Engaging Digital Scholarship:  
Thoughts on Evaluating Multimedia Scholarship

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Over the past few years, it has become increasingly commonplace to hear senior administrators avow that digital humanities scholarship is (or should be) taken seriously in tenure and promotion decisions. This development reflects years of concentrated effort on the part of various professional societies and leading foundations, not to mention the ongoing work over at least two decades of many of those laboring at the intersections of the humanities and the computational. For instance, the MLA has taken a strong leadership role in this arena, issuing Guidelines for Evaluating Work with Digital Media in the Modern Languages in May 2000 and inaugurating in 2007 a society-wide wiki, entitled “The Evaluation of Digital Work,” under the leadership of Geoffrey Rockwell and the MLA Committee on Information Technology, to update these guidelines. Other scholarly organizations, such as the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), the American Philological Association (APA), and the College Art Association (CAA; Davis et al.), have also released guidelines, and the American Historical Association (AHA) early on supported digital publishing projects, like Gutenberg-e. The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and more recently the NEH Office of the Digital Humanities made substantial investments in supporting this change.

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At the same time, a broad shift toward the acceptance of digital work may still be more imagined than real, particularly when it comes to promotion and tenure. At an anecdotal level, digital humanities scholars appear to be held to a double standard, needing to produce traditional print work (typically a monograph) in addition to their digital work in order to be taken seriously for tenure. A string of recent promotion cases to both the associate and full professor levels underscores this reality. These tales from the tenure front are corroborated by recent studies that indicate that many universities still lack adequate guidelines for the evaluation of digital scholarship. As observed by Diane Harley and her coauthors in a widely circulated report, there is a misfit between the reward structures in academia and more open or experimental forms of publishing. The Report of the MLA Task Force on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion, published in the 2007 issue of Profession, indicated that “40.8% of departments in doctorate-granting institutions report no experience evaluating articles in electronic format” (Report 11), let alone experience in evaluating digital works that move beyond text-only formats. Clearly, there is still work to be done in making the case for digital scholarship, even as change is slowly happening.

Given this environment, it is increasingly important that we scholars engaged in the many forms of the digital humanities continue to translate existing guidelines like those of the MLA into terms and practices that are meaningful for our home departments and universities. Our efforts should be both broad, engaging the leadership of national and international scholarly societies, and specific, focusing on the collaborative production of guidelines for our chairs and senior administrations. This article takes up a particular type of digital work—multimedia scholarship—that has come to some prominence at the University of Southern California, the authors’ home institution, in order to illustrate the affordances of this emerging field as well as some of the challenges involved in its evaluation. In an insightful piece in the 2010 issue of Profession, James P. Purdy and Joyce R. Walker argue that discussions around the evaluation of digital scholarship “have tended to focus primarily on establishing digital work as equivalent to print publications to make it count instead of considering how digital scholarship might transform knowledge practices” (178). They highlight the degree to which such a strategy tends to construct a print-digital binary in which print will always remain the privileged term, a claim backed up in the work of Harley and her coauthors cited above.

Multimedia scholarship, although it encompasses many forms, might best be understood as work that refuses the print-digital binary. It is by definition beyond print, even while text often remains a crucial element
of such work. It typically includes the following elements: multiple media (text, sound, image, moving images), user interactivity, a networked or database structure, nonlinear components, and a heightened attention to aspects of design, aesthetics, or form. It draws from both computational traditions and aesthetic traditions, from the digital humanities and from new media theory, and from popular and experimental technological developments. Because the capacity and infrastructure to produce multimedia work are emergent and not yet standardized (as the publication and form of print-based scholarly books and articles now are), a work of multimedia scholarship is often embedded in a broader context of production or systems design that also needs to be taken into account when the work is evaluated. Indeed, the intellectual contributions being made by multimedia digital scholarship are perhaps greatest at the level of infrastructure or system. Tenure and promotion committees are not now well equipped to deal with scholarship that pushes beyond simply porting text online, let alone with research efforts that take place primarily at the level of infrastructure or system, but bringing together guidelines from a variety of fields might help point the way toward fair and rigorous evaluation practices for multimedia scholarship.

Evaluating the Existing Guidelines

The MLA’s Guidelines for Evaluating Work with Digital Media in the Modern Languages is frequently cited as a key resource for tenure and promotion committees, and the MLA has continued to offer robust resources in this regard, including the ongoing MLA wiki project. The guidelines offer useful advice to departments, administrators, and the candidates themselves. This document is widely available on the Web. Some aspects of it are worth discussing with respect to multimedia scholarship. The report of the MLA Task Force on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion specifies that “since scholarly work is sometimes designed for presentation in a specific medium, evaluative bodies should review faculty members’ work in the medium in which it was produced. For example, Web-based projects should be viewed online, not in printed form.” It also suggests that reviewers with expertise in technology should be sought out during evaluation processes. But the document remains quite general. The recent MLA wiki offers a detailed checklist, although it tends to privilege scholarship that draws from traditions in the computational humanities, like TEI (the Text Encoding Initiative). Its discussions of interface design and usability, of encoding, and of technical design sometimes imply a preference for particular standards and design paradigms that could reasonably be seen to limit
the potential for experimentation in multimedia: the preference for stability and standardization might discourage the consideration of emerging genres of multimedia practice. There is also the underlying assumption that digital scholarship will privilege the management and comparison of text-based materials rather than explore the relations of text to other ways of knowing or representing knowledge. The openness and flexibility of the earlier guidelines may better serve a broad range of multimedia scholarship, particularly as the guidelines stress that “the pace of technological change makes it impossible for any one set of guidelines to account completely for the ways digital media and the work done with them are influencing modern languages and literatures” (Guidelines).

Multimedia scholarship is shaped both by traditions in the computational humanities and by traditions in the arts, bringing together the digital humanities, new media art, and digital media studies. Thus it is useful to supplement the conversation about evaluation occurring in the MLA with parallel conversations from fields like art and new media studies. In 1995 and 2007, the CAA released “Guidelines for Faculty Teaching in New-Media Arts,” a document that offers a powerful statement on the mutable and fluid nature of research in new media. On the issue of venue, for instance, its authors note:

For established disciplines, the range, type, and relative ranking of primary and secondary venues for sharing the fruits of academic research are relatively clear-cut. However, for emerging disciplines and areas, these venues are often new, experimental, and in constant flux. In the tradition of many schools of modern and postmodern genres, new media may be specifically employed to challenge and redefine the very notion of venue, such as relying on self-organizing networks or presentation to a narrow audience. (Davis et al.)

They also point to the blur between the theoretical and creative dimensions of new media research (we might also say between theory and practice), insisting that for a nascent field both dimensions are crucial. A portrait of a hybrid scholar begins to take shape, one working across both disciplines and genres, one who both writes and makes. Finally, the guidelines acknowledge that new media work may involve a great deal of labor that is not immediately apparent in the finished project. The authors observe that “an evaluator’s task is analogous to that of judging the importance of a multiyear horizontal study in the social sciences: such a study might require many years of effort, while resulting in a single article of modest length” (Davis et al.). Important suggestions begin to emerge concerning the need for guidelines for evaluating process and labor as much as final product.
A related perspective on the evaluation of digital scholarship is offered in “New Criteria for New Media,” a manifesto by Jon Ippolito and his coauthors published in Leonardo (where it is one of the art journal’s most downloaded articles). The piece expands our notions of how influence and citation might be understood in a digital era and usefully remaps conversations about peer review. Nuanced discussions around open or layered peer review are building steam in both the sciences and the humanities (see Fitzpatrick; Maron and Smith). Such discussions should be integrated into future guidelines for evaluating digital scholarship, particularly as open or layered peer review can facilitate our ability to assess both collaboration and various elements of the process of creating digital work.

Across these various documents, some key requirements for a meaningful evaluation of multimedia scholarship begin to take shape. We outline these below and reshape them for multimedia projects, drawing brief examples from our work as coeditors of the experimental multimedia journal Vectors.2

Respect Experimentation and Emerging Genres
While digital scholarship in its simplest form might simply mean publishing traditional work online, we should encourage a variety of approaches and nascent forms that better take advantage of the affordances of computation and allow us to ask new research questions. The experimental projects produced for Vectors have explored many nascent genres: the animated archive, the experiential argument, the interactive documentary, and the spatialized essay, as well as various forms of simulation or visualization. To these we might add new forms of curation, from digital scholarly editions to multilayered and heavily annotated archives.3 These forms are not fixed and fast; they can overlap in a project that draws on the multiple capacities of digital media. In this inchoate period of multimedia scholarship, there are advantages to such mutability, and it is important to continue to test and experiment. At the same time, we need to evolve standardized structures and interfaces that will allow us to delineate stable genres and to scale digital scholarship.

Understand Process
As noted in the CAA guidelines, multimedia scholarship often involves a long research process. This length of time reflects the need to acquire expanded research methodologies but also reflects the labor involved in making new forms of research. At Vectors, we have come to realize that our process is what scholars find most transformative and intellectually compelling. It is time to shift our notions of humanities scholarship away
from a fixation on product and even publication toward a new understanding of process. The affordances of digital media for process—for the understanding born of doing—are tremendous. The power of process resides less in the end products themselves than in the very act of making. We will need more finely grained accounts of the processes involved in the production of multimedia scholarship in order to evaluate properly the labor required in such research.

**Appreciate Transdisciplinary and Collaborative Approaches**

Multimedia scholarship is often produced through intense collaborations that extend across very different disciplinary traditions, including the humanities, the arts, computer science, and engineering. Projects produced by *Vectors* connect scholars, designers, editors, and technologists in close, iterative collaborations that last many months. The creative directors Erik Loyer and Raegan Kelly and the information designer Craig Dietrich (and several others) were essential to the process precisely because they were trained in different disciplines. Each collaborator comes to a shared understanding of the research at hand that exceeds any one collaborator’s initial expertise or expectation. As one of our authors noted, “The designers, as well as the database architects, influenced my theoretical perspectives” (Christen). The humanities have not developed adequate measures for evaluating deep collaboration, particularly given the ongoing focus on single-author monographs. We need to design modes of evaluation that draw from other areas where collaborative work is taken seriously, including both the sciences and practices like architecture and film production, while also understanding that it is often impossible to quantify who did what in some ongoing collaborative projects.

**Adapt Current Models of Citation and Peer Review**

From new modes of scientific publishing and data curation, like those evidenced in *arXiv* and *DataONE*, to the open peer review experiments in humanities publishing undertaken by the *Shakespeare Quarterly* and others, evidence is accruing that we need not sacrifice quality and rigor if we adapt current models of citation assessment and review for digital environments. Kathleen Fitzpatrick has convincingly argued for new models of review that depend on peer-to-peer review, open review, reputation economies, and community-based filtering. Ippolito and his coauthors argue for a more expansive understanding of citation, particularly given the inadequacy of traditional citation models for work in new or interdisciplinary fields. The traditional impulse of many tenure and promotion committees to seek reviewers from Ivy League universities will likely fail to produce
reviewers well versed in experimental design practices or the methodologies and practices of the digital humanities. At *Vectors*, we found that multiple models of peer review were required. Projects produced outside our collaborative production process (about a third of the pieces we published) underwent traditional peer review; in-house projects were reviewed at the proposal stage, during the development process, and near completion. An adequate review process often necessitated one aspect of review (or one reviewer) focused on content and another focused on design.

**Remain Flexible**

As is no doubt already evident from this list, meaningful evaluation of multimedia scholarship requires a flexible approach that situates the work in its broader context. Now is not the time for rigid or highly quantified standards. To draw an example from the MLA wiki checklist, some projects might rightly be evaluated by how they “link to other projects” (“Short Guide”), but linking itself should not be an inflexible standard for how multimedia scholarship gets evaluated. Likewise, while “open and well documented standards” are extremely important for much digital scholarship (“Short Guide”), multimedia scholarship may also draw on proprietary standards and platforms, as in the Flash-based projects published in *Vectors*. If authors or teams do choose a proprietary tool or platform, they should be able to provide a strong rationale for the choice they have made and articulate its advantages and shortcomings.

**Reward Openness and Contribution to a Public Commons**

Part of the power of digital scholarship resides precisely in its potential to support and facilitate an extensible mode of scholarly production, a mode that anticipates and values revision, debate, and community engagement. Although contrary to the logic of traditional assumptions about copyright, intellectual property, and sole authorship, digital scholarship is uniquely positioned to support modes of public intellectual discourse that benefit from open access and the contributions of others. Academia has much to learn from the success of open source software development—a nonhierarchical, communal programming that has resulted in some of the most powerful and efficient software development of the past quarter century. As the logic of open source continues to permeate other spheres of artistic, scholarly, and technical endeavor, humanists would do well to embrace an ethos of peer-to-peer information sharing and nonproprietary authoring. The increasingly common deployment of Creative Commons licensing for academic publications, for example, has greatly hastened the distribution of ideas and broadened arenas of debate beyond that allowed by
static, proprietary publishing models. It should not come as a surprise if younger generations of scholars begin to regard static, all-rights-reserved academic publishing with suspicion, as an artifact of an older model that can hinder the production and dissemination of knowledge. We allow Vectors authors to choose a Creative Commons license for their pieces. Vectors is open access and free, and we are affiliated with the Open Humanities Press.

Value Tools and Infrastructure

In 2009, Johanna Drucker issued the following call to action for humanists invested in shaping the future of their disciplines:

If we are interested in creating in our work with digital technologies the subjective, inflected, and annotated processes central to humanistic inquiry, we must be committed to designing the digital systems and tools for our future work. Nothing less than the way we understand knowledge and our tasks as scholars are at stake. Software and hardware only put into effect the models structured into their design.

Occasioned by the tensions related to physical versus electronic infrastructures currently being experienced by many academic institutions, Drucker’s article makes an impassioned plea on behalf of a genuinely transformative, ground-up approach to shaping the rapidly advancing future of the digital humanities. But how can we take seriously Drucker’s challenge to design digital tools that are specific to the needs of humanists? One answer is to reframe our understanding of tool design to align it with other scholarly endeavors—that is, to regard the development of tools as itself a scholarly endeavor deserving of recognition by the academic establishment. Drucker emphasizes the need for scholars to be directly engaged in every level of this process instead of turning the technical development over to IT specialists. Vectors has utilized such an approach: we always root our technological design in the needs and methodologies of the interpretive humanities, building tools in context.

Such a vision of the future of the humanities will require new kinds of workers and new models of production. The MLA wiki makes a useful argument about the need to evaluate tools, noting that “tools . . . instantiate hermeneutical positions about what questions are important,” and recommends that we take tool development seriously (“Short Guide”). Kenneth Price has likewise maintained that database design always implies an argument (see also Flanders). We might extend these observations to the very infrastructures that enable scholarship in the digital humanities. While we typically see the creation of infrastructure—new journals,
new centers (virtual or physical), new task forces and scholarly organizations, new technological platforms—as a type of administrative service, the creation of tools and other human and technological infrastructure for the digital humanities is better understood as a form of research practice, structuring the very grounds of possibility for digital scholarship. The tools and infrastructure are not only the preconditions for the work; at their best, they are also part and parcel of the work, deeply integrated into its methods and outcomes. Our tools and infrastructure are rich objects to think with. Any *Vectors* piece might be evaluated for its scholarly merit and design, but all the pieces we produced depend on a flexible database platform created to support the type of work undertaken by interpretive humanities scholars. The creation of this platform in turn depended on a rigorous and collaborative research process, and it is the basis of our ongoing work to scale the lessons learned from *Vectors* (see McPherson; see also the Web site for the Alliance for Networking Visual Culture [http://scalar.usc.edu/anvc]). Our practices at *Vectors* approximate the work of a studio or lab, extending far beyond the traditional scope of a scholarly journal. There are many challenges facing the field of the digital humanities (and, indeed, the humanities at large), but a central and pressing challenge will be the development of meaningful and fair methods of evaluation for the largely misunderstood or miscategorized work undertaken at the level of infrastructure and tool design.

**Worked Example: Critical Commons**

We now consider a platform that exemplifies an open-architecture scholarly tool designed to support a range of practices spanning research, pedagogy, and electronic publication, and we suggest how such a platform might best be evaluated and understood. *Critical Commons* is an open source, user-generated, online, media-sharing database funded by the MacArthur Foundation’s Digital Media and Learning Competition and supported by the University of Southern California’s Institute for Multimedia Literacy. The site was founded by Steve Anderson and launched publicly in the spring of 2009 with the goal of facilitating the sharing, annotating, and curating of media while simultaneously informing scholars about their rights and responsibilities under fair use. Although initially oriented toward the online presentation of video clips and commentaries solely in the context of the *Critical Commons* Web site, the real potential of the site’s rapidly expanding database lay in the capacity of the system to embed streaming videos in other online contexts. The site has now become part of the backbone of the new electronic authoring platform *Scalar*. It provides an
essential means of supplying copyrighted video under the protections of fair use.

Although the public distribution of media collections without a license is widely assumed to be prohibited by law, the ripping, capturing, and storing of media for educational purposes is explicitly allowed by the fair use statute as well as by the recently expanded exemptions to the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) defined by the Library of Congress. Media clips that are uploaded to Critical Commons are publicly viewable only when accompanied by a text or voice-over commentary that substantively transforms or recontextualizes the original work. The Critical Commons database currently contains over a thousand high-resolution video clips and was recently redeveloped to include a mobile application to encourage access through a broad range of Internet-enabled mobile devices. Along with the Shoah Foundation, the Hemispheric Institute, and the Internet Archive, Critical Commons is an inaugural partner in the multi-institutional Alliance for Networking Visual Culture, a Mellon-funded initiative in the digital humanities. The Alliance for Networking Visual Culture is promoting partnerships among digital archives, researchers, and academic presses and working with the Vectors team to develop Scalar. This project aims to model new digitally enabled scholarship and creative uses of digital archives, while also modeling proof-of-concept modes of compelling digital publication for academic presses.

Digital scholarship often renders unstable the divisions between scholarship and pedagogy. Because of its initial framing in terms of fair use advocacy, Critical Commons recognized no sharp distinction between these two realms. In media-related fields, the understanding and exercise of fair use is as necessary for teaching as for electronic publication. Hence Critical Commons was designed to support in-class teaching, student participation, and self-guided study as well as research and publication. For example, instructors using Critical Commons can upload virtually all the media for a given class to the online database. These media clips may then be combined with text or voice-over commentaries and curated into a play list or lecture format. Instructors may also assign students to post their own commentaries on the clips shown in class, and these commentaries become part of a growing collection of public discourse surrounding a given piece of media. The more commentaries that are linked to each media clip, the more cultural value is added and the stronger the fair use claim becomes. In addition, by using Critical Commons, instructors make the primary media sources for the class as readily available for quotation and commentary as, say, the written texts in a class focusing on literary analysis. When evaluating Critical Commons as an academic resource, some might conclude that
the platform is a pedagogical or advocacy project, but such an evaluation fails to understand that, in its very design, the platform enacts an argument about the importance of fair use for intellectual inquiry and also undergirds an emerging paradigm of open research.

**Researching in Public**

To date, *Critical Commons* has been actively used by educators and scholars in fields such as communication, cinema-television studies, and media production; it has also been used in less obvious fields, such as economics, literature, and history. The following user profiles suggest the range of uses to which the site is currently being put.

**Deleuze and Cinema**

The project “Deleuze and Cinema” emerged from the graduate seminar Deleuze and Culture, taught by Kara Keeling in the School of Cinematic Arts at the University of Southern California. The course engaged a selection of writings by and about the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. Drawing on Deleuze’s work on literature, music, painting, and film, the class focused on primary and secondary Deleuzian scholarship related to visual culture. Using the media-sharing capabilities of *Critical Commons*, students and instructors gathered relevant film clips and posted critical commentaries to be shared online, thus forming the beginnings of an annotated archive of media referred to in Deleuzian theory. The goal for students was to enrich their comprehension of the Deleuze texts, while simultaneously creating a public, discursive space for continuing discussion. In the longer term, these clips and commentaries constitute the beginnings of a comprehensive archive of the media referred to by Deleuze in his writings about cinema. Thus the goal of the project is process-oriented rather than encyclopedic in scope and execution. The strength of the project lies precisely in its ability to accommodate many voices, interpretations, and reinterpretations as well as an expanding collection of media to be used in both teaching and research.

**The Economics of Seinfeld**

For the past three years, Linda Ghent, chair of the Department of Economics at Eastern Illinois University, and her colleagues Alan Grant and George Lesica have been using clips from popular culture, posting tags, stills, and descriptions of clips on their Web site, *The Economics of Seinfeld*, to illustrate theories of economics. Since they began using *Critical Commons*, this team has dramatically expanded the impact of the project by
making dozens of original Seinfeld clips viewable online along with critical commentaries. Although the project was originally intended as a model for economics instructors wanting to illustrate abstract concepts such as opportunity cost and depreciation of capital through popular culture, the site now functions as a self-contained repository for economic analysis that is accessible to users outside a traditional curricular context. Ghent’s use of Critical Commons is, in effect, a hack that was totally unexpected though allowed for by the site’s basic architecture. It is precisely this type of emergent, collaborative, and transdisciplinary use that can be facilitated only through the development—and then the subsequent appropriation and reuse—of new tools and platforms.

**Digital Shakespeare**

Katherine Rowe, chair and professor of English at Bryn Mawr College, has used Critical Commons for a comparatist project on cinematic adaptations of Shakespeare. Rowe’s project, titled “Remember Me: Technologies of Memory in Michael Almereyda’s Hamlet,” incorporates clips from Almereyda’s Hamlet, along with Baz Luhrmann’s Romeo + Juliet, in order to analyze how cultural practices based on older technologies, such as play texts and writing, persist in and shape newer forms, such as film and video. Subsequently, Rowe’s students have published numerous related clips, commentaries, and lectures, adding to the growing body of Shakespeare adaptations available in Critical Commons, including Othello and Titus Andronicus.

Each of these projects exemplifies a kind of work that may be performed only because of the extensibility and flexibility of a digital infrastructure and its ability to contribute to an open intellectual commons. Another way of framing these efforts is akin to the emerging practice of writing in public, which has been promoted by Fitzpatrick and others in the development of scholarly publications that are produced in dialogue with a community. Fitzpatrick’s Commentpress-based, open peer review of her book Planned Obsolescence is an example; other recent examples are McKenzie Wark’s Gamer Theory, a project of the Institute for the Future of the Book that resulted in both online (GAM3R 7H3ORY) and print publication, and Noah Wardrip-Fruin’s Expressive Processing, which was simultaneously subjected to conventional peer review before its publication by MIT Press and incorporated into the community dialogue on the electronic literature blog Grand Text Auto. These models of public writing lead us to propose that the Critical Commons examples cited here in fact constitute a practice of researching in public. As a public, user-generated media archive, Critical
Critical Commons facilitates not just the sharing of text commentaries or notes on a written work in progress but also the eventual sharing of primary media resources, which may radically expand or transform the scope of a research project. Even the basic convention of using shared tags in Critical Commons results in unexpected connections among media in the database. The tag “Shakespeare,” for example, produces returns for not just the specific new-wave adaptations privileged by Rowe’s project but also clips from the science fiction TV series Babylon 5 and a scene from the IBM-sponsored feature film Desk Set, in which the capacity of a newly installed supercomputer is exemplified by its ability to distill the entire contents of Hamlet into a thin stack of searchable punch cards, an uncannily prescient vision, articulated circa 1957, of today’s digital humanities. Each of these projects might be evaluated and assessed for its own merit through reference to the rubric sketched above, but the platform itself merits consideration as a method of research, both in its engagement with debates around fair use and in its orchestration of a new model of curatorial scholarship.

The gathering and publicizing of media works in a critical context situate Critical Commons in a realm that blurs the boundaries between writing and curating. In 2009, the authors of The Digital Humanities Manifesto 2.0 advocated recasting the “scholar as curator and the curator as scholar,” defining curation as “making arguments through objects as well as words, images, and sounds.” In media and art-related fields, curatorial practice has long served as a vehicle for academics to cross institutional boundaries to seek relevance and visibility in the world outside, orchestrating screenings, displays, performances, and gallery events in public venues. But in academia proper, such activities are often undervalued, categorized as service to the field or considered professional practice as opposed to research. This marginalization of curating represents a missed opportunity for humanities disciplines, as the proliferation of digital archives and information systems renders the ability to structure, organize, and access data a more valuable skill than ever before. Indeed, the Internet has added formerly obscure cultural objects to scholars’ domain. Whereas the mastery of a field and its practices was once linked to having overcome the barriers of scarcity or geography (e.g., traveling to distant archives, tracking down obscure texts or artifacts, managing to experience ephemeral artworks or site-specific performances), the curatorial model of scholarship is no longer about experiencing or collecting individual objects but about functioning as a critical extension of distribution and exhibition mechanisms. Scholars who engage in curation in conjunction with their preferred form of scholarly output (writing, multimodal publishing, database design, etc.) expand the traditional domain of knowledge production by facilitating primary
access to cultural artifacts for a broader public. This expansion clearly enriches the possibilities for scholarly output and opens the possibilities for multiple interpretations, more informed contestation, and generally richer forms of engagement. The result is a reconfiguration of scholarship that is about cultural objects, texts, or media to scholarship that takes place with and for those objects, increasing their accessibility, their legibility, and the sophistication of their cultural framing.

From emerging genres such as curation to broader collaborative processes to building infrastructure and tools, the research outcomes of multimedia scholarship (and the digital humanities in general) are a challenge to review, whether before publication or in promotion and tenure decisions. Some responsibility for a successful evaluation no doubt resides with the author or project creator. Care should be taken by the scholar to explain the unique contributions of a work, its relation to existing fields, the labor involved in its creation, and the most useful ways of assessing influence and quality. Our departments, universities, and professional societies must also assume responsibility for adapting existing mechanisms of evaluation to ensure that this work is fairly reviewed.

But is the academic establishment—and are we as individual scholars—really ready to embrace and reward collaboration across disciplines and the creation of new platforms for knowledge? For centuries academia has operated successfully according to the logics of scarcity, individual expertise, and restricted access. It should come as no surprise that our institutions take a dim view of emerging genres when considering questions of tenure and promotion. Yet we resist such change at our peril. In a moment when universities and governments in the United States and abroad seem intent on shrinking the humanities and on interrogating their value, digital media offer an avenue to reinvigorate our scholarship and to communicate it in compelling new ways. This capacity of the digital to present work to a broader audience means that our work can circulate in many forms, in different affective registers, and in richer dialogues. At the same time, digital tools can inject new rigor into our scholarly practices by bringing our interpretive acts more closely in line with our objects of analysis—by, for instance, embedding our interpretations in the digital archive itself.

Whether we are willing to admit it or not, all humanities scholarship is now digital. From our electronic resources at the library to the software systems that produce our paychecks to our course management software, networked information flows are the terrain of the twenty-first-century university. If we choose not to engage in a deep and sustained manner with the digital infrastructures that shape our universities, our presses,
the media, the health care system, and the very engines of late capitalism, if we persist with the business of the humanities in the old and familiar forms, we also cede the opportunity to work as agents of change in those networks.

NOTES

1. The Organization of American Historians, the American Historical Association, and the National Council on Public History released the report *Tenure, Promotion, and the Publicly Engaged Academic Historian* in 2010. The report is focused on public history in general, but an accompanying white paper produced by the working group includes consideration of digital work (Working Group).

2. For analyses of *Vectors* and its work, see McPherson; Svensson.

3. For an interesting analysis of multimodal versus print argument, see Andrew Jakubowicz’s analysis of David Goldberg’s *Vectors* piece “Blue Velvet” (Jakubowicz and Leeuwen).

4. *Critical Commons* ([www.criticalcommons.org](http://www.criticalcommons.org)) was created using the free, open source video-sharing system *Plumi*, which was developed by the Australian design collective EngageMedia as a video-enabled variant of the content management system *Plone*. The basic media-sharing functionality of *Critical Commons* is as follows. Educators who apply for advanced-user status can upload and download high-resolution video clips, which are automatically transcoded to a streaming format. When linked to text or audio commentaries, the clips become publicly viewable on the site and may be downloaded at their original resolution by other advanced users. Only clips that are accompanied by a substantial, transformative commentary qualify for protection under fair use. In keeping with the safe-harbor clause of the DMCA, the determination of what constitutes a significant transformation lies entirely in the hands of the user community—in other words, *Critical Commons* functions like an Internet service provider and neither monitors nor assumes responsibility for the content of media posted on the site. It is a testament to the strength of the fair use context created by *Critical Commons* that, in its two years online, the site has not received a single DMCA take-down notice.

WORKS CITED


