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An Unpause-ish Statement An ACME Editorial

ACME Collective

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An Unpause-ish Statement: an *ACME* Editorial

ACME Collective

Dear community of geographers,

What is critical geography, and what can, and must, it be? As a journal that embraces radical visions for the field, we embrace this question again and again. Now we write to announce a renewed vision for *ACME* that brings the journal into conversation with broader publics and further defines and advances our scholarly and activist commitments. We stand with you in the struggles against global injustice, and all the more so in this time of global pandemic. We appreciate the work you do to fight for change. We hope this finds you well and well connected to those you love.

In March 2020, we announced that we were “Slowing Down in Solidarity”¹ with the urgent imperative to offer deeper care and support to our colleagues and comrades at the arrival of the pandemic, and then two months later issued a full “Pausing New Articles Unrelated to COVID-19 Pandemic-Related Issues.”² At the three year anniversary of these announcements, we find that we are more in need of support and solidarity than ever. With this “Unpause-ish Statement,” *ACME*’s Editorial Collective affirms our 20-plus-year commitment to critical geography. We continue to oppose the many forms of violence, injustice, and inequity that disrupt and destabilize the lives of marginalized human and more-than-human beings around the world and the planet we inhabit.

Accordingly, we clarify that a “return to business as usual” is impossible and unwarranted, and that it recreates the injustices we seek to fight. It is our position to maintain

¹ <https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/announcement/view/70>

² <https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/announcement/view/72>

an “unpause-ish” work environment, to step forward slowly and carefully or, at times, to remain in place instead of always pushing forward. We recognize what Ellen Samuels (2017) calls “crip time”: the ability for each person to define what is “normal” to us while recognizing that crip time is also packed with elements like grief time, broken time, sick time, and writing time (see also Clare 2017; Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018; Samuels and Freeman 2021). At the same time, we continue to recognize the inequity our authors, reviewers, and editors face in our own research and positionalities.³

In this editorial, we also seek to make visible our labour, structures, and policies to call for more transparency across the discipline, and to reinvigorate the true and original meaning of Open Access (OA) (Harnad, 1995; Pia et al., 2020). We realize most scholars do not know the generalized, let alone specific, inner workings of academic geography publications. The important history of the free OA movement has also been obscured by the corporatized claim to “open access” by for-profit journals (Khoo, 2019; see also Manjoo, 2013; Schreiber, 2013; Wei, 2020). Exposing the structures, processes, and power practices of journals and our place within the academic publishing industry is one way we can lay bare the production of academic knowledge itself, so that we can more carefully and critically create knowledge together (Walby & Lippert, 2019; Liboiron, 2021). For example, *ACME* has always refused to produce quantified measures of our work to inform for-profit impact factors like Web of Science, which Google Scholar’s h5-indexes are now able to tabulate without consent by web crawls and their own self-defined metrics.⁴ As the only primarily English-speaking, fully open access journal in geography—following the traditional definition of open access as free of cost to authors and readers alike—we offer the *ACME* Collective’s thoughts on these changes at this important time (see also ephemera, et al. 2021). We also describe our efforts to create a more secure financial future for *ACME*.

To reaffirm and further clarify our mission, the Collective has defined the political commitments that we understand as central to critical geography. In our triennial retreat, we set out to unpack the multiple meanings of “critical” among Collective members and to explore the extent to which we are radical. We began interrogating the distinction between critical and radical geographies only to find ourselves in the process of first needing to sort out what is “geography”— what is space and place? Is it not an inherently interdisciplinary study? *ACME* assembles work that exemplifies a praxis of social and political change aimed at identifying and challenging systems of domination, oppression, and exploitation, and dismantling the relations of power that sustain them in particular locations at a range of scales. We aim to challenge and expand what “critical” and “geography” mean to interdisciplinary thinking around space and place as we now publish in six languages. Thus we understand

³ As a Collective member, Ashanté Reese uses the term “unpause-ish.” This term was a way to congeal and carry our thoughts for the last three years as we did this work.

⁴ *ACME* has supported individual authors with their download numbers upon request at any time as we see this data as property of the author.

“critical” in our journal’s name as both the cornerstone of our Collective intellectual practice, and a marker of our intervention in a world deeply riven by multiple intersecting crises. In our conversations, we have taken up “geography” from a variety of perspectives that nourish our understanding of *ACME* as a home for interdisciplinary examinations of space and place alongside a commitment to care and liberatory praxis.

The Frame for Unpause-ish Work

Finally, this necessary shift to an “unpause-ish” framework, the broadened focus of our Editorial Collective’s expertise, and our commitment to furthering critical geographies in their most radical forms, together require a change in the ways we labour. As elaborated below, we write this editorial to clarify that we must be more selective with whom we work.

As a Collective, we recognize the necessity of interrupting the expectation that intellectual labour should return to ‘business as usual.’ Multiple intersecting global crises continue to disrupt and destabilize our daily lives, a burden unduly borne by already-marginalized people. We take seriously our mission to cultivate and amplify radical and critical scholarship that imagines the emergence of other futures from our collective struggle. We recognize an academy that faces defunding, de-resourcing, strikes, precarity, austerity, adjunctification, tenure-track positions that are increasingly unliveable, underpaid, and/or unpaid, and ever more exhausting demands for service alongside the support we offer students when university and social services fail them. We also recognize that the academy is finally hiring more Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people, people of colour, disabled people, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people, yet asking them to do more work with less support and less power to claim that support. Often, the academy is being reinvented as a corporate training ground. What kind of world can we create for ourselves, our students, and our colleagues through higher education if we do not confront these models?

Recently, Natalie Oswin described in “The View From Here” (2022) how she has found it impossible to un-press pause, since times are still challenging for her as a Managing Editor, and for everyone upon whom she greatly depends to keep *Society & Space* going. Like her, we also are unable to un-press pause. Like her, we feel, sense, and know: “Capitalist globalization has not only broken our health system, it has also broken our education system” (ibid., 389). We offer this “Unpause-ish Statement” in deep resonance and solidarity with Oswin and other colleagues within and beyond geography.

We recognize that we must commit to creating spaces of nurture, healing and support against ever-corporatized working practices (Schrecker, 2010). We hope these actions point—however tentatively and modestly—to “a different ethos that recognizes the challenges that our post-pandemic future will pose” (Oswin, 2022). Such a task has never been more urgent as the possibility of a “post-pandemic” future seems all the more impossible each day. We maintain an “unpause-ish”-like collaboration—in recognizing the time, energy, and bandwidth—with marginalized reviewers, authors, and editors are able to share. An “unpause-ish” approach is especially ethically relevant given the presence of so many precarious scholars

among our Collective, including many early career academics. We use the term early career academics to foster international solidarity with precarious scholars whose work and identities situate them at the bottom of structures of oppression within the neoliberal university model.

Why We Re-Envisioned *ACME*

A Renewed Mission and Structure

In order to be the journal we want to be for the field and for ourselves, since January 2020, we have conducted a re-envisioning of the journal. Unsurprisingly, the slow work of re-envisioning *ACME* took even longer in the face of burnout, exhaustion, loss, and other agonies brought on or exacerbated by the effects of the pandemic, climate change, global revolution, anti-trans uprisings, alt-right white power movements, anti-CRT politics, and more. The changes we have made to our mission statement, formats, peer review process, and collective structure, along with other practices and policies, are what we offer back to geography and broader interdisciplinary studies of space and place.

Our new Mission Statement makes clear that the core mission of *ACME* is to make critical geographical scholarship accessible for free to readers and authors as a manifestation of our commitment to collective labour.⁵ We remain international, multilingual, and fully open access. *ACME* publishes work that builds and advances critical frameworks such as those aligned with anti-racist, anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, anti-speciesist, anti-authoritarian, Black, Indigenous, feminist, crip, trans, queer, and multi-species perspectives. We recognize that, while we list these identities, perspectives, and theoretical and methodological approaches—as many journals do—we do not do them perfectly. Rather, we work toward them—and despite the many ways in which we are pausing our activities, this work has not stopped and will never stop. We learn from our authors, reviewers, readers, and Collective members how to better support this scholarship and lived experience paper by paper, issue by issue, conversation by conversation.

After years of debates, meetings, and emails, we significantly updated our Author Guidelines.⁶ We explicitly seek to support early career scholars, particularly those whose voices have not been elevated in geographic “knowledge production” (Hunt 2014). This support is not to the exclusion of receiving works from more established scholars, and we are grateful to those scholars who have long or more recently supported *ACME*. As we work for and with authors from an array of locations and contexts, we also hail from and draw on a multitude of intellectual backgrounds. Thus we believe authors must locate themselves in relation to the central debates in their paper, as well as situate how their understandings of difference and intersectionality shaped their work in relation to their topic of study. For example, we encourage authors to engage work on colonialism and imperialism in a way that appropriately considers relationships to/with land and systems of dispossession, including but not limited to

⁵ <https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/about>

⁶ <https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/authguide>

underlying dynamics of erasure, resistance, and/or accountability to acknowledge the lands on and through which we work (Curley & Smith 2020; Liboiron, 2021; cf. Anti-Racist Scholarly Reviewing Practices 2021).⁷

On Behalf of Readability and Publics: Diversity in Submission Formats

We feel responsible for creating a venue where both traditional papers and interventions and more public-facing academic scholarship can be housed (cf. Smith, et al. 2021). We have multiplied *ACME*'s Submission Formats to ease the pressure on our community to publish, and we host and share public conversations that afford easier access and dissemination of scholarship with broader publics.⁸ We shortened the length of *ACME* papers to 9,000 words to produce a more readable and focused format. We have also updated our font to increase readability to give the design of the journal the vibrancy and unique look evident in our and our authors' labour.

Collective conversations about our positionality require us to consider methods and outputs, as well as the need to broaden the ways we communicate, particularly as such a long-standing, public-facing journal. To that end we now encourage submissions of creative, academic, and activist work presented in formats that go beyond standard academic writing, fiction, or poetry, alongside data visualization analyses, interviews, comics, and speculative fiction. We are especially excited to publish interviews, letters, translations, and roundtables that allow us to directly listen in on conversations among experts sharing cutting-edge and historic work. We are simultaneously launching the *ACME* 20+ Year Anniversary CFP: The Critical Geography Conversations to support our devotion to readability, publication for a broader audience, and transparency in meaning-making in the field, while also hopefully allowing for faster turnaround time for some publication formats.⁹ We have also published and will continue to devotedly publish essays, tributes/remembrances, and editorials.

ACME began as a multilingual journal and we have carried on that commitment. We have sought to introduce work in languages other than English to English-speaking geographers. To this end, Team New Babel—as our Translations Committee has lovingly titled themselves—has developed relationships with *Geopolitica(s)*¹⁰ (Spanish), *Carnets de Géographes*¹¹ (French), *Justice Spatiale / Spatial Justice*¹² (French/English), and *Histoire de la recherche contemporaine*¹³ (French). Multilingual geographers are translating some of the most widely read research papers from these OA publications; these translations will launch shortly and hopefully be published annually in *ACME*. With much excitement, we also welcome

⁷ <https://tinyurl.com/reviewheuristic>

⁸ <https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/subformats>

⁹ <https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/announcement/view/95>

¹⁰ <https://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/GEOP/>

¹¹ <https://journals.openedition.org/cdg/>

¹² <https://www.jssj.org/>

¹³ <https://journals.openedition.org/hrc/>

translations of Italian, German, and Portuguese critical geographic scholarship into English for publication in *ACME*.

We made every effort to find a way to publish in PDF and HTML formats, namely as the latter would also enable the publication of video performances, podcasts, interactive data visualizations, videos, or GIFs. However, the software and support for such a dual PDF/HTML publishing venture using OJS are still under development. We hope that future generations of *ACME* Collective Editors will be able to further push the limits of the OJS platform to incorporate diverse formats. To be in conversation with the public, and avoid the kind of elitism that could bring about our own obsolescence, these formats must find their way into how academic journals publish.

Editorial and Peer Review Process

We strive to embody our mission not only through the work that we publish, but also by fostering transparency, reciprocity, and accountability in the editorial process. We conducted a rigorous evaluation of our Peer Review process during which Kate Derickson (2022) published her intervention to “do less” within and for them, and which we took to heart. We continue to offer Double Blind (both reviewer and author unknown to one another), Single Blind (reviewer unknown to author), and Open Review (both reviewer and author known to one another) in order to foster a deep recognition of the labour and care required to produce, review, and edit scholarly work. In this “unpause-ish” statement, we also seek to call in and out the for-profit publishers who demand faster turnaround times for research paper reviews. We seek to instead honor the labour and work of authors as *well* as that of our devoted, unpaid reviewers; in the current poly-crisis context, we must all become more supportive and caring, while recognizing the necessity of working towards balance and boundaries when needed.

Following long consideration, we have begun to run all published pieces through text matching software to identify instances in which a submitted text too closely matches that of a previously published source. This has become necessary due to the incredible volume of published material now available online. Delightedly and for all time, *ACME* authors maintain copyright of their own work through a Creative Commons BY-NC-ND 4.0 International License.¹⁴ In keeping with our long held approach, we only request authors to notify us of their plans to reprint or modify their *ACME* publications as book chapters, translations, or in edited volumes.

For the last few years, *ACME*, along with other critical geography journals, has published a significant number of special issues (SI) and themed sections (TS). We support and enjoy the publication of groups of papers as much as we look forward to editing individual papers. However, we have noted a pattern that these are often exhausting efforts for junior scholar editors who organize the SI spend so much time editing others’ work that their own writing receives insufficient attention. Who, then, benefits most from this work? It is time to

¹⁴ <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

address the costs these formats have for our community. We have created specific Special Issue and Themed Section Submission Guidelines for potential co-editors and authors to make visible the laborious and beautiful process of producing these issues.¹⁵

We are always furthering our practices and policies to support our authors, editors, translators, essayists, and interviewers in the pursuit of radical justice. A recent policy shift around citational politics is important to share with the broader geography community (Mott and Cockayne 2017, 2018, 2021). The growth of movements like BLM, Land Back, and #MeToo has helped many of us realize the people we read and cite may not live the politics on which they write (cf. Ahmed 2014). We are grateful to Brittany Meché who reached out to us about her concerns over her own citations of a scholar who had been accused of years of sexual harassment and violence. In collaboration with the Collective, Meché added a postscript to a previously published research article to make note of the citational practices she wished to amend.¹⁶ Going forward, we welcome any past and future author of *ACME* to add such after-publication footnotes to their work, with each being reviewed by the Collective for clarity and support. We ask our sibling journals to consider this practice of respecting our academic work as a living document, and we welcome other ways in which we can more critically craft our production of knowledge.

Building and Becoming the *ACME* Collective

Unlike most academic journals, *ACME* operates with a non-hierarchical Editorial *Collective* rather than an editorial board, and a large International Advisory Board (IAB) who we often look to as reviewers. Over the past ten years, our Collective has been comprised of 12-30 editors guided by differing theoretical, empirical, axiological, and methodological approaches. Our editors encompass diverse situated identities and knowledges, and are affiliated with institutions across the globe. At quarterly Collective meetings and through the work of committees, we use consensus decision-making to set policies and build our collective infrastructure. In addition to participating in key decision-making that directs the journal and the Collective, *ACME* editors also conduct editorial work on submissions assigned to them by the Managing Editor. Editorial work is assigned according to experience and expertise, with workloads openly assigned on an equitable basis. The equitable distribution of editorial assignments is directed by a model that recognizes the uneven demands placed upon those of us who are underrepresented in geography as a discipline. Thus our determination to be more selective with whom we work is driven strictly by the labour we can fully support.

We proceed on the principle that mutual aid and support are critical to challenging, dismantling, and transforming the injustices perpetuated through prevalent structures of power, many of which formed the very basis of geography as a discipline and continue to permeate the academy in which we work. Because we aim to emphasize work by, about, and

¹⁵ <https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/si-ts>

¹⁶ <https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/article/view/2101/1653>

with Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and all people of colour and their struggles for self-determination, people from the Global South, 2SLGBTQIA+ people, women, migrants, refugees, and (dis)abled and differently-abled folks, more-than-human beings, and others, we also aim to embody this approach in our Collective structure. We decided to increase the size of the Collective from 14 to 25 members in an effort to include multiple editors representing any particular identity to ensure each had the opportunity to speak with similar others who understand their specific struggles. We aim to make a Collective space where no one is alone in their identity or research interests.

By actively seeking out participation of more exploited identities, we recognize that many of those most underrepresented inhabit junior positions in the academy. Our Collective model pushes back against the unsustainable cycle of labour precarity that permeates hiring, tenure, and publication (Schrecker, 2010). As our journal matures and our Editorial Collective grows, *ACME* has adopted and reinforced a staggered workload model to better balance the needs, skills, lives, and tasks of each editorial team member with the positive synergy generated by collective volunteer labour. This process has sought to make the editorial process less demanding for our editors in these challenging times. For example, the larger Collective has allowed for many editors to take on a decreased editorial role while contributing to committee work and helping steer the direction of the journal.

By their very nature, *ACME*'s guiding principles often extend beyond the work of the journal and of the academy in general. Our commitments have manifested in statements of solidarity, including our policy decisions to support BLM and Black Geographers,¹⁷ French colleagues at PACTE (message de soutien aux collègues français de PACTE),¹⁸ the French academy's publication strike,¹⁹ and the Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs and Land Defenders,²⁰ our practice to slow down reviews during the early days of the Covid pandemic and 2020 revolution, and participation with/support of organizations like the Black Geographies and Queer and Trans Geographies Specialty Groups of the American Association of Geographers. We deliberately craft all such statements as a Collective through a co-productive process that enables as many of our voices as possible to be represented. We also intentionally seek the inputs, opinions, experiences and viewpoints of our diverse Collective in all decisions while at the same time being mindful of the burden of labour that this type of participation requires. Beyond the responsibilities of Editorial Collective members generally, there are three specific editorial roles (Coordinating Editor, Managing Editor, and Editor-in-Chief) whose functions we wish to make more transparent to the community and do so on our website under How We Are Organized.²¹

¹⁷ <https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/announcement/view/73>

¹⁸ <https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/announcement/view/78>

¹⁹ <https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/announcement/view/68>

²⁰ <https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/announcement/view/67>

²¹ <https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/organization>

Our Financial Stability in the Face of Precarity

Part of our project of transparency of course brings us to our own political economy and technological practices. To sustain *ACME*, we must reapply for the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council's (SSHRC) (Canada) "Aid to Scholarly Journals"²² grant every three years. SSHRC's funding particularly supports scholarly dissemination of original research with a specific focus on innovative activities and commitment to open access and innovative practices in digital practices. We rely solely on SSHRC funds to support the journal, although we are in discussions about broadening our financial model going forward.

Our limited funding options mean that *ACME* primarily exists on volunteer labour with the exception of the Coordinating Editor who is compensated at a rate of \$27,000 CAD per year. Over 90% of the budget funds the Coordinating Editor position come from the SSHRC funds. The remainder has been dedicated to supporting *ACME*'s mission through conference keynote honorariums, translator fees, technical infrastructure, and a tri-annual retreat. In the spirit of our commitment to collective labour, mutual aid, and full open access, and in the spirit of transparency, we are looking at this work against the problematic publishing for-profit model. With the exception of two annual course releases for our present Managing Editor when they were on faculty at the University of Kentucky, and the Coordinating Editor's salary noted above, no members of the *ACME* Editorial Collective have received monetary compensation for their labour in our 22 years of existence. We have never been able to afford a copyeditor and so we depend upon our authors and Editorial Collective to complete that work.

ACME is one of the loudest and longest advocates for actual free and accessible open access in geography and work on spatiality. Unsurprisingly, we are concerned about the existing and possibly forthcoming intensified inequity in academic publishing. Namely, for-profit publishers move to "open access" that require authors to pay for their publications through article processing charges (APCs), rather than through the current (albeit also concerning and imperfect) journal subscription-based formula. How will a move to APCs play out across different identities, universities, disciplines, geographies, and more? As a discipline and for those interested in 'the spatial', we find it curious and somewhat concerning that this move towards APCs is not yet leading to vocal and public discussions across our fields, particularly at a time when many journals are also emphasizing the public-facing nature of geographic research (e.g., Smith et al. 2021). This topic requires considerably more discussion than we can offer here, yet, we are keen to and will research and share more with the geographic and, hopefully, larger academic community later this year.

Recently, we were able to bring the journal's digital home base from UNBC—who we are grateful to for years of support and storage without cost to the journal—to UBC, which will

²²https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programmes-programmes/scholarly_journals-revues_savantes-eng.aspx#6

allow even more security and longevity for *ACME* papers and also takes on this relationship without cost to *ACME*. The shift also allowed a long overdue update of the Open Journal Software (OJS), a free and open-source software journal review, management, and publication application. While seemingly unexciting to you, our dear readers, this brought blissful tears to the eyes of our Editorial Collective members for its ease of use. The Érudit organization—a non-profit, Canadian band of librarians who work to increase the search engine optimization (SEO) of OJS journals—reached out to us and included us in their collection, so that a backup of the journal is hosted on their site for greater access and security.²³ Because we were an online journal before most of our peer journals and without a for-profit staff to handle technology needs, we have always faced the burden of navigating our own technological issues alongside UNBC and UBC staff. We are grateful for all of those who stepped forward to keep *ACME* online for over twenty years.

Moving Forward, and Sometimes Standing Still

The forward motion we used to expect of one another and ourselves feels like a state of burnout rather than energizing blaze. Sometimes standing still or sitting down or an un-pause-ish approach is the action we need. The careful labour to re-envision, re-launch, and upgrade the technology, design, structure, and mechanics of the journal and the Collective, along with writing this Editorial to share about this work, took three years and over 25 radical and critical geographers from six continents. Collaborative work takes time (and space), especially during such an ever-intensified time of crises, de-resourcing, and austerity. We are grateful to many for your continued support, and we welcome new colleagues to join. As we do every two to three years, we have announced a call for new *ACME* Editors and we welcome you to apply to join us in the work we described here.²⁴ We also welcome you to shape the voice of *ACME* by submitting your research and other work, and/or participating in the *ACME* 20+ Year Anniversary CFP: The Critical Geography Conversations by collecting oral histories of the field and conducting roundtables of those critical and radical conversations which must forever further shape the field and all of academic knowledge.²⁵

We stand with you in solidarity and rage, joy and determination, and light.

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²³ <https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/acme/>

²⁴ <https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/announcement/view/94>

²⁵ <https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/announcement/view/95>

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