

Rethinking text, techné and tenure: VREs as an evaluation and peer-review challenge in Humanities

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In the past 10 years, virtual research environments (henceforth VREs) became instrumental in developing new modes of digital editing, digital textual criticism and manuscript study. By inviting the production of multimodal editing tools, these online maker spaces change the conception of scholarship itself. We experience emerging possibilities to go beyond the limitations in legacy formats rooted in print culture. The quest to represent knowledge in its full complexity and diversity turns text corpora into open-ended sets of digital collections, connects resources from different locations, highlights the need to work with different layers of critical apparatus reconstructing polyphony (see Clivaz 2019), or leads to greater transparency in scholarly argumentation where researchers can clearly articulate uncertainties in their material (Edmond 2019), express diversity of opinions, or prepare thick descriptions of canonical sources (Tóth-Czifra 2020, Fenlon 2019).

Still, as long as print publishing with prestigious legacy publishers serves as the highest value currency of academia (see e.g. Moore 2019, Eve 2020), neither the creation of virtual workspaces, which, as we can see, became indispensable enablers of modern science, nor the digital scholarly objects produced in them are rewarded as genuine scholarly outputs. In my presentation, I aim to contribute to the pressing re-harmonization efforts of research evaluation and novel research practices in textual sciences and initiate an open discussion with the workshop attendees towards a community consensus over what matters in the evaluation of VREs. Candela, Castelli and Pagano (2013)'s now canonical study on the five core criteria of VREs will serve as a starting point for the discussion which will be structured around the following questions:

- What are the challenges of awarding credit in the contemporary age?
- Can research products involving new media be assessed with the same rigor used to judge scholarly quality in print media?
- Can or should VREs become autonomous research objects in and of themselves or only the digital scholarly objects produced in them?
- How the infinitely extensible nature of VREs change our conceptions of peer review?
- How user communities of VREs can take an active and systemic role in defining and promoting (quality) standards behind their operation?
- How to reward collaborative efforts intrinsic in the use of VREs?
- Can the peer review of VREs take more participatory forms than reading and result in actual contributions to the development of platforms?
- When it comes to quality assessment, how to keep a delicate balance between aspects pertaining to infrastructural maturity and technical soundness vs. user uptake and

scholarly appropriateness? (This question is especially important if we wish to avoid the mistake of judging the content by the container again.)

- What are the potentials and limitations of the FAIR principles in empowering emerging evaluative cultures around innovative forms of scholarship?

Only through strengthening evaluative communities around VREs for textual criticism can we eliminate the biggest barrier in the mass adoption of open and digital data sharing. Paving the way for evaluation criteria for VREs is essential in incentivizing scholars to start editing texts in ways that exploit the computing resources available to us, and appropriately reward scholarly practices that are the cornerstones in the advancement of modern scholarship.

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