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MediaCommons: Social Networking Tools for Digital Scholarly Communication

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Project Summary

Over the last two years, with the assistance of a National Endowment for the Humanities Digital Start-Up Grant, we have built the MediaCommons user profile system, within which members are able to consolidate much of the scholarly work that they produce across the web, and through which they are able to forge connections with other scholars in the field and develop collaborative projects.

This profile system is a crucial step toward achieving the broader changes that MediaCommons hopes to bring about: new modes of preserving, analyzing, and making accessible digital resources, as well as new digital modes of collaboration and publication. In order to lay the groundwork for a community-driven system for publishing in the digital humanities, we needed to develop the technical systems that provide the social framework for that community. As the broader publishing network will provide access to a wide range of intellectual writing and media

production, including forms such as blogs, wikis, and journals, as well as digitally-networked scholarly monographs, developing systems for the accreditation, dissemination, discussion, and preservation of such work is of paramount importance. These fundamentally social processes require a dynamic and complex membership system to serve as the backbone of MediaCommons.

In the coming months we hope to continue building on this social networking architecture, providing more advanced functionality, including a dynamic textual analysis driven recommendations system and a set of feedback/rating tools that will allow us to develop the peer-to-peer review system of the future.

About MediaCommons

MediaCommons is an all-electronic scholarly publishing network focused on the digital humanities developed by [Dr. Kathleen Fitzpatrick](#) (Pomona College) and [Dr. Avi Santo](#) (Old Dominion University), in collaboration with the [Institute for the Future of the Book](#) and [New York University Libraries](#). Fitzpatrick and Santo first began to map out what this environment might look like following a workshop organized by the Institute and the Annenberg School at USC in May 2006 on the ongoing crisis in academic publishing, as university presses are increasingly threatened by a faltering economic model.MediaCommons hopes to present one possible pathway out of this crisis, by re-imagining scholarly publishing in digital environments, and by focusing on the scholarly communities that such publishing is intended to serve.

MediaCommons is attempting to re-imagine what academic publishing and scholarly review processes might look like in the digital age. Though MediaCommons was initially envisioned as a born-digital scholarly press, its creators quickly realized that academics publishing in a digital environment required more than just new modes of writing, but also new ways of thinking about the functions of scholarly writing. Thus, MediaCommons was re-conceptualized as a scholarly network dedicated to shifting the focus of scholarship back to the circulation of discourse by transforming what it means to "publish" in a digital environment. As a scholarly network, MediaCommons thus has as one of its key goals facilitating interconnections among scholars, students, and other interested members of the public, enabling a shift in the way scholarly work is disseminated, from the privileging of distinct, isolated texts to focusing upon continuous discourse among researchers and authors. MediaCommons is also dedicated to making the process of scholarly writing and publishing transparent, encouraging authors, editors and readers to engage one another throughout. In so doing, it is our hope that new scholarly processes and forms of writing will emerge, at once collaborative, multi-nodal, open-ended, and multi-directional.

MediaCommons serves as an umbrella/incubator/host for several innovative projects, each designed to re-imagine what scholarly publishing looks like and does in an online environment. Below are descriptions of three current ongoing MediaCommons projects, though we have ambitions for launching several others (described toward the end of this document) and are

currently experimenting with ways of franchising our existing templates so that project editors can easily customize MediaCommons' design architecture to launch new works, while tapping into our diverse community of users.

In Media Res (IMR) is currently the most visible project created by MediaCommons and is one of several emerging sites experimenting with new approaches to scholarly writing in the digital era. Since its launch in October 2006, IMR has been dedicated to experimenting with collaborative, multi-modal forms of online scholarship. Each weekday, a different media scholar curates a 30-second to 3-minute clip accompanied by a 300-350-word impressionistic provocation. IMR offers scholars opportunities to engage in both new ways of writing and new ways of thinking about writing in a digital environment. IMR also regularly hosts "theme weeks", which are designed to generate a networked conversation between curators. All the posts for that week will thematically overlap and the participating curators each agree to comment on one another's work.

We use the title "curator" because, like a curator in a museum, IMR posters are repurposing a media object that already exists and providing context through their commentary, which frames the object in a particular way. IMR's goal is to promote an online dialogue amongst scholars and the public about contemporary approaches to studying media. Curatorial notes are purposely short because they are intended to enable a lively debate in which the sum total of the conversation will be more valuable than any one particular voice.

As of May 9, 2010, we have had 473 original curatorial posts to the site from 366 different contributors, including some of the top media studies scholars in the field. In March 2010, IMR received 16022 unique visitors (534/day) averaging 1.66 visits each to the site for an average daily traffic of 886 visitors.

MediaCommons Press: Open Scholarship in Open Formats was launched in August 2009 and is a live in-development component of MediaCommons promoting the digital publication and peer-to-peer review of texts ranging from article- to monograph-length. Utilizing CommentPress, a tool developed by the Institute for the Future of the Book that allows for simultaneous, granular, paragraph-level horizontal commenting on web documents by multiple users, MediaCommons Press has spearheaded new modes of engaging with born-digital work, both prior to and post publication. To date, the press has hosted a complete draft of Fitzpatrick's forthcoming manuscript from NYU Press, Planned Obsolescence: Publishing, Technology, and the Future of the Academy, along with two complete reviews of the manuscript. In so doing, the process of academic publishing is made transparent while the possibility for engaging with Fitzpatrick as she revises the manuscript is made available to a community of online participants. To date, there have been 278 comments made on the unpublished manuscript by 46 different respondents, including Fitzpatrick's engagement with her readers/reviewers, producing a rich set of micro-conversations building outwards from multiple sections of the manuscript.

MediaCommons Press also recently hosted an open-review experiment for an upcoming special issue of the print journal Shakespeare Quarterly dedicated to "Shakespeare and New Media." Special Issue Editor Katherine Rowe selected four essays under consideration for possible publication in SQ 61:4 and three reviews accepted for publication for limited time open peer review. From March 10 through May 5, 2010, the essays under review generated 341 comments from 41 different reviewers, including the essays' authors' engagement with one another, with the special editor and with their readers. Authors are currently revising their essays based on the feedback they received.

Most recently, MediaCommons also added The New Everyday (TNE), an experiment in "middle-state publishing" (a web publication whose form approximates something "between a blog and a journal") being undertaken as part of a two-year project by the New York Visual Culture Working Group, housed at NYU and funded by its Humanities Initiative. The project launched with a cluster edited by Nicholas Mirzoeff considering [the murder of Jorge Steven López Mercado](#); the pieces that form this cluster are open for discussion, and are intended to be seen, both collectively and individually, as remaining somewhat "in process." A new publishing platform, which remixes features of both IMR and CommentPress, is currently in development and is expected to be online when TNE officially launches in Fall 2010.

Project Achievements

In the two years since NYU was awarded the NEH Digital Start-Up Grant the project has realized a number of achievements both directly and indirectly related to the grant. The network of sites is now running on an entirely new infrastructure, based on the open source Drupal framework, and membership across the sites has grown to 874 registered users (from 206 on the 20th of January, 2008). The sites now include features such as customized content types, improved workflows, content syndication, a graphic design scheme that can be 'extended' for new MediaCommons projects, and faceted search and browse capabilities. Under the supervision of the editors, registered users can create and syndicate a wide array of different content types using easy-to-use, Web 2.0 interfaces to input, preview, and publish their work. Traffic to the sites has grown to over ten thousand unique visitors per month, with a peak of over 132,000 unique visitors in April 2010. We also improved the scalability and sustainability of the site by implementing a code repository and separate environments for the development, staging, and release of site code.

After the release of the new and improved MediaCommons and In Media Res sites, serious work began on the user profile and e-portfolio system described in the grant proposal. The high-level functions described in the grant were translated into a data vocabulary and wireframe outlines of page layouts, which were then mapped to a set of community created 'modules' and to custom functionality developed at NYU. The resulting version 1.0 of the profile system was released in late 2009. The profile has three high-level functional areas: 1) self-representation; 2) social network linking among users, directly and via terms such as affiliation and interests; 3)

aggregation of users' intellectual output in a range of formats and at a range of scales (from tweets to books).

Most of the development work for the portfolio system went into the aggregation of intellectual output. MediaCommons users now have a suite of powerful tools for creating an electronic nexus of their output as print authors, bloggers, critics or contributors on MediaCommons projects, and as users of services like Facebook or Hulu. Some of these tools are fully automated -- a user's commenting on an In Media Res piece will automatically be reflected on her profile -- while others, particularly the print publication database still require laborious manual input or esoteric file import abilities -- a drawback we hope to address soon by 1) finding repositories of bibliographic information from which to harvest records and then devising a means of associating the right records with the right users and 2) improving the overall usability of the profile management screens.

Design Process

The initial design challenge concerned the upgrade of the existing sites in preparation for the development of the user profile system. The technical team consulted with the editors to learn what they wanted the sites to do but were unable to realize within the original WordPress framework. For instance, the "theme week" concept is at the heart of In Media Res, but was initially an editorial construct without matching functionality: site structure was conveyed through conventions of titling, ordering, or by embedding links in text. Working with the editors, the design team worked to translate concepts such as 'theme week' into a suite of content types, roles, and workflows that would be determinate enough to ensure that functionality and presentation could be built around them, yet flexible enough to allow for contingencies such as a theme week's being published before all its constituent elements were complete (for which we developed functionality for editors to insert temporary placeholders).

When the time came to begin work on the profile system, we used a similar process. We began by discussing the concepts fully with the editors until distinct entities and functionalities emerged. These were documented as an "abstract data model" and a set of high-level functional requirements. When this documentation was complete, we searched for and found a consultant to help us map them to existing and to-be-developed functionality available in the Drupal framework, and ultimately hired Jay Datema of bookism.org. Jay used the design documentation to research and install a suite of 3rd party Drupal modules and to configure them in such a way that our core data model and functional requirements were met. We then spent a lengthy period of time refining, customizing, and debugging the system, and finally released it in January 2009, roughly 6 months after the initial documentation was completed.

Challenges/Lessons Learned

1. Technical Issues

MediaCommons and In Media Res are now running in Drupal, an open source content management system with a dizzying and ever-growing suite of add-ons known as 'modules' created and managed by the user / developer community. Keeping up with the latest state of the modules that are necessary to run the sites (by the time The New Everyday is released, there will be over 100 3rd party modules in use across the MediaCommons network) has proven to be a significant task in itself, requiring a regular review of the site and its dependencies by members of the technical design team. Recently, the design team undertook and completed a restructuring of the databases and code such that each site is run completely independently and connects to a shared database for user and taxonomic data. This revision should enable the development of additional projects without compromising the performance or stability of those already in production. As time permits, we expect to continue to implement architectural changes that reduce the interdependence of the sites, reduce unnecessary or redundant modules, and possibly eliminate the technical constraints currently impeding the rapid development of additional MediaCommons projects.

2. Editorial Issues

Beyond the technical difficulties that the site faced, of course, lie a range of editorial and community-oriented difficulties; as many such projects have found out, just because a system can be built doesn't mean that it will be accepted, and just because it is built on a platform as flexible as Drupal doesn't mean that everything we might want to do with it can be easily accomplished. The challenges that we've encountered in the editorial arena fall into a few different categories: the challenge of building participation among scholars in the field, the challenge of linking the profile system to the network's broader publishing goals, and the challenge of developing protocols for the review and assessment of the work produced within the network.

a. Community Participation

The challenges involved in fostering discussion within digital scholarly publishing networks are no small matter; motivating and sustaining the desire in users to participate in online communities has been the issue over which many innovative digital projects have stumbled. MediaCommons has developed a thriving user base (874 active users as of May 2010), but participation in the kinds of discussion that the network is hosting, whether the day-to-day conversations on In Media Res or the larger-scale, project focused commenting on MediaCommons Press, has been extremely difficult to build. This is by no means a new problem; motivating scholars to participate in the frankly selfless processes of peer review has long been a challenge within scholarly publishing, as any journal or university press editor can confirm.

The specific challenge for new modes of scholarly publishing like MediaCommons is to model and inculcate generosity. This is easier said than done, perhaps; as a commenter on Twitter noted after a recent talk Fitzpatrick gave about peer-to-peer review, "being helpful is not really part of

academic culture." Persuading scholars to take the time to participate in the process of reviewing, discussing, and assisting in the development of other scholars' work won't be easy—unless doing so is somehow in their interest.

There are two potential means that we can see for encouraging such self-interested altruism. The first is ensuring that the network within which scholars are publishing and commenting is composed of a community to which they are committed, and to which they feel responsible—the community of their peers. Noah Wardrip-Fruin, who conducted an experimental blog-based review of his book-in-progress, Expressive Processing, noted that prior such experiments had sought to create new communities around the texts as they were published, and argued that "this cannot be done for every scholarly publication," and, moreover, that there are in many cases existing communities that can be drawn upon to great advantage. Such communities might include existing online social networks, but they might also include the clusters of scholars who already interact and discuss projects with one another in different formats, via disciplinary organizations and other professional groups, field-based listservs, and even more informal writing groups. Making use of such existing communities will be necessary to motivating participation in online review precisely because scholars are already committed to the success of those groups, and to the opinion that those groups hold of their own work.

Beyond such professional responsibility, however, a key factor in motivating participation in new modes of online peer review will be the visibility that these processes will provide for what is now an unrecognized—indeed, an invisible—form of academic labor. Allowing scholars to receive "credit" for the reviews they do, both in the sense of making visible reviewers' critical role in the development of arguments and texts and in the sense of rewarding good reviewing, could help foster a culture in which reviewing is taken seriously as a scholarly activity, and which therefore encourages participation in review processes.

b. Linking Text and Network

Of course, in order to foster such a culture, we need to determine and to demonstrate by example what "good reviewing" is, such that we can reward it. That determination will require that this publishing system develop some means not just of reviewing a text, but of assessing the comments that are left by reviewers. This process of reviewing the reviewers will be crucial to any open publishing and review process, as authors and readers will need to be able to judge the authority of the commentary that a text has received.

There's thus both carrot and stick involved in building the scholarly review community; the carrot is the ability of reviewers to contribute something positive to the community and be rewarded for it, while the stick is the ability of the community to call out those members who don't contribute positively. This community regulation of peer review standards—not just the standards that texts under review are held to, but the standards that reviews themselves are held to—has the potential to greatly improve the quality of scholarly communication in a broad sense, reducing thoughtless snark and focusing on helpful dialogue between authors and readers.

In order for that community regulation to develop, however, we need to have reliable knowledge of who our reviewers are and what work they've done within the publishing network. For that reason, we hope to build a bridge between the CommentPress system in use at MediaCommons Press and the MediaCommons profile system (see below). A full understanding of the context of and perspective represented within comments and reviews written on texts published within MediaCommons will require linking those reviews to their authors' profiles. Moreover, including the reviews in the information in a scholar's profile -- and, further, including the community's assessment of those reviews -- will allow the community to see clearly which members are active in the reviewing process, which members are highly thought of as reviewers, and which members could stand either to become more active or more helpful as reviewers.

In this way, the stick in the carrot-and-stick approach to encouraging participation in an online reviewing process might allow the community to develop a "pay-to-play" relationship between reviewing and publishing, in which the right to publish one's own texts within the network can only be earned by participation in the review process.

It goes without saying that such a system will need to balance the desire to make the scholarly community self-regulating with certain fail-safes to prevent abuse of the system—avoiding logrolling, cliquishness, exclusionary behavior, and so forth. But we hope that by making all aspects of the reviewing system public and visible, and by tying the reviewing process to the community itself, we can promote an ethos of collegiality that will help guide the system's development.

c. Creating Assessment Metrics

Beyond developing and regulating the system of publishing and review, however, we need to find ways to communicate the value of the work that is produced within this publishing network to the scholarly community at large. Much of the resistance of scholars to new modes of digital publishing tends to focus around concerns that texts published in such venues won't be taken seriously, and therefore be seen to "count," by their colleagues, their departments, their deans and provosts, and their promotion and tenure committees. And worse, to some extent, they're right: scholars and administrators accustomed to evaluating print-based research products often don't know how to assess the quality or impact of born-digital scholarship, and tend therefore to underestimate its value to the field.

Numerous attempts to close that gap in the assessment of digital scholarship are underway, through projects sponsored by disciplinary organizations such as the Modern Language Association, as well as through policies developed at individual institutions. The documents being produced and circulated by these groups are helping to reshape the thinking of many review bodies with respect to the tenurability of scholars who work in digital forms.

However, such documents tend to emphasize "peer review" in a fairly traditional form, and ensuring that promotion and tenure committees take seriously the kinds of open review that texts such as those published by MediaCommons Press will undergo will no doubt require further intervention. But as Michael Jensen of the National Academies Press has argued, web-native scholarship has the potential to provide a much richer and more complex set of metrics through which the importance of scholarly texts can be judged. Such metrics, which form the basis of what Jensen has called "authority 3.0," will make use of a range of data including numbers of hits and downloads, numbers of comments, numbers of inbound links, etc., gauging the impact a text has had by the degree of its discussion around the web. But it will also make use of more sophisticated, less popularity-driven data, including such factors as the "reputation" of a press, an author, or a reviewer. As a result, these developing metrics will not focus simply on quantity— how many people have read, discussed, or cited a text—but also on the quality of the discussions of a text and the further texts that it has inspired.

The "review of the reviewers" that MediaCommons proposes to develop might help provide some of those new metrics of scholarly authority. By computing a reviewer's reputation based on the community's assessment of the quality of his or her reviews, we can then bring that reputation to bear on subsequent comments by that reviewer, indicating clearly to readers involved in promotion and tenure processes which opinions are generally considered authoritative by the community. The use and interpretation of such metrics will never be as simple as the binary measurement that traditional peer review provides—either a text was or was not published in a peer-reviewed venue—but they will enable us to develop a much more informative picture of the impact a scholar's work is having on the field.

3. Institutional Issues

Ownership of a project like MediaCommons represents a significant challenge, one that many institutions will find themselves facing in the increasingly collaborative world of digital humanities research. The project's two principals are located at Pomona College (California) and Old Dominion University (Virginia), and the project was begun in collaboration with the Institute for the Future of the Book (originally affiliated with the University of Southern California and now with New York University). As a result of that collaboration, MediaCommons's technical and design leads are located at NYU, and this Start-Up Grant, originally written by personnel from the Institute, was applied for through and administered by NYU -- an institution with which neither project principal has a direct relationship.

The multi-institutional nature of this collaboration has presented challenges for everyone involved. For the project principals, issues of communication were paramount; being unable to walk across campus for regular discussions with the technical and design team at times left them feeling out of the loop. For that team, issues of institutional mandate loomed; it wasn't always clear how much labor they could provide in support of faculty who weren't members of their institution. And for everyone, the host institution's only slowly growing awareness of the project's significance and potential resulted in a series of bureaucratic obstacles to rapid progress.

These challenges highlight the growing pains being realized as scholarly publishing shifts from its traditional location within the university press to take up a new position within the university library. Presses have for the last several decades had an outward-facing orientation; their primary stakeholders are in fields whose members are dispersed around the world, and as a result, they have a somewhat attenuated relationship with their own institutions. Libraries, by contrast, are largely inward-facing; their stakeholders are almost uniformly members of the institution that they serve, and for that reason, libraries tend to think institutionally rather than disciplinarily. As scholarly publishing moves into the library, and yet maintains its cross-institutional field-based focus, libraries will be required to face the challenges involved in supporting faculty from other institutions in their projects, and will need to think about ways to communicate to their administrations the value for the institution in doing so.

Further Work

1. Infrastructure

a. Franchisable API

As MediaCommons continues to grow, we expect an increasing interest among its users in spinning off new projects within the network (see Content / Project Development section below for examples). Currently, the design/technical team is developing a new journal of "middle state" work in collaboration with [Nick Mirzoeff](), an NYU faculty member. However, the ability of the design/technical team to take on similar projects for faculty at other institutions is expected to be extremely limited. For this reason, the editorial and design teams have discussed in our 'wish list' sessions the development of a 'franchisable API' that would allow members of the community to secure their own funding and / or technical support to develop projects whose timeline and ambition won't be constrained by the limited availability of the design/technical team. While we haven't developed a complete list of features, we do recognize that an API will be required for authenticating via MediaCommons, consuming and updating profile information, and exposing content to the federated MediaCommons search index. In addition to actual APIs, we expect that we will also need to provide code and instructional material for people developing projects - for instance Drupal themes and modules that would allow non-experts to graphically design a new MediaCommons project by manipulating some simple controls, such as a color palette or drag and drop layout designer.

b. Long-term Preservation Strategy

One major hurdle to the adoption of the MediaCommons network as a fully realized venue for scholarly communication is that persistence has not generally been addressed in web publication software as it has in print publication. A scholar asked to spend her limited time and energy submitting her ideas to a venue that has bounced around among institutions, disappeared for long periods of time, and lost access to its own content and that on which it depends may

understandably be skeptical or choose to reserve her 'A' ideas for print. For this reason, we recognize that it is critical for MediaCommons to develop and implement a long-term strategy for the continuing accessibility, verifiability, and renderability of its content.

There are many questions to be addressed before a solution can be designed and implemented. For example, while NYU's Digital Library Technical Services team has been producing sites like MediaCommons with one hand, it has been constructing and refining an OAIS-based repository for preservation of digital materials with the other. There is no immediately obvious way in which these two efforts fit together. The task of replicating MediaCommons content as "Archival Information Packages" within the OAIS context raises a host of questions and problems: How would a blog post and its attendant comments be represented as an AIP? How will the ability of content editors to continually edit their work affect the repository? And, not least, how much energy should be diverted from keeping MediaCommons sites up to date in order to ensure that they last, and what if this diversion actually ends up undermining the longevity of the project?

One possible avenue may build on work that is beginning at NYU now to integrate dynamic online collections and objects with the preservation repository by means of an "archive it" button that would appear on content editing interfaces such as those used on MediaCommons sites. A user with ownership over a particular piece of content, for instance an In Media Res posting, would have, in addition to the "Publish" button that appears now, the option to "Archive" the page in the repository. When she did so, the site would convert the various files and database fields that constitute the object into a data stream and send the "Submission Information Package" to the repository for ingest and / or updating of an associated series of versioned AIPs. When finished with the ingest, the repository would send a message back to the site that would indicate the date and status of the last archive action.

We don't know how feasible such a solution would be. One area that needs to be investigated and considered is the overhead of maintaining the ability to interact with the repository from a constantly evolving, community-driven publication platform (MediaCommons has already undergone a Wordpress to Drupal 5.x migration, a Drupal 5.x to 6.x migration, and will soon undergo a Drupal 6.x to 7.x migration -- none of these are trivial). Adding to this challenge is the rapidly expanding set of content types and structural relations conceived by editors and contributors in the MediaCommons community. One possible meta-solution to these problems may entail the articulation of a constrained and generalized set of preservation types to which diverse MediaCommons content types could easily be reduced. For instance, an In Media Res post's constituent parts might be characterized by highly general relations such as "is a response to" or "seed for conversation." In the case of In Media Res, whose underlying YouTube-hosted artifacts are highly unstable and sometimes at odds with the perceived interests of for-profit intellectual property holders, it may even be necessary to devise a means of representing the "missing center" of an archived conversation.

c. Recommendation Engine

Within the existing profile system, users are able to define their scholarly interests through tags; these tags are likewise used as a crowd-sourced taxonomy for the content published within the system. Further, users of MediaCommons are able to search for users and texts that deploy those tags, as well as for terms contained within the texts themselves, in order to find potential collaborators or texts of interest within the site.

All of this, however, requires the user to initiate the discovery process. We hope in the coming months to begin the development of a recommendations engine that would use the information in a member's profile, along with robust textual analysis of documents in the network, to present the user with frequently updated suggestions for texts to read, discussions to participate in, and collaborators to work with.

Such a system would help us encourage active use of and discussion on MediaCommons, by providing frequent reminders about the material of interest to each of our members.

d. Peer-to-Peer Review Tools

Alongside this recommendation engine, and as mentioned above in thinking through the challenges presented in linking the texts that we publish and the social network through which they're published, as well as in creating assessment metrics for the "success" of those publications, we hope to develop a set of tools that will turn the profile system we have built into the foundation of an open, online, peer-to-peer review network.

Fitzpatrick has written extensively about the need for such a network in her project, Planned Obsolescence: Publishing, Technology, and the Future of the Academy. The nature of authority is changing dramatically in online scholarly communication, and we need new review metrics and tools that work with that change, rather than imposing older gatekeeping modes of peer review where they simply don't apply. We therefore want to encourage the open, ongoing review of all MediaCommons-published texts, taking advantage of the network's capacity for discussion as a means of helping scholars filter the wealth of content that the network makes available.

However, we believe that the most crucial aspect of such a peer-to-peer review system will be not the review of the particular texts, but the review of the reviewers, an ongoing assessment of members' critical practices within the site that will allow other users to determine the relative authority of those reviewers, and therefore the weight that their criticisms should be granted. Such a review of the reviewers will require us to develop a "reputation" system that will allow users of the network to assess the quality of the comments left on texts published within MediaCommons, and then reflect that assessment within the profile system.

2. Content/Project Development

In addition to current projects like In Media Res and The New Everyday already available through MediaCommons, there are several other initiatives in development. These include Open

Beta, led by [Nina Huntemann](#) (Suffolk University), and an as-yet-unnamed media mash-up project edited by [Christian Keathley](#) and [Jason Mittell](#) (Middlebury College), which will build on their proposed NEH summer institute on Producing Media Criticism in the Digital Age. Both projects would take advantage of MediaCommons's franchisable API and user profile system in order to create customizable templates for their sites and to link them to our growing scholarly network. Open Beta is an experiment in scholarly gaming, combining video of academics playing video games with critical comments on the process. The mash-up project would provide a platform for critically analyzing these forms as well as a space where academics can experiment with and receive critical feedback on producing mash-ups.

We are also committed to expanding the current functionality of our existing projects. We are developing further customization capabilities for IMR that will allow posts to be better integrated into classroom curricula. In the future, registered IMR users will be able to customize existing posts by adding lesson-specific questions for students to answer and by setting up a password protected private version of a post available only to students registered for a particular class.

Conclusion

We are very excited about the changes that the MediaCommons network has undergone in the two years since this Start-Up Grant was awarded. In developing and deploying a 1.0 version of the user profile system, we have in fact surpassed our stated objective "to build a working prototype of a set of networking tools that will serve as the membership system for MediaCommons." Furthermore, by undertaking and executing this work, we have significantly improved both the organizational and technical foundations for further growth of the network and further exploration of the ideas from which the project originated. And, as is hopefully clear from this report, we have reached a point where the success of the network is itself propelling us into new areas of scholarly and technical inquiry, so much so that despite what has been realized so far, we continue to be very much focussed on creating new projects and continuing to strengthen the productive partnership that has arisen among Drs. Santo and Fitzpatrick, The Institute for the Future of the Book, and NYU Libraries.