

A WORD FROM THE EDITORS

When we first took on *JOMR* as a project, neither one of us anticipated the steep learning curve we would undergo. What's more, when we began planning this project with reviewers and editorial team members over a year ago, neither one of us anticipated the world in which we would be launching the first issue.

Thank you for accompanying us on this journey.

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What does it mean to speak, to have a voice? For that matter, what does it mean to have or do rhetoric? I don't ask these questions facetiously or to seem deep and philosophical. These are questions I ask of my students. I myself contemplate these issues on a daily basis.

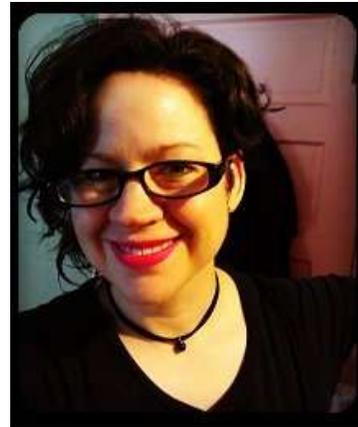
And I mean *daily* as the not-so-mundane stuff of everyday life. Because discourses cannot be dissociated from their situations and contexts and some situations and contexts are more equal than others.

Sometimes the most vital communication occurs in the

i n t e r s t i c e s .

M. Melissa Elston

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Some of you may not be used to seeing an editor's letter in a scholarly journal that begins on such an explicitly political note. That said, our field is inextricably bound to the political sphere. Teaching is an expressly political act, not because we are molding or indoctrinating people (as alarmists on the right frequently charge), but because we are preparing students to navigate a world that is politically constituted and reconstituted. To pretend otherwise — to speak and behave as if the rhetorics our students study and practice within the classroom can be divorced from what is happening outside of it — is disingenuous.

Rhetoric has been viewed with suspicion for much of eurowestern history.

Words cannot be trusted, especially not when they issue from the mouth of a woman.

Words cannot be true, especially not when they issue from the mouth of an ethnic Other.

Words are unstable, because they are queer things.

Words are mere sentiment, particularly when they come from people, bodies to be pitied.

It's difficult to speak when these paradigms of oppression intersect to hit you from all directions.

Or perhaps it's more accurate to say when these systems work together to prevent the favored from having to listen.

When the philosopher-prince Nezahuacoyotl fled the tyranny of his uncle, he composed a poem/song/record/lament/protest. Even now he shows us that some things cannot be separated or placed into binary categories:

Survivance and song.

Space and speech.

Life and meaning.

Words are actions are art are the bodies that compose.

Just because we don't express ideas in ways commonly understood through dominant lenses doesn't mean communication isn't happening.

We speak volumes, us *metics*.

Furthermore, if a rhetorician or compositionist actually tried to stake out such a position within earshot of me, I would have to look them/him/her in the eye, hard. And I'd ask what the point of their research or teaching even *was*, then.

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To be candid, I found myself asking this very question about my own work this fall, in the aftermath of the U.S. election. For me, it's been increasingly hard to sell students on the power of words and ideas. And, while I conscientiously refrain from policing students' specific political stances or commitments, I have often privately wondered since November: **How do I stand in front of my course sections and prattle on about “a good man speaking well” when a man who is less than “good” by Quintilian’s standards — a man who spoke intemperately, uncivilly, threateningly — has used those means to successfully seize the reins of power?**

Quintilian, it turns out, was a bit of an idealist.

If anything, 2016 exposed the limitations of Western-style rhetoric — at least, the oversimplified version many of us have been peddling to students in their core classes. Over and over, we insinuate in first-year composition courses that audiences are eminently persuadable if only you find the right blend of ethos, pathos, logos to sway them. The reality is that it's more complicated than that. To move forward, we must disabuse

Our *memoria* manipulates time and space. *Kairos* extends in all directions.

That is why some bodies must be silenced. Our very survival is rhetorical.

We have always been multimodal.

ourselves of the notion that the greater good can be accomplished through masterful argumentation alone. For a number of Americans in 2016, no amount of ethos, pathos or logos would have kept them from rising above their biases, their own short-sightedness and fear at the ballot box.

How do we persuade audience members who are, for example, unabashed bigots or Islamophobes? How do we get them to identify with us in a Burkean sense (and honestly, would we even want to)?

The reality is, rhetoric is not just about words (or images, for that matter). It's about action. It's about creation. More importantly, it's about coalition: respecting your audience and viewing them less as empty vessels to be persuaded and acted upon — and more as your equals, as people with agency and ideas to be acted with.

This isn't my fresh insight or anything. If you look outside the European tradition, other people have been telling Westerners this for years. Centuries. We need to step away from what the Academy tells us is the Center, and listen. And then, we need to get out there and link arms - as Robert Williams Jr. would say.

Because rhetoric isn't a good man speaking well.

It is good *people* speaking and listening and doing, together.