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Political variants mining:
computational investigations on authorial variants

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ABSTRACT

How can critical Digital Editions act on the community in the construction of collective ideas and thoughts? The representation and study of Authorial corrections, usually applied to literary texts, becomes of crucial collective interest when involves controversial works of modernity, such as Pietro Verri's *Observations on Torture*. Thanks to the potential of the Digital Edition, which makes it possible to represent the change of the Author's will, self-censorship or the hands of different authors, the project of Political Variants Mining applies the following analysis to a political text. It provides scholars with statistics on corrections, automatically computed starting from the TEI encoding of the text and made easily understandable through data visualization, allowing us to find out not only what has changed in the rewriting of a great political text but also to extend the resulting methodology to other works.

KEYWORDS

1. INTRODUCTION

Political Variants Mining has the double purpose to participate and to involve the largest number of people in the historical debate on torture, exploiting the new possibilities offered by innovative digital technologies and methodologies on the basis of the publicly accessible Digital Edition *Observations on Torture* by P. Verri, developed by M. De Blasi, and the qualitative and quantitative analysis of its corrections.

In the era of integrated communication and collective knowledge construction, the new possibilities offered by the digital paradigm emphasize the dynamic character of literary texts and their social value. Authorial Philology shares the same conception of texts as *in fieri* works making it possible to provide new critical interpretations through variants that denote changes in the author's will, self-censorship or the hands of different authors. Being openly available resources, Scholarly Digital Editions have therefore become fundamental in shaping collective ideas and thoughts, especially when it comes to political texts that have had a huge impact over the centuries.

2. HISTORY OF THE *OBSERVATIONS ON TORTURE*

Despite the several editions available, it was only in 2018 that the *Observations on Torture* has been published with an apparatus that included authorial variants.
As a result, Verri's work offered the possibility to study authorial corrections under an innovative perspective with respect to the stylistic one of a traditional literary text: the choice to reduce his own explicit considerations for the mere presentation of facts, in order to guide the reader's point of view through the way the events unfolded, represents a clear example of Verri's self-censorship.

3. RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS

With Political Variants Mining, we make available an innovative technique able to deepen the conventional philological reading, making it viable to gain and display in an automatic way linguistic and empirical insight into the creative process of an Author directly either from the PDF version of the text or from its encoding in an *ad hoc* TEI model. As shown in Fig.1, more than half of Verri's corrections are late variants (additions, written above, overwritten, derived) thus witnessing the aim of decreasing his own voice to obtain an unbiased report.
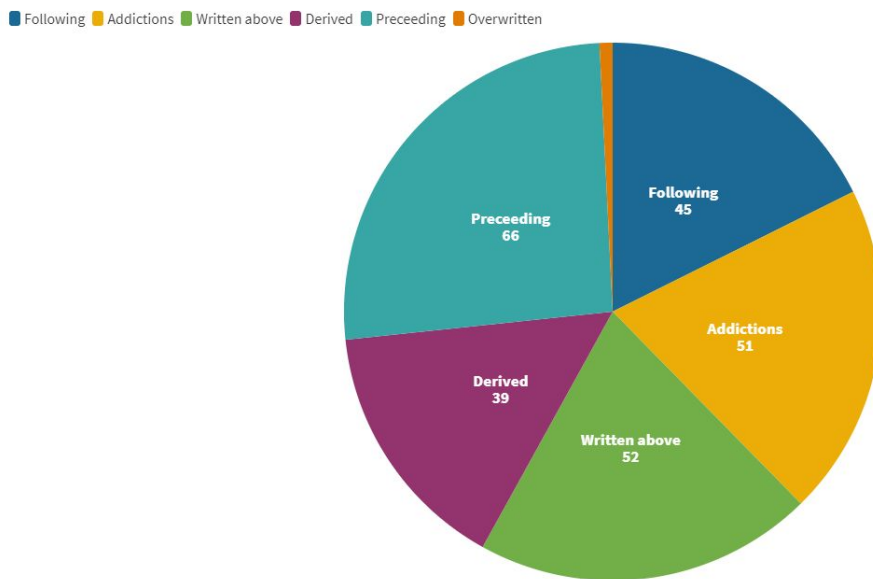
Fig. 1. *Observations on torture* frequency of correction.

The technical immediacy of the model allows to widen the study to other Authors to make a complete evidence-based analysis of the types of Authorial corrections and compare these different conceptions of writing statistically. Therefore, an open source detailed guide to achieve the same results and the code will be made available in a dedicated webiste. In fact, Political Variants Mining exploits new technologies both as means of information representation and as methodological frameworks to widen traditional philology to new perspectives of analysis, creating new possibilities towards the social democratization of knowledge.

4. CONCLUSION

Political Variants Mining makes evident Verri's idea in its very developmental process and highlights the importance of the conservation of a foundational text whose contribution was essential to raise social awareness on such a noteworthy topic.

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