acquired, despite the fact that a large part of institutional and private communication is entrusted to it. This aspect was emphasized by Anna Rovella (University of Calabria), according to whom an activity of classification of e-mail messages carried out by the producer also through a different involvement of the services made available by providers, e.g. those for the management of unwanted mail, could facilitate the return of complete, documented, and reliable e-mail archives. In fact, considering that today e-mails make up a large part of personal archives, it becomes necessary, and urgent, to define coherent and consistent preservation methodologies both of messages, whose nature is fragile and ephemeral, and of e-mail accounts, where messages constitute only a documentary part, and are deactivated if not used for a certain period of time. In this regard, Stefano Allegrezza (University of Bologna) described some critical issues related to the preservation of personal digital memories, including the lack of a valid sorting criterion from an archival point of view and the tendency to distribute the cores of one's personal archive over several storage systems, which, however, upon the death of the producer can only be accessed if credentials are known. This poses the problem of digital inheritance, for the regulation of which, as pointed out by lawyer Alessandro D'Arminio Monforte (NetworkLex), there are as yet no specific rules, even though countless resources have appeared in the wake of the digital revolution that are subject to inheritance (emails, photographs, cryptocurrencies, documents with personal or patrimonial content, digital works of art). Indeed, the issue of digital inheritance is complicated by many elements, including the fact that, for instance, for the acquisition of a virtual space or an email account the user signs a contract with a service provider, whose clauses stipulate the termination of the contract in the event of the user's death and the impossibility of transferring the account by will to heirs. In addition, there are problems linked to institutions such as the prohibition of agreements as to succession, which prevent people from using systems other than a will to dispose of their inheritance.

In conclusion, the conference in Pavia highlighted the necessity required by born-digital materials to bring together the perspectives of scholars from different domains, with the aim of developing best practices,

identifying standards for the preservation and study of these particular documents, and making authors aware of the problems that born-digital materials entail. Moreover, since we are dealing with objects that are quite different from those that traditional authorial philology has dealt with, the need has arisen to ask what kind of philological tradition should be used for the study of born-digital texts: in this regard, perhaps the tradition of *critique génétique*, which has focused on the media and the information that the media carry, would seem to be more in tune with the issues raised by these types of materials. At the same time, it is appropriate to ask whether the tools we have today for digital philology might also be suitable for conducting a study of digital native texts or whether, instead, we need to define the use of specific software and new study methodologies. These are still open questions, for which there are already prospects, and the hope is that the conference in Pavia was the first in a series of annual meetings to discuss these issues.

Carmen Ragusa
University of Siena

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