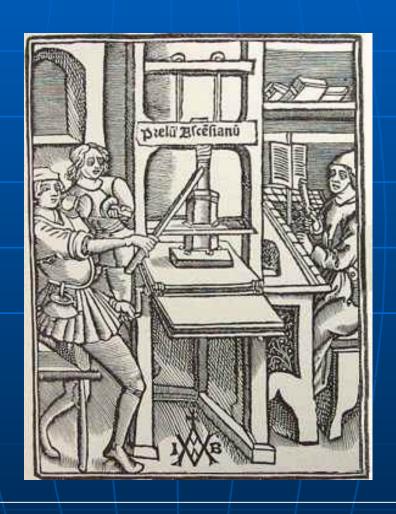# Peer review innovations in Humanities: how can scholars in A&H profit from the "wisdom of the crowds"?

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At the origin

Peer review **forms**

- In traditional paper-based publishing we distinguish:
- **Single-blind** peer review
  - Most widespead form of refereeing
- **Double-blind** peer-review
  - American Psychological Association
- **Open** peer review
  - Combines innovation with tradition
  - Rare in print journals but quite ordinary in Open Access publishing (BioMedCentral)

Scholars' **attitude** to peer review

- Scholars' attitude on peer review is generally speaking positive
    - ALPSP survey (2008) among faculty
    - **93**% of respondents disagreed that peer review is unnecessary
    - The large majority (85%) agreed that peer review greatly helps scientific communication
    - 83% believed that without peer review there would be no control
    - 71% of the respondents perceived the double-blind as the most effective form of refereeing
    - But …

Peer review **drawbacks**

- Concern about the effectiveness of the system
  - Undetection of mistakes and of falsifications
- Bias
- Delay in publication
- Costs
  - The minimum cost of refereeing has been estimated as $500 per accepted article by the American Institute of Physics (Harnad, 2001)
- Scalability problems

Peer review **innovations in social web**

- **Retroactive** peer review, performed through the overlay journals which select the content archived in repositories

- **Social peer review**, performed through blogs, wikis, social bookmarking tools like Connotea and Citeulike

- **Public peer review**, the social peer review embedded in the publishing workflow
  - **Ex-post PLoSONE**
  - **Ex-ante** Atmospheric-chemistry-and-physics

Quality assessment A&H

- Peer review in A&H is not a common practice:
    - Communities of humanists are **small, self-referential, scarcely cohesive**
    - The **monograph** is the predominant means of publication
    - **Quality control** is by far a greater concern in medicine and biology than, for example, in philosophy or history
    - Funds allocated in A&H are **scant**

Quality assessment A&H

- Some forms of quality assessment do exist in A&H too
  - **Monographs**
    - University presses editorial boards exercise a general form of qaulity control
    - Reviews (ex-post)
  - **Journals**
    - Journals internationally-oriented are mainly peer-reviewed
    - Journals oriented to local communities rarely adopt a peer review system

Digital Humanities

- Humanities are moving fast to **Digital Humanities**
  - for humanists as researchers the move to digital is not only a move from a format to another, but is also:
  - a way to explore the text, to profit of the power of the technologies in order to change the way research in Humanities is performed
    - **Computational methods** in Humanities are becoming widespread
    - **Semantic Web**
  - a way to foster the public debate, to recover the communicative function of the text

Social peer review in A&H

- Blogs and wikis, if embedded in the publishing workflow, have the potential to transform the peer review system, a practice never really established in A&H, from

"*a system of gatekeeping to a mode of manifesting the responses to and discussion of a multiplicity of ideas in circulation*" (Fitzpatrick, 2007)

CommentPress

- CommentPress

  is an open source theme and plugin for the WordPress blogging engine that allows readers

  - to **comment** paragraph by paragraph in the margins of a text
  - to **annotate**
  - to **gloss**
  - to **debate** on it

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This site is powered by [CommentPress](#), which allows comments to be attached to individual paragraphs, to whole pages, or to an entire document. To leave a comment on a paragraph, click the speech bubble to its left; to leave a comment on an entire page, click the link to "comments on the whole page" at right. To leave general comments on the entire text, click the closed book icon in the navigation bar. Comments are moderated for first-time unregistered commenters, but only as a means of spam-prevention; comments will not be filtered for content.

Additionally, registered users are able to post entries and comments in the [blog](#), for a wider-ranging, more synthetic discussion. (I reserve the right to deny author status to anyone who spams the site, or who I have reason to believe is a spammer.)

The main text column and the comments column can be made wider by dragging their right-hand borders; if you'd like more room in the main text, you can close the toolbar by clicking on its handle (click the handle again to reopen). Footnotes are readable by rolling over a footnote marker like this one [1]; they're also included as commentable text in the notes pages at the text's end.

Comments

5 Comments on the whole page

Kathleen Fitzpatrick 1 October 2009 at 8.26 pm

This is a comment that refers to the entire page.

Reply to this comment

Writing in the Internet's Margins - ProfHacker.com 2 October 2009 at 10.02 am

[...] Fitzpatrick explains, her "site is powered by CommentPress, which allows comments to be attached to whole pages [...]

Reply to this comment

La escritura académica digital « Clionauta: Blog de Historia 11 November 2009 at 5.03 am

Open Monograph Press

- A software developed by the Public Knowledge Project in 2009

- It provides the possibility to activate:
  - An **incubation stage** to assess the potential interest of the online communities for the monograph publication
  - An **assessment stage** to manage both an internal and external review process (Willinsky, 2009)

Overlay journal in A&H

- Up to date Humanists can count on a fair number of well-assessed repositories
  - CSeARCH
  - The History and Theory of Psychology Eprint Archive
  - E-LIS
  - HAL-SHS
  - Kultur
  - The Nordic Arts and Humanities e-print archives,
  - The PhilSci Archive
- **Perspectives on Electronic Publishing** is an experimental overlay journal connected with electronic publishing

Social Peer review **opportunities in A&H**

- Humanists can profit from the "wisdom of the crowds"

  - ▪ to begin to **establish** a **costless qualitative evaluation system** both for monographs and journals

  - ▪ to **build** and **reinforce** their **reputation** among peers

  - ▪ to **strenghen** the scholarly debate among scholars and non scholars (included students!)

  - ▪ to **focus social attention** on the humanities

  - ▪ to overcome the **fragmentation** in humanities

Social peer review **drawbacks**

- Concern about the real **effectiveness** of the system
  - Mainly ex-post quality control
  - Scarcely effective
- **Participation** of research communities in public debate may be scarce
  - Time consuming
- Collaborative work challenges the idea of **authorship**

But …

In the **future**

- **Distinction** between the different types of documents blur
  - blogs become a first approach to the scientific publication
  - the idea of "liquid publication", "scientific knowledge object" (Casati et al., 2007) challenges the concepts of "text", "version", "edition"
- **Collaborative work** is becoming more and more common in Digital Humanities
- In a close future publishers, editorial boards, learned societies, and scholarly communities will find **new copyright's forms** to protect the collaborative scholarly work