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From the Editor

Kelly Ritter

In this issue of *College English*, the first of this new calendar year, readers will see three different takes on the ways in which rhetoric informs the field of English studies, and potentially cultural studies, by showcasing the historical and cultural dexterity and malleability of rhetoric and rhetorical acts found in unexpected or undertheorized places—those just in our view but not commanding our full (enough) attention. In addition, we offer readers an additional voice to add to the conversation begun in our March 2013 issue regarding how to define (or describe, or evolve) this journal itself.

To start us off, Jamie White-Farnham investigates how the category of “rhetorical heirlooms” may extend to the commonplace items we see in our very own households (and those of our family members), specifically grocery lists. White-Farnham extends the work of composition’s “extracurriculum” by Ann Ruggles Gere and others, as well as theories of workplace and public literacies by Deborah Brandt, to present an argument about the importance of reading household objects through rhetorical theory, and as guided by oral histories and other remembrances of her female subject-participants in this study. As White-Farnham notes, hers is not the first scholarly foray into the rhetoric of food, consumption practices, or food-related artifacts, including some in this journal, but so far, none in this investigative group has focused on the grocery list per se. As White-Farnham shows, it is in the everyday—like grocery lists—that rhetoric may be most powerfully, and materially, enacted. Her closing argument for the relevance of this study and this artifact type to our daily work in writing and rhetoric is, in part, that “it is the rhetorical decision making where a belief in and practice of intertextuality meets writing teachers’ goals, especially those teachers now working with writing and rhetoric majors. To serve the twin goals of high-quality rhetorical education and the growth and evolution of the field, ideas about everyday writing such as rhetorical heirlooms may prompt writing program administrators and department chairs to begin conversations about how programs might institutionalize ways for writing and rhetoric students to make
more and varied rhetorical decisions—and increase their awareness of when they do or are already doing so” (223).

Next, Rebecca Lorimer Leonard examines the notion of “rhetorical attunement” in multilingual writers through interviews and conversations with six adult multilingual writers. Leonard defines rhetorical attunement, which aims to advance existing theories of language acquisition and writers’ coding, as “a literate understanding that assumes multiplicity and invites the negotiation of meaning across difference,” and notes these writers “are tuned toward the communicative predicaments of multilingual interaction,” which readers can see through their extensive and insightful commentaries on societal and cultural expectations of second-language writers in the United States and abroad (228). Leonard’s qualitative methodologies with her interview subjects highlight how “multilingual practices, when traced along the paths of migration, appear to be unstable but generative, shaping an attunement toward the often fraught normalcy of writing across difference” (229). I see Leonard’s study as an exciting addition to some of the key ideas brought forward in our July 2013 issue of *CE*, which readers may recall focused fairly exclusively on language and rhetoric in multilingual settings, as well as a fine pairing with White-Farnham’s own interview work in this issue. Both authors illustrate how drawing on the deeper perceptions of writers and speakers through oral histories, interviews, and other ethnographic work continues to inform and make especially dynamic the intellectual practices of rhetoric and composition as a field.

Finally, turning now to the archival rather than the ethnographic, Jeremiah Dyehouse takes an alternative historical look at the work of John Dewey and Fred Newton Scott, specifically their collaboration at the University of Michigan in the late nineteenth century, spotlighting their (failed) collaborative campus publication, *Thought News*. This article is noteworthy, to me, for its use of archival materials to explore and analyze a historical occurrence that ultimately failed—something we might want to see more of in our recovery work in rhetoric and composition studies, particularly in relation to the oft-cited figures of the field. Using these materials to reconstruct and put into larger disciplinary context the publication attempt itself, Dyehouse encourages readers to reexamine these iconic figures’ work through the aims of the project, arguing that “[w]riting activity served to ground the group’s planning, promising for it an application in the world outside the university’s boundaries. Moreover, writing was more than a conduit through which they hoped to share political, philosophical, scientific, and religious truths. For these thinkers, at this time, writing was an especially promising means for awakening readers’ own perceptions of such truths—and for sharing these perceptions widely, democratically, and efficiently” (250). Dyehouse argues that in order to advance the work on Scott and Dewey already cataloged by scholars in rhetoric and composition, we must
see how “[w]ith Dewey in particular, Scott theorized writing as a practical means for hastening the social organism’s development.” As “archival study of [Dewey and Scott’s] Ann Arbor association suggests [. . .] these two men engaged not in the transfer of intellectual expertise, but rather in mutual seeking and ideational experimentation. Moreover, the fruits of their activity—their writing theory—can suggest new questions to ask about their later engagements with writing theory and writing pedagogy” (251).

One such theory that Dyehouse ties to Dewey and Scott in the latter part of his article is technological determinism, citing Richard Ohmann’s work done on this very subject in *College English* in 1985. It is fitting, then, that we should also have in this issue a brief essay by Ohmann himself, partially as a response to, but really serving as a keen reflection on, our March 2013 symposium, What Is College English?, authored by Lynn Bloom, Edward White, Jessica Enoch, and Byron Hawk. In his reflective response, which also acts as an addition to the larger CE archive, Ohmann not only considers (or reconsiders) his tenure as editor of this journal in the context of some of the ideas brought forth in the symposium, but also asks pertinent questions about how our editorial pasts and futures may be connected. For one, he posits, in relation to Hawk’s portion of the symposium, “To shift the metaphor: were activists my college English ‘networks,’ comparable to those Byron Hawk helpfully analyzes [. . .] to describe the process of disciplinarity?” (273). I am so pleased that we can include in this issue Ohmann’s own retrospective on this journal and our field in dialogue with the symposium.