

“The Art of Ethical and Effective Editing”

ENG 496: Theory and Research in Composition and Rhetoric

April 13, 2010

Crystal Person-Tillman

“Most of the art of editing lies in the relationships developed with the author and other team members” (Greenberg 16). Susan Greenberg’s poignant statement on the importance of the editor(s) and author(s) relationship demonstrates the vital importance a good relationship in order to create an effective text. (An “effective” text is, simply put, a text that meets a purpose. Whether the purpose should be the author’s, editor’s, publisher’s, or audience’s is up for debate, but for the purposes of this discussion it can be any and all of the above.) The issue that is at the forefront of *my* purpose for this article is an exploration of how the editor’s role in the process of writing a text affects the relationship between the author and editor and vice versa.

It is important to think of editing as “a live, contemporary activity” because it foregrounds the impact it has on human society (Greenburg 8). In order to illuminate this impact, I will be exploring some of the ways the editor’s position has been described, how an editor can enact these roles, and the ethical implications these roles have on human society. I will be exploring the editor as peer, authority, shaper of a community, creator of meaning, and diplomat. Each of these roles connects to and shapes the others within the complexity of the editing process. Exploring these roles will, with hope, give insight on the editing process to editors, authors, and publishers alike. Most important, exploring these roles will encourage editors to enact the complexity of their roles in order to make more effective and ethical choices.

Due to the lack of research in some areas and my own creative incapacity, there are aspects of these roles that have either not been discussed or have left me with more questions than answers. It is a goal of mine that the questions raised in this document will lead me to a more complex understanding of the editing process and lead me to more questions and an increase of my capacity for understanding that complexity.

## **Editor as Peer**

One of the most influential roles an editor can have is as a peer to the author of the text she is editing. The peer relationship creates mutual respect and equality by putting the author and the editor in equal roles: the editor is not the sole decision maker in the editing process and the author does not assume that what she has written is the most effective it can be. This kind of relationship will also create an ethical environment for both the author and the editor: if the author and editor develop an equal partnership based on the encouragement and understanding of one another's perspectives, they will recognize each other as human beings. Although editing is often seen as the final stage of the writing process, in truth, it happens throughout the writing process: the editing being done both by the author and the editor throughout. Because editing is a continuous presence throughout writing, it is important for the editor to be part of the process from the beginning. And in order for this to occur, the author and editor must trust that the other is as equally invested in the process as the other. The mutual respect that can be developed out of peer relationships can develop this trust.

Peer relationships are shown to very influential in the writing and editing process because they foster a feeling of mutual respect between the author and the editor. In a study created "to foster social interaction among students," Yu-Fen Yang, Hui-Chin Yeh, and Wing-Kwong Wong demonstrated how creating a "learning community" among students was important in order to develop strong peer relationships (287). Learning communities, as defined by Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, are "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in these areas by interacting on an ongoing process" (288). This could easily define the relationships between an author and an editor (from a one on one pair to a group of writers and editors working together on a text) because the editor and the author share the concern of the text and interact to develop that text. The students in Yang, Yeh, and Wong's study were placed in an environment where their tasks were to write, edit, evaluate,

and re-write their own text, and read and edit the other students' texts in a virtual environment. The study's results demonstrated that "the more students interacted online, the more they did both local and global revisions in the texts" (300). This suggests that the more they were committed to their own writing process, the more they became invested in the writing process of others. The study also showed that there was "more willingness to help others if they [the students] assume the role of editor, writer and commentator" (300). These findings are important to understanding the way a peer-based editor and author relationship can create an environment of mutual respect, which will lead to a more effective text.

The questions then becomes why does a peer relationship create mutual respect when a superior to inferior relationship does not? I will be discussing the complex issue of authority in a later section, but one of the answers as to how peer relationships can create mutual respect is shown in how the students' felt and reacted to the learning community process in Yang, Yeh, and Wong's study. The study suggests that the learning community created an environment where students felt like their perspectives were important to the process of creating meaning; McMillan and Chaus describe the individual's place in the environment as "membership, influence, fulfillment, of individual needs and shared events that create emotional connection" (Yang, Yeh, and Wang 288). Because their texts were considered by many other perspectives and they considered the perspectives of many others', "everyone was someone else's scaffold in reading and writing" (Yang, Yeh, and Wang 304). In other words, each student was held up as an important and valid member of the learning community because each got a chance to express his or her point of view. As found in the follow-up interviews with students, this created a connection between the students: "viewing texts from other perspectives, they could easily understand and identify peer's dilemmas, feelings, and motives. This aroused their sense of empathy . . ." (304). That students' expressed this sentiment about the learning community shows how powerful the peer relationship can be during

the writing process. Developing empathy for others emphasizes what the peer relationship is set out to do, create a human connection between individuals.

This leads to the most obvious and most important question, how do editors and authors perform this peer relationship? One effective way of creating this peer relationship is through understanding each others' perspectives on the text and on the writing/editing process. Instead of the editor and author relationship being seen as one person making changes in a text and the other accepting them, the peer relationship develops a process of editing that involves the perspective of the author and the perspective of the editor negotiating meaning in order to enhance the effectiveness of the text. The peer relationship in an editor and author context helps keeps these perspectives at an equal level of equal importance and validity; this is important because it prevents the author from dismissing the editor's comments based on a perceived lack of respect on the part of the editor and prevents the editor from seeing themselves as the authority and dismissing the perspective of the author. This respect is created when the editor and the author both express their goals for the text, understand how each perceives the other's role, and develop a way of negotiating those roles and goals in a way that increases the effectiveness of a text.

This process of negotiation necessitates that the author and editor work together through every step of the process. Yang, Yeh, and Wang state that “[w]orking together while accomplishing a task is seen as a characteristic of powerful learning, aiming at active construction of knowledge” (288). This “active construction of knowledge” is exactly what the editor's and author's goal in the writing/editing process should be. The editor and author are in the process of *learning*, which Yang, Yeh, and Wang describe as “a meaning-making process in which learners create personal views of the world,” that creates a knowledge concerning the text and the relationship between the author and the editor (288). This knowledge is constructed when they negotiate meaning and understand each others' perspectives on a text, which, in turn, assists both in increasing the effectiveness of the

text through understanding it from multiple perspectives. Participating in this kind of learning community by working together is “most conducive to meaningful learning” because it allows all of the perspectives to be considered, develops mutual respect, and creates empathy in the participants (Yang, Yeh, and Wang 288).

The manner in which the editorial decisions are made is also important when considering the method of editing: electronic feedback, paper feedback, face-to-face, or a combination. The editor and the author can establish a peer relationship easily through face to face contact. In a survey conducted about authors and the editing process, authors born both inside and outside of the U.S. stated that they prefer a method of editing that includes face-to-face contact with the editor (Eaton et al. “Comparing Cultural Perceptions” 157). Face-to-face communication becomes important in a situation where one of the other participant (author, editor, or other) risks offending, confusing, or misunderstanding another’s perspective. Also, face-to-face communication makes people more aware of the ethical implications of their action because it necessitates that one see the other as a human being and develop empathy for the other. It has also been shown that the preferred mode of editing over multiple cultures is a combination of face-to-face contact and one of the other methods of feedback, especially electronic feedback (Eaton at al. “Comparing Cultural Perceptions” 157). This is both due to the ease of use of electronic feedback and the difficulty of meeting in person.

This face-to-face contact, however, must have the aforementioned levels of mutual respect, give and take, and negotiation of meaning in order for it to produce an effective peer relationship. A valid question would be whether or not this peer relationship is possible in the same way a student peer relationship would be because the author is not editing something that the editor wrote. But if we consider the peer relationship as one of give and take and a negotiation of meaning, the editor is playing multiple roles in the editing process, including author and constructor of meaning. If the editing process is understood as more than a textual process but part of a process of “creating

meaning in a text,” the editor and editing should have just as much importance as the originator and originating in process of writing (Greenberg 7). An editor should be as equally invested in a text as an author in order to create an effective text; since the author *does* perform the role of editor in many respects, the editor should play the role of the author in many respects. This is an issue that will be discussed further in the section “Editor as Creator of Meaning.”

The ethical implications of the editing process are a huge concern in developing a relationship between the author and the editor. When developing this relationship, both editor and author must be aware of the positions of power that both bring into the relationship and analyze these positions in order to make them conducive to a learning environment. It is easy for the editor to not consider her own position in regard to the ethical implications her choices may have on the author’s text; it is even easier for the editor to not be aware of the author’s position. If one believes or asserts that they have more power to make the decisions, create meaning, than the other, it can be difficult to maintain a relationship that will be conducive to an effective text. This negotiation of power is what the peer relationship is meant to equalize, and it can be negatively affected by everything from the author’s popularity to the editor’s position at the publisher. Ultimately, it comes down to a question of authority and being able to understand the complex power dynamics that exist in an editor and author relationship.

### **Editor as an Authority**

If the editor and author are supposed to be in a peer relationship, how can they negotiate the issue of authority? How does one gain authority when both must be in an equal partnership? This is complex in that to have “authority” may seem like a contradiction in a peer relationship.

Authority, however, does not mean that one has more influence or power than the other on the whole; it only means that one has authority on certain subjects concerning the text, purpose, or

editing/writing process. The editor has certain subjects that she has authority on, while the author has other subjects that she has authority on. A balance, respect, and mobility of authority is what is needed in order to maintain the peer relationship.

In the Yang, Yeh, and Wang's study on students' editing in a virtual environment, this balance of authority was complicated by the inherent structures of authority that exist within a classroom. The study showed that the only instances where the learning community placed certain positions above others were when students who were known for "better writing skills" and the teacher had their revisions accepted more often than other students (302). Also, students who rarely edited others' papers or did not make thoughtful revisions did not have their revisions accepted as often as others. Here, there are two different levels of authority being demonstrated: the teachers are seen as experts by being the teacher and the inherent authority in the classroom. This also suggests that there may need to be some degree of authority or expertise on the part of the editor and the author in order for one to consider the other's opinion valid enough to consider changing the text. Since students who were seen as better writers had their revisions accepted more often, it is understood that this authority can be developed instead of inherent, like the teacher. This authority can be developed through certain attitudes about the editing process and manners of giving feedback.

One of the ways the editor can demonstrate their authority on some aspect of the editing process is through explaining any changes that she makes that the author may need explanation on. This process not only demonstrates mutual respect of the text, it shows that the editor is truly thinking about the choices she is making in editing the text. In "Examining Editing in the Workplace from the Author's Point of View" a survey of authors' about the editing process showed that authors' most preferred editors to provide suggestions and/or explanations of the benefits when they make editorial decisions (134). This provides the author with the editor's thought

process in the editorial process, thereby establishing trust in the editor's ability to make those decisions in the text. It provides the author with a specific example of the editor's authority on a certain aspect of the text. Whether it is in guiding the author more closely toward their purpose for creating the text, offering an explanation as to why the audience might be more apt to understand the text if the change is made, or pointing to guidelines of correctness, clarity, etc. that will affect the audience's ability to understand the text, the editor is showing, by specific example, why the author should trust her decisions. Making these suggestions and providing explanations for these changes are what Eaton and her colleagues call "payoff statements," and they suggest that using these is the best way (evidenced by the author's point of view) to show respect for the text, consideration of point of view, and authority on subject matter regarding the text.

Part of the difficulty in balancing the authority and a peer relationship is in how the editorial relationship is already viewed by authors and set up by previous experience. While Eaton and her colleagues' survey demonstrated that most authors view the editorial process as largely positive, some authors have misconceptions of what an editor's role is and publishers sometimes have levels of authority built into the editor's role. The survey showed that very few of the authors thought of the editor's role as more than concerning "grammar, company style and standards, accuracy, clarity, and consistency" (120). If this is the only area where editors are seen to have authority, it is problematic when editors try to assume a larger role in content, structure, and meaning within a text. It is important for editors to provide their definitions of the editing process, how they see their role as editors, and ask the author the same questions. This is important if the editor wants to develop authority in any given relationship, and it is also important when needing to counteract misrepresentations the author may have about where the publisher or corporation places the authority in the editing process. The survey found that there were a few authors that were more likely to accept the editor's comments if the editor was their manager or had high status at the

publisher (151). The issue of hierarchy in an editing environment can change who has the authority and who doesn't based on certain circumstances; but if the editor and the author can meet those concerns through discussion about the editing process, negotiating each others' authority positions, and develop a peer relationship that is conducive to both levels of authority, the issue of authority can be, if not eliminated, at least controlled.

The question of authority, who qualifies as an expert in what areas and why, is a complex issue. In the editor and author relationship, however, necessitates a conversation on how and why authority can complicate a peer relationship: whose authority will be accepted in what situations, and how will these choices affect the effectiveness of the text as well as the relationship that the editor and author have created. Even when author and editor understand and recognize the complexity of authority and power dynamics, the peer relationship can be strained when both must consider the publisher's expectations from the editor and author relationship. Since the publisher (journal, publishing house, or otherwise) is the final decision maker in the process, and their goal is an end product that will *sell*, both editor and author are under their authority. No matter how the editor and author decide to negotiate meaning and create an effective text, their end product must be what the publisher, and in turn what the publisher says the reader, wants. Ultimately, this comes down to an issue of how the publisher perceives the audience for the text, the aesthetic of the journal or publishing house, and the role of selection editor.

### **Editor as Shaper of a Community**

An editor can have a wide range of responsibilities. Their job can range from basic style guided copyediting of a text to the selection of texts that will be chosen for publication. The role of the selection editor is the role I wish to explore now. The selection editor's role is to shape the "collective cultural artifacts," of a journal, collection, magazine, website, etc., into "a distinctive

voice” (Greenburg 9). It is important to ask how the choices a selection editor makes affect everything from the author and her text to the overall aesthetic of a publication or publisher. In each environment, the selection editor (often called the head editor) performs the role of gate keeper for the publisher. The ethical implications of such a role are enormous and they affect every aspect of the publishing process.

One of the ethical issues in being a selection editor for a publisher concerns the underlying reasons for the selections that are made. Selections editors can either choose to shape a community that others and leaves out voices and perspectives or one that embraces difference, change, and complexity in order to create a diverse and thriving community. Theresa Lillis’ and Mary Jane Curry’s main concern are scholars who are non-native speaker of English going through the process of getting (or not getting) published. In their article on professional academic writing, Lillis and Curry refer to editors and other individuals who influence the production of a text “literacy brokers” (3). The category of literacy brokers is broken down, and editors are placed either under the category of “language” or “academic” professionals. Language professionals are the people who focus on “the linguistic medium of communication” (14). Head editors, who make larger selection decisions for the publisher, are called academic professionals in the context of an academic journal or publisher. The issue that Lillis and Curry confront in this article demonstrates the complex relationships that can exist between publishers, editors, authors, and anyone else that has an influence on the production of a text. They point out that those who have the authority and make the publishing decisions are invariably English-speaking academics: “In 2004, 74% of the scholarly periodicals indexed by *Ulrich’s Periodical Directory* were published in English” (3-4). And it is difficult to argue that, simply due to the sheer dominance of English, it does not create preconceived notions on what is appropriate, interesting, correct, and ultimately publishable. Lillis and Curry, and many other scholars, prove that those standards are placed on non-native speakers and native speakers

alike, causing scholars, authors, and writers of all kinds to flatten their texts to fit those norms and standards—norms and standards that are mainly arbitrary, simplistic, and archaic.

As literacy brokers and gate-keepers to the publishing industry, editors wield a great deal of power and influence over a text, even more so when the author of a text is a non-native speaker/writer of English: “[T]hey influence opportunities for gaining access to English-medium journal publication as well as significantly contribute to the shaping of textual knowledge” (29). The pressure of non-native speakers of English to conform to the appropriateness, correctness, and style mandated by Standard American English in order to be published is causing many important voices to be lost in academia, and the same is true for non-academic publishers more interested in reproducing English norms in literature than offering anything new. When faced with these facts, it is difficult to see how an editor can get beyond these standards when they are convinced that it is part of their role as an editor to conform to them, or they risk their livelihood if they do not.

Theresa Enos describes her role as editor of *Rhetoric Review* as a creator of “a collection of various voiced creating an ongoing dialogue” (15). This suggests that there are editors in powerful positions who do understand the importance of incorporating a diversity of voices into a journal. She also describes her role as editor to develop a journal that is a collective “we”—a gathering of perspectives and voices (15). This gathering can consist of everyone from scholars from all over the world and scholars from all different disciplines. If editors think of their role a creator or gatherer of many perspectives and voices to make a “we,” they are actively shaping a community that includes rather than keeps out.

The issue of diversity and complexity in the writing process can not only refer to the cultural and language issues, more accurately *opportunities*, that can be presented to a selection editor, but those cultural and language related opportunities that are presented to those whom Lillis and Curry refer to as a “linguistic professionals.” A copy or content editor wields a great deal of power over

the language a text, which means she must make choices to actively eliminate or embrace diversity of the style of a text. A content editor must make decisions about changing the text that would change the meaning of the text. Lillis and Curry discuss how editors', as literacy brokers, "orientations vary from sentence-level corrections to minor and major shifts in content and knowledge claims" (29). These decisions contribute to the selection editor's "shaping of textual knowledge" (Lillis and Curry 29) and participate in an "active construction of knowledge" (Yang, Yeh, and Wong 288). Serving as mediator in both of these roles, the editor's job is to balance the concerns of the author with the needs and wants of the publisher. This role of mediator also necessitates that the editor be an equal partner in the goals of all sides: a diplomat for the text.

### **Editor as Diplomat**

Editors play a largely diplomatic role in the creating of a text. Because of the large variety of perspectives that must be considered when changing a text for the benefit of effectiveness and purpose, the editor must be able to negotiate what needs to be considered, how to consider those needs, and how to effectively communicate those needs to the others involved in the creation of the text. This negotiation of perspectives necessitates that the editor be an effective communicator as well as an expert in standards, usage, and the rhetorical strategies of the given text she will be editing.

In order to help create an effective text, it must involve effective communication with all of the perspectives that are engaged in creating the text: author, publisher, audience, etc. These perspectives are vital to consider because they can determine the effectiveness of communication (e.g. an author's misunderstanding of the editor's feedback can cause a hostile editing experience), whether or not the text is published (e.g. if it fits the wants of the publisher), and if the text will be read and engaged with (e.g. if the readers will understand, appreciate, or enjoy the text). The

perspective that has been traditionally most important is the authors'. How an author conceptualizes the editing process can affect the way an editor will be able to communicate and collaborate with them effectively. It has been shown that author's largely view the editing process in a positive way when it is based on "effective collaboration," "multiple points of view," "dialogue" (Eaton et al. "Examining Editing" 12). These aspects of an effective author and editor relationship relate back to the role of the editor as peer; the editor and the author must both feel equally respected and validated, or the process of complete collaboration will not work. The editor and author would not be able to freely express their needs, thereby leaving one or both of their perspectives out of the process. This could lead to (and be caused by) misunderstandings, cultural biases, and a failure to engage effectively with the text.

One of the ethical and practical issues that editors must consider in the editing process is the validation and support for the author's (and the collective "we" of the publication's) voice. Balancing individual style with standards, correctness, and clarity is a very difficult and complex process. Eaton and her colleagues found that the majority of authors "appreciated standards while at the same time appreciated editors who did not use them as straightjackets—who were willing to adapt to the situation to the best meet readers' needs" (Eaton et al. "Examining Editing"123). This balance is of vital importance to all genres of writing, from "professional" to "creative" because, no matter the content, the author's voice will always be present and vital to the effectiveness of the text. It is more than an author's ego and felt ownership of a text, the author's voice impacts that way the audience engages with and is affected by the text.

How then, does an editor demonstrate through her words and actions that she has respect for the author's voice, the purpose of the text, and the meaning that is being constructed? How can an editor be diplomatic in conveying the message without compromising her relationship with the author? In Mackiewicz and Riley ("The Technical Writer as Diplomat . . .") assert that the technical

writer needs to balance “clarity and politeness” when leaving feedback and/or speaking with an author about a text. This is done through “managing the directness” with which they communicate with the author (83). As previously discussed in the role of editor as peer, an editor can establish a relationship that is both direct and polite by elaborating on any aspect of their editing that may cause confusion. In other words, the editor must understand the author’s purpose and style for the text to a point where she knows what choices would need explanation, and she must then be able to create an explanation for any changes that are not easily seen as an improvement. It is important to answer any of the author’s possible questions about the changes that the editor makes because it will demonstrate that the editor respects the text and the author’s thoughts on the text by not making changes without valid reasons. This act implies that there is a partnership, or peer relationship, between the author and the editor because both perspectives are valid and respected: the editor’s through acknowledging the author’s concerns and the author’s through being part of the editing process. Just as any other diplomacy, leaving feedback can be compromised by a whole host of misunderstandings, cultural or otherwise, but it is of vital importance to be able to communicate with the author those misunderstandings about the text by asking questions, being honest but polite, and making sure to keep the relationship open.

### **Editor as Creator of Meaning**

While editing is traditionally seen as a “mediation” of meaning from the author to the audience, the editing process is more accurately collaboration that produces meaning: [describing editing] “as part of a process of creating meaning in a text . . .” (7). Lillis’ and Curry’s description of the editing process as literacy brokering shows the flaws of a system where editors are simply mediators of meaning, but a more cooperative and effective relationship between author and editor

would encompass all perspectives in way that would consider the ethical implications and effectiveness of the text and the process of creating the text. This definition of editing may seem impossible, but it is a necessary goal for any editor who desires to be a part of the writing process that is not superficial, misguided, or ineffective.

One of the simplest ways an editor can play a vital role in the writing process, a part of the creation of meaning, is through the feedback she gives to the author of the text when editing. The editor's attitude towards an author and a text is expressed through the feedback that she gives to the author, whether through face-to-face contact, written or verbal commentary, or electronic feedback. Each of the mediums of feedback has its own positive and negative connotations beyond the actual words used for the feedback, but much of the editor's attitude comes through the words she uses in her editorial changes, especially in a world where feedback is given increasingly electronically instead of face-to-face. The editor's role in giving feedback is to communicate to the author what she believes should be changed, deleted, or added to the text in order to make the text more effective. She is literally communicating what she perceives to be the meaning of the text through the feedback to the author. If the author and editor have not tried to fully understand one another's roles, goals, and perspectives on the text, the editor cannot be an effective communicator through this feedback. As Eaton and her colleagues addressed ("Comparing Cultural Perceptions of Editing from the Author's Point of View") the issue of feedback is a complex issue that relies heavily on the cultural perceptions of the editing process, specifically feedback, that the author may have. In their previous article that presented the results of their survey on author's view of the editing process, they suggested ways of making the feedback as direct and respectful as possible, so as to get their meaning and perspective across so the author can understand and respect the editor's opinion. Although the use of "pay-off statements" may assist an editor in communicating to an author her

perspective on the text, it only goes so far in communicating to the author how complex a process editing is and how closely tied to meaning creation it is.

Describing editing as a process of creating meaning in a text necessitates an explanation of how the editing process creates meaning. Susan Greenburg describes editing as “a human activity, carried out by individuals” and language “as a way of organizing and codifying meaning” (10). Editors are individuals who use their language expertise, rhetorical, standard, and other areas, to assist a text’s content and originator (author or otherwise) in a “state of ‘becoming,’ rather than being a final, finished product” (10). Authors (from professional to creative) continuously revise, rewrite, and rethink their writing, and editors take part in this process by consistently reminding the author of the purpose(s) for the text. They consistently bring the author’s attention to how the meaning(s) constructed in the text affect the audience, the author, the editor, and anyone else involved in the writing process. The editor constantly draws attention to how the rhetorical choices convey different meaning(s) to readers, users, and audience members on as many levels as can be considered. This process of analysis and revision is the role of the editor because it keeps the author aware of the ways their text can be used, interpreted, felt, and understood by the audience members. If the author has any interest in a text that is effective and communicates meaning (from emotional to technical), the editor’s role is vital to their process of creating meaning in a text.

Whenever “meaning” is brought up in a discussion of writing or editing, it is most often related to the writer’s intended meaning to an intended audience. This, however, is a simplistic view of the meaning making process. Of course, the author’s purpose for a text plays a large role in how that text gets created, but the purpose for the audience, editor, publisher, and anyone else who comes in contact with the text (“nonprofessionals”) is also an important consideration in the creation of a text, especially when interested in communicating meaning. Ultimately, the communication of meaning is the goal for anyone involved in the writing and editing processes, but

it is not sufficient, probable, or effective to only consider one person's perception of that meaning. So, how is an editor, in a world where "skilled human intervention is expensive, and the invisibility of editing makes its 'added value' very hard to quantify," a valuable contribution to this creation and communication of meaning? (Greenburg 13)

As Greenburg suggests, we need to see editing as more than a textual process: it's part of creating meaning in a text (7). Her article, "When the Editor Disappears, Does Editing Disappear," raises important questions about the seeming disappearance of editing in an increasingly technologically-based society: In a society where authors and readers play the role of editors, how can the editing process, done by an editor, be seen as valuable? In other words, what can an editor bring to this process that the author and reader cannot? Greenburg points out interactive online examples of "reader-as-editor," like Wikipedia, and examples of computer editing software to establish how editing is shifting away from the role of the editor (13). This shift has been happening over centuries and inevitably follows great leaps in technological innovation. This shift also questions the importance of having a "third-party" in the creation of meaning of a text.

Greenburg asserts that "editing is a decisions-making process . . . which aims to select, shape and link content" (9). She explains that editing is "part of a wider sense-making process" (9). From process to selection, then to shaping and to linking, the editor's role is to make the text as effective as possible for the audience—if the audience is not affected by the text, the text has failed to become useful, desirable, and usable. The absence of a third-party is what Greenburg, as do many other scholars, considers the fault in open-source websites, such as Wikipedia. Research has found that "collective or network editing" (Wikipedia) "tends to favor the addition of text, rather than its removal or reordering" (Greenberg 12). Greenberg argues that "[t]his reduces the overall quality, by omitting the 'macro' changes to meaning or structure typically made by experienced writers" (12). What is interesting, however, is that Wikipedia also has its own guidelines for editing and writing

that are very similar to many professional editing conventions (Greenberg 12). Even within an environment that is sometimes considered a more “democratic” source of information, there are rules and standards that are encouraged and rewarded. And while this acts as a kind of “public training in editing,” it still omits the important role of a third-party that facilitates the creation of meaning in order to increase its effectiveness.

A third-party can be someone either not originating the content of the text or someone that can offer a different perspective on the text—a perspective that can act as a reader’s perspective: “the editor has the explicit responsibility of representing the audience, and giving the text attention on its behalf” (Greenburg 10). Greenburg insists that this third-party perspective creates “awareness of the distance between what is, and what could be” (14). The implication being, if the reader, the author, or the computer software is undertaking the role of editor, there is a missing piece of the editing process: the person who is skilled at recognizing a level or space of meaning that would be ignored without the “triangular relationship between the editor, the originator . . . and the content itself” (Greenburg 10). This role increases the clarity of the text to the reader by acknowledging the many ways the reader might interpret the text. It is also a vital role because it increases the complexity of the meaning in the text. By enhancing clarity and complexity, the editor’s role assists the reader in interacting with, engaging with, and gaining knowledge from the text.

## Questions

After analysis of the many role of an effective and ethical editor, it is important to ask how the editor is defined in terms of the job she does. For example, concerning creativity and creation: if an editor is creating meaning, are they being creative? Are they only meant reinforce the creativity of the author, or are they taking part in the creativity of the author? How does one define creativity in the sense of “creating meaning” versus “creativity”? In the article “Technical Editing as Quality

Assurance: Adding Value to Content,” Michelle Corbin, Pat Moell, and Mike Boyd discuss the role of technical editors as “collaborating closely with technical writers on developing high-quality information” and as technical editing being a “quality assurance activity” (286). Corbin and her colleagues talk about quality assurance in technical editing as a focus on content that necessitates collaboration with the experts on the subjects of the text, a focus on testing the text in order to assure that readers will be able to use and understand the text, and generally being involved in the decisions that affect the users of the text. This is a very clear, technical, and complex role for the editor: one where they are part of creating the meaning of the text, but almost no one would call it “creative” work. Why? Does there need to be a separation between editors who take part in the traditionally creative process of “creative writing”? And, would this separation change the editor’s roles? Or, is it incorrect and unnecessary to divide these two roles into “noncreative” and “creative”? If both create meaning through a process that involves what would be considered “creative-thinking,” both processes should be considered equally creatively complex, just in different ways. Then why are there copious amounts of scholarship on editing professional writing when there is a very small amount of research on editing for creative writing? What is it about creative writing that makes the editing process so mysterious and un-analyzable?

Questions on authority are also still left unanswered. Lillis’ and Curry’s project outlines how difficult, if not impossible, it is to create a relationship between the editor and author that is not affected by political and cultural conflicts: The publisher will always be the final say on whether a text is published, and the selection editor cannot get away from her role as gatekeeper. In “Examining Editor-Author Ethics,” Nicole Amare and Alan Manning assert that “ethical decisions made by academic journal editors are governed to a significant degree by their intuitive sense of responsibility to a community of inquiry” (292). This “community of inquiry” is the understanding that all texts are created based on the knowledge and inquiries made before them; therefore, the

editors base their editing decisions (selection to copyediting) on what is best or most effective for the “collective we” (the journal or the publisher). Whether it is aesthetic choices or stylistic decisions based on the “collective we,” the editor makes her decisions based on the “ethical habit of preserving the community of inquiry” (Amare and Manning 295). Their article includes stories of editors who made their ethical decisions (from what to publish to rules set by the journal) based on this community of inquiry, and they insist that the “gatekeeper role” of this community is “one of many roles the editors must occupy” (297). Can we ever get away from this in any field where some are inevitably left out while others are inevitably let in? Can this function ever be positive if the editor embraces their roles as shaper of a community, diplomat, and peer?

### **Conclusions and More Questions**

As Lillis and Curry are adept enough to examine, the editing process has its faults: a third-party can never be wholly objective, politics are always involved in the publishing world, and there is no way to universalize “audience” in order to get a clear idea of what a text means to the readers of that text. All of these issues need to be the concern of an editor in every decision she makes, in every word she uses to communicate her purpose and perspective, and in every job she decides to take. If an editor cannot ask herself the important questions about what her role is in every rhetorical situation, she cannot be an effective or ethical editor. The effectiveness of the relationship the editor develops with the author is determined by how the editor can place herself in the position of the author, the publisher, the audience, and be able to negotiate her role of peer, shaper of community, authority, diplomat, and creator of meaning within the “live and contemporary activity” of editing.

The ethical implications of editing forces us to consider whether the elimination of “editors” is an end that is desirable or possible. What would happen if editors disappeared? Would their roles

simply be adopted by author-readers? What happens when consideration of the audience, the purpose, and the ethical concerns of that text take the back seat while authors-readers continue to add to texts without consideration of the complexity and value of the meaning making *process*? Without the editor, will writing be reduced to product once again, slowly eliminating the role of imagining what a text *could* be?

## Works Cited

- Amare, Nicole, and Alan Manning. "Examining Editor-Author Ethics: Real-World Scenarios from Interviews with Three Journal Editors." *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication* 39.3 (2009): 285-303. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 26 March 2010.
- Corbin, Michelle, Pat Moell, and Mike Boyd. "Technical Editing as Quality Assurance: Adding Value to Content." *Technical Communication* 19.3 (2002): 286-300. *ERIC*. Web. 25 March 2010.
- Eaton, Angela, Pamela Estes Brewer, Tiffany Craft Portweig, and Cynthia R. Davidson. "Examining Editing in the Workplace from the Author's Point of View." *Technical Communication* 55.2 (2008): 111-39. *IngentaConnect*. Web. 13 February 2010.
- Eaton, Angela, Pamela Estes Brewer, Tiffany Craft Portweig, and Cynthia R. Davidson. "Comparing Cultural Perceptions of Editing from the Author's Point of View." *Technical Communication* 55.2 (2008): 140-66. *IngentaConnect*. Web. 13 February 2010.
- Enos, Theresa. "Scholarly Editing: Creator and Shaping Communities." *Rhetoric Review* March (1987): 2-16. *ERIC*. Web. 25 March 2010.
- Greenburg, Susan. "When Editing Disappears, Does Editing Disappear?" *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 16.1 (2010): 7-21. *Sage*. Web. 25 February 2010.
- Lillis, Theresa, and Mary Jane Curry. "Professional Academic Writing by Multilingual Scholars: Interactions With Literacy Brokers in the Production of English-Medium Texts." *Written Communication* 23.3 (2006): 3-35. *Sage*. Web. 18 Oct. 2009.
- Mackiewicz, Jo, and Kathryn Riley. "The Technical Editor as Diplomat: Linguistic Strategies for Balancing Clarity and Politeness." *Technical Communication* 50.1 (2003): 83-94. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 28 March 2010.

Yang, Yu-Fen, Hui-Chin Yeh, and Wing-Kwong Wong. "The Influence of Social Interaction on Meaning Construction in a Virtual Community." *British Journal of Educational Technology* 41.2 (2010): 287-306. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 25 March 2010.