Kelly Ritter

In this issue, we present to you a range of fascinating takes on the borders and boundaries of our work as teachers and scholars of English studies. Two of our articles, by Jeff Rice and Adam Koehler, address digital spaces—their conceptual benefits as well as their pitfalls. Rice’s article, “Occupying the Digital Humanities,” interrogates the very concept of digital humanities—a popular and seemingly appealing phenomenon in not only English but other departments across campus, both in terms of its collaborative potential and in terms of its wide boundary-crossing into digital media spaces where certain objects (for example, archival documents) typically did not previously tread. Rice’s analysis, which discusses the theoretical implications of the digital humanities in a broad sense, aims to recalibrate the terms of analysis for digital humanities. He hopes “to discover a digital concept that hermeneutics will not show [him]” (362). Rather, such a concept will lead “toward a process of digital invention (discovery and exploration of a supposed new idea, communicative moment, or writing) in which pattern formation will play a different role than currently used in the digital humanities” (362). Rice further notes that the “myth” (in the tradition of Barthes) that he will “re-mythologize” is a photograph from the Occupy movement, “whose meaning, until now, has been based on interpretation” (362). Ultimately, Rice argues that “we might consider Occupy as a programmed moment that draws upon a network of associations that have been scripted into a discourse of critique and interpretation so that in place of a revelation of some concealment, suggestion occurs” (370). In arguing for this network, Rice advocates for the use of suggestion as a tool for digital humanities work, specifically noting that the digital humanities are often built on fixed interpretations, or “binaries that promise understanding”; his paradigm offers “a larger project of tracing networks, in images and elsewhere, in order to focus more on the power of suggestion” (374).

Koehler’s article, in contrast, asks what creative writing studies as a field might gain by venturing further into the digital. In “Digitizing Craft: Creative Writing
Studies and New Media: A Proposal,” Koehler attempts to “define and examine a
digital arm of creative writing studies,” using Tim Mayers’s coinage of the term craft
criticism but expanding its field-based definition to digital spaces (380). One of his
guiding questions is, “how does writing ‘creatively’ in digital spaces alter the act of
composing ‘creatively’ and help teachers, writers, and scholars better theorize […]
practices” (380)? He attempts to reconceptualize Mayers’s categorical terms of process,
genre, authorship, and institutionality in order to theoretically deepen the possibilities
for creative work that appears in and is shaped by digital spaces and online publication
venues. Koehler ultimately brings his interrogation to bear on both conceptions of
publishing and professional endeavors in creative writing studies, and on curricular
spaces within the university itself.

With Gwen Gorzelsky’s article, “Experiential Knowledge: How Literacy Prac-
tices Seek to Mediate Personal and Systemic Change,” we shift proverbial gears
from the digital to the personal and spiritual, as Gorzelsky considers the impact of
the Vietnamese Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh on literacy practices that change
experiential knowledge. Employing the four meditation categories identified in Nhat
Hanh’s The Miracle of Mindfulness and The Blooming of a Lotus as a framework for
understanding literacy practices, Gorzelsky argues for a new take on literacy studies,
advocating that techniques such as visualization and interpretation can help “scholars […]
develop an experiential approach to studying literacy practices” (415). Gorzelsky
believes that doing so would extend the work of James Gee, Shirley Brice Heath,
Brian Street, and Beth Daniell by “focusing on experiential knowledge, rather than
positioning conceptual or procedural knowledge as primary change agents” (415).
Such work begins with practitioners “retrain[ing] their perceptual and emotional
habits” as they undertake studies of literacy practices (412).

Finally, this issue features our second entry in the What Is College English?
(WICE) feature that was last on view in our November issue. For this issue’s WICE,
I asked four scholars of English studies to contemplate their own ideas about and
personal views of the journal itself, in relation to their own work and the works in
general that it has published over the years. I am grateful to Lynn Bloom for her
help in planning and shaping this symposium, and for her own essay that opens
the symposium’s dialogue. As you will see, Bloom as well as Edward White, Jessica
Enoch, and Byron Hawk provide individual and unique views on the meaning and
purpose of CE as a journal, recalling my original conception of this feature as one
that might speak to “college English” as a field of study, an intellectual concept, or
the publication bearing its name. Whereas Bloom and White focus their reflections
on more personal connections to the journal, and the ways in which the journal has
shaped their own careers and views of the field, Enoch and Hawk interrogate the
function and purpose(s) of the journal from a more theoretical sense, each engaging
in a (re)positioning of *CE* within the evolving networks of English studies—both those that emerge through historical and archival means (Enoch) and those that are deliberately grown through digital and other spaces (Hawk). I hope you enjoy these four compelling takes on what the journal has meant and will potentially mean to a variety of readers and contributors, and where it might subsequently want or need to head in the future.
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