

The Lapland Chronicles

wonder ye then at the fiery hunt?

“Issues of Labor, Credit, and Care in Peer-to-Peer Review Processes”

What follows is the text of a presentation I gave at the MLA 2019 Convention in Chicago, Illinois, on January 5, 2019 in [Session 613: Getting Credit in Digital Publishing and Digital Humanities Projects](#)

Slides

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Thank you to Anne Donlon for organizing this session and to Harriett Green for chairing it. I'm excited to be with you today to talk about issues of credit, care, and labor in peer-to-peer review processes. My original title focused only on credit and labor, but I realized as I was writing it up that a full accounting of labor and credit necessitated attention to the subject of care, as well.

In this talk, I'm going to:

- Begin by discussing a few models of peer review and peer-to-peer review
- I will then discuss issues of labor as they play out in such review processes
- I will then show how peer-to-peer reviews can be structured with care to ensure that participant labor is valued and respected
- And I will end by talking about issues of credit and the overall goals of p2p review

Peer Review and Peer-to-Peer Review

I'm choosing to focus on peer review, and network-enabled peer-to-peer for a few reasons:

- it is a space of scholarly communication in the academy where we see technology used to alter existing conventions of academic work;
- second, peer-to-peer review is not often discussed in terms of credit and labor, so it seemed a useful topic to explore in a session that deals more broadly with the way we value the work that we and our colleagues do;
- third, evolving forms of peer-to-peer review have been used in a variety of prominent digital humanities publishing projects in recent years, making it a subject of engaging interest;
- and fourth, I've experimented with multiple forms of peer-to-peer review myself and have some thoughts to share about them

Before progressing further, I want to take a moment to contextualize my discussion of peer review within the context of contemporary DH work on scholarly communication. Here, Kathleen Fitzpatrick is my guiding light; her work in *Planned*

Obsolescence: Publishing Technology and the Future of the Academy (2011) historicizes peer review and charts the way it is changing in the era of networked scholarship.

“Biagioli’s argument leads us to understand peer review not simply as a system that produces disciplinary in an intellectual sense, but as a mode of disciplining knowledge itself...”

— Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *Planned Obsolescence* (2011)

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Fitzpatrick builds on the work of Mario Biagioli to exhume the history of peer review and its entrenchment in systems of censorship and disciplinary control. Fitzpatrick notes the many weaknesses of double-blind peer review, in which journal articles and book manuscripts are circulated to reviewers in such a way that neither the identity of the author nor the identity of the reviewer is disclosed. Although double-blind peer review has often been implemented as a way of eliminating bias in the reviewing process, Fitzpatrick argues that the anonymous space of the double-blind peer review is ripe for abuse, manipulation, and uncharitable communications by reviewers and editors.

Fitzpatrick poses what she calls “peer-to-peer” review as an alternative to double-blind pre-publication review. In peer-to-peer review, projects are reviewed openly by a community of respondents, whose replies to the text are visible to the author and to each other.

Examples of recent publications that have used this kind of process include:

Fitzpatrick’s own *Planned Obsolescence*:

media commons press
open scholarship in open formats

Planned Obsolescence
Publishing, Technology, and the Future of the Academy

One: Peer Review

1 In a world where knowledge is being made available at a rate of millions of pages per day, it is comforting to know that some subset of that knowledge or science has been critically examined so that, were we to use it in our thinking for our work, we would be less likely to have wasted our time.

— Ray Spier, "The History of the Peer-Review Process"

2 [E]lectronic publishing distinguishes between the phase where documents are placed at the disposal of the public (publishing proper) and the phase where 'distinctions' are being attributed. It used to be that being printed was 'the' distinction; electronic publishing changes this and leads us to think of the distinction phase completely separately from the publishing phase. However, doing so changes the means by which distinction is imparted, and imparting distinction is a sure sign of power. In other words, those who now hold that privilege are afraid of losing it (gate keepers) and they will [use] every possible argument to protect it without, if possible, ever mentioning it.

4 Comments on the whole Page

Maria Bustillos
28 September 2009 at 6:30 pm

The other revolution produced by the web (aside from radical changes in content distribution) is the rise of the 'outsider'—from citizen journalists on dKos, a number of whom (Greenwald, Ana Marie Cox) have vaulted into the highest ranks of the tradmed, to the mad obsessives of Wikipedia, who have brought valuable knowledge to the attention of an interested public way before we could have gotten to know of it otherwise (especially true in the case of living notables and new fields of study.)

The big questions here might really be, who now qualifies as a 'peer'?? And what now qualifies as "authorization"?

I imagine you'll be getting into this later, but I didn't want to forget to comment on that; as a civilian who is interested in scholarly matters, this question is of particular interest.

Kathleen Fitzpatrick
1 October 2009 at 4:02 pm

REPLY TO MARIA BUSTILLOS

Absolutely, Maria — it's a key part of what's to come, and an enormous question that contemporary scholarship has to wrestle with as we think about what constitutes "authority" in the digital...

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Jason Mittell's *Complex Television*

media commons press
open scholarship in open formats

Complex TV
The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling by Jason Mittell

15 24's run was even more surprising, given its highly unusual narrative format: each episode features an hour of story time told in "real time" (minus commercial breaks) via split screens, counting clocks, and other self-conscious devices atypical of conventional television. Even the show's title refers to how the story will be told—in 24 hour-long installments comprising a day in the life of hero Jack Bauer—rather than anything notable about the story itself. The show's popularity grew from a weakly rated first season and slowly developed a strong enough following to last eight seasons and consistently rank in the Top 30 yearly ratings for much of the decade. 24 particularly benefited from DVD sales and rentals, a relatively new phenomenon for television series in the early 2000s, as viewers who caught up with the first season on home video helped increase second season ratings by a rare 25%. Taken together, the story of these three spy programs point to a changing landscape of American television, where complex and innovative storytelling can succeed both creatively and economically, while a conventional formulaic approach is viewed as a commercial failure.

16 *Complex TV* is about this shift, exploring how television storytelling has changed, and what cultural practices within television's industry, technology, and viewership have enabled and encouraged these transformations. Often these changes are framed as television becoming more "literary" or "cinematic," drawing both prestige and formal vocabulary from these older, more culturally

3 Comments on paragraph 5

Frank
April 5, 2012 at 7:30 pm

story -> points, "while a conventional formulaic approach is viewed as a commercial failure": I think I would like this better if it was phrased in a more qualified manner, like the preceding "can succeed", perhaps: "can fail commercially"?

Shane
June 4, 2012 at 7:23 am

Just wanted to second Frank's suggestion here.

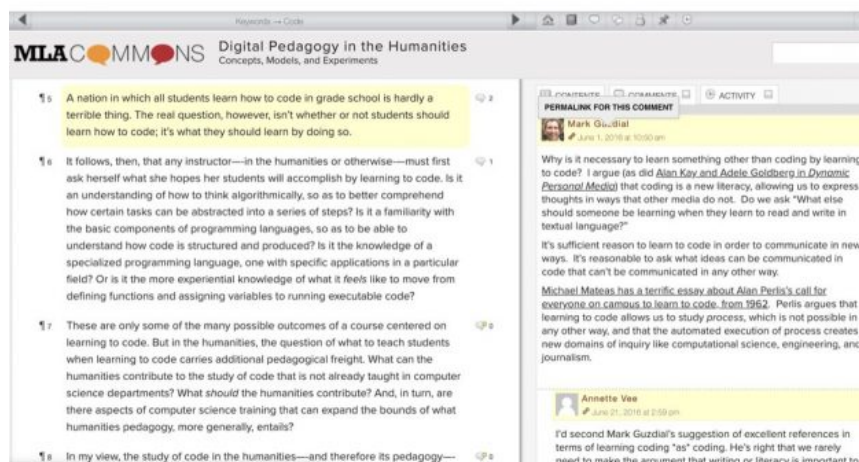
Jason Mittell
June 13, 2012 at 3:51 am

I've changed it to "where complex and innovative storytelling can succeed both creatively and economically, while a show with a safe, conventional approach can be viewed as a commercial failure."

Leave a comment on paragraph 5

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Digital Pedagogy in the Humanities, edited by Rebecca Frost Davis, Kathy Harris, Jentery Sayers, and me



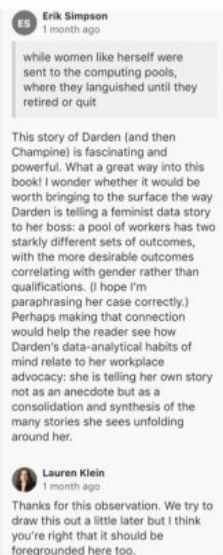
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Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren Klein's *Data Feminism*

book, *Hidden Figures: The American Dream and the Untold Story of the Black Women Who Helped Win the Space Race*, her boss's response was sobering: "Well, nobody's ever complained," he told her. "The women seem to be happy doing that, so that's just what they do."¹

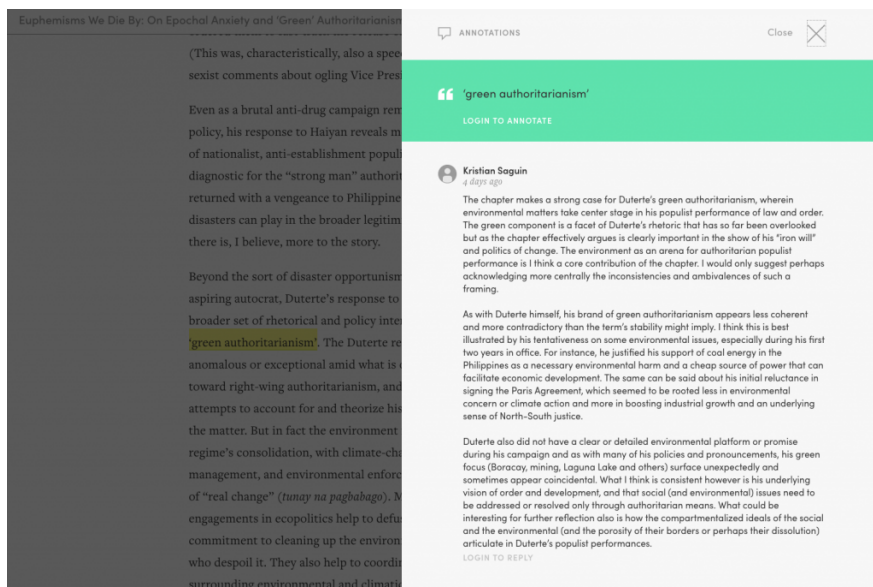
Today, a response like that would get a boss fired (or, at the least, served with a Title IX complaint). But at the time, stereotypical remarks about "what women do" were par for the course. In fact, assumptions about what women could or couldn't do—especially in the workplace—was the central subject of Betty Friedan's best-selling book, *The Feminine Mystique*. Published in 1963, *The Feminine Mystique* is often credited with starting feminism's so-called "second wave."² Fed up with the enforced return to domesticity following the end of World War II, and inspired by the national conversation about equality of opportunity prompted by the Civil Rights Movement, women across the United States began to organize around a wide range of issues, including reproductive rights and domestic violence, as well as the workplace inequality and restrictive gender roles that Darden faced at Langley.

That being said, Darden's experience as a Black woman with a fulltime job was quite different than that of the white suburban housewife—the presumed audience of *The Feminine Mystique*. And when critics called out Friedan, rightly, for failing to acknowledge how no single person could claim to speak



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And Jeff Maskovsky's edited collection *Beyond Populism: Angry Politics and the Twilight of Neoliberalism*



And in the sciences, there are a variety of other models of pre-publication peer review, including ArXiv, F1000 Research, and PLOS One

[Here I spoke extemporaneously about an article published the night before in *The New York Times*, “The Sounds That Haunted U.S. Diplomats in Cuba? Lovelorn Crickets, Scientists Say,” which was based on a paper published in Biorxiv. The NYT article noted that the paper had not yet been submitted to a scientific journal, but it was already receiving attention in the mainstream press:

“There’s plenty of debate in the medical community over what, if any, physical damage there is to these individuals,” said Mr. Stubbs in a phone interview. “All I can say fairly definitively is that the A.P.-released recording is of a cricket, and we think we know what species it is.”

Mr. Stubbs presented the results of the analysis at the annual meeting of the Society of Integrative and Comparative Biology. He and Dr. Montealegre-Z also posted an early version of their study online. They plan to submit the paper to a scientific journal in the next few days.

When Mr. Stubbs first heard the recording, he was reminded of insects he came across while doing field work in the Caribbean. When he and Dr. Montealegre-Z downloaded the sound file, they found that its acoustic patterns — such as the rate of pulses and the strongest frequencies — were very similar to the songs of certain kinds of insects.

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You’ll notice a bunch of platforms are commonly used across these examples:

- CommentPress, a theme and plugin for WordPress
- Github, a site for sharing code that has also been used for peer review

- PubPub, a new platform from MIT Press
- And Manifold, a new publishing platform from the University of Minnesota Press and my team at the CUNY Graduate Center

Beyond these peer-to-peer models and platforms lie a set of hybrid options, some of which I've explored myself in my collaborative publications. In the *Debates in the Digital Humanities* book series from the University of Minnesota Press, for instance, all volumes undergo a private community review in which authors review each other's work, followed by an intensive editorial review process. Special volumes in the series then receive a more traditional blind review administered by the Press.

DEBATES IN THE DIGITAL HUMANITIES 2017
Peer-to-Peer Review Site

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claims:

¶7 1. Cultivating technical facility with computer tools—including programming languages—should receive less attention than methodologies for analyzing quantitative or aggregative evidence. Despite the widespread DH interest in the former, it has little scholarly use without the latter.

2. Studying method requires pedagogically suitable material for study, but good teaching datasets do not exist. It will require communal effort to create them on the basis of existing research.

3. Following the “theory” model, DH has typically been inserted into curricula as a single-semester course. Yet as a training in method, the analysis of aggregate data will undoubtedly require more time, and a different rationale, than that offered by what Gerald Graff calls “the field-coverage principle” in the curriculum [1]

¶8 Nor are these issues only pedagogical. I learned with my students that present-day literary scholarship is fundamentally uncertain about how to make a convincing scholarly argument using quantitative evidence, and it has a habit of postponing or avoiding methodological debate in the name of open-ended exploration or disciplinary pluralism. If a more sustained research program including quantitative methods is to develop, those dispositions may be

COMMENTS

ACTIVITY

2 COMMENTS ON PARAGRAPH 7

More a comment than critique. There seems to a tension between prescription 1 and prescriptions 2&3. Prescription 1 appears to run counter to the notion that technical expertise is needed. Yet Prescriptions 2&3 seem to stress the need for technical objects (literary-themed, teachable datasets) and technical training (a year-long course rather than one semester). I wonder if that tension should be noted/addressed in the chapter.

REPLY TO DAVID RICH

I very much agree that all three of these claims cause great pedagogical challenges in DH. It seems that having students take general courses in applied statistics and data analysis would alleviate much of the concern about all of them.

(1) Applied statistics (or data analysis, or whatever it is called at a given institution) will almost

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The community review of the DDH volumes is semi-public. The review site itself is private and viewable only by contributors to the volume.

Reviewers can see author names and authors can see the names of reviewers. All authors can review any piece in book, though they are specifically assigned to one or two pieces themselves.

In early volumes, we simply opened pieces up for general review; for more recent volumes, we have been asking reviewers to leave comments throughout but to reply to a specific set of evaluative questions at the end of the piece.

This process is followed by a revision request in which the editors take account of the feedback, ask authors to revise

Labor

This is all a lot of work. How are we to value the labor of peer-to-peer review?

To begin, we have to acknowledge the situation within which we are working – the way that the internet, and technology more generally, can exacerbate the processes of deskilling and the devaluing of labor.

As Trebor Scholz says in *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory*:

“Shifts of labor markets to the Internet are described [in this book] as an intensification of traditional economies of unpaid work”

— Trebor Scholz, “Introduction: Why Does Digital Labor Matter Now?” in *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory* (2013)

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“Shifts of labor markets to the Internet are described [in this book] as an intensification of traditional economies of unpaid work”

and

“each rollout of online tools has offered ever more ingenious ways of extracting cheaper, discount work from users and participants”

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“each rollout of online tools has offered ever more ingenious ways of extracting cheaper, discount work from users and participants”

Scholz and others in that book are obviously talking about the commercial internet, especially as it intersects with social media – the way, for instance, that newspaper sales fell when social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook became a primary space for news consumption.

Of course, there is a clear difference between the business model of a pre-internet content business such as newspaper publishing and the process of academic peer review, which generally does not involve financial compensation (depend-

ing on how much one values a few hundred dollars worth of university press books – typical compensation in the academy for reviewing a full book manuscript).

But there are clear connections to the knowledge economy more generally and to issues of crowdsourced labor.

As we ask our colleagues to participate in open community reviews, we need to avoid a situation in which the work of public peer-to-peer review essentially becomes a site of alienated labor. Probably the most dangerous potential for that to happen occurs when work that has gone through open peer review winds up being published by for-profit entities such as Elsevier. In such cases, the labor of peer-to-peer review would certainly resemble the vampiric capital discussed by Marx.

In order to prevent such futures, we might turn to the practices and rhetorics of care as articulated in recent years by a range of scholars such as Bethany Nowviskie, Stephen Jackson, and Lauren Klein, among others.

As Nowviskie puts it in her forthcoming piece “[Capacity Through Care](#),” care can become part of the “design desideratum” for the DH systems we build; we can use it to ensure that the demands of public or semi-public peer review protect the affective and intellectual labor of the participants in the review.

“A feminist ethic of care—like many a DH research agenda or platform for large-scale visualization and analysis—seeks instead to illuminate the relationships of small components, one to another, within great systems. Noddings identifies the roots of care in what she calls engrossment: that close attention and focus on the other which provokes a productive appreciation of the standpoint or position of the cared-for person or group. . .”

— Bethany Nowviskie, “Capacity Through Care.” Forthcoming in *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2019*

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So, how, then, do we structure p2p review processes with care?

Here are some initial thoughts, and I look forward to hearing yours during the Q&A.

Building Care into the Structure of Peer-to-Peer Review Processes

1. **Provide review structures**
2. **Create guidance documents or codes of conduct**
3. **Make conscientious review assignments**
4. **Offer reporting mechanisms**

Provide review structures

- Contrast with completely open peer review
- Offer specific evaluative questions

Create guidance documents or codes of conduct

- Need to voice expectations of community norms for the review
- For examples, you can look at the Code of Conduct on D'Ignazio and Klein's *Data Feminism* book, which links to other resources
- We've used the following guidance in DDH

Finally, we ask that you remain attentive to—and supportive of—the range of voices included in this collection. *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2017* will include graduate students alongside some of the most senior scholars in the field; dyed-in-the-wool DHers alongside outside observers; artists and activists as well as archivists, librarians, and scholars. This range is deliberate. We believe that each contributor brings a valuable perspective, and it is our strongest desire is to create an environment in which all voices feel welcome.

Should you have any further questions or concerns, please leave a comment on this page or [email the editors directly](#).

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Make conscientious review assignments

- When setting up assignments, consider power and rank differentials, areas of specialization, and other factors to help structure fair and responsible reviews

Offer reporting mechanisms

- Things can and will go wrong. Provide space for backchannel conversations with editors. Develop flagging features for comments

Credit

Part of structuring a review with care involves providing credit to those who lend their labor to it. A number of publication venues have experimented recently with this, such as *The Journal of Cultural Analytics*



Critical Search: A Procedure for Guided Reading in Large-Scale Textual Corpora

Jo Guldi / 12.20.18

Peer-Reviewed By: Ted Underwood & Anon.

Clusters: Theory

Article DOI: 10.22148/16.030

Dataverse DOI: 10.7910/DVN/BJNAPD

PDF DOI: 10.31235/osf.io/g286e

Journal ISSN: 2371-4549

Cite: Jo Guldi, "Critical Search: A Procedure for Guided Reading in Large-Scale Textual Corpora," *Journal of Cultural Analytics*, December 20, 2018, DOI: 10.31235/osf.io/g286e

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And digital humanities practitioners have been discussing issues of credit at both the professional level and in the classroom. Here we can turn to the Collaborator's bill of rights, which resulted from a 2011 NEH workshop titled *Off the Tracks* led by Tanya Clement and Doug Reside, and the student collaborator's bill of rights, which was developed at UCLA by Haley Di Pressi, Stephanie Gorman, Miriam Posner, Raphael Sasayama, and Tori Schmitt, with additional contributors. Each of these documents show how credit on a project can and should be structured to provide adequate and fair credit to everyone involved in a project.

Community

As we think about models of peer-to-peer review, we need to think about how issues of credit and labor can make it sustainable.

But we also need to think about what it is that we are laboring on – and here I will build a bit on what Kathleen Fitzpatrick said earlier today in the “Transacting DH” panel – that as important as credit is for individual participants, we need to go behind it.

Peer-to-peer review is grounded in community investment and participation

People participate in community reviews when their friends/colleagues are invested in it or when they are intellectually compelled to take part

We have to stop imagining that simply making projects open will make peer-to-peer review viable

We have to go beyond the idea that simply giving people credit, or gamifying community peer review in some way, will make the work sustainable.

Ultimately, what makes peer-to-peer review work is when people have a real link to the people or content involved.

the labor of peer-to-peer review, then, isn't towards an individual text but to a community. What we need to start taking stock of is community value .

This involves investment in open-source, open access publishing spaces where people have autonomy over their work (Humanities Commons/MLA Commons/Commons in a Box/Manifold/DH Debates, etc)

Ultimately, the labor involved in peer-to-peer review is labor that helps us work towards a better academy, one grounded in Generous Thinking, as Kathleen Fitzpatrick has been arguing for] – in the development of what she calls “community-owned infrastructure.”

We should do this not just because it is the right thing to do, but also because it will produce stronger, more effective peer reviews.

But this is hard work, and the work of community development isn't particularly glamorous.

It is and can be gratifying, though, and it is labor that matters. It is, quite literally, a credit to the profession; but we have to ensure that the work itself is valued accordingly.

This entry was posted in conferences, presentations on January 5, 2019 [<http://blog.mkgold.net/2019/01/05/issues-of-labor-credit-and-care-in-peer-to-peer-review-processes/>] .
