



[Art & Labor](#)

Joy Garnett | February 14, 2015

The old issue of intellectual labor produced in exchange for little or no pay has been coming up more than usual this week, probably because the [College Art Association conference](#) is in full swing. Also, [National Adjunct Walkout Day](#) is upon us. In the meantime, I had all but forgotten about this recent email exchange:

Last month, I was contacted by an academic publisher, let's call her Dorothy Lamour, self-described "publisher for visual arts journals" at [insert name of the largest global academic publisher you can think of].

Dorothy Lamour informed me that the long-time editor of one of their "flagship visual art journals" had just retired. Would I be interested in taking on the editorship?

She mentioned that I had been vetted, my name, rank and serial number put forward by a friend and mutual colleague, along with a handful of other potential candidates. Her wording had the distinct air of pre-job interview. It was a given that I would be interested if not thoroughly stoked by the offer, and that I would be eager to compete with these other candidates, and win.

I re-read the email. Its tone was somehow familiar, off-kilter in a Nigerian scam mail kinda way. On one hand it was deferential, and on the other, it seemed obvious I was about to be robbed, or worse.

Dorothy Lamour pasted a description from the journal's press release: "Journal X explores how visual language is structured and visual meaning communicated... illustrates how picture collections are acquired, organized, indexed, and preserved...assesses the effect of electronic technology on current and future uses...provides a platform for reporting innovative ways to organize and access visual information...to increase the recognition and appreciation of visual documentation."

Indeed, an image does come to mind: oceans of papers, a never-ending stream of .docx flooding my Inbox, demanding to be read and re-read, the horror vacui of track changes. Preliminary deadlines before deadlines, reams of rejections written at different levels of sensitivity, endless requests for peer review, endless requests for revisions, all endlessly usurping my weekends, ruining date night, drowning me. Sounds like a job.

Dorothy Lamour suggested we set up a time for an informal, cross-Atlantic phone convo, so I quickly responded: "I'm unfortunately not in a position to take on an unpaid academic post at present. I assume that this editorship is an unpaid post."

I thought that would be the end of it. But no.

Dorothy Lamour shot back within the hour: "...we do not offer a salaried income for the position. If, however, your interest would extend to perhaps considering some involvement in the journal as part of an editorial collective or an expanded editorial board, so that the workload is shared, could that potentially entice?..."

Yes, it could, but you also have to provide the lavender unicorns.

I responded: float a number and then we can talk. That made me feel like a character in The Godfather. The story finally does end there, of course. The shoes of the previous editor will no doubt be filled by some poor, ravenous, beleaguered, tenure-track art professor. This is what that system was set up for. But I'm a superstitious person. And if some unlucky accident should befall the new editor... If s/he should get shot in the head by a police officer, or if s/he should hang him/herself in his/her jail cell - or if s/he's struck by a bolt of lightning, then I'm going to blame some of the people in this room, and that I do not forgive. But, that aside, let me say that I swear, on the souls of my grandchildren, that I will not be the one to break the peace we've made here today.