

**Losing our Modesty:
The Content and Communication of Peer Review ***

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Abstract: The one quality claimed universally by all forms of scholarly publishing, and that distinguishes this form of publishing from all others, is the practice of assuring some means of prior review and critique of proposed publications by readers qualified to make informed judgments of a work’s credibility and contribution to a field or discipline. Peer review—the shorthand way of describing this practice—has long been simply assumed by readers and claimed by scholarly publishers, without any means of disclosing to readers the nature of the review undertaken or the specific object that was reviewed. This article examines why this long-standing modesty among scholarly publishers is now contributing to the challenges faced by scholarly publishing in asserting its distinct authority as a source of knowledge; describes ways in which definitions of peer review could be made clear and public, and proposes a system for signaling to readers (and capturing in metadata associated with individual scholarly works) the nature of the peer review to which a work has been subjected; and explores a range of approaches to how such a system of signaling could be implemented and policed

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I pass with relief from the tossing sea of Cause and Theory to the firm ground of Result and Fact.
—Winston S. Churchill, *The Malakand Field Force*, 1898

To abandon facts is to abandon freedom. If nothing is true, then no one can criticize power,
because there is no basis upon which to do so.
—Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny*, 2017

Those of us who read this journal regularly share a common experience of trying to explain, to someone who does not, just what it is we do and why it matters. You know the scene: You are on an airplane, and because you are traveling on expenses you are likely in the middle seat, and the person sitting next to you, filled with the hope of entertaining conversation, asks you where you are traveling to or what it is you do. And you explain that you are traveling to a conference, or to a professional meeting, and that you are—eventually it comes to this—in the field of publishing, and, well (stifled cough), scholarly publishing.

It may be, if you are lucky, that your seatmate abandons the overture at this point and reinstalls his ear buds with great solemnity, signaling the end of your explanatory labors. But if you are not, the second question comes predictably: How is that different from just publishing?

This small vignette is, in essence, the conversation happening now at a very high level indeed in the life of academe. In one sense—the economic sense, and thus perhaps the most salient (or at least the most persuasive) sense to provosts, chief financial officers, and trustees—the answer of the past few decades would seem to be, less and less. If by *publishing* we speak of a productive function that brings the works of authors to a market of consumers, and that by making wise choices about which products to bring

to market recoups through sales the costs of production, then there has been vanishing little difference between scholarly publishing and trade publishing—at least in the financial sense. While those of us in this field rebel against such an idea almost instinctively, the trend toward ever-declining subsidies on the part of institutional homes for scholarly presses, be they universities or scholarly societies, is unambiguous. The neoliberal university is, for scholarly publishers, the condition of our daily existence.

But there is another way in which scholarly publishing makes a strong claim to distinction. And if, in the midst of all the turbulence, we get that far in our explanation to our seat mate, we will likely eventually stand on that claim: it is the practice of something called peer review, the idea that before a book or an article finds published expression, it must first be evaluated by knowledgeable experts in the field.

As both an expectation and a practice among scholarly publishers, peer review is arguably the single most distinctive characteristic by which we answer that question of how what we do is different from the rest of publishing. It is why, in its *Best Practices for Peer Review* handbook, the Association of American University Presses (AAUP) describes this practice as ‘essential to the university press mission of advancing and disseminating scholarship.’¹ That assertion is made concrete by the requirement, in the AAUP’s own membership criteria, that a press holding regular membership in the association have an editorial board that ‘certifies the scholarly quality of the books published through peer review consistent with commonly understood notions of peer review.’²

That vividly vague qualifier aside, if scholarly communication is the infrastructure of ideas, peer review is the civil engineering that makes sure the bridges stay up and the tunnels don't flood. Without it, we have no argument for distinction.

That rigor—and the trustworthiness of the resulting work that it imparts—is only becoming more and more crucial as we sail the fact-free floods of new media sources. It is not so much that scholarly publishing has lost its distinctive place in the world of ideas as that it seems at risk of being overwhelmed by the tossing seas of information questioning the authority of scholarship and claiming an alternative reality of 'Result and Fact,' in Churchill's words. If scholarly communication is, as I have characterized it, the infrastructure of ideas, then it is no surprise that like all infrastructures it has been systematically starved of resources and fallen into disrepair. To reassert its role in shaping and sending out the ideas that 'filter down, sometimes through unsuspecting channels, and stimulate thought in virtually every field of human endeavor,'³ scholarly publishing must find new ways to provide clear warrants for its claims of quality and authority.

Ideally, of course, we would approach this problem from the vantage point appropriate to all infrastructures—that of a public good. Closer to our grasp, however, is a less demanding and seemingly self-evident step we can take: To make clear to all readers the peer review that distinguishes our work and forms the basis of the value proposition we set before them—that the books and articles we publish have been through a uniquely rigorous process of quality control and that we place in their hands works of clear intellectual merit.

Peer Review as a 'Black Box' Phenomenon

I acknowledge at the outset that the whole question of what peer review *should* be, or how it *should* be conducted, is a matter of ongoing, not to say distempered, debate.⁴ For the limited purposes in view here, I take it to be a necessary condition of regarding scholarly publishing as distinct and uniquely valuable that some form of rigorous pre-publication review, conducted by reviewers who are both qualified by expertise and neutral with respect to the author(s), is conducted.

Yet here is a conundrum to consider. If you can't get scholarly publishers to agree on much, you can at least get them to agree that what makes us distinct (and what justifies our often luxury-goods-range pricing models) is the *fact* of peer review. Yet at the same time, the warrants for the guarantee of quality that peer review is meant to assure are, simply put, invisible.

To explain what I mean, I will simply recount a story from my experience in launching a new scholarly press. Given the opportunity to meet with a group of department chairs and chief academic officers, I asked them how they decided what published materials were and were not eligible for inclusion in a tenure or promotion portfolio submitted by a faculty member. 'Well, of course, it has to be something published by a scholarly press,' came the answer. 'Yes, and preferably X, Y, or Z university press,' came a helpful second voice.⁵

Eager for instruction, I asked: 'And why from a scholarly press?'

'Well, of course, because the work is peer reviewed,' came the patient, head-patting reply. Which of course led to my next question: 'So, what is different about the peer review process of X, Y, or Z university press?'

Furrowed brows and folded arms preceded the effort to offer strong views on this question, but ultimately all was speculation. The somewhat uncomfortable truth is that scholarly publishing is a business less of proof than of prestige. Prestige matters greatly, yet (beyond the halo effect of institutional association) it is not based on any concrete assurances about how (or whether) peer review is conducted.

Of course, there are two answers to the impolite question I posed. The first is that there is (or at least should be) *no* substantial difference between the peer-review process of one press and another, and indeed there is no ironclad law of nature that relates rigor to perceived prestige.

Even more remarkable, however, is the second answer: there is no way of knowing. Peer review is a ‘black box’ phenomenon; on it depends our reputation, yet nothing about it is made transparent or disclosed to those who consume what we produce.

This practice that sets us apart from all other publishing, this discipline of ours that gives substance to our claim to be the hard, high ground of Result and Fact in the midst of tossing seas of fact-free discourse, is something that we have historically simply *claimed* to be true. We have no agreed standard for how we do it; we have no way of communicating the fact that it has been done, at least not in any way intelligible to the consumer (other than ‘trust us’); and we have no systematic way of disclosing it, unless you count the first sentence of the penultimate paragraph in a typical acknowledgements section to be a standard means of disclosure. (‘I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of three anonymous reviewers, whose critiques helped me to strengthen weaker sections of earlier drafts and sharpen the arguments offered in a number of

sections,' in some variation.) Courtesy it may be, but civil engineering is made of more than good manners.

From Unspoken Understanding to Transparent Clarity

In the first months of 2000, as the world of scholarly communication was feeling the first tremors of digital disruption, the Association of American Universities and the Association of Research Libraries, together with the Merrill Advanced Studies Center of the University of Kansas, convened a meeting in Tempe, Arizona, over the vexed question of 'Principles of Emerging Systems in Scholarly Publishing.' (Spare a thought for how all of those attendees explained the purpose of their travels to *their* seat mates.) Somewhere in the middle of the final report of that meeting, published in May of that year, stands a deceptively simple proposition:

4. The system of scholarly publication must continue to include processes for evaluating the quality of scholarly work[,] and every publication should provide the reader with information about evaluation the work has undergone.⁶

'Must continue' assumes, of course, the existence of a standard for 'evaluating the quality of scholarly work,' which is what we mean when we say 'peer review.' But pay close attention to that second clause. What exactly is the information we have provided to readers about that evaluation—other than (as my group of department chairs seemed to feel) the name of the press on the spine of the book, or of the sponsoring society of a journal?

Remarkably—one almost wishes to say, incredibly—the characteristic of peer review, which alone sets scholarly publishing apart as a uniquely authoritative source of ideas and discourse, is based on no set of commonly agreed standards and no means of indicating to its consumers how these standards have been applied.

We can do better. Those of us who are working to make open access not just an acceptable means of undertaking the work of scholarly publishing but the norm throughout our field have the largest stake in seeing to it that we make clear and substantial the assurance we offer to readers that our works have been peer reviewed. Our need to do this is clear: too often the pressures on scholars to publish, and to publish in open-access outlets, has led to the creation of perverse incentives for unscrupulous ‘predatory publishers’ to emerge, offering (but not actually delivering) a substantive process of peer review overseen by an engaged editorial board.

In my work launching an open-access press for scholarship in the humanities, the arts, and the humanistic social sciences, I have had the great privilege of engaging with a wide range of audiences—faculty authors, librarians, presidents and provosts, department chairs, and colleagues at scholarly presses. In these conversations I find everyone agrees that peer review is the *sine qua non* of what we mean when we say ‘scholarly publishing’; everyone agrees that scholarly publishing has a distinct role to play both in identifying and evaluating the most important ideas emerging from the academy and in communicating those ideas in ways that can shape and enlighten our broader public discourse. And, increasingly, my colleagues throughout scholarly publishing are taking the view that finding ways of communicating this hallmark of quality is coming to be a necessary element of the argument we offer for the unique value of the work we do.

I want to offer the view that there are three steps we need to take to lead us from where we are to where we need to be. Two of these steps are clear and, I believe, can quickly and relatively easily command a consensus among scholarly publishers. The third is less clear, and so in approaching it I will sketch out the questions it must address and

the outlines of alternative answers that might be offered. Having attempted above to set out the case for the need for greater transparency in the conduct of peer review, my hope in the balance of this article is to offer a set of incremental, logically sequenced steps that will redound to the benefit of all scholarly publishers.

Step 1: An Agreed Set of Standards

Our work must begin by ending the unwritten and unspoken understanding that ‘of course we all undertake peer review’ and replacing it with a plainly spoken set of agreed definitions stating, unambiguously, just what it is we mean when we say that a work has been evaluated by scholars qualified to assess its arguments and evidence.

In offering this I am standing on the shoulders of giants—specifically, on the constructive work done by my colleagues on the editorial board of Lever Press. Lever Press is distinctive among scholarly publishers in many respects: It is a new publisher of scholarship, a daring thing to be in a field where prestige is often largely a function of age; it is a press founded with a commitment to be ‘platinum open access,’ meaning that it will neither charge readers for access to its work nor charge authors (or their institutions) a euphemistic ‘book processing charge’ for access to the opportunity to publish; and it is sponsored not by a single institution but by a consortium of more than fifty liberal arts colleges, acting through their libraries, to fund its work.

The editorial board of Lever Press comprises twelve senior faculty members drawn from across Lever’s sponsoring institutions. Reflecting together on the challenges faced by a new press (and an open-access press at that) at the outset of our work, these colleagues quickly saw the need to reassure authors and their institutions that the rigor by which our work is evaluated and produced is at least the equal of the best scholarly

presses. With this in view, they undertook the task of writing together a clear statement of Lever's commitments to peer review as the hallmark of its work, and the guidelines shaping how peer review would be conducted.

I do not claim that the result we have arrived at is perfect or beyond improvement—by no means. I do claim, however, that it offers a sound place from which to begin the work of establishing broadly agreed standards. We realized as our drafting progressed that different fields have different approaches to, and expectations of, the process of peer review—and that is as it should be, given that our methodologies and modes of inquiry differ as well. Our intent was not to prescribe a specific sort of peer review to be applied to all cases but to provide clear definitions of the types of peer review the press would undertake, as appropriate to the case. These definitions, once written, were made public on Lever's website. They are as follows:

Single-Blind Review. Reviewers may be informed of the author's identity, but the author is not informed of the identity of the reviewers. Publication occurs after the author's revisions in response to reviewers' comments satisfy the editors and the Editorial Board.

Double-Blind Review. The identity of the author is not disclosed to the reviewers, and the identity of the reviewers is not disclosed to the author. Publication is contingent on the author responding to the critiques and commentary offered by reviewers to the satisfaction of the editors and the Editorial Board.

Peer-to-Peer Review. The identities of both author and reviewers are disclosed each to the other. The process may result in more substantial exchanges and revisions to the work. Such a review process may eventuate from a process that began as Double- or Single-Blind; in other cases it may be employed for interdisciplinary work in which authors collaborate and review each other's contributions. Choosing to employ such a review process is always done with the advance approval of the Editorial Board.

Open Review. The work has been made publicly available through some accessible platform, and comment has been invited from a community of scholars. Various platforms (such as CommentPress or hypothes.is) may be utilized for organizing and curating the comment process; and each case may stipulate the terms by which reviewers may contribute to the work (e.g., anonymous, with names, with names and

institutional affiliation). The selection of platforms and processes is undertaken on a case-by-case basis, and is shaped by those considerations that will best serve the work. When Lever Press publishes works utilizing Open Review processes, it will normally employ an additional form of peer review as well.⁷

So let us imagine, as a first step, that with these definitions (or something like them) we might have the beginning of a set of agreed standards that a number of publishers could publicly commit to adopting as the standards by which they would agree to conduct their work. The establishment of these standards would follow a structure comparable to (but rather simpler than) the function served by the World Wide Web Consortium in establishing the standards by which the Web works—a consultative process governed by a group of key stakeholders. Once the standards of each form of peer review were agreed to by a core group of key stakeholders in scholarly publishing, they would be publicly promulgated in such a way as to invite all publishers to adhere voluntarily to these standards. I would argue that participation in this work should properly be limited to non-profit publishers and the scholarly institutions they serve, together with scholarly societies, on the argument that only those institutions with responsibility for evaluating and determining the intellectual content of what they publish should be engaged in this work—and not those whose principal function (and business model) is the provision of business services.

In this way the first clause of that key sentence from the Tempe Principles—clear definitions of what we do when we bring to bear ‘processes for evaluating the quality of scholarly work’—would be made plain and public. But what about the second clause?

Step 2: Disclosing the Process to Readers

As a reminder, that clause avers the requirement to ‘provide the reader with information about evaluation the work has undergone.’ This need not mean a full

disclosure of all exchanges among authors, reviewers, and editors, but it does mean that in some clear, consistent way the review and evaluation provided by qualified assessors be shared with readers.

The good news here is that we have an excellent model to follow in signaling relatively complex ideas to readers and consumers in clear and simple ways. It is, of course, the system of ‘buttons’ developed by Creative Commons to make plain the rights with which authors and creators have released their works into the hands of readers and users. An example of this, immediately familiar to readers of this journal (and to many beyond that audience), is given in Figure 1.

[Insert Fig. 1 about here.]

Figure 1. Creative Commons button for an Attribution–No Commercial Use–Share Alike license.

The button itself is only a signaling system. It gives the reader a signal about what rights the author of the work is willing to share. To discover the finer points of what rights those are, the reader is given a hint by the button to investigate further the language that constitutes the license. And that, in turn, leads to a number of resources—a license written in the language of contract law, a plain English version of the license, and a machine-readable version of the license that can be embedded in the lines of code of a variety of file types.

[Insert Fig. 2 about here.]

Figure 2. Peer Review button.

A number of people concerned about making peer review more transparent— notably Jason Mittell and Kathleen Fitzpatrick,⁸ approaching the problem as scholars, as

well as this author, approaching it from the perspective of a scholarly press—have tried to imagine how we might make derivative use of the buttons that Creative Commons has contributed to the work of publishing. Rather than signaling rights, these buttons would signal the kind of peer review a work had undergone—leading readers and users back to the agreed standards by which the various forms of review would be undertaken, described in the section above. They might look, for example, like Figure 2. This basic form could be easily adapted to signal specific types of peer review (Figure 3), the types described in the suggested language for the standards given above.

[Insert Figures 3, 4, 5, and 6 (as panels in a quadrilateral arrangement); the four panels are placed in a clockwise fashion, as illustrated in the table below.]

Figure 3	Figure 4
Figure 5	Figure 6

Figure 3. *Upper left*: Single-Blind peer review button. *Upper right*: Double-Blind peer review button. *Lower left*: Peer-to-Peer peer review button. *Lower right*: Open Review peer review button.

There are two more dimensions of the work of peer review that such a system could telegraph to readers by capturing the variety of forms and processes that peer review takes in scholarly publishing. First, it could clearly identify what *object* was reviewed—a proposal (typical in the first step of monograph publishing), a complete manuscript, or (for scientific and social science fields) a data set. Second, it could also show the *sequence* of review processes utilized. So, for example, a manuscript subjected to a double-blind peer review might look like Figure 4, upper left.

But imagine a case familiar to monograph publishers—a proposal, sent out for double-blind review, that yields a complete manuscript subjected to single-blind review. This sequence of steps could be easily represented in our badging system (Figure 4, upper

right). Or imagine a case of a scientific article sent out for double-blind review, while the data set on which the article is based was simultaneously sent out for a parallel double-blind review (Figure 4, lower left).

Finally, consider a case in which an author wishes to have an open review process made possible alongside a publisher’s insistence on traditional peer review. Such a sequence could be represented in our system as well—with a button that might have appeared, for example, on Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s well-known *Planned Obsolescence: Publishing, Technology, and the Future of the Academy* (Figure 4, lower right).⁹

[Insert Figures 7, 8, 9, and 10 (as panels of a quadrilateral); the four panels are arranged in a clockwise fashion, as illustrated in the table below.]

Figure 7	Figure 8
Figure 9	Figure 10

Figure 4. *Upper left*: Button for double-blind peer review of a manuscript. *Upper right*: Button for a double-blind review of a proposal, followed by a single-blind review of a manuscript. *Lower left*: Button for a simultaneous double-blind review of a manuscript and attendant data set. *Lower right*: Button for a simultaneous single-blind review and open review of a manuscript.

Step 3: From Standards and Signals to System

It seems pretty straightforward to suggest that the first step in communicating the fact of peer review in any published work—at least if that fact is intended to have meaning—is to define the terms of what peer review *is*, and then to find some way of communicating the process that has been employed to those who make use of the things we publish. What is less clear, at least to me, is how to implement such a system with a view to making it an agreed and meaningful standard governing the practice of scholarly publishers. Said differently, how can we ensure that the publishers who *claim* to be

conducting peer review in conformance with the standards we might agree to are in fact doing so?

Implementation is clearly a work of the community, and as such it will require a degree of community organizing. In my conversations with publishers, I've learned that agreement on the need to have common standards of peer review, and the desirability of a simple way of signaling what peer review has been conducted, breaks down when it comes to the question of implementation. Some feel a fairly rigorous structure is needed; others feel that self-interest will lead to widespread adoption and obviate the need for oversight. The sort of idealists (like me) who try to work as social entrepreneurs are often so enamored with our own ideas that we secretly harbor the notion that, of course, all people will come to see what an excellent idea it is we're offering and will then quickly grasp and implement the idea. At the most extreme, we see the requirement to create mechanisms and structures as a form of moral compromise with the purity of our idea. That said, my own view—shaped by scars of experience in non-profit start-ups—is that good ideas are rarely if ever self-executing.

Still, I have no settled view to offer here. Instead, for the sake of initiating conversation, I'll instead offer three broad categories of possible implementation strategies that seem to characterize the responses I have heard from colleagues when discussing this idea. I will also indicate what seem to me the advantages and disadvantages each would bring to bear.

Libertarianism

This approach holds the view that scholarly publishers have a clear self-interest around making evident the unique value of what they produce, and they will both adopt

and adhere to the standards of commonly agreed definitions of the various types of peer review—once they are issued by a group of stakeholders commanding sufficient authority and respect in the field to articulate and promulgate them. They will utilize a badging system made available for no charge and will make certain to perform the kinds of peer review these buttons represent for fear of the reputational damage that would result from failing to do so.

Advantages.—This is the lightest-weight, least burdensome means of administering a regime for establishing and implementing a system of peer-review standards. It could be put in place quickly and would align itself easily with the general ethos of publishers to be autonomously responsible for the conduct of peer review.

Disadvantages.—This approach gives publishers the authority to utilize an agreed signaling system based entirely on their own self-discipline in assuring that the review processes they implement have met the standards the signals represent. The downside risk of such an approach is that any publisher could utilize the buttons advertising the implementation of these standards, and no process would exist for assuring they had done so. While established scholarly publishers would likely not risk the reputational damage of falsely employing these signals, it is not clear that such a deterrent would have the same grip on the kinds of predatory journal publishers mentioned above.

Collective Enforcement

Under this approach, the initial announcement by a group of opinion shapers in scholarly communication about the standards defining various kinds of peer review would be accompanied by an invitation to scholarly publishers and learned societies to indicate their intention to abide by these standards. A pathway would be provided for

these publishers to register their agreement to do so, and the list of these publishers would be made public. Some form of centralized oversight committee or governing board would guide the resulting effort by providing resources to help publishers employ the standards and the signals associated with them (for example, a website providing a list of participating publishers, the text of the standards defining each form of peer review, and a repository of downloadable images for elements of the button system). This oversight committee would have the authority to remove the name of a participating publisher from the list if a clear pattern of failing to adhere to the stipulated standards could be shown.

Advantages.—This would add a small, potentially significant, dimension of enforcement to the system. It would add both the advantages of *naming*—that is, of creating a means by which publishers could be identified as participating in the initiative—and the deterrent potential of *naming and shaming*, viz., the impact of a publisher being removed from the list for cause. Rather than creating a new administrative entity, the oversight function could be performed by a simple extension of the mission of an existing organization—for example, the AAUP or the Committee on Publication Ethics.

Disadvantages.—There is no cost-free means of administration, and there would surely be costs associated with the elements of the system identified here. At a minimum, the registration and maintenance of a website would need to be provided. An oversight committee, or the function it performs, would need to be identified, organized, and engaged in what would be relatively light but significant work; most important, the individuals identified for this role would need to be willing to be associated publicly with the effort, to be advocates for the system, and to be of such standing as to lend credence

to the system by dint of reputation. Perhaps the greatest weakness of this approach is the ambiguity attendant on the process for identifying violations of peer-review standards on the part of member publishers. The existence of such a sanction presumes an evidentiary standard, but that standard would be hard to define, let alone to operationalize.

Accreditation

At the highest end of enforcement would be an agreed system for accrediting publishers aspiring to be associated with membership in a peer-review standards regime. Under such a regime, the assent of publishers to adhere to the agreed standards of peer review would be only a first step. In order to be permitted to use the button system assuring readers that a work has been peer reviewed, publishers would need in some way to disclose their peer-review process to an accreditation panel. We may think of this solution as something akin to the functions performed by Underwriters Laboratories or the Motion Picture Association of America, one that (a) interposes some form of inspection or oversight between a publisher's voluntary adherence to the standards regime and the privilege given to publishers to use the benefits of that regime (viz., the button system), and that (b) funds the necessary costs of such an inspection system through payments made by those wanting access to the privileges of membership. The means by which this inspection would be exercised could take a variety of forms, ranging from a requirement to submit a summary of the review process undertaken for each published work, to a requirement to submit some specific percentage of cases for review, or a requirement to submit to an occasional inspection of files pertaining to review processes, much like a visit from an accreditation authority or auditor.

Advantages.—Such an approach would be the most rigorous path toward enforcing a standards regime in peer review. Not content to rely on self-enforcement, it would provide some independent means of reviewing the work of member publishers to assure that their work in peer review lived up to the standards agreed to by taking part in the system. It would be, in short, a process by which peer-review practices were peer reviewed. It might, additionally, help efforts to assure credit to scholars for their contributions as peer reviewers gain traction and broader acceptance by linking their work to the larger questions of peer-review quality and consistency.

Disadvantages.—Such a system would impose the largest costs and the heaviest administrative burden. It would require the development of an agreed quality control mechanism—whether a voluntary submission process or an occasional inspection visit. Such a mechanism would, in turn, demand the skills of qualified professionals and the development and maintenance of (presumably digital) a submission system that requires a peer-review ‘packet,’ say, summarizing the claims made by a publisher about a specific publication (both ‘What was the object reviewed?’ and ‘How was it reviewed?’). It would also require a membership-fee scheme by which the costs of the systems and the professionals upon which the system depended would in some way be equitably spread across all publishers benefiting from the system. Needless to say, publishers would need to be persuaded that the benefits of participation (or the reputational risk of *not* participating) were worth the costs imposed to make the system run.

Last Remarks

We who toil in the vineyard of scholarly communication are deeply and rightly convinced of the distinctive quality and critical importance of what it is we do. But we

have been too modest in making plain the arguments behind *why* what we do is distinctive—modest, indeed, to a fault, and increasingly to our cost. It may well be awkward for us, as collegial competitors, to fashion agreed language about what we mean by peer review and how it is we conduct it. Indeed, it may be that one of the greatest fears we face in taking this step is the possibility of discovering that in fact there *is* no widespread agreement among scholarly publishers as to just what this distinctive quality is or how it is best achieved.

But to make our case plain, to give weight and depth to the unique value of the works we publish, we must (in Lincoln’s words) think anew and act anew. We need a clearer, more substantive way of positing that claim. It will benefit our readers, by making plain and unambiguous the rigor of the review process that the work in their hands has gone through to reach them. It will benefit librarians, who now would have a clear and meaningful way of distinguishing peer-reviewed works at the cataloguing stage. It will benefit authors, by giving them both the assurance that the outlets in which they publish adhere to a publicly stated standard of peer review and a means of distinguishing trustworthy from predatory actors in an increasingly noisy publishing sphere. And in the end it will benefit us, by setting us apart from those fact-free outlets with which we find ourselves, almost incredibly, compared.

¹ Association of American University Presses, *Best Practices for Peer Review*, 2016, 6, <http://www.aaupnet.org/resources/for-members/handbooks-and-toolkits/peer-review-best-practices>.

² Association of American University Presses, ‘Membership Eligibility Requirements,’ n.d., <http://www.aaupnet.org/aaup-members/becoming-a-member/eligibility-requirements>.

³ Johanna Drucker, ‘Pixel Dust: Illusions of Innovation in Scholarly Publishing,’ *Los Angeles Review of Books*, January 16, 2014, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/pixel-dust-illusions-innovation-scholarly-publishing/>.

⁴ As one example, consider a recent attack averring that ‘the profit motive of much of traditional scholarly publishing and the centrality of peer review as a gatekeeper to publication serve to reinforce traditional methodologies and discourses as normative, making it difficult for divergent voices to enter the scholarly record.’ Harrison W. Inefuku and Charlotte Roh, ‘Agents of Diversity and Social Justice: Librarians and Scholarly Communication,’ in *Open Access and the Future of Scholarly Communication: Policy and Infrastructure*, ed. Kevin Smith and Katherine A. Dickson (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 107. Trevor Lipscombe has argued in the pages of this journal that peer review done for scholarly presses, the grandchild of a process fashioned by the church for assuring theological orthodoxy, often serves the dishonorable function of grinding axes and assuring conformity with the preferences of an editorial board: ‘peer review at a modern university press resembles the processes set up in sixteenth-century Europe.... [E]very press at which I have worked has had discussions in which an editorial committee member has begun a sentence with “None of us is in favor of censorship but...” that resulted in further rounds of review, against standard practice, that seemed designed to bring negative reports back to the committee.’ Lipscombe, ‘Burn this Article:

An Inflammatory View of Peer Review,' *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 47, no. 3 (2016): 291, 293.

⁵ I have replaced here the specific names of the presses mentioned with these algebraic variables to protect the innocent.

⁶ Association of American Universities, Association of Research Universities, Merrill Center for Advanced Studies (University of Kansas), 'Principles for Emerging Systems in Scholarly Publishing,' May 10, 2000, 3, <http://www.arl.org/storage/documents/publications/tempe-principles-10may10.pdf>. The document is known eponymously as the 'Tempe Principles.'

⁷ For the full text of Lever's Peer Review Commitments and Guidelines, see <https://www.leverpress.org/peerreview/>.

⁸ Private correspondence with the author.

⁹ Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *Planned Obsolescence: Publishing, Technology, and the Future of the Academy* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).