



Publication details, information for authors and referees and full contents available at: <http://global-discourse.com/>

ISSN: 2043-7897

Suggested citation:

Johnson, M. T. (2010) 'Editorial Introduction', *Global Discourse* [Online], 1: 1, available from: <<http://global-discourse.com/contents>>.

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Editorial Introduction

Matthew Johnson¹

There are many journals. There are very many journals. There are too many journals - especially in the social sciences. The proliferation of journals has been driven by two needs: firstly, the need of certain groups studying esoteric subjects or pursuing innovative approaches to publish their paradigmatic work in a single forum. This has, in various cases, sparked the development of disciplines and approaches to some significant collective benefit; secondly, the need of academics to publish, not simply to disseminate their work, but, rather, to satisfy the research requirements of their profession. This second phenomenon has engendered, in many cases, the most cynical examples of instrumentality. It is not uncommon for PhD theses to be turned into five articles and a book, each containing similar content and identical ideas. It is not uncommon for special issues of journals to be turned into collected editions, with the addition of an editorial introduction and, perhaps, a glossary, justifying secondary publication. It is not uncommon for there to be special issues in several different journals on almost exactly the same subject within a very short space of time. There is, unfortunately, very little value in such publications. Yet, precisely because of the publishing imperative, perhaps the majority of academics are forced into instrumental engagement with their work, producing safe, timely, but far from interesting or dynamic articles solely to fulfil their professional duties. I suspect that there would be very little cost to the knowledge of the academy if even fifty per cent of all publications were consigned to the dustbin. How, then, can I justify the creation of yet another journal? What can another journal offer that is not already available? The value of this journal lies in what we believe it is not.

Firstly, we do not have any pretensions of inherent prestige and do not seek to monopolise knowledge. We do not charge any fee for access, and we welcome all comments and replies to articles through the moderated discussion boards on each page. Authors retain copyright and can, after a period of six months publication, move their article to another journal. We do not seek to impose extensive rules regarding formatting, referencing (save that it be consistent) or insist on stylistic conformity, meaning that authors can submit with the greatest of ease and with a future submission to another journal in mind. We accept many unorthodox submissions, such as those in multi-media format, and publish dynamic and stimulating essays which are seen to be unsuitable for the traditional peer review process and for publication elsewhere.

Secondly, we do not seek to maintain disciplinary boundaries or focus on the creation of cohesive themes, save where submissions naturally converge. We will consider any perspective on any issue of broad (extremely broad) relevance to politics and international relations. We are particularly committed to encouraging interdisciplinary discourse. In the vast majority of journals, such discourse is

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implicitly and detrimentally discouraged. It is precisely by encouraging dialogue between areas of expertise that knowledge can develop. Sadly, academics across disciplines are, at present, discussing the same issues but within the confines of their own fields, using their own lexis, in their own journals, stifling invaluable cross-fertilisation of ideas.

Thirdly, our first impulse is not to reject an article. Rather, we seek to provide a supportive environment in which the refereeing process is intended to build an article up, rather than to knock it down as a means of quality control. The task of the referee is to enable, rather than to discourage, publication. At a time in which referees' reports are increasingly brief, often contradictory when compared against one another, and not uncommonly derisory, we offer authors a formative process in which the aim is to maximise the potential and interest of the piece.

Fourthly, discourse does not end at publication. At present, in the overwhelming majority of cases, publication is the end, rather than the beginning, of discussion. Often largely unread, the article lies dormant, contributing only to the author's CV. In *Global Discourse*, publication of the article is accompanied by publication of a substantive review by the referee. This is, not only to provide substantive advice on how to develop the article further but, also, to stimulate discussion among readers and the author. There is space on each page for replies from readers in order that discussion of the journal's contents is public and truly peer-led.

Discussion lies at the heart of our review section in which single books are subject to several reviews to which the author then responds. These intensive reviews are of far greater value than the extensive review sections found in many journals which, in and of themselves, often fail to convey much more than the occasionally jaundiced opinions of readers seeking to accumulate early academic capital. (I have been guilty of this on several occasions.) While the motivation may not differ, in our review section the authors do at least have the chance to respond to the reviews, clarifying their position, acknowledging deficiencies and rejecting misinterpretations. In *Global Discourse*, these mini-symposia provide a thorough and truly engaging discussion of a text to enable, not simply evaluation of the merits of purchasing the book but, rather, consideration of the merits of the thesis at stake.

This is a journal which attempts to undermine some unhelpful hierarchies by encouraging discourse between all those interested in the subjects at hand. By stimulating inter-disciplinary discussion and communication between established academics, those just entering the profession, enthusiastic postgraduates and independent scholars, we aim to produce a publication which avoids the staid approach of other journals, which provides a forum for dynamic and innovative work and which provides a platform for authors to progress to the higher echelons of their profession. We believe that this first issue, which we tentatively describe as an Andrew Linklater special issue, goes some way towards achieving these aims.

The content of the first issue is intentionally eclectic, unorthodox and distinctive. Martin Weber has contributed a statement of intent which conveys many of the sentiments outlined above but, of course, in a far more eloquent fashion. The piece started life as the keynote speech for the *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Politics Conference 2008* which Mark Edward and I organised in Newcastle. This event consolidated our belief in the aims above and it is fitting that Martin is again at the fore, writing in his inimitable fashion. This statement of intent is followed by Shannon Brincat's intriguing interview with Andrew Linklater in which Linklater

discusses his intellectual development, Marx, Hegel, Kant, emancipation, cosmopolitanism, political praxis, inclusion and exclusion and structure and agency. The interview serves both to clarify some of the core developments within Linklater's thought and to lay the foundation for the symposium on his *World Politics and Critical Theory* in the book reviews section. The first main article is Marcos Zunino's dynamic and innovative Gadamerian interpretation of Gulliver's encounter with the Houyhnhnms in Swift's classic novel. Zunino demonstrates precisely the sort of distinctive interdisciplinary engagement we seek to encourage, producing an article full of creativity. The second main article is Heath's rigorous and illuminating evaluation of E. H. Carr's enduring contribution to contemporary political thought and international relations. Attempting to explain several areas of inconsistency in Carr's work, Heath embraces the flux and fluidity of his work, appealing for a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of his thought.

In the essay section we have two works on Western engagement with Sub-Saharan Africa. In the first, Stenberg invokes the contemporary practice of witchcraft as a means of illuminating local understandings of liberal policy. She argues that contemporary witchcraft can be seen as a representation of the ills of modernity, concluding that much of the blame for the current malaise lies in the Enlightenment tradition of compartmentalising the social, the political, the economic, the cultural and, importantly, the spiritual, to the detriment of communities. In the second, Kabbah argues that Africa is stuck in a void between worlds of *Independence or Imperialism*. With undertones of Huntington, Kabbah argues that Africa must be allowed to assimilate fully into Western society or, otherwise, be allowed to return to traditional African ways. The fate of Africa, he argues, lies in the hands of aid donors – particularly average, middle class, Westerners – who are caught in their own state of ambivalence between wishing to preserve certain cultural practices while wishing to eradicate significant others.

It is, however, in the review section where we have the most lively, discursive contributions. This is the result of the diligence and enthusiasm of Shannon Brincat and Mark Edward in organising intensive reviews of several important texts. In the first, Brincat, Heath, Talbut, Thame and Yearwood review Andrew Linklater's *World Politics and Critical Theory*. Linklater responds by restating and clarifying his position on humanity, the state, harm and community and civilisation. In the second, Edward, Srnicek and Dunham review Levi R. Bryant's *Difference and Givenness*. Bryant contextualises his work, explains his fascination with Deleuze and clarifies his engagement with realist ontology. In the third, Coward and Perezalonso review Kyle Grayson's *Chasing Dragons*. Grayson responds succinctly to claims of inconsistency and challenges to his anti-foundationalism. In the final piece, Martin Farr reviews *A View from the Foothills: the Diaries of Chris Mullin*, the British, Labour MP. This witty piece contextualises the diaries and discusses Mullin's role in politics with great humour, producing a brief overview of the demise of the British hard left and Mullin's own ideological journey, including his part in the election of the ex-Speaker, Michael Martin.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the roles that each of the following have played in organising the journal and the first issue: Shannon Brincat and Mark Edward for setting up the journal and organising the book reviews; Martin Weber, Andrew Linklater, Martin Farr, Derek Bell, Gillian Whitehouse and the referees for their extremely generous assistance with the project; the authors for their contributions; Elliott Johnson for organising Martin Farr's book review; Martyn

Griffin for organising refereeing processes; Ronnie Yearwood for his proof reading and Lacy Davy and Jan Luedert for organising reviews for future issues and circulating calls for papers.

I hope that this first issue will entertain as well as engage readers and provide the stimulus for significant and substantive discourse across disciplinary and geographical boundaries; truly 'Global Discourse'.

Yours,

Matthew Johnson

Newcastle, UK, January 28th 2010.