

Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies
Vol. 20, No. 1, March 2006, pp. 13–16



Murdoch's Garden

Toby Miller

I think I was in the garden of a Murdoch University faculty member in 1986 when I first heard about plans for *Continuum*. Everybody around the table, informally representing the four tertiary-education institutions of Western Australia, seemed to be directly involved in the project, other than me, a listener. It all seemed very exciting, an affirmation of an extraordinary year in which I had been told that: feminists liked to express desire and didn't all condemn public references to sex, popular culture could be legitimate, studying the media was an academic pastime, the world had not ended with Althusser and Gramsci, I didn't have to wear a tie or be at work the same time each day, and there were other socialists who liked to have fun. I bought the first issue of *Continuum*, about Australian film in the 1950s, a year or two later in Brisbane. Stuart Cunningham was carrying copies around, selling them for what he could get—an early instance of inter-state carpetbagging by the journal. That issue remains a favourite. It neatly served the remit that saw the Australian Film Commission provide financial support as part of its responsibility to sustain and develop screen culture.

When I moved back to Western Australia in 1990 I became involved in running the journal, mostly working with Tom O'Regan and Alec McHoul. We solicited articles and special issues, wrote last-minute pieces to load up what we had, copyedited others' work, input desktop codes, delivered printer paper, and picked up bound issues—the whole deal. More of this was done by the other two than me, and Brian Shoesmith was also involved (of course, Brian has been a lynchpin from the beginning). Since 1993 I've been an admiring, if removed, reader of the journal as it has developed a sizeable advisory board, attracted a commercial publisher, and moved away from a focus on the media towards a broader remit of (Australian) cultural studies.

Toby Miller is Professor of English, Sociology, and Women's Studies and Director of the Program in Film & Visual Culture at the University of California, Riverside. His teaching and research cover the media, sport, labour, gender, race, citizenship, politics, and cultural policy. He is the author and editor of over 20 books, and has published essays in more than 30 journals and 50 volumes. His current research covers the success of Hollywood overseas, the links between culture and citizenship, and anti-Americanism. Correspondence to: Toby Miller, 1120 Nowita Pl, Venice, CA 90291, USA. E-mail: tobym@ucr.edu

During the same period I've been involved with other journals, and I thought it might be interesting for this commemorative issue to reflect on that experience, and make some noise about the future of academic publishing. I've been the editor of *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* (Sage, 1996–1999), *Social Text* (Duke, 1997–2001), *Television & New Media* (Sage, 2000 to the present), and *Social Identities* (Routledge, 2004 to the present). In addition, I've edited special issues of *Communication Review* (2002), *Film International* (2003), and *Social Semiotics* (2005). When I became their editor, none of these journals was the creature of a professional association (the most direct route to subscriptions and citations). Two had just been the focus of scandal (one very publicly, the second much less so), and one was a start-up. In order to become the editor of the *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* I had to put in a tender against many others, and was the third choice—ultimately selected after others felt it would wound their tenure chances, or that it wasn't the appropriate time. To run *Social Text*, I went through a virtual tenure process myself—unprecedented for the journal and not repeated since—because the hegemon of Duke University were deeply troubled by a hoax perpetrated on the journal immediately prior to my election by the collective. They needed reassurance about me. To launch *Television & New Media* I had to convince publishing executives who thought TV was dead that it still mattered, despite the fact that their market research had shown almost unanimous academic support for the project. Eventually, I selected between three offers. While many of these enterprises have run smoothly much of the time, there has also been controversy, difficulty, and exhaustion. That experience, plus editing several book series and serving as a board member of journals linked to professional associations, informs the rest of this brief contribution. Also, when I go to conferences, publishers are usually the most interesting people to talk to. They know I'm not trying to sell them anything, so they tend to be fairly open about the tenor of the times. And so . . .

There is a rough bifurcation between journals of tendency and journals of profession, though they may overlap. On the one hand, journals of tendency have avowedly political projects. They seek to intervene in social space, seeing themselves as situated in particular—and partial—coordinates. On the other hand, professional journals claim a disembodied, timeless truth, part of the earnest search for a universal knowledge that purports to come from nowhere and is, above all, disinterested. Journals of tendency generally rely on manuscript readers who are alive to politics and style, whereas journals of profession prize scientific validity, via double-blind refereeing undertaken in praise of disciplinary adherence and falsifiability. The former offer quick(ish) responses to contemporary social problems, and open calls for papers, whereas the latter restrict access to members of professional associations, and favour process over product. One seeks to change the world, the other to police occupations. The first approach is about transformation, the second about normal science.

Of course, the future of publishing in general is a contentious subject. Many editors within publishing houses now argue, for instance, that the edited collection, often the site of major intellectual breakthroughs that professional associations would not have

supported owing to the glacial timing and thinking of their review processes, is doomed. Because customers now purchase books online, they are thought not to embark on the serendipitous bookshop consumption of the past that frequently led them to buy anthologies. Meanwhile, the monograph, long a sine qua non of tenure in Research-1 universities in the United States, is ceasing to be viable, because libraries have cut their purchasing budgets. Journals frequently subsidize book series, but they too are in jeopardy. First-time authors of books are now being asked to help fund production in a way that didn't happen five years ago, when such a thing would have been regarded as a blight on legitimacy, almost a sign of vanity publishing.

Major presses that for decades charged high prices for every scientific and medical journal, safe in the knowledge that most US medical schools would buy two of each, are not so comfortable today. Anger at the prohibitive cost of these items, along with the tendency of scientists to send out material in advance on the Web, and, perhaps most significantly, the US federal government arguing that, since it pays for vast amounts of this research, the results should be publicly available *instantly et gratis*, have radically changed the environment.

Cultural and media studies journals do not cost much to produce by contrast with these other publications, but nor are they especially remunerative, so publishers increasingly want us to affiliate with professional associations and obtain subscription deals wrapped up with membership. I've been able to avoid this with the journals I've run, but I wonder how much longer that will last.

In addition, applications for tenure in the humanities and the soft social sciences, at least the ones I evaluate for universities across the United States and Canada, are shifting. Candidates are desperate to have their work published in journals that are heavily cited and have high rates of rejected submissions in order to look 'excellent' in the eyes of their departmental colleagues—and those from unfriendly disciplines—who adjudicate their case. This can be inimical to new progressive work from political economy, queer theory, subaltern studies, and science studies. Lastly, the dominance of the English language—complete in the sciences, significant elsewhere—increasingly annoys many of us within cultural studies, but is difficult to get around in hard-copy formats.

The Internet is often turned to as an answer to these problems, but questions of legitimacy dog its gatekeeping procedures, and its perennialism. It's fine for me to publish on the Web, but probably unwise for someone junior in terms of what will 'count'. Again, I'm speaking of the US academic juggernaut here, and the same may not be true elsewhere. I'm excited that *Television & New Media* is bundled electronically, not least because this has given it additional exposure in Latin America. At the same time, I'm glad that *Social Identities* attracts authors based in the global South, some of whom might face problems with Web publishing in terms of both legitimacy and accessibility.

Most leftist publishing projects that I've been associated with have relied on (often hidden) subsidies, variously: volunteer labour; university salaries, postage, telephone, fax, site licensing, and electricity; sales from other publications; and arm's-length

cultural subvention by benign fractions of the state. Those factors, along with the pressure on young scholars to have their work appear in outlets that will aid their careers, the pressure from publishers to become subdivisions of professional associations, the pressure to internationalize linguistically, and the pressure of changed formats and sites of publication, all make for a complex future. Only once have I published my work or participated in a journal on an even partially instrumental basis (namely, sending my first book to Johns Hopkins). That luxury may be an artefact of the times.