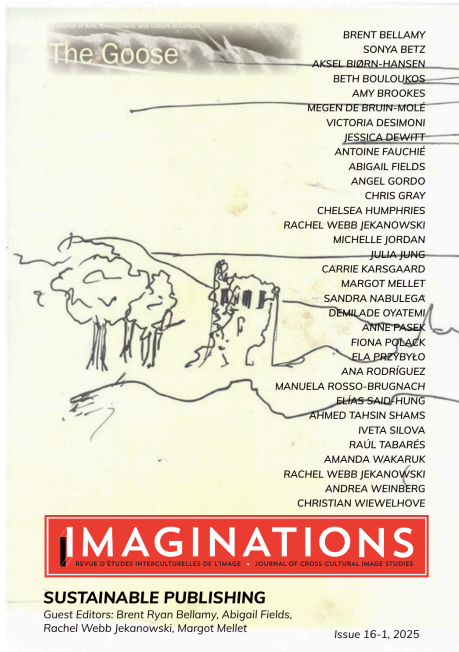


# IMAGINATIONS

REVUE D'ÉTUDES INTERCULTURELLES DE L'IMAGE • JOURNAL OF CROSS-CULTURAL IMAGE STUDIES



IMAGINATIONS:

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## PUBLISHING IN AND FOR PLACE

FIONA POLACK

Place-based university presses are committed to disseminating knowledge generated in, about, or of particular relevance to the lands and waters surrounding them. They invariably work in close and creative relation with adjacent academic and non-academic communities in order to cultivate and spread ideas. Despite their deep intellectual and ethical commitments, the vital work undertaken by place-based scholarly publishers is not always sufficiently acknowledged.

My reflections in this piece are very much shaped by my simultaneous roles as a professor who disseminates her own research in a variety of scholarly venues, and as an academic editor who publishes other people's work. I have held the dual roles of professor in Memorial University's Department of English and academic editor at Memorial University Press since 2017. My main responsibilities at the Press include developing our list, overseeing peer and community review processes, and developmental editing. The academic editor role is rare in Canadian scholarly publishing; the position's duties are more typically divided between (non-academic) acquisition and (academic) series editors. However, MUPress's size—we currently publish four to six North-Atlantic-associated books each year and have two full-time staff—makes the academic editor position economically practical, with the added benefit of ensuring our authors' access to deep scholarly developmental engagement in their projects from the outset. My views are also heavily influenced by the fact I'm a settler academic who received her doctoral training at the University of Tasmania in Lutruwita/Tasmania and has been based for most of her

subsequent career at Memorial University in Ktaqmkuk/Newfoundland.

In Memorial University Press's case, a place-based approach has generated publications including multidisciplinary artist and scholar Pam Hall's *Towards an Encyclopedia of Local Knowledge (ELK)* project. The most recent volume of the series, *Chapter Three: Miawpukek: The Middle River*, was composed by Hall, who is a settler, in collaboration with Mi'kmaw artist Jerry Evans, and published, after extensive community peer review, with the approval of Miawpukek First Nation. *Miawpukek: The Middle River* is a meticulously illustrated, bilingual Mi'kmaq/English volume. In order to afford to produce it, we partnered with local press Breakwater Books, and leveraged grants from sources including SSHRC and the Canada Council for the Arts. The translation was completed by a freelancer in Mi'kma'ki, Breakwater undertook the copyediting of the English portion of the text, and MUPress handled design and production. The very existence of the *ELK* is testament to the ways in which place-based scholarly publishing is invariably richly and complexly collaborative.

Place-based scholarly publishing does not only mean disseminating knowledge derived from a press's immediate vicinity. To state the obvious, the local is deeply imbricated with the global in multifarious ways. MUPress also publishes work extending from sociologist Rie Croll's *Shaped by Silence*, focusing on the experiences of female inmates in the Catholic church's Magdalene laundries around the world, to Sheena Wilson and Lisa Moore's edited volume of flash fiction about energy transition across Canada and beyond. In order to make sure our scholarly publications reach all of their potential readers, MUPress has devoted considerable attention in recent years to gradually and sustainably shoring up our distribution networks. Having first built solid connections with regional bookstores and booksellers, we have moved on to partner with national and, subsequently, international distributors that share our values. We have also ventured into open access publication, although with some trepidation given the intense financial burden it can place on operations of our size. In the process of these developments, MUPress has benefited enormously from the generous professional knowledge shar-

ing that occurs in organizations such as the Association of Canadian University Presses. Place-based scholarly publishing is ultimately intensely relational, and deeply reliant on the building and sustaining of myriad connections to produce and circulate ideas in the context of limited financial resources.

The kind of scholarly publishing I am championing here is not always given its appropriate due. As an academic, I feel subject to professional pressure to publish with the Big Five, and am a regular member of hiring and promotion and tenure committees in which questions around the supposed “prestige” or otherwise of a scholarly press or journal often arise. “Prestige” does, of course, matter when it is code for robust and appropriately conceived peer and/or community review processes, meticulous attention to production and design, and a press’s ability to disseminate widely the innovative and valuable ideas the books it produces contain. There are, however, arguably far more scholarly presses with these capacities than those typically perceived as top tier. All too often, “prestige” is also code for sizeable, metropolitan, corporatized, and often (for Canadian scholars, at least) located elsewhere. The prioritizing of “prestige,” in these latter senses, decreases opportunities for decentring power, and for bolstering the health and diversity of the scholarly publishing ecosystem. This latter concern is particularly critical at a time when university budgets are shrinking, and those of university presses along with them. Academics, and the crucial decision-making committees on which they serve, urgently need to give greater weight to the circumstances under which publications are produced, and the ethical and relational commitments (or otherwise) of the scholarly publishers in question.