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Introduction to the Open Peer-Reviewed Section on DR2 Methodology Examples

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Introduction to the Open Peer-Reviewed Section on DR2 Methodology Examples

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In the last twenty years Franco Moretti's 'distant reading' approach has provided a fresh understanding of literature and its historical development not by studying in detail a few particular texts (as in the so-called 'close reading'), but rather by aggregating and analyzing large amounts of information. As members of the DR2 research group at the University of Turin—DR2: Distant Reading and Data-Driven Research in the History of Philosophy—we share the conviction that it is time to apply such methods to the history of thought. This kind of methodological innovation can be of interest for scholars working on different historical periods (ancient, medieval, modern, contemporary) and from the perspective of different fields (history of philosophy, history of science, history of ideas and intellectual history, sociology of knowledge, and so forth). A founding moment for this approach was the first DR2 Conference, held in Turin in 2017. Some of the participants to the Conference agreed to publish edited versions of the conference talks in the form of working papers, that would be subjected to an open peer review *process. We present here the results.*

In the last twenty years Franco Moretti's 'distant reading' approach has provided a fresh understanding of literature and its historical development not by studying in detail a few particular texts (as in the so-called 'close reading'), but rather by aggregating and analyzing large amounts of information (Moretti

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2013). The central role of data in this approach is not determined only by their quantity. It is also important to look for different kinds of data, not investigated before, drawn from a variety of sources. In this sense this approach may be regarded as a form of data-driven research in the humanities. As members of the DR2 research group at the University of Turin—DR2: Distant Reading and Data-Driven Research in the History of Philosophy—we share the conviction that it is time to apply quantitative methods to the history of thought, and in particular to the history of philosophy, very broadly conceived. It seems to us that this kind of methodological innovation can be of interest for scholars working on different historical periods (ancient, medieval, modern, contemporary) and from the perspective of different fields (history of philosophy, history of science, history of ideas and intellectual history, sociology of knowledge, and so forth).

A founding moment for this approach was the first DR2 Conference, held at the University of Turin on January 16-18 2017. At the conference, after Moretti's opening talk on "Pattern and interpretation" (later published as Moretti 2017), several scholars from different countries met together for the first time to discuss a variety of topics and methods: from Justin Smith (Paris Diderot) to Gino Roncaglia (Viterbo), from Arianna Betti (Amsterdam) to Peter de Bolla (Cambridge), to mention but a few of them.

Since then the DR2 research programme has developed in several directions. First of all, the research group has been enlarged by new members and collaborators. A series of DR2 Colloquia was inaugurated, and a second DR2 Conference was held in Turin on February 12-13 2019. Among the invited speakers were Franco Moretti (Stanford and Berlin), Arianna Betti and Pauline van Wierst (Amsterdam), Glenn Roe (Paris Sorbonne), Nakul Krishna (Cambridge), Paolo D'Angelo (Roma Tre), Giulia Venturi (CNR Pisa), and Nicola Guarino (CNR Trento). The conference focused on two main issues: style in philosophy and corpora building. Furthermore, some courses on quantitative methods in the history of philosophy have been scheduled at the University of Turin—such as a course held by visiting professor Arianna Betti on the computational history of ideas and a special course at the Scuola di Studi Superiori "Ferdinando Rossi" (both in the academic year 2019-2020)—and the first M.A. dissertations based on these methods were defended. Bonino, Pulizzotto & Tripodi 2018, Buonomo & Petrovich 2018, Petrovich 2018a and 2018b, Bonino & Tripodi

2019, and Carducci et al. 2019 are some examples of the group's results; moreover, the first issue of the series "DR2 Working Papers" is going to be published. Last, but not least, a web page and a blog were opened, with the aim of raising attention on this approach, of communicating results and reflecting on tools and techniques, and of providing a space for discussion of our research work (`https://dr2blog.hcommons.org`).

Some of the participants to the first DR2 Conference agreed to publish edited versions of the conference talks in the form of working papers, that would be subjected to an *open peer review* process. The trial—as the editors of Nature said about their own run at open peer review: "We use the word 'trial' rather than 'experiment' advisedly" ('Peer review on trial' 2006)—has been an interesting chance to stretch the limits of peer review. *Nature*'s trial quite failed and the practice has been abandoned by them, but it has been taken up by others, and sometimes with perceived success: "What failed for Nature in 2006, has been very succesful for JMIR since 2009: inviting the broader scientific community to comment on current submissions before they are formally published" (Eysenbach 2015). This seems very inviting indeed: nonetheless, we must admit that we were not completely pleased with the outcome of our effort.

There is a lot of alternative interpretations of 'open peer review' or 'open review': a systematic review of the available definitions (more than one hundred) has been provided two years ago by Tony Ross-Hellauer (2017). For our trial, we went for collaborative, community-driven open peer review. Thus we opened a second DR2 blog for the review process (`https://dr2openpeerreview.hcommons.org`), where anyone could comment the papers by the paragraph (thanks to the excellent CommentPress plugin, `http://futureofthebook.org/commentpress/`) and we put to work the DR2 community that had gathered around the various activities of the research group. The submitted texts and the comments can still be scrutinized by interested readers.

On the one hand, the quality of the reviewing was quite satisfying, and we consider the result of the reviewing process utterly adequate for validating the final publications. On the other hand, we found ourselves—at times—in a situation not dissimilar from that of illustrious predecessors: "The trial was well-publicized ahead of time by *Nature*, but comments were rather scarce" (Shema 2014). One member of the DR2 group spent part of his scholarship gathering and galvanizing reviewers, with fairly good results: yet, in our experience, this aspect—participation—was, is, and is likely to remain the crucial shortcoming of this kind of open peer review process.

We'd like to warmly thank the Journal of Interdisciplinary History of Ideas for accepting to include the open peer-reviewed papers in the section devoted to methodological *Notes*: we are grateful for the attention that the *Journal* has been recently paying to distant-reading, quantitative, data-based methodologies in the history of ideas. We also heartily thank the authors and the reviewers who participated in the 'trial', and hope that the readers will enjoy the result.

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Logo of the DR2 Research Group