

optimistic that the benefits of open peer review will be felt more pervasively throughout the larger ecosystem of academic publishing in all formats and media. *

Open Peer-Review as Multimodal Scholarship

by SHANE DENSON

In contrast to the vaunted double-blind peer-review process, regarded by many as the gold standard for ensuring academic rigor, *[in]Transition: Journal of Videographic Film & Moving Image Studies* reviewers know the names of the scholars whose work they are evaluating—and even more important, they sign their names on those reviews, which appear alongside the videographic works accepted for publication. The effect is not just to remedy the double-blindness of both parties (authors or producers and reviewers) but also to provide the ultimate “consumers” of research, the journal’s readers or viewers, with insight into the process as well.

Indeed, the transparency of evaluative standards to outside parties is a key component of *[in]Transition*’s effort to achieve what the journal’s “About” page refers to as “disciplinary validation” for videographic work.¹ For without making the process visible to the outside, there is nothing to guarantee that publication decisions are made fairly and according to principles that, although they might not be shared in all particulars by all scholars in the field, at least are capable of receiving consensus from a broad community of scholarly peers. Of course, the advantage of the double-blind process is that (anonymous) reviewers are free to express their honest opinions, candidly and without fear of retribution or other negative consequences, while also ensuring that (temporarily anonymized) authors are judged on the basis of their scholarship rather than their past achievements, current standing, popularity, or power. Clearly, compromising the anonymity of either side potentially compromises the value and reliability of the review process itself. Unless, that is, the review process as a whole is opened to a further instance of public scrutiny or community “review.”

Whether or not open review is the ideal process for all scholarship is open to debate. I tend to doubt it. But it is clear how the process contributes to *[in]Transition*’s goal of “creat[ing] a context for

1 “About *[in]Transition*,” *[in]Transition: A MediaCommons/Cinema Journal Project*, <http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/intransition/about-intransition>.

understanding [videographic work]—and validating it—as a new mode of scholarly writing for the discipline of cinema and media studies and related fields.” For at stake is not just a new method for validating a familiar form of scholarship, but a method for validating a new form of scholarship *as scholarship in the first place*. The publication of reviews, signed by the reviewers—whose own scholarship can be tracked down and whose authority to evaluate the work can thus be verified—is an important part of this enterprise, because it initiates a conversation (rather than providing the “final word”) on what we can expect from this new type of scholarship, what constitutes valuable work, and why we should take notice of it at all. In this way, the journal’s readers and viewers—a public consisting of students, practitioners, established researchers, and the scholarly community at large—are invited to “engage . . . in this stimulating and important dialogue concerning the future of videographic work as a scholarly form.”

So much for the journal’s own argument for the open peer-review process, implicit in the journal’s public-facing statements about itself and its guidelines for contributors. But while I agree wholeheartedly with this account of open review and its merits, it should be noted that what it accounts for above all is indeed the public-facing significance of the process—its significance for the public already described here. Beyond this, however, the open-review process has important implications for the relations that authors and reviewers maintain with respect to one another—and above all for the experience of the reviewer who agrees to perform this role in public.

The latter impact was not at first evident to me, but it is just as important to account for this transformation, which takes the formerly invisible labor of the peer reviewer and makes it eminently visible. The open review, and the experience of writing one, sits somewhere between the “private” existence of the traditional peer review and the public performance of a commissioned book review—or even original scholarship itself. Having written several of these reviews for *[in]Transition*, I can attest to the fact that I approached my task differently than when I presumed I would remain anonymous to the author and—more significant by far—that my evaluation would not be read by a potentially very large online audience. Writing under the condition of openness, I weighed my words more carefully, perhaps, and I definitely elaborated on ideas and criticisms to a greater degree. But it was not for fear of consequences that I changed my approach; as far as I can judge, I was no less critical of the works that I reviewed openly as I am of those I have reviewed anonymously (but I do not wish to deny wholesale that problems might arise in this respect). What really prompted me to change my approach was a recognition that, in addition to this new form of videographic scholarship, it was the discourse itself about the new scholarship that was the ultimate object of the journal. In other words—and I think this is directly attributable to the open peer-review process—my experience of peer reviewing for *[in]Transition* became one of coauthoring a collaborative discourse that encircles but goes beyond particular video essays and ultimately bears upon the form as a whole.

Clearly, my contributions to the discourse as a peer reviewer were supplemental to those particular video essays and the authors’ statements that accompanied them. But supplementarity, as Derrida taught us, is a two-way street. Recently, videographic practitioners have debated the necessity (or not) of the textual supplement for making video essays’ arguments explicit and for legitimizing scholarship. And although I am

not confident that a blanket answer can be given to that question, my own experience as a reviewer supports the notion that at present, at least so long as we are coming to terms with what video essays can do and be, a wide range of supplements are necessary to mediate private and public experiences of authorship, readership, and evaluation. Above all, this experience leads me to affirm the necessity of conceiving the task of “disciplinary validation” in terms of collective, though distributed and occasionally conflictive, authorship—video essayists, viewers, and reviewers become the collective authors of a new type of scholarship: a prismatic, multimodal discourse for a multimodal form. *

Critics and Makers

by MARIA A. VELEZ-SERNA

One of the most recalcitrant habits I acquired from my film studies education is the tendency to refer to films as “texts.” That structuralist abstraction has its role, but the work of arranging words and that of assembling images are very different practices. People who write about films and people who make films based on the written word know very well that they are incommensurable. The videographic work that *[in]Transition: Journal of Videographic Film & Moving Image Studies* publishes allows for authors to think “in the original language,” as they say one should do with philosophy. But as this point has been made so much more eloquently before, I focus here on one observation regarding the practice of peer-reviewing videographic work.

Having submitted one piece and reviewed another one for *[in]Transition*, I got to thinking about the perceived completeness and finality of a short film as compared to an academic article. Peer reviewers are asked to comment on both the video and the supporting statement. On publication, a note accompanies some of the videos, explaining that the version available is an amended one—it has been revised in response to peer review. Amended videos are in the minority, but academic papers rarely get published without revision. This is not to suggest that the journal’s standards are lax, but perhaps that we approach the task of reviewing differently. Film scholars are used to writing about films we cannot change, only critique. The presence of the reviewers’ statements next to the published videos at *[in]Transition* positions this writing as a kind of public film criticism rather than the closed-circuit rhetoric of traditional peer reviewing.

In contrast, as many of the reviewers are also part-time filmmakers, it may be that their awareness of the pragmatic aspects of video