

# Human Geography

## Editorial: The Neoliberalization of Knowledge

Richard Peet

**I**n the past, the means of publication of academic journal articles were controlled by academic and professional institutions. But over the last twenty years, control over the dissemination of scientific knowledge has increasingly been privatized. Access to published knowledge increasingly passes through private corporations, as with Thompson Reuters, a giant media/news/information conglomerate, with a "product line" that ranges from financial and enterprise information to the social science citation index. They publish the Journal Citation Report and the Journal Use Report as parts of their "ISI Web of Knowledge". Journals that this corporation does not index might just as well not exist. Writers that this corporation does not follow, write in thin air. Our work is not known if they choose not to notice us. We are judged, ranked and ordered via criteria decided upon by a media corporation.

Academic journals that once were produced by universities and academic and professional associations have come to be produced by publishing houses that increasingly are concentrated in the hands of a few multinational media conglomerates – Routledge (Taylor and Francis), for instance, publishes 950 of them. Blackwell Synergy, "home of over 1 million articles from over 850 journals" is part of Wiley InterScience "a leading international resource for quality content promoting discovery across the spectrum of scientific, technical, medical and professional endeavors". The privatization of knowledge dissemination means that media corporations control access to large parts of the fund of knowledge produced by academic labor. This fund increasingly becomes a profitable main source of political, cultural and economic power. We find the privatization of knowledge dissemination reaching back into its production, increasingly as knowledge-commodities are thought for sale

on the internet. This produces the erosion of contemplation, in which deep thought either ceases, or becomes merely entertaining.

For radical academics the privatization of knowledge poses the additional problem that causal agents in capitalist contradiction control the knowledge published about its crises. Yet we too, as academic workers, must submit to a social order of publication that was, and remains, elitist in terms of its control by "established, reputable academics", but now is also quantified in terms of exposure and citation factors in an increasingly technified, privatized, corporatized and commodified new system. It also means that the surplus (monetary) value produced by the academic labor that writes the content of journals ends up as profit for media capital. Perhaps this value could be re-captured by the producers of knowledge-wealth?

Our conclusion? We need to retain control of the value produced by academic labor. We are determined to resist this privatization trend – "Take Back Our Knowledge". Hence we have founded a non-profit corporation "Institute for Human Geography Inc", as owner of this new journal – the Institute's officers are drawn from the Board of Editors. The Institute will not establish relations of any kind with commercial publishing houses. Let it be clear, we are not proposing an open access, web based journal. However, individual subscriptions are offered at a low cost (\$40 a year for high income individuals, \$15-20 a year low income individuals), with institutional subscriptions at a moderate cost (\$100 in our first year, slightly higher subsequently), far less than they generally cost at the moment – multinational publishers charge institutions annual subscription rates in the range of \$250-\$5000 a year. A single journal can generate half a million

to a million dollars a year in profit. We could use this money to sponsor radical research ... but only if ownership and control over the knowledge we produce is kept out of corporate hands. As soon as we have a surplus we will announce the availability of radical-geographic research grants, and appoint a committee to administer them.

So we announce the start of a new journal called **Human Geography**. This is our first issue. We conceive a journal like this broadly to cover topics ranging from geopolitics, through cultural and economic issues, to political ecology. We envisage a well written, critical, intellectual journal, not full of empirical detail, and not encumbered by too many citations, a journal that can be read in its entirety. The journal will be peer reviewed – but we want to give positive, helpful reviews of papers, and not savage them or decline to publish based on minor points made by reviewers who hide behind anonymity (the elitism referred to above). We plan a mix of longer papers up to 7500 words and shorter papers of up to 3000 words, with timely opinion pieces and book review essays interspersed within the body of the main text of the journal. We plan a paper version of the journal for the moment, followed soon after by a web site with multi-media content.

We invite your interest, comment and support. We could use donations to fuel the start-up of the journal – please make checks out to Institute for Human Geography, send these to: IHG, P.O. Box 307, Bolton, Massachusetts, 01740-0307 USA, and \$100 gets you two years of free issues. We invite you to submit papers, opinion pieces, reviews and editorials to our editorial board. If you have an idea for a contribution let us know what you have in mind, so that we can provide immediate feedback – please email your proposal or paper to the respective editors:

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