Scholarship on the Move – 6 (Conclusions) by James P. Purdy and Joyce R. Walker

This Prezi is one of six by James P. Purdy and Joyce R. Walker for “Scholarship on the Move,” a piece in The New Work of Composing, forthcoming by Utah State University Press and Computers and Composition Digital Press (http://ccdigitalpress.org/).

Conclusions

Our analysis of these different spaces points to three significant conclusions:

Rhetorical Moves

What we conceive of as characteristic of traditional scholarship (i.e., the argumentative essay, the print monograph)—i.e., the rhetorical moves that characterize these texts happen in recognizable ways in digital forms, most evidently in webtexts, but in all the forms we studied. Thus, we cannot discount digital productions on the basis that they don’t perform or allow for the rhetorical moves we have come to value in our systems of tenure and promotion. They do.

We should not, then, treat these texts as inherently—or even potentially—less valuable or scholarly than the recognizable scholarly forms with which we are comfortable. Just because a text is digital does not make it easier or less rigorous. While our colleagues in computers and composition might agree with this assertion, faculty in English studies more broadly often do not, and our analysis provides concrete evidence that the kinds of moves that define traditional scholarship can also define digital scholarship.

Redefining Scholarship

Scholarly activity happens in new ways in these digital spaces. Digital forms not only allow for some of the same moves that define the scholarly productions long valued in English studies, they allow for extending our definitions of the “scholarly” and provide new outlets for productive knowledge-building work.

Thus, we might consider ways in which academics might be given the opportunity to account for these new scholarly forms in their tenure and promotion materials—that is, not only to show how their work that looks different is actually the same in some important ways, but, perhaps even more importantly, how their work is different in generative ways.

Supporting Scholarship

Work in spaces like twitter, Techrhet, and blogs can be a direct outlet to most formal scholarly productions (ideas explored and developed in these spaces frequently find their way into other scholarship)—that is, they play a role in the development of ideas and production of knowledge, a role that we perhaps used to ascribe to things like conferences and society meetings and reviews. However, unlike the face-to-face interactions that characterize these types of activities, the work of scholarship that happens in blogs, and through other digital interactions like discussion groups and social networking sites, is visible and traceable—a fact which may require us to identify more specifically how such activities, collectively and individually, work to support scholarship within a discipline.

Conclusions

These conclusions pose challenges:

Recognizing Contributions

If we want to account for this range of scholarly activity, we need to think carefully about ways in which we might do so that adequately recognize the contributions of nontraditional, less familiar forms. In other words, our categorization of scholarly activity must expand to address the work that is occurring in these new spaces.

Developing New Frameworks

We need to develop new frameworks for understanding the work that happens in these spaces. The framework we offer here is one way to begin assessing the different kinds of scholarly moves that can be made in non-traditional spaces, but it does not necessarily help us to negotiate how these productions might be assessed in terms of influence. Not all webtexts, blogs, tweets, and listserv posts are primarily scholarly, and in many cases, scholarly moves are blended with moves might be better defined in terms of service or teaching. Therefore, we need to develop assessments that take into account both the content of these productions and the influence these texts are having on scholars in the field.

Resisting Print-Based Frameworks

As we have worked to analyze these various spaces, we’ve become very conscious of the ways that our fundamental frameworks for assessing scholarly value are currently based on specific activities that center around traditional print publishing. That is,

scholars come up with ideas

develop research agendas

present preliminary findings at conferences (and through meetings, short articles, etc.)

and then move inexorably towards a print-based article, monograph, or book-length production.

Our analysis shows that scholarly moves are made in other ways through various digital productions, ways that do not exactly fit this trajectory, and yet clearly contribute to the development of ideas within the discipline. Therefore, our efforts to broaden our understanding of scholarship must recognize and resist frameworks that are based on this pre-digital model, because it does not account for activities that have clear value within the discipline.

Further, our analysis points not only to ways that we might define the presence of scholarly activity, but also highlights some inadequacies in the way that our current assessment of value is often influenced by factors such as scarcity (i.e., how difficult it is to place a text in a particular venue) and peer-review. While the webtexts we’ve analyzed are peer-reviewed, and are subject to considerations of scarcity, the other venues we’ve analyzed are not, at least not in the traditional sense. Nevertheless, these venues do offer evidence of vetting, and more importantly, they offer evidence that scholars’ ideas are being exchanged, taken up, and used by the community.

Thus, perhaps the most important challenge of our work is that the development of alternative frameworks for assessing value are actually at odds with print-based models upon which we have come to rely. In the end, we are not only attempting to expand our understanding of scholarship to include moves that are more speculative, associational, and dialogic, we are challenging a system that values certain kinds of limiting factors as indicators of success. We seek to replace these factors with frameworks that can more flexibly assess scholarship as it may be found in the more fragmented, open-ended, dialogic environments we increasingly work within.

A Final Note

Ultimately, we ignore texts produced in these spaces at our peril. If we do not makes moves to account for the activity scholars engage in them, we limit ourselves to scholarly forms that are increasingly less published and publishable. Indeed, equating scholarly activity with specific formal productions is not only limited, but dangerous as it ties us to forms of materiality that may not endure. However, if we focus on scholarly activity in more broadly defined ways, and seek to assess it through more flexible means, we may be able to encourage a more robust conception of scholarship that will allow us the potential to explore all of the various spaces where knowledge can be made and shared.

Finis

This concludes the article. Click out of full screen view and return to the webtexts to view

references or to review other section of the article.