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We know that double-blind refereeing predates John McEnroe, but where, why, and to what effect? Some of the slings and arrows directed at *Social Text* this past year have argued that our procedures for vetting manuscripts exemplify a lack of professionalism and precision. So it's a good time to consider the issue.

Double-blind refereeing (where the author's identity is hidden from referees and vice versa) arose in the social sciences to compensate for not being methodologically falsifiable or amenable to utilitarian auditing. The system gradually spread across universities, although some of the sciences have stayed with single-blind review (where the author's identity is revealed to referees). Most refereed journals are financially and intellectually supported by professional organizations. *PMLA* only publishes papers submitted by dues-paying members of the Modern Language Association, and all such offerings are read by fellow initiates. Your work is not considered if you don't belong to the club. The results leave many of us ambivalent. An editor of *Nature*, for example, has bemoaned the fact that refereeing would have prevented Crick and Watson's double-helix letter of the 1950s from being published by the journal today, while research on peer review shows that it may generate caution and reproduce an "invisible college" of elite scholars and disciples (Clemens et al. 1996; Maddox 1989; Willis and McNamee 1990).

*Social Text* is open to submissions from nonsubscribers and has no professional association to provide referees. In place of such policing procedures, we are animated by certain political and cultural positions. These are touched on in our title, perhaps an improbable syntagma but one that indicates objects of concern and ways of writing about them. The criteria for publication do not necessitate proving that, say, "language is contested" by putting "Baudrillard 1983; Chomsky 1965; Eco 1973" in parentheses at the end of a sentence. In other words, the conventional literature search is not essential. We also see value in publishing work by nonexperts (or at least nonacademics). Nowhere do we say the journal is refereed. Nowhere do we claim it as part of professional mentoring or monitoring. A committee sits down and discusses the pros and cons of individual papers.

This is a journal with a line: it is interested in popular democracy, how culture is imbricated with power and pleasure with politics. When I

first picked up *Social Text* in my local subtropical library twelve thousand miles from Manhattan in 1988, that was blindingly obvious, in the same way “a line” is obvious in *Dissent*, *Theory and Psychology*, or *Art and Text*. This does not mean the journal simply publishes the beliefs of its editors—we are too diverse for that—but it does mean anybody who cares to look at the different gatekeeping protocols on the academic publishing scene ought to understand where we fit.

Secondly, a note on language. We are told that failure to write clearly is characteristic of cultural studies, which is said to neglect “ordinary” people as readers and cover up ignorance/banality with obscurantism. But there is no universal clarity of language. Why? Because genres of writing differentiate authors, readers, and texts via specialized forms of enunciation and address. Here’s an experiment to prove the point.

I looked at various publications lying around my apartment and found very diverse vocabularies, necessarily exclusionary but not necessarily elitist or stupid; that is, they have to be learned. The texts I picked up included a first-year undergraduate primer. It is set around the world as an introductory guide to what has become, alongside faith and medicine, a triumphant late-twentieth-century mixture of popularization and power to the elect. This volume (Tisdell’s *Microeconomics of Markets*) contains this randomly selected sentence: “Perfect competition (usually) ensures that the rate of product transformation is equal to the rate of indifferent substitution of products by consumers and this consequently ensures Paretian efficiency.” Some of you may not understand all the technical language of this sentence. But it comes at pages 393 and 394 of the book, that is, when the vocabulary of neoclassical economic discourse has been established.

Now can we get on with some work?

## References

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- Maddox, John. 1989. Where next with peer-review? *Nature* 339: 11.
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