

RICCARDO POZZO

NIETZSCHE ONLINE
A CRITICAL APPRAISAL

ABSTRACT: The *Nietzsche Online* database gives access to the complete edition of the works and letters of Friedrich Nietzsche by Giorgio Colli andazzino Montinari, together with virtually all of the publications that have been published by De Gruyter on Nietzsche's works and reception. We are talking of more than 100,000 book pages. However, the research platform offers considerably more than the sum of its print content. In fact, electronic editions have themselves a pyramidal structure, whose apex is the reconstructed text, which is always arbitrary in some measure, just as it is arbitrary the notion of an *intentio auctoris*.

KEYWORDS: Digital Humanities; Editions; Linked Data; Hypertexts; Nietzsche

The *Nietzsche Online* database gives access to the complete edition of the works and letters of Friedrich Nietzsche by Giorgio Colli andazzino Montinari, together with virtually all of the publications that have been published by De Gruyter on Nietzsche's works and reception.¹ In addition to approximately seventy volumes of the Nietzsche edition, there are more

¹ *Nietzsche Online*, editorial advisory board: Christa Davis Acampora, Keith Ansell-Pearson, Marco Brusotti, Daniel Conway, Beatrix Himmelmann, Anthony Jensen, Brian Leiter, Vanessa Lemm, Robert Pippin, Bernard Reginster, Martin Saar, Herman Siemens, Andreas Urs Sommer, Werner Stegmaier, Martin Stingelin, Paul van Tongeren, Patrick Wotling, Claus Zittel, editorial staff: Hannah Große Wiesmann, Axel Pichler, Berlin-Boston, De Gruyter, 2011, ISBN: 978-3-11-021955-5, DOI: 10.1515/NO.

than eighty monographs and reference works such as the *Nietzsche Wörterbuch* and all thirty-eight annuities of *Nietzsche-Studien*. We are talking of more than 100,000 book pages. However, the research platform offers considerably more than the sum of its print content. In fact, electronic editions have themselves a pyramidal structure, whose apex is the reconstructed text, which is always arbitrary in some measure, just as it is arbitrary the notion of an *intentio auctoris*. Under each text are witnesses, which must be presented both as images and as transcriptions (this being especially important for manuscripts). One feature is that the online edition of the *Kritische Gesamtausgabe Werke* and the *Kritische Gesamtausgabe Briefe* contains the entire text corpus in updated form, with all subsequent corrections, including those from subdivision IX, incorporated into the text. *Nietzsche Online* gives access to the most recent and up-to-date text versions. A second feature is that the digital edition gives access to all documents related to a text in its context. Drafts, variants, commentaries and annotations are retrievable line by line in footnotes via popups. Central documents, manuscript descriptions, the forewords of Giorgio Colli from the *Kritische Studienausgabe* and other central documents can be found in the context menu in the right-hand window next to the respective text, facilitating research to the entire text corpus.

While using the navigation in the browser menu and the different search criteria, one can do narrow searches, thus obtaining connections among specific passages or individual terms to correspondent passage in other witnesses (if any) and, if applicable, to its presence within the reconstructed text; and from witnesses to families of witnesses, by means of the so-called *stemma codicum*. The content of the texts in the database is extensively linked, which means that one can directly retrieve the secondary literature related to the specific Nietzsche passage one is reading. Philological apparatus (which justifies critical decisions among variants) and historical-critical notes (providing information on the content and the context of the work) connect the reconstructed text to a textual *universum*. Definitions from the *Nietzsche Dictionary* can be retrieved directly from the text. The posthumous fragments of Nietzsche from autumn 1885 on can now be compared directly next to each other – in the version of *Kritische Studienausgabe* 10-13, the transcriptions of subdivision IX and the facsimiles of the notebooks and folders.

On the left side of the page, Nietzsche's texts are ordered in the following groups: (1) Philologica, (2) Philosophica, (3) Gedichte, (4) and Briefe. The *Nietzsche Wörterbuch* follows, together with collections of biographic and iconographic materials, with Nietzsche's documented readings and own private library, and finally with a taxonomic descriptions of hermeneutic approaches to Nietzsche's work as well as presentations of key-documents concerning Nietzsche's life (e.g. his severe eye-pain diagnosis of April 1873). All secondary literature on Nietzsche that has been appeared with De Gruyter – indeed a substantial number of quite good works – provide the basis of the hypertext. Buttons on the right side connect to a list of abbreviations for German and English Nietzsche texts, and to a collated concordance to the fragments (which evaluates the data from *Kritische Gesamtwerte* VII and VIII as well as the concordance from *Nietzsche-Studien*). The database is to be expanded on a regular basis to include new print content and also ahead-of-print content, which will at first only be available in *Nietzsche Online*. New entries to the *Nietzsche Wörterbuch* and pages on special topics are also to be added. The updates will contain new functions and features.

Previously, one had to search through several volumes and in different critical apparatus. *Nietzsche Online* is the key for obtaining unexpected results. Let me give one example for all serendipity, which I draw thanks to the reference I have found in Irene Treccani's doctoral thesis on *Nietzsche e l'astronomia del XIX secolo* on Nietzsche's appropriation of the nineteenth-century discovery of light-years.² In Treccani's work, keywords are 'Licht', 'Sterne' and 'strahlen' as well as 'Verschwendung', 'Sonne' and 'verschenden'. The basic occurrence is obviously N 1880 3 [125]: "wie man von Sternen spricht, deren Lichtstrahlen uns erst erreichen nachdem sie längst schon zerfallen sind, so strahlen die Irrthümer noch lange ihren Glanz fort, nachdem sie widerlegt sind"³. While looking for 'Lichtstrahl' together with all its composites and syntagms, one cannot fail to notice, however, the explanation Nietzsche gives in Letter 436 to Malwida von Meysenbug in Rom of March 1875 for the visionary regard of love that is

² I. Treccani, *Nietzsche e l'astronomia del XIX secolo*, Padua, Il Poligrafo, 2014.

³ F. Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, 15 vols, G. Colli and M. Montinari (eds.), Berlin/New York, De Gruyter, 1988, IX, p. 87-88.

nourished by elective affinity: “Nur im Lichtstrahl von Otiliens Liebe sieht Eduard so aus, wie er billigerweise immer erscheinen sollte”⁴.

Finally, it remains to be said that the *Nietzsche Online* has been preceded in the last decade of the last century by a handy CD-Rom version of all of printed works, and in the first decade of this one from the horizontal internet platform *Nietzsche Source*⁵ (which is run in the European Projects *Discovery*⁶ and *Agora*,⁷ both joined by ILIESI-CNR).

The main function of database-oriented hypertexts is enabling the reader to choose one reading path out of many, without presupposing a strong structure of content organization. They are useful if the reader has a previous and independent familiarity with the content of the database. They can be of invaluable help in doing research work; but they are neither e-books, nor suited for book-oriented reading. In many cases, the linearity of the original text is a primary and nonnegotiable fact, whose disappearance would take all the meaning away.

I am not advocating the sheer accumulation of data [...]. Instead of bloating the electronic book, I think it possible to structure it in layers arranged like a pyramid. The top layer could be a concise account of the subject [...]. The next layer could contain expanded versions of different aspects of the argument, not arranged sequentially as in a narrative, but rather as self-contained units that feed into the topmost story. The third layer could be composed of documentation, possibly of different kinds, each set off by interpretative essays. A fourth layer might be theoretical or historiographical, with selections from previous scholarship and discussions of them. A fifth layer could be pedagogic, consisting of suggestions for classroom discussion and a model syllabus. And a sixth layer could contain readers' reports, exchanges between the author and the editor, and letters from readers, who could provide a growing corpus of commentary ...⁸.

With these lines, Robert Darnton had imagined the most effective hypertextual structure in an influential article on the March 18, 1999 issue of *The New York Review of Books*. Elaborating on Darnton's vision, Gino Roncaglia has observed that hypertext are expected to function well within

⁴ F. Nietzsche, *Briefwechsel. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, G. Colli and M. Montinari (eds.), Berlin/New York, De Gruyter, 1975-, II/5, p. 36.

⁵ <http://www.nietzschesource.org>

⁶ <http://www.discovery-project.eu/home.html>

⁷ <http://www.project-agera.org>

⁸ R. Darnton, *The Case for Books: Past, Present, and Future*, New York, Public Affairs, 2009, p. 76.

the textbook-genre, at schools and at institutions of higher education. One ought to distinguish between two different ways for setting up hypertextual links, namely ‘vertical links’, which enable the descent into lower layers or the ascent back along a hierarchy structure, and ‘horizontal links’, which are minimal or completely absent at the highest level (which presents a strong, linear structure: a *narrative*), but become more and more frequent upon descending towards the basis of the pyramid. The difference among these two kinds of links correspond to a first level of typization of the links, while further forms of typization would come into question for separating different textual domains such as primary and secondary texts, philological apparatus, iconography, etc.⁹

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RICCARDO POZZO

CNR-Dipartimento Scienze Umane e Sociali, Patrimonio Culturale (Direttore)
Riccardo.Pozzo@cnr.it

⁹ G. Roncaglia *La quarta rivoluzione*, Roma, Laterza, 2010, p. 223-226 – see also Roncaglia’s paper “Alcune note su modelli diversi di organizzazione ipertestuale”, in *La macchina nel tempo: Studi di informatica umanistica in onore di Tito Orlandi*, L. Perilli-D. Fiormonte (eds.), Firenze, Le Lettere, 2011, p. 91-101.