Critical Disability Discourse Retrospective

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"Don't Do It"

Or, to put it more accurately, I was advised not to establish a journal while still a student, given the ponderous weight of the workload. This was more or less the friendly bit of counsel given when I first approached an editor in the disability studies field and made rather vague, starry-eyed inquiries regarding how to set up a journal. Admittedly, looking back now, I would have to conclude this was excellent advice.

And yet, this issue marks the fifth anniversary of *Critical Disability Discourse/Discours Critiques dans le Champ du Handicap*, a modest but worthy accomplishment for the journal's run. To commemorate the event, this retrospective will reflect on the process taken to establish *CDD*, including the nuts and bolts to structuring and managing a journal. Undergirding these seemingly practical obstacles has been our original mandate, which required intense deliberation, careful development, and at times earnest defence. I hope to lay out here the overarching philosophical and political principles that frame the work we have set out to accomplish over these last five years. I do so in order to honour those who upheld these principles, to account for their evolution, and to make our original intentions clear as future issues are turned over to increasingly newer hands.

From the Ground Up

That first year, the project came together during small meetings in campus coffee shops. The few students interested in participating in the endeavour comprised an industrious and creative lot, though we were quick to find that our decision-making required drawn-out debate. We disputed details as tedious as the journal's name and the website's aesthetic, and topics as central as our scope, structure, and mandate. The process lacked all formalities, followed nothing like Robert's Rules, and could drone on for hours, only to spill into lengthy email exchanges.

Frustrating certainly, but these great debates crystallized an aspect to our organization that has never since been so clear: *CDD* was meant to be the product of consensus and collaboration. We shared in a collective vision, realized in solidarity and with transparency. Even if the process took time or aggravated participants, the final product had a sort of authenticity to it that could not be found if the project was organized via a top-down approach. For, its frame embodied the kind of politics we hoped its content would eventually contain.

Essential to this vision has all along been that the journal would be conceived of and managed by students. York University faculty members had roles to play early on as counsel and reviewers, and in later years supporting graduate assistantships, but students have been responsible for *CDD*'s structure and substance. Further, and what marks our journal as unique in disability studies, we only accept for publication material written by students. Having students both working in managerial and editorial capacities and submitting articles has required that we organize deadlines around school terms, and that we find the patience to instruct on the process thoroughly and often. These indulgences are certainly a worthwhile trade-off, for the opportunity *CDD* offers to gain insight on the publication process.

You see, the journal became advantageous for people just entering into competitive scholarship, where the learning curve is steep. We may well be many academics' first stop on a long and difficult road, which makes the lessons they learn and the feedback we give all the more important. Further, the field of disability studies is burgeoning, and already in flux; we need to carve out more spaces for fresh perspectives. The new, the raw, and the inexperienced certainly has the power to be insightful, and may serve as catalyst to push the academic and activist discourse on disability forward. There is epistemic value, then, to giving voice to student innovation.

Money Matters

This student-conducted work is entirely volunteer-based (with a notable exception I will discuss shortly). The commitments vary according to position, but across the board students have been offering their time and expertise for the lessons learned, the C.V. credential, perhaps out of passion for the project, but not for pay. Moreover, *CDD* is published online, which renders production costs unnecessary; and is open access, meaning that we generate no profit from subscriptions. As it was originally conceived, the project was designed neither to require nor to raise funds. Operating unhampered by financial constraints meant that we might preserve the integrity of our mandate, for money so often comes with strings attached.

But this philosophy has shifted as the years wore on, with the establishment of a funded graduate assistantship for the position of managerial editor. The post exists because our organizational structure has also shifted since our inception. With the framework for the journal set via consensus, the day to day dealings with journal business were relegated to management, and that work is onerous, vastly unacknowledged or under-appreciated given much of it is conducted in isolation. The editorial board has at various points in *CDD*'s history taken on responsibilities outside of content selection, but the managerial editor now takes up that labour and coordinates every step of the process. This becomes a problem precisely because we are students: because our primary responsibility is to finish school, and because many students are not in the financial position to offer a substantial amount of volunteer work. So the question became: how might we respect the work done since our structural changes and yet protect our constitutional core?

The solution to this problem, the graduate assistantship, has come with a host of political questions that have yet to be worked out, such as to whom the managerial editor is to be held

accountable when the journal functions independently of faculty. To this I respond with cautious

optimism, given my faith in the York faculty members who have supported the journal

unconditionally since its founding. I would further note an additional boon to an established, paid

position: it ensures our longevity, because it anchors each issue to a single person who can

initiate momentum each year.

Concluding Remarks

As for my hopes for the future of *CDD*, I have dreams of having articles integrated into

search indexes so that they might be easier to access in the greater academy. I can imagine a

more invested commitment to bilingualism: greater promotional efforts, full translations of

articles. I also wonder whether posterity will need to return to and tinker with the centralized

organization of the journal. I would like to see greater realization of the original set-up: a

deliberative, consensus-based framework for decision-making. Though, this is difficult to

replicate the larger we get, when our reviewers and editors are scattered and can only

communicate decisions via e-mail.

Even while looking forward, determining next steps, there is value in remembering who

came before. Special thanks to founding editors Natasha Saltes, Bonita Heath, and Laurence

Parent, who each left their stamp on *CDD*; Jenna Reid, Jessica Vorstermans, Catherine

Duchastel, and Elisabeth Harrison, who have occupied managerial positions over the years and

have understood the journal's vision well; Andrea Kosavic, who built the website and solved

myriad technical problems along the way; the reviewers and editors over the years who took on

the shadow work necessary for getting to print; as well as those who forgave my tyrannical

hiccups whenever I was in charge (and even a few moments when I was just convinced I was in

charge).

And if the readership will permit me this final moment of reflection as my last contribution to *Critical Disability Discourse:* good work has been produced both behind the scenes and in print over these past five years. The project was large in scale from its beginning, ambitious if not ill-advised, and can only be deemed a success thanks to the politics driving it and the people constituting it. Though politics have a way of changing with time and the confrontation of obstacles, I have learned to have faith in those people who take their turn at the helm.

Happy anniversary, *CDD*. Best wishes in the years to come.