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OPEN SCHOLARSHIP POLICY OBSERVATORY



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## Open Annotation Tools

by Caroline Winter | 26 July 2018 | English, Observations, Observations and Responses | 0 comments



*Lisez-le en français*

*This observation was written by Kimberly Silk.*

*At a glance*

Title	Open Annotation Tools
Creators	Academic researchers, students, faculty
Publication date	2018
Keywords	<b>digital scholarship</b>

Open annotation is the ability to freely contribute to online, usually web-based, content, such as

documents, images and video. Open annotation as a concept has been embraced predominantly by scholars in the Digital Humanities, a group that has a long history of online collaboration.

An early open annotation project, the [Open Annotation Collaboration](#) project, was begun in 2009 and completed in 2013. Hosted at the University of Illinois and funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the project successfully “facilitated the emergence of a web and resource-centric interoperable annotation environment that allows leveraging annotations across the boundaries of annotation clients, annotation servers, and content collections”(University of Illinois 2013). The project informed the work of the [Open Annotation Community Group](#), a World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) community group which focuses developing “a common, RDF-based, specification for annotating digital resources” (W3C 2012). The group recently published a specification for the [Web Annotation Data Model](#) in February 2017, and continues to develop best practices to facilitate adoption of the specification.

A variety of open annotation tools are available, though the list changes rapidly as projects are launched and retired. A useful resource is the [series of bibliographies](#) developed by the team at the Electronic Textual Cultures Lab (ETCL), University of Victoria, which provides a list of collaborative annotation tools (Arbuckle et al. 2014). Another helpful resource is the [bibliography in “The Value of Plurality in ‘The Network with a Thousand Entrances’”](#) which surveys annotative practices (Siemens et al. 2017a; Siemens et al. 2017b). Annotation tools continue to emerge; current examples include MIT’s [Annotation Studio](#), [Hypothes.is](#), [NowComment](#), and [Prism](#).

Two examples of digital humanities projects using open annotation are [The Open Utopia](#) and [Infinite Ulysses](#). The Open Utopia is an online, digital version of Thomas More’s *Utopia* that embodies the spirit of that work, “that all property is common property” (Duncombe 2012). The text is open to read, copy, and modify, and is presented in various formats: text, several e-reader formats, audio and video. Participants can discuss and annotate the text using the version on Social Book, and collaborate with others to create a new text using a wiki platform.

Infinite Ulysses was the focus of a digital humanities literature dissertation successfully defended by Amanda Visconti at the University of Maryland in 2015 (Visconti 2015b). The site offered an open, digital, online version of Joyce’s *Ulysses* for the public to read and annotate with questions and comments. A community of 775 readers contributed to the text between March 2015 and May 2016. Visconti used the project to demonstrate how to engage public readers outside of the academy to contribute to a piece of digitized literature by adding their interpretations and questions to the actual text (Visconti 2015a).

Open annotation tools facilitate social knowledge creation in the classroom as well as in individual research projects. Tools relate to policy development as they often act as the mechanism for open scholarship to occur, and require acknowledgement and support for this important role.

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