

## WITTGENSTEIN SOURCE

Wittgenstein Source, Alois Pichler, Joseph Wang (ed.), 2009. <http://www.wittgensteinsource.org/>. (Last Accessed: 5.08.2020). Reviewed by Cristian Santini.

### 1. Introduction

This review is part of the exam for the course in *Scholarly editing and digital approaches* held by prof. Paola Maria Carmela Italia at the University of Bologna in a.y. 2019-2020. This paper will be a description and an evaluation of the digital edition *Wittgenstein Source*, edited by Alois Pichler (Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Bergen) and Joseph Wang (Research Institute Brenner-Archiv, Innsbruck). I am Cristian Santini, I'm 23 years old and I'm a first-year student of the second cycle degree in *Digital Humanities and Digital Knowledge* at the University of Bologna. I have a bachelor's degree in Philosophy and my main interests are in cognitive sciences and computer science. Wittgenstein Source, as stated in the *Introduction page* (<http://www.wittgensteinsource.org/>), provides free access to primary sources related to the work of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889 - 1951). The complex website infrastructure is developed and run by the Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Bergen (WAB, <http://wab.uib.no/>) in cooperation with Joseph Wang, the Section for Digital Services at the University of Bergen Library, and net7. The project accepts contribution from both public institutions, scholars and private organizations. Institutional contacts are freely provided in the homepage.

Overall, the resource aims to be a complete tool for scholars and readers who want to have a direct contact with relevant sources related to Wittgenstein's work, such as *facsimilia* and text editions of his manuscripts (his *Nachlass*). In the latest update (October 2019) the project consists of the following editions:

- Bergen Nachlass Edition (BNE)
- Facsimile Edition of Moore's Notes of Wittgenstein's Lectures (MWN)
- Facsimile Edition of Tractatus Publication Materials (LPA)
- Prototractatus Tools (PTT)
- Wörterbuch für Volksschulen Materials (WVM)

## **2. Collection**

In Wittgenstein Source a collapsing left sidebar under the header provides the user links for each of the projects contained in the website, their relative descriptions and notes about their updates.

The first project is the Bergen Nachlass Edition (BNE), edited by the Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Bergen (WAB) under the direction of Alois Pichler. It is surely the biggest and most articulated project contained in Wittgenstein Source. This edition consists of *facsimilia* and text editions of the numerous notebooks and manuscripts written by the Viennese philosopher along his life, as summarized by his trustee G.H. von Wright in "*The Wittgenstein papers*" (1969). This exhaustive collection includes the so-called *Prototractatus*, the Big Typescript complex (1929-1934), the Brown Book complex (1934-1936), the *Lecture on Ethics* and *Notes on Logic*. Due to the unfortunate paths related to the printed works of Wittgenstein and the complex development of his thought, the Bergen Nachlass Edition represents a more than useful research tool for any Wittgenstein scholar.

Another relevant resource available on the website is Prototractatus Tools (PTT), a textual edition produced by Martin Pilch (Vienna) of the so-called *Prototractatus* (Nachlass item Ms-104), the first typescript of the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (1921). This transcription is available externally in PDF form and it claims to be a complementary source to BNE, aiming to reconstruct the composition process of the *Tractatus*.

Moreover, Wittgenstein Source contains a number of facsimile editions. One of them is LPA, which contains all the *Tractatus*' publication material (1921-1922). MWN contains the notes that the philosopher G.E. Moore wrote on lectures that Wittgenstein held at the University of Cambridge in 1930-1933. WVM contains notes, drafts and printed editions of Wittgenstein's *Wörterbuch für Volksschulen* (1926), the second of only two works published in Wittgenstein's lifetime and written while he was a schoolteacher in rural Austria (1920-1926).

## **3. Content and methods**

Due to its complexity and richness, we chose to pick BNE to describe the way Wittgenstein Source deals with the texts published in its web infrastructure. BNE is an edition of the entire collection of Wittgenstein's philosophical manuscripts (his *Nachlass*). This project represents for the Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Bergen a way to pursue, in a web-based environment, the digital publication of documents related to the work of the Viennese philosopher. In fact, WAB started this digital delivery in 1998, with the OUP Bergen Electronic Edition of the *Nachlass* (entirely available

since 2000), and this foundational work constitutes the source material through which BNE has been built<sup>1</sup>. BNE offers high quality facsimile images of the *Nachlass* with diplomatic and normalized editions of 5000 pages (XML/HTML). However, textual edition of the entire *Nachlass* are available on WAB'S IDP site (<http://wab.uib.no/transform/wab.php?modus=opsjoner>). Moreover, each item is equipped with an archival note and an additional commentary regarding the item's text genesis and philosophical relevance.

From the link of the Bergen *Nachlass* Edition ([http://www.wittgensteinsource.org/box\\_view\\_url\\_shortener?u=el](http://www.wittgensteinsource.org/box_view_url_shortener?u=el)), we access an index of the *Nachlass* items, through which the user can configure a synoptic view of both the facsimile and the diplomatic/normalized edition. In this way, the user can keep track of the different phases of writing in the genesis of the manuscripts and confront the transcribed text directly with the images of the respective *exemplar*. Although both diplomatic and normalized editions deeply annotate the text, the diplomatic edition is characterized by describing with clear markup all the orthographic insertions and deletions, while the normalized edition highlights all the substitutions made by Wittgenstein to his writings. Take for example the diplomatic and normalized transcriptions for Ms-114, 92v[1] ([http://www.wittgensteinsource.org/BTE/Ms-114,92v\[1\]\\_d](http://www.wittgensteinsource.org/BTE/Ms-114,92v[1]_d)), a page of the *Philosophische Grammatik*: you can clearly see, at a glance, that the first states all the deletions made by Wittgenstein in his drafts, while the latter describes the different lexical choices made by the Austrian philosopher.

Overall, the editing results informative and the guidelines about the markup used for annotating variants are clearly provided in the *Index* page, under the title *Legend*. Nonetheless, in order to help citations and avoiding problems posed by ephemeral digital objects, Wittgenstein Source provides a *permalink* for citing the items in BNE. Finally, we should state that this edition is surely a chance, considering that Wittgenstein published in his life only two works and accessing his manuscripts is an obliged path for every scholar who wants to have a comprehensive cognition of the development of his thought.

By the way we should remark that, in our honest opinion, all the projects presented on the website, including BNE, fail to provide a complete picture of the text-genesis of the philosopher's works. The scarceness of notes on text-genesis are far from capturing the *endogenesis* of Wittgenstein's works and their philosophical relevance. Another issue is the almost absent enrichment of each critical

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<sup>1</sup> David G. Stern, *Digital Wittgenstein Scholarship: Past, Present and Future*, In: From ontos verlag: Publications of the Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein Society - New Series (Volumes 1-18) <<http://wab.uib.no/agora-ontos/>>. Republication by the Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Bergen, 2013. Original publication in: Publications of the Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein Society - New Series, Vol. 6: Wittgenstein and the Philosophy of Information (ed. Alois Pichler, Herbert Hrachovec). Heusenstamm: ontos verlag 2008, pp. 223 - 238.

representation of texts with contextual information related to what is called the *exogenesis* of the historical documents. Nonetheless no introductory tool or essay is provided to a non-expert reader, making Wittgenstein source surely a resource for studying, but not for approaching Wittgenstein for the first time.<sup>2</sup>

#### **4. Publication and presentation**

At first glance, the website infrastructure presents a common and well-structured layout. At the top we have a header with the website title and two buttons: one for checking navigation history and one for getting a shortened URL. Under the header a collapsing left sidebar guides us through all the projects of the digital resource, which are constantly updated. This sidebar surely provides an effective tool for jumping from an edition to another with a single click. In addition to this browsing tool, a configurable system of boxviews allows the user to organize the presentation of the content in an interactive and accessible way.

However, a few remarks have to be made. Even if the layout seems at first pretty common, after few configurations of its boxviews for displaying the editions, this process seems pretty intricate and almost annoying. Nonetheless, the size of the boxes and the fact that the layout is not responsive force the user to constantly scroll to read just a line of a text edition or to see an entire facsimile. This is surely not a concession for scholars who are not used to the digital environment. Moreover, after a few researches<sup>3</sup>, we found out that the website exploits a framework developed by the European *Discovery project* (2006 - 2009), which appears now, after more than a decade, clearly outdated. This might be the reason for the lack of usability and the *not-so-fresh* look of the website. Another drawback is that Wittgenstein Source does not help further dissemination of its content. Every item, except the transcriptions in PTT, are accessible only via the website. No download button and no external PDF file; moreover, the digital resource doesn't have any social media integration. Besides the layout, the environment in which the textual content is delivered definitely acquires the features of what Hans Walter Gabler calls a *knowledge site*: a relational space characterized by 'creatively participatory intelligence'<sup>4</sup>. In fact, Wittgenstein Source gives the possibility for

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<sup>2</sup> After few researches, we discovered that Wittgenstein Source once provided a list of essays that are now available via WAB website (<http://wab.uib.no/cost-a32/essays/essays.html>)

<sup>3</sup> Alois Pichler, *Wittgenstein Source, the Bergen Nachlass Edition, and the Bergen Nachlass Transcriptions*. In: *Ludwig Wittgenstein: die Tractatus Odyssee - Ausstellung*. Edited by Radmila Schweitzer in cooperation with Bea Laufer-sweiler, Wittgenstein Initiative 2018. pp. 213-226

<sup>4</sup> Hans Gabler, *Thoughts on Scholarly Editing*, p.15; extracted by Krista S. G. Rasmussen, *Reading or using a digital edition? Reader roles in scholarly editions*, in *Digital Scholarly Editing: Theories and Practices* (ed. Matthew James Driscoll, Elena Pierazzo), Open Book Publishers, 2016, p.124.

users to annotate the edited text via the external app Pundit. Moreover, WAB made available for everyone a suited ontology (OWL/RDF), designed to annotate Wittgenstein's works<sup>5</sup>. With these relevant features, the curators prove their effort in supporting interchangeability and standardization; moreover, they show their belief in a Semantic Web that can enhance research and learning activities. Finally, to improve the sustainability of the *Nachlass* edition, samples of XML transcriptions are made available on WAB website ([http://wab.uib.no/wab\\_hw.page](http://wab.uib.no/wab_hw.page)).

Still, not all the possibilities of the so-called *Digital Paradigm*<sup>6</sup> were exploited. As we previously stated, the textual content often doesn't show the expected information enrichment. Indeed, one of the worst drawbacks is the fact that the collected items lack any integration among one other. Especially considering the case of Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose philosophical issues are so persistent and yet explored so differently along his biography, this digital resource doesn't meet the expectations of a scholar who wants to achieve an intuitive picture of his theoretical path. Even the tools for corpus querying are limited to a rudimental search bar for string matching, which restricts the possibilities for users to conduct quantitative analysis (i.e. concordances, collocations and word frequencies) with this edition.

## 5. Conclusions

In conclusion, Wittgenstein Source is a scholarly digital edition that realizes the aim to provide an open access tool for every scholar interested in improving his knowledge about Ludwig Wittgenstein with exclusive resources delivered in form of facsimilia and the Bergen Nachlass Edition, an edition that effectively allows everyone to carefully retrace the history of thoughts and ideas of one of the greatest geniuses of the XX century.

Overall, the content is extremely reliable and of great value. Also, its presentation is excellent: with good quality images and the integration of a practical synoptic viewer which allows the user both to manipulate and get a clear interpretation of textual content. Indeed, in BNE writing phases are perfectly captured by understandable editing markup and brief text-genesis notes.

Finally, we have to recognize that the fact that this project characterizes itself as an open workspace shows how curators are perfectly aware of some of the innovative features of the Digital Paradigm

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<sup>5</sup> Alois Pichler and Amélie Zöllner-Weber, *Sharing and debating Wittgenstein by using an ontology*, LLC 28 (2013), pp. 700-707.

<sup>6</sup> Patrick Sahle, *What is a scholarly digital edition?*, in *Digital Scholarly Editing: Theories and Practices* (ed. Matthew James Driscoll, Elena Pierazzo), Open Book Publishers, 2016, pp.19-39.

and how it can enhance scholarly editions. Collaborative annotations, suited ontologies and available encoding standards are some of the relevant features that allow Wittgenstein Source to open up undefined spaces for Wittgenstein digital textual scholarship.

However, we should also notice that, besides its scholar reliability and its care for the Digital Paradigm, Wittgenstein Source often seems to forget what type of reader the digital resource wants to involve. If the revolution brought by digital media seems to, reasonably, put in foreground philological effort as well as public engagement, Wittgenstein Source never makes explicit what type of public this website wants to address.

No additional content (i.e. essays, biographical notes) related to Wittgenstein and its philosophy is provided, both for inexperienced readers and experts. The layout is certainly not so user-friendly for small screens or people who are not used to browsing so-called “digital knowledge sites”. Moreover, the reader has no chance to get an intuitive picture of the content delivered in each digital edition, since no integration between items, besides an index, is provided to him.

Finally, we should acknowledge that these drawbacks are certainly not an insurmountable obstacle for a project that aims at constant updating of its content and its forms. In fact, past as well as current goals are stated by curators in WAB website ([http://wab.uib.no/wab\\_nachlass.page/](http://wab.uib.no/wab_nachlass.page/)). Among them, Nachlass Timeline and WITTFind (<http://wittfind.cis.uni-muenchen.de/>), a suitable app for querying Wittgenstein’s manuscripts and retrieving quantitative as well as textual information, are some of the ongoing projects held by WAB that arouse many expectations and would supply for most of the shortcomings that this project still shows.

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