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# Guest Introduction to the 40th Anniversary Issue: Manifestos, Web Pages, and Continuities in Criticality

Ed McLuskie  
*Boise State University*

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Boise State University  
1910 University Dr.  
Boise, Idaho 83725-1920 USA  
emclusk@boisestate.edu

A decade ago, *JCI* marked its 30th anniversary with a tracing of mastheads (McLuskie, 2004) once manifesto-like in character, but less so as the journal moved through its first three decades. Now, at its 40th year, the word "Inquiry" in the journal's title still announces an orientation that aims beyond method. Whether discussing the field and its problems or offering alternative modes of inquiry, *JCI* has a reputation as a space for fresh academic air (more on the history, importance, and perennial vulnerability of that reputation in a moment).

But the significance held by mastheads in 2004 is different in the online world of 2014, as *JCI* publisher Sage adapts with the rest of the publishing industry to garner and speed circulation. The proclamation of identity that came from mastheads is now more loudly proclaimed outside the Journal's printed pages. Scholarly production and consumption by the 2010s is seen through the world's increasingly webbed libraries, also offering shorthands—"shortcuts," these days—and gatekeeping—"portals," these days—to guide the searching scholar whose work gets done, in the best of circumstances, on the run to the rare spaces of reflection. Multiple titles of articles await, the journal title itself a subject matter hash tag used to point out landings. Web pages for the journals themselves recommend articles, organized for the searcher into an academic journal's alleged best hits. If those hits do not register the journal's identity, they do register intra-journal popularity in terms of recency. They also help—likely the opposite of "help"—shape what counts in an academic world.

As of early January 2014, *JCI* has its own top 50 lists, as do most online pathways to academic journals with major publishers. One quick click away from an "All Journals" link at the main web page sits a tabbed choice: "Most Read" and "Most Cited," with "Most Read" as the default display. All such lists invite the reader to pause, perhaps linger, with a snapshot of recency (the site determines "most read" based on what was most read during the previous full month, December 2013 at this writing). Thus, it should not surprise that 50% of the list is drawn from 2010 through 2013, or that nearly a half of that is from 2013. The other 50% of 50 hits is halved at 2004, so that the decade between the 30th and 40th anniversary of *JCI* owns 75% of the top 50 greatest hits for the recency-minded. The "Most Cited" list reaches back into the 1980s, suggesting much of the journal's inaugural decade, 1974–1984, has little hope in 2014 of reaching a top 50 list. One will find, however, 20% of the "Most Cited" within the journal's fourth decade, though those beyond 2008 may await their appearances. On this set of popular measures for academic publication, the journal faces fading memories of its past—unless one gets curious beyond the measurements of the age.

*JCI* also has other guides from the publisher's web page, where a "Recommended Reading List" stops at 2001, and where two "Coursepacks" reach a bit further into this century. One of the coursepacks breaks into the past decade, with four articles on political economy and communication (Craig, 2004; Dahlberg, 2005; Engstrom, 2008; Proffitt, Djung Yune, & McAllister, 2007). Other guides lie behind lists of article titles: The special issue on cultural studies with Stuart Hall in 1986 (10:2) is a recurring example. Closer to this *JCI* anniversary, a commemoration of James Carey in 2007 (31:4) marks an indigenous American critique of journalism and the ritual view of communication to go with it. And at the cusp of this 40th anniversary, an interview (Harmsen, 2013) with Todd Gitlin recognizes the 1960s–1970s range of scholarship and activism that informs and works through the pages of *JCI*.

Those speeding through the site may click a PDF link. That alone registers the hit. Once landing in view of the PDF, however, readers find an unfurling critique that points beyond what may first seem content-bound in the culture surf. A careful reader willing to reach through the decades risks a move off the top 50 gridscope. Arcs, however, open up to show the sweep of investigation into the less popular and specialized perspectives on communication.

For example, Marx and Marxism on this question of perspective reaches from the first issue (Manca & Manca, 1974) midway into *JCI*'s fourth decade (Fuchs, 2009). Since the digitization of yellowing mimeographs—*JCI*'s first medium—the journal stays as it is able to, "cruising on the Left" (Hardt, 2007). Readers only need to pause long enough to see such unpacking still at work.

*JCI* dives into the second decade of this century, then, in part by extending its legacies, but also by exercising critical studies into the moments of concern to contemporary editors. Behind all web pages and actual articles is a history of contributions by authors and editors who forged relationships to bring influential scholars to *JCI*—Larry Grossberg and Kuan-Hsing Chen in the case of the Stuart Hall issue just mentioned, and Bonnie Brennen for an Edward Said (1992) piece, to name another. These and other such collaborations and publishing events accelerated and legitimized the efforts of *JCI*'s student editors to recreate and redirect communication inquiry.

During its first decades, the journal aimed to challenge and remind "the mainstream" that method-, message-, and profession-obsessed inquiry missed the mark of communication. Each generation of *JCI* editors tried to break out of that mainstream. Who would have thought that *JCI*'s fourth decade would open in a volume that turned the tables, when Kang (2004) highlighted "the colonial condition of knowledge production" even in the midst of "the critical?" During the fourth decade, the colonization of criticality is itself a looming and continuing occasion that the journal warned of more generally, earlier (Hardt, 1986). Into its fifth decade, however, the journal publishes critical examinations of colonization through global market economies that rob entertainment of cultural distinctiveness (Cox & Proffitt, 2014) and empty news of political meaning by making messages subservient to ownership concerns (Kumar, 2014).

Thus, it is an achievement to begin a fifth decade with student editors in charge. As graduate student editors craft each issue with authors and themes they select, the work flexes peripheral as well as pointed vision, cultural context as well as cultural content, and critical reflection as well as contemporary insight. Difficult enough to pursue for any scholar in the age of the marketed university, many today are sustained by remembrances of a doctoral student's scholarly independence. A journal with a respectable and respected history, it is now a 40-year contribution to intellectual independence in the face of "Most Read," "Most Cited," and, indeed, most other criteria of assessment. Importantly, *JCI* preserves the essay form against templates that confine expressions of academic work. The essay form is rare beyond the single author who not only still thrives in this journal but also faces the demands of publication mills on the way to coveted tenure-track positions.

Pursuing reflective writing as a single author has been in decline since the mid-80s (Feeley, 2008). But any top 50 list on *JCI*'s Web site shows the prevalence of single authors. In these ways, at least, *JCI* is a refuge when it must be, a challenge to those who enter its pages longer than the little time required to register a "hit." Those who hang out there awhile can appreciate the intellectual and practical stakes that each generation of editors and authors offers to a field that is, like its Web site, all over the map.

The journal's history includes the recurring worry that editors might be silenced via academy–business pressures. In the fragile opening years of *JCI*, it was by no means certain the journal would someday celebrate a 40th anniversary as a student-edited publication. A rare history of the journal, worth updating since the last century closed, was itself a graduate thesis, though written outside Iowa. Titled "Containing the Critical" (McAlister, 1996), its author reports funding and intellectual orientation to be continuing issues accompanying the journal since its inception. Editors she interviewed not only reported an intellectual environment at Iowa eager to challenge the field, but they also reported the need for a faculty buffer and an intellectual culture of the critical against more conventional researchers who, considering the journal "marginal" and therefore unimportant (McAlister, 1996, p. 8), encouraged students and potential editors away from *JCI*. Such tensions reached the journal's pages, from a special issue honoring a controversial j-school director's transformation of journalism and graduate education during the 1960–1970s ("Essays in Honor of Malcolm S. MacLean, Jr.," 1976), to a recent issue's opening page noting the important role of a long-time advisor–mentor (Durham, 2011). This lore is without a hyper-link for the searching researcher. Meanwhile, the journal still depends on institutional-administrative cover to critically interrogate theoretical, economic, political, and careerist pressures that continue to press on a journal that continues to challenge manifestations of the mainstream culture within and outside the academy. As occupational–professional tensions mark the history of the institution, the journal's advisor today, listed as "executive editor" instead of "advisor," continues the buffer zone despite the neoliberal labelings encouraged if not forced by an increasingly

vulnerable academy. The advisor's "original vision" survives through the fourth decade of the journal's life, thanks to a faculty that remains committed to "a student-edited academic journal committed to publishing cutting-edge, innovative, and politically invested research" (Durham, 2011, p. 3). That statement serves today as a masthead-manifesto.

The *New York Times Magazine* also reflects the webbed world. It has a page of snippet boxes. One monitors something like the high-speed half-life of the culture at large in America. The trend line to a "meh list," a list of the now unimpressive that we can safely ignore, but never debate, is noted as an expectation by one of the nation's premier newspapers. There each Sunday, The Meh List marks passings with a shrug on the way to forgetting. It is a list of notations to be left in virtual dust, marking the unmaking of cultural life and consciousness. Soon to be without a trace, its presence on the list is a ghost happening. A fading acquaintance-with, left only to web pages and their time-bound greatest hits, is a kind of Meh List, a worst fate for critical scholarship, whose identity, after all, is about only those passings that change praxis for better-lived lives—subject to debate, of course, over what that better life means. Criticality is "meh-ed" into indifference when locked into "the construction and control of the cultural" without "an ideological framework" (Hardt, 2007). For 40 years now, *JCI* asserted its warnings against indifference. We have its editors, its authors, and their supporting faculty to thank for each awakening from indifference in this celebration of a rare anniversary of a critical journal still run by the generation with the longest stakes against indifference. As with those before them, the editors and authors welcome especially those debates not making the merely acclimated or algorithmic list.

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