

EASA Media Anthropology Network - discussions -

<http://www.media-anthropology.net/>

Informal discussion on JOURNALS and OPEN ACCESS PUBLISHING

Medianthro mailing list
25 – 29 April 2007

Subject: [Mediantthro] Trouble with journals
From: John Postill <jpostill@usa.net>
Date: Wed, 25 Apr 2007 09:53:52 +0100

Max Forte wrote:

> I am also a very passionate proponent of open access publishing, and in that
> vein I am the editor of a specialized, peer reviewed journal titled, KACIKE:
> The Journal of Caribbean Amerindian History and Anthropology (at
> www.kacike.org), which has encountered absolutely *none* of the problems that
> opponents of open access journals normally list.

I'm glad Max has brought up the subject of journals as I've been discussing this issue with colleagues recently and it seems to me (and others) that something's seriously wrong with how the system works. I've experienced firsthand and heard stories of journal submissions where one is kept waiting anything between 12 and 24 months before hearing any substantial news, and that's after having chased this up with the journal a number of times. At the same time, authors are not allowed to submit the same piece to another journal, so often at the end of a very long wait a rejection comes and they're back to square one having wasted precious months.

It's clear that people are busy and that peer reviews take time, but should we really have to wait 12-15 months, or even longer, for a response? Perhaps journals should commit themselves to a reasonable waiting period (say, max 4 months) and publish figures of the time it takes them on average to get back to prospective contributors? Or perhaps contributors themselves should publish or circulate these figures in the public domain?

Any thoughts on this?

Subject: Re: [Mediantthro] Trouble with journals
From: "S.Pink" <S.Pink@lboro.ac.uk>
Date: Wed, 25 Apr 2007 10:10:19 +0100

Perhaps media anthro starts a journal that commits itself to appropriate waiting times?

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Subject: Re: [Mediantthro] Trouble with journals
From: simone abram <s.abram@sheffield.ac.uk>
Date: Wed, 25 Apr 2007 10:33:24 +0100

ASA is about to announce an online publication series. One discussion we have been having is about whether refereeing should remain anonymous. There are clearly pros and cons, so if anyone has experience of journals with open refereeing, we'd be interesting in what the response has been.

Simone

Subject: Re: [Mediantro] Trouble with journals
From: "S.Pink" <S.Pink@lboro.ac.uk>
Date: Wed, 25 Apr 2007 11:39:42 +0100
Organization: Loughborough University

Given that if the person is either well known or specifically known to the reader then it is usually obvious who an article has been written by I think that trying to hide the identity of the author is pointless - it just means that some you know and some you don't which creates another type of inequality
Sarah

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Subject: Re: [Mediantro] Trouble with journals
From: Vered Amit <vamit@alcor.concordia.ca>
Date: Wed, 25 Apr 2007 09:20:47 -0400

In many cases, editors already find it very difficult to find reviewers. Insisting on the identity of reviewers being made known to the reader could well make it even more difficult. It might also discourage critical reviews where criticism, including recommendations not to publish, is appropriate.

I agree with John that the length of time taken by many journals in responding to a manuscript submission is a matter of increasing concern. It certainly imperils the objective of timely publication of research findings. I suspect that these delays are resulting from a combination of:

- 1) increasing submissions to journals as a new generation of scholars is coming under pressure to publish
- 2) difficulties in recruiting reviewers so that editors are reluctant to insist on a quick turnaround by reviewers for fear of making this task even harder
- 3) the volume of work involved in editing journals which makes it difficult to keep track of the length of time a reviewer has held onto a review. Many editors are working with a shoestring operation and have little or no clerical assistance

I'm not sure that either electronic publishing or open reviewing will resolve any of these difficulties. Indeed a further proliferation of journals could make it even more difficult to find reviewers.

sincerely
Vered

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Subject: Re: [Medianthro] Trouble with journals
From: "S.Pink" <S.Pink@lboro.ac.uk>
Date: Wed, 25 Apr 2007 14:32:14 +0100
Organization: Loughborough University

Vered & All

I think Vered makes very valid points which explain well the situation. But this does not change the fact that there is something gravely wrong with a system in which someone might spend over a year waiting for their article to be rejected, especially when journal articles have become so crucial to career progression.

Perhaps one of the questions is how might academics be encouraged to be more active and responsible as reviewers?

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Subject: Re: [Medianthro] Trouble with journals
From: Gabriella Coleman <biella@gmail.com>
Date: Wed, 25 Apr 2007 11:01:48 -0600

I recently had a conversation with a colleague about this topic as she had an article in the pipes for 19 months and I have had one now in the pipes for 14 months. And indeed, I found out about 4months ago that one reason it has been so long was because one of the two reviewers kept stalling, every month for like 8 months and the editors did not "notice." This, I think is the fault of the journal editors, and one solution lies in editors being a little tougher and giving tough deadlines and just moving on to the next reviewers if the original reviewers don't pony up the goods.

Admittedly, the points Vered raised (1, 2, 3) are very real and act as significant constraints but my response would be: that journals should try to be more strict because calling folks on their abuse, just might work on its own (and I know of one top anthro journal that has in the last year tried hard to do this and apparently it has worked).

Second, if there are so many junior scholars who are flooding the journals, this also means there is a small army of junior scholars who also become very quickly slightly less junior, available for reviewing. And while you can't only count on junior reviewers, when you are using 2-5 reviewers as these journals do, surely using the mass of junior faculty can help alleviate the problem.

We also talked about the lack of incentives in doing reviews, for they offer very little official 'payback' and yet take quite a bit of time, in a context when professors are already overworked. And perhaps a solution could be crafted whereby more recognition was built into the system. My friend proposed that reviews should be included in people's

(interal) cv's for such things like tenure review and promotion, where you would include a list of articles/book reviewed (and include the date you received it and when you returned it.). All of a sudden, how long you take or how quick you are is open to a slightly wider public than just your editors.

While I am somewhat ambivalent about this path (for its obvious, disciplinary implications) but then again, if we are judged anyway, why not include in the judgement an assesment of whether we are "good citizens," in doing things like completeing reviews on time and be rewarded for it, just as with good teaching and publications..??

Anyway, not sure what the right solution is, but indeed, some sort of solutions are needed and it is good to have this conversation.

Biella

Subject: Re: [Medianthro] Trouble with journals
From: Sarah Pink <S.Pink@lboro.ac.uk>
Date: Wed, 25 Apr 2007 22:14:48 +0100

I was just going to write something similar about incentives for reviewers: indeed having been invited to review and article and ALSO having actually done so on time ought to be considered an indicator that at scholar is esteemed in some way. This might not only be part of the CV of the individual but could also be used as a way of indicating the prestige of academic departments. If embedded in a system in this way academics might feel that it is not only their own research achievements that are valued by their departments but also their wider contribution to the development of scholarship in the form of reviewing others work. This might help busy academics to feel that they are able to justify spending time doing a review of an article.

We probably won't change the system simply by discussing it on this list, but it is certainly good to discuss it!

Sara

Subject: Re: [Medianthro] Trouble with journals
From: "Maximilian C. Forte" <mforte@alcor.concordia.ca>
Date: Thu, 26 Apr 2007 02:01:50 -0400

I have mixed feelings about the role of peer review in the social sciences, and in some ways this really is connected to the question of open access electronic publishing. Inevitably I agree and disagree with a little of each message so far.

In my case, I have had very rigorous, fastidious, detailed, and demanding reviews undertaken by anonymous reviewers. I have also received the same high quality of critical commentary from friends.

I have had very amateurish, dismissive, hasty reviews done by anonymous reviewers. In some cases, in interdisciplinary ventures, editors who failed to clean up the digital properties of the Word files they forwarded to me betrayed the identity of the reviewers. After a quick Google search, I discovered that two individuals in one project were in business communication & public relations, and management studies, and they were lecturing me about what makes ethnography ethnographic. I have also received some rough treatment by friends, who were not impressed with the ideas and purposes of a particular piece of work, and tried their best to convince me that I was producing rubbish. In one case, a very close friend told me: "I thought this sucked bad on page one, and to my surprise it actually kept getting worse!" as an opening line. Sometimes friends can feel most

comfortable in speaking plainly and directly, and one might be tempted to respect their negative opinions more and with less defensiveness.

With that kind of background, I am simply not convinced of the merits of peer review, or its demerits. Peer review, I think--but please tell me if I am wrong--like the journal report, is an import of the natural sciences. If you are boasting of a new technique for brain surgery, yes, I can imagine having experts examine and validate your claims would be absolutely essential. Is what we write comparably sensitive or threatening? In some cases, maybe yes...but in most?

I also do not think that anonymity necessarily leads to high quality, or prevents nepotism (at least not on an intellectual level...hence those journals with numerous articles that all sound like they were written by the same Foucauldian person). What I find most disconcerting is the notion that peer review is done once, and never again, and it all happens prior to publication.

We have many peers, most of whom will read our work *after* it has been published--I want to hear their opinions too. We also have potential public constituencies, those that some of us might call "lay persons"--I want to hear their opinions too. I want to be able to respond, and I want a record of the dialogue as it might be edifying to readers and researchers with similar interests. I also want to revise again some time in the future. Rubbish can and does get published anyway, but I would love to have the chance to clean up my own.

Electronic, open access publishing is especially useful for achieving these last aims, and putting them into practice. Revision should be ongoing; it should not appear with a time or date stamp.

In addition, we are allowed the freedom to implement our models, to manage our affairs in the ways we deem best, when we are not constantly being "partnered" as dependents of some multinational publishing corporation, whose ultimate interests are always profit and the anti-democratic monopolization of information. I can imagine being subordinate to such interests when one has little choice...but this is not an activity that should demand our subordination.

Anyway, thanks for allowing me the chance to write this novel.

Very best wishes,

Max.

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Subject: Re: [Medianthro] Trouble with journals
From: M.D.Way@westminster.ac.uk
Date: Fri, 27 Apr 2007 10:28:31 +0100

The problem is not just with journals - I was asked to write an article for a book in 2002. I submitted it in December, 2002. It has still not been published, but has been at the publishers for at least a year now.

Maria

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Subject: Re: [Medianthro] Trouble with journals
From: Guido Ipsen <guido.ipsen@uni-dortmund.de>
Date: Fri, 27 Apr 2007 12:00:46 +0200

Maria, count yourself lucky with this single pending article. Meanwhile, I am waiting for SIX articles to finally appear somewhere. All submitted, all positively reviewed, all accepted - all pending. Please note that the editors/publishers are by no means no-names in all of the cases. I wish they were subjected to the usual deadlines in the economy. They'd lose their posts in a week, or sooner.

Best,
Guido

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Subject: Re: [Medianthro] Trouble with journals
From: Gabriela Vargas-Cetina <gabyvargasc@prodigy.net.mx>
Date: Fri, 27 Apr 2007 09:04:34 -0400

As someone who likes to put together books and special issues of journals (I have edited three books and been guest-editor of three special issues of different journals) I have come to accept and understand that anything related to publishing takes time, but that is the way things are in academia.

First, journal editors are regular professors who are not paid by the journals they edit: they do that work on top of their own work at their universities. Usually only the Assistant Editor gets paid, and this person is completely overwhelmed by all the things s/he has to do. This is why it is so hard for journals to change editors, because now universities do not want to fund journals, so those who accept the job do it practically against the will of their Deans and the rest of the hierarchy.

Second, it is hard to find reviewers, since everyone is so busy and universities demand increasingly more tasks from their professors.

Third, those who are editors of books or articles have to find time of their own to work with each individual author before the book or special issue is finally completed. Not all authors are prompt, and at least the way I see it is that when you think of a book or a special issue it is because you know a number of authors whose work is key for the theme. So, while some wait, others take longer to submit.

Fourth, some of the papers might be revised by the author more than once, because of the editor's queries. This takes time for thinking and re-thinking.

Five, publishing houses and journals have their own internal politics, because people out there are not reading very much, so they have to find ways to stay afloat. This might mean putting back the release of some books or articles so others considered more attractive are featured. For example, a journal may have a policy of putting out a special issue each year, so that issue might have to wait until a number of assorted issues are published for it to enter the actual publication cycle.

Academic journals and books are part of a very fragile economy of prestige. They are only imperfectly integrated in the capitalist system. There is a push to turn academic books and academic into 'regular' commodities, but this is something we all have to fight back, if we want our work to be taken for its academic content rather than for the market value it gives the authors.

Gabriela Vargas-Cetina

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Subject: Re: [Medianthro] Trouble with journals
From: Guido Ipsen <guido.ipsen@uni-dortmund.de>
Date: Fri, 27 Apr 2007 15:19:56 +0200

Dear Gabriela and all,

Defending a system that does not work by listing the systemic deficiencies might help to save the good editors' credits, however it does not help the scientific community.

Most of us have been involved in editing projects, I presume, and I know the problems myself.

This is how I learned for myself that the system does not work.

I for myself have the impression that the scientific community adores the fetish of the printed work too much. Plus, styles, the looks, the editing house's names etc. have become over-important. With all these scholars around on the globe, the system is jammed: Too many papers to be produced on too high a technical level with too little

editing time, because everybody thinks they are great scholars if they publish a lot, and with the "important" publishers. Which they are not; and the quality of ideas is set behind the quantity of published pages.

It is a waste of effort to continue this madness, if we expect more and more findings, theories etc. to be brought to the academic market!

I would prefer a culture of oral communication, an international agora to meet and discuss. Let us focus on ideas and their development instead of dead, dry paper. Then, let's have large databases of text, data, findings, results, theories and all including intelligent search engines that provide good results for anybody who requires scientific support on ideas. Everything else should be taken from the traditional editing system, and publishing houses, journals etc. be abandoned.

Well, this for a radical proposal.

Long live the ideas!

Best,
Guido

--

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Subject: Re: [Medianthro] Trouble with journals

From: Jens Kjaerulff <jk@socant.net>

Date: Sat, 28 Apr 2007 18:11:53 -0700

While the main issue commented on so far is timeframes, I think Maximilian C. Forte's wider input regarding the merits of peer review was quite refreshing. In some ways it ties in with the debate we had last year on "Publishing a Monograph" (see the list archives, September 2006). It may in turn connect with the issue of timeframes, in that smaller and less well known publishers may operate faster, though perhaps not yield as much impact in terms of the importance of publishing for a career track. In this latter regard I have a question.

I have encountered claims that chapters in edited books do not qualify as "peer reviewed", or at least count less compared to journal articles. This strikes me as odd, given that at least the editor(s) of the given volume would have reviewed the chapters, as would perhaps also the publishing house's editor. I have also been advised of the importance (career-wise) of publishing a book I have in the making with a well known publisher rather than with a small and lesser known one. Yet, in my experience as reader, there is not necessarily a straightforward correlation between size and fame, e.g. of publisher or journal, and consistency in the quality of what is published - something Maximilian also seems to point to.

To my question then, extending from Maximilian wrote:

With regards to the notion of peer review, I have a suspicion that the

term in practice is used far less consistently than its liberal use might suggest (perhaps not unlike the word culture in other contexts). Is the concept in fact used uniformly and consistently, e.g. across national and disciplinary boundaries or between journals? Are you familiar with institutional/departmental measures towards formally clarifying this, in terms of definitions of what precisely qualifies as "peer reviewed", and what not, e.g. when assessing applications for a position? Even if it is imported from the natural sciences as Maximillian suggests and imposed at the level of governments, how is that translated (if it is formally translated at all) to more "local" settings, other than in terms of gut feeling?

// Jens

Subject: Re: [Medianthro] Trouble with journals
From: enrico maria milic <em.milic@gmail.com>
Date: Sun, 29 Apr 2007 11:33:05 +0100

hello,

(my name is enrico milic, i have been a lurker on this list till now... i worked 6 years as on-line journalist and co-founder of an internet publishing company in italy. at the moment i am searching for a phd in the UK or elsewhere)

i would support guido ipsen point of view. he wrote in this list some days ago:

"I would prefer a culture of oral communication, an international agora to meet and discuss. Let us focus on ideas and their development instead of dead, dry paper. Then, let's have large databases of text, data, findings, results, theories and all including intelligent search engines that provide good results for anybody who requires scientific support on ideas. Everything else should be taken from the traditional editing system, and publishing houses, journals etc. be abandoned."

i will add something to his points.

maybe the 'academic community' (that is made, i.e., by the members of this list) should stop a minute and ask itself one more time what is the purpose of publishing articles and journals?

sure, if this purpose is the professional career of academics, no doubt that the academic publishing industry could be helpful within the old fashioned traditional way. whoever the system's gatekeepers are, they are there for the reproduction of a community.

so, if the meaning of the publishing academic system is giving evidence of the quality of any single scholar, then no doubt that the actual system is working. obviously the quality of the individuals here is not necessarily the <abstract scientific quality> of their texts but of their social connection and negotiation with these gatekeepers.

instead...

if you think that sharing your knowledge with a broader community ('the society') could be relevant...

if you think that your knowledge should be helpful to others than your 'academic community'...

then you already know what to do and the answer is quite nicely embodied in this mailing list. you can go on-line and use whatever of the new magic tools that allow people to share their creativity (blogs, forums, wikis, databases, etc.).

obviously, then, one could question the quality of what is archived on a blog, a forum, a wiki, a database. and that is the point. one could question that quality precisely by questioning it publicly, commenting, linking, re-editing (think to wikis), debating and so on. and i am pretty sure that this kind of virtual social textual interaction works much better in elevating the general quality of a scientific debate.

ok, but then who gives you the money? if you don't publish stuff with that nice label of routledge (or whatever publisher), how will you be assessed? i don't know exactly. but there are a lot of brilliant persons across academia and i am sure that the 'reproduction' system of the system could be challenged and renewed easily, if one ever wants...

frankly JSTOR is just one more ivory tower built on the top of that middle-ages ivory tower (academia, mhmh?). and when i refer to JSTOR i do that as it is the blatant new version of a very much closed system. and i deal with JSTOR every day since i started my MA in anthropology...

p.s.

bad to write it here, but i am searching for a phd with maintenance. if one knows studentships and awards for eu citizens (and italian citizens in particular) about topics like EU, emotions, media, diasporic (italian) communities... please tell me...! at the moment i am completing my MA in anthropology at queen's university of belfast. thanks for your attention

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enrico maria milic