

Book & New Media Reviews

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From the Book & New Media Review Editor's Desk

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As a journalist for my college newspaper, I frequently found myself tasked to initiate conversations with people attending campus events. I recall an assignment to write a story about residence hall move-in day. As I stood in a busy corridor, a Pentax camera strap around my neck, I attempted to initiate conversations with housing staff, parents, and new students as they carried cardboard boxes, plastic grocery bags, and rolled aluminum dollies. Few people wanted to talk with a student reporter on move-in day, though nearly all accepted the offer of an extra pair of hands to carry a load of stuff. After twenty minutes spent hesitating, I worked up the courage to ask a senior residence life advisor a question. Without a hint of irony, I ask if he had any “profound” thoughts to share with *Captain's Log* readers regarding being an RA. He looked at me, blinked a few times, and said “profound” with a rising intonation and an abrupt exhalation of air.

Had I asked him to tell me a story about a day he felt challenged as an RA, about his biggest pet peeve, or about his hall's bulletin board design, the conversation may have gone in a useful direction. Instead, he turned away. With this misstep, the conversation ended before it ever really began: “move along, aspiring journalist, there's nothing ‘profound’ here worth discussing and people have real work to do.” Even as a green reporter, I understood that a good quote, from the right source, is the lifeblood of a story worth reading. If no one I spoke with had anything substantial to say, there was no story. What I struggled with most as a reporter assigned to write a story about move-in day was my own confidence in drawing out strangers' stories. In fact, I did not write the student move-in article assigned to me and instead covered a soccer game as a photographer. As I reflect on the “profoundest” article I never wrote, it is the ordinariness of the situation that I turn over in my mind over twenty years later.

As I read the reviews assembled in this issue, I am inspired by the firmness of purpose I know to be required in putting one's words into the world. Christopher M. Brown's review of Kelly Ritter's *Reframing the Subject* offers significant insight into post-WWII Coronet instructional films as proto-MOOCs (massively open online courses). Brown's review explores how these films addressed increasing enrollment and college access demands placed on educators due to the GI Bill. For large numbers of students, these films replaced “meaningful teacher-student interaction with one-way regurgitation of tasks modeled on-screen.” Educational access narratives that require literacy instruction to be packaged as a commodity, through mass-delivery

systems, according to Brown's reading of Ritter, are more likely to be impediments to "social and economic mobility" than the salve they profess to be.

Sandra Shattuck deploys a rhetoric of slowness and explores how our sense of time changes in the face of our culture's obsession with speed in her review of Berg and Seeber's *The Slow Professor*. Rachel Buck's review of *Composition in the Age of Austerity* likewise explores labor and knowledge-building practices in writing studies and the impact of an increasingly stark fiscal landscape on the literacy needs and goals of our local communities. In Madelyn Pawlowski's review of *Grassroots Literacies*, she examines sexual literacy, collective action, and the normative narrative arcs through which LGBT and queer subjects navigate a politics of invisibility and becoming in Turkey. Sally Benson's review of *The Desire for Literacy* explores the unarticulated values and assumptions that constitute what literacy means for adults who seek to further their literacy learning in domains outside of formal school contexts. Eric A. House's review of *Freedom Writing* is keenly attentive to the function of spirituality, music, and singing played in grassroots literacy education and civil rights activism for black people at the Sea Island Citizenship School in South Carolina. All of these reviews, and the writers who composed them, follow in the tradition of writing as a communal endeavor that is at its best when it is realized on the page. All of these reviews reflect on how we come to understand literacy and the complex frameworks that keep many of us, in reviewer Sally Benson's words, "hush-mouthed" or even render us silent.