

# Documenting horizons of interpretation in philosophy

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This poster presentation will describe a project currently underway at the Faculty of Filosofía y Letras, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). It has been funded by a grant from the Programa de Apoyo a Proyectos para la Innovación y Mejoramiento de la Enseñanza (PAPIME), a university endowment program for innovation in education. It is a collaborative documentation project of the individual and collective processes of research and writing of a group of 25 researchers, working on papers about the contemporary strategies of appropriation of the antiquity and aims to use innovative web-based technology to document different data of the research/writing

process and to create a visualization model to use the data for educative and didactical proposes.

### **Background, assumptions and needs**

In may 2010 a group of professors and researchers teaching at the Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, UNAM, gathered to start a project following Barbara Cassin's proposal in the conference *Les Stratégies contemporaines d'appropriation de l'Antiquité*. The objective is to create a seminar and produce papers on the subject of the contemporary strategies of appropriation of the antiquity, for a series of publications to be used as a teaching material in a variety of courses in Contemporary and Classical philosophy at the faculty. The main assumption of the project is that we cannot have access to the classic antiquity without mediation or heritage (Gadamer 2005). Reading and studying Classical philosophy implies the act of taking a position in a horizon of interpretation from which the object of research is built, the problems around it are articulated and the center of attention is decided.

Project's seminar and papers will discuss those strategies in contemporary authors from France and Germany, who study the antiquity and point out the horizon of interpretation from which they approach the ancient texts. The findings will be used to teach the conceptions of contemporary authors and their ideas of Classical philosophy, as an example of Nietzsche's thesis that there are not facts but interpretations (1998), and to explain technically to students the process that produces an interpretation.

The idea to use a web-base technology for a collaborative documentation project came afterwards, once all these ideas about the project were settled. A paradox emerged from the project approach: in order to describe those horizons of interpretation all the

researchers, both as individuals and as a group, needed to create their own horizon of interpretation. Can we document that process? With that documentation, can we answer the question “from which horizon are they writing?” And can we use the documentation for teaching?

As opposed to traditional research in philosophy, which analyzes finished works to set the horizon of interpretation; we want to produce a record of an ongoing work to show how the horizon is created and how it changes with the influence of new readings or the interaction with other researchers. These goals lead us to two main problems:

- a) What kind of data do we need to collect to have an idea of the horizon of interpretation?
- b) How to collect data in an open and dynamic way that allows us to follow the process of research and its changes during a period of time?

We focus on the two main activities in academic literacy: reading and writing. The kinds of data we want to obtain are the reading annotations as an evidence of reading and the variants of the progressive writing<sup>i</sup>. Also, it will be relevant for us to keep a record of the methodology adopted by the individual researchers as a single data or as a succession of variants.

All these data must be obtained while researchers are working on the project and until they finish their papers (by June 2011). It is vital to have not only a record of individual activity but also of the collective work of the professors.

### **Blogging, annotating, writing**

Our project is an application of collaborative "crowdsourcing" (Albors 2008), following previous experiences in Digital Humanities. For instance, we have in mind the success

of “A Day in the Life of Digital Humanities”, using blogging and wiki for collaborative documentation of daily activities of digital humanists<sup>ii</sup>. It consists of each one of our 25 researchers writing their own blog in which they document their daily research activities, as well as commenting on other blog entries. This mechanism will allow us to trace collective work around independent participation. However, additionally we need to collect annotations and methodological assumptions. In order to do so we have already developed a web application for these specific needs:

**a) Capturing and highlighting quotes:**

With our web application researchers can upload book passages and highlight some paragraphs in it, to document and share its readings. Every passage will be able to be marked by different researchers and the web application allows comparisons between these marks. Highlighting different parts of a same text shows individual decision and collective assumptions.

During the process of the project, all the mark up will be made as a reference to a place on the passage and they will be part of a rendering system in Javascript. This makes the marks live outside the text. Once the project is finished, the marks will be exported to TEI to preserve the documents and marks that will be part of the text. Nevertheless, during this process each contributor can mark Dates, Names, Terms and Quotes like it is done on TEI Lite to produce also a strong markup of the text to use it didactically for students, by linking those marks to complementary information. Passages entries and highlights can be commented by other participants and can be linked to blog entries.

**b) Explain and update methodology**

Researchers can explain their methodology and are able to update their methodological assumptions anytime they decide to change the study methodology or the study subject

in our web application. At the end of the project we will be able to compare the evolution of the research in a timeline, mixed with their blog post and annotation, having an insightful way to analyze the initial work and their finished paper.

### **Individual and collective**

Highlighting quotations and comments on blog and quotation entries are ways to have evidence of individual decisions and collective assumptions. We extend this view to the creation of metadata. As it is used in many commercial and academic projects, researchers can create metadata or use those that had been created by others. Metadata are central to finding links between autonomous and collective work. The final ontology can help us to understand how strong the collective or the individual view has been. We are still working on the metadata creation rules.

### **The didactic aim**

As an educational project, the last objective is to use the documentation to help students to understand how we study the classical antiquity from a horizon of interpretation. As a tool for education, it allows students to:

- a) Follow individual researcher's work in real time during the activity of the project.
- b) Compare quotes and highlights being used by different researchers.
- c) Follow the entries (blogging, passages, highlightings, methodology) on a modern or classical author.
- d) Have extra information about modern or classical authors (reference, biography, bibliography)

## References:

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<sup>i</sup> Cheryl Geisler (1994). *Academic Literacy and the Nature of Expertise: Reading, Writing, and Knowing in Academic Philosophy*, Laurence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers. New Jersey, 1994 pp. 15 ss

<sup>ii</sup> Day in the Life of the Digital Humanities project is at [http://tapor.ualberta.ca/taporwiki/index.php/Day\\_in\\_the\\_Life\\_of\\_the\\_Digital\\_Humanities\\_2010](http://tapor.ualberta.ca/taporwiki/index.php/Day_in_the_Life_of_the_Digital_Humanities_2010)