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## Editor's Preface

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## Editor's Preface

How should one announce, or greet, the arrival of yet another academic journal in a market already glutted with such publications? Can one possibly hope to justify such a seemingly perverse enterprise? Perhaps the best and simplest way to situate *Journal x* in the immense field of contemporary scholarship on literature and culture is to say that this journal exists because so much of that scholarship seems so joyless. At a time when the relationship between intellectual work and intellectual pleasure seems ever more attenuated and obscure, *Journal x* hopes to reengage and perhaps even renew that relationship, to promote the return of pleasure to an institution (the academy) and a mode of writing that seem to have grown wary of it.

Twenty years after the publication of Roland Barthes's *The Pleasure of the Text*, we may be seeing a minor resurgence of scholarly interest in the subject of pleasure, if recent titles by Slavoj Žižek (*For they know not what they do: Enjoyment as a political factor*) and Wendy Steiner (*The Scandal of Pleasure: Art in an Age of Fundamentalism*) are any indication. Yet most of us continue to write, teach, and converse with our colleagues as if pleasure were at best irrelevant to comprehension and critical thinking and at worst an active obstruction to it. While the vast majority of the reading public goes on reading for pleasure, in some cases almost exclusively for pleasure, academics on the whole seem defensive, skeptical, even embarrassed about their pleasures. As Steiner recognizes, pleasure remains something of a scandal in contemporary intellectual life, perhaps nowhere more so than in universities. It may be that the obviousness of pleasure as an integral part of, and motive for, reading is too easily mistaken for triviality, leading us anxiously to focus our intellectual energies on other things, as if to reiterate for ourselves the value of our professional expertise and the necessity of our professional existence as highly skilled readers of literature and culture.

In particular this problem plagues our critical and theoretical writing: volume after volume, essay after essay, we publish and review as if pleasure had — or should have — little or nothing to do with the intellectual value of our work. Nor does the subject typically come up in tenure or promotion reports. Yet everyone has experienced the difference between academic writing that is useful, responsible, original, illuminating — in a word, *publishable* — and that rarer sort of writing that thrills, delights, and surprises, that yields a genuine intellectual buzz.

Wherein that buzz? That is the question that *Journal x* sets out to address. It is of course a multifaceted one: does pleasure inhere in subject, style, method, voice? Can it be isolated, theorized, taught and learned? Or is it hopelessly/gloriously idiosyncratic? Barthes attempted to account for pleasure in terms of textual gaps and scars: readers receive bliss, he claimed, from a specific kind of textual absence or abrasion that creates desire. This has been an influential model, but ultimately one too schematic for our editorial purposes.

*Journal x* is not committed to any particular set of answers or even approaches to the question of pleasure, only to the question itself. We will of course welcome critical or theoretical essays that explore this question directly, but our immediate editorial goal is a good deal more modest, indirect, and open-ended: to serve as a sort of ongoing research archive for present and future investigations into what Žižek might call “enjoyment as an intellectual factor,” by publishing scholarly and personal essays that themselves give pleasure. With that goal in mind, *Journal x* instructs its reviewers to make pleasure an explicit criterion for acceptance and publication, alongside the more orthodox academic criteria of originality and responsibility. To poach upon Wallace Stevens’s description of the supreme fiction, the *Jx* essay *must give pleasure*, must bring the thrill of discovery that has always alerted readers to the presence of a first-rate intellect engaged in the exploration of new territory and the definition of new problems and paradigms.

Hence our title. It was suggested to us by a four-year-old boy who decided to offer his own contribution to a long list of potential journal names, most of them pompous or ponderous, some of them both, all of them eminently rejectable. Immersed in his own sophisticated televisual culture of X-Men and their ilk, he simply reached for what was handy. At first, “Journal x” was an inside joke, standing for little more than our inability to name the journal in a way that would instantly convey its conception. Gradually, however, the working title started to look more and more like the thing we were after. “X,” after all, is the mathematical symbol for an unknown variable, a value to be determined at some later time; the symbol also demarcates an intersection point, a site of crossing or exchange. The goal of *Journal x* is to make good on both of those associations. We envision a publication whose identity is not presented from the outset as an editorial *fait accompli* but instead remains in a productive sense unfinished, to emerge in an ongoing way as our authors, reviewers, and readers collectively define the journal’s personality and direction, “solving for x,” as it were. We also envision a journal genuinely worthy of a chiasmatic title, a window onto the fertile crossings and collisions — theoretical, institutional, disciplinary, stylistic, even (mindful of the encounter that christened our project) generational — that inform intellectual life and literary and cultural study today. If this policy sometimes creates strange bedfellows between the covers of *Jx*, our hope is to create new connoisseurs of that chaos.

In order to achieve these goals, we are dedicating *Jx* to a principle of short-term reinvention. Many critical journals in the profession gain a particular reputation and character over time. Inevitably, any successful journal risks getting into a certain critical groove; it acquires a loyal readership and tries to publish essays that confirm its identity and meet the expectations of its audience. Such journals of course do continue to search for innovative pieces, but the institutionalization of a journal’s identity often works against this goal. When we look at the editorial boards of most established journals, for instance, we read the names of the profession’s luminaries — the full professors who have made their mark and whose critical proclivities are generally well-known and recorded in multiple books and articles. The names on such editorial pages rarely change, and getting one’s work accepted by an established journal often means

figuring out how to fashion one's views into a form that meets with the approval of the board. Common sense tells us that this state of affairs certainly slows and may well stifle important advances in literary studies. Indeed, many young scholars trying to break into the publishing game find themselves accommodating their work to the styles and standards of the leading publications.

Rather than rejecting this paternalistic "peer" review process outright, *Jx* aims to complement it. We envision ourselves as a protean journal. To this end, we will not court the all-stars of the profession, who hardly need yet another outlet for their views. For the same reason, we have not invited the usual suspects to serve on our advisory board. Instead, the editors have sought to assemble an eclectic group of critics whose star is still very much on the rise. Moreover, as a sign of our confidence in our readers, we will not issue specific review guidelines to referees other than to urge them to recommend essays that give them intellectual pleasure. Thus, rather than assessing whether or not a submission fits the subject, method, or audience of *Jx*, our referees, by recommending one submission and rejecting another, will define what *they* think *Jx* ought to be. In addition, to ensure a continuing influx of fresh ideas and approaches, and to prevent the journal's identity from becoming calcified, all board members will have a tenure of no more than five years. The same principle applies to the editors, who will step down after a period of no more than seven years in order to hand the operation over to a new generation. In this way we hope to assure that *Jx* will keep pace with scholarly and professional innovation in the field.

The principle that we have tried to built into the operating structure of *Jx* is thus one of (rapid) obsolescence. Our goal is to remove some of the inevitable obstacles that traditional journals place in the way of critical work that does not fully confirm to established standards and expectations, and to try to bring the best scholarship of tomorrow into the present more rapidly by providing a new generation of younger scholars with a vehicle for their work and ideas.

In a further effort to distinguish ourselves from other journals and to pursue our policy of pleasure, this issue marks the debut of a new kind of review-essay that will run as a regular feature of *Jx*, one that takes a few liberties with the existing conventions of the genre. Most academic publications commission a noted authority to pronounce upon the scholarly merits and demerits of several very recent publications in his or her particular "field," within a paradigm of what Gregory L. Ulmer describes in this issue as disciplinary mastery. *Journal x*, however, wants to reorganize the review genre around the issue of pleasure. For each issue, our "Reading for Pleasure" series will invite a different reviewer to choose a handful of texts, published anytime within the last several years, that have given him or her, as a reader and scholar, the kind of intellectual pleasure that our editorial policy seeks to cultivate. The idea is for each reviewer to engage with the texts and their pleasures on a very personal level, and perhaps on a theoretical one as well, in an essay roughly equivalent in size and scope to the regular journal articles. The texts chosen can be on any subjects that might be of interest to readers involved in literary and cultural study. Such texts may range widely among the disciplines, even outside the humani-

ties if the fancy strikes. They do not have to be thematically related nor represent any particular methodological approach to their subjects. They do not have to be field-specific or even discipline-specific, nor will the reviewers be expected to comment on their choices specifically *from* the perspective of their "fields." All the texts need have in common is their ability to convey that elusive buzz. Our hope is that the cumulative impact of a series of such reviews, each with different subjective emphases, will help contribute to a fuller understanding and articulation of the impact of pleasure on intellectual work, and its place in that work. To that end we are looking for polymaths, people who read widely in a number of fields and for a variety of motives: intellectual, aesthetic, political, personal, and otherwise. We seek generous readers with nimble minds, readers who are forthright, unapologetic, and eloquent about their pleasure(s). We believe that "Reading for Pleasure" represents a promising new function for the book review in contemporary scholarship, reflecting a new way of organizing one's reading and thinking.

Finally, from a co-editor's perspective, one of the richest pleasures offered by *Journal x* has been that of collaborating with the contributors, board members, outside reviewers, editorial assistants, design consultants, printers, and the many colleagues whose suggestions and well-founded criticisms have helped make this debut issue possible. Special thanks must go to Jennifer Cobb for designing a database to help us track the progress of submissions, to Debra Rae Cohen for her valuable and timely logistical support, to Susan Lee for creating the *Jx* logo and for countless acts of troubleshooting in person and over the phone, and to the Department of English, the College of Liberal Arts, and the Office of Research at the University of Mississippi for their many forms of support. Then there is the matter of collaborative editing, a process that has turned out to be nowhere nearly as efficient as it sounds, but one that has also brought its own peculiarly intense forms of collegiality, personal and intellectual growth, and, yes, pleasure. As we now prepare to extend and widen the field of collaboration, *Journal x* welcomes you to our experiment.

Ivo Kamps  
Jay Watson