

My Days at the Helm of the Good Ship Antipode

Dick Walker (1991-1999) 2006

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My stint as co-editor of *Antipode* seems a world away now, even though it was only the Nineties (1991-99). I was delighted to be asked to do it, at a moment in my early 40s when my career was well established with a couple of books under my belt and my ambitions were high for the Left in geography (and for geography in the world of ideas). Now that I'm a disciplinary Old Fart, with more perspective and fewer ambitions left, I can reflect back with pleasure on my accomplishments. In the event, however, it was often a daunting responsibility being editor and difficult times for *Antipode* and the kind of Left it represented.

I took over the North American side of the editorship from Eric Sheppard, while Joe Doherty stayed on in Britain for two years as co-editor. Joe steadied the ship while I got my bearings, and the pipeline was relatively full for a time. After Joe moved on, Linda McDowell came on board in 1993. Linda's arrival gave the whole enterprise a shot in the arm, and we were able to reconfirm *Antipode's* commitment to the broadest kind of left project in geography (I say reconfirm, because there was a common perception, as Linda says, that *Antipode* was a male Marxist holdover – something I did not believe). Linda was a pleasure to work with.

Being editor wasn't easy at first, I must admit; it's a daunting responsibility evaluating people's submissions, finding reviewers, recommending revisions, and – most of all – keeping to a publishing schedule. Fortunately, I had some terrific help from a couple of graduate student assistants, Kate Davis and Kathy Johnson, and we got a system down for handling the work flow and keeping on top of things. That allowed us to run all the compilation work for issues of the journal through Berkeley. Being editor was, in all likelihood, more of a slog than it is today but easier than it had been in the early days of *Antipode*.

At first, the biggest issue facing *Antipode* seemed to be regularization. After all, the journal had snuck into the margins of the geographical mainstream. Our citation rate was high and we were the reference journal of the Left in the discipline – having survived for twenty years (unlike some others, such as *The Insurgent Sociologist*). Eric and Joe had changed the format and found a publisher, upgrading *Antipode* from its artisanal, collectivist days at Clark University. Quite soon in my tenure, Blackwell came calling with an offer we couldn't refuse, allowing for a further upgrade in looks, pay for a copyeditor, and a fourth issue per year. For reasons of my own aesthetic preferences, I changed the cover into something clean and modern. I even got my Dean to agree to pay for a part-time student editorial assistant, as part of the deal of appointing me to the Chair of the Geography Department at Berkeley in 1993. I was on a roll.

But not for long. Times were changing fast in academia, and the 'post-prefixed' revolt was in full throat. Marxism, socialism and the New Left had become passé among young geographers, especially the growing numbers of women. The Left fractured into a host of new projects on gender, culture, consumption, body politics, and philosophy; what it meant to be radical was in question. Worse, Marxism and political economy were seen by some as part of the problem – essentialist, masculine, Eurocentric, realist, and so forth. It was hard watching the Socialist

Geography Specialty group growing greyer, and seeing the crowds at AAG meetings gather for yet another panel on deconstruction or the postmodern city.

Antipode was no longer the cutting-edge of radical publishing in Geography, either, as new journals sprang up across the disciplinary landscape: *Society & Space*, *Ecumene*, *Gender, Place & Culture*, and the rest. Many bright young people abandoned us for the new journals and drop-off in article submissions to *Antipode* was dramatic. The issues from those days seem thinnish by comparison with the chunky numbers that plop on my desk today. Even the radical blush was off the rose, as many young scholars were more interested in getting published than in changing the world. But we held the fort for the materialist left at *Antipode*, while reaffirming our feminist, anti-racist, and anti-imperialist commitments.

Moreover, Linda and I put out some fine issues along the way. I was pleased to reach out to scholars beyond the usual pale of geography, such as sociologists Michael Burawoy and Enzo Mingione, and historian Bill Cronon. And I am delighted to have published some of the first articles of the next generation of leading lights on the geographic left, such as Don Mitchell, Katharyne Mitchell, Bobbie Wilson, Noel Castree, Andy Herod and Melissa Wright. Despite everything, *Antipode* fulfilled its calling as the place for new, radical voices to be heard.

After a decade at the helm, I was happy to see the journal passed along in 2000 to the team of Jamie Peck and Jane Wills, who brought new energy and new ideas, and who promptly negotiated an even better package from the publishers. *Antipode* stormed back, as the postmodern wave receded in North America (having profoundly changed the coast of geography in the meantime) and the age of empire (Bush II) reasserted itself. It is gratifying to see the heft and quality of *Antipode* today, and I take quiet pleasure in noting that no less than five members of the current editorial board are former students of mine.

As the decade drew to a close, I also withdrew from my other public role as Chair (Head) of Department, thoroughly exhausted by the experience. I had changed the face of Berkeley geography in my tenure, but it had not been an easy time. I was relieved to go back to teaching and writing, and happy once again to put out books of my own. It's funny (but not very) looking back at one's life and speaking of decades gone by: *Antipode* was my 40s, and it went by in a flash. But it is a good yardstick to measure a life by, and I'm glad I did it.