

Editorial: Examining Perspectives and Applications

A class of freshman composition students were recently asked to consider the multitude of reality programs on network and cable television and to offer an explanation for the popularity of reality shows. They pondered all manner of reality shows, including competitions like *Top Chef*, *The Voice*, *Biggest Loser*, and *The Bachelor*, among others; reality dramas, shows which follow individuals as they live, work, and play, such as *Gold Rush*, *Appalachian Outlaws*, *Amish Mafia*, and the various *Real Housewives*; and “informative” reality shows, including *Pawn Stars*, *Antiques Roadshow*, and *Diners, Drive-Ins, and Dives*. Having contemplated the situation, my students cited viewer curiosity and superiority, and belief in the American Dream as potential contributors to the preponderance of these shows. They may well be correct.

We consume these programs to learn what life “really” looks like in Alaska or West Virginia or Beverly Hills; to watch the drama and scandal of the lives of others and feel some comfort in our own circumstances; or perhaps, drawing upon our better angels, to be inspired by the successes and happiness of the individuals on the screen before us. Though the veracity of these reality shows is often in question, each autumn a new class debuts, each hoping to be the next *Survivor* or *American Idol*. Due in part to these programs, television, a relic of the 20th century, remains relevant in the 21st, albeit consumed on ever-smaller devices and through a variety of delivery systems by many audiences of weekly programming. It is not surprising then that we find that our first open call issue primarily features articles which address the role of television in both past and contemporary culture, ranging from *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* and *Little House on the Prairie* to *Jersey Shore* and the recent BBC adaptation *Sherlock*.

The editors and contributors of *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy* are pleased to present Volume 2, Issue 1, “Traversing Realities: Genres, Histories, and Politics in Popular Culture.” While several of these essays do indeed reference reality television, authors Kayce Mobley, Sarah Fisher, and Amy Fatzinger examine the relationship between television drama and the realities of politics and race relations. Mobley and Fisher use *The West Wing*’s fictional American president Josiah Bartlet and his administration to teach American foreign policy, and Fatzinger considers Laura Ingalls Wilder’s portrayal of American Indians in her books and their eventual adaptation in *Little House on the Prairie*, a show which would contribute largely to the perception of Native Americans for an entire generation of American children. These dramatic fictions and historic realities intersect on-screen, demonstrating the ever-fluctuating boundaries of the “real” in the artifacts produced by our culture.

Examining the sort of reality that we simultaneously fear and are drawn to, that of the zombie apocalypse, Anthony Neely considers *The Walking Dead* and its depiction of informal learning in the absence of a structured educational environment. In a related universe, Myha Do reviews M.J. Trow’s *A Brief History of Vampires*, in which Trow examines the relationship between the historical individuals who served as inspiration for the Count and the literary and cinematic character of Dracula. Kate Donley, too, undertakes an iconic figure and his representation on-screen, in her discussions of the pedagogical applications of Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes and adaptations of the novella *A Study in Scarlet*. We are pleased to include Donley’s application essay as a new feature for the Journal, in which scholars consider the use of texts—films, books,

art, music—in the classroom. We also debut here a reflection by Shannon Reed, who discusses her experience and those of other women in the world of Shakespearean theatre. Both the Reflection and Application sections will appear in future issues of *Dialogue*, when applicable and available.

We return, then, to reality television, with articles by May Friedman and Louisa Danielson, who write on *Survivor* and *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, respectively. Friedman addresses the topics of representation and authenticity in reality television and how these issues could be incorporated in the classroom, while Danielson's article examines the children's show that incorporates both the actual persona and character of Fred Rogers and the fictional-yet-realistic situations addressed by the scripted interactions on the program. Shelbee Nguyen, in her discussion of higher education and travel abroad preparation, demonstrates how influential reality programming can be in shaping students' perceptions of people, nations, and the values and behaviors espoused by international cultures. And in perhaps the most "real" artifact treated in this collection, Peter Kay reviews a live performance by yMusic at the University of South Carolina.

These examinations included in Volume 2, Issue 1 take place in the spaces between genres, histories, politics, and realities, where fictional and factual figures traverse the landscape of our screens and classrooms. Enjoy your reading.

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