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(Re)Visioning Women's Film History: The Women Film Pioneers Project and Digital Curatorial-Editorial Labor

Introduction

“One of the first Hispanic women to attain stardom in the silent cinema, Beatriz Michelena appeared in at least a dozen films between 1914 and 1920 and headed her own production company, Beatriz Michelena Features, from 1917 until 1920.”¹ So starts the career profile on Michelena, written by MaryAnne Lyons, for the Women Film Pioneers Project (WFPP), a digital publication and scholarly and archival resource hosted by Columbia University Libraries, developed and run by film scholar Jane M. Gaines.² On the one hand, in foregrounding Michelena’s fluid work as both actress and producer, the profile reflects WFPP’s larger mission to recoup what has often been overlooked in traditional film historical accounts of the silent era: women’s behind-the-scenes participation, at an international level, as directors, producers, editors, screenwriters, distributors, exhibitors, and more. On the other hand, in highlighting Michelena’s status as an early Latina American star (her father was Venezuelan),³ the profile exemplifies WFPP’s desire, through the specificity of individual careers, to construct a wider and more diverse picture of cinema’s first two decades.

Michelena’s profile was one of approximately 180 similar entries that were featured on the website, alongside eight longer thematic essays and an array of bibliographic and archival resources, when WFPP was launched in October 2013. Since then, one of the project’s overarching goals has been to jumpstart further research. The structural inclusion, in 2019, of a “Research Update” box on the back-end of the website, which could be added to any profile as needed, is one of the ways that the project has tried to center the processual nature of film historiographical research, especially as more primary sources are digitized and made accessible through online databases and archival platforms. Thus, it was not un-

¹ MaryAnne Lyons, “Beatriz Michelena,” in *The Women Film Pioneers Project*, ed. Jane M. Gaines, Radha Vatsal, and Monica Dall’Asta (New York: Columbia University Libraries, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.7916/d8-76bd-6466>.

² See <https://wfpp.columbia.edu/>, accessed April 1, 2024.

³ Some scholars have previously said that Michelena was Mexican-American, but that has since proven to be incorrect.

welcome, both logically and conceptually, when film scholar Laura Isabel Serna got in touch with the editorial team in 2020 with some new information about Michelena. Serna had found an obituary for Michelena's father, the opera singer Fernando Michelena, that called him a "devoted stepfather" to Beatriz and her sister. As the project manager and an editor of WFPP, I decided, after some further research, that this piece of information was worth presenting to readers, even if it was not confirmed elsewhere. I took what Serna had sent me and fashioned it into a short editorial note that I published as a Research Update on the front-end of the profile. Appearing at the bottom of the page, the dated box, which included a link to a copy of the obituary, outlined Serna's findings and the remaining absences (e.g., she had not yet been able to locate a birth record for Beatriz). Following this update, a new PDF version of the profile was also deposited in Columbia's digital repository, Academic Commons, in line with the project's preservation policy. As such, without changing the original profile, the short editorial update that I compiled, presented, and preserved functioned as both a reminder to keep questioning film historical knowledge and as a prompt for potentially new avenues of collective investigation around Michelena (Figure 1).

The screenshot shows the WFPP profile for Beatriz Michelena. At the top, there are navigation links: 'Overviews', 'Pioneers', 'Resources', 'About', 'Projections', and 'Partner Projects'. A search bar is on the right. Below the header, the profile title 'Beatriz Michelena' is displayed. A 'Research Update' section is highlighted with a yellow box, containing text about new research findings from Laura Isabel Serna. Other sections visible include 'Also Known As', 'Lived', 'Worked as', 'Worked In', and 'Citation'. The 'Citation' section includes a box with a citation for an article by Lyons, MaryAnne. At the bottom, there is a link to 'Return to top'.

Figure 1: The Research Update on Beatriz Michelena's WFPP profile, screenshot.

I bring up Michelena not to challenge her status as one of the first Latina American film stars and producers. Rather, this anecdote serves to introduce the focus of this chapter, which considers WFPP in relation to both the iterative nature of film historiography and the mutability of digital scholarship and online publishing, as well as the practice of digital curation. Not only does this anecdote show that maintaining a long-running feminist digital humanities resource like WFPP is ongoing and critical film historiographic work, it also reflects the ways in

which editorial labor has expanded in the digital era, revealing its close proximity here to digital curatorial processes of creation, presentation, preservation, and the ongoing management of digital (textual) materials and film historical knowledge. As such, I posit that WFPP relies on and makes visible a digital curatorial-editorial practice that I call “(re)visioning,” which draws on the open-ended processes of creating visibility at the heart of feminist film historiography and the practice of versioning at the heart of digital humanities.⁴

While this (re)visioning emerges from a particular feminist case study, it does not exist in a vacuum. In fact, it parallels the recent use of the term “updatism” by Frédéric Clavert and Andreas Fickers in their capacity as editors of the *Journal of Digital History*. Drawing on the field of memory studies, they define updatism as a computational practice reflective of an era “in which the memory of the past is constantly updated,” and affirm that to publish in this era means keeping scholarly content continuously readable, explorable, and conceptually relevant.⁵ This emphasis on change – or, as I see it, technical or conceptual movement – is an important way to understand what it means to produce, edit, and disseminate (film) historical knowledge in the digital era. In other words, although the idea of updating knowledge of the past in the (historical) present is hardly new to the digital era, with on-line publishing projects like WFPP, the ability to update our understanding of the past has become a central editorial feature. I use the term (re)visioning rather than updatism for two reasons: first, to hopefully circumvent the risk that the latter carries, to quote Steve F. Anderson, of “all too easily reassure[ing] us that the injustices of the past are being systemically redressed and overwritten by a more enlightened present”;⁶ and second, to emphasize a non-linear, fragmented, and iterative editorial practice rooted in feminist film historiography.

WFPP is, of course, not the only digital feminist film historical project to deal with updates. For instance, the Importing Asta Nielsen Database is currently at “edition #7” (as of July 2022), with many added features and content, and the editors of the Nordic Women in Film platform regularly make updates to the film-

⁴ This is slightly different than Adrienne Rich's feminist formulation of “re-vision,” or “the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction.” See Adrienne Rich, “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision.” *College English* 34, no. 1 (1972): 18.

⁵ Frédéric Clavert and Andreas Fickers, “Publishing Digital History Scholarship in the Era of Updatism,” *Journal of Digital History* (2022), accessed April 1, 2024, <https://journalofdigitalhistory.org/en/article/m7DWqDjY3hoV>.

⁶ Steve F. Anderson, *Technologies of History: Visual Media and the Eccentricity of the Past* (Hanover: Dartmouth University Press, 2011), 168.

maker profiles, especially the ones with active careers.⁷ But, as I will show, the specific features for updates implemented on WFPP and the type of work that the editors have fostered are particularly productive for understanding some of the practical and conceptual realities of film historical digital scholarship.

My interest in WFPP's editorial operations is the result of my longstanding position within the editorial team. I became involved with WFPP in 2011 as a graduate student research assistant at Columbia where I was part of the team finalizing the website for the online project launch. In 2013, only a few months before the launch, I became the project manager, a role that I continue to perform a decade later. As project manager, I oversee all aspects of the editing and publishing processes, among other outreach and administrative tasks. Moreover, alongside Gaines and the technical team, I have spent considerable time discussing how to update an ever-expanding academic resource with new profiles and essays, as well as how to make changes to existing scholarship. While many of the initial technological and infrastructural conversations and decisions (e.g., the choice to use WordPress) took place prior to my involvement – making it difficult for me, as a non-technical person who learned some basics “on-the-job,” to speak to the project’s technological development – my hands-on proximity to the editorial side of the project is unique. This chapter, which draws on public and private information, work documentation, emails with colleagues, and my own experiences, is thus rooted in a desire to make sense of my specific practical and conceptual work at a theoretical level in the context of both WFPP and digital film historiography more broadly.

WFPP has been defined in many ways over time, with “database” and “archive” being the most common terms. For the purposes of this chapter, I have chosen to give attention to its presentation of original scholarship over its database structure by introducing it above as a “digital publication and scholarly and archival resource.” Moreover, although I recognize that WFPP could be called an archive, with the profiles and essays collected, preserved, and presented within it, I refrain from using that term here. This is partly because I think that “archive” is currently used too liberally, and partly because, while the notion of the archive is embedded in WFPP in more ways than one (hence making it archival), I think “archive” can also downplay its ongoing textual scholarship. Furthermore, while WFPP does feature some digital copies of historical moving and still images and archival documents, these are not the primary focus on the platform (both in terms of design and editorial labor) or probably the main reason for user-engagement. I

⁷ See “About Us,” *Importing Asta Nielsen Database*, accessed April 1, 2024, <https://importing-asta-nielsen.online.uni-marburg.de/>; Tove Thorslund, email to author, January 27, 2023. See also <https://nordicwomeninfilm.com/>, accessed April 1, 2024.

would thus also not call WFPP a “scholarly digital edition,” which has been defined by Patrick Sahle as a web-based academic project that offers a “critical representation of historic documents.”⁸ However, as I hope will become clear, I do see similarities between WFPP and the scholarly digital editions that Sahle discusses, from their shared position within a so-called digital paradigm to the ways that critical editorial labor becomes an ongoing part of the scholarly creation and dissemination process. Thus, to frame WFPP here as a “digital publication and scholarly and archival resource” allows me to hone in on the project’s editorial and publishing dimensions, while remaining open to the particular film historiographic, archival, and humanistic research impulses that emerge from and are embedded within it.

In the first part of this chapter, I will survey WFPP’s development, from its early years as an analog archival research project in the mid-1990s and a planned multi-volume book series in the 2000s, to its launch as an online-only institutional project in 2013, and its present manifestation as a well-known academic digital resource. Following that, I will discuss how editorial labor has expanded and shifted in the digital era, including through the practice of versioning. I will then present the concept of digital curation, a data-driven term that follows a so-called lifecycle model of ongoing, active management of digitalized materials and data. Although I use it loosely, it is a productive framework for understanding the iterative digital editorial labor – from initial selection, preparation, and publication through any necessary updates – currently carried out on WFPP, especially regarding the profiles. By drawing a connection between iterative and expanded editorial labor and digital curation in this way, I will show how WFPP’s integration of the aforementioned Research Update boxes, as well as the implementation of textual versioning via digital object identifiers (DOIs), minor updates, and versioned records in Academic Commons, can all be understood as a part of the broader digital curatorial-editorial practice of (re)visioning, or a critical-feminist perspective on scholarly editorial labor that is open to continued historiographic movement and its ensuing management online.

The Women Film Pioneers Project

In addition to providing some background for what I will discuss thereafter, this survey functions as one of the only published accounts to date of the project’s full

⁸ Patrick Sahle, “What is a Scholarly Digital Edition?” in *Digital Scholarly Editing: Theories and Practices*, ed. Matthew James Driscoll and Elena Pierazzo (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2016), 23.

history.⁹ Around 1994, Jane M. Gaines started collecting the names of silent-era women film directors, screenwriters, producers, and editors that she was discovering in her research and through her colleagues' archival investigations. As she later recounted, she had two motives for gathering these archival traces: she was both "fascinate[ed] with collecting – names upon names upon names" and interested in seeing how this labor challenged "a then-feminist orthodoxy," which entailed an "implicit prohibition against empirical work in favor of theory."¹⁰ Gaines' embrace of empirical evidence, part of the historical shift in film studies at that time, reflected a period of renewed attention to silent cinema and the archive as well as women filmmakers. As a result, the historical narrative constructed in the 1970s and 1980s, in which there were virtually "no women" behind the camera during the silent era, was thoroughly upended. As Gaines rightly notes, historians like Anthony Slide and feminist scholars like Sharon Smith published research on some women filmmakers in the 1970s,¹¹ but the 1990s marked a shift from widespread absence to "a flood of empirical evidence"¹² and, consequently, a much larger awareness, at least in film archival and scholarly domains, that women had worked at all levels of the global silent film industry. Emerging from this dramatic feminist film historiographical shift from lack to presence, WFPP as an act of collecting names not only constituted a challenge to the "theoretical investment in women's 'absence,'" which was central for feminist psychoanalytical film theory.¹³ It was also a way of capturing (and attesting to) a new historical visibility confronting contemporary film scholars.

Gaines' task of collecting eventually became the Women Film Pioneers Project at Duke University, where she was then a professor. As more women were recovered and more scholars contributed research, the project was conceived as a multi-

⁹ Such a brief survey cannot do justice to the many people at various institutions who have contributed their intellectual insight and labor to the project (as editors, graduate student research assistants, project managers, web developers, library collaborators, volunteers, and administrators). I do not want to erase the thirty years of labor that has gone into developing, sustaining, and expanding WFPP, both in print and online. See <https://wfpp.columbia.edu/editorial-team-and-acknowledgments/>, accessed April 1, 2024.

¹⁰ Jane M. Gaines, "On Not Narrating the History of Feminism and Film," *Feminist Media Histories* 2, no. 1 (2016): 11.

¹¹ Anthony Slide published *Early Women Directors* in 1977 and Sharon Smith's research was published in 1973 in *Women and Film*. Alongside these first publications was work by Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, Karyn Kay, and Gerald Peary, among others. See Gaines, "On Not Narrating," 19.

¹² Monica Dall'Asta and Jane M. Gaines, "Prologue: Constellations: Past Meets Present in Feminist Film History," in *Doing Women's Film History: Reframing Cinemas. Past and Future*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Julia Knight (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 14.

¹³ Dall'Asta and Gaines, "Prologue," 15.

volume academic book series. Volume I was to focus on the United States and Latin America, while a later Volume II would focus on Europe, Canada, Australia, Asia, and the Middle East. Within these national frameworks, the books were designed to emphasize the individual. Comprised mostly of short profiles written by scholars and archivists – many active in the Women and Film History International network and its affiliated conference, *Women and the Silent Screen*¹⁴ – the goal was to centralize a woman's individual career and its output in order to challenge the established idea that only men shaped cinema in its first two decades. Central to this was the inclusion of an archival filmography in each profile where applicable, which listed any extant film holdings in order to jumpstart further research, preservation inquiries, and exhibition activities. In addition to profiles, the manuscript for Volume I, which was written and compiled in the early 2000s, contained a handful of longer overview essays dedicated to national cinemas and specific occupations, as well as several appendices containing bibliographic and archival references. Thus, planned as a standard print academic book, the aim of this second iteration of WFPP was to introduce scholars and students to specific empirical evidence – hundreds of early women filmmakers and their surviving films – historical information and archival materials that had been largely absent from previous film historical narratives.

Around 2007, Gaines relocated to Columbia. While the plan was still to publish Volume I with the University of Illinois Press, she was soon approached by Columbia library staff looking for projects for the university's recently established Center for Digital Research and Scholarship (CDRS).¹⁵ As a result, by 2008–2009, the project comprised the two planned books "with digital on-line components."¹⁶ The planned ancillary website would offer space for supplementary visual materials and relevant event announcements as well as, potentially, additional profiles.¹⁷ However, according to Rebecca Kennison, the founding director of CDRS, "in further discussions, it soon became clear that [the University of Illinois Press] was not so keen on doing the encyclopedia after all, as it didn't make sense financially for them, since fewer and fewer libraries were buying encyclopedic materials and, at that time,

¹⁴ *Women and the Silent Screen* began around the same time as WFPP (the first edition was held in the Netherlands in 1999) and often involves many of the same feminist film historians and archivists. See Gaines, "On Not Narrating."

¹⁵ Nancy Friedland, the Librarian for Film Studies and Performing Arts at Columbia, connected Gaines with CDRS. Rebecca Kennison, email to author, December 13, 2022.

¹⁶ Mark P. Newton, Jackson Harvell, and Leyla S. Williams, "Women Film Pioneers Project (WFPP): Presentation at Coalition for Networked Information, Fall Forum 2013" (2013), <https://doi.org/10.7916/D8GB223R>.

¹⁷ Kennison, email, December 13, 2022.

Illinois was not positioned to do online products.¹⁸ Thus, by 2010, the project had dropped the planned print books entirely and had reconceived itself as an open-access online-only database that would be published by CDRS. The accompanying in-progress website, which was then hosted on MediaWiki, was consequently redesigned by the CDRS team to account for the inclusion of Volume I's content. New sections that corresponded with the manuscript, such as "Overview Essays," "Women Film Pioneers," and other categories drawn from the appendices ("Archives," "Bibliographies") were added as tabs at the top, as were new categories such as "Contributors" and, for a short time, "Contact and Message Boards" (eventually, "Contact"). As a result of this reconceptualization, the individual profile pages (which closely followed their manuscript model), the overview essays, and the various resources were now placed together on equal terms as WFPP was transformed from a planned print book, with its linear trajectory, into an online database with the potential for open-ended browsing.

In 2011, the content of the in-progress website was migrated to WordPress. I was not involved at the time of this decision but, according to Kennison, WordPress was chosen by the CDRS team for several reasons, including that the lead web designer was most comfortable with that platform, and that the team believed that WordPress would be easier for the non-technical editorial team members to learn compared to other content management systems.¹⁹ For these reasons, and probably also because CDRS led the development phase of this project before taking a back-seat role after the launch, the migration to WordPress was primarily a technical rather than an editorial decision, driven by specific institutional abilities and goals. At the same time, it is worth noting that the migration to WordPress also solidified a direction taking shape at the editorial level: a move away from the possibilities for public editing and community content collaboration on a wiki-based website.

Most importantly, however, WordPress allowed CDRS staff to create a number of customized back-end infrastructural features that they had been unable to employ on MediaWiki. One such customization was the implementation of a back-end taxonomy of industry occupations that functioned as front-end tags on the profiles. Organized alphabetically on the back-end, the taxonomy of occupations listed a variety of relevant terms, such as "director," with corresponding child terms, such as "co-director" or "assistant director." (A simpler taxonomy for the regions in which women worked was also created on the back-end.) The taxonomy was created by the editorial team in collaboration with CDRS colleagues, with the terms themselves coming mainly from the Volume I profiles and the con-

18 Kennison, email, December 13, 2022.

19 Kennison, email, December 21, 2022.

tributors' research.²⁰ While listing occupations (and regions) at the top of a profile had been an important component of both the print manuscript and the Media-Wiki website, these had never been organized into relational fields that could be systemized and hyperlinked across the entire resource. As a result of this work on WordPress, in the finalized version of the website, users could not only move between profiles based on related occupation and region tags,²¹ they could also sort via these same occupational and national categories on the profiles landing page, which was organized alphabetically by default.

Between 2011 and 2013, the customized WordPress website went through several front-end aesthetic iterations before everything was finalized in the spring and summer of 2013. The official public launch of the WFPP website, in October 2013, ran in tandem with two complementary film programs at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.²² In the decade since its launch, WFPP has added many new profiles and (now blind peer-reviewed) overview essays as well as new bibliographic and archival resources.²³ In 2019, the editorial team collaborated with new staff within the Digital Scholarship division of the Columbia libraries (into which CDRS had been folded in 2017) on a redesign of the WordPress website aimed at, among other things, decreasing back-end plugin dependencies and ensuring mobile functionality, as well as creating a better user experience by making the front-end of the website more stylistically and functionally up-to-date and accessible.²⁴

This relaunch also marked the moment in which the WFPP editorial and technical teams actively responded to the increasing centralization of data-driven film

²⁰ More should be said about the creation and implementation of WFPP's occupational taxonomy as an editorial entity than space allows. However, following its initial pre-launch creation by the technical and editorial teams in collaboration with a Columbia metadata librarian, the selected tags are now chosen or suggested by the contributors in discussion with the editorial team (and the metadata librarian when warranted). Designed to be an open-ended taxonomy that can be updated as needed, it reflects the diversity of ways that cinematographic work was categorized in the silent era, while also increasingly raising issues about standardization and interoperability given the idiosyncratic nature of this taxonomy.

²¹ Before a website redesign in 2019, related names were also listed at the bottom of each profile.

²² "Women Film Pioneers Project Launched at the Museum of Modern Art, New York City!" *The Women Film Pioneers Project*, November 25, 2013, accessed April 1, 2024, <https://wfpp.columbia.edu/2013/09/25/10192013-women-film-pioneers-project-at-the-museum-of-modern-art-new-york-city/>.

²³ As of this writing, there are 320 women (from six continents) represented in the published profiles, and fifteen overview essays.

²⁴ "The Women Film Pioneers Project Relaunches!" *The Women Film Pioneers Project*, October 18, 2019, accessed April 1, 2024, <https://wfpp.columbia.edu/2019/10/18/the-women-film-pioneers-project-relaunches/>.

historiographical practices and discourses within the field of film and media studies. Until this point, as it had been designed to emphasize the text-based scholarship via customized back-end page templates, the WordPress website had effectively codified what could be published. As part of the 2019 relaunch, a new section of the website, called Projections, was added, in which the editorial team hoped to include more digital-friendly and visual approaches to silent film research and feminist scholarship beyond the profile or essay format.²⁵ Although arguably hampered by the technical limitations of WordPress, along with the fact that any software and design support from the library would take time, given how many other projects it hosts, Projections reflected the editorial team's active interest in digital methods for presenting and disseminating research, alongside its continued investment in textual scholarship. Moreover, the relaunch also coincided with the development of several collaborations between WFPP and external partners who saw the former's film historiographic information as important datasets for developing new narrative and visual approaches to doing women's film history.²⁶ Previously, data export had not been an internal topic of conversation but, via these collaborations, the Digital Scholarship team made WFPP's biographical and occupational dataset publicly available in Academic Commons to ensure its preservation and to invite further creative (re)use and analysis.²⁷ As a result, the back-end occupational taxonomy, for example, whose structure had remained largely invisible to front-end readers because of the way that the WordPress website had initially been designed, was now visible in the exported CSV file. Although a small step toward open data and transparency compared to other digital platforms, this embrace of data (re)use introduced the WFPP editorial team to broader discourses around data standardization and interoperability.

On the one hand, this survey highlights that WFPP has gone through many idiosyncratic iterations, straddling both print and digital conceptualizations. Unlike other digital film and media projects that emerged around the same time, such as the Media History Digital Library and the Media Ecology Project,²⁸ WFPP's central feature – original text-based scholarship bound by a static citation and concepts like “author,” “editor,” and “publisher” – reflects its specific print legacy, even as it has

25 See <https://wfpp.columbia.edu/projections/>, accessed April 1, 2024.

26 See, for example, the “Aesthetics of Access: Visualizing Research Data on Women in Film History” (research group), accessed April 1, 2024, <https://www.uni-marburg.de/en/fb09/institutes/media-studies/research/research-projects/davif>.

27 Jane M. Gaines and Columbia University Libraries, “Women Film Pioneers Project Biographical Data” (2020), <https://doi.org/10.7916/m4dc-n768>.

28 See <https://mediahistoryproject.org/>; <https://mediaecology.dartmouth.edu/wp/>, both accessed April 1, 2024.

opened itself up more to online data-driven endeavors over time. On the other hand, like its contemporaries, it is a film historical project that is rooted in the archival domain: as a digital humanities film project, it is concerned with not only capturing the ongoing “flood of empirical evidence” of women’s involvement in the silent film era, it is also about bringing scholars and students around the world closer to archival materials and relevant research data to facilitate further film historical investigation.

“A Living Resource”: Scholarly Editing in the Digital Era

WFPP is also an early digital humanities publishing experiment that developed at Columbia at a time when university libraries were increasingly embracing digital publishing, or the online presentation and dissemination of scholarly content, by creating centers and initiatives to further explore different approaches, methodologies, and services, as well as open-access platforms and innovative editorial tools.²⁹ In fact, WFPP was one of a few early academic press partnerships that CDRS first developed in 2008.³⁰ Like these and other projects, WFPP was seen as a collaborative investigation into the different ways that scholarship could be presented online, augmented by archival and visual materials, hypertext, and other online resources. This is not to suggest that WFPP or CDRS was the first of its kind, but rather to situate both within a period – roughly the first decade of the twenty-first century – marked by the increasing presence of collaborative interdisciplinary spaces, focused on digital methods and services for research, dissemination, and teaching, within (American) university libraries.

Framing WFPP as an academic publishing project productively situates it within the broader discourses around scholarly editorial labor in the digital era. First, the advent of web-based publishing has changed how we understand what counts as editing, beyond the critical intervention upon a text prior to publication or the “parsing of the cultural record [i.e., manuscripts] in terms of questions of

²⁹ Diana M. Zorich, “Digital Humanities Centers: Loci For Digital Scholarship,” in *Working Together or Apart: Promoting the Next Generation of Digital Scholarship* (Washington, DC: Council on Library and Information Resources, 2009), 70–78, accessed April 1, 2024, <https://www.clir.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/zorich.pdf>.

³⁰ Kennison, email, December 13, 2022. See, for example, Rebecca Kennison, Neni Panourgiá, and Helen Tartar, “Dangerous Citizens Online: A Case Study of Author-Press-Library Partnerships,” *Serials* 23, no. 2 (2010): 145–149.

authenticity, origin, transmission, or production”³¹ in the case of scholarly editions, for example. As Anne Burdick et al. wrote in 2012, the then-emerging institutional field of digital humanities was engendering new editorial practices, which could be understood as “productive and generative” work, or a “suite of rhetorical devices that make a work.”³² “Editing,” they explain, “is the creative, imaginative activity of making, and as such, design can also be seen as a kind of editing: It is the means by which an argument takes shape and is given form.”³³ Thus, while editing the Volume I manuscript in the early 2000s constituted the more traditional practices of selection, organization, and preparation of texts for publication, the online editorial labor around an individual profile, for example, now also involves manually adding the aforementioned regional and occupational metadata on the back-end, which allows the profile to exist within and relate to a broader argument about the global scope and range of women’s creative practice that is built into the design of the website.

In addition, scholarly editing’s underlying frameworks and assumptions have also changed since the digital turn. Digital platforms – with their potential for collaborative commentary, interactivity, and open navigation, as well as the ability to present more (multimedia) information than a print book – engender processual thinking over notions of a static, fixed publication. As Susan Brown et al. have written regarding their work on the online Orlando Project, the notion of “done” is now a “fragile” and “negotiated” concept, both in terms of ongoing technical needs and content updates.³⁴ Indeed, WFPP, like many other digital scholarly projects, was always expected to grow: CDRS promoted it as a “living resource”³⁵ and the editorial team sought to expand and update the website quickly after the launch, initiating “Phase II” of the project immediately (effectively to embrace “everywhere else” after Phase I’s primary emphasis on Latin America, the United States, and Canada). Unlike some projects – the Orlando Project, for instance – that make content additions and updates at certain points, WFPP implemented a rolling publication approach. The editorial team quickly began soliciting new contributors and giving new deadlines to authors who were late with submissions, and, by September 2015, the project had published thirteen new profiles, covering more of the United States,

31 Anne Burdick et al., *Digital Humanities* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 18.

32 Burdick et al., *Digital Humanities*, 18.

33 Burdick et al., *Digital Humanities*, 18.

34 Susan Brown et al., “Published Yet Never Done: The Tension Between Projection and Completion in Digital Humanities Research,” *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (2009), accessed April 1, 2024, <http://digitalhumanities.org:8081/dhq/vol/3/2/000040/000040.html>. See also <https://www.artsrn.ualberta.ca/orlando/>, accessed April 1, 2024.

35 Newton, Harvell, and Williams, “Women Film Pioneers Project (WFPP).”

Europe, and now Asia, and had a handful of thematic and national overview essays assigned and/or out for peer review.

During this period of expansion, we also embraced the opportunity to update existing content. We began making small-scale modifications to the published scholarship, whether it was responding to new film discoveries (or finally confirming archival holdings) by updating a filmography, fixing broken links, and correcting any typos, or updating profiles with new DVD release information or streaming links. In some cases, minor revisions to the profile text were made in collaboration with the author. It should be noted too that many of these corrections and updates came to our attention via emails sent to the “contact the editors” address on the website, which was used, very soon after our official launch, by a wide variety of users – from scholars and archivists to private collectors, relatives of a filmmaker, and casual readers – who all recognized WFPP’s capacity to expand and change over time.

Thus, from its launch onward, editing in regard to WFPP has not only involved the “collecting, selecting and preparing [of] texts for publication”³⁶ and expanded rhetorical and technical labor. It also immediately presumed a certain processual perspective on the resource as a whole and an awareness of the fragmentary and iterative nature of feminist film historiography more broadly. It was, to borrow Patrick Sahle’s description of digital scholarly editions, “an open enterprise,”³⁷ which required ongoing editorial labor. However, while these early updates and corrections to existing content mentioned above – alongside the constant inclusion of new profiles and essays – were necessary for WFPP to remain a reliable feminist film historical database, they were also problematic: there was no means to be transparent about changes in a profile or essay, and we had no editorial policy in place for major textual updates. In other words, “the inherent changeability” of WFPP’s content, no longer limited by a static book, “also pose[d] threats to the scholarly ecosystem”³⁸ within which the project was embedded. Or, to use terminology from the digital humanities and digital publishing, in the immediate post-launch period, the WFPP editorial team did not engage in any versioning practices.

³⁶ Peter L. Shillingsburg, *Scholarly Editing in the Computer Age: Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), 2.

³⁷ Sahle, “What is a Scholarly Digital Edition?” 29.

³⁸ Paul A. Broyles, “Digital Editions and Version Numbering,” *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (2020), accessed April 1, 2024, <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/14/2/000455/000455.html>.

Versioning, or the iterative creation (as necessary for conceptual or technical reasons) and notation of new versions of something,³⁹ be it numbering digital scholarly editions or software upgrades, is a central practice in the digital humanities, one that embraces transparent process over final product.⁴⁰ In the case of digital scholarship and academic publishing, versioning is a way of maintaining the necessary balance between the ongoing reliability and stability of a scholarly resource and its potential variability. Of course textual versions and variants have a long history in academia that pre-dates the digital era, and new editions and supplementary publications have always been a part of scholarly publishing, albeit at a slower pace still bound to the material limitations of the book. But versioning in the computational era totally upends longstanding academic notions of the stable, completed scholarly work, or, at a technical level, the publication itself, which still dominated the previously mentioned forms of scholarly updates and variation. In the case of digital scholarly publications, as Kathleen Fitzpatrick and Paul A. Broyles have respectively argued, versioning reflects the now necessary commitment, on the part of authors and editors, to both the initial creation and editing processes and the “post-publication maintenance of texts,”⁴¹ as well as demands that we remain “attentive to the way textual resources transform in time.”⁴²

As Fitzpatrick and Broyles also remind us, versioning requires a systematic editorial (or technical) policy. While WFPP did not have one in place at the time of its launch, it soon became clear that it would be necessary to develop a clear workflow for updates, corrections, and new information.⁴³ In internal conversations, which were intermittent over three years, the editorial team and our library colleagues discussed the benefits and limits of various editorial and design options to responsibly update published profiles and essays. Ultimately, in 2019, we introduced two new features as part of the website relaunch: the Research Update box, already mentioned, which could be added to any profile as necessary as a dated editorial addendum for new information, and the implementation of DOIs for every profile and essay, linked to a PDF record in Academic Commons, which finally allowed for textual versioning. While the former can be understood

³⁹ This chapter focuses on textual versioning and content updates since technical upgrades on WFPP were handled by Columbia library staff.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Broyles, “Digital Editions”; Burdick et al., *Digital_Humanities*; Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *Planned Obsolescence: Publishing, Technology and the Future of the Academy* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

⁴¹ Fitzpatrick, *Planned Obsolescence*, 119.

⁴² Broyles, “Digital Editions.”

⁴³ Kate Saccone, “The Women Film Pioneers Project: Two Years Later.” Paper presented at Women and the Silent Screen VIII, University of Pittsburgh, 2015.

as a casual additive process and the latter implies a more formal iterative one, both function as methods by which information on WFPP could finally be updated in a more transparent and consistent way.⁴⁴

Digital Curation as a Framework for Iterative Editorial Practice

One can read the implementation of Research Update boxes, DOIs, and versioned records through the lens of shifting conceptualizations of editorial labor in the digital era and the necessity to find ways to balance digital textuality's mutability with scholarly ideals of reliability. But one can also read them as curatorial. By curatorial, I am referring specifically to the practice of digital curation, which, much like versioning, emphasizes process over final product, through different levels of ongoing engagement with digital(ized) materials and data. According to Arjun Sabharwal, digital curation, which emerged as a concept in the early 2000s, is a broad framework for understanding the ongoing preservation and promotion of data, datasets, databases, and digital(ized) materials.⁴⁵ Within the archival and cultural heritage domains, digital curation often refers to ongoing administrative, management, and preservation actions taken to ensure long-term and meaningful access to digital(ized) material and data. These practices, shaped by the library and information sciences, follow a life-cycle model, which stresses, for example, different related sequential actions, like creation, appraisal, ingest, preservation, storage, access, reuse, and transformation.⁴⁶

While digital curation as I have just described it may not seem an applicable framework for a text-based publication like WFPP, especially since I have explicitly refrained from using "archive" to define the project, I believe its emphasis on ongoing sequential actions is useful for thinking about the profiles specifically as elements now open to research updates and textual versioning, as well as other modifications over time. In other words, while I do not define WFPP as an archive

⁴⁴ It should be noted that the Research Update boxes and the versioned records are not perfect editorial features; the type of information and documentation that goes into a box is not standardized across the website, and often the notes about changes in the records remain vague. Yet, these are not necessarily finite editorial features, but steps taken, roughly six years into an evolving online project's life, to deal with updates and textual changes.

⁴⁵ Arjun Sabharwal, *Digital Curation in the Digital Humanities* (Waltham, MA: Chandos Publishing, 2015), 11.

⁴⁶ Digital Curation Centre, "Curation Lifecycle Model" (2008), accessed April 1, 2024, <https://www.dcc.ac.uk/guidance/curation-lifecycle-model>.

in order to emphasize the original scholarship on the platform, there are clearly archival operations at play. I see the individual profiles as modules – following Sahle's point about the fluid modularization of scholarly editions in the digital era⁴⁷ – within the larger project, which require ongoing active editorial management in order to maintain their reliability as sources for historiographical film research and archival information. As such, I contend that editorial labor on WFPP, in addition to constituting critical textual selection and preparatory work and other forms of expanded rhetorical labor online, can also be understood through a lifecycle model like digital curation.

I am not the first to make a connection between editing and curating. For example, in 2015, W. B. Worthen brought together scholarly editing (of both print and online texts) with more traditional museological conceptualizations of curation as a form of both collections care and public-facing exhibition making.⁴⁸ While he outlines several curatorial dimensions of editing (e.g., editorial labor as a form of “*curing*” a text “of its ills,” or the compiling of a themed journal issue via submission or solicitation),⁴⁹ this is not his main concern. Rather, he is interested in the shift toward discourses of curation in the digital era itself, which he contends reflects “the changing socialization of academic labor, and perhaps [a] changing sense of what we value about it.”⁵⁰ On the one hand, he sees the turn toward discourses of curation as indicative of the expanded methods for knowledge production emerging in the digital humanities.⁵¹ On the other hand, he worries that “the stylish veil of *curation*” not only obfuscates editing’s “disciplined attention to the formal, rhetorical, contextual, and conceptual presentation[s] of an argument,”⁵² but that it also makes this work – which is often time consuming, tedious, and detail-oriented labor – “seem harmlessly irrelevant, a melancholy byproduct of the long, withdrawing roar of print culture.”⁵³ So while digital humanities scholars like Kathleen Fitzpatrick have written with excitement about the ways in which the remix culture of the internet, for example, can contribute to an awareness of curation as a

47 Sahle, “What is a Scholarly Digital Edition?” 36.

48 W. B. Worthen, “Fashion(ing)/Formation,” *Contemporary Theory Review* 25, no. 1 (2015): 90–93, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10486801.2015.992251>. While Worthen looks at the academic editor as curator, others have also looked at the reverse, or a museum curatorial function as editor. See, for example, Dušan Barok, Julia Noordegraaf, and Arjen P. de Vries, “From Collection Management to Content Management in Art Documentation: The Conservator as an Editor,” *Studies in Conservation* 64, no. 8 (2019): 472–489, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00393630.2019.1603921>.

49 Worthen, “Fashion(ing)/Formation,” 91, 92–93 (emphasis in original).

50 Worthen, “Fashion(ing)/Formation,” 90.

51 Worthen, “Fashion(ing)/Formation,” 93.

52 Worthen, “Fashion(ing)/Formation,” 92 (emphasis in original).

53 Worthen, “Fashion(ing)/Formation,” 93.

valuable scholarly endeavor,⁵⁴ Worthen worries that such a perspective could also contribute to a limited view of scholarly textual editorial labor, one in which such work is seen as merely cosmetic final steps. Thus, in using the term digital curation, which also echoes notions of care and stewardship, as a way to understand the ongoing editorial labor on WFPP, this chapter offers a way to engage with both Fitzpatrick's excitement and Worthen's hesitancy. It not only provides a framework through which to consider forms of curatorial labor in the digital era as valuable scholarly (in the case of WFPP, specifically film historiographic) work; it also allows for a continued emphasis on iterative editorial labor – from textual to online design and continued updates – as time consuming and detail-oriented disciplinary work in support of authors and their research.

In this section, I will not transpose the exact stages of the digital curation lifecycle model, first developed by the Digital Curation Centre (DCC) in 2008,⁵⁵ to WFPP, since a one-to-one comparison is impossible given the latter's specificities – preservation actions for the profiles were not part of the editorial workflow until 2019, and technical processes of disposal and migration, occasional actions in the standard model, are not central to the editorial labor on WFPP. Rather, I am inspired by the framework that such a concept and practice provoke from an editorial perspective: the emphasis on sequential actions over time and an awareness that digital environments require constant management (curation and preservation) of information. Thus, loosely adapting the standard DCC model, I have created a simplified high-level graphical overview that outlines the sequential actions that comprise the current editing and publishing workflows for the WFPP profiles. This editorial lifecycle not only functions as a useful way to break down ongoing editorial labor into finite stages as part of a broader process; it is also particularly germane to WFPP, due to both its subject matter and the fact that long-term web hosting and financial resources are currently not pressing challenges (Figure 2).

At the center of the model is the WFPP profile, the digital textual entity that is assigned (selected by the editorial team), submitted, and eventually published on the platform. Around it, are the full lifecycle actions – curation and preservation – which, taken together, constitute the ongoing management of these scholarly entities over time. These ongoing actions can be broken up into specific sequential actions, which I loosely categorize as: conceptualization, creation, preservation, access and promotion, assessment, and (potential) change for updates.

⁵⁴ Fitzpatrick, *Planned Obsolescence*, 79.

⁵⁵ The DCC model has since been used, adapted, and discussed at length within the digital humanities and information sciences. For a detailed critical discussion of the DCC model, see Hea Lim Rhee, "A New Lifecycle Model Enabling Optimal Digital Curation," *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1177/09610006221125956>.

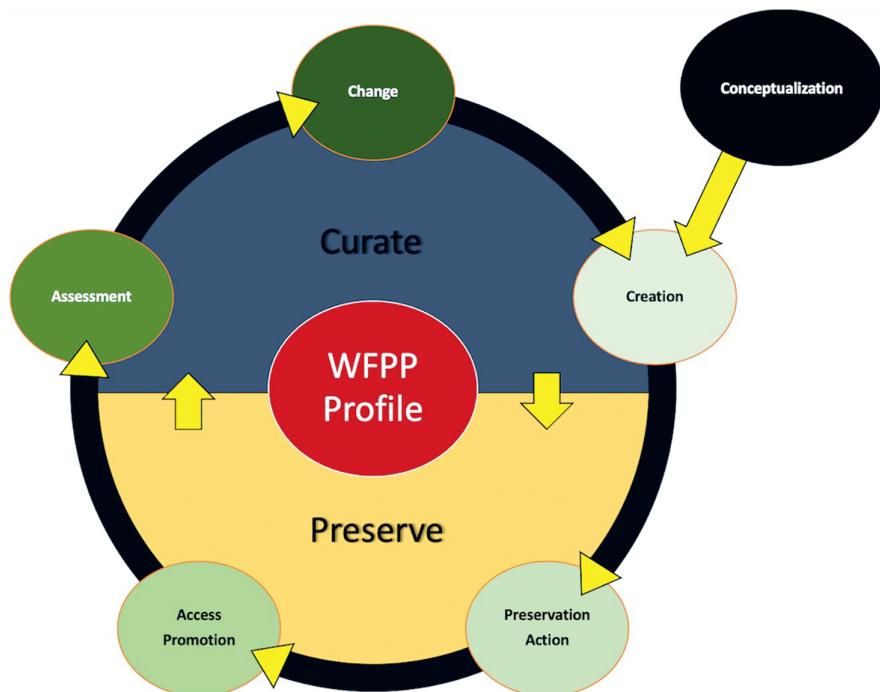


Figure 2: The WFPP editorial lifecycle model for profiles. Adapted from the Digital Curation Centre's "Curation Lifecycle Model," <https://www.dcc.ac.uk/guidance/curation-lifecycle-model> (accessed April 1, 2024).

In this model, conceptualization of the profiles covers the assignment and editorial review stages, which involve intellectual, administrative, and legal activities. Some profiles are assigned after a potential contributor has reached out to the editors and pitched a profile – often for a woman featured on our “unhistoricized” list⁵⁶ – but many are assigned through standard editorial commissions. For example, the editorial team stays abreast of new archival film discoveries, restorations, and scholarly publications that relate to women’s film history, and reaches out, either via email, or in person at conferences or film festivals, to scholars or archivists who could contribute a given profile. Following the submission of the initial draft (Microsoft Word) – which can take anywhere from six months to many years after assignment – a rigorous review takes place, involving

⁵⁶ See <https://wfpp.columbia.edu/resources/unhistoricized-women-film-pioneers/>, accessed April 1, 2024.

editorial feedback and suggestions at both conceptual and textual levels. This review stage usually involves several rounds of editorial feedback and revisions and often further research, and can take anywhere between a few months and several years.

Throughout this phase, both the author and the editorial team are working toward finalizing the profile as a specific scholarly entity in a format and scope structured by certain agreements. In addition to the style guidelines, which also urge contributors to be self-reflective about their research,⁵⁷ this stage also includes handling any rights clearance for images. Moreover, at the time of the first submission, authors must now sign a standard agreement stipulating the (re)use policy and various stakeholder rights that will go into effect should the article be published.⁵⁸ For example, the author agreement clarifies that the author retains copyright of the profile and that all content on WFPP is published under a CC BY “Attribution” license. Thus, throughout this stage, processes of selection, administrative and legal practicalities, and collaborative critical and intellectual labor constitute the conceptualization of the WFPP profile more broadly.

Once a profile text is finalized and all relevant accompanying images have been submitted by the contributor, the profile page is created on the website. The text is then placed on the back-end of WordPress, using the customized template originally designed by CDRS. The biographical and occupational metadata is also added, thus integrating the profile into the database structure. The images, as high resolution JPEG files, are also added to WordPress’ back-end media library, with caption and rights information, and then placed on the profile page. Further copyediting and the adding of relevant hyperlinks also occurs during this creation period.

Once the author has previewed and signed off on a final version of the profile online, the first preservation actions are taken: a staff member in the library assigns the page a DOI and deposits a PDF version in Academic Commons, after which the profile can officially be published (made visible on the profiles landing page), where it can now be internally tracked via Google Analytics and regularly archived by library staff via the Wayback Machine. There is also some necessary promotional work at this stage, from adding the new profile to the “featured pioneer” space on the WFPP homepage to signaling the new addition on social media and in our quarterly newsletter.

These different editorial and publishing stages – from conceptualization and creation to preservation, and access and promotion – constitute important sequential actions to present and preserve the WFPP profile online. As this brief

⁵⁷ See <https://wfpp.columbia.edu/guidelines-profiles/>, accessed April 1, 2024.

⁵⁸ This policy has been in effect for all new assignments since 2019.

summary also highlights, the editorial labor on WFPP comprises both the standard selection, organization, and preparation of texts and also administrative and technical labor as part of finalizing the work for online publication. It also signals that when a profile is published on WFPP it is not a work-in-progress, but the finalized output of a contributor's scholarly and archival research. But at the same time, as I have already discussed, the project has always been open to that work progressing as needed in order to reflect the iterative and fragmentary nature of feminist film research and archival investigation more broadly. With the implementation of the Research Update boxes, the DOIs, and the versioned records in Academic Commons, this progression, as part of the profile's lifecycle as it were, can now be understood as key phases in more concrete terms.

As part of being freely accessible online entities, the profiles are open to assessment, from readers, contributors, and members of the editorial team, who all recognize them as unfixed modules that can change over time in response to new archival discoveries, for example, or the recognition of previous inaccuracies. Assessment can therefore lead to meaningful change within the profile page, in terms of both research updates and textual versioning and at the level of hyperlinks and metadata. In all cases, these updates lead to new phases of content creation on the profile page, albeit mostly minor to date, as new text and images are ingested, documented, preserved, and made accessible for further ongoing assessment.

As previously mentioned, the editorial team currently uses the Research Update boxes to present new information separate from the profile. As evidenced by the Beatriz Michelena update in my introduction, these editorial addenda act as informal spaces to note new questions, research discoveries, and changes that do not require textual rewrites. Since 2019, I have added a Research Update to a handful of other profiles, including the French actress, director, producer, and archivist Musidora. Published in 2013, her profile could not account for the (future) fact that a fragment of *VICENTA* (1919), which she directed, was discovered in 2016. I have since updated the filmography and created a Research Update box to highlight this change, sending an updated PDF of the profile to the library for preservation in Academic Commons (where it now exists with the following record note: "A research update box was added to the profile, and the PDF associated with this record was updated, in January 2023").⁵⁹

The implemented DOIs, on the other hand, allow for more formal and extensive textual revisions within the profiles. For example, in 2016, we published a

⁵⁹ Annette Förster, "Musidora," in *The Women Film Pioneers Project*, ed. Jane M. Gaines, Radha Vatsal, and Monica Dall'Asta (New York: Columbia University Libraries, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.7916/d8-f4nt-4j92>.

profile on May Watkis, a Canadian woman who was believed to have been the administrative head of a provincial government film agency. As I have written elsewhere, in 2018 previously unseen archival materials were brought to the editorial team's attention, which challenged Watkis' presumed position of director of this organization.⁶⁰ When the completely revised profile was published in 2020, it now reflected Watkis' more complicated – and still unclear – position in the early cinematographic field as a clerk at the agency, a projectionist for a local film censor, and a theater inspector.⁶¹ At the top of the new profile, which was assigned a new DOI, there is a brief note indicating that the original version can be accessed at the previous DOI, which links to the archived PDF in Academic Commons and allows for comparison if necessary (the new Academic Commons record also links to the previous version) (Figure 3).

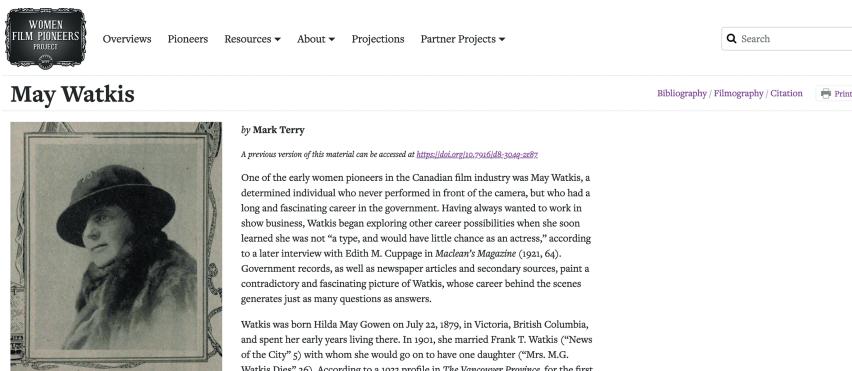


Figure 3: The revised WFPP May Watkis profile with a new DOI, screenshot.

These examples of the Research Update and textual versioning – two different types of website updates that are both connected to stable records in Academic Commons – can thus be understood as part of the ongoing active and critical editorial

⁶⁰ Kate Saccone, "Digital (Re)Visions: May Watkis and the Women Film Pioneers Project," *Modernism/modernity* 5, cycle 5 (August 17, 2020), accessed April 1, 2024, <https://modernismmodernity.org/forums/posts/saccone-digital-revisions>.

⁶¹ Mark Terry, "May Watkis," in *The Women Film Pioneers Project*, ed. Jane M. Gaines, Monica Dall'Asta, and Radha Vatsal (New York: Columbia University Libraries, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.7916/d8-4ac7-fq81>.

management of the profiles.⁶² These editorial features not only allow the texts “to live and breathe,”⁶³ to quote Fitzpatrick, in ways that are only possible in the so-called digital paradigm; loosely framed by the concept of digital curation, research updates and textual versioning also become a potential part of a broader editorial lifecycle comprising a wide range of processes, or sequential actions of creation, preservation, and the ongoing assessment of the profiles over time. While I have not (yet) had to add a second new DOI to a profile that already contains some textual versioning, I have returned to some Research Update boxes several times.⁶⁴

Smaller changes can also occur on a profile once it has been made accessible online and open to ongoing assessment. For example, in the case of linked open data practices, the challenge of linking to consistent resources and maintaining reliable connections on the profiles has been a long-term editorial project. At the time of our launch in 2013, linked open data was only briefly discussed internally; the focus when designing and finalizing the WordPress website was to link as much as possible within the website – to other profiles, essays, and resources – rather than connect with outside ones.⁶⁵ At the time of the website relaunch in 2019, the editorial team made a conscious effort to better connect the profiles to external archival resources, and I manually went through every profile and linked each archival paper collection to a relevant collection page, online finding aid, or general archive website. (A similar task of linking to the archives in the filmographies was done automatically.) As more institutional resources are digitized and described online, these links also require continual management to avoid link rot or to provide better, more reliable connections. Similarly, the ongoing management of the biographical metadata has become a central part of this iterative editorial workflow as I have, as a result of the ongoing mass digitization of archival documents and historical records, had to update many women’s dates of birth or death, for example. Making these technical or metadata changes to the profiles – always with an update to the Academic Commons record as well – not unlike the research updates and textual versioning, can thus be read as part of

⁶² It should be noted that these PDFs are “reduced” versions of the profiles, without the moving or still images. This runs counter to traditional preservation practices with digital(ized) media where what is preserved is often the high quality, uncompressed version, while what is presented to the public is a compressed, lossy version.

⁶³ Fitzpatrick, *Planned Obsolescence*, 69.

⁶⁴ See, for example, Angel Miquel, “Mimí Derba,” in *The Women Film Pioneers Project*, ed. Jane M. Gaines, Radha Vatsal, and Monica Dall’Asta (New York: Columbia University Libraries, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.7916/d8-pw36-1k24>.

⁶⁵ There were early efforts, however, on the part of CDRS, to add links to WFPP on Wikipedia, a process that was, unfortunately, undone when the website relaunched in 2019 with a new URL (“cdrs” was removed by the library since the center no longer existed).

the ongoing management and preservation of the profiles to ensure their reliability as scholarly and archival resources over time.

The concept of digital curation, again taken as a loose inspiration here, underscores how editorial labor on WFPP – in addition to being textual support – can be understood as a form of ongoing active management, in terms of textual scholarship, archival information, and data. In other words, if editing in the digital era can be understood as the “suite of rhetorical devices that make a work,” to recall Burdick et al., the WFPP editorial team’s active and critical management, its digital curation of the profiles – as modules within the larger project that are never quite “done” – supports the project’s broader argument about the iterative nature of women’s film history. Of course, not every profile has required changes, but that does not mean that they do not exist within this broader framework, as entities that can be changed, at varying levels, when necessary.

(Re)Visioning, or Toward a Critical-Feminist Digital Curatorial-Editorial Practice

In describing WFPP’s digital editorial labor as curatorial – where creation and (the potential for) versioning, for example, exist within a lifecycle model – I am interested in the relationship between scholarly editorial labor and notions of mutability and historiographic movement. While a concept like “updatism,” for instance, certainly signals digital scholarship’s move away from the one-text paradigm of print toward multiplicity and open, iterative online editorial labor, it does not explicitly highlight this tension between fluidity and reliability or, in the context of WFPP, the continuous revisiting of a profile over time as new information must be made visible and new interventions are warranted. I therefore advance the concept of “(re)visioning” instead, which plays on the practices of versioning, as well as on ideas of scholarly revisions and research updates, the iterative nature of feminist film historiography, and the ongoing management of digital environments over time. My conceptualization of “(re)visioning,” shaped by WFPP’s specific historiographical origins, ongoing institutional funding, and online editorial practices, such as its embrace of a rolling editorial and publishing approach, is thus inherently feminist, reflecting the project’s longstanding emphasis on, to quote Sarah-Mai Dang, the “transformative nature of knowledge produc-

tion.”⁶⁶ Similarly, paralleling the field of data feminism, which argues that labor must be visible,⁶⁷ I use “(re)visioning” to highlight the work itself, to turn attention to what is being done on platforms like WFPP at the editorial level and how that work can be framed.

In the way that “(re)visioning” reflects and emerges from WFPP’s history and subject matter, one could argue that it is a very limited concept, demonstrating only how the “inexhaustible”⁶⁸ nature of feminist (film) historiography and (silent era) archival research finds a productive match in the mutability of digital scholarship and online publishing. But while other feminist websites, such as the Importing Asta Nielsen Database and the Nordic Women in Film platform, are certainly inscribed within this framework, I contend that “(re)visioning” does not only concern feminist projects. In fact, I use “(re)visioning” to encourage the adoption of a critical-feminist approach to digital film historiography more broadly. In addition to centralizing both the iterative and fragmented historiographical processes and the curatorial-editorial work that manages, maintains, and expands the digital resources we develop and use, “(re)visioning” is conceived as part of the broader “interrogation of notions of ‘completeness’ and ‘done’” in the domain of scholarly publishing in the digital era.⁶⁹ In other words, the updates (research and metadata) and examples of textual versioning that I have discussed do not reflect, in the words of Joanne Tucker, research “failure[s] which ought to be quietly rectified.”⁷⁰ Rather, to make (re)visions is a critical-feminist act, a reminder that most digital scholarly projects remain “undone,” both in terms of (modularized) content updates and platform-wide enhancements over time. Most importantly, it is a celebration of our collective generative and iterative labor.

Conclusion

Ultimately, my notion of (re)visioning – a concept that frames editorial labor as a form of digital curation encompassing, in the case of WFPP, practices of creation,

⁶⁶ Sarah-Mai Dang, “Unknowable Facts and Digital Databases: Reflections on the Women Film Pioneers Project and Women in Film History,” *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (2020), accessed April 1, 2024, <http://digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/14/4/000528/000528.html>.

⁶⁷ See Catherine D’Ignazio and Lauren F. Klein, *Data Feminism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020), accessed April 1, 2024, <https://data-feminism.mitpress.mit.edu/>.

⁶⁸ Brown et al., “Published Yet Never Done.”

⁶⁹ Brown et al., “Published Yet Never Done.”

⁷⁰ Joanna Tucker, “Facing the Challenge of Digital Sustainability as Humanities Researchers,” *Journal of the British Academy* 10 (2022): 104, <https://doi.org/10.5871/jba/010.093>.

assessment, and making various updates – is intended to continue the conversation about what it means to present, disseminate, and preserve scholarship online, especially when that scholarship, and the archival research sustaining it, is neither finite nor complete. What a project like WFPP offers to the broader field of digital film historiography is an example of how editorial labor has expanded and transformed. Most importantly, it models how a critical-feminist framework for doing digital film history can continue to activate an iterative and reflective curatorial-editorial practice.

While this chapter focused on manual editorial labor around the individual profiles, the idea of digital curation as a framework for understanding the editorial work on the website is open to further development. It remains to be seen, for example, how the external (re)use of the WFPP biographical and occupational dataset will feed back into the profiles and the information they present, and what (other) curatorial actions further efforts around linked open data could engender on the website. The value of digital curation as a framework for positioning the research updates and textual versioning as part of the profiles' editorial lifecycle lies not only in how it highlights expanded scholarly editorial labor online, but also in the fluid, flexible perspective of the project as a whole, where further actions – such as thinking more concretely about long-term preservation and digital sustainability – could still be incorporated into editorial workflows.

October 2023 marked the ten-year anniversary of WFPP's online launch. As I have shown, this past decade has been a time of steady growth, both in terms of content and internal practices. Looking ahead, in addition to encouraging scholars to explore the dataset, I hope the project will continue to expand, adding new profiles and overview essays as well as Projections posts that engage with digital methods and data visualization approaches. This may require rethinking the technological limitations of the WordPress website, in collaboration with our library colleagues, and finding ways to deal with larger media files and different applications and tools. I also hope that the editorial team can revisit aspects of the project, from critically returning to our taxonomy of occupations, with an eye toward more standardization across the website and external controlled vocabularies, to thinking more consciously about linked open data and documentation. If the project's history can anticipate its future, there has always been room to expand and transform, to consider and develop slightly different versions of this editorial project in response to both shifts in scholarly dissemination practices and the iterative nature of feminist film historiography. WFPP has come a long way since Jane M. Gaines began collecting names – and there is always more to do.

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