

Guest Editorial

Public Knowledge

At the time of this writing, like many of you I'm sure, I am largely consumed with planning for a safe return to our physical buildings this fall. Information changes daily if not hourly. Budgets swing wildly as infusions of cash from federal sources do and don't trickle down to the library's bottom line. Vaccine mandates come with asterisks and exceptions. In between going round and round about safe ventilation when I don't know more than I can google about HVAC and thinking through how much sanitizer, plexiglass, and vaccines we'll need on hand to check out books in the coming academic year, I am reading Hester Blum's masterful history of polar print culture, *The News at the Ends of the Earth*. As the climate warms in response to human industrialization, dead letters floated by balloon, buried in cairns, and stuffed into frozen tundra by European and American men seeking a northwest passage and a science of the southern hemisphere emerge from the ice. Drawing from these bits and pieces of arctic and Antarctic communication and the newspapers, playbills, and other print culture explorers made for each other, Blum describes how knowledge is constructed and shared under extreme conditions. As editor of the book reviews section of *College & Research Libraries* here in the Anthropocene, I have been working through such questions myself.

For icebound sailors and scientists, newspapers produced and shared aboard ship contributed to the social life of the boat. Just as they did in life "back home," the papers marked time, producing periodicity through months of polar darkness. And the papers told readers what mattered, creating an imagined community where the goings on of the penguins outside constituted the news. The readers of the paper were bonded through that reading, constituted as a public through the act of circulation and consumption. *College & Research Libraries*, like other journals, web-based projects, and Twitter chats also produces a public. Like the men on those ships, those of us who read this journal are in imagined community with each other, anticipating each issue, reading and critiquing the articles, and citing research contained in its pages as we produce new knowledge ourselves, sometimes, if we can get over the hurdle of peer review, for publication in *College & Research Libraries* itself. This journal produces a reading, thinking, and writing public, in part through the words you're reading right now.

As editor of the book review section, I select a handful from among thousands of books published each year that academic librarians should include in our discourse. What authors and ideas should we be talking about with each other? In some ways this is easy: research and writing that is immediately germane to our daily work. Books from library publishers like ACRL, ALA Editions, Library Juice Press/Litwin Books and others are clearly within our domain. But ours is an inherently interdisciplinary field that should be usefully informed by work outside our sphere and, in turn, should inform the fields of others. When we place a book on a shelf, we might draw on science and technology studies, a field that explores how this kind of decision making is informed by social realities, or structuralist theories and their discontents from linguistics or anthropology. And the materialist knowledge we gain from

producing and reproducing these systems day after day is both novel and field-changing when translated for others. When I have shared my work with scholars in museum studies, gender and sexuality studies, American studies and others, I've watched minds be blown by what counts as ordinary for those of us who work in libraries. Thinking expansively about what we review means turning ourselves into a public for these other fields and makes those fields a public for our work as well.

In this issue, you'll find my latest attempt to make good on what matters to me about this section. As a steward for the field by way of this journal, I am focused on growing the profession in directions that more explicitly and directly engage scholarly work adjacent to and intersecting with academic librarianship. At the same time, I want to continue *College & Research Libraries* longstanding commitment to insightful and critical review of books produced by and intended for practicing librarians. I've pulled in titles squarely from our discipline, including Rebecca Tolley's book on trauma-informed librarianship, Joanna Gadsby and Veronica Arellano Douglas's edited volume on information literacy as service work, Sara Holder and Amber Lannon's work on wellness in academic libraries, and Renate L. Chancellor's recent biography of E.J. Josey. I include a Festschrift in honor of archives theorist Richard Cox, a book documenting the role of print culture in Appalachian activist circles in the 1970s, a history of cartography, and a study of racialized artificial intelligence by a cognitive scientist.

It also matters who reviews. Situating work within our field and evaluating its contributions requires thoughtful matching of title to reviewer; we don't all read things the same way. I am focused on connecting books and readers who bring the requisite experience and expertise to offer insights for readers of the journal. This issue's reviewers are selected with as much care as the books themselves, and I am grateful for the thoughtful writing of Twanna Hodge, Nandi Prince, Megan Duffy, Jason Alston, Iyra Buenrostro, Richelle Brown, Jordan Hale, and Jasmine Clark.

Charlotte Roh, Scholarly Communications Librarian at the University of San Francisco, introduced me to the practice of counting the number of white people at a conference, in the workplace, and in the pages of scholarly journals. Given the tendency of white people to take the presence of a small number of BIPOC individuals as evidence of racial diversity and equity, turning that white gaze onto itself has helped me to see the often-invisible work that whiteness does as it traverses our scholarly spaces unmarked and unexceptional. When we rely only on volunteers or on our largely segregated individual networks, we can all too easily reproduce the exclusions that have kept academic librarianship (and the university itself) dominated by white perspectives about what is worthy of our scholarly attention. For me, this means that white people positioned to provide platforms and opportunities to others in our field—those of us who hold this kind of power—must center racial equity in all of our decision-making processes. It has to matter every single time if I want it to matter at all. Keeping count of both reviewers and books reviewed is crucial to publishing a section that resists the dominant whiteness of research and scholarship in our field.

The section is, of course, a work in process, as all work always is. Why do we only review books when other forms of media contribute to our discourse too? What about small and independent publishers whose work is often left outside the boundaries of traditional scholarship? Could we publish review essays that address urgent issues in our field from a range of author perspectives? As I move forward with editing this section, it is all subject to change. I encourage you to reach out to me with ideas and proposals for review. This is about all of us.

As I finish this essay in my tiny Brooklyn bedroom with the door closed, my seventh grader practices (or doesn't) trombone in his bedroom while my partner writes a book in the living room. It isn't exactly William Shackleton's *Endurance* being crushed by icebergs, but it isn't comfortable either. Books—reading them and reviewing them—can help us feel less alone, part of a public engaged with shared ideas and analysis. Consider this a note floated from me to you by way of balloon, a reminder that we are still together.

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