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Editor's Note

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the *Professional Wrestling Studies Journal*. The official scholarly publication of the Professional Wrestling Studies Association, the *Professional Wrestling Studies Journal* is dedicated to publishing scholarship on professional wrestling that is as evocative, stylized, and impactful as the sport(s) (entertainment) that so captivates us.

Often spectacular, frequently confounding, but never irrelevant, professional wrestling has long enjoyed a place of interest within the scholarly universe. Scholars of wrestling often trace our roots in the academy to Roland Barthes' seminal, oft-cited 1957 book *Mythologies*, in which Barthes observed, "What wrestling is above all meant to portray is a purely moral concept: that of justice" (19), elaborating:

What is portrayed by wrestling is therefore an ideal understanding of things; it is the euphoria of [humans] raised for a while above the constitutive ambiguity of everyday situations and placed before the panoramic view of a univocal Nature, in which signs at last correspond to causes, without obstacle, without evasion, without contradiction. (23)

In the sixty-plus years since, scholars have written about wrestling from a wealth of methodologies and theoretical perspectives. Wrestling-focused scholarship has appeared in journals dedicated to a diversity of disciplines such as film, folklore, history, performance, popular culture, psychology, sex and gender, and sociology. Scholars have located wrestling in the body, in mythology, in culture, and in politics, utilizing conceptual and theoretical approaches as diverse as content analysis of macro and micro narrative storytelling, dramaturgy, geopolitics, gender and sexuality, media effects, performance studies, and race and racism—to provide but a sample.

But as any wrestling scholar can attest, the project of tracking down and accounting for this heretofore scattered body of literature has rendered it difficult to unite these diverse voices in dialogue. With rare exception such as *The Popular Culture Studies Journal's* 2018 special wrestling issue, wrestling scholarship has lacked a home, a dedicated forum for the growth of our discipline. The *Professional Wrestling Studies Journal* strives to become such a home; the scholars, editors, and reviewers who contributed to this volume of original research have gifted us fertile ground on which to grow our shared understanding of wrestling and what it means.

And what a moment in time for our undertaking. That which Barthes once deemed a reflection of "perfect intelligibility of reality" doesn't always seem so intelligible these days. Our favorites wrestlers and promotions may antagonize us. They may confound us. They may infuriate us. We can only guess what "univocal Nature" Barthes might have perceived in 2003 when WWE world heavyweight

champion Triple H degraded challenger Booker T with racist evocations of black criminality, only for WWE to affirm the heel's mythic superiority with a WrestleMania squashing straight out of a Stormfront-hosted e-federation. If wrestling holds up a mirror to show us "an ideal understanding of things," what can we make of our own reflection in 2004's Eddie Guerrero-John "Bradshaw" Layfield feud in which the heel JBL rode an ethos of racism, xenophobia, and bullying of the most vulnerable among us to championship glory while the plucky Guerrero was brutalized, outsmarted and humiliated without a hint of comeuppance for his antagonist?

As Sharon Mazer observes: "Rather than simply reflecting and reinforcing moral clichés, professional wrestling puts contradictory ideas into play, as with its audience it replays, reconfigures, and celebrates a range of performative possibilities" (3). Beyond its enduring popularity and cultural resonance, pro wrestling warrants vigilant and ongoing scholarly interrogation because the diversity of its cultural contributions demands an appropriate multivocality of scholars to make sense of it all. I believe that not only will the articles in this volume contribute to our ongoing scholarly conversations about pro wrestling, they will begin new and vital ones.

Our inaugural volume begins in spectacular fashion with a discussion of the man who makes spectacle of everything he touches, Donald J. Trump. "Squared Circle, Oval Office: Vince McMahon and U.S. Politics" by Michael Scibilia explores the inextricable relationship between the WWE Hall-of-Famer's rise to power and the politics and persona of WWE CEO Vince McMahon. In an age when political discourse has traded in horseracing for pro wrestling, Scibilia's article is as timely as they come.

Moving from the body politic to the politics of bodies, "The Veiled Production of Debility in Professional Wrestling" by Brooks Oglesby critiques the WWE's role in breaking down the bodies of its performers through the concept of *debility*: the process by which expendable bodies are systematically worn down and broken down as commodities. I suggest that after reading Oglesby's article, which interrogates WWE's role in the breakdown and death of our favorite wrestlers while reproducing hegemonic able-bodiedness, readers will never look at even the simplest of bumps quite the same way.

We continue our exploration of political bodies with an in-depth discussion of one of the most unforgettable characters of the Territory Era, Kamala. In "Playing the Savage: Professional Wrestling's Portrayal of the Exotic Through James 'Kamala' Harris," Mario Alonzo Dozal analyzes the Kamala character's resonance within wrestling history for its place at intersections of race and colonialism. Dozal's critique of Kamala's character trajectory from monstrous to subjugated Other not only yields remarkable insight to a vital character but reminds us that the larger-

than-life wrestlers who inhabit our memories are always formed in crucibles of power and ideology.

Turning to the world of geopolitics, Adam Nicholas Cohen explores arguably the greatest source of wrestling controversy over the past decade: WWE's incendiary business relationship with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In "WWE and Saudi Vision 2030: Professional Wrestling as Cultural Diplomacy," Cohen removes the façade of WWE's initial forays into running live events in Saudi Arabia, exploring issues of diplomacy, propaganda, and how WWE's business interests limit its stated mission of promoting cultural understanding and progress.

The first *PWSJ* concludes with a piece that promises not only to challenge our understanding of wrestling but our understanding of *how we talk about wrestling*. "Toward a More Objective Understanding of Professional Wrestling: The Multidimensional Scale for the Analysis of Professional Wrestling (MSAPW)" by Tyson L. Platt and Aaron D. Horton proposes an alternate quantitative model for rating wrestling matches to the fabled five-star system popularized by wrestling journalist Dave Meltzer, offering in its place a multidimensional scale accounting for expanded criteria for evaluation. Given the furor with which wrestling fans debate star ratings, I say let the debate over how we rate wrestling matches begin anew.

In the months that have followed the call from which this journal's first contributions spring, the wrestling landscape has changed profoundly. All Elite Wrestling, only a concept at the time of our journal's incorporation, has emerged as a thrilling, precocious second national brand of wrestling in the U.S.; the potential for scholarship in AEW's characters, stories, and ethos of opposition to WWE hegemony may provide scholars with myriad opportunities for scholarly inquiry. (Or AEW could go the way of Global Force Wrestling.) As I write these words, the developing COVID-19 pandemic has forced a radical restructuring of professional wrestling as we know it with live shows delayed indefinitely or recorded in empty buildings and WrestleMania 36 thrust into liminal space of both substance and spectacle. All we know about wrestling in 2020 is that there's so much we don't know. Yet we can be certain that wrestling in whatever form it takes will provide scholars plenty to talk about.

— Matt Foy, Chief Journal Editor
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