



The Political Economy of Publishing in Geography¹

Pamela Moss

Faculty of Human & Social Development, University of Victoria
PO Box 1700 STN CSC, Victoria, BC, V8W 2Y2, Canada, E-mail:

PamelaM@uvic.ca

Lawrence D. Berg

Department of Geography, Okanagan University College
Vernon, BC, V1B 2N5, Canada, E-mail: Lberg@ouc.bc.ca

Caroline Desbiens

Department of Geography/Women's Studies Program, University of Georgia
Athens, GA 30602, USA, E-mail: Desbiens@uga.edu

What's New in Journal Publishing?

During the last few years, a spate of new journals emerged, not just in geography but across the academy. Specialisation may partly have been the motivation behind the proliferation. No doubt too frustration over the wait for published material has been influential in forcing new publishing options into the market. But for us, the decentralization of knowledge production has been a major — perhaps the most significant — factor that has influenced this surge of interest in academic journal publishing. With the success of founding so many “new” fields of knowledge has been the recognition that there are markets within the academy that are no longer part of the

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orthodoxy that has sustained academe for so many years. Intensified pressure within the academy to publish more has also pushed publishers to cater to the publication needs of the “intellectual.”

Yet few among these new ventures — many of which focus on analyses that are part of challenging the orthodoxy of society, polity, and economy — challenge the political economy of academic journal publishing. Conventional publishing methods for journals in paper are increasing in price, partly because the circulation of “specialized” journals is smaller and partly because of the shifts and changes in the telecommunications industry with the popularization of, and easier access to, the internet. In many fields the “state of the art” has changed by the time articles come out in print. The relative quickness that e-journals can provide is increasingly attractive as demands on more publications prior to tenure rise. The challenge to publishers of paper journals has been so strong that publishers are providing electronic versions of articles in print — accessible as long as you or your institution’s library has paid a subscription fee. The electronic versions are still available only upon publication in paper copy format.

Unlike these journals, we think *ACME* has something different to offer. We think web publishing, more than conventional paper publishing, is positioned to challenge the political economy of journal publishing. Our underlying purpose in creating an international e-journal for critical geographies is to make critical work accessible for free. We set no subscription fee. We do not publish for profit. The labour put into the journal is voluntary — editors, editorial board members, reviewers, and the occasional person who has wanted to contribute to the project. Authors, too, are asked to assist with formatting and proofing beyond what would regularly be the case with paper journal publishing. The purpose here for us is not smug self-righteousness. Everyone involved takes on the labour as part of their regular workload if employed and as part of their politics if unemployed. No one depends on the journal for their livelihood. Although all the labour is voluntary, there are still some costs involved in the production. We created the journal out of small developmental grants from the Faculty of Arts at Okanagan University College and the Faculty of Human & Social Development at the University of Victoria. This money was targeted (and spent!) for graphic design, hardware, software, and (ironically) bookmarks for advertisement.

We also chose to take on web publishing because this was the least expensive way to access the most people. We recognize that computer access is not ubiquitous around the globe. But we think that providing a free, critical journal on-line is an effective strategy to challenge the political economy of publishing and hegemony of English language and Northern publishing. This strategy also makes sense in that because of the chronic underfunding of libraries, if there is money, technological improvements are more likely be a priority. Internet access always seems to be at the top of the list.

For us, accessibility has dimensions other than financial. As with other e-journals, the parameters for publishing various types of works shift. Flexibility is the key. We make the work accessible for Braille and text-to-sound readers. Sound bytes, too, have a transcription. The form the piece of work takes need not be solely written prose. As part of our critical interpretation of accessibility, we encourage authors to submit works in an assortment of formats – prose, poetry, still images, sound, and video. In short, there is no longer the mandate to publish conventional academic papers (although there is still the

possibility). The mandate now is more encompassing: to make critical pieces of work accessible in production, presentation, and circulation.

Because we have chosen accessibility as the key feature, we also have to address the tension of innovation and legitimacy. We need to demonstrate that we are indeed a serious journal. We chose portable document format (pdf) so that page references are consistent from one citation to another, from the print-out of one printer to another, from the browser of one computer to another. Sometimes with on-line publishing in hyper text mark-up language (html), the page numbers vary widely depending on the formatting the downloader uses. As another practice to legitimate the journal as a serious academic journal, we chose to use a rigorous peer review process. In this way, ACME is just like any other academic journals – a peer-reviewed, rigorous, scholarly publication devoted to excellence in critical analysis and praxis. Academics, professionals, artists, and writers alike can “count” their published work toward their tenure and promotion cases, resumes, portfolios, and *oeuvres*.

A Critical Imaginary with a Critical Praxis

Yes, there are several national and international journals that now publish critical geographies both within and outside the discipline of geography. Some of these journals that do publish critical work tend to reflect the organization of the discipline of geography either according to topic — cultural, political, social, economic — or according to region or political unit, the latter often arranged through professional organizations. Other journals publishing critical geography, often organized along the lines of a theoretical or political approach, tend to focus on a particular set of theories or politics. Put simply, there is no umbrella journal that publishes a range of critical approaches to understanding, explaining, and acting on power relations that are explicitly about space, place, and geography. Pulling together an array of these varying approaches to theory and praxis is the critical imaginary of the journal.

By the phrase “critical imaginary,” we are hoping to evoke notions of an amalgam of critical thinking, radical analysis, and politicized activities. We are interested in work done from a variety of critical and radical perspectives, as for example, anarchist, anti-racist, environmentalist, feminist, Marxist, postcolonial, poststructuralist, queer, situationist, and socialist. By critical thinking and radical analysis we mean that the work is part of the praxis of social and political change aimed at challenging, dismantling, and transforming prevalent relations, systems, and structures of capitalist exploitation, oppression, imperialism, neo-liberalism, national aggression, and environmental destruction. We do not intend to develop yet another journal that collectively distances theory from a practical politics; rather, through the publishing of myriad types of work, we seek to demonstrate *collectively* that the links between theorizing and activism are valuable, even indispensable. It is in this context that we are looking for works that push the boundaries both of critical theorizing and of practical, radical strategies for social and political change. Thus, topics of study found in the pages of the journal can just as readily be an ontological argument in favour of fusing environmentalist politics with an essentialist view of sex as a short report on strategies a community group found useful in protesting a municipality’s closure of a recreation center. For us, what matters is that there is a commitment to the larger project of effecting change from critical and radical perspectives.

This critical imaginary would mean nothing for us unless there was a critical praxis to go along with it. The issue for us became the integration of a critical praxis into what can be viewed primarily as an academic project — academics founding a journal to circulate information about disciplinary activist and research interests. We identified areas where we could engage a critical praxis — structure of the editorial boards, review process, publication languages, and copyright model. As the journal ages, we hope that our praxis too matures.

We chose to structure the journal as a co-edited undertaking with a relatively small working Editorial Board (most of whom have someone nearby to work with) and a more widely-based Advisory Editorial Board. We considered the traditional response to hierarchical boards, that is, a collective, co-operative model, but decided against for two primary reasons. First, the strength of a collective or co-op is the synergy of interaction. Given our already agreed upon commitment to challenging the political economy of publishing, getting together to meet and discuss manuscripts seemed unreasonable and financially impossible. Second, being engaged in collaborative models of decision-making inevitably increases workloads. Given that we were already taking on this project “off the side of our desk,” we were reticent to set up a collective process that would demand so much time from already overworked colleagues. The collective decision-making mostly goes on between us as editors. We do the conceptual and detailed labour to move a piece of work to publication. We work with individual Editorial Board members on specific projects and seek input on particular topics or issues that arise in the course of our duties as editors. Editorial Board members also engage in reviewing submissions. Advisory Board members generally provide names of people to review submissions and may occasionally review a paper. They also provide a certain amount of legitimacy to the project. Members of both editorial boards provide input into the critical imaginary either at board meetings (held at the AAG and ICCG meetings) or upon request.

We decided to create an open, more flexible review process. Rather than focusing on the option of the reviewers to reveal their name (which has been the choice for more progressive journal collectives), we developed an “open by choice” process that involves the author as well as the reviewers. Usually, authors choose to reveal their names first and the piece of work is passed along to the reviewers with the name attached. Also part of this review process is the circulation of all reviewer comments to all the reviewers. Again, revelation of name is by choice. Contesting the culture of peer review as an editor is difficult because there is a tension between providing constructive feedback to the authors and maintaining the integrity of the feedback that the reviewers provide. There is the argument that this places authors in a doubly disadvantaged position — they submit their work for review and they reveal who they are before reviewers make their choice. So far we’ve had mixed results — some authors were reticent to put their name forward initially and some reviewers preferred not to reveal their names. Authors have been enthusiastic about taking on the suggestions reviewers have made to enhance the piece of work. We will continue using this flexible review process because we think that it builds a critical engagement among authors and critics whereby there is some negotiation of power within the practice of peer review. As a result, the piece will inevitably become stronger.

We recognize the hegemony of the English language in academia and therefore we are committed to publishing in a variety of languages. Although technologically we are limited to publishing in alphabetic languages (at the moment — though this could change at any time), we are willing to work with authors in any language. We are willing to

develop the resources to make the journal multi-lingual in a bid to make it truly “international.” At the same time, we also recognize that along with Anglo-hegemony is the prestige associated with having a publication in English for people working for, in, and with non-English-language-based institutions. Thus, we are willing to set up the review process in the language of the submission. And, only when the piece of work is in its final form, would we request translation. Unfortunately, at least for now, we do not have the resources to do translations.

We chose to publish only original material. In this sense, our approach to publishing is a conventional way to promote a particular vision of the journal. However, instead of demanding copyright be passed to the journal, we honour the authors’ claims to copyright. In exchange for publication, we ask that the author give the journal the right to publish their piece of work in perpetuity. If there were to be a request to re-publish the piece of work in an anthology or a magazine, the author grants permission. The journal requests only that recognition be given to the journal as the first place it had been published.

In order to demonstrate our commitment to multiple critical projects that academics and activists are engaged in, we have arranged to include several sections of journal: *Editorials*, *Commentaries*, *Research Articles*, *Review Essays*, *Activist Strategies*, *Critical Approaches in ...*, and *Progress Reports*.

- *Editorials* are short, opinion pieces usually between 1500 and 2000 words. These pieces will be written mostly by the Editors and members of the editorial boards.
- *Commentaries* are relatively short pieces (about 3000 words) that address some interest to the journal’s readers. They can communicate a variety of messages — proscriptions, reflections, or opinions on relevant issues. They need not be based on empirical research nor do they need to contribute to a theoretical or philosophical understanding of a topic.
- *Research Articles* are larger manuscripts focusing on empirical studies or theoretical exposition that are between 5,000 and 8,000 words.
- There are two types of *Review Essays*. First are book review essays (about 3000 words, but will vary depending on the number of books reviewed). There is the expectation that there be extensive engagement with the content of the book. Second are literature review essays (about 5000 words). These essays are to be thorough and innovative and should creatively summarise or extend newly emerging fields in critical studies.
- *Activist Strategies* (between 2500 and 5000 words) are praxis reports and essays. These focus on concrete examples of how critical praxis plays out in specific places.
- *Critical Approaches in ...* are longer pieces (about 7000 words) that set a context for a particular field of study, as for example, critical approaches in economic geography, or a particular place, as for example, critical approaches in Hungarian Geography. This context can be historical, contemporary, social, cultural, economic, etc.

- *Progress Reports* are short write-ups (about 2500 words) of ongoing projects (research or activist) being undertaken. These publications are intended to raise issues that provide insight or pose questions to critical analysis and praxis.

Although the vast majority of contributions to the journals will be unsolicited, we will from time to time solicit a person to prepare a presentation on a particular topic.

Naming

Although we have come to talk about the name near the end of our editorial, we actually undertook to name the journal early in the project. We wanted something that would capture our enlarged notion of accessibility as well as our critical imaginary with critical praxis. We thought that maybe *ACME* would encapsulate what we wanted to convey — the notion of being at the peak, zenith, and pinnacle as well as the notion of being part of the generic, the commonplace, and the ordinary. *ACME* is a statement for both academics and activists to the apex of excellence and the everyday struggle for change. We want to step a little further away from the conventional models of academic exchange; to move a little closer to activist translations of knowledge and political acts; and to push both toward a critical understanding of the links between the two.



This inaugural collection represents a range of critical academic pursuits within geography. Although it is our plan not to introduce the works comprising an issue or a volume, we make an exception in this first issue to draw out some links among these works to *ACME's* critical imaginary. We offer these articles here as a way to read critical initiatives in thinking and acting.

- Trevor Barnes, in his *Commentary*, reflects on both his experiences of and contributions to building a body of critical work in economic geography. His insight into his past permits readers a glimpse of the process through which radical possibilities inspire scholarship and political acts and how they seemingly pass into the present, providing a history of a sub-discipline. He closes with the point that critical analysis is not only about explanation and critique; it needs also to anticipate a vision of a better world.
- David Butz, in “Resistance, representation, and *third space*,” rethinks the notion of resistance through the material struggles of porters in Northern Pakistan. He theorizes the trail itself as a specific *third space* where traditional confrontational resistant strategies have been supplanted by informal, tactical, and well-informed resistance. Through a constitutive notion of space, he is able to provide a critical explanation of the constitution of hybridity in subjectivity through specific fields of domination.
- David Wilson, in “Constructing a black-on-black violence,” provides a nuanced explanation of a complex empirical reality. His critical insight into the spatiality of discourse shows that the rise of black on black violence has been publicly attributed to moral decay in black urban neighbourhoods. His analysis affords a

critical look at the ways in which policy and, subsequently, the ways these policies are taken up in the public realm, are fuelled by conservative values, feeding into a conservative agenda.

- Richa Nagar, in “Women’s theatre and the redefinitions of public, private, and politics in North India,” works from the premise that theories need to be messier. She reads three different types of theatrical performances by women in North India and considers how each performance manifests a feminist politics. Her critical approach to both theorizing meaning and materiality shows how people marginalized by specific constellations of relations of oppression reconstitute public and private spaces through various socio-political identities via performance and resistance.
- Nadine Schuurman, in “Reconciling social constructivism and realism in GIS,” seeks to travel the chasm between the epistemological assumptions of geographic information science or systems (GIS) and its critics. She goes through specific examples of research in GIS to demonstrate how realist and social constructivist claims play out in GIS. Through critical insight into how values play out in scientific inquiry, she is able to show that even though GIS is socially constructed — even to the point that there are social influences at the technical level — there is still value in using GIS to simulate real situations.
- Stuart Aiken and James Craine, in their innovative challenge to conventional notions of (re)presentation — in “The pornography of despair” — argue that social relations can be mediated by emotion, and by desire in particular. They demonstrate how the soundworlds — lyrics *with* the music — of Matt Johnson (from *The The*) construct multiple masculinities that challenge socially constructed heterosexual normative desire. The complexity of their argument surfaces through their engagement with the tensions among representations of heterosexual male desire and the acts arising out of trying to figure out what to do with it.