

Special section:

Experimenting with the AcademicConferenceMachine

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1. Introducing the AcademicConferenceMachine (ACM)

AcademicConferenceMachine produces, reproduces, and breaks.

AcademicConferenceMachine creates us.

AcademicConferenceMachine space-time-matterings.

AcademicConferenceMachine affective resonances

AcademicConferenceMachine data-fications and fictions

2. ACM and puntOorg

The ACM is a neologism, devised by our CG writing collective (the Crazy Gang Collective), to conceptualise the neoliberal, striated and stratified modes of knowledge production which can be present at academic conferences. The ACM rests on the assumption that academic conferences have played a significant role in the global redesign of the university and of education as a service to be sold in the academic and global knowledge marketplace. The ACM, with its focus on conference orientations and architectures, sits alongside a host of other academic work that bears witness to the commodification, capitalization and neoliberalisation of academic production, including attention to the Academicwritingmachine (AWM) (Henderson, Honan & Loch, 2016).

Through a series of publications (Benozzo et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2019; Carey et al., 2021; Fairchild et al., 2022) the CG Collective have worked to interrogate the boundaries of what constitutes knowledge, and how knowledge gets produced, repeated, disciplined, and structured at/in/through conference spaces. Explorations with/in the ACM draw inspiration from a rhizomatic conglomeration of onto-epistemological mo(ve)ments, practices, and forms of resistance including: posthumanisms, feminist new materialisms, antimethodology, queer and interdisciplinary inquiry, post-colonial scholarship, speculation, and post-qualitative research sensibilities and experimentations. The ACM is imbricated in some of the many seductions made possible in process-focussed and research-creation inspired methodological approaches that refuse disciplinary boundaries and trouble avowedly humanist traditions and approaches to knowledge production (see Carey et al 2022). This work has opened (us) up (to) opportunities for working in more experimental, creative, curious and undisciplined ways with/in which more relational, diverse, and affirmative critiques to the normative ways of 'producing knowledge' might flourish. The ACM is a concept that is always on the prowl for further/other collaborations.

The call for papers in puntOorg was issued as an attempt to extend that 'opening up' to others. The call followed a seminar in which the CG collective speculated about the ACM's potential productivities in disturbing the production of knowledge in work and organizational psychology. The call was issued as an invitation for others to creatively develop the concept of the AcademicConferenceMachine and/or to interrogate/decompose/recompose those contemporary academic spaces which repeat tired and worn-out formulae of intellectual capitalism; spaces that represent an epiphenomenon of the transformation of the modern university as a prominent actor of a neoliberalised and neoliberalising global (knowledge) economy.

3. Special Section, ACM and peer review/editing

This special section continues and extends our collective practices of revisioning and re-practicing academic processes and responsibilities differently. In this special section we revision how peer reviews could be carried out in more relational and caring ways; ways which generate and create rather than limit, control quality and in some cases disqualify. This work has been inspired by the experiences of our colleagues, students, and ourselves. For example, a reviewer comment on an earlier draft of our original ACM paper (Benozzo et al., 2019) voices the following dilemma in considering their options when conducting their peer review of the paper:

Reviewer J: I'll refer them to some readings — that should help them situate the paper better ... although I'm not actually sure ... do they need to do this? Why would it be important or even helpful to use existing concepts and notions which are the very things they are working against. At the same time it may help them clarify their points. Or am I asking them to subjugate their thinking to normative knowledges? Academic-conference-machine produces governed scholarly bodies and texts which these authors are actually trying to resist.

We sat with similar uncertainties and tensions as we took on multiple roles: as editors, as reviewers and as nursemaids for how the concept of the ACM might be developed by the authors in the special section. These dilemmas, we contend, also reflect what Pontille and Torney (2015) argue are the fundamental tensions imbricated in the peer review process more generally. In the context of the ACM, we were wholly aware of the irony in our impulse to rule and regulate the writing of others as editors/reviewers; to reproduce the expected and acceptable by imposing some sort of quality control on how a paper regarding the ACM might be written as other scholars put the concept to work following the invitation to contribute to the special section. On the other hand, there was a divergent and opposing impulse which sought to allow the concept of the ACM to breathe life into academic writing in ways that we might not have even imagined; for the ACM to produce writing in forms and formats that might be less conventionally seen as 'academic writing product'. Throughout the process of reviewing/editing we sat with these tensions; never quite resolving it: inclining, inevitably, more towards the latter impulse. Indeed, our approach(es) to editing/reviewing were hailed by, and shaped in, the content and affect produced by the papers: their authors and reviewers all. For example, the paper titled *Cartography-ing: sympoietic journeys through conference spaces* clearly aims at disturbing the academicwritingmachine. The author has created a new term, *CarCtography-ing*, using a differentiated font style — specifically, a different font applied to the letter *c* within the word — to indicate a distinct form of cartography: one that is *of* and *through* conferences, and that is also artistic and literary. In addition, this paper shaped the review process in a number of ways, not least in how it invoked a set of affects for conference spaces that take place in hot, dry, sunny climes; conferences in spaces that are wholly different from the more Northern Anglo-American shaped spaces that hold fast to partial and particular idea(l)s of linearity, of clarity and of certainty.

Much of the traditional peer review system and process aims to draw a clear separation between the submitted article and revised published article, the author and reviewer, and the produced knowledge and legitimate knowledge. The example of reviewing shared here intentionally blurs those lines, invites different types of texts into dialogue, and creates a

collective ‘author’, producing a variety of different texts about and around the topic of the special issue. All this is done to embody care. Following Bellacasa (2017) caring serves as “a speculative affective mode that encourages intervention in what things could be” (p. 66). Care is work of maintenance including labor, affective and emotional elements, and ethical relations. Care is being sensitive to - and working with - the wounds of the text and of the ACM. Degen and Kößler, in their article in this special section, beautifully craft and illustrate the complexities of un/non/post/past-conferencing, building on the resistance, care, and radical imagination needed to counter ACM and its normative a/e/ffects.

Our approach to peer review/editing in this current special section also leant into those explorations of, and disturbances to, the peer review process that we experimented with when writing about seduction, and how such seductive forces might (mis/re)shape and be (mis/re)shaped by (qualitative) inquiry (Carey et al, 2022). In that previous writing we effected some serious play with the idea of ‘blind review’. Our commitments with such serious play was not just an attempt to resist the use of such ableist language/metaphors (cf also: Saderi, n,d,: minor concerns and feedback 1), but to use the peer review process itself as a way to make manifest the review process more generally and to render it accountable for itself.

From the start of the process for the current special section we held (ourselves) open to continuing some form of experimentation with the review process. This marks our commitments to exploring and disturbing the operations of the AcademicConferenceMachine and/or of the AcademicWritingMachine (Henderson et al., 2016) as key architectures of academic knowledge production: we are endlessly imbricated in, and fascinated by, the (imagined) lines of sight that are redolent of (peer) re-viewing as part of academic publishing. From the beginning we were not completely sure what our experimentations – or their outcomes – might entail or look like. Rather, we wanted to remain vigilant, mindful, about how our work, and the work of others who were willing to add their thinking-writing-doing in the context of the AcademicConferenceMachine, might extend our explorations of academic review for scholarly publication. Through our review experimentation we tried to generate emotions, questions, and curiosity without providing clear direction or simple answers. We wanted to stay open to how we could play (with) re-viewings, to have a dalliance with re-view, to embrace what might occur (to us) in the dilly dally meander towards publication of the special section. As part of the process, we also became aware of how our approach to reviewing/editing intra-acted (Barad, 2007) with the papers that the special section contributors offered up. As editors/reviewers we asked for changes to papers; the papers also changed our approach to editing/reviewing in this context.

At the same time, we were also mindful to work with/in any constraints that the host journal outlined. Thankfully, for the most part, the journal’s editorial team were wholly supportive of our experimentations; the only stipulation was that, as part of our process, we engage reviewers that were independent of the guest editorial team. In effect, and in the conceptualisations of Pontille and Torny (2020), this requirement veered our ‘open review’ process (back) into one that had an element of ‘anonymous review’.

4. Peer review as curation

To curate:

1. *To be in charge of selecting, arranging, and presenting material for [an art exhibition or museum or a book]*
2. *To be in charge of arranging, presenting (a festival or other event)*
3. *To take special care in selecting, arranging and presenting (something) in order to achieve a specific effect.*

Collins online dictionary (no date)

Early in our process of reviewing/editing the special section, the idea of *curation* occurred to us as a way of directing our efforts in reviewing/editing the papers submitted for the special section. In doing so, we played with and traced some of the lexical and etymological associations of the word 'curate'. As well as the dictionary definitions above, Google's AI application gives some of the following ideas (adapted):

- From the Latin *curare*: "to take care of" but also, via classical Latin, has links with 'cure' and 'treat'
- Medieval/religious meaning: originally referring to a priest who was put in charge of the care of souls in a parish. Curate also denotes an assistant, a priest at the lower levels of the church hierarchy.
- Modern meaning: The verb "to curate" today extends this idea of careful selection and organization beyond religious contexts to include art, online content, and other collections.

In reviewing/editing the special section for puntOorg, we often turned towards, and returned in the Baradian sense (2007), these musings on curate and curation.

Our curation efforts (care-ful selection and re-presenting) with the papers in the special section is underpinned by at least two inter-related framings. These are/were framings-in-the-making; as much unformed articulations before and during the process as they are (barely) articulable strategies in retrospect. The first framing speaks to and from some of the more widely held concerns about the role and future feasibility of peer review as an integral part of academic publishing more generally (e.g. see Hug, 2022; Waltman, et al, 2023; Woods et al, 2023, See also ASAPbio, 2021.), and in thinking about how academic publishing might survive in more democratic and accessible ways going forward. The second framing was more attuned to how the ACM might produce writing differently; how writing (against) the ACM might prompt a different way of (re)viewing academic writing and academic writing product.

In terms of the first of these framings, our curation of the articles leans into the kind of democratic open peer review that Pernille and Torney (2020: 115) outline; a review process that 'relies on a plurality of instances that generate a continuous process of judgment'

We suggest that this kind of extended review is akin to what Pernille and Torney (2020: 117) refer to as 'open commentary' and that is effected in open commentary platforms like MetaRoR (<https://metaror.org/>) or F1000Research (<https://f1000research.com/>) with their focus on a model of post publication, open peer review. These innovative technological experimentations effect solutions for some of the many problematics identified for contemporary academic publishing (Waltman et al. 2023). They also reflect a philosophy of what Montgomery et al. (2024) characterise as 'publish-review-curate'; architectures for academic publishing that aim to 'encourage a more transparent, collaborative, and constructive review process'. In taking

on, and talking into, these concerns about academic publishing we pivot our reviewing/editing process towards Ostergaard and Nugent's (2019) view of editing as a form of curatorial archiving in which journal editors archive more than just the final texts; that they archive 'reviews, author correspondence, article drafts, internal documentation, and so on' as a means of assembling and making accessible 'the "affective dimension" (Enoch, 431) and other hidden facets of journal editing'. We effected this kind of approach to reviewing/editing through a series of curation notes in which we archive a truncated selection of materials associated with each of the papers submitted. For each paper, curation notes archive (parts of): initial review maps from Claude (see below); the independent reviewer's comments, some elements of the authors' responses to these.

The second framing in our curatorial review/edit process for the special section was in taking seriously how writing (against) the ACM and AWM has the potential, in and of itself, to disturb and disrupt writing in its form and format. We here invoke Barthes' idea of the 'writerly text' (1970) to help further frame our curatorial attitude. Writerly texts are 'open' texts; challenging texts that require the active and mindful participation of readers as they interpret and make sense of the text. In the context of our review/editing process, positioning readers as endlessly co-producing the(se) texts aligns with the philosophy of open commentary/review. Of course, we include here those readers from 'within the academic closet' (Pernille and Torney, 2020: 120) - ourselves as guest editors and our independent reviewers. However, and in the spirit of the ACM, we also wanted the papers in this special section to not only have more vitality during the production but also to have a potential life beyond publication; that they might remain open in some ways, that they might have the potential to provoke their readers; to invite their readers in/to the mess and melee of what it could mean to work/write (against) the ACM. Our hope is that the process of *taking care* does not end here but continues through the act of reading and writing.

Relatedly, and with a more exaggerated bend towards Barthes' idea of writerly texts, we adopted an attitude of appreciative reading towards these papers. We came to appreciate how these papers represented the authors' ruminations about working with/in and against the ACM. We came to see how these papers embodied the complex, contradictory and potentially unruly landscape for writing when academics are challenged to work outside of, or against, what might be deemed as conventional and acceptable in the academy. In Barthian terms we came to see these papers and this special section, not so much as a product of authorial intent, but rather as the efforts of 'scriptors' who channel the flow of ideas and concepts from the contexts in which they are produced. Given the initial provocation laid for these papers, our curatorial process fully embraced the idea that indisciplinary (see Carey et al., 2022; Benozzo, 2021) may well have been a dominant seductive force in the production of these papers. As such, our curatorial process was fabricated in the warp and weft of how these papers attempted to represent the authors' entanglements with and against the ACM. And, at some point in the reviewing/editing process, our curatorial ethic asked us to step back from the papers, to allow them to weave their own form of vitality as part of the puntOorg production.

In the way that things can happen, those instances of fortuitous serendipity, the first paper in the special section here which explores the 'pre-formative' (see Carozzi et al. in this special section) provided us with the ideal way of thinking about 'open text'; about the unruly text, about how we might attend to the 'pre-text', those texts that might, in other circumstances, be seen as not yet wholly formed. This idea of the 'pre-' (as that which precedes the pro-: produce,

proceed) helped us, as editor/reviewers/curators, to re-think how we might be(come) vis-à-vis these submissions.

The initial round of curatorial review involved each of the guest editors reading the submitted papers. Collectively, we generated a number of ‘prompts’ and provocations that were occasioned by our reading. We actively adopted a strengths-based and appreciative approach to our re-viewings of the papers. In large part, many of our prompts focussed on asking the authors about how the thinking-writing in their first drafts were explicitly related to the ACM.

This initial round of re-viewings, and how we framed our comments were fed back to the authors, was shaped in part by our awareness of the increasing controversial role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in academic landscapes more generally, and in the academic publishing industry more specifically (Mann, et al, 2025; Kankanhalli, 2024; Weber, 2024). Relationalities and complex onto-epistemological linkages with AI are also explored in the article by Linares-Roake, Zawadzki and Zawadzki. These authors create a living assemblage of AI, plants, sexuality, and knowledges which dislodge and jam ACM and its normative social effects and hierarchical practices. Plugging in friendships instead of tenure tracks, plants instead of paper, and care instead of alienation will potentially reshape our collective academic futures.

In the context of this special journal section we decided to engage with generative AI (we used Claude by Anthropic) in presenting our re-viewing prompts for authors in the form of a prompt map. Generative AI took our comments and generated an interlinked map while also surprising us as authors how the content became organized. Our tracing of the AI generated map was visible but unexpectedly connected. Rather than being directed in the more traditional peer review fashion to ‘fix’ their paper, the authors were instructed in the following ways:

Dear Author(s)

I have read your paper and, as a consequence, have produced a range of reactions/curiosities in the form of a series of questions/provocations. I have subsequently worked with Claude - the AI platform - to (dis)organise these questions into a map. The map is non-hierarchical; I have invited and allowed Claude to organise these questions in whatever order it decided. My impulse to work with AI in this way is an experiment ‘in process’; something that I want to work out as we go along in the process.

I attach the map of our reactions/questions to this letter. In reviewing your paper, I would like you to:

- *use my questions/provocations to re-turn (to) your paper*
- *use the map in whatever way you desire, as a set of prompts to re-view your paper*
- *Re-vise your paper while travelling the map*
- *You might even want to go beyond the map: discover territories for re-view beyond those that we claim in our mappings here.*

What I want you to produce:

- *take a copy of the map and highlight your tracings of review i.e. mark your revision travellings onto the map. Return this traced map with your re-viewed paper. Together with the map you can add comments or reflections or whatever.*
- *Use track changes to indicate the changes you make in the paper itself.*

Return your re-viewed paper and the new map with your tracings via the Journal's online system.

Thank you for your paper, I am looking forward to reviewing your work again!

These instructions were accompanied by the prompt map generated via Claude (see curation notes).

Following this round of review, the authors had the opportunity to revise their manuscripts and to comment on the maps themselves. Additionally, and to satisfy the requirement of the journal, a further round of re-viewing was initiated. In this instance, we, the curators of the special section and another colleague played the role of reviewers. We invited a colleague who was independent of the first round of review to make commentary on the paper. Again, the intention, by this point, was leaning less and less towards quality control, and instead leant towards curating the papers with the lightest touch; with a respect for re-presenting the papers as the authors'/scriptors' entanglements with the ACM. Our task to the blind reviewers was to carry out a reading of the text and respond to the authors with thoughts, affects, surprises, speculations, provocations and more. How might the articles be extended based on newly created relations with an external reader and 'reviewer'. Our reviewers' creative and speculative responses ('reviews') can be found within our curation notes.

The final papers are followed by intermezzos which we, the editors, name 'curation notes'. Within these curation notes reviews, maps, relations and bodies, creative extensions, matter, and affect related to each submission are curated to share yet another iteration and extension of our collective work within and against ACM. In this way, we have tried to give shape to editorial curatorship as a process that supports the development of a paper and that could potentially continue over time. Can we imagine opening an on-going conversation with authors of each paper and with readers through an online blog? In this sense, curatorship, as we conceive it, would be under constant pressure, branching out along countless paths and not aiming to reach a fixed endpoint.

Keywords

AcademicConferenceMachine; Curation; Peer-Review; AcademicWritingMachine; Editing-as-becoming

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