If the Word is not the Thing, Why Call it a Piece of Writing?

Have you noticed that when describing the results of our writing activities we tend to use words that also describe physical matter, for example article, item, or piece? Does the word text suggest ideas, rather than a lump of something? The first definition in my Webster’s New Collegiate defines text as “the original words and form of a written or printed work,” and my Webster’s New World says “the actual structure of words in a piece of writing; wording.”

Form and structure seem interesting, but what about content?

For this exercise, please allow me to elementalistically separate form and content, and a few other things, although this is counter to a healthy general semantics orientation. Does it seem paradoxical that I must make such verbal separations in order to suggest that we don’t?

I’d like us to think about writing and reading as thinking processes that do not involve a thing, object, or lump of something. Admittedly, sometimes we encounter heavy writing. Along with ideas, I’d considered using the word thought, but that too tends to suggest a thing. True, I occasionally lose my chain of thought; I was looking for it the other day but all I found was an accumulation of grey matter—dust—under the rug.

Seriously, let’s think about writing as an extension of thinking processes. As Editor of ETC, I’d like to find more new material—oops, another substance—to publish in our journal’s pages. Let’s change that to more new thinking processes. And this is where you come in. You may or may not consider yourself “a writer.” Let’s not get locked into ideas of what we “are.” You undoubtedly do plenty of thinking, and some of that concerns general semantics or you probably wouldn’t be reading these pages.

You may also consider yourself “a person who does some writing.” (What panache, what a dénouement, what an original grocery list!)
Seriously again, *ETC* depends on its writers. Without writers, we wouldn’t have much to print. You don’t have to write perfect prose. We seek ideas, content, reports, etc., and we can help with editing and polishing. You don’t have to write like Shakespeare. (It would be better if you did not.) Our writers tend to be members of this organization from a variety of occupations who write about what interests them, not necessarily professionals who write for money.

What sort of content should we have in *ETC*? That’s partly up to you, our readers, especially if you write something for us. In my view, *ETC* needs a balance of the theoretical and the practical. We need to hear how GS works. Let me rephrase that because I’ve just fallen into the trap I’m talking about, and suggested that GS is a thing that does certain actions by itself. It’s people who act. Let’s see how we can act with a GS orientation to improve our lives and the lives of others.

We want articles and essays from educators, GS aficionados, and from students. We have papers by several students in this issue, in the section on papers presented at the Twelfth International Conference on General Semantics.

In future issues of *ETC*, we also plan to have more photos, drawings, and other graphics. Do you have photos that might have a general semantics twist? Do you draw? Please let us know.

Why don’t you share your thinking processes with *ETC* readers? Start by getting in touch with me. Send me a brief description of what you’d like to say, or a “finished” essay or article. We can help edit it to fit *ETC* style, if necessary. E-mail me at editor-etc@time-binding.org, or write to me, Editor of *ETC*, P.O. Box 1565, Fort Worth, Texas 76101-1565. For our guidelines for writers, artists, and photographers, see our web page at www.time-binding.org. Perhaps you still don’t feel moved to write; then let me know what you would like to read about.

With the merger of the International Society for General Semantics with the Institute of General Semantics, there has been a powerful amalgamation of the diverse skills and talents of members of two organizations, people who think, evaluate, and act effectively and value such qualities in others. Let’s hear what you have to say.

Paul Dennithorne Johnston, Editor *ETC*