

# UC Santa Cruz

## Refract: An Open Access Visual Studies Journal

### Title

The Future of Digital Publishing

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/98n4g1zw>

### Journal

Refract: An Open Access Visual Studies Journal, 5(2)

### Authors

Gonder, Justin  
lee, rachel  
Roh, Charlotte

### Publication Date

2023

### DOI

10.5070/R75259845

### Copyright Information

Copyright 2023 by the author(s). This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

## The Future of Digital Publishing

Justin Gonder, Rachel Lee, and Charlotte Roh  
*California Digital Library*

*How do you view the relationship between digital publishing and peer review, or between self-publishing and peer review? Are there other ways to create and assess legitimacy and scholarly rigor in digital publication spaces?*

Peer review has long been held as the [gold standard for article](#) evaluation. At its simplest, the goal of peer review is to ensure that a published article in a journal has been appropriately vetted by qualified scholars. Traditional models require that this process is either single- or double-blind; the editor assigns reviewers based on subject expertise and either/or reviewer and author names are hidden. In an ideal scenario, this fosters open and unbiased commentary, but attempts at evaluation and rigor can soon become gatekeeping and exclusion. The reality of peer review is often [fraught with issues](#), including [biases toward race, gender, and language proficiency](#).

For peer review to function ethically, it is vitally important that a journal editor selects an equitable and transparent review model that establishes criteria and best practices for the review process itself. The Library Publishing Coalition's *Ethical Framework for Library Publishing* provides [resources](#) that can support editors in evaluating and revising their journal's peer review practices.

Additionally, the physical limitations of print often limit the academic conversation. However, the digital environment provides a number of tools to support continued reader engagement. Overlay software, like [hypothes.is](#) (which can be

made available to eScholarship journals), “academic twitter,” or Discord help journal authors and editors to diversify and broaden discussion and debate.

Alternate approaches to closed, blinded (anonymous) peer review can also support greater transparency and equitable representation in the review process. Fully open review (where both author and reviewer names are revealed to all participants) has been offered as one solution, along with “[publish, then review](#)” and [crowdsourced peer review](#).

*How can scholars measure the impact of their work in the digital realm as technologies evolve and transform? What are the potential impacts of shareability and virality on digital academic publishing?*

There’s no question that we’ve found new ways to measure the impact of scholarship beyond traditional citation counts. [Altmetrics](#)—as these new metrics are called—now include downloads, page views, social media shares, and activity in media platforms that aren’t strictly academic. We’ve also seen the rise of criticism, as these quantitative metrics can be manipulated, overinterpreted, and given undue weight. Journal impact factor, for example, has increased in importance, which is particularly frustrating for librarians, who initially created impact factor as a tool to decide which journals to purchase, not as a measure of research quality. [Impact factor](#) does not, in fact, measure research quality, as it does not consider the content of each article, but is simply a popularity count for journals.

Thankfully, open access journals like *Refract* and other journals published by eScholarship don’t have to worry about library purchasing budget cuts, since there are no subscription costs. In addition to alleviating cost, publishing in open access has been found to [increase](#) citation rates of [publications](#). The availability of scholarship through open access platforms therefore increases the reading and sharing of research for greater impact. We can also make values-based publication decisions rather than profit-based decisions, and there are many who feel that that’s how the impact of scholarly work should be measured as well.

Some initiatives are looking at the situation more holistically. The [HuMetricsHSS](#) initiative is exploring evaluation of scholarly work in the promotion and tenure process, and the [Library Publishing Coalition](#) and [Open Access Scholarly Publishing Association](#) are organizations that value ethics and transparency. Finally, we should prioritize long-term access for scholarly works that might not have immediate virality but are important for society.

*How might digital publications include media beyond text? What opportunities or ways of reimagining the relationship between form and content are unique to scholarly digital publishing, and what risks or stigmas must those approaches contend with?*

Nontextual media in scholarly publishing poses a number of opportunities and challenges. Rich media greatly expands the choices for expression, and may engage a broader set of readers, particularly those for whom text isn't a primary form of communication. Media can also reach across language and cultural barriers. Still, the vast majority of academic articles remain largely text-centric as a norm in Western academic culture. In some ways, this may be symptomatic of limitations that apply to audio and images, such as copyright restrictions. Nontextual media is also more challenging for accessibility, machine readability, and preservation.

As a publisher that deals primarily with text-based scholarship, we don't claim to have this area completely figured out, though publications like *Refract* are doing an admirable job of exploring ways to juxtapose text and media in thoughtful and responsible ways. Generally it's important to keep in mind that media won't necessarily be consumed the same way by all audiences. It's therefore important to observe [best practices](#), such as including text-based alt tags that can be read by screen readers, and captioning video and audio-based materials. Since discovery methods such as indexes, databases, and search engines are also highly text-dependent, these practices have the added benefit of increasing findability, readership, and potential reuse.

Preservation (which we'll talk more about next) is also an important concern when working with media. Simply embedding content from an external site might seem an easy way to include rich media, but the embedded content will invariably move or disappear. This makes it particularly important to embed media directly in scholarly works, or to attach the media as supplemental material so that it can be preserved alongside the text for future readers.

*Although digital publications may seem less fragile than their analog counterparts, the infrastructure of computing and the cloud often result in shorter lifespans for born-digital content. How might digital publications be preserved?*

Digital publications, without the care of preservationists, can be very fragile. Websites and their content are dynamic, and require expertise to keep running day-to-day and to be preserved for an uncertain future. Even with backups and archives, can we be certain that readers many years from now will be able to find the content

they're looking for? And once they do find it, will they be able to open the files or make meaningful use of them?

This is one area where library publishers like eScholarship benefit greatly from the contributions of generations of academic librarians who are dedicated to the preservation of the scholarly record. At CDL, a team of digital archiving experts manage the [Merritt repository](#), an open-source digital preservation repository that provides the University of California community with long-term archiving and preservation of materials and is [CoreTrustSeal certified](#).

All content in eScholarship, including the articles and files that make up *Refract*, are deposited to Merritt upon publication for long-term preservation. This duplicative archiving practice provides an extra layer of assurance that, should something catastrophic happen to eScholarship and its contents, or should someday in the future the service cease operations, a backup is stored securely with the support of the UC libraries. Other publishers make use of similar archival repositories, or take advantage of community-based preservation solutions such as [CLOCKSS](#) to ensure permanent open access.

Of course, preservation isn't of much use if readers can't find the content, which is where persistent identifiers come in. eScholarship and Merritt maintain both Archival Resource Keys ([ARKs](#)) and Digital Object Identifiers ([DOIs](#)) for content in *Refract*. These identifiers are permanent, and curators ensure that the location that the identifiers point to is up to date. So, if eScholarship ever changes the way its URLs are constructed, or if the content moves to another site altogether, readers will always be able to follow the identifiers in a citation and arrive at the intended content.

\* \* \*

Justin Gonder is Senior Product Manager in Publishing at California Digital Library, where he strategically manages the eScholarship Publishing portfolio of open access publishing and dissemination services that include eScholarship, UC's institutional repository and open access publishing platform, as well as the systemwide UC Publication Management System.

rachel lee is the Director of Publishing at University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources and previously worked as Publications Manager at California Digital Library, supporting the success of the 80+ open access journals published in eScholarship.

Charlotte Roh is the eScholarship Publications Manager. She collaborates with librarians and researchers across the 10-campus UC system to help manage a well-established journals publishing program and to cultivate new publishing projects

with a particular focus on the humanities, social sciences, as well as other fields and researchers who are underserved by the traditional publishing marketplace.