

“The American Literary Studies Periodical as Form”

Special Issue of *American Periodicals*

Ed. Tim Lanzendörfer, Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main

The research university has always been bound up in the form of the periodical, the scholarly journal—2030 will mark the 150th anniversary of the first American journal in English Studies, *The American Journal of Philology*. Since that beginning, the academic journal has been a key element of scholarly production, of scholarly exchange, and of shaping research. But for all that, it has been somewhat understudied as a *form*. This special issue aims to take a first step towards a theory of the academic journal and its formal affordances. In calling up the idea of the “affordance,” the special issue draws on previous work on form (Levine 2015) and suggests that objects shape their uses and are shaped by their uses relationally: that they restrict and enable, limit and permit in social constellations. In literary studies, there has never been a time when periodicals were not key to the distribution—but also the shape and content—of research. From *Modern Language Notes* and the beginnings of the *PMLA*, through the *Kenyon Review*, *Sewanee Review*, and *Southern Review* as the chief organs for disseminating New Criticism, and into the post-war era of more an ever-growing cosmos of both broadly-conceived and narrowly specialized journals, periodicals have shaped the forms of research in literary studies. The special issue means to explore *how* the restrictions and opportunities of academic journals have shaped academic work itself. From the limitation of individual articles in terms of style to particular word counts, to issue length, to periodicity, to the specific affordances of the special issue, to considerations of (self-imposed) journal remits, audiences, and lately, the move to open access and online publication, the academic journal shapes what it is possible to say in academia, how.

The special issue proposes to take a wide view of literary studies. I am happy to entertain contributions across the literary humanities, including across the language disciplines. I am looking for papers that think about the role of periodicals, as forms, in the formation of literary studies in the United States. Questions, ideas, and concepts to guide your abstracts and papers may include, but are by no means limited to:

- What might a “theory of the academic periodical” look like? What does it mean to understand it, and its constitutive parts, as “forms”?
- What affordances do periodicals bring to academic work?
- What specific roles have periodicals played in the shaping of literary studies, including their promotion (and constitution?) of specific fields (from *American Periodicals* to *Modernism/Modernity* to *Contemporary Literature*)? Do their roles differ in different language disciplines?
- What is the role of the editor in shaping the content of a journal, and what of the presses that carry the journals?
- What concrete changes have technological and sociological developments, from the massification of higher education, wider access to periodicals via library subscriptions, the advent of the internet, to open access wrought?

- Case studies of the impact of individual periodicals, periods in the existence of individual periodicals, or histories of the development of periodicals might be fruitful?
- Discussions of specific forms in periodicals, such as the article, the essay, the note, the review, the special issue, the forum, the reply, and so on
- How does writing for a periodical differ from writing for an edited book collection? How does editing it differ? Is there a formal difference between journal and book contributions? What would that difference mean?
- What is the meaning of periodicity for the academic periodical?

There has been a strong expression of interest in this special issue from *American Periodicals*.

Special Issue Forum

The special issue is also supposed to contain a “Forum,” tentatively entitled “Contemporary Challenges to Academic Periodicals: AI, OA, PH and More” The forum will bring together short (1500 word) contributions by academic periodical editors, framed around the future and current challenges of academic journal production. For this forum, I am looking for editors willing to opine and comment on the potential future and current challenges to the periodical as forum, ideally but not necessarily clustered around the initialisms here suggested:

- artificial intelligence, the production of slop, the potential ability of AI to produce good work, the potential support gained from AI in the reviewing process, and so on; the writing of AI policies and their rationales
- open access and online access versus print publications, including questions of financing, reputation, writing-for OA as an issue in tenure review or something like the UK REF system; the question of form in online venues (where more flexibility would appear to be possible than in print?)
- public humanities as an increasingly widely-heard call for scholars to write to public-facing outlets, the making of and distribution of such outlets (for instance, the parascholarly *LARB*) and as a challenge (perhaps?) to scholarly journals to do public outreach
- contributions to this forum may also dispute, of course, the relevance of these concerns and foreground, instead, what they in turn deem the most pressing concerns for American scholarly periodicals going forward.

Please submit abstracts (300-400 words) for articles, and expressions of interest in contributing to the forum, with a short (three-four sentence) biography to me at tlanzend@em.uni-frankfurt.de by July 15, 2026. Submissions selected for submission will have a deadline of January 15, with hopes of submitting the final version of the special issue to *American Periodicals* by August 2027, for publication that fall.