Textual Cultures of Medieval Italy

Edited by William Robins

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS
Toronto Buffalo London

Toronto Buffalo London
www.utppublishing.com
Printed in Canada

ISBN 978-1-4426-4272-0 (cloth)

Printed on acid-free, 100% post-consumer recycled paper
with vegetable-based inks.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Textual Cultures of Medieval Italy/ edited by William Robins.
Based on papers presented at the 41st Conference on
Editorial Problems held at the University of Toronto,
Toronto, Ont., from Nov. 6–8th, 2005.

Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-4426-4272-0

1. Italian literature – To 1400 – Criticism, Textual.
2. Transmission of texts – Italy – History – To 1500.
3. Manuscripts, Medieval – Italy.
I. Robins, William Randolph, 1964– II. Conference on
Editorial Problems (41st : 2005 : University of Toronto)

PQ4065.T49.2011 850.9'001 C2010-908010-6

University of Toronto Press acknowledges the financial assistance to its publishing program of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council.

Canada Council for the Arts | Conseil des Arts du Canada | ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO

University of Toronto Press acknowledges the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund for its publishing activities.

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WILLIAM ROBINS

Introduction

The essays in this volume arise out of papers given at the conference 'Textual Cultures of Medieval Italy: Editorial and Other Approaches' held at the University of Toronto on 6–8 November 2005 as the forty-first Conference on Editorial Problems. Looking back, the conference can be seen as one sign of the emergence over the course of 2005 and 2006 of 'textual cultures' as a significant, mainstream critical term. During this period in the United Kingdom a conference in Glasgow announced medieval English 'textual cultures' as its theme, while another in Stirling addressed 'textual culture' (in the singular) within English literary studies more generally; in the United States the Society for Textual Scholarship relaunched its official journal (previously *Text*) as *Textual Cultures*; and here in Canada we saw the inauguration of the Electronic Textual Cultures Lab at the University of Victoria and of the research group Transmission, Translation and Transformation in Medieval Textual Cultures at McGill.[1] The term 'print culture' had by then established itself as a catchword in the field of Book History, and to some extent the notion of 'textual cultures' can be seen as a reaction to that rather monolithic conceptualization; there was a feeling (acutely felt among medievalists, as well as among those working with digital technologies) that the time had come to broaden that field beyond the culture of the printed book (and beyond schematic oppositions between 'print culture' and 'scribal culture'), to work out a less deterministic set of propositions about how texts influence behaviour, and to announce our interest in a much messier plurality of textual forms and their cultural effects.[2] Certainly, the formulation signals a desire, at least among anglophone students of pre-print societies, for an ever greater rapprochement between the relatively abstract analyses of textual theory, intellectual history, and the study of ideologies on the one hand,

and the more concretely inflected specialties of editing, palaeography, codicology, and material philology on the other. As the plural form 'cultures' implies, the goal is not to speak of textuality (not even of pre-modern textuality) as something uniform, but rather to illuminate specific textual habits: to gauge how ideological and conceptual formations may have intersected with (may have enabled or been enabled by, may have disrupted or been disrupted by) the techniques through which particular sorts of texts were produced, transmitted, and interpreted.[3]

At Toronto, the term helped us reconsider an annual conference that has for decades been devoted to issues of editorial method – the Conference on Editorial Problems – and to adapt that venue to showcase the growing interest among practitioners of various disciplines in understanding how medieval texts served as sites of cultural production.[4] This overarching concern with the cultural work performed by texts (an important consideration for any editor of a text) can be approached in equally valid ways by editorial methods and by other modes of historical contextualization. The idea of the conference was to bring together scholars from different fields – literary study, history of culture, art history, legal history, philology – to present case studies on specific moments of textual practice in medieval Italy. Some of the contributions highlighted questions of editorial method, but the majority opted for other historical approaches to illuminate their case. Each contribution provided an example of methods that were specific to a given discipline, in keeping with the aim of studying precise cultural configurations, making the conference not so much interdisciplinary as pluri-disciplinary in its scope.

The essays that follow, all of them reworked for inclusion in this volume, could be arranged in various orders any one of which would highlight certain connections among the contributions. They might, for example, be ordered according to the chronology or geography of the phenomena studied, or according to the academic discipline through which those phenomena have been approached, or according to a set of historical themes. In the end, we have opted for an arrangement that suggests some of the basic orientations to be found in the study of medieval Italian textual cultures, with essays paired in four groups after an opening historiographical review of the state of the field. Texts (medieval or otherwise) consist of both an immaterial aspect (structured in the minds of readers and writers through literary form, propositional content, and conceptual patterns) and a material aspect (vocalized sound, ink on a page, etc.). In the first pair of essays, yoked under the

rubric Forms of Textual Exchange, the interpretive emphasis falls more on the ideational aspect of texts, with a critical orientation that accordingly surveys and assesses the cultural evolution of particular discursive forms over the course of several decades. In the second pair, Materials of Textual Communication, the balance shifts more toward the material aspect, highlighting the visual and aural aspects of medieval textuality as important factors at work in the production and reception of texts. Approaches to medieval textuality, especially editorial methods, also customarily distinguish between two general species of texts: first, documentary 'acts' produced in the course of institutional administration (especially when an act stands as an official record or executive order), which are caught up in a tight web of legal, political, governmental, and archival apparatuses; and second, texts which are not juridical or contractual (for example, literary texts or scientific writings), and which harness narrative or discursive or expressive modes for bringing writers and readers into shared textual practices.[5] The essays that make up the third pairing in this collection, under Administrative Textual Cultures, present scenarios in which administrative forms of textuality were operative: the authors explain the workings of the institutions in which these texts took effect, offering documentary transcriptions of noteworthy texts. The final pair, under Collaborative Textual Cultures, examines textual practices where authorial contributions were joined by other voices in the collaborative production of textual meaning, with a critical orientation that explicitly attends to textual change, adaptation, and reception, reflecting upon their implications for editorial method. Such an arrangement in no way aims to map out a general paradigm of critical approaches, but attempts rather to cut across traditional disciplinary divides with some thought-provoking juxtapositions of early and later medieval situations, of Latinate and vernacular writings, and of textual cultures of different geographical and institutional milieux.

The pluri-disciplinary characteristics of the current state of the field are described in the first chapter by William Robins, who provides an overview of the study of medieval Italian textuality. Here a case is made for seeing medieval Italy as particularly precocious and complex with respect to the kinds of textual cultures to which it gave rise, and to see the scholarship on these cultures as rich, multiform, and currently undergoing an interesting set of shifts of emphasis.

In the first pair of essays, Ronald Witt and Christopher Kleinhenz examine the development of two new forms of written expression, accounting for the cultural impact of ways a writer might address the

recipient of an epistolary or poetic text. Witt asks why, in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, grammatical education based on study of pagan classics was supplanted, in Italy, by a new rhetorical-legal mode of schooling that took conventional, efficient letter writing (*ars dictaminis*) as its main basis. The inculcation of impersonal, simple prose composition, he argues, was a direct consequence of the circumstances brought on by the movement toward church reform during the Investiture Struggle. The questioning of the morality of earlier grammatical teaching, the disruption of cathedral schools which made possible new private teaching establishments that focused on law and letter writing, and the vibrant circulation of propaganda to win the hearts and minds of the populations of northern Italian cities: all of these developments democratized education, as Italians endeavoured to extend their practical literacy into the sphere of political debate and rhetorical communication. One genre of lyric poetry in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries especially designed for exchanges was the *tenzone*, or exchange of sonnets through which poets entered into dialogue about current topics or about metapoetic concerns. Kleinhenz surveys this practice from the poets of the court of Frederick II in Sicily to the *tenzoni* of Dante and Cino da Pistoia, attentive to what these poems have to tell us about the way that poetic acquaintanceships and textual communities were sustained. Especially interesting is the way that the mode of exchange nourished in the *tenzoni* also crops up in meta-literary dialogues found in other works such as Dante's *Vita nuova* and *Commedia*. These two essays, which are both concerned with the circulation of ideas about textual exchange, survey the works and writers that contributed to the consolidation of these new practices of the *ars dictaminis* and the *tenzone*.

The essays by Linda Safran and Maria Predelli tackle aspects of what we might call the mass-media or multi-media contexts in which texts were actualized in the public sphere, looking in particular at the intersection of writing with visual and performative modes. Bringing an art historian's eye to carved and painted texts of the Salento from the eighth to the fourteenth centuries, Safran, through a combination of sociolinguistic analyses and an elucidation of visual and spatial features, outlines a variety of functions that these texts took on as forms of public discourse. Through the determined spatial setting of these texts, commissioners, craftsmen, and audience members harnessed the visual potential of public texts as a way of intervening in social and religious discourses, even as the multilingual context of the Salento – which has left us texts in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, many of which also show

interference from the nascent Italian vernacular – complicated their strategies for expressing individual and community identities. The poetic genre of the *cantare* that Predelli examines was similarly shaped by a tension between the presence of written textual forms on the one hand and by performative recitation to local audiences on the other. Predelli looks closely at the *mise-en-page* of poems in *ottava rima* from fourteenth-century Tuscany, suggesting that the layout of the poems encodes important information about the extent to which they were expected to be works for reading or works for singing, arguing that the genre contained these two rather different impulses from its earliest instances. These two essays attend to spatial, visual, and performative modes of interaction within which written texts – both those exposed to public view in epigraphy or frescoes, as well as those enmeshed in oral traditions of recitation – took on significance within wide public communities that included literate and illiterate, as well as elite and popular elements.

The contributions by Nicholas Everett and Luca Boschetto examine the way in which specific textual practices took effect within local administrative contexts, focusing closely on the complex exchange between local needs and foreign currents and contexts. Everett looks in particular at how Paulinus of Aquileia in the 790s negotiated between the centralizing energies of the Carolingian court and the local traditions of Italian ecclesiastical administration when he devised a new oath for candidate bishops, the *Sponsio episcoporum*, a vow that was sworn in an oral ceremony as well as signed as a written contract. By editing this text anew, discussing its manuscript context, and tracing its employment of earlier Italian documents, this chapter clarifies how Italian ecclesiasts harnessed to their own ends the practical literacy of their communities in the early Middle Ages. The agents of cultural exchange that Boschetto focuses on are notaries, and in particular those who came to Florence from elsewhere in Italy during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to serve at the Mercanzia (the merchant court), where they were required to record documents not in Latin, as they had been trained, but in the vernacular – and in the Florentine vernacular at that. Boschetto traces the reasons behind the employment of the vernacular at the Mercanzia, which was demanded by the kind of legal textuality crucial to the merchant elite; he then demonstrates the effect that this requirement had on the language of the foreign notaries, who were gradually initiated into the lexical and phonological peculiarities of Florentine speech, turning them into important emissaries for the spread of Florentine literary and cultural, and not just legal, customs.

In the volume's final pair of essays, Dominique Poirel and Susanne Lepsius focus on written texts that were reworked and transformed through the collaboration of many hands in their circulation, pointing out how communities of readers define themselves in relation to texts that they modify and keep alive. Poirel's detective work on the *Liber Angelae* of Angela of Foligno not only uncovers the textual problems generated as members of the male Franciscan community of Assisi rendered into normative Latin discourse Angela's vernacular record of her visions and spiritual advice, but it also reveals the stages by which that community used the *Liber Angelae* gradually to expand their store of memories of Angela after her death in 1309. The result was a text in continual evolution, gradually reconfiguring the tension that obtained between Angela's own anxieties about her approaching death and her followers' expectations that her ending would be exemplarily saintly, enabling a drama of textual collaboration involving Angela and the Franciscan brothers. Lepsius delves into the transmission of a late legal treatise by Bartolo of Sassoferrato, which entered into circulation at different stages, and was left unfinished at the author's death in 1357; study of the surviving manuscripts reveals how, gradually, later readers brought the treatise in line with the citational practices expected by the community of legal experts, while also adapting the text to reflect more individual interests. For texts like the *Liber Angelae* and Bartolo's *Tractatus testimoniorum*, the traditional editorial distinction between an authoritative original and its later, corrupt scribal witnesses is troubled by such collaborative processes of alteration and supplementation, raising many thorny problems of editorial practice that both of these essays, by suggesting practical editorial solutions, take pains to address.

NOTES

1 For the Quadrivium Symposium in Medieval English Textual Cultures held on 3–4 November 2005 at the University of Glasgow, see http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/quadrivium/. For the Textual Culture Research Group at Stirling, including the Textual Culture Conference of 18–20 July 2005, see http://www.textual-culture.stir.ac.uk. The inaugural issue of *Textual Cultures: Text, Contexts, Interpretation*, edited by H. Wayne Storey, appeared in 2006. For the Electronic Textual Cultures Lab at the University of Victoria, initiated in 2005, see the home page at http://etcl/uvic.ca. For Transmission, Translation and Transformation in Medieval Textual Cultures at McGill University, initiated in 2006, see http://ttt.mcgill.ca.

2 The term 'print culture' first gained currency through Elizabeth Eisenstein's *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). For objections, see especially Joseph Dane, 'The Myth of Print Culture,' in *The Myth of Print Culture: Essays on Evidence, Textuality, and Bibliographical Method* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 10–31.

3 For attempts to define and explain the critical significance of the term in the singular form ('textual culture'), see *Textual Cultures* 2.2 (Autumn 2007), a special issue dedicated to definitions of textual culture, although the claims to be mapping out 'a new intellectual field' are rather overstated by Joe Bray and Ruth Evans, 'Introduction: What Is Textual Culture,' 1–8 at 1. For reservations regarding the novelty of this 'shift in nomenclature,' see David C. Greetham, 'Philology Redux?' *Ecdotica* 3 (2006), 103–27 at 103. The term 'textual cultures' had been gaining currency among medievalists for several years prior to 2005; see, for example, Martin Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture: 'Grammatica' and Literary Theory, 350–1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), as well as the announcement in the first volume of *New Medieval Literatures* 1 (1997) that describes the publication as 'a new annual of work on medieval textual cultures.'

4 For the scope and history of the annual conference, which has been held on a different theme every year since 1965, see the website at http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/cep.

5 See, for example, the guidelines recently put out by the École nationale des chartes, which dedicate separate volumes to 'Actes et documents d'archives' and to all other texts, which are discussed as 'Textes littéraires'; *Conseils pour l'édition des textes médievaux*, vol. 1, *Conseils géneraux*; vol. 2, *Actes et documents d'archives*; vol. 3, *Texes littéraires* (Paris: Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques – École nationale des chartes, 2001–2).

WILLIAM ROBINS

1 The Study of Medieval Italian Textual Cultures

Writing in Medieval Italy

The premodern period, according to general surveys of technologies of communication, is framed, on the one hand, by the profound transformations brought about by the introduction of writing and, on the other hand, by the similarly deep transformations attendant upon the arrival of printing with movable type. Within this period – the chronological limits vary considerably from one culture to another – the situation of medieval Europe is characterized above all by a constant and productive interaction between written and oral modes of communication and, as far as the technology of writing is concerned, by the rise to prominence of the codex format of the book, by the gradual evolution of documentary practices within church and secular bureaucracies, and by a slow and steady rise in the importance of practical literacy. For several centuries after the breakdown of the western Roman Empire, control over the use of books and documents remained largely in the hands of a learned, ecclesiastical elite, who across Europe shared a common training in Latin letters and who possessed as a common focus of textual interpretation the sacred texts of Christian scripture. From about the twelfth century on, the castles and courts of the landed nobility constituted another sphere where the practices of writing were increasingly put to use, both in Latin and in the various vernacular languages of Europe. Members of the 'third estate' of working men and women – including merchants, guildsmen, and farmers – began to harness writing for their own practical and recreational purposes toward the end of the Middle Ages and in increasing measure throughout the early modern and modern periods.[1]

Such are the main points of the general overview of the period for Europe as a whole, although in fact there was considerable regional variation in the ways in which people made use of or resisted written texts. Furthermore, cutting across these regional variations were several textual practices specific to professions possessing a strong interregional coherence of their own – the textual habits of lawyers, say, or itinerant preachers. Premodern Italy presents an especially rich array of these discrete textual cultures (regional ones, as well as professional ones): no other medieval region of similar size surpasses Italy for the number and variety of distinct habits of writing that took root there.[2] The perpetuation of the function of the Roman *tabelliones* by medieval *notarii* guaranteed a much higher degree of practical literacy in early medieval Italy than elsewhere in Europe, and this practical literacy was continually extended into new economic and political spheres.[3] In part, the variety of textual cultures that emerged was due to geographical divisions that separated parts of the peninsula from each other, with attendant differences in language and political structures; these divisions were never overcome by a centralized system of rule akin to the power of the monarchy in England or France, so local modes of administration remained remarkably heterogeneous, as did local expectations about how individuals might interact with each other (in formal or in informal settings) with the aid of texts. In part, this proliferation of behaviours involving documents and books was due to the economic vibrancy of medieval Italian states, where powerful incentives led members of all classes to document their goods and transactions and to ensure that the requisite educational and legal systems were available to meet their needs. Numerous other factors were at work as well – from the unique kind of socio-textual authority exerted by the papacy in Rome, to the early introduction of paper-making – in making Italian communities especially precocious and multiform in finding ways in which texts could be put to use.[4]

Even if a survey were to limit itself to those modes of literate behaviour that originated in Italy and then eventually spread throughout Europe to become characteristic of the medieval period as a whole, the field would be wide. The importance of *lectio divina* as part of the manual labour and common life of cenobitical monasteries was given special prominence during the sixth century, above all at Saint Benedict's abbey of Monte Cassino; the Benedictine rule stipulated the need not only for liturgical prayers and dinner-time recitations, but also for the continual, ruminative encounter with texts: 'Idleness is the enemy of the soul. Therefore, the brothers should have specified periods for manual labour

as well as for prayerful reading.'[5] Reading manuscripts, and copying them, would be a central feature of European monasticism largely through the influence of these early Italian establishments. In a very different sphere, the administrative apparatus of the papal chancery was crucial for determining the nature of church-state relations in the early Middle Ages, and, from the early thirteenth century on, it served as the model *par excellence* for the record-keeping operations of later secular governments across Europe.[6] The consolidation of myriad forms of canon and civil law into a manageable corpus was set in motion in Bologna by Gratian and his followers around 1100, inspiring subsequent scholastic endeavours at encyclopedic compilation, and initiating, through the requisite apprenticeship into commentary traditions, the institutional framework for Europe's first university.[7] Another striking example of the wide-ranging impact of a medieval Italian textual innovation is provided by double-entry bookkeeping, first appearing in the accounts of late medieval Italian merchants, eventually spreading throughout the world, and without which the protocapitalist and capitalist enterprises of late medieval and early modern society would have been almost unimaginable.[8]

Yet alongside such a survey we would also want to acknowledge several textual practices that remained specific to their Italian locale. Take, for example, the huge, parchment Exultet Rolls, on which the texts of the Easter Vigil service were oriented in one direction in order to be recited by officiating deacons while the accompanying and often lavishly illuminated pictures were oriented the opposite way so as to be viewed by the congregation; these rolls were produced, from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries, only in southern Italy.[9] Also specifically Italian was the shape that writing took in the hands of Italian merchants: schools that were dedicated to teaching basic arithmetic, measuring, and literacy multiplied, while the *registro* format of book construction served as a vehicle for both accounts and personal diaries; there emerged 'a separate and specialist technical culture solely in the vernacular language,' the hallmark of which is its own characteristic script, *lettera mercantesca*.[10]

Hundreds of other tantalizing phenomena – whether of local or international significance, whether fleeting or lasting – would also have to be touched upon in any survey of medieval Italian textualities. It would be almost compulsory, for instance, to mention how Augustine, sojourning in Milan, was astonished to see Bishop Ambrose reading without moving his lips, one of our earliest notices of silent reading in the West: 'When he was reading, his eyes ran over the page and his heart perceived the sense, but his voice and tongue were silent.'[11]

Equally noteworthy would be the gradual process by which Guido of Arezzo and a succession of monks established the standard, writable musical staff which so decisively changed musical education and performance.[12] Dante Alighieri would constitute an obligatory point of reference, not only because he produced the first defence for writing in the vernacular, but also because he put forward the claim, through his own poetry, that vernacular versifiers could be accorded the same status of 'poet' previously reserved to classical authors.[13] As for significant developments in the history of the book, attention might well turn to the *pecia* system that arose for copying university texts in the late Middle Ages, out of which emerged an organized system of book production that linked stationers to a book-buying public.[14] Nor should one overlook the new letter-forms that fifteenth-century humanists introduced for handwritten and printed texts, forms so successful that they even persist in the principal fonts – 'roman' and 'italic' – in which this volume is printed.[15]

The Historical Semiotics of Textual Cultures

There has always been considerable interest in learning how medieval texts were produced and circulated. Indeed, the reception of medieval culture, at least in the academic community, has been inseparable from scrutiny of the actual books and documents that have come down to us. An imposing edifice of catalogues of medieval manuscripts, indices of incunabula, and aids to archival organization was erected by the erudite antiquarians of the Enlightenment. Especially important contributions were made by great librarians of Italy, such as Leone Allacci (1588–1669) at the Vatican library, Ludovico Muratori (1672–1750) at the Biblioteca Estense in Modena, Giovanni Lami (1697–1770) at the Biblioteca Riccardiana, and Angelo Maria Bandini (1726–1803) at the Biblioteca Laurenziana; not only did these men establish impressively scientific cataloguing methods, they also penned learned studies of medieval literary, religious, and political culture. By the second half of the nineteenth century a very different framework for research had emerged, bolstered equally by the organization of humanities disciplines within the modern university system, and by the energy unleashed in the service of national unification, thanks to which new importance was attached to Italy's medieval past. A glance at any issue of the major journals begun at that time, such as the *Archivio storico italiano* (begun in 1842) or the *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* (begun in 1883) makes clear just how much the discovery, description, and critical evaluation

of documents lay at the very core of historical reflection. Even when, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, fields such as art history and literature shifted away from empiricist, historical emphases, the scientific reliability of manuscript studies was being greatly improved by technological advances in photoreproduction;[16] these advances were further consolidated by institutional commitments to palaeographical training (the Vatican's school of palaeography was established in 1884, that at the University of Rome in 1887), and to Medieval Latin as a distinct area of research.[17] Nevertheless, it seems fair to state that the discourses of higher learning assigned a decidedly subsidiary status to the study of past writing practices. For historians interested in events, documents remained important above all for the way their contents shed light upon what was happening at a particular place and time; understanding how a document was constructed was meaningful only to the extent of ensuring that historians not be misled about its evidentiary value. In classical philology and vernacular literary studies, too, the study of manuscripts, writing practices, and textual transmission generally figured as ancillary to historical and stylistic evaluations. The study of writing, and of how written texts functioned, was seen as a necessary prelude to interpretation, but it was not seen, within most fields, as constituting in itself a central concern of historical interpretation.

Profound transformations in intellectual life in the decades after the Second World War encouraged serious reconsideration of the way in which texts take on meaning within societies. Among the generation of scholars at work after the war, several made bold, new claims about the social imperatives embedded in past forms of textuality: Erich Auerbach's analysis of *sermo humilis* in late antiquity and Hans Baron's political interpretation of Italian humanism are just two well-known examples.[18] More thoroughgoing transformations of the disciplines came a decade or two later, with changes brought on by the anthropological, sociological, and linguistic 'turns' in the humanities. The anthropological turn, besides introducing new methodological questions about interpreting cultural formations, called into question prevailing Western assumptions about the neutrality of writing and the benefits of literacy, especially by inquiring into the oral bases of communication in non-Western societies. Lord and Parry's recognition of the formulaic re-elaboration of oral storytelling; Levi-Strauss's arguments about the power differential that is set into motion by the introduction of writing; Luria's cultural-psychological analysis of the cognitive patterns of non-literate peasants; and Goody's and Ong's suggestive thoughts about 'the

consequences of literacy' and the 'psychodynamics of literacy,' drew attention to the peculiarities of writing when compared to the face-to-face oral interactions of traditional societies.[19] The analogous technological shift introduced by printing with movable type was seen to have engendered equally pervasive changes in Western culture, as was argued most forcefully by McLuhan and by Eisenstein.[20] Accordingly, the preprint manuscript culture of the Middle Ages stood revealed as more different from the modern textual situation than we had previously thought, and medieval culture as a whole was seen to be embedded as much in oral as in textual modes of interaction.

Medievalists and early modernists working on Italy increasingly called for the kind of historical imagination and interpretive patience that would enable a more anthropological approach to early modes of communication, with lucid models of such an approach established by many prominent historians, including Peter Brown's trend-setting studies of late antiquity, Giovanni Tabacco's analysis of formal and informal institutions of power, and Jacques Le Goff's influential work on the mindsets of late medieval social groups.[21] The traffic of ideas between elite and popular cultures took on special prominence in the work of Carlo Ginzburg, Peter Burke, and Aron Gurevich,[22] while studies of kinship structures and ritual ceremonies (such as Klapisch-Zuber's and Trexler's studies of renaissance Florence) painted new pictures of the charged contexts in which private and public messages were conveyed.[23] In the meantime, a concern with the ethnography of writing transformed the study of orality and literacy in medieval contexts, as pioneered by Zumthor and Cardona.[24]

As sociological models burgeoned in the social sciences and then extended into adjacent fields, humanists found themselves equipped with even more new methods for grasping how texts might act as determinants in the communication circuits through which societies organized themselves. Assigning special importance to the role played by bureaucratic structures in the logic of the modern state, Max Weber's work in particular exercised a potent influence on later researchers, as did that of Norbert Elias, attentive to the psycho-social force of civilizing behaviour and forms of speech.[25] More recently, the concepts elaborated by Pierre Bourdieu – the 'habitus' of social agents, the 'social space' within which they interact, and the 'symbolic capital' accruing from learned competencies – have helped scholars speak about verbal texts and material books as participating in fields of cultural production.[26] In France, in particular, from the late 1950s on, sociological concerns (and to some degree their related quantitative methods) gave rise to the new

fields of the *sociologie de la littérature*, especially through the contributions of Robert Escarpit, and of the *histoire du livre*, for which Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin's *L'apparition du livre* sounded the clarion call.[27]

In Italy, with its strong Marxian traditions of analysis, especially as inflected by Gramscian notions of culture and hegemony, the sociological study of writing took hold and branched out in various directions (mostly concerned with more modern forms of the book trade).[28] The circulation of texts during the late medieval and early modern periods received many ground-breaking studies at this time, from Bec's studies of the book-culture of Italian merchants and of Florentines, to Dionisotti's influential emphasis on the highly local nature of premodern textual production.[29] Other scholars studied the commerce and costs of manuscript books in particular localities in the peninsula.[30] Because even more evidence of the costs of production and trade exist for the era of printing, studies of the economic circumstances of early printers flourished, as did detailed analyses of the market-driven roles of publishers and editors.[31]

The 'linguistic turn' has become a familiar catchword for the importance attached to questions of representation, signification, and discursive structure that shook up not only linguistic and literary studies in the 1960s and 1970s, but also philosophy, history, and the humanities generally. Concerns became focused on how functions of signification were combined into overarching structures of meaning, making the nature of 'textuality' a particularly prominent topic of debate. A text was no longer seen as a simple, stable entity, but rather as an unstable site where different semiotic codes might be in play. This textual instability might have limits set on it by certain ideas or institutions. Notions of 'a work,' of 'authorship,' of 'allusion,' were seen to be not neutral, value-free abstractions, but rather disciplinary functions with their own charged histories. Political and cultural institutions, as well, were assessed in terms of the structural logic (or illogic) of power, and in terms of systems of representation that legitimized or contested the exercise of social authority. Such interpretive procedures located the meaning of a piece of writing not in the text itself, but in the cultural discourses that were put into play around and through the text.

In Italy, the linguistic turn manifested itself above all through a strong commitment to the new discipline of semiotics, which offered the study of signs as a way to grasp how the linguistic codes of texts intersected with other cultural codes. Of the first generation of Italian semioticians, many had formative training as medievalists and developed their semiotic approaches at least in part through analyses of medieval culture. Umberto Eco's early work on medieval aesthetics can be read as

having prepared ground for his later theoretical work on semiotic functions and on the interpretive role of readers, while romance philologists such as Maria Corti, Cesare Segre, and D'Arco Silvio Avalle offered direction to a whole generation of literary critics through their semiotic scrutiny of medieval Italian literary texts, highlighting the potential of what Segre labelled 'semiotic philology.'[32] Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the study of medieval history, art history, philosophy, and religious studies also found vocabularies for addressing concerns about systems of representation, about discursive constellations, and about stable and unstable aspects of cultural codes. The semiotics of cultural systems emerged as an innovative way to reevaluate the cultural history and the 'textuality' of the past.

Alongside these developments that affected the general intellectual landscape of the time, there were also contemporaneous developments internal to medieval studies that decisively redirected attention to the physical nature of manuscript documents. Codicology emerged as a discipline dedicated to the examination of medieval manuscript books, based on the premise that every aspect of a manuscript – its handwriting, but also its use of materials, its *mise-en-page*, its binding, etc. – was potentially significant.[33] While codicology became institutionalized above all in Belgium and France, in other countries an analogous turn toward the study of the entire manuscript occurred under the aegis of a renewed palaeography, given the label 'integral palaeography' by Leonard Boyle.[34] Such was especially the case in Italy, where palaeography, especially in the work of Armando Petrucci, reached out into the concerns of literary and cultural studies, establishing a new groundwork for the historical study of literacy.[35] The 1977 conference on literacy and written culture organized by Petrucci and Attilio Bartoli Langeli announced the new importance of the study of literacy to which palaeography, 'understood as the history of writing in its entirety and in its relationship with society,' would be a major contributor, and for which the study of the spread of the capacities of literacy would be intertwined with assessing 'the function that writing considered on its own performed in the milieu of every organized society and the function that each graphic type or production performs, in turn, in the milieu of the unique cultural environment that produced and employed it.'[36] This was the same year in which Petrucci launched the journal *Scrittura e civiltà* to make visible this wider terrain of palaeography, in which Febvre and Martin's *Apparition du livre* was translated into Italian, and in which Giuglelmo Cavallo put out an important volume of essays on the history of the book.[37] Meanwhile, the methods of 'textual bibliography' that had developed in England and the United States began to have a deep impact on the study of early Italian printing through the work of Conor Fahy and others, even as Italian traditions of bibliography found an important forum through Luigi Balsamo's direction of the journal *Bibliofilia*.[38]

Thus throughout the 1960s and 1970s new vibrant areas of inquiry gained definition; the History of the Book, Literacy Studies, Integral Palaeography, Textuality. These areas delimited common research topics toward which practitioners in disciplines as varied as sociology and art history could gravitate. But the diversity of disciplinary inheritances also pulled scholars away from these centres in all sorts of directions. The vibrancy of the methods derived from anthropology, sociology, and linguistics; the gains made by codicology and palaeography; and the continued interest in traditional questions regarding institutional and cultural history all competed with each other especially at the level of methodology. By about 1980, scholars in the field were asking whether the centripetal forces exerted by these new research areas could counteract the centrifugal tendencies exerted by such disparate approaches. Reflecting upon the field of Book History, Robert Darnton suggested that the field as it was structured lacked real coherence, a case of 'interdisciplinarity run riot.'[39] Literacy Studies, according to Harvey Graff, was at a crossroads, for specific research on literacy was losing steam even as its questions became diffused throughout a whole host of established disciplines.[40] Semiotically inflected studies of 'textuality' were at times almost aggressively positioned with respect to literary history, prompting established textual critics to wonder if the term 'text,' in its more recent theoretical appropriation, had come to mean almost the opposite of its traditional signification.

In retrospect, such anxieties can be seen as the prelude to a new consolidation of cross-disciplinary currents that took place over the course of the early 1980s, kindling a new intensification of the historical study of textuality. With respect to the study of medieval Italy, we might single out 1983 (now a quarter of a century ago) as a convenient date for marking how the study of textuality, after several decades of methodological innovation, had reached a new threshold of coherence. Two items published in that year – Armando Petrucci's contributions to the multi-authored volume *Produzione e consumo* and Brian Stock's *The Implications of Literacy* – seem especially indicative. The multi-volume reference series *Letteratura Italiana*, directed by Alberto Asor Rosa, was polemically envisaged to bring material and historical considerations back into the forefront of Italian literary study and, in fact, it quickly

became an obligatory first stop for students in the field and a point of reference for scholars; the second volume in the series, *Produzione e consumo*, surveyed the conditions under which texts (especially literary texts) were produced and consumed in Italy from medieval to modern times, with several important contributions on the use of texts in the Middle Ages. A highlight of the volume was Petrucci's contribution, 'Il libro manoscritto' (The Manuscript Book), where in a brief twenty-six pages he summarized the relationships, from the twelfth century onwards, that tied techniques of book production to the social organization of writers, copyists, and readers. Not only is this piece a masterful distillation of several decades of palaeographical study, its seamless integration of integral palaeography with the concerns of literary history is notable, and it immediately became a standard in the field.[41]

Stock's work, meanwhile, argued that many aspects of the intellectual transformation of twelfth-century Europe had been made possible because of a new prominence granted to written texts and because of the 'textual communities' that had arisen as a result. Of the case studies elaborating this argument, most significant was Stock's discussion of the heretical Patarine movement of twelfth-century Milan, in which he directed attention

> to 'textual communities,' that is, to groups of people whose social activities are centred around texts, or, more precisely, around a literate interpreter of them. The text in question need not be written down nor the majority of listeners actually literate ... Moreover, the group's members must associate voluntarily; their interaction must take place around an agreed meaning for the text. Above all, they must make the hermeneutic leap from what the text says to what they think it means; the common understanding provides the foundation for changing thought and behaviour.[42]

By reconceptualizing the way persons defined themselves in relation to textual practices, Stock's work provided a new model for combining recent theoretical tendencies in sociology and anthropology with the detailed historical knowledge of medievalists.

While neither Petrucci nor Stock claimed in these works to be doing anything radically innovative from the point of view of critical method, nevertheless they synthesized various approaches in a way that was remarkably fruitful: their investigations testified to the newly achieved maturity that the study of textuality had attained, and they made visible to a wide, interdisciplinary audience (one that reached far beyond the

specialists of Italian codicological description or of twelfth-century intellectual history) the great potential to be found in a semiotics of textual culture that was materialistically and historically inflected. After all, textual artefacts and interpretive communities mutually constitute each other through complex, dialectical interactions. Some studies might focus on how communities bestow meanings on texts (i.e., when a group constructs technologies of production and interpretation in order to meet specific social and ideological needs). Petrucci's contributions, we might say, are exemplary of this direction of investigation. Other studies might focus instead on the way that texts help to create communities (the presence of texts generates interpretive practices that give definition to groups of persons, uniting them through the exigencies of caring for and interpreting documents). Stock's work on 'textual communities' aims in this direction. While these and other studies may, individually, tend toward one or the other side of this dialectic between text and community, the study of medieval Italian textuality since 1983, when taken as a whole, has been characterized by the attention granted to both processes. The way in which communities create textual practices and the way in which textual practices help create communities appear as mutually constitutive and reciprocal aspects of the way textual cultures function.

When thinking about the twenty-five years that have passed since 1983, we had best keep in mind the vibrant multifariousness of textual cultures in medieval Italy, for this has in many ways shaped the direction of the field. A book title such as Gellrich's *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages* (even with its two chapters on Dante) would not work well for the Italian Middle Ages, where so many different 'ideas' of textuality proliferated.[43] Cultural historians have tended to be highly sensitive to the specifics of geography, period, and social class, producing a body of work that is highly articulated, and making the study of medieval Italian textuality a pluri-disciplinary affair. There has not really emerged a distinct subdiscipline organized around the history of written culture akin to the History of the Book in English-speaking countries or the *histoire du livre* in France (and even to the extent that the *storia del libro* is a recognized field, it tends to focus on post-medieval, printed books).[44] An anchor for studies of medieval textuality continues to be provided by palaeography in the wider, Italian sense of this term as including codicological and historico-cultural analyses.[45] Recent research has tended to be very responsive to the needs and directions of specific disciplines – social history, art history, literary study, etc. – even as the study of textual functions has encouraged scholars to reach beyond their

own disciplinary boundaries for bodies of evidence or for methodological possibilities developed in adjacent fields. Indeed, the study of the institutions and assumptions of writing remains one of the primary grounds for dialogue among medievalists in different departments.

The medieval ranks and professions most in control of manuscript production and consumption – monks, ecclesiasts, scholars, lawyers – continue to be subjected to ample historical attention, as do the structures of education in place at local and university levels. Studies of the dynamic interactions between written texts and oral preaching in the mendicant orders, as well as investigations into the administrative operations of judges and notaries, are good examples of the fruitfulness of recent projects on such main arbiters of textual culture.[46] The comprehensive identification of the scribes active in particular localities, or general analysis of local scribal activity, is another direction that research is taking.[47] Yet it is the research into the documentary cultures of other classes that has been especially innovative in the last quarter-century. The literacy of inhabitants of the rural countryside has been emphasized by Balestracci.[48] The account books, contracts, and diaries of merchant writers have been subject to considerable scrutiny.[49] Religious contexts outside of official ecclesiastical structures, such as confraternities and popular spiritual movements, have been examined as potent scenes of social communication and textual interpretation.[50] The fault lines among different classes, as well as local systems of dispute resolution, gave rise to political issues that have been approached in relation to issues of textual literacy.[51] More recently, considerable attention has been directed toward the role of written texts in the lives of medieval and early modern women; a few prominent female religious writers (especially St Catherine of Siena and St Catherine of Bologna) have received several sophisticated recent studies,[52] but in general this remains a topic for which much basic groundwork still remains to be done.[53]

Anthropological interest in the ritual function of medieval texts has taken an interesting turn toward more probing discussions of the performative and visual dimensions of medieval textuality. Studies of performance (continuing the examination of medieval orality in the wake of Ong and Zumthor) examine how texts – legal and religious texts, as well as poetic and narrative ones – were actualized in front of an audience of listeners.[54] The influence of specific venues and ceremonies, the techniques of gestural and facial expression, the relationship between script and performance (or, alternatively, between performance

and memorial transcription) are now understood in some detail.[55] In this regard, the contributions being made by musicologists to our understanding of codicology, performance, and the aural aspects of medieval textuality are especially illuminating.[56] As for visuality, considerable scrutiny has been paid to the visible nature of writing itself, as well as to the visual 'paratexts' that accompanied texts and provided readers with indications about how to receive and interpret them.[57] The interaction of writing with other visual codes – painting, sculpture, architecture, textiles, gestures – is a growing area of inquiry, especially regarding publicly visible texts that were mounted as parts of artistic projects.[58] Furthermore, through studies of visualization much interesting work is being produced linking textuality to medieval notions of memory; studies of medieval memory have moved beyond abstract notions of the 'cultural memory' maintained by texts toward the examination of medieval processes of mnemonic visualization that writers and readers took for granted.[59]

As a counterweight to the geographical and temporal specificity of the bulk of the work on medieval Italian textual cultures, the time-honoured tradition of studying the transmission of intellectual ideas and artistic styles still runs very strong. For generations this has entailed detailed assessments of manuscript evidence (the reception of classical texts among humanists, the translation of Arabic scientific texts, the spread of French and Provençal poetry thanks to itinerant jongleurs, etc.). Such research questions have increasingly converged with the aims of integral palaeography, becoming transformed into questions demanding the tools of codicologists and social historians, and not limited to the internal logic of intellectual and artistic phenomena.[60] In other ways, too, the focus on local textual cultures has increasingly been supplemented by studies of the channels of communication that linked disparate centres and that made cultural traffic take particular forms. Such an emphasis on the cultural traffic of textual production is in many ways still a developing field, but its significance to medievalists is amply shown by the emphasis on space and place signalled by the recent multi-volume reference work *Lo spazio letterario del Medio Evo*.[61] The circuits of communication to be studied often extend beyond the confines of the Italian peninsula to other European regions and across the Mediterranean to Byzantine, Arabic, crusader, and other civilizations.[62] The material implications of cultural exchange, especially across languages, religions, and political systems, promises to bring together scholars with different competencies over the next decade and more.

Editing and Textuality

The practice of editing texts has long been crucially important for the study of medieval textual cultures, although it is also a practice that introduces its own complications. Especially with respect to our topic – the study of how medieval persons defined themselves as users, producers, and consumers of written texts – editorial method is caught up in a tight hermeneutic circle. We inevitably rely upon edited texts to study medieval attitudes toward all sorts of phenomena, including medieval attitudes about textuality; yet, at the same time, we must posit certain assumptions about medieval textuality whenever we edit a medieval text. Editions do not 'represent' a medieval work in all of its features and attributes; rather, an editor chooses, from among a multitude of features, those which seem most deserving of emphasis, and the edition becomes a way of modelling those features for a modern audience. An edition will home in on certain aspects of a text – for example, the presumed 'authorial' original of a philosophical treatise, the transactional content of a charter, the improvisational wording of a song, the visual materiality of a manuscript's layout, etc. – and it will then devise a way to present those features according to the norms of the relevant discipline and according to the degree of readability required for the envisaged audience. In other words, editorial methods inevitably pre-empt the discussion of medieval textuality by starting off with certain enabling assumptions about which aspects of a medieval text ought to be showcased. Despite this limitation, however, the detailed scrutiny of manuscripts that an editor performs often brings to light new evidence that can further refine (or call into question) our understanding of how texts actually circulated and functioned.

In Italy especially, for several decades (or even centuries), strong philological and editorial traditions in the humanities disciplines have underpinned the study of medieval texts. In fact, one thing that distinguishes Italian research into medieval textuality is the way in which editions and philological investigations related to editorial projects have provided many of the most prominent contributions to discussions about the nature of medieval texts. Sapori's editions of the account books of mercantile companies, Barbi's and Petrocchi's groundbreaking editions of Dante, Benedetto's magnificent account of Marco Polo's *Milione*, Castellani's meticulous presentation of early Tuscan documents, and Petrucci's reproduction of Salutati's notarial protocol are just some of the better-known and influential models from earlier generations of twentieth-century scholars.[63] These editions include

detailed analyses of the genesis, circulation, and purposes of original documents and scribal copies, and they arrive at important conclusions about the kind of textual cultures that were in play at very specific historical moments and in very specific communities of writers and readers.

In fact, Italian philology has been especially attentive to historical issues surrounding the transmission of texts ever since Giorgio Pasquali's fundamental rethinking of the genealogical methods of classical text editing that had arisen in nineteenth-century Germany. Karl Lachmann had proposed a rigorous method of editing classical texts that began with the process of *recensio* (sorting out genealogical relations among manuscripts so as to reconstruct the archetypal form of the textual tradition) and then moved on to the process of *emendatio* (proposing corrections to the archetype in order to bring the text closer to the author's putative original). Pasquali drew attention to many intransigent problems faced during the process of *recensio*: copyists might have had recourse to more than one manuscript, some misreadings might have cropped up independently in several places in a textual tradition, there might not always be a stage between authorial and archetypal forms of the text, etc. For Pasquali, an editor had to become thoroughly informed about the *storia della tradizione* (history of the textual tradition), which was to be considered an integral part of the text that an editor confronts. This required close examination of manuscripts, thinking deeply about the habits of scribes, and understanding the way a classical text might interact with actual medieval practices of copying.[64] Subsequent philological methods in Italy have been rooted in thoroughly understanding the history of a text's transmission. This is especially true for the study of literary texts, as developed through the *nuova filologia* of Michele Barbi and the *variantistica* of Gianfranco Contini.[65] Documentary (as opposed to literary) text editing has always been less prone to discuss theory and method, but even here the Italian contribution has been especially noteworthy.[66] As a consequence, Italian scholars in all the relevant branches of cultural history are accustomed to looking at editorial projects as rich mines of information about medieval textual cultures.

It might be useful briefly to draw a contrast with the rather different place of editing in anglophone studies of medieval textuality. If Pasquali was Italy's greatest classical editor of the early twentieth century, Britain's was A.E. Housman, who objected to different aspects of the Lachmannian method. For Housman, the editor's highest calling lay in *emendatio*, and for this an editor would need to be fully steeped in the

language and culture of an author, so that textual errors could be easily spotted and plausible emendations intuited. Scribal variants in manuscripts, he argued, were poor guides for emending; instead, deep knowledge of the original context, not of the history of transmission, was the order of the day.[67] Housman's position is indicative of the less important role generally given to the *storia della tradizione* by anglophone editors. The most important edition of a medieval English text in the late twentieth century was probably Kane and Donaldson's edition of William Langland's poem *Piers Plowman*, in which the editors similarly emphasized the role of aesthetic judgment in reestablishing a text that the chaotic conditions of scribal transmission had irreparably mangled.[68]

One consequence of this difference in editorial traditions is that medieval editing in the English-speaking world was more susceptible to the critiques of editorial method that were launched beginning in the early 1980s. As the notions of authorship and of the authority of an original version came under theoretical attack, methods of text editing that had relied heavily upon those notions were openly targeted. Some of these critiques called for editors to pay more attention to the social context in which texts circulated; others homed in on the 'idealist' aspects of traditional Lachmannian and Housmanian textual criticism as easy targets for rather overblown polemics that came to be known as the 'New Philology.'[69] In Italy, by contrast, the poststructuralist critique of text editing made less headway, in part because Italian philological traditions were already highly attentive to textual variance, and in part because the 'idealism' with which Italian critics had to grapple was above all the aesthetics of Benedetto Croce, the best antidote to which was, in fact, sustained historical philology, including attention to such material factors as the role of the author.[70] A second consequence of this difference in the role assigned to editions has been that discussions of European (including Italian) medieval textuality in the United Kingdom and North America have tended to be published not as introductions to editions of texts but rather as monographs dealing with specific topics. Where Italian editorial methods have guaranteed a level of empirical detail and methodological scrutiny that is enviable, the monographs associated with non-Italian scholarship often have shown more flexibility in manoeuvering into new methods and topics of discussion.

One of the field's most exciting developments in the last decades of the twentieth century has been the increasing interdependence of philological and cultural studies of textuality. For Italian philologists, the 1990s became a time 'when one is always expecting more from text-editing, and when the text is coming to be seen as the bearer of multiple

meanings, meanings that also interact with paratextual and extratextual elements, in a complex entity that might meaningfully guide our understanding not only of the genesis of any particular text, but also of its literary, documentary, poetic or religious status.'[71] The 'ancillary' disciplines of palaeography, codicology, and text editing have become bearers of considerable theoretical and methodological reflection. Not only have the place of these disciplines within the larger system of the academy shifted as a result, but also individual projects increasingly have shown that traditional philological concerns cannot be separated from recent understandings of the complexities of textuality, or, vice versa, that general formulations about the nature of medieval textuality require the tools of palaeography and editing. The editing of medieval civic statutes offers just one example of this confluence; in place of foregrounding the normative dimension of these documents (the motivation for earlier editors), editors of statutes are now just as likely to explore how the drafting of these texts brokered important social and political exchanges: 'every item in a statutary code has to be understood as part of a larger work that has come together in stages and that undoes itself with repetitions and contradictions, testifying to the variousness and sometimes the incoherence of the history that produced it.'[72] Another notable phenomenon of convergence is the current dialogue between Italian traditions of philology and North American models of cultural-literary studies, evident, for example, in the way North American Italianists such as Wayne Storey and Teodolinda Barolini have explored the functions of medieval authorship and readership by considering the discursive significance of palaeographical and codicologial evidence.[73]

At the Start of the Twenty-First Century

There are signs that we are now in the midst of another threshold moment in the study of medieval writing, similar to the consolidations and transformations of twenty-five years ago. In the intervening decades all the relevant humanistic disciplines have responded energetically to the basic imperative to see written documents (and indeed all verbal and non-verbal signs) not so much as transparent windows giving direct access to extra-textual facts, but as complicated material and social phenomena in their own right. The dynamic interplay between texts and social contexts is now taken as a starting premise for research, both for the way in which different 'interpretive communities' bestow meanings upon texts and for the way in which texts give rise to distinct 'textual

communities.' There is also a new sophistication in the way literary and cultural historians are weaving questions of textual materiality into their investigations of cultural forms. In codicological terms, 'materiality' designates the physical make-up of a manuscript document; in linguistic and semiotic terms (especially in reader-response criticism), 'materiality' indicates a dimension of communicative coding which is subsequently actualized through ideation in the mind of a reader or listener; in Marxist traditions of cultural critique, 'materiality' designates the ideological context of forces of production. All of these meanings of 'materiality' have been important in the study of medieval Italian textuality for many decades, and recently we have seen a widespread confidence in ways of integrating or establishing relations among these different registers, and for uniting questions about materiality to questions about the social logic of discourse.[74]

We might take as symptomatic the recent predilection in Italian titles for the word *fabbrica*, as applied to insightful studies of anatomical books (*La fabbrica del corpo*), writings against witchcraft (*La fabbrica delle streghe*), chivalric literature (*La fabbrica dei cavalieri*), the *Divine Comedy* (*La fabbrica della Commedia*), and an important codicological summary (*La fabbrica del codice*).[75] This term eludes translation into English: its primary denotation may be 'factory,' but because it also suggests the processes of manufacture, the place of labour, and the social construction of cultural artefacts, it should be rendered through a verbal noun such as 'fabrication,' 'fashioning,' 'construction,' or 'making.' Equally illustrative of the new state of affairs would be the dramatic development in anglophone studies of medieval Italian literature, where scholars of a new generation, such as Olivia Holmes and Justin Steinberg, having incorporated the codicological interests usually more associated with colleagues in Italy, are producing novel readings of how poetry was situated in relation to basic physical and social parameters of communication and self-definition.[76]

Significantly, these new developments tend not to take the category of materiality for granted. Instead of seeing the material dimension of a text as a kind of facticity that precedes its decoding by a reader, many researchers are beginning to explore how the physicality of texts is something that has a history. The very corporeality of a text is in part created, or at least summoned up, through the performative nature of writing and reading, even as there are aspects of the material that are not amenable to being captured by discursive sensibilities. In this regard medieval encounters with the physical page may have differed in even the most basic parameters (time, space, touch) from modern encounters.

The issue of materiality when approached as a problem of corporeality includes experiential and hermeneutic dimensions. As a consequence, issues of authority, ideology, and community are increasingly being inflected into concerns about the experiential phenomenology of reading and writing in the Middle Ages. This is not easy to do, as we possess only scanty evidence for the way most medieval persons experienced the acts of reading or writing;[77] but where we do have indications – as for the devotional reading that involves participation in the life of Christ, for the mercantile strategies for warding off anxieties about risk or usury, for the place of visual texts in the art of memory, or for writing as a buffer against death[78] – we now sense that there is still much to be learned about the role of affect in the actualization of texts, as well as about the role of the body in the performance of reading and writing.

In the meantime, the advent of digital technologies has prompted a host of new approaches to how we study and edit medieval texts. When computers first appeared on the scene, much of the critical discussion among humanists was complicated by polemically utopian praise for the liberatory potentials of hypertext, as well as by anachronistic parallels drawn between medieval, pre-print textual instability and post-modern, post-print networks of indeterminacy. Greater familiarity with the specificity of these new forms of media (with their limitations and their discursive implications) has tempered those initial predictions. Confusions of a more practical sort now arise from the thorny difficulties of establishing standards for the technical work of electronic editing; shared norms that might be intellectually appropriate, easy to implement, enduring, and cost-effective in terms of time and resources are more elusive than had been hoped. Nevertheless, databases such as the *Opera del vocabolario italiano* and *Dante On-Line*, as well as hypertext editions designed for scholarly and pedagogical use, are rapidly changing the archive with which medievalists work.[79] New computer-driven methodologies for editing are also being explored, as in the application of cladistic procedures to aid in editorial *recensio*.[80] Cataloguing, too, is in a state of upheaval.[81] More generally, there can no longer be any doubt that our own immersion in more fluid and unpredictable channels of information has enlarged our sense of the possibilities that may have existed in premodern cultures for establishing circuits of communication. As our own epistemological parameters change, the specificity of premodern textual practice becomes all the more interesting as a topic of study.[82]

The most palpable change associated with computer technologies is still relatively undertheorized, namely the proliferation of digitized

manuscript images. Since the turn of the millenium, digitized images have been a central aspect in the publication of catalogues from Italian libraries, of handbooks of palaeography, of facsimiles of entire manuscripts, and of internet exhibitions and teaching sites.[83] Leaders in this process have been the catalogues of dated manuscripts in Italian libraries, the *Manoscritti datati e databili*, with volumes now appearing at a rapid clip in CD-Rom form.[84] The accessibility of many images on the web and their easy reproducibility for the classroom has whetted the curiosity of a generation of students about the appearance of medieval documents. It would now be feasible, as Ezio Ornato has pointed out, to store medium-quality images of every page of every medieval European manuscript on a single server (the obstacle consists not in cost or technology, but in the assertion of ownership rights and privileges).[85] Yet while textual scholars now have a rich literature of theoretical and methodological reflection about electronic texts and hypertexts, the role of the visual images of manuscripts is still in the process of being understood.[86] Such images seem to give viewers more direct access to the phenomena of medieval manuscripts, and yet such a proposition is clearly false: the digitized image is a form of mediation, one which is selective and manipulative even as it provides an illusion of contact. In so far as images are a means of representation and mediation, they have sometimes been heralded as capable of replacing traditional forms of textual editing, for we can increasingly direct students and readers to this visual archive; yet this propositon is also false, especially in the case of medieval manuscripts where skills of palaeography are still called for, and where the task of examining the textual tradition remains undiminished by having such images close to hand. The digital image seems to give us the 'aura' of the unique manuscript (in Benjamin's terms), yet it does so through a process of technological reproduction. The 'virtual aura' is not a neutral phenomenon: already the profusion of manuscript images has produced a new, intimate 'shock of the old,' and we now approach medieval texts with a heightened visual literacy, and also with an inevitable entanglement in issues of materiality and representation, the unique and the replicable, the tactile and the virtual, ideational content and the logic of media, that are affecting our own textual culture.

Perhaps one sign of the new state of affairs is the changing of the guard at some of the pioneering journals in the field. In the English-speaking world, the journal *Text*, which had been a central clearing house for the intersection of critical theory with bibliographical and codicological analyses, put out its last volume in 2002, transforming itself into *Textual Cultures*, the first volume of which was dedicated in

large part to early Italian phenomena. After witnessing 'the profound transformations that have occurred in this rather vast field of scientific interests,' the twenty-fifth issue of *Scrittura e civiltà* (for the year 2001) was the last one.[87] In the next few years, two new Italian journals of palaeographical study, *Segno e testo* (2003–) and *Litterae caelestes* (2004–), arrived to fill the vacuum, and to make sure that the strong traditions of Italian integral palaeography continue to provide a crucial forum for cross-disciplinary discussions.

Above, I suggested that consolidation of the field in the early 1980s was structured above all around new understandings of the dynamic interaction between text and community, citing the work of Petrucci and Stock as emblematic examples. This interaction of text and community has now become so extended and complicated that it seems we can speak of a new period of perhaps not consolidation, but at least confluence and excitement. The dynamic interaction of material and discursive aspects of medieval texts is now at least as prominent a concern, no longer just with the intention of seeing what effects of sense are produced by manuscript *mise-en-page*, but now with an increased understanding that the relation between textual artefacts and discursive meanings is always vexed and unstable, occasioning all sorts of performative modes of realization. In the twenty-first century, our understanding of medieval Italian culture is taking more and more account of the fluidity of textual meaning, the intimate nature of the physical document, and the volatility of the situations in which medieval texts were produced and used.

NOTES

1 See, for example, the brief historical overviews contained in the entry 'Libro,' in *La piccola Treccani: Dizionario enciclopedico* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1995), 6:737–40; and in the entry by Philip Unwin and George Unwin, 'Publishing,' *Encyclopædia Brittanica*, 15th ed. (Chicago: Encyclopædia Brittanica, 1998), 26:415–49. In recent years there have appeared several first-rate book-length surveys of the histories of writing, reading, and book technologies: Henri-Jean Martin, *The History and Power of Writing*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Frederick G. Kilgour, *The Evolution of the Book* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Guglielmo Cavallo, ed., *A History of Reading in the West* (London: Polity, 1999); Frédéric Barbier, *Histoire du livre*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Colin, 2006); Colette

Sirat, *Writing as Handwork: A History of Writing in Mediterranean and Western Culture* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006).

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