

Open at the Level of (Para)Text: Critical Intertextuality and Discursive Notation as Open Research Practices in the Humanities

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Abstract: This article contends that open research practices and principles are embedded in humanities research paradigms in ways that are not currently visible within either the open science–dominated framework of open research or the discourse of open qualitative research that is emerging as its corrective. Focusing on practices around citation (here framed as critical intertextuality) and discursive notation, I explore the ways in which these everyday practices of humanities discourse manifest forms of openness that should be more fully recognized within the discourse of open research. Occurring at a time when efforts to measure, incentivize, and mandate open research at institutional, funder, journal, and research assessment levels risk delegitimizing forms of inquiry that lie outside existing frameworks, such reconsiderations of unrecognized practices of openness in the humanities are both crucial and timely.

Keywords: open research, humanities, citation, notation, paratext

Introduction

Emerging in the aftermath of the replication crises of the 2010s, open research is a movement that seeks to make the research process more “transparent, inclusive and democratic” (UNESCO 2023), sharing research outputs and opening up the processes of research to create more accessible, collaboratively produced, and verifiable knowledge. Yet in practice, as Paul Longley Arthur and Lydia Hearn note, “[t]he discourse around *open research* has centered almost exclusively on *open science* underlined by positivism, that is, the concept that research begins by developing a tightly defined theory from which a hypothesis can be deduced, tested, verified, replicated, and generalized” (2021, 830; italics in original). In other words, the concept of open research as conventionally deployed relies on a narrowly defined notion of research that is misleadingly represented as a default model for all. Focusing as a consequence on reproducibility, and the kinds

of methodological transparency that facilitate it, dominant models of open science leave little space for the recognition of other forms of openness in research with different epistemic commitments, as Crystal Steltenpohl et al. observe: “Open science guidelines fail to account for research based on epistemologies that are not strictly positivist and methods that are not strictly quantitative in nature” (2023). This article seeks to explore some of the forms of openness that lie outside this narrow disciplinary and epistemic scope, focusing in particular on two discursive practices in the humanities—critical intertextuality and discursive notation—that manifest different forms of methodological transparency. Considering these and other open practices in the humanities and social sciences offers one way of contesting the disciplinary bias in dominant conceptions of openness, opening “open research” itself to a process of multidisciplinary reimagining.

This article has three parts. I first unpack the limitations of dominant conceptions of openness in the context of research in the humanities and qualitative social sciences; second, I consider the epistemic and inferential specificities of humanities discourses that demand a different approach to openness in this context; and third, I unpack two discursive practices—critical intertextuality and discursive notation—that might be considered unrecognized practices of openness in the humanities.

Background: Open Research or Open Science?

Some of the key limitations of open science-derived paradigms of open research have been highlighted through qualitative researchers’ resistance to expectations around the use of privileged open science practices such as preregistration, data sharing, and the pursuit of reproducibility. Such scholars make the point that qualitative research is not linear, frequently proceeds inductively, and often entails an iterative process by which research questions and methods are gradually refined; it therefore resists the logic of preregistration (Feldman and Shaw 2019; Steltenpohl et al. 2023; Santana 2024).¹ Qualitative researchers have further foregrounded the epistemic specificity of dominant discourses of openness by raising a series of issues around data sharing and reproducibility. Barbara Class et al. highlight the challenges to data sharing presented by “sensitive or personal data, which qualitative data often are” (2021, 3), while in the context of the humanities specifically, Rebecca Grant (2023) notes concerns about copyright, intellectual property, and licensing. Further concerns are raised regarding the situatedness and intersubjective co-creation of qualitative data, which may limit the possibilities of

1. While scholars including Tamarinde Haven et al. (2020) have developed relevant tools, such as a dedicated preregistration template for qualitative research, these arguably function differently to comparable resources for quantitative research; rather than supporting researchers to evidence lack of deviation from an existing plan, they instead aid an initial formulation of an approach that is likely to evolve.

their re-creation or re-analysis.² Qualitative perspectives thus challenge the “portability” of data (McLeod and O’Connor 2021, 528) and their separability from their context of (co)creation.³ These concerns about both preregistration and data sharing illustrate the practical and epistemic challenges that surround attempts to consider qualitative research in terms of reproducibility:⁴ Where knowledge is situated and intersubjectively co-created, as it is in interpretivist qualitative research (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012), to what extent could one expect to “re-create” previous findings?

These questions of reproducibility and situatedness have informed debates about the tenability of “replication” in the humanities specifically and qualitative research more broadly. Scholars such as Rik Peels and Lex Bouter (2018, 2023) contend that replication studies in the humanities are both possible and desirable, operating as a means of verification and quality control.⁵ Yet Peels’s qualification that replication is possible in the humanities “*to the extent that [the humanities] are empirical*” (2019, 6; italics in original) is telling. Suggesting a process in which “facts” are objectively derivable from “data,” the framing of (a significant proportion of) research in the humanities as “empirical” is epistemically inappropriate, as Sarah de Rijcke and Bart Penders suggest: “[t]he coexistence of multiple valid answers and the value of their interaction disqualify replication as a viable quality criterion” (2018, 29).⁶ Recognizing the subjectivity of analysis and plurality of valid interpretations in the humanities, Pim Huijnen and Pieter Huistra consequently forgo the concept of a “maximal replication” of historical work, which would trace the study from research question (A) to “answer” (Z), advocating instead for a “minimal” reproduction in which “the question at stake is not whether the same research would lead to the same outcome, but whether the given outcome is sustained by the sources and methods used in the original study” (2022).

“Minimal replication” addresses the fact that the process of analysis in the humanities is *not* “empirical” in the sense implied by Peels, in which “facts” are objectively derived from “data”; however, it is unclear what this very diluted notion of replication adds to existing research practices in the humanities, in which, as I discuss below, research already entails detailed evaluation of the work of other scholars on the same topics and sources. There is hence a question of how productive it is to frame such practices in

2. On these points, see also Broom et al. (2009); Chauvette et al. (2019); Feldman and Shaw (2019); Prosser, Hamshaw, et al. (2023); Prosser, Bagnall, and Higson-Sweeney (2024); Prosser, Brown, et al. (2024); Lamb et al. (2024). Questions have also been raised about the (lack of) ease with which qualitative data can be de-identified (e.g., Pratt et al. 2020). On the ethical relationship between researcher and participants, see Mauthner (2012). On the implications of qualitative data sharing expectations for often precarious academic labor, see Weller (2023).

3. See also Mauthner and Parry (2009).

4. On this topic, see also Leonelli (2018).

5. Various different forms of replication (e.g., direct, conceptual, and reproduction) have been theorized with regard to the degree to which the data and methods are new or identical to those of the existing study. For the purposes of this discussion, I use “replication” to refer to all of these and “replicability” to refer to the capacity of a study to be successfully replicated.

6. On this point, see also Holbrook et al. (2019).

terms of replication and reproducibility, which evoke positivist connotations at odds with the practices and epistemic commitments of humanities research. In this, I concur with Madeleine Pownall (2022), who, in response to Matthew Makel et al. (2022), contends that the inextricability of subjectivity from qualitative research severely limits the relevance of replication in this context, adding that qualitative research possesses its own existing practices in pursuit of research rigor.⁷ While scholars such as Matthew Hanchard and Itzel San Roman Pineda (2025) have posited qualitative reimaginings of replication via such concepts as “re-renderability,” Pownall’s argument queries the fruitfulness and necessity of efforts to derive a workable approach to openness in qualitative research from this starting point.⁸

In place of a focus on key tenets of open science such as reproducibility, and key practices such as preregistration and data sharing, the emerging discourse of open qualitative research emphasizes the openness characteristic of many practices already prevalent in qualitative research, especially in the social sciences. Steltenpohl et al. (2023), for example, highlight the value of positionality—explicit clarification regarding the standpoint from which the research is produced—and reflexivity, or the continuous and explicit self-examination regarding the impact of (inter)personal context on the study’s design, implementation, and analysis. Indeed, scholars such as Michelle Jamieson et al. (2023) are beginning to advocate for the adoption of many of these practices in quantitative research.⁹ The adoption of such practices beyond qualitative contexts promises forms of openness that recognize and acknowledge the fact that, as Sandra Harding writes, “all scientific knowledge is always, in every respect, socially situated” (1991, 11). Nevertheless, positivist models of “open science” and the regulatory regimes they inform have been slow to respond to these critiques, and the emerging discourse of open qualitative research is itself focused largely on practice in the social sciences, suggesting a need to surface open practices in the humanities that are currently under-examined in both these discourses.

The Stakes of the Debate

The stakes of the lack of epistemic diversity in conceptions of open research are high. Expectations around research openness are increasingly becoming part of the regulatory mechanisms that govern research practice, whether in the form of journal submission

7. For a wide-ranging overview of critical responses to the relevance of reproducibility to qualitative research, see Cole et al. (2024).

8. On the incompatibility of reproducibility and replication with qualitative research, see also Leonelli (2018, 2022); Penders, Holbrook, and de Rijcke (2019); and Dienlin et al. (2021). For a discussion of the implications of debate on the “limits of replicability,” see Guttinger (2020). For a dissenting perspective that asserts the relevance of replication for qualitative researchers in some instances, see Tuval-Mashiach (2021).

9. See also Endacott et al. (2024, 9).

requirements, funder mandates, or at a more emergent level, institutional expectations and national research assessment exercises. While efforts to recognize and incentivize open practices are important, applying a model of openness that is essentially tailored to quantitative and positivist research carries the risk of disadvantaging those disciplines that are less consistent with these paradigms. On data sharing expectations, for instance, Annayah M. B. Prosser, Richard J. T. Hamshaw, et al. note that “unilateral or vague open data requirements [. . .] may serve to close the door to publication for [qualitative] researchers” (2023, 1643). Regarding expectations around reproducibility, Bart Penders, J. Britt Holbrook, and Sarah de Rijcke (2019) likewise observe that “[i]f fields of research exist for which replication is an unreasonable epistemic expectation, then policies for research that universalise the replication drive will perpetrate [. . .] an epistemic injustice, ghettoising the humanities and hermeneutic social sciences as either inferior research or not really research at all.”¹⁰ This reference to “epistemic injustice” recalls Natasha Mauthner’s comment, of prescriptive data sharing policies, that “it is reminiscent of what post-colonial feminist scholar Spivak (1988) calls ‘epistemic violence’” (2012, 168), highlighting the oppressive impact of subjecting one group of fields to the epistemic values of another, as well as the concrete inequities that might result in terms of funding allocation, publication opportunities, and research evaluation.

Open Research in the Humanities: Adaptive and *a priori* Approaches

Having outlined some of the key areas of friction between dominant framings of open research and the humanities and qualitative social sciences, I now explore further some alternative ways of approaching openness in the context of the humanities specifically. In addressing the epistemic and disciplinary imbalance in conceptions of open research, one key question is whether to take an *adaptive* approach—mapping the practices and expectations of open research from quantitative and STEM research to qualitative and humanities contexts, or what I term an *a priori* approach. The latter would entail devolving strategies of openness from the underlying values or first principles (rather than existing open science-derived best practices) of open research, coupling this with a close attention to existing discipline-specific practices of openness that are not currently visible within the dominant discourse. While scholars such as Michelle Sidler have echoed the position of Peels and others in suggesting that “[p]erhaps the most pragmatic strategy for bridging the ‘three cultures’ is to develop projects that adapt the

10. On this point, see also Leonelli (2022).

digital tools of Open Science for research projects in the humanities and social sciences” (2014, 84), I follow scholars including Arthur and Hearn and Marcel Knöchelmann in advocating for bespoke approaches that are consistent with the epistemic commitments and research practices of the humanities.

Contending that “there is a need to develop a stronger framework in which to enable open humanities rather than simply reapplying approaches drawn from open science” (2024, 46), Arthur and Hearn sketch an open humanities that includes “collaboration, citizen engagement, and making humanities research data, tools, software, and materials available in more findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable [. . .] ways” (2021, 831), citing as examples initiatives including DARIAH, Open Library of Humanities, and OPERAs.¹¹ Similarly, Knöchelmann states that “*open science* does not address the unique characteristics of the humanities [. . .], making an *open humanities* discourse necessary” (2019, 4; italics in original) and focuses—in what is perhaps a midpoint between adaptive and *a priori* approaches—on how practices such as preprinting, open peer review, and open licensing must be reconsidered in the context of the humanities. Elsewhere, more fully *a priori* approaches are evident in the refigurings of digital long-form publication identified and advocated for by such scholars as Kathleen Fitzpatrick (2011) and Janneke Adema (2021), with examples including the Open Humanities Press’s experimental Living Books series,¹² the evolving nature of which foregrounds the processual and collaborative nature of knowledge creation.¹³

My focus here, however, is less on emergent practices and infrastructures and more on the “open” affordances of our existing methods. As scholars such as Pownall (2022) and Steltenpohl et al. (2023) have undertaken in relation to social science practices such as reflexivity, there is a need to re-examine the mechanisms of openness that are characteristic of existing practice in the humanities but currently invisible within the open science-derived discourse of open research.¹⁴ There are a number of approaches that might be taken here—for example, examining the open potential of public scholarship via such media as podcasts and blogs; exploring participatory methodologies such as co-production in the humanities; or assessing forms of relational openness through attention to processes of affective entanglement.¹⁵ Following my interest in scholarship and writing as key analytical methods in these disciplines, I focus here on textual and paratextual discursive practices relating to citation and discursive notation.

11. <https://www.dariah.eu>; <https://www.openlibhums.org>; <https://operas-eu.org/about/>

12. <https://www.openhumanitiespress.org/labs/living-books-about-life/>

13. Experimentation in open digital publishing also includes the development of relational and antihierarchical publishing practices as evidenced in Tavella and Spiegelhofer (2025).

14. To acknowledge that there are current practices that embody “everyday” forms of openness in the humanities is, of course, not to imply that there exists no need or potential for researchers in these disciplines to embrace other, less well-established open practices.

15. For an insightful recent discussion of scholarly podcasts as instances of open and public scholarship, see Sewell (2025).

The argument below is illustrated with reference to a body of examples from current scholarly literature in the humanities, with one to three articles from the most recent issues, at the time of writing, of the following journals in the Open Library of Humanities,¹⁶ selected to represent a broad disciplinary spread:

- *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*
- *Architectural Histories*
- *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-Century Writings*
- *Free & Equal: A Journal of Ethics and Public Affairs*
- *Genealogy+Critique*
- *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics*
- *Open Library of Humanities Journal*
- *Regeneration: Environment, Art, Culture*

Articles were selected based on the extent to which they provided relevant examples of the (para)textual practices under discussion. A full list of the articles selected is provided in the Appendix; I refer to these throughout as “the corpus.” The (relative) arbitrariness of this selection is intended to highlight the degree to which the discursive practices under discussion are characteristic of the conventions of humanities discourses; therefore, we might expect to find supporting examples in any sample of articles drawn from these disciplines.

I begin with a brief sketch of some overarching features of scholarly discourse in the humanities that connect productively with some of the principles of open research. In speaking about the humanities, there are obvious perils of generalizing, which to an extent I submit to in the interests of advancing a productive argument. What follows therefore carries the proviso that it is a generalization of a field with diverse objects, methodologies, and goals. Nevertheless, humanities disciplines share key characteristics, including a focus on “the meaning-making practices of human culture” (Small 2013, 23); as Arthur and Hearn note, they also share a distinct set of methodologies and a focus on open-ended dialogue and debate: “Operating in nonlinear and nonuniform ways, the philosophies underlying the humanities [. . .] engage with a variety of methods of analysis through, for example, source criticism, hermeneutics, nuance, contextual meaning, and phenomenology. These encourage rational exchange and communication for deeper understanding and knowledge production but do not necessarily

16. Open Library of the Humanities was used as a source for this article’s examples as the platform brings together a suite of highly regarded journals across several humanities disciplines and subdisciplines, in which all work is openly available—in this sense, the platform might be considered an open dataset of sorts.

seek answers or closure” (2024, 49).¹⁷ I return to several of these points below in a brief sketch of some of the discourse-level elements of openness characteristic of work in these disciplines.

Temporality

I first refer in brief to the simultaneity of research and writing that characterize both the humanities and arguably much social science discourse. In a seminal essay on writing as a method of inquiry, social scientist Laurel Richardson contests the supposed separability of research and writing as a theorization emerging from quantitative approaches: “I had been taught, as perhaps you were as well, not to write until I knew what I wanted to say, that is, until my points were organised and outlined. [. . .] When I thought about those writing instructions, I realised that they cohered with mechanistic scientism and quantitative research” (Richardson and Adams St. Pierre 2005, 960). In the same co-authored essay, Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre concurs, citing Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s statement in *A Thousand Plateaus* that “writing has nothing to do with signifying. It has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come” (1987, 4–5; cited in Richardson and Adams St. Pierre 2005, 969), adding that “it is thinking of writing in this way that breaks down the distinction in conventional qualitative inquiry between data collection and data analysis. [. . .] Both happen at once” (Richardson and Adams St. Pierre 2005, 970).

This is, of course, not true of all instances of critical writing and is very difficult to evidence, yet it resonates with my own experience as a researcher in both the humanities and metaresearch, especially in such activities as close textual analysis. In qualitative analysis, whether of a literary text or an interview transcript, activities such as annotating and coding a passage—identifying it as an appropriate illustration of a given point—take place prior to writing, but the process of analysis is only fully actualized in the act of writing itself, a point Jonathan Kramnick makes in relation to literary analysis: “[t]he craft of composing these sentences means that an important part of their knowledge work lies in the doing [. . .], not in thoughts or ideas or even research that precede the act itself” (2023, 13). Penders, de Rijcke, and Holbrook make a similar point regarding philosophy: “the text *is* the research, and the act of writing the text is identical to the act of doing research. The argument and logic is developed in the production of a book, chapter or paper and [. . .] the writing offers a bounded and coherent narrative in which *knowledge-making*, not just *knowledge made*, is visible” (2020, 109; italics in original).

17. See also Parker (2008, 90).

We can perhaps identify traces of this simultaneity of writing and analysis in an example from the corpus. In a discussion of the poetic contributions of Lady Elizabeth Landon to Anna Birkbeck's album in 19th-century London, Armstrong writes, "Both poems turn on negatives that are implicitly troublesome—'no more,' 'no shelter,' 'no place,' 'never,' in the first poem, to which I now turn. 'That flower's bloom is not sooner gone | Than hope that trusts to thee.' (The slight rhythmical glitch of 'not sooner' draws attention to the phrase.) It was 'vain,' to no avail, to trust to the lover's 'bosom': love requires stability; if its pinions 'roam' it ceases to be love; the changeful 'aspin' (aspen) is no place for the dove—and implicitly its wings—to rest" (Armstrong 2024, 5). The sense of a thought unfolding is hinted at here in the cumulative effect of the punctuation, evoking the processes by which one observation and its recording give birth to another and still another. The parenthesis regarding the "slight rhythmical glitch" likewise suggests a fleeting observation, an undecidedness about the extent to which this is or is not part of the analysis's top line. Finally, we might identify at least the ghost of scholarly affect in the use of terms such as "troublesome" or "glitch," again evoking immediacy—the process of coming up against an obstacle or textual infelicity.

While we can make no conclusions about the process of the passage's composition, I read these details as traces of the fact that, as Cook observes, "writing is integral and not just secondary to marshalling an argument" (2013, 204). We see this recognition baked into some of the methodological terminology of text-based disciplines—for example, in the very phrase "close reading," which is, as Kramnick states (2023, 22), a process at once of reading and writing, as well as in the prevalence of terms such as "thesis" and "argument," which likewise evoke both knowledge and its expression in one breath. While it is not the case that the written text manifests the full history of its own editing and rewriting, we can nevertheless treat the text as a document of its own process. We might therefore tentatively situate the simultaneity of humanities discourse alongside process-based mechanisms of transparency in other disciplines—for example, reflexive memos in an interpretivist social science study or open electronic notebooks in STEM.

Epistemics

In this second sketch, I address the nature of the epistemic claims humanities discourses characteristically make. I do so both to further highlight the incompatibility of these discourses with that of reproducibility and to underscore the unfinalizability and epistemic contingency of the claims they articulate, positioning this as a form of *perspectival openness* characteristic of these discourses.

An examination of the verbs used by articles in the corpus to articulate their own projects provides a useful starting point. These texts voice their intentions to "advocate"

(Tremblay and Gill-Peterson 2024, 2), “argue” (Brake 2024, 4; Van Dijck 2025, 2; Cheatle 2024, 4; Farantatos 2024, 3; Müller and Axel-Tober 2025, 3; Perica 2024, 6), “conceptualize” (Kajita and Mack 2024, 6), “conjecture” (Schroeder 2025, 33), “contribute” (Coon and Vázquez Álvarez 2025, 25), “critically examine” (Peyroles 2025, 2), “critique” (Cheatle 2024, 4), “explore” (Perica 2024, 3; Farantatos 2024, 3; Kajita and Mack 2024, 5; Peyroles 2025, 10), “investigate” (Farantatos 2024, 3), “offer” (Brake 2024, 5; Cheatle 2024, 4), “propose” (Baker 2025, 3; McAteer 2025, 2; Müller and Axel-Tober 2025, 3; Tremblay and Gill-Peterson 2024, 8), and “suggest” (Brake 2024, 2; Schroeder 2025, 8). The provisionality of the knowledge claims advanced are well encapsulated in the following statements from the essays:

[D]rawing on hooks, I offer the critical practice of autotheory as a political refinement to feminist domesticity and as a decolonised mode of architectural history writing. (Cheatle 2024, 4)

In this essay I want to extend Puar’s critique of the myth of transgressive queerness to Elizabeth Bishop’s treatment of colonized landscapes and people in order to tarry longer with that discomfort and consider new ways to understand queer complicity. (Rohy 2024, 2)

[W]e propose to cast Darwin in a new, admittedly less dramatic role: that of an empiricist for whom nature and sex are united by a common accidentality. (Tremblay and Gill-Peterson 2024, 8)

Jean-Thomas Tremblay and Jules Gill-Peterson’s “proposal” and Emma Cheatle’s “offer” are both ways of presenting potential insights without claim to their definitiveness or ultimate authority, echoing Catherine Belsey’s statement that “the [textual] analysis is not exhaustive: it does not embrace all the possible readings, past and future” (2013, 169). They illustrate the characteristic status of knowledge claims in humanities discourses as contingent, provisional, and imbued with a sense of their situatedness within a discursive, conceptual, and interpretive space that is inherently plural and multiple.¹⁸ Knowledge in these disciplines is recognized as multifaceted, intersubjectively negotiated between a host of different critical perspectives, each with its own positionality and theoretical standpoint, illustrating Knöchelmann’s assertion that “[d]issonance is essential and there is no need for agreement in a discourse for it to be successful in scholarship” (2019, 2). Valerie Rohy’s stated aim to “tarry longer with that discomfort and consider new ways to understand queer complicity” further highlights the exploratory component characteristic of these critical discourses—not only the sense of writing as

18. See, for example, Rachel Alsop on the evolution of ethnographic methods in English studies (2013, 114).

a space for thinking, and its resultant distinctive temporality as discussed above, but also the fact that their aim is to pluralize rather than displace existing interpretations.¹⁹

The contingent and highly situated epistemic claims made here, together with their self-conscious acknowledgment of their location amid a plurality of potential readings, underscore the extent to which “reproducibility” is largely incompatible with humanities discourse. Yet this does not preclude the identification of different forms of openness that are manifested precisely in such provisionality.²⁰ To illustrate what I mean by this, contrast the “offer,” the “proposal,” with the kind of epistemic claim more commonly found in non-humanities discourse: the “finding.” The latter inescapably evokes (post) positivist perspectives on knowledge, positioning the claim as a discovery of something that exists externally to the process of research. To present a *finding* is to make a claim that is in the realm of objective facts and a related bid for one’s knowledge to be recognized as valid and authoritative. But the scientific method nevertheless incorporates an openness to supersession, to displacement of a formerly authoritative account of a topic where new facts emerge or a finding fails the test of replication. Sharing materials such as data and code facilitates the scrutiny that may enable such supersession. Temporally speaking, this is a linear process: One consensus is displaced by another, and while multiple competing theories or analyses of a phenomenon may exist at the same time, the aim of each is to be accepted as the prevailing one, superseding the others in precisely this linear way.²¹

The corresponding form of openness of humanities discourses is by comparison spatial, characterized by simultaneity; interpretive perspectives sit alongside each other in the same plane—and additionally are in dialogue with each other. This openness to other, dissenting interpretations, to productive dialogue as part of a collective ongoing project, is what I mean when I talk about the perspectival openness of humanities discourses. It is different in kind from the linear openness of reproducibility mechanisms but comparable in terms of the values expressed: a vulnerability and openness to the ongoing collaborative negotiation of knowledge. This stance finds expression in the corpus in Kalle Müller and Katrin Axel-Tober’s statement that “[w]e hope that our proposal invites [. . .] further investigations and [. . .] reexaminations” (2025, 32); it is

19. I follow Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen’s construction in his postnarrativist philosophy of historiography of the form of “truth” aspired to in humanities discourse as residing in “warranted assertability” rather than correspondence to objective fact. Kuukkanen defines this as “a case in which the historian has managed to construct a rationally persuasive argument for some specific point or conclusion [, one which offers] an insightful way of making sense of the past and [. . .] provide[s] a comprehensive account of the data available that is also internally coherent and subsumes the wide scope of phenomena under it” (2015, 166–67).

20. I am aware that for many working in the field of open research, this suggestion may be read as applying the concept of openness in research in ways that far exceed its justifiable remit. However, this arguably evidences precisely the rich variability within the conceptual bounds of open research when considered in an epistemically inclusive fashion.

21. I am, of course, sketching with very broad brushstrokes here.

one that makes its intellectual resources available to a continuing process of negotiating meaning.

These two sketches have indicated some aspects of the temporality and epistemics of humanities discourses that facilitate or are conducive to openness. In the body of this article, I explore two discursive practices that operate within this temporal and epistemic context to further facilitate forms of openness that usually go unrecognized as open research practices but which might be productively considered in this context: textual practices relating to citation conventions, which I here term “critical intertextuality,” and paratextual practices relating to discursive notation.

Critical Intertextuality—Citation Practices in a Collaborative Discourse

Having offered an account of humanities discourses’ perspectival and process-oriented openness, I here provide a more detailed account of another aspect of openness characteristic of these discourses—critical intertextuality, or the dialogue between different critical and interpretive positions such discourse characteristically enacts. This mode of engagement, particularly as embodied in citation processes, enables a form of openness in which the critical and intersubjective groundings of the interpretation advanced are made clear.

In humanities scholarship, the positions of other scholars are afforded a comparable degree of care, attention, and detailed engagement to that received by “primary texts” (e.g., a poem, a historical source, a musical score), as Knöchelmann notes, observing that “critiquing and reinterpreting existing contributions to a discourse [. . .] [is] an integral part of the humanities” (2019, 2). Rather than merely naming or summarizing, humanities discourses allow other scholars to speak in their own voices, as in this example from the corpus:

McBean, emphasising the queer origins of network models, articulates how in Hanya Yanagihara’s *A Little Life* (2015) the network is presented not simply as “a banal structure of contemporary life” but “as a labor” (McBean 2019: 439). [. . .] While D’hoker argues that the term “network novel” is “too specific and unfamiliar to cover the whole range of novels that operate on the cross-roads of the integrated novel and the short story cycle” (D’hoker 2018: 27) [. . .] the importance of the network as a structuring principle is that it allows for a combined focus on the formal mechanics of the novel and the networks it represents. (Baker 2025, 5)

The commitment to devoting space to the speech of critical interlocutors is embodied at a literal level in the use of block quotes—indented quotations that allow citation

of a substantial passage of text from others' work.²² Scholarly mise-en-page here acts emblematically in terms of the unassimilated incorporation of other critical voices, echoing Bonnie Mak's assertion that "[t]he page transmits ideas [. . .] but more significantly influences meaning by its distinctive embodiment of those ideas" (2011, 5). The spatiality of critical discourse in the humanities—a theme I will return to below—in this way emblemizes its scholarly multivocality.

To scholars in the humanities, this brief overview of common practice when citing secondary literature may seem mundane, but it is notable relative to practices elsewhere. To take one example from the corpus, consider this passage from Heidi Svenningsen Kajita and Jennifer Mack:

Analyses by feminist scholars Silvia Federici (2012) and Nancy Fraser (2016) show how care and capitalism undermine one another when the affective and material labour of maintaining households and broader communities of wage earning are at odds. As Fraser points out, "processes of 'social reproduction' have been cast as women's work. . . . Comprising both affective and material labour, and often performed without pay, it is indispensable to society. Without it there could be no culture, no economy, no political organization" (2016: 99). Anthropologist Andrea Muehlebach concurs, noting that despite its key societal value, care work, or affective labour, is often positioned as "non-work" (2011: 60). In a similar vein, Michael Hardt underscores the critical importance of affective labour in capitalist production, writing that "the processes of economic postmodernization . . . have positioned affective labour in a role that is not only directly productive of capital but at the very pinnacle of the hierarchy of labouring forms" (1999: 90). (Kajita and Mack 2024, 9; ellipses in original)

In a different discipline, we can imagine the passage looking something like this: "Analyses show how care and capitalism undermine one another when the affective and material labour of maintaining households and broader communities of wage earning are at odds (Hardt 1999; Muehlebach 2011; Federici 2012; Fraser 2016)."

What has been lost through this imagined transformation? A list of names and dates is presented in a somewhat decontextualized fashion, a sense of consensus implied or manufactured from a series of critical positions that inevitably contain differences of argument, perspective, and theoretical and methodological stance. We have lost the specificities of the argument, lost the words themselves, indicating the extent to which they matter less in critical discourses that less fully acknowledge the continuity between an argument and its articulation. In losing the specificities of language and argument,

22. See, for example, Peyroles (2025, 4, 7).

as well as the page references, there is also a loss of accountability in the uses to which these scholarly perspectives are being put and the precise relationship between these voices and the unfolding analysis. If a subsequent scholar wished to trace exactly what part of the article or book was being referred to, and exactly which arguments or analyses were relevant, this would prove challenging.

Borrowing an analogy from different scopes of textual engagement in literary studies, we might deploy a taxonomy of *close* versus *distant reading* in characterizing this distinction. Associated with the digital humanities, the term “distant reading” was introduced by Franco Moretti to refer to approaches that analyze large amounts of textual data in a manner that close reading never could—for example, a computational analysis of the use of proper nouns in the titles of every (digitized) 18th-century novel. Moretti writes, “[t]he ambition is now directly proportional *to the distance from the text*: the more ambitious the project, the greater must the distance be” (2013, 48; italics in original). This quantitative approach to cultural phenomena is arguably anomalous to the body of work in the humanities; Moretti himself acknowledges its limitations: “Distant reading: where distance, let me repeat it, is a condition of knowledge: it allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text. [. . .] And if, between the very small and the very large, the text itself disappears, well, it is one of those cases where one can justifiably say, Less is more” (Moretti 2013, 48–49).²³ The list of names and dates following a summary-level statement of critical opinion allows just this kind of “big picture” approach, in which dozens or even hundreds of secondary works can be cited within a single article, precisely because of the broad view taken. This approach has its place in scholarship in the kinds of “ambitious” surveys Moretti gestures to, but the contrasting “close reading” approach arguably more fully embodies the value of transparency that underpins open research. As suggested, this is a transparency of what exactly is being claimed about the work of prior scholars and how the future reader can verify that they are in fact saying what they are being made to say. In allowing other scholars to speak in their own words, and treating these words with care and seriousness, the polyphonic²⁴ humanities discourse that results from such critical intertextuality carries an ethical potential that discourses with other citation conventions may not. In a Levinasian ethics in which the face of the other can also be presented to us through discourse,²⁵ the polyphonic text refuses to erase and overwrite

23. For a useful and concise discussion of both Moretti’s “distant reading” and Matthew Jockers’s “macroanalysis,” see Bode (2017).

24. I use the term “polyphonic” in Bakhtin’s sense of “[a] plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses” (Bakhtin 1984, 6).

25. In this, I follow the approach of such scholars as Derek Attridge, for whom texts can be the medium by which a reader or scholar encounters an alterity via which an ethical responsibility is instantiated (2004, see especially 130).

the alterity of the (scholarly) other through the assimilatory practices of paraphrase and the author-date list, with its conflation of scholarly perspectives.

Discursive Notation, Methodological Openness, and Counternarrative

From a discussion of critical intertextuality in humanities discourses, I turn now to a discussion of discursive notation, a phenomenon that might be considered part of a scholarly publication's paratext. "Paratext" is Gérard Genette's term for the "zone between text and off-text" (1997, 2); components of paratext include such peripheral textual elements as prefaces, dedications, titles, and notes.²⁶ While Genette considers the original authorial note (as opposed to, say, a note in a critical edition) as lying "in a very undefined fringe between text and paratext" (1997, 328), he also states that an identification of a discursive component as paratextual is ultimately a pragmatic decision: "'The paratext,' properly speaking, does not *exist*; rather, one chooses to *account in these terms* for a certain number of practices or effects, for reasons of method and effectiveness. [. . .] The question is therefore not whether the note does or does not 'belong' to the paratext but really whether considering it in such a light is or is not useful and relevant" (Genette 1997, 343; italics in original). Considering the note as paratext foregrounds its status as a supplement—an aspect of the text that is not mandatory but that, if present, carries potential in enhancing research openness. The same might be said to apply to other paratextual spaces and practices, such as the "digital exoskeleton" (Kapiszewski and Karcher 2021, 474–76) of Annotation for Transparent Inquiry (ATI), which Alan Jacobs et al. summarize as "a technology developed by the Qualitative Data Repository [. . .] that allows researchers to layer a citation, analytical note, source excerpt, and possible link to a source over the relevant passage in the article text" (2021, 183) and which I discuss further below.

First and foremost, discursive notes²⁷ can be viewed as a mechanism of transparency. *Literally underpinning* the text in which, as we have seen, analysis is *occurring* rather than merely being reported, they can be read, in Anthony Grafton's words, as "the humanist's rough equivalent of the scientist's report on data: they offer the empirical

26. I am focusing here on peritext, those aspects of paratext that relate to the text itself, rather than epitext, which refers to aspects outside the text such as interviews, authorial diaries, etc. (Genette 1997, 5). For a useful discussion of this distinction, especially as it pertains to digital texts, see Skare (2021). For a wide-ranging discussion of paratext specifically as it pertains to digital literature, see Desrochers and Apollon (2014).

27. The below points refer to footnotes, but are arguably applicable to all discursive notes including endnotes. While footnotes are arguably preferable in terms of the lesser distance between text and note, their availability will depend upon the digital format used by a given publisher.

support for stories told and arguments presented” (1999, vii). Our footnotes, in Sanja Bogojević’s reading, “allow others to hold us accountable for the choices we have made in our scholarship” (2024, 3); more poetically, Blaise Cronin refers to footnotes as “footprints which bear witness to the passage of ideas” (1984, 25). Discursive notes are a paratextual space in which explanatory asides may unfold, interpretive and methodological stances can be justified and unpacked, supportive or dissenting critical others given voice. In contrast to perfunctory and sometimes performative author-date lists,²⁸ discursive notes, alongside the more detailed in-text methods of secondary citation I have discussed, provide a mechanism of transparency. Where the “unpacking” that takes place within their realm is that of the scholarship’s situation relative to the work of other scholars, or the elucidation of such scholars’ (assenting, diverging) viewpoints, the form of transparency facilitated is precisely that of the intersubjective and intertextual context from which the work emerges. The discursive note in this sense provides a benchmark and precursor to the forms of transparency permitted by more emergent practices such as ATI; indeed, Diana Kapiszewski and Sebastian Karcher note that “[f]or scholars who use lengthy footnotes to clarify and illustrate points, ATI annotations are a natural extension of their writing practices” (2021, 474).²⁹

These observations cohere with the above discussion of critical intertextuality, with the discursive note providing a supplementary space for scholarly contextualization that is not crucial to the main analysis, but which provides valuable added context. As evident from a glance at the corpus, this might take the form of opening up onto parallel or related conceptual arenas (e.g., Van Dijck 2025, n10: “Jean-Christophe Cloutier’s ‘shadow archive’ is another helpful term in this context”); highlighting additional relevant scholarship on particular points (e.g., Rohy 2024, 14n46: “There is much more to be said about affect and queer complicity. See [. . .]”); or self-positioning relative to other critical perspectives (e.g., Motchoulski 2025, n6: “I believe that Thompson is correct with respect to harm views, but as I discuss below, reparations for historical injustice based in distinctly political principles can avoid such collapse”). Such usages facilitate the transparent positioning of a work relative to prior scholarship and demonstrate rigor in the acknowledgment of one’s sources—a key point given that two of the questionable research practices most perilous to humanities research are plagiarism and AI-induced hallucination.³⁰

28. Discursive notes can arguably themselves be performative, creating the impression of substantiation of an argument via their reassuring bulk while lacking genuinely elucidatory content. Nevertheless, such obfuscation is significantly harder to hide in a free text format with conventions of precise quotation and attribution.

29. It is worth noting that ATI, while more extensive, is also a significantly more labor-intensive paratextual intervention into transparency—see, for example, Siewert (2021). It is likewise limited in terms of availability due to journal and platform dependencies.

30. Plagiarism is arguably beyond “questionable,” but there are certainly gray areas that might fit into the category of QRPs.

Discursive notes can also provide a space for personal reflections, or what Genette terms “autobiographical asides” (1997, 326). These foreground the author’s positionality and disrupt any notion of objective authority to the claims under articulation; as Sylvia Molloy notes in relation to the place of the personal in scholarship more generally, “such intrusions are useful [. . .] because they effectively call attention to seams, gaps, differences that a general, impersonal discourse would ignore” (1996, 1073). In one article in the corpus, for example, we find the following note, which accompanies the author’s discussion of transformative discoveries in interpersonal relationships and the ways interpretations can shift: “The evening before this paper was accepted, I encountered a powerful illustration of this when my daughter got upset at me for buying her black tissue paper to distribute holiday gifts. The tissue paper that I had purchased was in fact gold, but she was seeing it in dim lighting conditions” (Schroeder 2025, 8n7). While this arguably adds little to the example already presented in the article—that of the “internet dress” that was perceived varyingly by different viewers—neither is the note superfluous. Relevantly in the context of an article concerned with matters of perception, the note allows Schroeder to situate the article in a personal and interpersonal context. In this example, the process of situating is an almost literal one: in time (“the evening before this paper was accepted”; “holiday gifts”) and in space (the family home)—but arguably all irruptions of the personal in academic writing bring into focus a different view of the claims and interpretations presented—like the lighting shift that enables Schroeder’s daughter to see the paper as first black, then gold. For a moment, we glimpse the place from which the claims are uttered and thereby their contingency on this context. Openness, here, concerns first the fact of the research’s situatedness and, second, where the author chooses to explore or refer to it, the nature of this situatedness. This is possible via a range of different mechanisms—for example, positionality statements or reflexivity in qualitative analysis—with the forms of “aside” facilitated by the discursive note being just one.

I’ve suggested that discursive notes support transparency regarding both the (inter) subjective and intertextual contexts from which the work issues. Yet these are not the only forms of transparency they enable. Grafton comments that “[l]ike an engineer’s diagram of a splendid building, the footnote reveals the occasionally crude braces, the unavoidable weak points, and the hidden stresses that an elevation of the facade would conceal,” adding that “[f]ootnotes buttress and undermine, at one and the same time” (1999, 23, 32). The spatiality of Grafton’s imagery highlights the discursive note’s status as at once a *visible foundation*—the scholarly method behind the claims made manifest in the availability of references to scrutiny—and a space to make visible that with the potential to *undercut* the explicit argument. This recalls the spatiality in Genette’s original exploration of notes, where he states that the author who declines footnotes “denies himself [*sic*] the possibility of a second level of textual discourse, one that sometimes

contributes to textual depth” (1997, 328). Genette’s evocation of depth and Grafton’s imagery of the footnote as both a foundation and an undermining highlight that through their spatial location, as Mak writes, “[p]aratexts shape the page [both] graphically and cognitively” (2011, 7).

As one example drawn from the corpus, after explicating one approach to a question of legal culpability, Elise Sugarman qualifies in a footnote: “[t]his simplifies somewhat, as some *actus rei* are omissions rather than actions” (2025, 59n33). The underpinning framework of the article, in the sense of its scope and the degree to which some collapsing of categories has been necessary, is thereby transparently acknowledged. The note also provides space for the acknowledgment of counter-readings, as in Müller and Axel-Tober’s note: “In fact, the source could also be secondary predicate. Secondary predicates and manner adverbials are both uninflected in German, and they are not easy to distinguish semantically in all cases” (2025, 12n11). The function of the discursive note as counternarrative space hence enables a different form of transparency that acknowledges the ways in which the analysis presented in the text *could be otherwise*.

As a related point, we can see from an examination of another article in the corpus the extent to which discursive notes as a counternarrative space enable the articulation of dissenting and (self)critical voices: “In critiquing the neoliberal deployment of ‘it gets better,’ it is not my intention to dismiss individual hopes and desires to get better from physical or mental illness, but to challenge political and cultural narratives that obscure structural inequalities through the co-option of diversity and inclusion agendas” (Powell 2025, 20n8). Daisy Powell’s discursive note provides space for the acknowledgment of other voices and perspectives, whether those of a reviewer, those of the imagined reader for whom “up lit” offers a meaningful and necessary source of hope amid suffering, or those of scholarly voices who take a different approach to narratives of social and personal recuperation. The references to “my intention” at once acknowledge the potentially problematic implications of Powell’s argument and offer another nod to research’s situatedness, its entanglement with the individual critical and theoretical agendas of its practitioners.

Conclusion

This article has traced the significance of critical intertextuality and discursive notation in enacting “everyday” forms of open research in humanities discourses. These lie beneath the interpretive radar of our existing paradigms—both of open science-derived open research and of the open qualitative research movement that is emerging as its corrective. These observations demonstrate the productive nature of efforts to explore existing practices in qualitative and arts, humanities, and social sciences research as

mechanisms of openness that other disciplines and research types might likewise benefit from adopting. Finally, this analysis has also clarified the significance of discursive space(s) to a consideration of research openness, suggesting the extent to which, for (often) text-based disciplines like those of the humanities, the nature and capacity of the spaces made available for scholarly publication are crucial to their open potential. Setting aside emergent developments such as ATI, discursively expansive practices around citation and notation underscore the crucial nature of long-form publication formats and the consequent imperative to accelerate the movement toward open monographs in these disciplines, as well as the need for capacious word counts in journal publications to facilitate the open discursive practices specific to humanities research.

Open Peer Review Reports

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Data Availability Statement

The data underlying this publication consist of a body of articles that are openly available; the list of articles, sources, and DOIs are provided in the Appendix.

Rights Retention Statement

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Appendix: The Corpus of Articles from Which Examples Are Drawn

Journal	Subject areas (taken from https://www.openlibhums.org/journals/)	Issue	Article
<i>19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century</i>	19th-century studies, Victorian literature, archival studies, beauty, aesthetics, infrastructure studies, environmental humanities, museum studies, art, sculpture, Realism, Impressionism	Issue 36 (2024)	I. Armstrong, "L.E.L. in and out of the Birkbeck Album: Poetics and Politics" (2024), https://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.16537 L. Brake, "In Our Time: Adult Education and Birkbeck: Extra-Mural—An Experiment 1988–2009" (2024), https://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.16324
<i>Architectural Histories</i>	Architecture, architectural history, global history, city planning, landscape studies, monuments, methodology, design history, aesthetics, built environment, photography, cultural studies, Modernisms, homemaking	12.1 (2024)	E. Cheatle, "From Simone de Beauvoir's 'House' to bell hooks' 'Homeplace': Autofiction and Autotheory in Architectural Writing" (2024), https://doi.org/10.16995/ah.11690 P. Farantatos, "Embodied Memories, Retroactive Traces: Le Corbusier's Travel Sketches in <i>Le Modulor</i> " (2024), https://doi.org/10.16995/ah.10728 H. S. Kajita & J. Mack, "Hertopia: Women's Welfare Landscapes in Sweden, 1960s and 1970s" (2024), https://doi.org/10.16995/ah.8656
<i>C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-Century Writings</i>	Contemporary literary studies, 21st-century literature, narrative theory, genre theory, postmillennial fiction, transnational literature, contemporary poetry, contemporary drama, contemporary culture, digital poetics, digital humanities	12.1 (2025)	T. Baker, "The Scottish Network Novel" (2025), https://doi.org/10.16995/c21.18020 D. A. Powell, "The Spectre of Austerity in Up Lit: Mike Gayle's <i>All the Lonely People</i> (2020) and Gail Honeyman's <i>Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine</i> (2017)" (2025), https://doi.org/10.16995/c21.15315
<i>Free & Equal: A Journal of Ethics and Public Affairs</i>	Philosophy, public affairs, politics, political science, ethics, policy, law, sociology, economics, social issues, social problems, public administration	1.1 (2025)	M. Schroeder, "Tipping Points: Abuse and Transformative Discovery" (2025), https://doi.org/10.16995/fe.17907 E. Sugarman, "Supposed Corpses and Correspondence" (2025), https://doi.org/10.16995/fe.17735 A. Motchoulski, "Reparations, Recognition, and the Restoration of Relational Equality" (2025), https://doi.org/10.16995/fe.17813
<i>Genealogy+Critique</i>	Critical theory; media studies; digital humanities; science and technology studies; postcolonial, gender, and race studies; critical posthumanities; critical genealogies; Foucault studies; phenomenology	10.1 (2024) and 11.1 (2025)	I. Perica, "Competitive Words: Identity Counts in Large Amounts" (2024), https://doi.org/10.16995/gc.11086

(Continued)

(Continued)

Journal	Subject areas (taken from https://www.openlibhums.org/journals/)	Issue	Article
<i>Glossa: a journal of general linguistics</i>	Linguistics, linguistic theory, syntax, phonology, semantics	10.1 (2025)	K. Müller & K. Axel-Tober, “A Syntactic Approach to Pragmaticalization” (2025), https://doi.org/10.16995/glossa.16342 J. Coon & J. J. Vázquez Álvarez, “Embedding, Extraction, and Clausal Pied-Piping in Ch’ol” (2025), https://doi.org/10.16995/glossa.17171
<i>Open Library of Humanities Journal</i>	Environmental humanities, medical humanities, digital humanities, performance studies, curatorship studies, medieval studies, musicology, sound studies, critical posthumanities, graphic narrative, comics studies, critical theory, avant-gardes, science and technology studies, utopian theory, waste studies, water studies, game studies, contemporary literary studies, screen media, film & TV studies, American literature	11.1 (2025)	A. Peyroles, “Against Political Literature: What’s Next?” (2025), https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.17997 C. Van Dijck, “Out of Africa: Nat Nakasa’s Exit Paperwork” (2025), https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.17354 M. McAteer, “Universalism and Locality in Sally Rooney’s Digital Ireland” (2025), https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.16767
<i>Regeneration: Environment, Art, Culture</i>	Environmental humanities, ecocriticism, ecologies, critical posthumanities, critical animal studies, Indigenous studies, queer theory, Black studies, the Anthropocene, apocalyptic studies, new materialisms, cultural geographies, social justice, environmental racism, art, activism	1 (1 and 2) (2024)	V. Rohy, “Queer Complicity and the Colonial Anti-Pastoral” (2024), https://doi.org/10.16995/regeneration.16500 J.-T. Tremblay & J. Gill-Peterson, “Sex in Nature” (2024), https://doi.org/10.16995/regeneration.16503

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