Reading Machine. Tradition and new Technologies for the Text Comment

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Report on the Conference "Macchine per leggere. Tradizioni e nuove tecnologie per commentare i testi", Florence University, November 19, 1993.

The announced invasion of electronic publishing, even about humanities, the new status of writing texts that's realized in it, the necessity to create a software library concerning the reading of texts, have been the subject of the Conference *Macchine per leggere. Tradizioni e nuove tecnologie per commentare i testi*, organized by Fondazione Ezio Franceschini and the Fondazione IBM Italia, sponsored by Florence University, on November 19th, 1993.

Chaired by Claudio LEONARDI, from the Fondazione Ezio Franceschini and Marcello MORELLI by Fondazione IBM Italia, different lectures have concerned and discussed the theoretic problems of reading of the texts prepared for the electronic support (lectures of D'Arco Silvio AVALLE, of Florence University; Tito ORLANDI, of Rome "La Sapienza" University; Raoul MORDENTI, of Rome "Tor Vergata" University) and the tradition of the comments methodologies in the Humanities (lectures of Marco BECK, of Arnoldo Mondadori Editore and Giancarlo MAZZACURATI, of Pisa University).

The presentation of effective experiences aiming to create the convergency between requirements and solutions that the new situation can offer, has been the subject of Robert HOLLANDER lecture (Princeton University) who lectured on "The Dartmouth Dante Project: Dante's comments accessible through Internet; of Wilhelm OTT (Eberhard-Karls Universität Tubingen) about "Reading, electronic publishing, and tools in between: experiences from supporting humanities computing"; Mario RICCIARDI (Turin University) on "Analisi qualitativa e tradizione dei generi: l'esempio del romanzo

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cavalleresco"; Giorgio SOMMI (IBM Semea) on "Lettura intelligente dei testi: presen-tazione del sistema IR"; Corrado DE FRANCESCO (Milan University) on "Gli InfoBase nell'accumulazione e la diffusione del sapere"; Maura GORI and Francesca GRAMIGNI (CRAIAT – Florence University) on "Un ipertesto per il Goldoni"; Fabio CIOTTI (Rome "La Sapienza" University) on "Programmi di memorizzazione, codifica ed edizione".

These topics have been discussed again during the final Round Table, by Mau-rizio BETTINI (Siena University), Roberto BUSA (Aloisianum, Gallarate), Vito CAP-PELLINI (Florence University), Tullio GREGORY (Rome "La Sapienza" University), Luca TOSCHI (Florence University) and Patrizia VIOLI (Bologna University).

The Proceedings of the Conference have been published in the Fondazione Ezio Franceschini collection *Quaderni di cultura mediolatina*.

Anyway, we can summarize the major results of the Conference as follows:

a) In his introductory remarks D'Arco S. Avalle underlined that text reading linguistic and metalinguistic formulas are a collection more than a well defined and coherent system. Language logics are so complex that, generally speaking, we can argue that "in the future there will be no step forward in the field of informatics, unless we will take advantage from humanities and linguistics".

b) This language situation confirms the usefulness of "reading machines" that mainly analyze lexicons, quantifying and formalizing their running, but can determine, in this way, the difficult comprehension of them, because of the rigid relationship between term and meaning that's not always the same in the language. If no language is a system, each language has its "instability" and every language exists for the fact that is spoken. This exercise—as in practical communication, as in reading,—creates the relationship between concepts-terms-objects. The linguistic reality of reference should not be the single term but the sentence, that terms creating relations and existing in those relations. Formalizing of thesauri of sentences is more complex but in the wholes of language what exists are not terms but sentences.

c) A similar procedure is that of images in literature. This use—as in hypertexts—must be over the teaching dimension and must verify the possibility of increasing of our texts knowledge. The definition of a logic of sentences leads words in the effective world where they exist, taking care of what Stoics called *lekton* (that, if we simplify the approach, we can call enunciation, exercise of the signifying and signified); the coupling of image and text must have the same function. To give to a text a graphic shape, doesn't mean to transform the text into a caption, but must process the text as a "map" (to refer to well known texts and images systems). However, if we transform the text into a map, we carefully define the tree that will be the skeleton of the hypertext. Every text requires its own "tree" and it is always available to different trees (to its labyrints, to its cobwebs, to its roots, to its ryzomes), but humanists have not done so much to define a study methodology of such tree structures. The reading machines should help readers to play the invention of the trees.

d) The last item, the standardization of programs is very important for communication, but also threatening for research. Everyone must know the risks connected to systems standardization. During the Conference the scientific responsibility of creating more

and more different products in short time has been underlined. Only in this way, scholars and young researchers will be trained as requested by humanities computing.

All the above problems have shown how much this subject is relevant at present time, especially in a country such Italy which is investing more and more in the field of artistic heritage and humanities, even if this investment sometimes risks to create difficulties and to compromise important areas of humanistic research, as a consequence of non coherent management decisions.