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Joseph Tabbi: All Over Writing: The Electronic Book Review (version 4.0)

Introducing a collection of scholarly essays, *Debating World Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), Christopher Prendergast cites an observation by Arjun Appadurai that should give pause to anyone who wants to create a space for literature in new media: public spheres, Appadurai writes, are increasingly dominated by electronic media (and thus delinked from the capacity to read and write). [22] That thus can rankle. Obviously Appadurai is not thinking of the Internet, which is still (and likely always to be¹) overwhelmingly textual, despite an increasing visual and insistently instrumental presence. The assumption that reading and writing are of course delinked from all electronic media, shows just how deep the separation of spheres has become for scholars in the field of post-colonial cultural studies. Any notion that electronic literature might in fact be an emerging world literature is foreclosed at the start.

This is available in printed form as part of the [Conference Proceedings Book](#) at Lulu.

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It wasn't supposed to be like this. Appadurai's casual dismissal of reading and writing as active elements in electronic media should seem strange, if one recalls the idea advanced by cyberculture visionaries for a universally accessible, open-ended archive primarily for texts. That was the idea behind Vannevar Bush's Memex and Ted Nelson's hypertext not the current expanse of decontextualized hot links but rather a way of bringing documents, in part or in their entirety, to a single writing space for further commentary and the development of conceptual connections. Another word Nelson coined for the process was transclusion an inclusion through site transfers that could be full or partial, depending on one's requirements: in every case, the original document remains at its home address while being reproduced at the target address (not just referenced or linked). The achievement of this capacity, which can make reading and researching also a kind of worldwide consortium building, brings to the public activities that had been considered, like much of print culture, private and secluded.² Realizing such a collaborative network in the field of literary scholarship is behind the current version of *Electronic Book Review*.

The essays by Anne Burdick and Ewan Branda describe how the interface works, technically and from a design point of view. Here, I discuss how the interface might be made to work in the transformation of critical writing. Electronic interfacing, as practiced since the implementation of ebr 4.0 (early in the year 2007), has a chance to bring a distinctively literary practice back into the operational field of computing and text processing. Connections that over time have become, in print, conceptual and implicit, become explicit and readable not through technical means alone (e.g., the hot link), but by the strategic placement of words, sentences, and other semantic elements in every space afforded by the screen. Even the URL of an ebr publication says something, not only about the electronic address of an essay, a narrative, or an essay-narrative, but about its content; literary concepts are tagged in each essay, and the tags are developed in awareness of keyword and metatag development at affiliated sites throughout the Web. Though possible and, in our view, desirable, transformations in the practice of critical writing are by no means inevitable and they will depend, not on ebr or any one site, but on the development of a consortium of sites and a consensus about best practices that answer to, and can help direct, practices under development in ebr.

The creation of the ebr writing space, even as it looks back to Ted Nelson, also looks forward to another, as yet unrealized, conception of knowledge processing on the Internet namely, the Semantic Web. The Semantic Web is most useful as a metaphor at this point, since its realization depends not on a top-down development but on the independent decisions by many site developers to mark up and tag text according to a common and communicating set of references.³ My interest in the Semantic Web is its potential, through the mundane task of tagging documents, for developing not only a database but a vocabulary specific to the field of e-lit, using procedures that involve both ordinary readers and editor/curators. At the same time, the necessary awareness of vocabularies under development elsewhere must not influence the autonomous development of a literary metatag vocabulary for literary purposes. In whatever ways the literary field is transformed by electronic environments, its transformations should be readable in terms created by, and for, literary authors.

Certainly, its creators want to make the conceptual writing in ebr consistent with the predominant flow of information among sites whose developers recognize the need for pooling content. Nonetheless, editors and authors cannot assume that our attention to semantic content will be enough to sustain a literary presence on the Internet. Where tagging and linking depend on direct, imposed connectivity at the level of the signifier, the creation of literary value depends on suggestiveness, associative thought, ambiguity in expression and intent, fuzzy logic, and verbal resonance (where slight differences, not identifications among fixities, are the origin of meaning the difference that makes a difference, in Gregory Bateson's phrase; Emily Dickinson's expression of internal difference / where the

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meanings are, the topologies that, according to Michel Serres, haunt the geometries where most people live). Tags are important; naming is one of the literary arts. But the names need to change, new names need continually to be created so that the tags read by machines do not appear (to living readers) as word soup. The need to combine this literary development with the machine-readable content that would characterize an operative Semantic Web is a challenge not only for ebr but for any site interested in knowledge creation that depends on, but is never identical to, information storage and retrieval.

All Over Writing

At a time when powerful and enforced combinations of image and text threaten to obscure the differential and processual ground of meaning, ebr seeks to recognize and encourage the potential for bringing together, rather than separating, rhetorical modes in the production of nuanced, textured languages within electronic environments. Much of what we present, online, is recognizable from the tradition of print: the self-standing essay, the book review, editorials, descriptive blurbs, and so forth. What distinguishes our presentation from print, however, is a way of linking content together through conceptual writing, so that relations that tend to be implicit in a print archive are made explicit and present in one place. Following a reference or an allusion or even a hint, readers need not go to a different bookshelf, library, or archive. The term I want to offer, for such a critical enterprise, is drawn from the arts: bearing in mind the all over painting in abstract expressionism, I want to propose an all over writing that embraces seriality and interconnectivity, rather than being distracted by links. It happens that this term, all over painting, figured in my first book, on relations of technology and contemporary fiction, which was published at about the time when I conceived The Electronic Book Review. For documentary purposes, as well as for purposes of visual illustration, I will launch this discussion with a brief reference to my book or rather, to the cover (see Figure 1).

Reproduced here is Small Higher Valley 1 (1991), the first in a series of paintings by the New York based poet and painter Marjorie Welsh. In the book's introduction, I described this painting's use of a virtual system of geometric sectionings to suggest the networks and grids that underlie rational thought, while at the same time avoiding any single total system that could dominate everything (Postmodern Sublime, 20) That description resonated with my topic, the sublime in American fiction as it was finding expression in a group of authors whose work registers the emergence, post-World War II, of technologies of information, communication, and control. Only recently, while unpacking my library in the Summer of 2007, did I happen to notice how similar in some ways Welsh's multi-colored grids are to the visual design of the ebr weave by Anne Burdick: <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/>

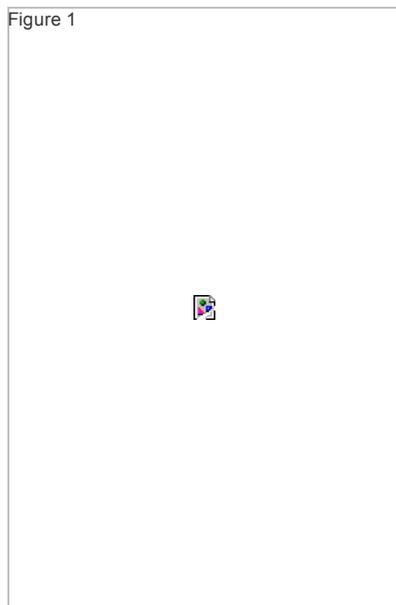


Figure 1: *Postmodern Sublime* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995)

Notice for example this page's capacity to include any color against the generous black background, its flexibility and expansiveness made possible, not limited, by material constraints of the line and the screen. The grid gives precise and measurable locations they are the known habitations for both the viewer of Welsh's painting, and the user of interfaces. But, to cite Serres again, one can live in geometry and still be haunted by topology. The grids also serve to stage a sequence of wholly relational meanings. Paint is allowed to brush or bleed into the adjoining quadrilateral sector (in the Welsh painting); while files, placed under columns and listed chronologically, also radiate outward to other files based not only on informational content, but on conceptual similarities that might be recognized by readers and editors, though not necessarily anticipated by authors. The design is relational and open-ended, and the electronic writing space is extended all over, so that one site or essay can be included within and transferred to other sites.

Market

In my talk today, I want to discuss some of the ways that our mode of all-over writing capitalizes on what the Web allows, enabling a media-specific reading and writing practice. But to understand this specificity and why it requires

Foundations and Futures of Digital Humanities"

Patricia Seed: Looking Back: A Decade of Using Games to Teach History, 1996-2006

Rebecca Allen: Global Interfaces, Intimate Interfaces and the Interface between Art and Technology

Sarah Sweeney: Way-Finding on the Web: Urban Planning and the Virtual Interface

Session #2: Interface Genealogies

Session #5: The World Wide Web Evolves

Session #6: Racing (through) Domains

Session #7: Connecting the (Virtual) Dots

Session #8: Innerspace and Interface

Session #9: Ludic Depths: Games, Narratives, Platforms

Tim Wang and Ulrich Rauch: An Arts

Metaverse: Reconstructing the Past (A Short Review)

Timothy R. Tangherlini, Todd Presner, Zoe Borovsky: Thick Viewing: Integrated Visualization Environments for Humanities Research

Ewan Branda: A Map of Relations: Three Interfaces in the Electronic Book Review

Helen Papagiannis: Augmented Memories, Digital and Analog Realities

Jennifer E. Boyle: Interfacing Affect: The Hollins Community Project

Jessie Daniels: Searching for Dr. King: Teens, Race and Cloaked Websites

John Seely Brown Keynote: The Social Life of Learning in the Net Age

Matthew Tinkcom: Education: A Theory of Value in the Digital Cinematic Epoch

Michele White: The Hand Blocks the Screen: A Consideration of the Ways the Interface Is Raced

Nicole Starosielski: Reskinning the Digital Surface: Borders and Immobility at the Interface

Noah Wardrip-Fruin: Internal Processes and Interface Effects: Three Relationships in Play

Session #1: Funding the

designers and programmers working with, but necessarily independent of, writers, I need to say a few words about what our journal is not trying to do. First of all, we're not competing with print, and we're not trying to reproduce the traditional peer review academic journal (see coda below) or the just-in-time delivery of established review media. Though it sounds odd to say it, even slack there's no reason that an essay or book review needs to appear close in time to the texts under discussion, except for the commercial (and relatively recent) enforcement of brief shelf lives for books on the one hand, and platform obsolescence for most Internet sites on the other hand. Those limitations are not inherent in books or websites. Obsolescence a theme in ebr's earliest manifesto is not a technical problem, but a political and economic one:

Tabbi, Joseph. A Review of Books in the Age of their Technological Obsolescence. ebr 12-30 1995.
<http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/manifesto>

With the rise of neo-liberal economics in the 1980s and 1990s came a consolidation of major book publishers, a proliferation of small presses even as local bookstores were in decline. Authors were being transformed into performers and book peddlers, and the desktop itself was being converted into an environment suitable primarily for office work and innovations in marketing. In general, such transformations have been catastrophic for reading and writing, as my opening quotation from *Debating World Literature* suggests. The Web's been around long enough, that one can safely say that older, bounded, forms of the literary are not likely to re-appear in the current, user-friendly environments. There is of course a wealth of experimental, non-narrative fiction and poetry in non-commercial platforms. But if we haven't had major born digital novels or poems by now, probably we never will.

In my own practice of critical writing within English and Arts programs in the United States, these developments would seem to be consistent with the rise of cultural studies and media studies where graduate students, instead of taking the years and sometimes decades needed for mastering a subject, are encouraged to publish even as they are still taking courses, carrying a teaching load, and often holding a job. There are now, at my State University in Chicago, even academic conferences for undergraduates. Literary and Cultural journals on the Internet tend to be short-lived, and platform obsolescence has made it difficult to establish the canon of contemporary texts that is necessary to the sustained critical discussions needed to form a field. The literary work produced in such a climate has been characterized, in an essay presented to the German Network on American Studies as *Media Studies* by the critic John Durham Peters, as a kind of just-in-time production. With low start-up costs and low barriers to entry in terms of knowledge, and the ability to supply the increasingly important cultural industries with savvy employees, the new curricula can be recognized as a kind of academic parallel to neo-liberal economic policies. Such curricula, and the mostly student-run Internet journals that support them, often encourage a topical, informatic approach to scholarship that might be summarized in the formula: find a hot topic, add theory, present paper.

Peters, John Durham. Strange Sympathies: Horizons of Media Theory in America and Germany. Paper presented at conference of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Amerikastudien, American Studies as Media Studies, Göttingen, 10 June 2006. ebr 03-01-2008
<http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/criticalecologies/justintime>

If the Internet were just a way of making that process still more efficient, I would have left the field years ago. In fact, all but a few of my colleagues in Literary Criticism, Theory, Fiction and Poetry Writing, have left, or relocated to departments of New Media, Arts, and Communications. After establishing a career where reading, writing, and traveling are the primary activities, what author would compromise such autonomy for a career of Project Management, Grant writing, long-distance and frequent commuting to corporate conferences, and continual subjection to programs and platforms that routinely confuse commercial interruption and technical instruction? As Linda Brigham writes in her ebr review of N Katherine Hayles, there is something abject about our dependence on expensive, controlled goods, and even the celebrated distribution of agency in networks has its limits: Feedback to network nodes, Brigham writes, seldom indicates the nature of the network; that information yields only to a higher level of surveillance and analysis, while the nature of the network feeds some entity beyond us, we continue to subsist on the empty calories of ideas and concepts. A similar note is sounded by Andrew McMurray, in his introduction to our *Critical Ecologies* thread: the idea that everything, even literature, needs to be done using computers, might serve the current technocracy but it has mostly rendered transactions and communications sclerotic.

Brigham, Linda. Do Androids Dream of Electronic Mothers ebr 11-09-2006
<http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/liminal>

McMurray, Andrew. Critical Ecologies: Ten Years Later ebr 12-01-2006
<http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/ecocritical>

Unforgiving as this critique may be and I agree with it the work of McMurray, Brigham, Peters, and many others writing for ebr also indicates a way forward: these writers, after all, are not only offering critiques; and neither are they simply transcribing their critical writing from one medium to another. What they are doing, in most cases, is reflecting on the medium and their own relation to networks as they join with (or engage in principled argument against) other writers within a network that is identified in the process of writing. This engagement involves more than an adjustment of attitude or achievement of competence with computers and databases. To subsist on more than concepts, one needs to bring one's own work into contact with other, related work, so as to be recognized by others who, writing critically in ebr and elsewhere, have made similar recognitions on the basis of involvement in similar projects, similar discussions. Every technical innovation in ebr, fundamentally, is geared toward the realization of this one goal: to bring the electronic network and its nature into consciousness. What we are working toward is the possibility not simply of literatures inhabiting networks, but for literature to become a network.

Digital Future

Session #3: Theorizing Interface

Session #4: Electronic Book Review 4.0: Toward a Semantic Literary Web-based Interface

Sylvia Nagl and Sally Jane Norman: Raranga Tangata: The Weaving Together of People

The Future of Art in a Digital Age

The Future of Learning: Three Perspectives

Emergence

Once that goal is recognized, it becomes possible to imagine a place for doing the work of literature without expecting miracles, revolutions, or the end of books. I refer to the work of literature, not works of literature, for a reason: namely, talking about processes makes more sense in electronic environments than talking about objects, even when the objects are verbally inventive and could only be devised using new media. At ebr, in the threads titled Webarts and Image + Narrative, we give extensive coverage to conceptual and literary arts that explore their newfound media specificity, but were not a free-standing art project. ebr accommodates, but does not encourage, critical hypertexts and other self-contained, custom projects because these tend to proliferate connections internally, encouraging reading in isolation.

What we are trying to do at ebr is to develop and maintain an advanced literary culture within the new media. There's an aesthetic, over the years, that ebr has advanced fairly consistently, and it can be seen in the examples that Anne Burdick and Ewan Branda have on display in their essays (appearing jointly with this one). I, together with my co-editors at the University of Illinois at Chicago, New Zealand, SUNY Buffalo, Leuven, Boulder, Colorado, Siegen, Germany, Munich, Atlanta, Georgia, and elsewhere, have tried to express the nature of that aesthetic in editorials and in comments seeded throughout ebr in blurbs, glosses, essay ids, and other small, para-textual elements that can be viewed in the screen shots in the accompanying essays by Burdick and Branda. The all-over aesthetic can also be sensed visually, in the non-verbal judgments implied in gatherings, threads, and folds; and it can be generated as much by the database structure as by content.

Knowledge, in such an all-over writing environment, is produced not directly, but as a meta-phenomenon, traceable to (though not identical with) the tags, keywords, and descriptors that authors use (or that they leave to the programs they're using, in which case authors cede more autonomy to the machine than they might know). Here, the actual knowledge is not produced, not entirely, by the content of an essay but is put in by the author or editor, and the uses of such knowledge are not realized until a reader enters the picture, following a gloss, or connecting one tag with another, identical or related tag. In this sense, knowledge production in a networked environment is virtual which is to say, it is given as a potential, in the act of tagging, and realized only when the relations among tags are recognized by a reader or made noticeable by an editor.

In following such connections and enfoldings, the reader does not in any sense replace the author as a producer of knowledge; rather, the reader produces a different knowledge, constructed not only from works the reader has read, but from the works self-descriptions. The knowledge is, from the very start, already relational: and this is what makes it appropriate for a networked environment driven as much by semantic encoding (regarding what works are about) as they are by syntactic and structural coding (regarding what the works are made of materially its letters, sentences, and so forth).

Jerome McGann, in his ebr essay on the electronic future of the Humanities, mentions in passing the severe critique of critique from what D. G. Rossetti called an inner standing-point that most telling of critical positions. McGann, of course, creates his own set of critical references, including his near-contemporary, Bruno Latour, as well as past self-critical critics, creators, and philosophers such as Rossetti and Alfred North Whitehead. That is what any scholar must do, in addressing him or herself to peers in a literary essay. But, in addition to the authors self-chosen references, the gloss on Rossetti takes readers to a critique of McGann's own Rossetti Archive, by Katherine Acheson in ebr. Still further, but invisibly, the term, from an inner standing-point has been tagged with the keyword, focalization. And so the entire essay is not just linked notionally to essays on or by Rossetti, McGann, and the field McGann consciously enters; McGann's work also has been gathered, through the database, to literary works (for example, Rob Swigart's short story, Dispersion) that experiment with focalization as well as several essays that discuss the concept critically. Further still, once the tag is in place, it will be linked automatically to future works on that topic, as they are recognized and tagged by future ebr editors.

Acheson, Katherine. *Multimedia Textuality; or, an Oxymoron for the Present*. ebr 11-11-2006.

<http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/criticalecologies/illuminated>

Swigart, Rob. *Dispersion*. ebr 10-27-2006. <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/fictionspresent/apparent>

Truly, if there is such a thing as all-over writing, it cannot be defined by pointing to specific features or information; the site needs to be worked with, read, so that significances that are relational have time to emerge. (A similar, serial effect is given in all-over painting: the Small and the Higher in Welsh Valleys would be impossible to discern on just one canvas from this series: smaller, higher, than what? Where? Such questions are meaningful only with regard to relations that are produced as the painting is created, and as the painters' decisions are recognized by viewers over an extended time of viewing.) Emergence does not produce an object; meaning in online writing cannot be traced or reconstructed by monitoring hits or reader trajectories, meaning can only be held in mind, while reading, writing, or gathering essays onsite. I'll give here two examples both of them conventional enough to look at, but connected in ways that are recognizable in the process of reading the essay. In doing this, I present ebr's first enfolded site a project description at the University of Virginia NINES website that is coherent with what's been happening at ebr. Rather than simply linking to this site, we've brought the essays in their entirety from the NINES site into ebr. The essay remains on the NINES site, but its description, its metadata pointers, are brought into the ebr database. The essay itself is, in a sense, wrapped, so that (from a reader's point of view) it is as much a part of ebr as the essay by Jerome McGann which mentions the project (a Networked Infrastructure for Nineteenth-century Electronic Scholarship).

McGann, Jerome. *The Way We Live Now, What is to be Done*. ebr 01-03-2007

<http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/rethinking>

The NINES and COLLEX projects, referenced by McGann in ebr, can be accessed on the University of Virginia Web Site as well as at ebr:

Jerome McGann and Bethany Nowisky. NINES: A federated model for integrating digital scholarship. ebr 04-09-2007

<http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/enfolded/collaborative>

The blurb leading to this essay stresses the coherence (and difference) between McGanns and Nowiskys project and the overall (all-over) ambition of the ebr interface, namely:

NINES is an initiative at the University of Virginia to establish a coordinated network of peer-reviewed content and tools. We present the project here because its consistent with the initiative at ebr to create a peer-to-peer literary network for conceptual writing.

This example is meant to demonstrate the reach of the ebr interface, a model for collaborative reading, and a mode of collaboration among sites that has been, too often, forgotten by busy-bee writers. The ease of linking makes it unlikely that editors will consider, in detail, what arguments, keywords, metatags, and implied audiences essays from the two sites might have in common. That such collaboration demands explicit negotiation between site editors, who are expected to grant permission without seeking payment in return, is a necessary and desirable feature for the construction of a literary network. It carries into the new media one aspect of scholarly interaction that critics and writers cannot readily do without, namely, the gift economy among literary and cultural peers.

As I would not want to imply that ebr could achieve its all-over ambition by itself, I should also mention the consistency of our project with other advanced sites (such as the Archiving the Avant Garde Project, *NT2: Nouvelles textualités, nouvelles technologies*, and the proposed ELO Directory). Such sites are not dedicated to the advancement of one specialized discourse; they, too, are about building a field, and creating a context for the persistence of literary and conceptual arts in new media. All such projects need to be developed in awareness of each other and the vocabularies being developed in many nodes, but capable of being gathered universally into a Semantic Literary Web. Whether or not the SW becomes a reality, it offers a good point of reference and a general direction for our project as it might connect with other projects.

Coda: Peer to Peer

No one, I think, will dispute the desirability of developing Semantic Web standards that are suitable for literature. Few ought to object in principle to establishing consortia of mutually recognized sites so that a vocabulary standard can evolve over time and under a range of institutional contexts. For such cooperation to gain traction, however, mechanisms of review need to evolve along with the standards. These review mechanisms, to be more than privileged community gates, also need to be in place universally, throughout the literary profession. In the past, at universities worldwide, the peer review system has developed in response to this need for standards, which is in reality twofold: 1) to keep track of terminology and conceptual trends so as not to turn the ivory tower into a tower of babble; but also, 2) to uphold standards of quality. The communicative function, which is managerial, is not always conducive to the qualitative function, which is a matter of agreement and disagreement among many subjectivities, among authors, readers, and (most important to the field development) readers in the process of becoming authors. Bringing these two functions together, the administrative and the evaluative, is the challenge of academic review.

Beyond even these dual necessities of quality control and career advancement, peer review is also, perhaps primarily, a mechanism of sorting. Its how professionals, would-be colleagues and collaborators, select some materials for attention and reference (in the process necessarily excluding the majority of materials and producers). Only through selectivity can the efforts of professional readers and their students be responsibly marshaled. Reading lives are limited, and this material condition is what necessitates the development of literary canons and what justifies the employment of accredited professionals to teach canonical works and their differing receptions in different historical periods.

While necessary in principle, peer review can easily be corrupted when faculty themselves no longer have time collectively to read the work that their own profession is producing at record volumes even as tenured lines at universities worldwide have been reduced drastically. As is widely known and trenchantly reported by Marc Bousquet, in the United States today, around 75% of courses are taught by lecturers, graduate employees, and other casual or temporary workers; 25% by tenured or tenurable professors. Forty years ago the proportions were reversed.

Bousquet, Marc. How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation. New York: New York University Press, 2008.

It would actually not be so bad, if Bousquet were simply arguing that the academic system is currently dysfunctional. But Bousquets point, rather, is that university administrations, with the implicit support of faculty, have shaped the system to do exactly what it is meant to do - namely, to restrict the supply of peer reviewed researchers and employ an expanding force of low-wage workers whose development is subject to sub-professional performance standards. Consistent with critiques of new liberal economics generally and the critiques in ebr by McMurray, Brigham, and Peters (cited above), Bousquet connects the informatics of education with the informality of work conditions for the majority of graduate and non-tenurable teachers. From this perspective, fears of the traditional universities being displaced by electronic regimes of distance learning are misplaced. The packaging of education as information has already distanced the majority of literary professionals from the day to day activity of their own students and colleagues even within their own departments. The restrictions on what we actually get to review are such that our collective work, as writers and scholars, is unknown even to ourselves.

See the Techno-Capitalism thread in ebr, co-edited by Bousquet and Katherine Wills:

<http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/technocapitalism>

The consequences of this material transformation are felt in the tenured ranks themselves in many ways. Restrictions on what can be reviewed, and on the number of professors who can do the reviewing, can in effect disqualify professors from evaluating peers responsibly and selecting the texts that will be common to our disciplines. The disqualification has more to do with limitations on time than with any active attack on academic freedom. Speaking from my own experience, over the past several years at advisory meetings for the promotion of colleagues, I increasingly have a sense that only those assigned to report on a candidate's scholarship have read the work with any care. The majority have time only to read reports sent in by outside readers. The premise, that there is an audience of specialists out there, better able to analyse a work of literary writing than the colleagues in one's own department, has done more to fragment the profession than any purported tendency toward jargon or politicized language in academic writing. The conceit that there is a set of standards apart from those developed internally among a cohort of professionals, only reinforces the widespread acquiescence to the imposition of standardized testing at all levels of education.

So as to avoid this outsourcing of services that need to be performed by all, not a select few, within the literary profession, and to advance efforts at reforming the academic review process, as of February 2008 ebr has placed on its site a formal statement of our longstanding, hitherto informal, practice:

ebr is a journal of critical writing produced and published by writers for writers: a peer to peer modification of academic review. Each essay is reviewed by a thread editor (a tenured professor) and at least one other ebr editor. On acceptance, the essay is posted to our staging site, where it is made available for comment by our 500-plus past contributors, all of whom are published authors in print and online. Unlike academic peer reports, which are generally seen only by committees, ebr reviewer comments can be read in the margins of the essays, as glosses. More substantial response is given in commissioned Ripostes.

This policy is in solidarity with initiatives and institutional experiments under way as of this writing, notably at the Institute for the Future of the Book:

Jeffrey R. Young. "Blog Comments and Peer Review Go Head to Head to See Which Makes a Book Better." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Tuesday, January 22, 2008.

<http://chronicle.com/free/2008/01/1322n.htm> (for subscribers only)

More generally, the development of a web-based reading culture promises to bring to academia and its publishing institutions something that has been languishing in print culture for a long time, namely: a practice where works are not only read but our various readings are recorded, and that record is itself made public. Like the standardized tests that can account only for what can be tested, standard accounts of reading can account only for elements that can be measured: in surveys giving the number of books in circulation, the time that students or teachers claim to spend reading, and so forth. If instead of measuring what is measurable, we make visible the active and participatory reading that is actually going on in our profession, we improve our chances of justifying the actual work that creative writers and literary scholars are engaged in. What we bring to our respective desktops, and what we do with the materials that arrive there, is the essence of literary work. The activation of this process, and the case by case transclusion of work by our self-selected colleagues, is not just a realization of the technical promise of literary hypertext. The idea is not just to establish digital writing practices as one further literary specialization among all the others. The goal of an all-over writing project has not changed since the work of Ted Nelson: to renew literary scholarship as such.

Endnotes

¹ Handling images is still something of a strong-man act, at least in applications that I use in my own writing life which is non-extreme but I think not unrepresentative, for literary scholars with some investment in e-lit. For example, I went over a year using less than 1% of the capacity on my gmail account, but then the account reached 50% capacity after I circulated among a few friends, resized photos from a single vacation, in a single day.

² One instance of all over textual distribution is self-exemplifying in the present essay: namely, the sentences leading up to this point in the essay also serve as an introduction to a companion essay, *Electronic Literature as World Literature*, under consideration for print publication in a special number of *Poetics Today* on the topic, *Writing Under Constraint*. Otherwise, there is no overlap between that essay and this one.

³ I have described the Semantic Web Applicability to literature in an essay at the Electronic Literature Organization website: <http://eliterature.org/publications/>.

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