


# Intertextuality Research

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**Abstract** The concept of intertextuality refers to the relationships, functions, and effects arising between two or more texts where the texts reference each other in quotations, allusions, or structural parallels. The concept was formulated in literary studies in the 1970s and 1980s as part of an extensive theoretical debate and has recently been updated under the auspices of digitality. Digital methods are used to find, annotate, and evaluate intertextual references. Depending on the method, different approaches to the phenomenon of intertextual relationships develop, some of which align with traditional literary studies concepts and are characterized by the specifics of digitality.\*

**Keywords** Intertextuality, Literary Theory, Text Reuse, Annotation, Operationalization, Modelling

The concept of intertextuality – i.e., the relationship between two or more texts marked by textual similarity – establishes a link between literary and theological research traditions. For (neo-philological) literary studies, the concept was established in the 1960s and 1970s by the post-structuralist conceptual and theoretical development surrounding Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes. This concept was then further developed, specified, and partially reconceptualized in various ways during a subsequent phase (cf. Genette [1982] 1993; Riffaterre 1984; Broich & Pfister 1985; Lachmann 1990). By and large, the aim was to make the post-structuralist-deconstructivist concept of a text, which characterizes Kristeva's and Barthes' work, more operational by tracing it back to concretely verifiable text structures and/or authorial intention.<sup>1</sup> The embedding in the fundamental literary-theoretical debate on the meaning and function of central concepts and terms such as author, text, and work was decisive.

By way of contrast, the theological approach to textual similarity has been more practice oriented, in that the approach is less theoretical and more primarily describes

\* This chapter, including quotations in foreign languages, was translated from German by Brandon Watson.

1 Cf. the following remarks on the intensity of intertextual markings in the compendium by Broich & Pfister: "Pretexts or text foils that are only brought to the text by the genesis of the work or only arbitrarily by the recipient constitute [...] weak intertextual references, whereas the *hard center of maximum intensity* is reached when the *author is aware* of the intertextual reference, assuming that the recipient is also familiar with the *pretext* and refers to it clearly and unambiguously through a *conscious marking in the text*" (Pfister 1985, 27) [emphasis added, J.N.].

the citation practices and textual references during the reception, dissemination, and transmission of biblical texts and theological literature (cf. Gillmayr-Bucher 2006). The reference to historical textual practices indicates the relevance of intertextual references, the historical tradition of which goes beyond the lines of the development of the concept of intertextuality to antiquity (cf. Berndt & Tonger-Erk 2013, 7). In part, the theological understanding, trained in a complex historical tradition with multi-layered, branched textual relationships, also comes much closer to the post-structuralist concept of a “mosaic of citations” (Kristeva [1967] 1972, 348) without a connection to a specific author than many of the literary scientific developments in scholarship (cf. also Brodie 2006, 75). At the same time, recent theological research also emphasizes the relevance of considering a *literary* dimension of biblical intertextuality (cf. Brodie et al. 2006, 4; id. 2006a, 285; Dörr 2012, 20–24). This study, in turn, explicitly corresponds with the literary tradition of intertextual analysis.

Both disciplines have a long and diverse academic tradition of treating intertextuality phenomena in the age of (largely) analogous research in the humanities. These lines of tradition form the background against which the reconceptualization of the phenomenon of intertextuality by digital methods takes place. At the same time, many Digital Humanities methods are methodologically based on a comparison of textual properties,<sup>2</sup> which, however, takes place primarily based on numerical values and measurable characteristics on the surface of the text. Textual similarity therefore tends to be conceptualized differently in the context of computational operationalization than is the case for the classical humanities.

Therefore, mutual reference between theoretical conceptualization and method guided practice represents a central and, at the same time, flexible scope for digital intertextuality research, which is reflected in the development of different, partly overlapping approaches to researching intertextual phenomena. In the following, various approaches to the digital detection, modeling, and analysis of intertextual modes of writing are presented and compared in terms of their modeling practices, theoretical and methodological foundations. The relationship to analog traditions of intertextuality research are also considered.

## 1. Manual Digital Modeling of Intertextual Relationships

Systematically modeling intertextual references is one approach to increasing the possibilities for structuring and linking digital information for intertextual research. The starting point for this approach assumes intertextual references can be systematized regarding the specific relationship between the intertextually linked texts,

2 This assumption underlies the Working Group *Comparing Text* of the DFG Priority Program Computational Literary Studies led by Christof Schöch.

which already underlies the analog concepts of intertextuality. At the same time, digital implementation inductively gains new insight into the structure and functioning of intertextual relationships on the basis of a comprehensive machine-readable recording of intertextual references (cf. Nantke & Schlupkothen 2018; Horstmann et al. 2023). The conceptual point of reference is thus structuralist-hermeneutic theories of intertextuality, which, as shown in Genette (1993) or Broich & Pfister (1985), assume a clearly definable relationship between a source text and a subsequent text (cf. Molz 2020, 17). However, the digital no longer focuses on systematization based on a taxonomy of identifiable relationship types and degrees of intensity, but rather on the accumulation of data in a database or within the framework of a formal representation, which can then be evaluated according to common patterns (cf. Hohl-Trillini & Quassdorf 2010, 4; Nunn 2016). The aim of manual modeling approaches is to do justice to the complexity of the phenomenon of intertextuality by going beyond the *simple* cases of clearly identifiable, punctual references to include implicit references and structural parallels reaching beyond the individual text and affect the text. Additionally, the existence of an intertextual reference is modeled as well as how intertextual transformation and the functions of the intertextual references are also included (cf. Hohl-Trillini & Quassdorf 2010; Nantke & Schlupkothen 2018; Nantke & Schlupkothen 2019). A structured, machine-readable description of the intertextual relations then forms the basis for an automatic evaluation of the annotated features. In the most extensive project of this kind to date, *HyperHamlet*, a database created in 2010 combing over 8,000 references to Shakespeare's famous drama from literary and non-literary texts from the period 1600–2010. These texts are taken from the secondary literature on Hamlet and can be searched individually or together for various parameters as part of the digital presentation.<sup>3</sup> The *HyperHamlet* corpus also forms the basis for the WordWeb/IDEM database, which makes intertextual relationships between English dramas of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries machine searchable and sortable.<sup>4</sup>

While the advantage of manual digital modeling of intertextuality lies primarily in the structured accumulation of data and its subsequent flexible evaluation, a manual approach also limits the scope of knowledge to the amount of data able to be generated. Approaches to collaborative annotation, such as those developed in the TEASys project for the annotation of intertextual relationships,<sup>5</sup> can extend this analyzable range of data.

A close reading approach, in which intertextual references are initially detected and annotated manually, is another starting point for automation. Three different

3 See <http://www.hyperhamlet.unibas.ch> (there was no access to the database on 27 July 2023. However, according to Regula Hohl-Trillini, the database will soon be accessible with this link).

4 See <http://wordweb-idem.ch/index.html> (Accessed: 18 June 2024).

5 Cf. <http://www.annotating-literature.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Styleguide-2020-08-11.pdf> (Accessed: 18 June 2024).

options are conceivable. First, one can perform automated detection as a supplement to a qualitative-manual evaluation and then compare the results (cf. Molz 2020). Second, the manually recorded cases of intertextuality can be transferred into a formalized vocabulary, which then forms the basis for an automated evaluation that is potentially suitable for deriving new insights from the modelled data (cf. Nantke & Schlupkothén 2018; Horstmann et al. 2023). Third, under certain conditions, the data from manual annotation can be used as training data for an algorithm for the automated detection of intertextuality.<sup>6</sup>

Depending on which automation scenario is pursued, there are different requirements for the manually generated data. In his mixed methods study on Shakespearean references in works of contemporary British literature, Molz concentrates on (sometimes slightly modified) quotations and explicit mentions of names and work titles, i. e., named entities that can also be relatively easily captured by machine (cf. Molz 2020, 20 and the chapter by E. Gius in this volume). A mixed methods approach is an ideal way to correlate the references subsequently identified by humans and to detect the matches by computer linguistic tools for textual comparison. If the focus is on the detection of semantic similarities, then manual annotation must be geared towards the operationalization of the target phenomena as machine readable concepts (cf. Pichler & Reiter 2021).

## 2. Computational Analysis in the Reuse of Texts

A central form of digital modeling and intertextual analysis has thus far been research of text reuse: “Text reuse refers to citing, copying or alluding text excerpts from a text resource to a new context” (Moritz et al. 2016, 1849). Concrete references between texts are digitally modeled, primarily at the grammatical level, i. e., direct quotations and slightly modified paraphrases, which are possible automatically detected matches on the linguistic level of the surface of the text.<sup>7</sup> Various computational methods of text mining and natural language processing are used for this purpose, some of which are adopted from the field of plagiarism detection.

At the interface of literary and theological research, the DFG project *Zitieren als narrative Strategie*<sup>8</sup> (Citation as Narrative Strategy) at the University of Konstanz is investigating questions of cultural hybridization between classical antiquity and Christianity using a mixed methods approach for the computer aided detection of citations

6 Cf. section 3 on automated detection of semantic text similarities.

7 Büchler et al. designates these references of “paraphrasing” as “a hyponym of text reuse” (Büchler et al. 2014, 221).

8 Cf. <https://www.litwiss.uni-konstanz.de/latinistik/forschung/forschungsprojekte> (Accessed: 18 June 2024).

in the corpus of letters of the church father Jerome. Corpus linguistic methods such as keyword in context and part of speech analyses as well as topic modeling are used as methods that are more strongly related on the level of content (cf. Revellio 2022, 94f.).

The methods used to analyze text reuse are primarily aimed at the automated detection of textual relationships in large text corpora. Theoretically, the concept of text reuse is based on a distant reading approach, an approach that began with the work of Franco Moretti, Matthew Jockers, and others (Moretti 2000; Jockers 2013). The automated machine detection of textual matches provides reliable mass data alongside previous individual case research, covering larger volumes of text and longer historical time spans (cf. Liebl & Burghardt 2020, 58). The Big Data argument of Moretti and Jockers is contrasted with a focus on highly canonical texts, such as the Bible and Shakespeare plays (cf. e.g. Büchler et al. 2014, Moritz et al. 2016; Liebl & Burghardt 2020). This points to a fundamental challenge of algorithm-supported research: the increased possibilities of quantitative analyses correspond to an equally increased need for example or training data, which can be used to train the algorithms and test them in terms of performance and reliability. For the phenomenon of intertextuality in the specific form of explicit references on a linguistic level, corpora exist for which references are available and known to the necessary extent, especially in the field of ancient philological and theological texts and, due to the large number of explicit references and the extensive academic debate that has been going on for centuries, in the field of Shakespeare research.

Theoretical and methodological perspectives are intertwined in the formation of the concept of text reuse: the limitations of automated evaluation necessitate a concept of intertextuality that prioritizes concrete quotations over *softer*, semantic parallels that are difficult to identify automatically (cf. Büchler et al. 2014, 221). At the same time, the use of computational methods enables one to uncover linguistic similarities that cannot be explicitly detected by human readers (cf. Coffee 2018, 207).

Some intertextuality concepts (Genette [1982] 1993; Broich & Pfister 1985; Holt-huis 1993) based on precision and concretization ultimately prove to be conceptually abstracted from the focused, more linguistic understanding of correspondence on which the operationalizations under the term *text reuse* are based. Although the phenomena studied under this label can be described as the narrowest form of intertextuality, as defined by Genette in his subtypes of transtextuality (cf. Coffee 2018; Liebl & Burghardt 2020, 58), the term *intertextuality* rarely appears in studies on text reuse, despite obvious conceptual reference points (e.g., Büchler et al. 2014; Moritz et al. 2016). However, the starting point of the research are text critical questions about textual dependencies and transmission histories (cf. Moritz et al. 2016, 1894; Coffee 2018).

### 3. Automatic Detection of Semantic Textual Similarities

From the perspective of literary studies, which originally shaped and formulated the concept of intertextuality, computational approaches aimed at citations and linguistic similarities lack complexity (cf. Horstmann et al. 2023, 1). Computational approaches to exploring textual similarities beyond the linguistic level of grammatical parallels are emerging. These approaches run parallel to and partially overlap with the concepts of computational detection of text reuse and undertake classical intertextuality research by focusing on the analysis of content dependent on interpretation and stylistic similarities, which are central to the concepts following Genette's structuralist hermeneutic hyper textuality approach.<sup>9</sup> Computational analysis works seamlessly with a significant expansion of the scope of the term intertextuality more in line with Kristeva's post-structuralist/deconstructivism (cf. Scheirer et al. 2016, 205f.).

Topic Modeling is a standard method of the Digital Humanities used to detect intertextual relationships (cf. the chapter by M. Althage in this volume). In the *Intertextual Hub*<sup>10</sup> developed at the University of Chicago, Topic Modeling is not aimed at investigating the references and transformations of specific texts intended by authors; rather, digital intertextuality research uses the general affinity of computational methods for the comparative examination of texts to determine content-related similarities in larger text corpora. The method aligns with a stabilization of the corpus. The *Intertextual Hub* offers various collections of French literary and political texts from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which have certain thematic and ideological similarities. The *Tesserae*<sup>11</sup> platform developed at the University of Buffalo focuses on ancient Latin and Greek texts as well as on texts that can be analyzed across languages regarding linguistic, semantic, metric, and phonological similarities using an online platform (cf. Coffee 2018, 207).

Alternatively, another option for the quantitative modeling of intertextual relationships is to train an algorithmic model specifically for the detection of textual similarities. The trained algorithm then has more flexible applicability, given the trained model can be applied to corpora. At the same time, however, the high degree of variability of intertextual spellings presents a challenge. Intertextuality cannot be reduced to a fixed set of text structures but can be realized at any level of the text (cf. Karrer 1985). For model training, a reduction must be made to make the textual similarities operational in the context of training data. The *CompAnno*<sup>12</sup> project sim-

9 Genette's theory of hypertextuality is categorized into forms that imitate the literary style of another text and those that transform the plot (cf. Genette [1982] 1993, 36–43).

10 See <https://intertextual-hub.uchicago.edu> (Accessed: 18 June 2024).

11 See <https://tesserae.caset.buffalo.edu> (Accessed: 18 June 2024). On the functionalization of *Tesserae*, see Coffee 2018, 211f.

12 Comparative Annotation to Explore and Explain Text Similarities (CompAnno); Project in the framework of the DFG focus program on Computational Literary Studies, [https://dfg-spp-cls.github.io/projects\\_en/2020/01/24/TP-CompAnno](https://dfg-spp-cls.github.io/projects_en/2020/01/24/TP-CompAnno) (Accessed: 18 June 2024).

ilarly concentrates on automated detection of similarities in the representation of characters in literary texts. The intended detection and classification of similarities in this automation approach no longer refers to historically verifiable references but to model intertextuality, which is exclusively based on detectable semantic similarities.

#### 4. Summary

Digital modeling corresponds to the general idea of the concept of intertextuality by establishing the capability of systematization of the types of writing. Conversely, the methods of Digital Humanities have an affinity to a comparative analysis of texts. A challenge remains in analog intertextuality research since there are different specifications regarding the concrete modeling of intertextual relationships, which are generally too unspecific for digital operationalization; however, the research creates a larger scope for various digital approaches.

Digital forms of differentiated manual modeling and formalization of intertextual relationships aimed at subsequent computer aided evaluation are closely linked to the literary tradition.

The reduction of the concept of intertextuality by concentrating on linguistically locatable cases such as direct quotations, paraphrases, and syntactic correspondences enables one to use a variety of established methods from computational linguistics for the automated detection of intertextuality.

The expansion of the concept of intertextuality in the direction of a general similarity of textual properties allows one to focus increasingly on the level of meaning bearing text structures within the framework of machine detection yet tends to balance out the historical dimension of textual dependencies.

Digital intertextuality research thus reproduces the inherent tension in the analog approach between the concentration on precisely determinable and marked individual text references and the perspective of a general intertextuality of literary text production. However, one advantage of digital approaches that are strongly oriented towards practical work on and with digital corpora is that different approaches to the phenomenon of intertextuality do not have to remain unconnected to each other but can be related to each other via data comparison. For example, direct quotations at a word level and detected parallels at plot or character representation level could be annotated together in a text and examined for overlaps and deviations. Conversely, automatically generated annotations can be transferred into the formalized structures of a machine-readable description system of intertextual writing styles. In this way, findings on the form and function of intertextual relationships can productively complement each other on the text level. On a metalevel, the combination of different approaches allows the associated ideas of intertextuality to be discussed. In this

sense, the digital modeling of intertextuality can also contribute to the theoretical foundation of the digital practice of comparison.

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