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### ***Space and Culture as critical practice and as space of culture***

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What does it mean to create a literary and public space, such as a journal, for reflecting on culture as itself a form of space? What are they as intellectual spaces? Perhaps because they exist as Prefaces and presentations, reflections by journal founders and editors are relatively difficult to trace in print. Bibliometrics substitutes numeric data for experience but tends to provide little new insight. In the early 1980s, White and Griffith (1982) showed the relevance of co-citations to create bibliometric clusters of topics and researchers.

Beginning with editorial work assisted by Monica Degen in **1996**, *Space and Culture* will attain its 20<sup>th</sup> year of publication in 2017. Joost Van Loon and Ian Roderick came on board as Editors. Thinking about the spatial evolved over these two decades into network and relational approaches. Journals such as *Cultural Geography*, *Topia* and many others were established and some have continued. Questions about particular spaces and places, projects and constructions have raised questions of not only continuity in relations, social and ethical forms but of breaks, bifurcations and crises points.

To a certain extent, journals occupy a **specific niche in the ecology** and process of academic reporting and dialogue. The unique quality of this process is that it is simultaneously asynchronous and synchronous. Historically, journals, newsletters and magazines were sequential, **epistolary** communications to a specific group of subscribers and insiders who formed an audience and as such a collective. As **asynchronous** communication, academic journals created not only a stream of issues but a space of introspection and proclamation. The publications are received sequentially, they are not always progressive. That is, they have a variable set of dimensions: a linear sequence, focused recollection and reflection, and a reflexive quality in which elements of the collection that may be from the distant past are recalled and the possibility of external elements being drawn into the discussion. Particular articles may relate directly to each other or be contiguously linked as a particular issue. If journals are linear, then they have additional dimensions; they **have loops and knots**, like an Inca Qiupu string text. The preoccupations of journals can also split into separate themes that emerge through co-citation and coalescence around particular problems and topics.

The resulting tissue is a set of relations that have the qualities of a space. In this sense, one can talk of an intellectual space of concepts and sentiment, as well as a journal as a textual space. New relationships of opposition and concurrence; coincidence and divergence; precedence and anticipation can be articulated in an article which relates together and brings forward older texts from different periods as well as external sources.

Today, journals are encountered as archival databases of articles. Little remains of the unity of printed issues except a logo or symbolic thumbnail of the cover. In this sense, they are **synchronous** collections. A bit like a well that is dipped into with the aid of search engines and browsers.

### **The Nature of Niches**

These intellectual spaces, however are **not isolated**, '**sovereign subjects**' that make sovereign decisions on direction. Rather, they are

'embedded in complex networks of institutions and practices over which the editorial team has limited control; chief among them are the conventions of peer review, the proliferation of academic journals, the escalating pressures on academics to publish and the ceaseless struggle to improve ranking and citations... Like the spaces of large cities, journals too become spaces crucial for the formation of individual and group identities, something that is accompanied by much agonizing about quality, acceptance, purity, contamination and even annihilation' (Gabriel 2010:757).

Increasingly journals are **impacted by and implicated in academic rankings**, and preoccupation with indicators of prestige and status as signs of success. Some critics have argued that 'As editors become more preoccupied by the ranking of 'their' journal, they exercise performative power over authors, by setting standards for publication that exclude many while compelling those that are published to adapt to the styles, priorities and imperatives of editors. One result has been a ceaseless quest for novelty, manifest in an insistence that each paper must make a 'distinctive' theoretical contribution' (Tourish 2011:367). Overwhelmed editors are in a way, tired of words, disaffected by text.

However, rankings are *virtual* indicators of academic success and probable estimates of the impact of submissions. That is, they are **virtual** in that they offer a translation of impact and relevance of past contributions, positive or negative, that is **applied to the journal 'as if' it engendered the citations** rather than their authors. Indicators might also be thought of as *probabilistic* in that they are treated as **signs of the 'actually-possible'** likelihood of future citations.

Academic entry into publication is governed by practices and conventions of **rational critique** 'at once the bedrock of academic discourse but also capable of inflicting much damage and of prematurely closing promising lines of inquiry' (Tourish 2011:367). Tourish argues that this must be complemented by an ethic of care which recognizes the limits to rationality. This is rarely resorted to, but I would argue that any rereading of, for example, Donna Haraway's '**Cyborg Manifesto**' would find an article that would struggle to be published in a contemporary journal, even if it is given the benefit of a historically sensitive appraisal in the context of the date of its first publication.

The idea that citations and co-citations between authors mark the nodes and contours of patterned intellectual communities is an old one (White and Griffith 1982). However, there is risk that journals come to be intellectual **gated communities** in which only one type of public discourse is deemed acceptable. This can happen as easily as in the case where editors repeatedly ask one question of manuscripts, 'what does this tell me about...?' 'How is this positioned with respect to...?' Or where conventional citation of masters as a launching point takes over whether that be Marx, Foucault or Luhmann. This represents a disenfranchisement of outsiders.

### ***Space and Culture***

Certainly there are different types of academic journal. The amazing thing is **how difficult it is to reinvent** the form. We have experimented with **online publications**, including a blog format Spaceandculture.com . However these don't hold the loyalty or affinity of contributors and readers the way a printed object seems to. This affective aspect of the materiality of an otherwise quite abstract entity suggests a rich future for those that do find expression on paper. Maybe this is reflected in the continued use, across the board, of paper-era citations rather than digital indexes such as DOI numbers. One example is the Asian journal *Transit* printed with illustrations using what looks like a paper master

at about 150dpi (similar to the old Gestetner technology) on industrial paper that is similar in feel to paper napkins. Another is the online and in-print annual of the *Sarai* collective in New Delhi.

Speaking from experience with not only *Space and Culture* but several others such as a print journal *Theory Culture and Society*, a French journal *Espaces et Sociétés*, and an online journal *FastCapitalism.com* journals have a complex topology but a few shared features. These involve both space and time. Journals have the qualities of both knotted lines and spaces. This entailed grasping culture in its **topological** sense as relational, which brings to bear relations in time as well as space. Journals have both duration and tempo. If *Space and Culture* has been around for 20 or so years, like other journals it also operates on the **temporal availability of volunteers**. Unlike some European language academic publications, most English-language journals are not supported by paid editors nor do they attract the support of most university administrators. Publishing other peoples' work may seem hardly a recipe for success. Editors and founders especially are unusual in that they are both entrepreneurs willing to take the risk of appearing foolish – the first dismissive comment one usually hears is about vanity publishing – and being patient over many years with both contributors and presses, whom editors are stuck between.

In the contemporary context of online publications, and the proliferation of re-posted memes and short comments, journals **slow down** debate. They impose a brake of up to two years on the publication of articles. This has had two results: many articles now exist in a prepublication form that can be more widely read and referred to than the published version that is being cited. Unless an editorial article is created, titles of theme issues can be lost in indexing databases. Without careful attention, digital indexing practices remove some of the 'flags' an editor or guest editor can wave, so to speak. The other effect is that authors find themselves revising papers not only in the light of referee comments but after the **passage of months**, during which their understand has also changed. Articles, while authored, are also the result of collegial discussions, referees comments and editor's direction. They in some ways express a temporary moment and corner of the intellectual community that is the journal.

### **The political**

In what ways has an interest in 'space and culture' effectively responded to political questions and ideological crises? Was it important? These questions and crises are challenging in that they are both localized and globally significant; they disproportionately affect specific groups/identities/statuses but raise general questions of justice, equity, respect and care.

In 2006, *Space and Culture* was **first into print** amongst academic publications reflecting on Hurricane Katrina and the flooding of New Orleans in 14 weeks. This was the precursor to a series of disasters that came to be understood as signs of climate change. The format of this response was an issue of 25 relatively short papers from both well-known intellectuals and simply those who responded to an urgent Call for Papers, including visually. That particular issue, published in Dec 2006, has a certain mosaic quality to it, a 'spread' of analysis. Critique is often theorized under the rubric of the temporal. This was one example of where a certain space of concern was created which had a critical impact in subsequent writing and in policy.

This projects' affinity for the spatial has directed attention to forms, relations and to intersections rather than institutions and identities. Reading across over 300 articles, and around 3000 submissions, this is one of the significant hallmarks of an **emergent approach to space** and to culture as processual rather than categorical. 'It happens' and 'we happen' with it rather than it stands and we look in from outside

of a structure. This process of 'social spatialisation' is at the core of the identity of the journal. Spatialisation is an ongoing process of spacing and placing activities here and other activities there. It is both a **noun and verb**, tangible and intangible. Spatialisation encompasses **material bodies** and **performative practices**, **abstract codes**, plans and representations and constitutes a **virtual framework** and horizon of experience and **anticipates probable** developments.

However, the limitations are to continually contextualize what many authors would rather highlight as a focus. Gender, race, specific places and cities are displaced by racialized community in a city, gendered performances in spaces, or the right to the city as an ethic.

*Space and Culture* was initially established to create an **invisible college**. Both a space and an archive. It is up to others to judge the relative merits of the ensemble. However it felt great. Academic careers are more and more precarious, contentious and stymied by obtuse bureaucracy and lack of resources. But founding and editing a journal has never had the frustration of so many other academic tasks. Even if marginalized in annual career and research assessments, these are short-term. Involvement with a journal is rewarding on its own terms as a project for the long-run. As a career accomplishment, there is no more differentiating and outstanding marker, no more irrefutable qualification, no when one looks at the overall span of a career -- which is short. But made sweeter by establishing a journal.

### **Selected References**

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