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The Shock of Tradition: The Case of the Humanities Lab

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Abstract

This essay assesses recent claims for the special innovations and collaborations of the Humanities Lab in the context of a century-long tradition of 'laboratory' work in Chaucer Studies.

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In recent decades, interdisciplinary scholars and teachers have experimented with the laboratory model in humanities research and teaching. As an infrastructure for research, the humanities lab has most often been associated recently with the rise of Digital Humanities collaborations, with textual coding and editing, digitization and visualization projects, and accordingly with the methodologies originating from what was once called "humanities computing." Examples of what Urszula Pawlicka-Deger has called "the laboratory turn" have, in these and other contexts, seemed to herald a radical innovation in style and function, regularly pitched as counter to the (capital-T) Traditional protocols, pleasures, or pains of standard humanities research.[1]

On the one hand, Pawlicka-Deger's deft historiographical work helpfully broadens the conceptual terrain signified by the "lab" in media, arts, and humanities; on the other, her rhetoric dramatically overstates the changes that the lab model has recently wrought. Accordingly, humanities labs are thought to be "a new institutional structure that was supposed to fuel the development of the humanities with new working models and research practices"; even if humanities labs necessitated a "shift from a *laboratory as a physical location* to *conceptual laboratory,"* they nevertheless unleashed "a new cultural paradigm" (emphasis in original). A paradigmatic shift of the type famously theorized by Thomas Kuhn, "the laboratory turn entails fundamental changes in the practices and function of the humanities at large."[2] As it was designed to be, so Pawlicka-Deger claims, the lab "intended to work as a driving force to develop a *new* model of the humanities based on collaboration, partnership, interdisciplinarity, situated practices, technology-focused work, and alternative, empirical education" (my emphasis).[3]

The survey that Pawlicka-Deger offers helpfully acknowledges the fact that differential modalities of infrastructure need to respond to disciplinary specificities—humanities labs are not, that is, identical to science labs. Nevertheless, in this account such particularities are understood to prompt "fundamental changes" for new models of humanities *tout court*. That's a whole lotta newness, and not all of it earned. For one thing, it is not the case, as she writes, that "[t]he first laboratories serving other than natural sciences were computer science labs established in media studies in the 1980s and 1990s" (as Chaucerians likely know, and as will be discussed below).[4] For another, textual scholars and linguists working on projects like *The Middle English Compendium* or the *Oxford English Dictionary*, have

[1] Pawlicka-Deger's astute survey assesses certain kinds of infrastructural developments that enable the lab model, one that extends beyond Digital Humanities (DH) uses and as outside the perimeters of physical space—enabling conceptual project-based in person research collaborations in myriad ways. While I will suggest some insufficiencies to the story she tells, I am indebted to her observations and insights.

[2] Pawlicka-Deger, paragraph 2. The reference here is to Kuhn. This application seems to me an unfortunate misapplication of Kuhn's epistemological model, which is less about how infrastructural changes precipitate shifts in thinking than the challenge that anomalous data poses to explanatory hypotheses. As will eventually become clear, I am arguing that the laboratory model for the humanities has long been a feature of certain kinds of innovative work. It is not so 'new' as it seems.

[3] Pawlicka-Deger, paragraph 12.

[4] Pawlicka-Deger, paragraph 9. "Media labs," she continues, "were launched as production, dynamic, and experimental research spaces, studios, and ateliers." She mentions a series of such research communities in media studies (The Laboratory Paragraphe at the University of Paris 8, established in 1983; the Media Lab at MIT founded in 1985; and the Aalto Media Lab at Aalto University in 1993).

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long been organized via collaborative groups, labs in all but name. Such collaborative endeavors continue apace. Furthermore, scholars regularly rely on archives and libraries rather precisely as their "laboratories," if by laboratories we mean places designed to facilitate observation, experimentation, thinking, and discovery. Within those spaces researchers regularly collaborate with collection librarians and other professionals.

This essay endeavors to revise some current assumptions about the vicissitudes of the Humanities Lab model to suggest that its astonishing newness and special collaborative force have been overstated. In the first place, collaboration via different kinds of lab models has been crucial to certain kinds of work in Chaucer studies for a century or more. And in the second, such collective traditions across a wider range of humanities fields have been important to the development of new ways of thinking and writing. What follows demonstrates some of the reasons why being mindful of this history might be especially crucial to what comes next with the humanities lab. I address two examples: the Chaucer Laboratory, housed at the University of Chicago in the early part of the 20th century under the name "The Chaucer Research Project";[5] and an experimental humanities lab we developed at Indiana University via a graduate course during the fall of 2019. Our course, ENG-L 504 "Experiments in the Humanities Lab," operated as a research *practicum*, one dedicated to assessing the benefits and liabilities of lab epistemologies and methods by linking practical experimentation in manuscript research with the history and example of the Chaucer Laboratory.

Questions of old and new are at stake in both examples; and both might be, I will argue here, important exemplars for our current moment in the history of the Humanities. But this will also mean facing up to more complex combinations of old with new than we are accustomed to. It will require assessing the force and power of "how things are repeated";[6] it will require developing our abilities to distinguish between *kinds* of newness, rather than simply harnessing the category of newness or innovation in simplistic oppositions to all things old. Such habits of mind, as I have argued elsewhere, might contribute to a fuller account of the "ethics of invention and eventful change"[7] both for our field and beyond.

Old Habits

If Humanists are thought to be latecomers to the lab model, such assumptions usually combine with accounts of our supposed preferences against collaboration. Thus, where traditional humanities work is understood as private and individual—or so the story goes—labs are innovative and collaborative. Where traditional humanities disciplines emphasize the single-author monograph, the single-authored article, and the tour de force essay or conference paper, lab-based research is thought to prompt newly inventive research outputs: web-pages, multi-author blogs, podcasts, data sets, digital corpora,

[5] Records from the Chaucer Project can be found at the Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center at the University of Chicago Library. Pawlicka-Deger does note the importance of the early 20th century to disciplinary developments for changes in the Humanities. But without knowledge of examples like the Chaucer Laboratory, this seems like a "new independence of the humanities and the building of the discipline's own physical place . . . as "departing from a *laboratory methodology* was accompanied by moving from a metaphorical *laboratory* towards an office and a library: spaces that for a long time served as the main places for humanities research" (Pawlicka-Deger, paragraph 5). Clearly the Chaucer Laboratory offers a powerful counter example. There are, moreover, and following Max Weber's important essay, "Science as Vocation," ways that we might continue to think through the differences of humanities models to those in the sciences.

[6] Ingham 4; 16.

[7] Ingham, 196.

mapping visualizations, etc. These distinctions are often rendered as oppositions to one another, with the latter assumed to tend more toward the anti-hierarchical, democratized, and democratizing than the former. Where traditional scholars are thought to relate to one another through outmoded hierarchies of competition, seniority, and prestige, lab collaborators are thought to work together as "peers."[8] In this context, it is important to remember that the apprenticeship model found in most science labs, leaves standard academic hierarchies entirely intact. In the U. S. context, one could argue that the apprentice model from the sciences helps to fuel University administrators arguments against the legitimacy of labor unions for graduate student teachers.

While few humanists would deny the institutional power of the single-author monograph or the pleasures of a quiet day in the archives, these oppositions are rather dramatically overdrawn, even to the point of caricature. Furthermore, the linkage legible here between innovation and collaboration is worth pressing upon. For one thing, as theorists and historians of innovation have pointed out, the need to insist and insist again that some habit, procedure, or protocol is new—"It is NEW!! I tell you"—does not register confidence in new and radical change so much as hint at anxieties about those old continuities that persist.[9] On that account, it is worth emphasizing the degree to which such claims operate ideologically as well as descriptively. On one side, the so-called traditional humanities scholar is cast as solitary writer: this is the humanist as monkish recluse, studious if risk-averse litterateur committed to slow thought, a desk littered with old fountain pens, alongside the draft of some magnum opus in longhand rendered from copious notes in a Moleskin™ notebook. On the other, the collaborative team, caffeinated and sleep-deprived, energetically absorbed, actively conferring in real time as they design daring new platforms and search mechanisms, making full use of computing affordances, and innovative in form as well as in function. To be sure both caricatures sketched here are a bit rose-tinged; their darker sides will be eventually made clearer in what follows. But first I wish to note that if romanticized versions like these hint at the productivity of both approaches, they also traffic in overdetermined oppositions: tradition versus innovation; theoretical versus experiential; solitary versus communitarian; leisure contemplation versus demands for action; old versus new.

It is not particularly surprising that contrasts between old traditions and new innovations have been fundamental to the marketing and promotion of Humanities Lab initiatives. It is in some ways understandable that those promoting the Humanities would follow the lead of the University's larger marketing strategies by claiming (not unreasonably) to purvey new things and new ideas. Nor is it surprising that these kinds of contrasts ground descriptions of labs by the institutions that fund and organize them. Thus when, quite early in the 21st century, Stanford University established the "Stanford Humanities Lab," the projects it funded had to meet two criteria: "They must be

[8] In most accounts of the innovations of the Humanities Labs this aspect is rather wildly overstated. We can certainly appreciate the ways labs enable the sharing of data and other kinds of materials without forgetting that most labs in the sciences operate under a functional apprenticeship model.

[9] For my own thoughts, see Ingham, 1-20. Other thinkers alluded to here include Taleb and Edgerton. Bruno Latour has noted the degree to which "innovation" demands a complex network of actors, human and non. Crucial, too, is the work done by the collaborative Anchoring Innovation group in the Netherlands, under the Academic Direction of Prof. Ineke Sluiter: https://www.anchoringinnovation.nl/organisation.

collaborative, and the research results must be in a form that is nontraditional for the humanities."[10] According to one of the directors, Professor of Classics and archeologist Michael Shanks, the humanities lab offers "a peer community of researchers," and a means to enable "experimental research and development across the Humanities and Arts."[11] A related rhetorical flourish on the "non-traditional" marks Arizona State University's new "Humanities Lab" where the web page declares: "Arizona State University continues to be one of the most innovative universities in the country. The new Humanities Lab is consistent with that ranking because it changes the way faculty and students approach instruction and research." [12]

As these initiatives themselves suggest, one can quite easily read a more complex relationship between new lab models and old humanities research even here: for one thing, scholars of traditional disciplines like classics or medieval studies have regularly been leaders in the lab movement, DH or otherwise. (Anyone who has ever worked on an archeological dig would recognize it as a lab by another name.) For another, the Humanities Lab at ASU sits quite comfortably in the large public state University, where "instruction and research" remain primary endeavors. These kinds of complexities are worth promoting—and it will help the humanities enormously to promote them.[13] I have argued elsewhere that today's University regularly trades in slogans of innovation and experimentation that assigns, whether implicitly or explicitly, a narrative of decline to the traditional Liberal Arts. It's worth noting that, in the example just offered, ASU counters this trend by championing innovation *in* those traditional disciplines of the Liberal Arts. Yet insofar as this claim is used to help ASU distinguish itself from other kinds of Humanities programs, it may not help the Liberal Arts quite so much—as those continue to be consigned to the side of the old. One potential problem with this approach is that Universities could, accordingly, argue that the way forward involves building new lab or makerspaces (great idea!) precisely by hollowing-out funding for traditional research resources such as libraries (boo, hiss!).[14]

Yet, and at the same time, avoiding or eschewing a rhetoric of innovation or newness as predicated on instrumentalist assumptions of the corporate University carries its own risks. It can obscure wide-ranging histories of newness that have long been crucial to what is now classified as "traditional" arts and humanities work: from those legible in the interventions of the Annalists, the Subaltern Studies Group, or the Combahee River Collective or the innovations of Critical Race

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[10] See Michael Shanks' description: http://web.stanford.edu/~mshanks/MichaelShanks/34.html. Shanks collaborated with Jeffrey Schnapp of the Department of Comparative Literature, and Henry Lowood (Stanford Libraries). See also, the description at "The idea of the Humanities Lab": http://web.stanford.edu/~mshanks/MichaelShanks/218.html.

[11] To be sure, there is little about labs in the sciences that suggest "peer" rather than hierarchical relations. Multiple authorship neither requires nor regularly avoids the usual hierarchies of 'traditional' scholarship, as the various disciplinary protocols for rank ordering authorship in multiple author publications throughout the sciences suggests. Ways of managing attribution in collaborative publications continue to be important ethical questions—and it is not unrelated to the adjacent issue of problematic citational practices in single-authored work.

[12] This description can be found at https://humanities.lab.asu.edu/.

[13] What gets recognized as 'innovation' depends largely on groups of promoters as well as on the frisson in exchanges with their critics. As Akrich et al. put it "the fate of innovation ... rests entirely on the choice of the representatives or spokespersons" (217).

[14] Makerspaces are educational spaces designed to enable hands-on creative projects and to facilitate DIY digital or analogue productions of various kinds. They have come to prominence alongside humanities labs, a point that Pawlicka-Deger makes forcefully.

Theory.[15] Similar examples of collective efforts from medieval studies are apparent, nearly everywhere: the Early English Text Society; The Chaucer Laboratory; TEAMS; the establishment of the New Chaucer Society itself, not to mention the production of valuable recordings made by groups of scholars through The Chaucer Studio; collective work under the auspices of The Medieval Globe; the Medievalists of Color collective; BABEL; the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship; the Global Chaucer research group; or the editorial collective at *Exemplaria*, to name those that come most immediately to mind.[16]

All of which is to suggest that humanistic commitments to experiments in new methods and epistemologies have long included scholarly collectives and other collaborative ventures. To what extent, we might ask, do such collectives represent less a departure from the more famous individualized model of the traditional scholar than a continuation of the equally long tradition of collaborative work by artists and humanists? There seems an as yet untold pre-history to the humanities lab, and not only via those collective projects officially termed as such. And how about less formal engagements: the workshops, reading or writing groups, acts of thinking together across the seminar table, collaborations between librarians and researchers? With these traditions in mind, might we consider the Humanities Lab as, precisely, an explicit reclamation of our collaborative impulses, and thus the most recent example of the pursuit of innovation by way of a transformative engagement with tradition?

This is a profound point about newness that we too often miss. As Chaucer and his contemporaries seem to have understood, 'newness' is less a descriptor than a category of *value*. An ethically probative category, the new can organize changes which purvey trauma and dislocation as easily as it may prompt improvements for a new aesthetic, technical, or human future. Moreover, those developments generally marketed as drastic changes, often turn out to be, well, not entirely as previously unimagined as is claimed.[17]

There is an important payoff for thinking about collaboration as itself an old humanist habit: doing so enables a host of crucial next questions about the *kinds* of relationships these entail, or the character and nature of their research outputs. Once we admit that humanists collaborate constantly (often in a dialectical relation to their work as solitary readers and writers) we can more precisely adjudicate the differences that the lab model makes legible or possible, and the extent to which these lab collaborations should not be called democratizing or cooperative. Certainly the history of science-based labs is replete with examples of labs functioning via hierarchy, status-mongering, and cut-throat competition. We need instead, to assess what such a cooperative structure might look like, a question that includes considering the status of expertise to those collaborations. To what extent do such labs

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[15] My comments here offer a friendly rejoinder to Carolyn Dinshaw's "Notes on Experimentation, June 2020", which distinguishes "experimentation" from a University-driven fascination with "innovation." I am more concerned than Dinshaw seems to be on the ways such categories coalesce, particularly in institutions with limited budgets.

[16] For thoughtful commentary on collaboration with an emphasis on the digital, I'd recommend Barrington and Hsy.

[17] This is a key insight made powerfully by Sluiter's "Anchoring Innovation" group: for innovations to be recognized as important or useful, they must be tied firmly to existing structures and frameworks: this 'anchoring' is one crucial reason for linking history to the new. And see, importantly, Edgerton, which serves as the inspiration for the title of this essay. For a longer version of my thoughts on this point, see Ingham, 1-7 and 194-197. Some reviewers of my book have opined that I do not offer a renewed definition of newness—yet this (a single non-ideological definition) is the very thing that *The Medieval New* endeavors to cast as an impossibility. Any stable definition of the 'new' must function ideologically. The "new," I had hoped to show, is an ethical prompt, what Deleuze would call a "problem-question."

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continue to purvey standard academic hierarchies (hint: all the time) as well as offer avenues for useful critiques and self-critiques (a strong feature, in my opinion).

To be clear: I am here neither to bury nor to praise the Humanities Lab—I remain both aware of its limitations and optimistic about its benefits. I am interested, instead, in endorsing the long tradition of collaborative experimentation—and its attendant claim to 'innovation' as one that predates our current moment. The remainder of this essay tells the story of my own experimentation with the lab model in collaboration with a fabulous, interdisciplinary, cross-period group of graduate students at Indiana University in Bloomington during the fall semester of 2019. The course, on the one hand, also involved a strong collaboration with Librarians at IU's Lilly Library, as well as with a series of scholars and researchers who visited us (some virtually; some in person);[18] and on the other, the course leaned into the collaborative possibilities of the graduate seminar. The case of the Chaucer laboratory, we learned, offered exemplary ways to consider the power, pleasures, *and politics* of collaboration of the kind now again in vogue.

Our Humanities Lab

In the early decades of the 20th century, John Matthews Manly (scholar of the literary works of Chaucer and medieval authors and early president of the Modern Language Association) and Edith Rickert (scholar of texts of Chaucer and medieval romance) collaborated at the University of Chicago with other scholars, employees, and graduate students on "The Chaucer Research Project," conventionally known as "The Chaucer Laboratory," a collaboration dedicated to the production of scholarly editions of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and other key medieval texts. Eventually, the Lab would also produce a collection of Chaucer's Life Records. This fact is fairly well known among Chaucerians. Yet from the vantage point of most accounts of the development of 'labs' directed by humanists, as the introduction to this essay demonstrates, the Chaucer Lab emerges as an historical anomaly.[19] It might be recast, at best, as a radical innovation *avant la lettre*; or, at worst, as a case fallen out of history. In other words, the Chaucer laboratory undermines the standard story told about the humanities labs—particularly the assertion that they are a recent disruption to traditional humanities research agendas.

This context prompted our starting question in L 504: Why has this example been so little remembered outside Chaucer Studies, and what can the Chaucer Laboratory teach us about the oppositions of old vs. new, the collaborative vs. the individual scholar? On the one hand, we noted that the example of the Chaucer Laboratory urges attention to the long history of collaborative research methodologies in Chaucer studies, specifically, and textual studies more generally. *The Text of the Canterbury Tales: Studied on the Basis of All Known Manuscripts*[20] took decades to compile. It was based on a set of international collaborations (and intercontinental travel by ship) with archivists and

[18] Our thanks to Maureen Maryanski, Education and Outreach assistant Librarian Lilly Library; Bethany Christiansen, BTAA postdoctoral scholar; Elizabeth Scala, UT Austin; Michelle Warren, Dartmouth University. Maureen and I collaborated on a digested list of items (mostly from the Ricketts collection) that the lab members would eventually examine. Special thanks to Abby Ang, who served as graduate assistant for the course.

[19] From the vantage of Nicholas Taleb's work, The Chaucer Lab might be considered a black swan, something unforeseen. Or we could tell a different story about a longer lab history, to promote and re-value it as the continuation of something with a history of marked innovatives for the discipline. As I wrote in 2015: "It is in narrative that the unusual, the anomalous, or the capricious takes on innovation's dazzle and shine." (Ingham, 2).

[20] Chaucer 1940.

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librarians, private collectors and antiquarians, and it gave employment to a range of students and scholars (many of them women; many of these holding positions we would recognize today as precarious). It offered an account of *every* textual variant in the text of *The Canterbury Tales* from the surviving manuscripts that could be located at the time. As late as the late 90's, when I was first teaching Chaucer, the text and its list of textual variants were available on CD-Rom, and they could easily be mined to devise assignments for undergraduate courses that engaged questions of textual variation and interpretation. From its inception, the Chaucer Lab used the latest technologies (the photo-stat; infra-red technology, the facsimile, for instance) as crucial to its lab work.[21]

It was a monumental project and, like many monumental projects, was never, exactly, finished. But the volumes began to be published in 1940, just before Manly's death but two years after Rickert's in 1938. The introduction to the first volume, alongside diverse scholarly accounts of the Chaucer Laboratory history and project,[22] offered a view of the vicissitudes of this decades-long collaboration. Bloomington Lab members brought keen analytical insights to their reading of these accounts, and they were quick to contrast the fractious, complex, affectively-charged histories of the Chaucer Lab with what they increasingly came to see as today's glib celebrations of the innovations of the Humanities Lab. These accounts often moved us: we had a particularly inspiring lab meeting (a. k. a. seminar session) discussing Manly's poignant words about his recently-deceased collaborator, E. R. Yet the record also abounded in evidence from the darker sides of academic culture, lab-based or not: there was plenty of conflict, pettiness, illness, cruelty, competitive jockeying for position; plenty of evidence for the differential relations rendered by the larger institutional structures inflected (then as now) by credentialing, status, gender, race, and class. New methods can channel old injustices.

Our work took two tracks, one methodological and one focused on traditional research practices. Methodologically, we sought to assess the benefits and liabilities of collaborative work and collaborative writing in a lab setting; we considered the range of possibilities that beckon for the future of the Humanities Labs at research universities. What features of early humanities laboratories might we revive or redirect? What liabilities to the lab model are legible either from the example of the Chaucer Laboratory, or in other examples today? But as we considered these questions, we simultaneously experimented with the lab model for Humanities Research and Teaching, especially beyond the bounds of DH. We focused our attention as a group on a number of late-medieval Books of Hours housed in the Rickett's Collection at IUB's Lilly Library. Each lab member selected one particular item to examine closely. The first order of business involved preparing a comprehensive description as the items varied widely. Some were full codices, others singular leaves or leaf fragments. Some materials had quite extensive descriptions in relevant catalogues, or in the vertical files used to

[21] The sharing of research data from the lab model also leads (eventually, as in the sciences) to future research outputs. Junior scholars on a research team help with the PI's project, and gain access to the data which they can then develop in ways as "their own." We also see this in the Manly-Rickert example. The manuscript materials that M-R collated became the basis of *The Text of the CT* (for which they were the PIs and had first-author status on the publication), but also how collaborators like Germaine Dempster and others used those same collation cards to write their own essays. (I'm grateful to Elizabeth Scala for this insight.) This returns us to questions, both ethical and practical, of proper attribution. The Chaucer Lab had its own controversies over fair attribution of labor and ideas. Attribution and credit remain crucial questions in humanities research today, and so the question deserves a full-length treatment that falls outside the scope of the current essay.

[22] "Preface" to Manly et al.; Bestull; Scala 2005, 2009.

collect references to a given artifact; some merely stub entries; and some no entries at all. Each member started where they were: many were in their first semester of graduate course work; some took the course on account of their interest in the theoretical or methodological issues; a few were advanced graduate students in medieval studies with quite advanced language and research skills. Importantly, every one of us had to learn to begin amidst our confusions, incapacities, or uncertainties. If there were moments of exciting momentum, there were equally moments of friction and disappointment. Some members came up with impressive guesses on unresolved issues of manuscript provenance; another considered the affective charge of reading the "Office of the Dead" from a 14th c. Book of Hours with a history of female ownership; another became fascinated with miniaturization as a feature of codex production; a number of other lab members engaged methodological concerns, from the foundational to the subtle. Precise projects developed as we proceeded, but we emphasized the analytical power of unfamiliarity; the power of experimentation; or the question of what to do with a handmade book that you don't have the skills (yet!) to read. In short, we revealed the power of the unfamiliar in the very familiar context of a Library Reading Room in a small college town in Indiana.[23]

From the start, our research outputs were left undefined; unsurprisingly, some members of the lab initially thought this a dubious prospect. All of which is to say that the intention to constitute ourselves into a collaborative 'lab' took shape over time, and in fits and starts. Here is how the students would ultimately describe this part of their experience, in a guest essay they were invited to write for the *Remix the Brut* webpage at Dartmouth. I will quote from their remarkable reflections at some length:

> [I]n the process of developing individual projects, we found ourselves inevitably drawn into conversation with one another: referring one another to quirky marginalia; following each other down rabbit holes of manuscript provenance; feeling for the life histories of the materials; investigating inconsistencies in the materials' vertical files; and sharing our personal impressions of the sometimes haunting texts before us. Seemingly spontaneously, we generated ourselves as a lab.[24]

Yet if work in the Lilly made these collaborators both engaged and generous with one another, our methodological conversation also generated productive tensions and difficulty. Lab members ultimately decided to compose an essay on these questions in collaborative fashion. And in that work, the example of the Chaucer Lab proved informative precisely because it made legible the frustrations and frictions that collaboration often also produces:

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[23] I want to stress that our *corpora* for consideration were predominantly low-status objects. It may seem that this kind of *practical* course would only be available at institutions with considerable manuscript holdings. To the contrary, the kind of experimentation we took on might be done on a variety of archival material, including University archives, no matter the location. Furthermore, fragments from manuscripts and medieval Books of Hours can be found in a remarkable range of places. The Peripheral Manuscript project is a new collaborative initiative (led by Elizabeth Hebbard at IUB, Ian Cornelius at Loyola Chicago, Sarah Noonan, at St. Mary's College, IN; and Michelle Dalmau, Associate Librarian at IU) and dedicated to digitizing medieval manuscripts and manuscript fragments from 22 non-R1 midwestern colleges and universities. See their website: https://peripheralmss.org/

[24] The authors come from a range of disciplines, methodological interests, and hope to work in various literary periods: Tess J Given, Milo Hicks, Tyler Kniess, Sarah Schmitt, Denise Weisz, Maggie Gilchrist, Joshua Harris, Gregory Tolliver, "Promises and Paradoxes of a Lab," a guest post. Please read it at:
https://sites.dartmouth.edu/RemixBrut/2020/06/18/promises-and-paradoxes-of-a-lab/.
Special thanks to Michelle Warren for her characteristic generosity in reviewing the piece and offering comments and edits for the venue.

> The diverse approaches, interests, and expertise of our lab members meant that there were many moments of friction and frustration at every stage of the project. These tensions became essential for thinking through the lab as a space for embracing (mis)interpretation. As our lab coalesced our individual projects into a collaborative paper, the (mis)interpretive space of our humanities lab became its own critical object. Our attention to the prefaces written by and about those involved in the Chaucer Lab cued us to the value of the paratext. Like the margins of the medieval manuscript, these paratextual spaces allow for conversations across time.

As these uncommonly thoughtful young humanists made their companionable way through quite challenging material, even as they worked diligently to manage the diversities among them. Their willingness to work together, navigating intellectual and interpersonal conversations and working to manage disagreement without closing it down, proved a remarkable example of humanities collaborations at their very best. This work demonstrated the power of the history for new method and the force of collaboration as crucial for the intellectual labor of humanists. Considering their insights, and their place in the bright future for humanities research and teaching, I think it best to give Tess Given, Milo Hicks, Tyler Kniess, Sarah Schmitt, Denise Weisz, Maggie Gilchrist, Joshua Harris, and Gregory Tolliver the last word:

> During our time in the Lilly Library, we were struck by the simultaneously fragile and durable link between the past and present. . . . In retrospect, our work in the Lilly Library anticipated the project that came after: a collaborative essay that took shape primarily in digital space (currently in revision for publication). The group of students who had huddled over a shared folio became a flurry of cursors in a Google Doc. Readers who had interpreted oily smudges in a medieval manuscript later puzzled over the implications of a question mark in a group email. Our humanities lab depended on these moments when someone was both absent and present, both in the room and physically not. Such bridges across time and space left room for misinterpretation—both frustrating and productive—with our dead and living collaborators.

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