

FROM THE EDITORS



All About Hands, Markus Hartel, 2008

It's time for us to come clean.

Wayback in March, when we launched our first issue, a friendly fellow named Clifford Garstang posted a review of our magazine on his blog, "Perpetual Folly." He called it "handsome," which we liked, and our contributors "impressive," which we liked, and our manifesto "controversial" and possibly "insulting," which we also somewhat liked.

Two users commented on his post. One, "t.sheridan", spent most of his comment hawking his own magazine, but kindly proclaimed, "Wag's Revue is a cool name!" And then there was "Anonymous." Acerbic, acrimonious Anonymous. Some kind of sneering Deep Throat, armed with a laptop and an attitude.

"Well," he writes. "I'm unimpressed. Yes they scored some names in their debut issue, but the fact that they are all students and the sheer pomposity of their manifesto is quite off-putting and they are students, students who do comedy. blech."

Students no longer—well, one of us is working on her Master's. But yes, setting aside all the objections we might like to raise, and all the [sic]'ing we might like to do, there is no escaping it. We have a history with comedy. Worse yet, both of our interviews this issue are with comically inclined subjects—David Rakoff, a writer and wit of *This American Life* fame, and TJ and Dave, perhaps the world's best comedic improvisers.

Blech away, dear readers, if you must. But there is a reason. After all, we're not called *Somersmith's Review*. We here at *Wag's* believe in comedy, in humor, not only as a form of entertainment but as the very fundament without which good writing could not exist.

That's not to say that all good writing is funny. But it is to say that writing without a sense of humor, an understanding of the unusual turns and disjunctive slippings that belie a laugh, is sure to be bad writing. Jacques Derrida's "Structure, Sign and Play" (an essay we'll now pretend to understand) describes the system of language as one that can't be "totalized," one that

can't be encompassed by and subjected to the forces of reason and rationality. Where language escapes these empirical forces, it does so through what Derrida calls *le jeu*: “the game,” the play of imperfect signification of language. And what is that escape, if not literature itself? Art depends on playfulness.

And we're conscientious in publishing work that reflects this truth. Poetry in this issue, as every one before, toys with conventions of language and form, creating strange logics all its own—from Ara Shirinyan's collages of Google search results from the prompt “[country name] is great” to Mathias Svalina's tightly visceral “Dogs of Chelsea” series. Essayist Lucas Mann cleverly probes the shifting symbolisms in the popular TV series *Glee* on page 69. And if you're looking for playful fiction, go no further than Ben Rogers' ingenious “Mayfly” in this issue's section.

So yes, Anonymous, we “do comedy.” We dig funny. But it's your mistake for underestimating what humor can do. It's not telling jokes. It's undermining structures, questioning rules; at its best, in its peculiar way, it's telling truth. As Dave Pasquesi said in his interview this issue, “You can do a little tiny sketch about polar bears fucking cake, but that's not gonna last very long. ... [I]t has to be something closer to genuine.”

And as he puts it elsewhere in the interview, “Go fuck yourself.”