

Peer Review in Art History¹

Sam Rose

Uncorrected preprint of article accepted for publication in *The Burlington Magazine*, late 2019

‘Scholars, especially in the humanities, know surprisingly little about the academic publication system in which they participate.’² So suggests a recent article on high prestige journals in North America, noting that while humanities scholars have been long been fascinated by historical systems of knowledge production, the actual mechanics of publication, including peer review, have rarely been thought to merit much attention. It is probable that for both you and me, the reader and the author of this article, any sense of the precise conditions under which it was reviewed and accepted for publication will be largely a matter of gossip and guesswork. And yet publishing is the economy through which our discipline functions. At its most idealised we rely on it to disseminate our research, to provide a forum for public exchange and debate, and in doing so

¹ I have been asked not to attribute certain quotations below, though all information not footnoted comes from conversations and requests for written information conducted during personal research for this article between 2013 and 2019. I am also unfortunately not able to thank some who have helped here, as they wished to remain anonymous. In addition to the department members of the School of Art History at the University of St Andrews I am pleased to at least be able to thank: Sam Bibby, Paul Binski, Karen Collis, David Peters Corbett, Whitney Davis, Jack Hartnell, Dmitri Levitin, Scott Mandelbrote, Bence Nanay, John Onians, Sarah Victoria Turner, and especially Camilla Mørk Røstvik and Aileen Fyfe. Personal disclosure: I am currently a member of the editorial board of *Art History*, and have experienced forms of peer review (broadly understood) as author or reviewer with *Art History*, *The Burlington Magazine*, *Visual Culture in Britain*, *Visual Resources*, *nonsite.org*, *Image and Narrative*, *New Literary History*, *Critical Inquiry*, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, *Tate Papers*, Oxford University Press, Penn State University Press, Yale University Press, Blackwell, Routledge, and Palgrave Macmillan.

² Chad Wellmon and Andrew Piper, ‘Publication, Power, and Patronage: On Inequality and Academic Publishing’, *Critical Inquiry*, (published online only, 21 July 2017, updated 2 Oct. 2017), https://criticalinquiry.uchicago.edu/publication_power_and_patronage_on_inequality_and_academic_publishing/.

to uphold standards of scholarly practice that allow publication to function, whatever our political stance, as an implicitly democratic forum for the free exchange of ideas on which our sense of the advancement of disciplinary knowledge is based. While it is often said that ideals of this sort are increasingly under threat – from the marketization and metrification of higher education, the worsening situation of the job market, and the decreased commercial viability of publication – discussion of the practicalities still tends to be found in isolated studies of particular areas, or in editorials or other shorter pieces such as those comments made by *The Burlington Magazine* in recent years.³ In order to better understand the forces that shape our field, then, this article attempts to draw together much of this literature in order to offer a brief account of the history of peer review and its current role in art historical publishing. Using a mixture of writing on particular areas of art history, accounts from other disciplines, first hand research in journals, and conversations with art historians, it charts the rise and current status of the practice in the United States and United Kingdom. The aim is not to offer anything like a comprehensive history but to open up work on this area, as well as to contribute to conversations about the future of publishing in art history and in the humanities more broadly.

Peer review, as recent writers on the subject have stressed, is an old but multifarious practice. It needs to be understood, in other words, not just as having a long history, but as having a history that shows the apparently unchanging ideal to in the past have taken a number of different forms and served a number of different purposes. According to some accounts, peer review

³ These are discussed below, especially in the final section.

'started as an early modern disciplinary technique closely related to book censorship'.⁴ More widely agreed upon is the role of scientific societies such as the London and Edinburgh Royal Societies and the Paris Académie Royale, and in particular the eighteenth century move to a committee-based system of review for their journals. The London Royal Society took its *Transactions* in house in 1752, with a Committee of Papers meeting every six weeks to vote in secret ballot on the suitability of papers, based on abstracts.⁵ By 1832 it was felt that the meaning of publication in the *Transactions* had gained enough currency to demand a more careful system of evaluation; papers would now have to be read in full by an individual with expert knowledge in the subject before being approved for publication.⁶ By 1849 refereeing practices had 'stabilised' into the system that clearly foreshadows that of the present day: the entire fellowship could be drawn on for review, with papers usually sent out to two reviewers (one after another so as to save the effort of recopying a manuscript).⁷ Similar practices were increasingly adopted by learned societies in Britain and the US during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, suggesting that in those societies some form of refereeing had become a standard part of the idea of a 'scientific journal' that published 'research articles' (comprising an original contribution to knowledge, a named author, and proper citation of the works

⁴ Mario Biagioli, 'From Book Censorship to Academic Peer Review', *Emergences: Journal for the Study of Media & Composite Cultures* 12 (2002), p. 31.

⁵ Noah Moxham and Aileen Fyfe, 'The Royal Society and the Prehistory of Peer Review, 1665-1965', *The Historical Journal* 61 (December 2018), pp. 870-72.

⁶ Moxham and Fyfe, 'The Royal Society and the Prehistory of Peer Review', pp. 874-75. Moxham and Fyfe note that (though usually oral and rarely used) provision for this practice had been in place informally in the Royal Society since 1752.

⁷ Moxham and Fyfe, 'The Royal Society and the Prehistory of Peer Review', p. 878. On this history see also Alex Csiszar, *The Scientific Journal: Authorship and the Politics of Knowledge in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago, 2018), pp. 119-158.

that the article relied on).⁸ Scholars have nonetheless cautioned against associating this system too closely with present-day peer review. For one thing review was neither always primarily external nor gatekeeping in function, instead taking multiple forms and allowing readers to play roles ‘including that of publicist, advisor, synthesizer, and judge’.⁹ For another refereeing remained fairly uncommon both in independent journals and in journals outside of Britain and the US.¹⁰ Reasons for the reluctance to adopt review included the extremely slow and cumbersome element that the review process introduced into publication, suspicions that peer review offered a system of quality control no better than the longstanding use of editorial expertise, and even the problem of creating multiple copies of articles to send out (as subsequently simplified by the typewriter in the 1890s and the photocopier in the 1960s).¹¹

In many areas of the humanities and social sciences the late 1800s saw the rise of this kind of scholarly journal connected with a learned society, but this did not yet mean the rise of peer review in art history.¹² At the turn of the twentieth century there was no major Anglo-American art historical journal founded in connection with a learned society, so that far and away the best known scholarly art historical journal of the time in English, *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, from its founding in 1903 operated with a

⁸ Csiszar, *The Scientific Journal*, pp. 4-5, 156-57. Melissa Baldwin, ‘Scientific Autonomy, Public Accountability, and the Rise of “Peer Review” in the Cold War United States’, *Isis* 109 (September 2018), pp. 541-542.

⁹ Csiszar, *Scientific Journal*, p. 157. For a sense of the range of practices at different points, see Benjamin Newman, ‘Authorising geographical knowledge: the development of peer review in *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, 1830–c.1880’, *Journal of Historical Geography* (in press, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2019.03.006>); Imogen Clarke, ‘The Gatekeepers of Modern Physics: Periodicals and Peer Review in 1920s Britain’, *Isis* 106 (March 2015), pp. 70-93.

¹⁰ Baldwin, ‘Scientific Autonomy’, p. 542.

¹¹ Ray Spier, ‘The History of the Peer-review Process’, *TRENDS in Biotechnology* 20 (August 2002), p. 358. For suspicions about peer review at the time see Csiszar, ‘Peer Review: Troubled from the Start’, *Nature* 352 (21 April 2016), p. 308.

¹² Stefan Collini, *Common Reading: Critics Historians, Publics* (Oxford, 2009), p. 219.

combination of editor or co-editors and a large (and not necessarily 'professionally' art historical) Consultative Committee.¹³ Just as in many earlier journals, the editor was in that case given the power to solicit, select, and even write their own articles as they pleased. And this was not just a case of the slightly maverick organisation of a newborn, amateurish, discipline. In its privileging of editorial decision over formal review process and the swift rate of publication that could result, the *Burlington* was in line with thinking of the time that did not see formal peer review 'as a *sine qua non* of scholarly journals'.¹⁴ In the sciences more broadly, in fact, '[p]eer review did not become standard practice...until after World War II', really developing into the idea that the credibility of science relied on 'expert refereeing' (in the form of formal review by external readers) between the 1950s and the end of the 1970s.¹⁵ *Science* (1880) and *The Journal of the American Medical Association* (1883), for instance, did not use outside reviewers until after 1940, while the independent and more

¹³ For this aspect of early history of the *Burlington* see Helen Rees-Leahy, "'For Connoisseurs": *The Burlington Magazine* 1903-1911', in Elizabeth Mansfield, ed., *Art History and its Institutions* (London, 2002), pp. 231-245; Caroline Elam, 'A More and More Important Work: Roger Fry and *The Burlington Magazine*', *Burlington* 145 (March 2003), pp. 142-152. This is taking a limited view of 'art historical', as any attempt to chart publication in art history runs into definitional issues due its wide spread among universities, museums, amateur engagements on the edges of 'art', the art market, and more popular interest. The early issues of the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* (1937) for instance list over 60 relevant 'periodicals received' as varied as *Old Master Drawing*, the *Museums Journal*, *Pencil Points*, *Transactions of the Monumental Brass Society*, and the journals of many local and county archaeological associations.

¹⁴ Csiszar, *Scientific Journal*, p. 5. Melinda Baldwin, "'Keeping in the race": physics, publication speed and national publishing strategies in *Nature*', *British Journal for the History of Science* 47: 2 (June 2014), pp. 257-279.

¹⁵ John C Burnham, 'The Evolution of Editorial Peer Review', *Journal of the American Medical Association* 263 (1990): 1323-29, and Baldwin, 'Scientific Autonomy'. See also Francis H. Chapelle, 'The History and Practice of Peer Review', *Groundwater* 52 (January/February 2014), doi:10.1111/gwat.12139; David Pontille and Didier Torny, 'The blind shall see! The question of anonymity in journal peer review', *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology* 4 (2014), doi:10.7264/N3542KVW.

popularly oriented *Nature* did not adopt external peer review as standard until 1973.¹⁶

Though accounts of peer review in the humanities at this point are scarce compared to the sciences, a window is provided by the investigative work undertaken by the *Modern Language Association*.¹⁷ By the 1960s they could report that of over a hundred English literature journals surveyed, 'Only sixteen publications indicated that a single reader, usually the editor, passes upon an accepted article. Twelve journals submit an item to five or more readers before it is accepted, but the general rule seems to be two or three readers before acceptance...Twenty editors have acknowledged that it takes as much as six months or longer to evaluate many of the articles they receive. The average time required is closer to three months...'.¹⁸ Despite this early and strong acceptance of peer review in general terms, it was not until the late 1970s that, under pressure from areas such as the MLA Commission on the Status of Women in the Profession, the adoption of the now-familiar form of author-anonymous or 'double-blind' peer review was accepted by the association as standard practice – being agreed by the Delegate Assembly in 1978 and applied by *PMLA* (1884), arguably the most prominent literary journal in the US then and now, from 1980.¹⁹ (*The Historical Journal* (1923), to mention an equally prominent History

¹⁶ Chapelle, 'The History and Practice of Peer Review'. Spier, 'The History of the Peer-review Process'. Melinda Baldwin, 'Credibility, peer review, and *Nature*, 1945-1990', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society London* 69 (September 2015), pp. 337-352. Another notable adopter at this time was the British medical journal *The Lancet*, which began publication in 1823, and did not adopt peer review until 1976.

¹⁷ Humanities peer review has not benefited from the attention that, especially in recent years, scientific review has, though a notable exception is David Pontille and Didier Torny, 'From manuscript evaluation to article valuation: the changing technologies of journal peer review', *Human Studies* 38 (March 2015), pp. 57-79.

¹⁸ John Lavelle, 'Facts of Journal Publishing, IV', *PMLA* 81 (November 1966), pp. 3-12.

¹⁹ Joel Conarroe, 'Editor's Column', *PMLA* 98 (March 1983), pp. 147-148. English Showalter, 'Editor's Column', *PMLA* 99 (October 1984): 851-853. The need to tackle gender discrimination

journal, did not adopt double-blind review until 1990.²⁰) There was much controversy and some vocal dissenting voices. Stanley Fish, for instance, argued repeatedly that knowledge of the author was a fundamental factor in assessing an article's worth and potential interest to the field – that “merit is not in fact identifiable apart from the “extraneous considerations” that blind submission would supposedly eliminate.”²¹ Nonetheless, every member survey of the next decades confirmed that double-blind review (what Fish called ‘blind submission’) was generally seen as the correct choice – albeit allowing for particular journal sections such as editorials and even certain contributions to journal special issues to be peer reviewed without anonymity or not formally reviewed at all.²² And as well as double-blind peer review swiftly becoming standard practice in the 1980s, this was the decade when among English literary journals the restriction on submitting an article to multiple journals at the same time was generally instituted as official editorial policy.²³ By the early 1980s in other words, in Literary Studies at least, the practice of single-journal submission and double-blind review as we all know it today was in place.

As an academic discipline, art history itself was relatively quick to make use of peer review. The full recognition of art history in US and UK universities in

has been a key driver of double-blind peer review in a number of fields. This compares interestingly with recent accounts of how review processes can continue gender bias, both historically (‘Ladies, Gentlemen, and Scientific Publication at the Royal Society, 1945–1990’, *Open Library of Humanities*, 4 (June 2018, doi: doi.org/10.16995/olh.265)), and in the present day (Erin Ross, ‘Gender Bias Distorts Peer Review Across Fields’, *Nature* (21 March 2017), published online, doi:10.1038/nature.2017.21685).

²⁰ Mark Goldie, ‘Fifty years of the *Historical Journal*’, *Historical Journal* 51 (December 2008), pp. 821-855.

²¹ Stanley Fish, ‘Guest Column: No Bias, No Merit: The Case against Blind Submission’, *PMLA* 103 (October 1988), pp. 739-748. Geoffrey Galt Harpham et al., ‘Forum: Fish on Blind Submission’, *PMLA* 104 (March 1989), pp. 215-221.

²² Donna C. Stanton, ‘Editor's Column: What's in a Name? Revisiting Author-Anonymous Reviewing’, *PMLA* 112 (March 1997), pp. 191-197.

²³ Donna C. Stanton, ‘Editor's Column: On Multiple Submissions’, *PMLA* 109 (January 1994), pp. 7-13.

the first half of the twentieth century was accompanied by the journals *The Art Bulletin* (1913, publishing article from 1917) and the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* (1937), and from the 1930s at least these operated systems of review via their Editorial Boards.²⁴ (Then as now the publication process could be painfully slow, with it reported in 1964 that the wait time for publication in *The Art Bulletin* was around a year and a half.²⁵) Despite this early adoption by some of board-based peer review it was by no means a requirement in the discipline for many years. In the 1960s it was possible for an art historian such as Michael Fried to make his name publishing articles and even (exceptionally) his doctoral dissertation in the editor-controlled magazine *Artforum*.²⁶ And though by the 1980s the academic capital of venues like *Artforum* (1962) and *Art in America* (1913) had to some extent waned, other journals more firmly associated with academic art history continued to operate outside of the system of multiple-reader-based peer review. Under John Onians the newly established *Art History* (1979), the journal of the Association of Art Historians, between its foundation and 1988 consciously rejected peer review by external readers as standard. Onians, as editor, pursued a policy intended to foster radicalism and originality by which he would personally review submissions and decide about external peer review on a case by case basis, sometimes sending out articles for review and sometimes publishing without

²⁴ On the development of art history in the UK from the *Burlington* to the 1930s see Sam Rose, *Art and Form: From Roger Fry to Global Modernism* (University Park, PA., 2019), pp. 25-31, 50-67.

²⁵ Millard Meiss, 'The Art Bulletin at Fifty', *The Art Bulletin* 46 (March 1964), p. 1.

²⁶ See the autobiographical remarks on his early career in Michael Fried, 'An Introduction to My Art Criticism', in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 2-15, and Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: Artforum, 1962-1974*, New York, 2000, pp. 244-45, 283-86.

any further consultation.²⁷ This was too much for some. In an exchange of letters in which Michael Fried wrote to the editor to complain that an article published in *Art History* had not referenced his own work on a topic, he added that 'Naturally I think the editorial policy you express...is absurd'.²⁸

That the same writer who had made his career in the 1960s publishing via *Artforum's* single-editor-based system had by the 1980s rejected such a model as 'absurd' is telling. Fried by this time was publishing (as he has stated) not 'criticism' in journals such as *Artforum*, but 'art history' in journals including *New Literary History* and *Eighteenth-Century Studies* (in the 1970s) and *Critical Inquiry* and *October* (in the 1980s).²⁹ There is a definite shift here, as with journals such as *October* former art critics now working in universities attempted to create scholarly respectable periodicals for the publication of their semi-art-critical work, bringing what might previously be considered mere criticism under the banner of 'academic' art historical scholarship. And as this blurring suggests, the difference in mode of review between 1960s 'criticism' and 1980s 'art history' should not be overstated. *October* (1976) and its more recent derivatives, alongside broader journals that became prominent venues for art historical writing such as *Critical Inquiry* (1974), *New Literary History* (1969), and *Representations* (1983), tended to operate (and often continue to operate) via a system of 'peer review' that was not double-blind and would be largely

²⁷ John Onians, 'Letters to and from the Editor', *Art History* 11 (June 1988), pp. 155-156.

²⁸ Fried in Onians, 'Letters to and from the Editor', p. 157.

²⁹ The distinction between criticism and history is discussed in Fried, 'An Introduction to My Art Criticism', pp. 47-54. For these articles: Michael Fried, 'Toward a Supreme Fiction: Genre and Beholder in the Art Criticism of Diderot and his Contemporaries', *New Literary History* 6 (Spring 1975), pp. 543-85; Michael Fried, 'Absorption: A Master Theme in Eighteenth-Century French Painting and Criticism', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* (Winter 1975-76), pp. 139-77; Michael Fried, 'Painting Memories', *Critical Inquiry* 10 (March 1984), pp. 510-42; Michael Fried, 'Antiquity Now: Reading Winckelmann on Imitation', *October* 37 (Summer 1986), pp. 87-97.

handled by the editorial board.³⁰ Obviously peer review is a relative concept in these circumstances. Many found that the way to both support the journal and publish the innovative work they desired was to place their own writing primarily (or almost exclusively) in the journal of which they were an editor or member of the editorial board.

Since the 1980s peer-review has become increasingly standardised in UK and US art history, though in multiple forms that include what might be termed 'mostly editorial board non-blind' (*October, Representations*), 'editor and author-nominated external reviewer non-blind' (*Journal of Art Historiography*), 'board and external' (*Oxford Art Journal*), or full 'external double-blind' (*Art History* and *Art Bulletin*).³¹ (The 'triple blind' system where even the journal editor does not know the identity of the author, adopted in certain philosophy journals such as *Mind*, *Noûs*, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, and *The Philosophical Review* at least in part in response to issues with gender discrimination and implicit bias, has to my knowledge yet to be adopted by any journal primarily publishing research in art history.³²)

³⁰ Information about review in these and other journals comes from conversation and correspondence with art historians who have engaged with their publication process. Helpful discussions of individual journals can be found at Princeton's 'Reviews of Peer-Reviewed Journals in the Humanities and Social Sciences', <https://journalreviews.princeton.edu/reviews-of-peer-reviewed-journals-in-the-humanities-and-social-sciences/>, while further information about more recent experiences with particular journals is available at the Humanities Journal Wiki, http://humanitiesjournals.wikia.com/wiki/Comparative_Literature,_Cultural_Studies_and_Theory_Journals.

³¹ Information from conversations and correspondence with art historians. The *Journal of Art Historiography* system is outlined at <https://arthistoriography.wordpress.com/peer-review-process/>.

³² The systems and qualifications are helpfully detailed, with contributions by various editors, in Justin Weinberg, 'A Closer Look at Philosophy Journal Practices', *DailyNous* (20 January 2015), <http://dailynous.com/2015/01/20/closer-look-philosophy-journal-practices/>. Despite this, Adrian Piper's *Berlin Journal of Philosophy* website suggests that as of 2018, 78.76% of English-language philosophy journals surveyed 'state no explicit commitment to double-blind review', and that only her own has a truly 'explicit strict blind submission procedure'. See the tables at <http://www.adrianpiper.com/berlinjphil/philosophy-journal-paper-submission-policies.shtml>.

The UK Research Excellence Framework, which is used to determine the distribution of government funding between various university departments, has played an important role due to its attempt to force university staff to prioritise quality rather than quantity in their 'outputs'. On the REF 1* to 4* ranking scale, neither 1* ('recognised nationally') nor 2* ('recognised internationally') research is deemed worthy of 'quality weighted' funding, while 4* ('world leading') research is funded at four times the level of 3* ('internationally excellent').³³ (For an art history department, in other words, a publication deemed 'world leading' is worth four times that of an 'internationally excellent' one, while those 'recognised internationally' and 'recognised nationally' are worth nothing at all.) In requiring just one to four publication 'outputs' per scholar over each approximately five-year cycle, REF seems to place value on journal publishing only in the form of a very few long articles in 'major' journals for which formal peer-review is a basic requirement, with some humanities departments attempting to restrict or altogether prevent their academics publishing in small, low 'impact factor', or non-blind-peer-reviewed journals (aside those well-established enough to confer prestige without blind review). Some UK universities now require all articles sent to journals by faculty members to be first submitted for an additional internal peer review, where they will be assessed for REF eligibility, suggestions for 'improvement' made, and in some cases where the journal is deemed unsuitable or the article insufficiently 'REF-able', submission altogether discouraged. The future cost of such policies for

Peer review in Philosophy and its problems more broadly are discussed in J. Katzav and K. Vaesen, 'Pluralism and Peer Review in Philosophy', *Philosophers' Imprint* 17 (September 2017), 1-20, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.3521354.0017.019>.

³³ *Research England Guide to Research and Knowledge Exchange Funding 2018-19* (Research England, May 2018), p. 19.

small journals and the diversity of the academic publishing world is something yet to be fully reckoned with in art history.

All of this in many ways brings the UK even closer into line with the US system, where tenure cases largely require a set and relatively low number of peer-reviewed publications, strongly favouring high-end journals (sometimes ranked internally) when assessing the case. For early career researchers in either country the 'major' journal article remains one key element of a successful fellowship or job application. While peer review of one kind or another is now expected of even long-established journals, for those new journals that need to make claims to high prestige status – whether for REF, tenure, or job-getting suitability – there seems to be little way around the even more particular system of double-blind peer review. *British Art Studies*, established by the Paul Mellon Centre in 2015 with such a system, is a notable example of a journal that has accepted this form of peer review as potentially time-consuming and restrictive but nonetheless unavoidable. Working with possibilities as well as necessities, the journal features a mixed system of double-blind review for articles and other forms of review (such as by editorial group) for features and other material.³⁴ The journal also breaks with humanities convention in clearly stating the particular method of review below each article (though identities of reviewers and dates that articles are received and accepted are not provided as they are in some sciences journals).

There remains a great deal of dissatisfaction with peer review. For many the increasingly formalised and restrictive (and by some accounts arbitrary) process of double-blind review for journal articles, combined with the immense

³⁴ See <https://britishartstudies.ac.uk>.

wait for publication – sometimes over a year for acceptance, then another year or two for the article to appear – means that it is no longer a sensible option for many increasingly time-pressed academics. 'Journals: oh, you mean those places in which people who don't get asked to contribute to books have to publish their work...', one 'leading philosopher' has put it. This attitude is especially prevalent among senior scholars less concerned about tenure or promotion cases who feel there is little sense submitting to journals with blind review and acceptance rates as low as their publication wait times are long, when the edited collection, catalogue essay, or solicited journal contribution are all readily available.³⁵ For those not connected with a particular journal this is compounded by a sense that the peer review system is something of a red herring – that journal editors will control the process either way through sending the article to reviewers likely to be more or less sympathetic, and through the level of weight they choose to give to readers' reports. Maybe it is all just 'smoke and mirrors' anyway, in the words of another senior academic who asked stay anonymous (this time an art historian).

There is an irony in these apparently cynical attitudes towards the peer-review system, for in rejecting systems of double- or triple-blind review scholars are in fact often not rejecting peer review altogether. In fact although Stanley Fish was widely attacked for stating that *blind* peer review was the problem rather than peer review as such – that the reputation and past work of the author *should* be taken into account during the review process – this is the

³⁵ Patrick O'Donnell, Tim Dean, Armand E. Singer, Louise K. Horowitz, Gary A. Stringer, Jeffrey L. Sammons, William B. Hunter and Betsy Bowden, 'The Decrease in Submissions to *PMLA*', *PMLA* 116 (May 2001), pp. 650-656.

position that a great many senior academics appear have tacitly adopted.³⁶ There are large numbers of academics whose only peer-reviewed journal articles are those in edited issues or in journals where non-blind peer review operates among the editorial team: in short, in cases where it is accepted that the author's standing and past work will be taken into account by their peer reviewer(s). For this reason networks remain central to a certain form of academic freedom in art history. Truly risky or innovative work might have to live outside the channels of the double-blind review, yet only those with insider access to certain journals and their editorial boards will be able to publish such work in a venue prominent enough for a REF, tenure, or promotion case without the possibility of a one or more year wait and rejection that is too stressful and disruptive for the early career scholars to risk.

Having said all of that, the journal process should not be allowed to obscure the less visible situation of academic book publishing, as it has tended to do in the recent spate of re-examinations of academic publishing outside of art history.³⁷

While on some accounts the increasingly formalised processes of academic review means that the peer-reviewed article is more important than ever, it is

³⁶ Fish, 'Guest Column: No Bias, No Merit'.

³⁷ The focus on journals is especially notable in the great deal of interdisciplinary scholarly literature currently attempting to rethink peer review, partly due to the stress on the sciences over the humanities, as in the 33-author article Jonathan P. Tennant et al., 'A multi-disciplinary perspective on emergent and future innovations in peer review', *F1000Research* 6 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.12037.1>, and the recent report on academic publishing resulting from the 4-year AHRC project 'Publishing the Philosophical Transactions: a social, cultural and economic history of a learned journal, 1665-2015': Aileen Fyfe, Kelly Coate, Stephen Curry, Stuart Lawson, Noah Moxham, and Camilla Mørk Røstvik, 'Untangling Academic Publishing: A history of the relationship between commercial interests, academic prestige and the circulation of research' *Zenodo* (May 2017), <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.546100>. US-based work on English literature and the humanities, interestingly, follows the same pattern, as in Wellmon and Piper, 'Publication, Power, and Patronage', and Andrew Goldstone and Ted Underwood, 'The Quiet Transformations of Literary Studies: What Thirteen Thousand Scholars Could Tell Us', *New Literary History* 45 (Summer 2014), pp. 359-384.

still overshadowed by the significance of the (university-press published) monograph.³⁸ In the UK it may have been intended or at least hoped that REF would allow for a focus on high quality articles, but in fact the major academic monograph is now widely regarded as the only 'safe' way to two 4* outputs for an individual: *safe* at 4* because the difficulty of putting together such a publication is a guarantee of quality; and *two* outputs because such a publication can be 'double-weighted', and thus count as two submissions rather than just one.³⁹ The move in the current REF cycle to an average of 2.5 outputs per staff member (and a minimum of 1) in fact threatens to all but wipe out the journal article in art history in the eyes of senior university members, as the ideal submission becomes one that consists of nothing but books. REF eligible staff members are now expected to contribute one double weighted book per cycle as standard, with their extra 0.5 output given over to those staff members able to contribute two or more books. In the United States research universities tend to stipulate a monograph (or sometimes even two) as an indispensable condition of tenure cases. Whereas in the UK having a university press as publisher is widely desired for the implication of a 'safe' 4* REF rating, in the US it is often mandated absolutely. 'It has to be a university press, it doesn't matter which', a junior colleague at a US research university was recently told by their department chair in a meeting about their future tenure application.

³⁸ John Champagne, 'Editorial Policy and Peer Review', *PMLA* 124 (March 2009), p. 662. Lawrence McGill, *The State of Scholarly Publishing in the History of Art and Architecture* (Rice University Press, 2006), Section 5.5 (published online <http://cnx.org/content/col10377/1.2/>).

³⁹ The reality of this view is hard to confirm given that results are not given for individual outputs. General information on REF book submissions and double weighting for the last (2014) round can be found in Simon Tanner, 'An analysis of the Arts and Humanities submitted research outputs to the REF2014 with a focus on academic books: An Academic Book of the Future Report' (London: King's College, 2016), DOI: 10.18742/RDM01-76.

One of the most surprising, dramatic, and yet little known elements of the influence of peer review results from the discipline's unblinking commitment to the academic monograph. In double-blind journals acceptance rates can be as low as 5-10%. The percentage of articles rejected by the editors without review, meanwhile, will tend to be fairly low, and certainly below 50%. But in academic art-historical book publishing

[b]y far the largest proportion of manuscripts (and proposals) [are] rejected at the stage of initial receipt; just 15% were sent out for formal review. Of those submitted for review, about 85% were accepted for publication. In other words, the winnowing process is very much "front-loaded." For every 50 manuscripts or proposals submitted, 8 will be sent for review; 7 of these will survive the review process and be published.⁴⁰

The selection of art-historical books for publication, in other words, is determined far more by press editors than academics. The vast majority of books are rejected by press editors without being sent for peer review, and those that make it to review by academics (in which case double-blind review is essentially an impossibility) are usually successful in making it to publication. To an extent this statistic is misleading, as proposals are subject to either in-house or external peer-review such that a rejection before the manuscript itself is sent for formal review may still involve feedback from university academics. Nonetheless it shows that the gate-keeping function in the world of book publishing is largely in

⁴⁰ McGill, *The State of Scholarly Publishing*, section 4.2. On book publishing in art history see also the forum on 'Publishing Paradigms in Art History' edited by Catherine M. Soussloff, *Art Journal* 65 (Winter 2006), pp. 36-55.

the hands of press editors rather than academics, with peer review operating less for the gate-keeping function that it plays in the world of journal publishing than as a means of ensuring academic quality through the forms of correction and reworking that an attentive peer-review can bring about.⁴¹

This is hardly news to art historians who have experienced such review processes, though many junior scholars will be curious and surprised. What's significant in relation to peer review in general is that to the extent that the dominant system of REF, tenure, or general prestige values the university-press-published book above all other publications those systems are also placing the shaping of the discipline of art history beyond the hands of academics who carry out peer review. Academic press editors are (from my experience) extremely serious and smart, and this is in no way to suggest their prominence in the world of academia is a problem. All the same, it needs to be reckoned with that we are in a moment where university presses are being increasingly subject to financial constraints, are firing press editors well-loved by academics in the service of taking a more commercial direction, or are threatened with actual closure.⁴² As Susan Bielstein, executive editor and art history editor at University Chicago Press, puts it, reflecting on the end of the golden days of academic art historical publishing, when paper and images were cheap and departments were not only expanding art historical programs but demanding physical book purchases to match,

⁴¹ In recent years university presses have been notably intent in stressing the rigour of their review processes; see the Association of American University Presses *Best Practices for Peer Review* handbook <http://www.aupresses.org/policy-areas/peer-review>, and the Peer Review Transparency initiative <https://www.prtstandards.org>.

⁴² The restructuring of Yale University Press and of museum publication departments is discussed in 'Editorial: Publish or be Damned', *The Burlington Magazine* 158 (September 2016). The University Press of New England (a collaboration between the Brandeis, Dartmouth, New Hampshire, Northwestern, and Tufts) shut down in December 2018.

those all-important library sales [had] been dropping since the 1970s, but in the past fifteen years, with digital products devouring most of a library's budget, the decline has been precipitous. The kind of monograph that used to sell 2000 printed copies may now sell fewer than a thousand. And all those specialized "first books" – the revised dissertations that feed the American tenure system – which used to break even at around 700 copies, may now sell only 300.⁴³

The pessimism from university publishing does, for sure, need to be set against the general growth in art book publication, with a 2005 study noting definite growth in university-press published art books since the early 1990s (though slowing in the 2000s),⁴⁴ and a large-scale 2013 quantitative study even more optimistically recording a year on year increase of 5.3% between 1991 and 2007.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, Bielstein's words are a reminder that things are growing increasingly difficult. In this situation it is not a fault of the presses that their

⁴³ Susan Bielstein, 'Letter from the editor: climate change in art history publishing', *Perspective: actualité en histoire de l'art* 2 (2015), DOI: 10.4000/perspective.6064.

⁴⁴ McGill, *The State of Scholarly Publishing*, pp. 4-5, 15. For comments on why this study may have underestimated the volume of art books, see Henry Pisciotta and James Frost, 'Trends in Art Publishing from University Presses, 1991–2007', *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America*, 32 (Spring 2013), pp. 7-9. The Pisciotta and Frost article is developed from a longer report, Henry Pisciotta and James Frost, 'Analysis of Trends in Art History Publishing from University Presses: Report to the Kress Foundation' (Kress Foundation, June 2010), http://www.kressfoundation.org/uploadedFiles/Sponsored_Research/Research/Pisciotta_Frost_ArtHistoryPublishing.pdf.

⁴⁵ Henry Pisciotta and James Frost, 'Trends in Art Publishing', 2-19, especially pp. 7-11. As the study notes, however, we also need to consider that the growth rate of 5.3% is still 0.8% lower than that of book publication as a whole, that the boom in contemporary art publishing obscures the way that some subjects (such as 19th century art) have levelled off or decreased, that this rate is far lower than the growth of actual art historical tuition and research in universities, and that all of this is in relation to growth in number of titles rather than publication and sales as such. For more on shifts in academic book publication see J.B. Thompson, *Books in the Digital Age* (Cambridge, 2005).

interests are no longer so clearly in line with the interests of the discipline, but merely a matter of economics. But that is no reason why the interests of the former should be allowed to shape or drive the latter.

A recent editorial in *The Burlington Magazine* pointed to the still impressive sales of exhibition catalogues and popular history books, and suggested that the low sales of academic art history books may be 'a matter of supply as much as demand', the fault of poor writing and academic obscurity by art historians in universities.⁴⁶ Yet while 'the precedent of colleagues in literature departments' might once have driven university art historians to write a certain way, in the present day the adoption of certain kinds of writing is surely as much a sign of a need to keep up with professionalising and disciplining demands of REF, tenure, academic promotion, and their associated systems of valuation.⁴⁷ Calls for art historical book publication to popularise once again in part recall a pre-1970s world in which the majority of academic art historical book publishing was oriented to a more popular market and sold far more, while on the other hand the best articles were attributed a scholarly seriousness and forms of recognition equal to those of books. With the demands of book publishing and the health of art history as a discipline now somewhat misaligned, a return to this situation might be tempting. This would remodel art history as closer to philosophy, in which it is not problematic for a professor never to have published a book, or even to be able to state in opening their first book 'When I finished my doctoral dissertation I resolved that I would never write anything as long as a book again'.⁴⁸ In a revived situation of this kind books

⁴⁶ 'Editorial: Publishing Art History', *The Burlington Magazine* 160 (September 2018), p. 715.

⁴⁷ 'Editorial: Publishing Art History', p. 715.

⁴⁸ Richard Holton, *Willing Wanting, Waiting* (Oxford, 2009), p. ix.

could become something that one wrote either if one desired to reach a wider audience or if a subject for intellectual reasons truly *needed* to take the form of an academic book. In as much as the latter wouldn't be the rule for every interesting scholar, articles would be on the same level as books as the currency of academic life, with the different forms used when appropriate to different communicative purposes, and books weighed on their actual intellectual merits rather than the formal glitter of look, heft, and brand.

 Tempting, but unlikely. The model is possible in analytic philosophy because it values citation of the most significant recent publications over lip service to long-accepted books in the field. Until a revolution in art historical citation practice means that a peer reviewer is more likely to chide a writer for omitting reference to a recent article rather than a major book on the topic from the 1980s, there will be no move beyond the REF and tenure reliance on the book as currency.

**

This article has focused on history and current practice rather than the future, but given the continued reliance on the book in art history I'd like to close with two things that may become increasingly important for the health of the discipline.

 The first is the need for a wider range of options for art historical book publication, something that cannot come about until art historians embrace a more diverse conception of what prestigious book publication actually means. There are now various new and innovative publishing outlets that combine

established forms of peer review with lowered publication costs, often building open access into their models and prioritising online publication in order to do so: Courtauld Books Online, University College London Press, Open Book publishers, and (beyond art history) initiatives such as the Sustainable History Monograph Pilot and the possible open access Scottish Universities Press.⁴⁹ In order for early career scholars to truly be able to publish innovatively in this way without fear of issues arising with REF or tenure, the discipline needs senior scholars to leave behind their deals with their usual or own-university presses in order to actually publish their major works with these outlets.

The second, without which the first is unlikely to ever be practicable, is the need for an art historical ‘academic spring’ (the 2012 drive for open access for scientific articles) in relation to image fees, still paid by almost all book publishers despite College Art Association advice that images used in scholarly writing come under ‘fair use’ and should not incur charges.⁵⁰ Clearly not all senior figures in the university and prominent ones outside of it are going to lead the way in the shift from established presses and journals to newer venues and forms. They could, instead and at least, lead the way in absolutely refusing to have image fees paid for their books and articles, and if necessary divert some of their hefty subventions to pooling funds in order to fight for this right – and with it for the future health of art historical publishing – in the courts.

⁴⁹ For the latter two see <http://www.longleafservices.org/blog/the-sustainable-history-monograph-pilot/>; and <https://scurl.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/SCURLScottishUniversitiesOAPressConsultancy2019.pdf>.

⁵⁰ *Code of Best Practice in Fair Use for the Visual Arts* (College Art Association, February 2015). <http://www.collegeart.org/pdf/fair-use/best-practices-fair-use-visual-arts.pdf>. The code builds on the major report Patricia Aufderheide et al., *Copyright, Permissions, and Fair Use among Visual Artists and the Academic and Museum Visual Arts Communities: An Issues Report* (College Art Association, February 2014), http://archive.cmsimpact.org/sites/default/files/documents/pages/fair_use_for_visual_arts_communities.pdf.

