EDITORS' COLUMN

Working in the curious genre of the editor's column, writers are seriously and deeply constrained by conventions. Editors must, of course, offer a pithy and enticing capsule of each article. They must, as well, situate the articles in a larger context, a discussion of a theme, a confluence, or occasionally an editorial whim. The issue is offered as a whole, carefully sequenced and with interconnections, substantial or fleeting, duly noted. Whether many readers actually consume the journal in that linear, beginning-to-end way is debatable. More likely, the typical reader dips, reading first the piece by a friend or acquaintance or recognized name, or perhaps choosing because the subject seems pertinent. Often enough, too, the articles are not read in the context of the issue in which they first appeared, but as single pieces obtained online or in a collection or course pack—decontextualized from the site of their first appearance, but as likely as not recontextualized into the midst of other articles on the same subject or by the same author. "When we remix," announces the title of Chris Leary's article for this issue of *JBW*, "we remake." Still, it seems at least passing worthwhile to examine those articles selected from the current crop of submissions for what they might reveal about the state of the field politically or theoretically, to capture the style of the present moment and look for predictions of the next moment.

This issue of *JBW* is redolent of subversiveness, of performance, of "passing," of veils lifted and margins transgressed, of play with texts and language, of apparent binaries that may actually be polyphonal. This speaks well for the state of the field. "Basic" in the terms embraced in these articles is not foundational but initiating, not minimal but ambitious. Challenging. The goal of all basic writing is for students to move well and truly *beyond* basic. This aspiration is often construed extremely narrowly, mainly as passing through gateway requirements to the credit-bearing or mainstream composition course (or, as several of these authors suggest, "passing" as academic insiders). In many settings, the ticket for such movement can be as simple as the production of what Hannah Ashley calls the "fiveparagraphessay" with few stigmatizing errors. Not simple at all, actually, but by definition limited and formulaic. As several of the articles in this issue explore, however, moving beyond "basic" can represent not only a sequential advance or further development in skill, but an altered or even transformed relationship to writing. And ideally, this transformation occurs not post-basic, but rather as part of the agenda for the basic writing class itself.

Hannah Ashley's powerful polyphonic piece, "The Art of Queering Voices: A Fugue," in both content and form extends the ideas expressed in "Ventriloquism 001: How to Throw Your Voice in the Academy" by Ashley and Katy Lynn

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in *JBW* 22.2 (2003). In Ashley's view, incorporating other voices into one's text is at the heart of all academic writing, but this act is potentially and ideally neither passive nor conventional. Drawing on Bakhtin and on queer theory, she advocates and illustrates how it is possible for writers—whether professionals, composition students, or basic writers—to gain the desired insider's position without relinquishing "outsider status and perspectives (to push at the constraints of academic discourse)."

The dialogic movement of Ashley's article signals a move that is in some ways central to all of the pieces in this issue. Each complicates and deconstructs an apparent binary, to discover, bring to the surface, or unveil an unseen factor or possibility. Carole Center's piece, "Representing Race in Basic Writing Scholarship," is perhaps the most traditional in its approach. Reviewing what Susanmarie Harrington has termed "student-present" articles published in *JBW* between 1995 and 2005, Center examines these same articles for the presence of race, either of the students or the teacher, and most often finds it absent. Center considers the "discursive factors" that might cause authors to veil the race of the students or teacher being discussed. Then she argues in favor of bringing race to the surface, providing an analysis of limits found in articles where it is missing and gains where it is present.

Moving beyond basic inevitably entails control of conventions, at once widely over-valued in the superficial aspects and undervalued—as Ashley helps us to see—in the capacity they provide to manipulate, stretch, test, and contest. Two articles on teaching grammar find unexpected ways to approach long-contested issues of correctness in student writing. In "Grammar Games in the Age of Anti-Remediation," Margaret Tomlinson Rustick locates the important binary not in standard/non-standard or formal/informal language, but rather in spoken and written language. Games of the kind Rustick proposes are especially useful in the multicultural and polyglot classrooms where many of us teach, and the prospect of play opens up many possibilities. Student writers gain power over their written language through open-ended play, and they come to understand that the switch from spoken language to written text is one shared by all writers. At the same time, Rustick's strategies may offer a way to extend students' oral fluency/facility to written language, as students who are extremely inventive in oral language might also play with written language. This kind of game, which serves to point up the precision demanded by readers, also links reading and writing and thus might well contribute to students' development as readers.

In a second piece focusing on grammar, "When Is a Verb? Using Functional Grammar to Teach Writing," Leif Fearn and Nancy Farnan distinguish between "grammar in writing" and "grammar for writing." Favoring a methodology that

is operational and active, i.e., "functional" rather than descriptive, they present the results of a study they conducted with tenth graders. Faced with a dual goal—improving students' writing and helping them to pass multiple-choice tests of grammar—many teachers, both at the secondary and post-secondary levels, feel compelled to teach traditional grammar. Fearn and Farnan demonstrate that if the sole goal is the ability to respond to questions about grammar, the two strategies appear to work comparably well; if, however, it is also important for the students to write better, the functional approach appears to be more effective.

Faced with a related dual task, preparing students for freshman English and also for a high-stakes test of writing, Chris Leary uses digital mixing as a model, drawing on his own identities as professor and graduate student, teacher and scholar. Adding a further blend of ethnography and test prep, he develops an exercise in collaborative composition. "'When We Remix . . . We Remake!!!'" is perhaps the most "student-present" piece *JBW* has ever published. To redirect some of his students' focus from test prep and engage them in the higher-order part of the task of writing, Leary read scholarship on composition with his students and involved them as collaborators in writing a paper for his graduate course in composition studies. Although the authorial voice is Leary's, the piece incorporates both overt student voices and their embedded responses to the readings and drafts of the graduate paper. At the same time, he extends the "remix" to the students' test prep work, so that this, too, enables them to "remake" the task and address it as fully conscious writers. The strategies Leary lists for helping the students understand and undertake the task posed by the high-stakes test make this task into something that can actually serve the broader goal (the one they think needs to be put off until they pass—or they are "fixed").

This particular mix, the Spring 2007 issue of *JBW*, appears to signal some new directions for the field, both conceptually and formally. Some time ago, we noted—without providing strong evidence—that to our knowledge no issue of *JBW* had gone to press without at least one citation of Mina Shaughnessy's work. We remarked that when an issue was published without a single citation of Shaughnessy, it would be an occasion to mention. Volume 26.1 appears to be that issue. While we don't imagine that this will be a permanent absence—indeed, our Fall issue will feature an article looking into the future from the vantage point of Shaughnessy's legacy—it perhaps is indicative of a generational shift, one that we see in our departments and institutions as well. At the same time, it is encouraging to note the excitement and engagement with which the journal's reviewers, who represent a range of vintages, have responded to these submissions. We remix; we remake.

—**Bonne August** and **Rebecca Mlynarczyk**