FROM HANDWRITING TO FOOTPRINTING

TEXT AND HERITAGE IN THE AGE OF CLIMATE CRISIS

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Conclusion

While I have spent most of my adult life archiving, publishing, writing, and editing, convinced that advances in knowledge are facilitated by digital media, the accelerating climate crisis has moved the parameters of what I have always considered my vocation in a way that is fundamental for the values that are at the heart of my vision of textual studies. The extent to which my inner orientation was shaken by this shift in the way I conceived my mission as a scholar called for a new form of enquiry. For once, I did not publish a blog post, a scholarly article, a series of tweets, or an edition of an old manuscript — in the hope, maybe, of reaching new readers and opening new transmission chains, but also, certainly, to find peace and reconcile with the scholarly choices I had made across the years. There is something contradictory in writing a book about the fact that so much is changing about texts and books that I do not really know how long the book will be there for an audience to read, in what form, or for whom. But it mattered to me to shed light on the consistency between considerations on environmental issues and reflexive work on digital media. In this book, I wanted to show that philology, Open Access, and environmental evolutions are intimately intertwined.

This called for detours. I revisited many of my earlier publications in a condensed form in the first chapters of this book. The European perspective I bring to such topics as archiving, text constitution, or the advent of a publisher-based book market is strongly connected to the objects I know best: early modern manuscripts, scholarly books, and artefacts encapsulating the canons of literary history. Considering them in their digital dimension opened new perspectives on the theories and artefacts of my early career, even more so in the environmental context of more recent years. With my education and my training, I am not able to offer more than what I think remains a traditional European perspective. I am also aware that I have only superficially touched on economic and legal aspects that would add a decisive dimension to the argument, just as my scattered educational suggestions lack a theoretical basis. But for all that is not in this book, I still hope that what there is can open a much

needed dialogue, and bring to the question of access to text in the context of the climate crisis the attention it deserves.

Considering the opposition between nature and culture has long been a theoretical, if not rhetorical, topic of interest in north-western countries. Technological advances have now become so dominant in the regulation of interpersonal relationships that natural physical time and space tend to lose their mental substance as a framework of reference. Drawing a direct line between elaborate technological artefacts such as digital editions and the natural resources they require in order to be manufactured is not instinctive, nor is it culturally fostered in north-western countries. It was my goal here to uncover all the intermediary steps that digital philology can provide in order to make this process visible and to raise awareness of the emergency there is to show it more clearly. By creating cultural artefacts, we destroy natural resources: this finding is so crushing that it can lead to the conclusion that cultural activities, at large, are destructive — a similar predicament to that of activists spattering soup on Van Gogh's Sunflowers. But, like them, I do not want to break the glass protection that preserves the artwork.

With this book, I wanted to show that as a society, even as a global one, we have been able to build the material and intellectual conditions to provide access to community-building cultural artefacts, especially text. It is up to today's actors to turn it into an asset in the context of the climate crisis and to envision a future where access to text is a common good that even more societies can rely on than it is the case today. We know how to make access to text sustainable in the middle and long run with hybrid settings building on physical artefacts and the digital forms of their representation. We know that in order to make it work, we need to offer dedicated training and erect infrastructures to preserve and distribute information that will be accessible to all. And we know there is no time to lose.

Having reached the end of this journey through text, yet another question is still waiting for an answer. What should I do with the old papers I found in the family home? My mother would throw them away, my daughter would want to keep all of them, but she does not know how to do so. It is pretty much up to me to decide, and to choose what remains in the drawer, what goes online, and what will only be a vague

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memory in the stories I tell my children and hope that they pass them on to the next generation.