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Seeing the Sites

Seeking Philosophy Journals on the Web: Scholarly, Full-Text, and Free

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Abstract

Allan Scherlen introduces us to the elusive world of free, online, peer-reviewed journals in philosophy. He argues that free e-journals, although often well respected among specialists within the field, can paradoxically be obscured from library researchers because of poor representation in established indexes and directories. He evaluates three such e-journals in terms of their history, scope, design, navigation, and archiving. *Serials Review* 2002; 28:225–231.

Introduction

Quite a lot has been written in library literature about issues related to e-journals, and especially electronic access to traditional print journals. Most paper journals have some kind of electronic access, be it through an aggregator database such as InfoTrac, or an archival one such as JSTOR. Recently another class of e-journals has been gaining momentum in readership and status while escaping the notice of many librarians, researchers, and even commercial indexers. I am referring to free, Web-based, full-text e-journals, many of which are peer reviewed and scholarly.

When moving between library electronic resources and the Web, researchers, students, general readers, and librarians can be overwhelmed quickly by the confusion between free and subscription e-journals. Most library users rarely know or care whether a journal is aggregated in an EBSCO database, is part of Elsevier's ScienceDirect, is archived in JSTOR, or is directly linked to a Website via a subscription purchased by their institution. As librarians grapple with how to make the myriad of online subscription journals efficiently available to users, less effort has been dedicated to incorporating free online e-journals either into library OPACs or indexing tools. More often than not, these renegade e-journals are relegated to a library general list of useful or “other” Websites or an online subject guide, if they are noted at all.

As a librarian who works both in reference and in collection development in the areas of philosophy and religion, I wanted to examine this emerging but elusive class of free,

scholarly e-journals in philosophy. I was interested in seeing how nonsubscription e-journals in philosophy serve a diverse range of readers and researchers of philosophy from general readers to university students and specialists, and in beginning a discussion of how this class of e-journals can be better represented in established indexes and directories.

Selecting Philosophy E-journals for Review

I decided to examine as many lists of philosophy e-journals as I could find using both traditional and Web tools in order to see what types of free scholarly e-journals in philosophy are available and then to evaluate a few examples. What I quickly discovered was that no one source provided a comprehensive list, much less a taxonomy of the subtypes of free, scholarly, online journals in philosophy. I found some useful “clearinghouse” philosophy Websites, such as the Guide to Philosophy on the Internet, Philosophy@<large>, and Noesis Philosophical Research On-line index.¹ Publications such as ARL's Directory of Scholarly Electronic Journals and Academic Discussion Lists include surprisingly few e-journals in philosophy, but, interestingly, a simple search of the Web or perusal of a subject directory in a Web search tool such as Yahoo and Google can retrieve some philosophy e-journals not listed in the standard philosophy clearinghouse sites.² Ultimately, I found a variety of philosophy e-journals, some homespun, simple platforms for sharing ideas with other amateur philosophers, and others that were quite professional and specialized. Among the free philosophy e-journals were e-journals by and for undergraduate students, such as CUSJP, The Carlton University Student Journal of Philosophy; general philosophy magazines, such as Minerva; and numerous interdisciplinary e-journals dealing in such intersections as philosophy and technology (Tekhnema), philosophy and cognitive science (Connexions), and philosophy and law (The Journal of Philosophy, Science & Law). I chose three that are representative of English language full-text scholarly, peer-reviewed e-journals available to the general Web viewer without subscription but underrepresented in the indexing sources: Janus Head: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature, Continental Philosophy, Phenomenological Psychology, and the Arts; The Examined Life On-Line Philosophy Journal; and Cultural Logic: Marxist Theory and Practice.³ None of these appears to be represented in Serials Directory,⁴ Philosopher's Index,⁵ Arts and Humanities Index,⁶ or Noesis: Philosophical Research On-line,⁷ All three, however, have ISSNs, and two are cataloged in OCLC.

Criteria for Evaluating E-journals in Philosophy

I will briefly outline the background and scope of the publication, the audience and subject(s) it seeks to address, and the niche it intends to fill. I will also examine graphic design qualities and practical factors, such as accessibility to the current issue. Finally, I will consider ease of navigation, search capabilities, appropriate use of technology and aesthetics, and the integrity of the site to determine if the site is updated regularly, adequately administered and maintained, and offers added value for its Web-based presence.

Three Philosophy E-journals Evaluated

Janus Head <http://www.janushead.org> (ISSN 1521-9194)

Background and Scope

Janus Head came into existence when a number of philosophers from Duquesne University (Pittsburgh, PA) decided that a Web-based journal could be a cost-effective way of promoting “interdisciplinary dialogue rooted in phenomenology and continental philosophy—with a particular emphasis on the intersection of literary theory and phenomenological psychology and philosophy.”⁸ The home for the journal is Duquesne University, and it was originally supported in part by the university's Simon-Silverman Center. From its beginning the journal offered free, full-text articles. The editors of this new philosophy journal feel that it is important to include poetry and other art forms. This decision “hinged on [their] understanding of poetry as evocative, non-literary significations of phenomenological intuition, and these articulations are what founds (sic) the explicit and exact articulations of meaning in philosophy and the sciences.”⁹ Like the Janus head reliefs over doorways of ancient Roman homes, the journal is a threshold through which students and professionals may enter into a space where thinking and dialogue can occur. The total number of hits is steadily growing and averages between 40,000 and 70,000 per month.

Issues

Janus Head first appeared in the summer of 1998 and is published biannually in the spring and fall. Although the journal is free online, readers can subscribe to a paper edition through the Website. Each issue typically contains five or more essays, a number of poems, an editorial or two, some book reviews, and images of art. Submissions to the journal are peer reviewed and writers who submit material are asked to follow clear submission guidelines described on the site.

General Design and Navigation

The front page of Janus Head has an attractive but simple design (see Figure 1). Links to the articles in the current issue are prominently displayed in the center of three columns. A navigation bar beneath the title banner facilitates navigation to subpages. These links are repeated and described on the homepage along the right column as well as at the top of all the subsequent major pages. The left column lists the editors, consulting editors, and advisory board. Although this gives the front page a traditional journal look and proudly promotes those associated with the endeavor, it may have best been relegated to a subpage. The only description of the journal on the front page are the words to the right of the logo: “continental philosophy,” “literature,” “phenomenological psychology,” and “art,” which may not effectively communicate the interrelationship of these concepts in the journal to a new reader.

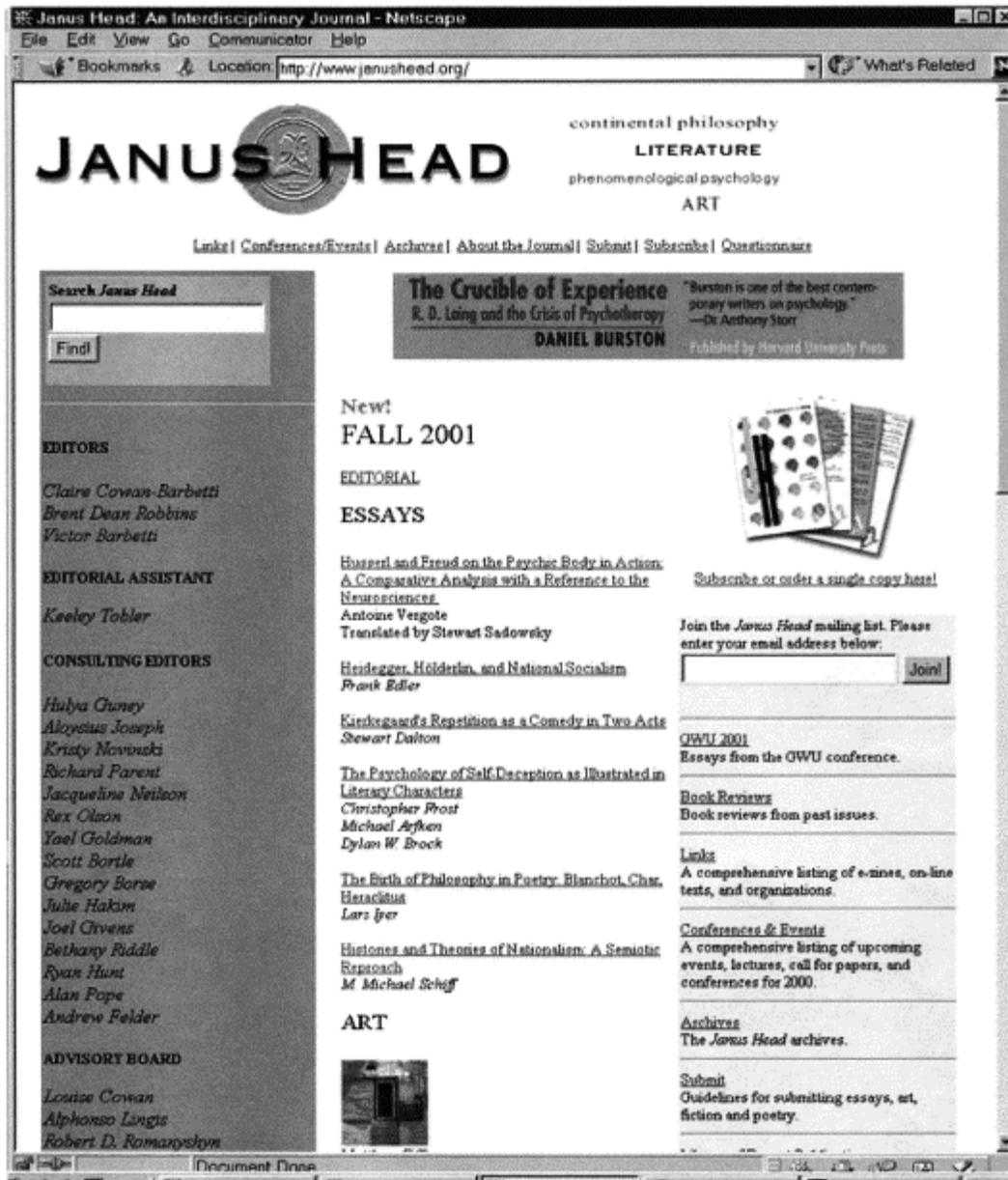


Figure 1. Janus Head

Searching and Indexing

Finding articles in Janus Head is straightforward via a well-placed search box directly beneath the title banner. Finding Janus Head articles using outside commercial resources, however, can prove more elusive. As noted earlier, I could not find Janus Head in the list of journals indexed by Philosopher's Index or in the collection of FirstSearch database, which includes a version of Arts and Humanities Citation Index., 10 The closest I came to a citation was through a DIALOG search of Social Science Citation Index, which revealed two articles from other journals that each contained a reference to Janus Head articles., 11

Archiving

Janus Head maintains an archive of all issues. The archives page displays issue numbers and author names that are linked to attractive, individual HTML issue pages. These issue pages each have the Janus Head title banner, a site search box, and sparse use of images that facilitates easy page loading.

Site Maintenance

Janus Head appears to be functional and well maintained. All links and images appear to work, the instructions for submissions and subscriptions are easy to find and follow, and the Web pages are not cluttered with ads or excessive imagery. Reader input is encouraged by an easy-to-use online questionnaire linked on all the major pages.

Added Online Value

In addition to current and past journal issues, Janus Head provides other content that readers expect from an online journal, including a list of upcoming conferences and an extensive list of links to philosophy-related Websites. The latter contains electronic books and journal sites, philosophy, psychology, and theology sites, and professional organization sites that can be easily navigated using the subsection title links displayed at the top of the page.

The Examined Life On-Line Philosophy Journal, <http://examinedlifejournal.com/>
(ISSN 1538-4373)

Background and Scope

This e-journal site was started in 1999 as an attempt to preserve some of the quality philosophical discussion from Web forums. The site grew in scope and began featuring articles, reviews, and commentaries in philosophy in spring 2000., 12 To date, it has published close to 150 articles by writers ranging from amateurs to professional philosophers. The site surpassed one million hits in its second year and now averages fifty thousand visitors per week. Nine full-time volunteers located around the world perform various functions, from moderating discussions to editing submissions.

Issues

The Examined Life is a quarterly publication. Each issue has a theme, such as philosophy and science, knowledge, language, and ethics, and contains ten to twelve articles, several commentaries or editorials, and a few book reviews. According to the editors, submissions are peer reviewed. Information on submissions can easily be found either on the title banner or on a link with each issue. The guidelines are clearly delineated and printable. The issue opens into a new window to allow the reader to continue traveling elsewhere in the site while reading a particular article. This can be useful when one is commenting in a discussion forum on a particular article.

General Design and Navigation

The basis style of the front page of The Examined Life, embellished with the columns and architrave of a classical Greek temple, fits numerous elements onto the screen

without appearing cluttered (see Figure 2); however, the reader must scroll down for many of the important sections. Some of the elements on the front page, such as the bulleted lists of events, resources, discussions, and services, could be more effective as single text or icon links to subpages, thus reducing the size of the front page. Like Janus Head, The Examined Life front page is arranged in three columns, with the table of contents to the current issue in the center. A mission statement is included in a tiny box at the top but is far too small to read and must either be resized or linked to a second page.

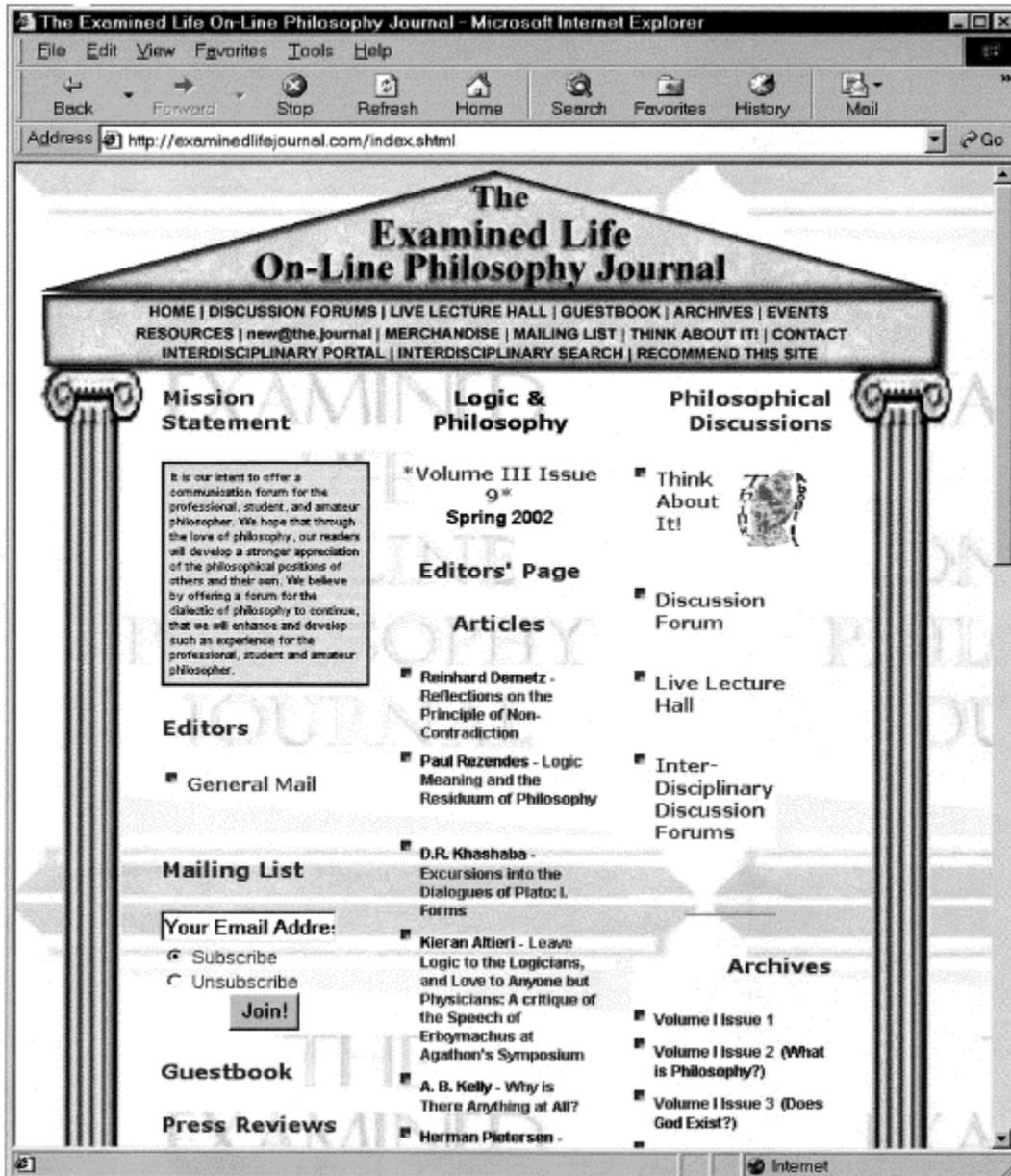


Figure 2. The Examined Life

For ease of navigation, the title banner contains all the essential subsections and can be found on most of the major subpages. Individual issues open into a separate window, which allows readers to easily open more than one article or have an article available for reading while browsing the site.

Searching and Indexing

A site search box is available on most pages, including each of the issue pages. Like the previous e-journal example, finding The Examined Life articles through outside indexing tools can be a challenge. A recent search of articles from this journal in Philosopher's Index, Arts and Humanities Citation Index, and Noesis was without success.

Archiving

The Examined Life archives all of its previous issues, and each issue linked is titled according to the general philosophical theme addressed in that issue. The linked articles in HTML are full pages for easy printing, have an attractive background texture, and are embellished with a small emblem of the journal. Each article has a link at the bottom for reader comments.

Site Maintenance

The Examined Life is quite impressive in its range of operations and production values. All links and images work well, the pages do not take long to appear, and the pages all appear to be up to date.

Added Online Value

The first added-value features of the journal one notices are the various means for reader input and discussion. As mentioned earlier, each article has a link for reader comment that takes the reader into the discussion forums section. This section has a well-organized set of topics and clear instructions for participation. The discussion forums are also prominently linked on the front page. The Examined Life also has an extensive list of philosophy events and Web resources, as well as direct links to press reviews of the site.

Cultural Logic: Marxist Theory and Practice, <http://eserver.org/clogic/> (ISSN 1097-3087)

Background and Scope

Like so many independent e-journals on the Web, Cultural Logic rose from a dream and little financing. As the editor remarked: "It started out as an idea that came to me in a basement in Wichita, Kansas, and grew into a publication that receives more than 60K hits a year, with contributors from all over the world, and an advisory group consisting of well-respected scholars. I'm surprised at how well we've done with zero institutional support and a budget that comes out of my son's coin jar.", 13

Cultural Logic is an interdisciplinary journal that publishes articles, poetry, and reviews within the Marxist tradition. A testament to the importance of articles in the journal is that a search of Social Science Citation Index revealed four instances when articles in

Cultural Logic were cited by writers in other journals. Arts and Humanities Citation Index had one cite from another journal.

Issues

Begun in fall 1997, Cultural Logic is officially biannual with a publication schedule that tends to be irregular. The planned publication of a double issue this summer will bring them up to date with volume 5. Individual issues are in HTML format and appear like a printed page for easy printing. Submissions go through a peer-review process of two outside readers, and publication decisions are made within a couple of months. Some issues are organized around special topics such as “Marxism and Education.” Each issue contains approximately seven articles plus a variety of other materials, which may include poetry, books or film reviews, responses and counterresponses to articles, and interviews. Footnote numbers are hot linked to their targeted footnotes at the bottom of the page.

General Design and Navigation

One's first encounter with the e-journal is oddly intriguing because the homepage is a colorful dreamlike painting by Dee Rimbaud with the words “Cultural Logic Marxist Theory and Practice” at the top and the hot link “Index” below. The link takes the reader to the current issue, which has an aesthetically designed title banner with the article titles beneath (see Figure 3). At the very bottom of the page are the navigation text links to the rest of the site., 14 One can only speculate that the editors chose to place links to the rest of the site at this unconventional location in order to emphasize the current issue and/or to give the current issue a more traditional journal look.

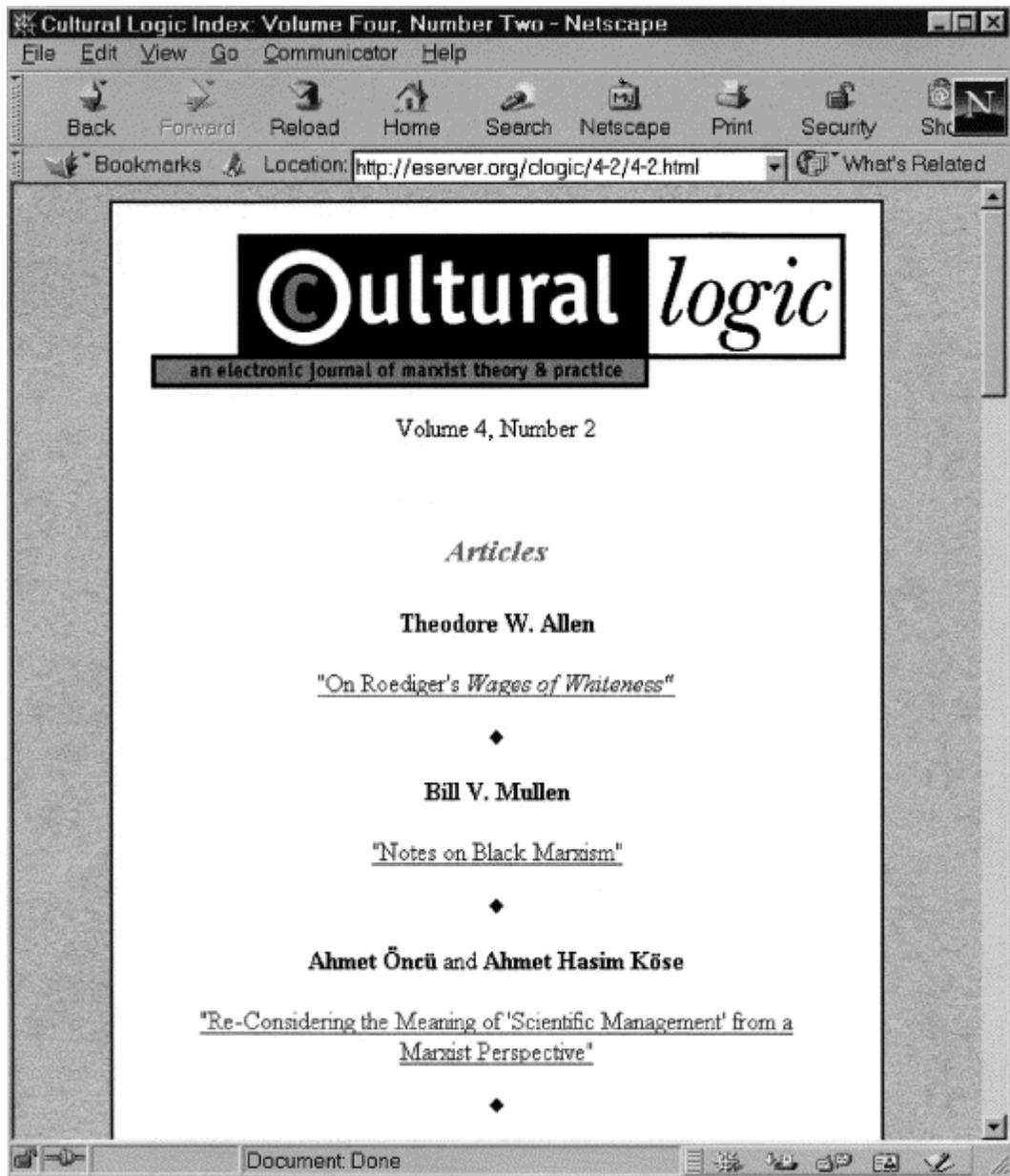


Figure 3. Cultural Logic

Searching and Indexing

The Website does not have an internal search engine for locating information within the site, but by employing the “Find” feature of the browser, one can at least scan the list of titles and authors found on the “Back Issues” page. Researchers hoping to have articles from Cultural Logic included in commercial indexes will discover that only MLA Bibliography indexes the journal. The editors courteously inform the readers of this indexing source on their subpage, “Copyright and Indexing.” Although Cultural Logic has been cited a number of times by authors publishing elsewhere, it still is not indexed in Philosopher's Index and elsewhere.

Archiving

Cultural Logic archives all issues on their “Back Issues” page. Unfortunately, however, the issues are not dated. The page contains both the names of authors and their titles. The reader cannot link directly to an article in the list, but must click on the issue number and go to the issue proper.

Site Maintenance

Cultural Logic may be criticized for some Web design shortcomings, but its basic function of producing an accessible forum for interdisciplinary, scholarly writing in the area of Marxism is dependable and commendable, considering its financial restraints. Notable for Cultural Logic is the prominent front page location of the date of last update. The simplicity of the Website facilitates quick loading of pages and images and allows the new reader to quickly become familiar with the site's arrangement.

Added Online Value

As previously mentioned, footnote numbers in Cultural Logic are hot linked to their respective footnotes. Also, the URLs within article footnotes are hot linked directly to their sources.

Conclusions

These three examples illustrate just a few of the many free, scholarly Web-based journals being produced in the discipline of philosophy. Like all journals, their styles, design qualities, content, and audience vary greatly. Paradoxically, their commonality is the potential to reach millions of readers because they are free on the Web. The scarcity of traditional indexing, however, actually hides them from potential readers who mainly search indexes for appropriate citations. Indexing is a key component to research in serial literature. Some of the most technologically progressive journals—those that exist only in an electronic form—are also some of the most neglected by electronic indexers. Can this neglect be attributed to free e-journals not generally being sponsored by large institutions or publishers or distributed by major vendors? Without adequate commercial indexing, free, independent scholarly e-journals remain barely accessible within the scholarly communication process. Only enthusiasts of the discipline appreciate their value when they discover these treasures through an academic grapevine or by Web searching. This creates a vicious circle: if journals are not indexed, they are less used and cited. If they are less used and cited, then they are not deemed worthy of being indexed. More effort should come from both the creators and the readers of these e-journals to press for their inclusion in established indexes so vital to the mainstream of scholarly research.

Notes

*1 Scherlen is Collection Development Librarian for the Social Sciences, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC 28608, e-mail: scherlnag@appstate.edu.

*2 Note: The "Seeing the Sites" column presents description and analysis of freely available electronic journals on the World Wide Web. Sites are not limited to traditional scholarly journals, but may be any that would interest serials librarians. Columns may focus on either one site, two or more sites that offer enlightening comparisons or contrasts, or several sites in a specific field or discipline. The column will seek to answer two basic questions about each site being considered: (1) What makes this e-journal interesting? and (2) Why would a library and its users want to go to this site? Contributions to the column are appreciated. If you are interested in contributing, please contact the column editor, Bob Persing, at persing@pobox.upenn.edu.

*3 with a contribution from Allan Scherlen

1 "Guide to Philosophy on the Internet," <http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/philinks.htm> (14 February 2002); Philosophy@<large>, <http://www.liv.ac.uk/Philosophy/> (22 March 2002); and Noesis: Philosophical Research On-line, <http://noesis.evansville.edu/> (16 April 2002).

2 "Directory of Scholarly Electronic Journals and Academic Discussion Lists" (Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries, Office of Scholarly Communication, 2000), Yahoo, <http://dir.yahoo.com/Arts/Humanities/Philosophy/Journals/>; Google, http://directory.google.com/Top/Society/Philosophy/Journals/Electronic_Journals/ (31 January 2002).

3 Claire Cowan-Barbetti, et al., "Janus Head: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature, Continental Philosophy, Phenomenological Psychology, and the Arts," <http://www.janushead.org> (10 April 2002); Christopher Altieri and Mitch Hodge, The Examined Life, <http://examinedlifejournal.com/index.shtml> (20 April 2002); David Siar, et al., Cultural Logic: Marxist Theory and Practice, <http://eserver.org/clogic/> (30 March 2002).

4 The only philosophy e-journal found in Serials Directory was EJAP: Electronic Journal of Analytic Philosophy, <http://ejap.Louisiana.edu>, which interestingly is not a journal indexed in Philosopher's Index. Serials Directory, accessed through EBSCO (18 April 2002).

5 Philosopher's Index, accessed through SilverPlatter Database (18 April 2002).

6 Arts & Humanities Citation Index, accessed through AH Search, FirstSearch database (5 April 2002).

7 Noesis: Philosophical Research On-line, <http://noesis.evansville.edu/> (16 April 2002).

8 Background information and quote regarding Janus Head are from an e-mail interview with Brent Dean Robbins, co-editor, Janus Head (bdeanrob@sgi.net), 22 April 2002.

9 Ibid.

10 Philosopher's Index, accessed through SilverPlatter database (18 April 2002); Arts & Humanities Citation Index, accessed through AH Search, FirstSearch database (18 April 2002).

11 DIALOG Social SciSearch Database No. 7, <http://www.dialog.com/> (18 April 2002).

12 Background and other information about The Examined Life are courtesy of the editor, Mitch Hodge, via e-mail (editor@examinedlifejournal.com), 23 April 2002.

13 Background information and quotes to follow regarding Cultural Logic are from an e-mail interview with David Siar, co-editor of Cultural Logic (siard@wssu.edu), 23 April 2002.

14 The navigation text links includes "Interests and Submissions," "Editors and Advisors," "Copyright and Indexing," "Back Issues," "Books For Review," "Journal/Web-Site Ads," "Home," and "The English Server."