

Editors' Introduction

Looking Forward: The Next 25 Years of Feminist Scholarship in Rhetoric and Composition

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The Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition celebrated its 25th anniversary at the 2014 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in Indianapolis, IN, and in just a few weeks, Coalition members will travel to Arizona State University for the tenth biennial Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference. These milestones represent a quarter century of vibrant work. From the start, the group Kathleen Ethel Welch conjured has been a learned society of dedicated “scholars who are committed to feminist research throughout the history of rhetoric and composition” (“Our Mission”). Since Welch, Marjorie Currie Woods, Winifred Bryan Horner, Nan Johnson, and C. Jan Swearingen signed the Coalition’s constitution, the organization has upheld a two-fold mission: “the advancements of research throughout the history of rhetoric and composition” and “the education of women faculty and graduate students in the politics of the profession” (“Our Mission”). With the act of coalition as its *techne*, the CWSHRC has always been engaged in moving the field of feminist rhetoric and composition forward and supporting and mentoring feminist scholars along the way.

In this special issue of *Peitho*, we mark and celebrate the Coalition’s achievements. Rather than offering an extended retrospective, however, we take a different tack. Together with our thirty-six contributors and *Peitho*’s editorial staff, we invite you to join us in looking ahead to the next 25 years as we ask, “What should our shared concerns, priorities, and prerogatives be? What topics should we address? Where should we direct our attention—and that of others—and why?” At first, this invitation to consider the future may seem strange, especially since we include the term “history” in the title of our organization. A retrospective of any sort might thus make more sense. However, as Barbara L’Eplattenier and Lisa Mastrangelo note in their introduction to the first peer-reviewed issue of this journal, *Peitho* shares in the Coalition’s mission to promote feminist research that connects the past to the present as a means of envisioning the future. In our case, working together on this issue has heightened our awareness of our field’s deep and abiding investment in the transformation of now into then, today into yesterday, last month into

last year or the last 25 years, and so on. In *Electric Rhetoric*, Welch reminds us, “New rhetorics’ have proliferated at various moments in the 2,400 year construction of traditional Western rhetorical theory,” and the work we include here testifies to their proliferation in the twentieth and early 21st centuries (53). Of course, history is a cumulative process, and Welch gives us the phrase “next rhetoric” to name each wave, acknowledging its relationship to both previous rhetorics and forthcoming ones.

In essence, then, we asked “What’s next?” when we circulated our call for contributions a year and a half ago. In seeking scholarship to “commemorate the first 25 years of the Coalition,” we were eager to learn about the topics our colleagues would identify as both urgent and emergent, and we were curious to see the methods and methodologies they were taking up—or making up—to engage with exigent rhetorics. As the work included here reveals, contributors did indeed pursue historiographic questions, but they also looked beyond them to pedagogy and present-day rhetorical concerns and made use of new methods and methodologies along the way. Not surprisingly, the work they accomplish substantiates the claims made by Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa A. Kirsch when they write, “Feminist rhetorical practices are not only changing research methods but also research methodologies—the guiding assumptions and theoretical principles that underlie all research—what counts as data, how we gather and interpret data, what role researchers play in relation to participants, what ethical stance they assume, and so on” (29). In dialogue with Royster and Kirsch, contributors to this issue offer examples of changing methods and methodologies while they address the question “What’s next?” in one of three main ways: through brief key concept statements, through extended scholarly texts, and through the virtual display of the Digital New Work Showcase originally presented at CCCC 2015.

As a genre, key concept statements serve a particular purpose. Bounded by brevity (each is 1200-1500 words), they not only describe but also embody and verbally enact ideas we believe are critical to unlocking the next 25 years. In name, key concept statements echo two familiar resources, Raymond Williams’ *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* and Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle’s recently published book of threshold concepts of writing studies, *Naming What We Know*. The former is a nearly forty-year-old work of cultural philology, representing Williams’ efforts to understand the shifting, often contradictory connotations of the 109 terms he identifies as the main vocabulary (at least in British English) for articulating contemporary culture and society (xxviii). By contrast, Jan Meyer and Ray Land introduce threshold concepts in a 2003 paper that both acknowledges their ubiquity and situates them squarely in the realm of instruction, particularly academic teaching and learning. As they explain, threshold concepts are crucial framing ideas or

“portals” that open specific ways of thinking about a subject “without which the learner cannot progress” (1). As a result, threshold concepts, whether in writing studies or elsewhere, are both valuable and troublesome. In a Burkean sense, they are helpful because they pronounce what seem to be common concerns and values and offer ways for us to identify with one another. But they are problematic too because in their terministic *selection* there is also *deflection*: while so much is said, so much is unsaid (45).

We understand the key concepts discussed in this issue—history, coalition, inclusion, agency, feminism and language rights, material, embodiment, and service—as heuristics for us to consider our work in the coming 25 years. Of course, readers may add to or subtract from this list (and indeed we expect they will). We see this genre as one that encourages imaginative response, and we hope it will drive others to compose, assign, and circulate subsequent statements through any number of available means. By bringing one bunch together here, in a special, edited section of this issue, we hope to initiate this process and at the same time affirm alternative forms of scholarly communication. As Wendy Sharer writes in “Opening the Scholarly Conversation,” “our traditional and (still) most esteemed genres of scholarship have, with few exceptions, been constructed in a way that serves to exclude the voices of a great many faculty” including those “who, often by choice, work at teaching-heavy institutions that do not place as much value on or expend as many resources in support of traditional processes and genres of scholarship” (np). Theresa Lillis and Mary Jane Curry concur, considering the same issues from an international perspective, underscoring “the need to decentre Anglophone-centre control [of academic publishing] and to reimagine the kind of knowledge production, evaluation, and distribution practices currently governing scholars’ practices and experiences” (155). Over the next 25 years, feminist scholars and scholarly publications can—and should—be at the fore of imagining, establishing, and legitimating what comes next with regard to all aspects of knowledge production, including publication, and we see these key concepts as an attempt to do so.

If you click through this issue in order, key concept statements provide initial frames for interpreting the seven full-length scholarly texts that follow. Each one offers a rich example of the topics, methods, and methodologies the authors believe should be “next” on our radar. Starting with Stacey Waite’s “Cultivating the Scavenger: A Queerer Feminist Future for Composition and Rhetoric” and Jessica Restaino’s “Surrender as Method: Research, Writing, Rhetoric, Love,” these two essays offer powerful, distinctive meditations on some of the most personal aspects of feminist scholarly work. For Waite, that work is feminist and queer as well as pedagogical, and it is best understood as what Judith Halberstam terms a “scavenger methodology” or a way

of organizing inquiry that “attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other” (13). Describing the “profound political and personal stakes” of bringing scavenging into the writing classroom, Waite argues “that all writers must commit to learning to disrupt, to read differently, to ask more of texts, to ask more of the world than linear, normative functions allow.” For Restaino, who writes with (and in memoriam to) Susan Lundy Maute, the stakes for feminist research are nothing less than life and death. From this profound rhetorical situation, Restaino asks these questions: “In what ways [. . .] can feminist methods for knowledge-making sustain us in explorations of that which we can never fully understand, like illness and love? To what extent is our work in feminist rhetorical study rooted in a willingness to merge the struggles of our lives with the goals of our work? How might care, love, and intimacy serve as spaces in which research might be reinvented and re-envisioned?”

The personal comes to the fore in conjunction with performance throughout this issue, affirming both as vital to feminist endeavors, including scholarly ones. In *Feminist Rhetorical Practices*, Royster and Kirsch identify particular elements of the personal as factors that make current feminist academic projects meaningful to us. Looking “beyond notions of rescue, recovery, and (re) inscription” to map groundbreaking work in our field, they pay primary attention to colleagues’ engagement with gender (and sexuality), race and ethnicity, and status along with geographical sites, rhetorical domains, genres, and modes of expression (43). The examples they select demonstrate some of the many ways scholars’ identities and identifications operate in our field’s most important current projects, and they also reveal the various types of performance feminist scholars study and themselves enact. Similarly, we showcase a broad range of positionalities and performances in this issue of *Peitho*. As Waite and Restaino engage in scavenging and surrender, respectively, they perform the traditional scholarly essay in ways that foil different aspects of its usual arrangement, style, and delivery. Considered alongside Adela C. Licona and Karma R. Chávez’s “A Swarm of Vitalities/A Swarm of Affinities” and Jordynn Jack’s “Objects at Play: Rhetoric, Gender, and Scientific Toys,” the essay is hardly a form ripe for retirement, as Adam Banks declared in his 2015 CCCC Chair’s Address. Instead, at least at the hands of these scholars, it is a mode of expression readily adaptable to next rhetorics, especially feminist ones.

As much as this issue embraces the future of the scholarly essay, it also celebrates the communicative possibilities that *Peitho*’s new format affords, both now and next. For Licona and Chávez, *Peitho*’s multimodal platform makes it possible to enact the relational literacies they theorize in the extended essay that frames their video. As they explain, relational literacies are interactive occasions that create “coalitional possibilities” by engaging people

directly in “connecting, understanding, knowing, recognizing, and acting with one another.” Their video, “A Swarm of Vitalities/A Swarm of Affinities,” captures two examples of such literacies through footage of queer youth in a community-based project and Licona’s ailing mother. Individually, each example would illustrate how relational literacies can invite “new kinds of understanding, interaction, and politics.” Remixed in an experimental format, the footage becomes an occasion that challenges us to find meaning in the deliberately disorienting swarm of images and sounds we encounter.

Like Licona and Chávez, Jack’s interest in play catalyzes knowledge and identity formation, focusing on children and their play with scientific toys. Her webtext, punningly titled “Objects at Play,” takes as its subject an often under-studied (or even unstudied) group within feminist rhetorical scholarship: children, and explores how the discursive and material rhetoricity of scientific toys makes assertions about gendered expectations and practices. Arguing that “[p]lay is a crucial vector through which children develop what Pierre Bourdieu calls *habitus*,” Jack examines the ways children’s interactions with popular toys such as Erector Sets, LEGO, Goldie Blox, and Roominate have “the potential to disrupt, reproduce, or reconfigure gendered habitus even as [children] are first learning them.” Likewise, by offering her readers different paths for navigating her webtext, Jack cultivates scholarly play with similar possibilities for feminist rhetorics.

Our inclusion of peer-reviewed scholarship in genres and modes new to *Peitho* opens a veritable Pandora’s box of questions for feminist scholars to address over the next 25 years. Collectively, we may need to answer questions that challenge the legitimacy of webtexts and videos as scholarship. Along with the scholarly publications that have established a precedent in our field, we can turn to a variety of professional resources, including CCCC position statements on “Scholarship in Composition: Guidelines for Faculty, Deans, and Department Chairs” and “Promotion and Tenure Guidelines for Work with Technology” as well as the Modern Language Association’s “Guidelines for Evaluating Work in Digital Humanities and Digital Media.” Both individually and together, we also need to ask ourselves why we should choose one or another available mode of scholarship when we embark on our own next projects. For indeed we are deciding among a nested set of functional, critical, and rhetorical possibilities when we do (Selber 25). Thus we must learn to take into account our own compositional abilities, the arguments we want to make, and the affordances different formats offer us as well as our audience, the readership of *Peitho*.

While these are decisions all multi-literate scholars must make in a digital age, we welcome them as feminist scholars, for they prompt us to take into account how different formats can (or cannot) help us achieve feminist ends. As

Jack illustrates, even when particular scientific toys do not explicitly encourage children to resist interpellation into rigid gendered roles, play enables them to discover the agency to do so anyway. Likewise, Licona and Chávez demonstrate through their scholarship and the community work they highlight how remix can be an act of resistance. They align this strategy with the practice of relational literacies and thus with women-of-color feminisms, literacy studies, and queer temporalities: a coalition with “the capacity to produce knowledge and to connect to home knowledges and abuelit@ wisdoms.” The authors of the remaining three scholarly texts also work in this spirit, suiting their media to their messages, while addressing what we might consider our final key concept might be: women. That is to say, individually and together, Patricia Bizzell and K.J. Rawson, Nicole Khoury, and Alexandra Hidalgo cast in relief our ideas and assumptions about women along with the roles this term and its embodied realities play in feminist scholarship writ large and the future of the Coalition more particularly.

In “Coalition of Who? Regendering Scholarly Community in the History of Rhetoric,” Bizzell and Rawson have an intergenerational dialogue about the politics of gender identification both in general within feminist scholarly communities and specifically within the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition. Their video-recorded conversation, which they term a “thought experiment,” invites us to think with them about how the Coalition in name and orientation will translate into the next wave of academic activism for feminist scholars in our field, including the Coalition’s first women members such as Bizzell; early-career transgender scholars such as Rawson, and others. A provocative exchange, their piece illustrates the phenomenon A. Finn Enke observes in the inaugural issue of *Transgender Studies Quarterly*: that “[g]ender becomes legible through acts of translation that betray disciplinary success and failure simultaneously” (242).

While Bizzell and Rawson engage questions of gender and the rhetorical sustainability of “women” as a priority for feminist scholars, Khoury invites us to consider how transnational concerns also trouble and complicate any stable sense of this term. In “Enough Violence: The Importance of Local Action to Transnational Feminist Scholarship and Activism,” Khoury explains how Lebanese women are not a political category per se, and they have very few civil (as opposed to religious) protections. In this context, feminist organizing around human rights requires not the translation of international language and law into a Lebanese vernacular but intense mediations of cultural difference across legal, public, and private spheres. With the activist NGO Kafa as her example, Khoury speaks in concert with Bizzell and Rawson, and together they challenge us to consider trans issues of all kinds in the next 25 years,

improving our ability to work across the shifting borders that distinguish genders, generations, religions, and nation-states.

As both a complement and a challenge to these engagements with “women” as a guiding term for our work, we offer a final documentary, Hidalgo’s “Lifting as We Climb.” Building on the “digital docu-history” Michelle Eble and Wendy Sharer composed with Mary Hocks in 2008 for a session at CCCC entitled, “Learning from our Histories” (19), Hidalgo’s standalone video examines the initial development of the Coalition with an eye toward its future. Filmed at CCCC 2014 during the 25th anniversary festivities, “Lifting as We Climb” celebrates the Coalition’s greatest successes, including *Peitho*, and identifies the group’s greatest challenges. On one hand, then, as Jacqueline Jones Royster comments in the video, “I return to the fact that we’re still here as the greatest success. [. . .] And we have done good work. I don’t see that there’s anything more important than that.” On the other hand, there is plenty of work to be done, especially with regard to expanding the Coalition’s membership and the group’s commitment to diversity. As Royster summarizes: “I think that there’s lots of work to do yet on trying to convince all of us that gender is a part of a human enterprise, just as race is a part of a human enterprise, just as sexuality is a part of a human enterprise, just as geographical location is a part of a human enterprise.” As we look to the future, Hidalgo’s work challenges us to see not only the Coalition’s work but also feminist work more broadly as deeply human work, which we engage at the intersections of identity.

Just as we begin this issue with a special edited selection of key concept statements, we conclude with special edited content. Following in the tradition begun when *Peitho* was a newsletter and editors included scripts of the presentations given at the Wednesday night CCCC Coalition meeting, we offer here a digital version of the New Work Showcase hosted by the Coalition at CCCC 2015. Celebrating the next 25 years as well as the journal’s new multimodal platform, we are proud to help make the Coalition’s annual scholarly event accessible over time to a wide audience. As *Peitho* readers will discover when they click the link, the digital showcase features new work by ten of the 2015 session’s eleven participants, all of whom remediated their original displays for publication. As the overview included in this special section explains, Jenn organized the New Work Showcase in her role as Coalition president. Participants were nominated by colleagues and selected by a committee that included both regular members of the Coalition and members of the Coalition’s Advisory Board. Additional colleagues served as participants’ mentors, and Trish Fancher curated the digital version, working in collaboration with Tarez Graban. At CCCC, close to three hundred conference-goers spent an hour walking among the new work on display, talking with presenters and with each other. We encourage you to spend extra time with this part of the

issue, clicking through the digital showcase and getting to know the kind of work we are sure you will be seeing again and again in the next 25 years.

Together, all thirty-six contributors to this special issue offer a glimpse of the work that lies ahead of us. In reviewing the topics and scholars featured here, some readers might applaud the range of material and even the demographic diversity of this thirty-six, considered across age and academic rank, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, ability, and institutional affiliation. Others, however, might rightly ask important questions about what is missing from this issue and what a future predicated exclusively on its contents might mean. As editors, we second these concerns, for even with the presence of varied positions and perspectives, there is indeed absence. We hope, though, that the absences in this issue, whether topical or demographic, can serve as heuristics not only for critique but also for action—including scholarly acts that fill available spaces and create new ones for rich and diverse feminist research in our field.

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler remarks on the “embarrassed etc.” that closes so many attempts to list all of the attributes of feminist subjectivity. For Butler, the invariable failure of such exercises is instructive, and the “illimitable *et cetera* [. . .] offers itself as a new departure for feminist political theorizing” (182). Of course, there is much more that feminist scholars of rhetoric might consider as they look to the future. There is much, much more to say (thankfully). We hope whatever *Peitho’s* audiences see when they peruse this issue, it looks like an invitation to participate, whether participation takes the form of an audio essay or hypertext, whether it is composed in ALT DIS or hybrid discourse, whether it proposes new topics or challenges the ones identified here. Whatever the case, we look forward to what’s next over the next 25 years—and beyond.

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