How to Invent Everything: A Survival Guide for the Stranded Time Traveler

Ryan North. 2018. Riverhead Books [ISBN 978-0-7352-2014-0. 438 pages including index. US$27.00 (hardcover).]

Time travel is a common and popular theme in both literature and film. From H.G. Wells to *Back to the Future*, people have imagined how time travel could work and alter their lives, perhaps by travelling to the past to make a sound investment or place a winning bet on a sporting event. However, very few sources center on travelling through time with the intention of inventing *everything* and explain to you how to do so. Humorist Ryan North, perhaps best known for his Dinosaur Comics, wears the hat of a technical communicator and presents a fun, but serious look at how to re-create the modern world if you are stranded in the past, in *How to Invent Everything: A Survival Guide for the Stranded Time Traveler*.

The book's framing narrative is that you are a time traveler stranded in the past, reading the time machine repair guide. In the likely event that you cannot fix the time machine, you'll have to build modern society from scratch, with the guide's help. While this sounds fantastical in concept, it sets the tone for what is essentially a reference book on discovering everything, from breeding dogs from wolves, to creating charcoal to filter water, to composing "Ode to Joy" with your name on the manuscript.

In the introductions, North credits a technical writer (himself in another timeline) with creating the book's content. Accordingly, much of the content is relatively technical in nature, although explained so any common person/stranded time traveler can follow along and understand. Each section lists the invention, a relevant quote about it, a description, what people did without it before it was invented, when it was invented, the prerequisites of inventing it, and how to invent it. For example, without inventing glass you would not have corrective lenses or microscopes. To invent it no prerequisite inventions are needed unless you want to make artificial glass. Next, not only instructions on how to create glass are provided, but also how to form glass into useful objects, such as a telescope. Footnotes help flesh out the process and add levity to the content.

After reading *How to Invent Everything*, you may not be ready to create a combustion engine from scratch, although all types of engines are described. Throughout what could be a dense encyclopedia of information, North sprinkles humorous observations and informative footnotes about actual history, such as the "wandering womb" theory from ancient Greece that persisted until the 1800s. The content reads like a high-level summary of what you would expect to learn in an overview course of just about everything, including basic chemistry to music composition to computer logic and the first 768 digits of pi for reference. For anyone who would like a general explanation of how the modern world works explained at a high school level, invent moveable type and bookbinding, pick up a copy of this book, warm up your flux capacitor, and prepare for a delightful travel through time.

Timothy Esposito

Timothy Esposito is the Manager of Logistics Documentation at Oracle, an STC Fellow, the STC Secretary, and a past president of the STC Philadelphia Metro chapter with more than 20 years of technical communication experience.

Creative Writing for Social Research: A Practical Guide

Richard Phillips and Helen Kara. 2021. Policy Press. [ISBN 978-1-4473-5598-4. 212 pages, including index. $47.95 (softcover).]

Connect with the heart and the head will *follow*. The return journey takes a little *longer*.

This is the idea behind *Creative Writing for Social Research: A Practical Guide*. It's a daunting task since it often flies in the face of traditional scholarly conventions. Like, for example, citing in the text "(Smith, 2008)." Instead of Smith said *this* and Jones said *that* people like to know who Smith *is*, as in: "Economist Jayson Smith found that. . ." And the dozens of other examples of "academese."

The authors emphasize that social researchers use creative writing in all aspects of their work, from exploring and analyzing data, to presenting and disseminating their findings. And they insightfully expand their definition of the term, to include a wide range of genres, such as: letters and stories, poems and diary entries, written dialogues and playscripts.

You can divide creative writing into two parts: One includes writing techniques like rhythm and

repetition; figurative language and rhetorical questions; conversational language and changing the parts-of-speech of words (this one from Truman Capote: "There was a group of Australian army officers *baritoning* 'Waltzing Matilda.'")

The second is: dissecting the meaning of the word *story*. At its simplest, a story contains three elements: people, place, and plot (the 3 P's): (1) People are interested in *people*; (2) the idea of *place* engages the physical senses; something important even for anchoring more abstract ideas; and (3) plot. And this is *crucial*: In academic and scholarly writing, you can think of plot as the thesis or hypothesis: the theme you are pursuing throughout the written piece; the major thread that runs throughout it.

Some problems? The authors succumb to academic jargon; words like polyvocal, polytextual, and polygraphical (p. 11). They compare creative writing with social research, that they refer to as its "canonized counterpart" (p. 3). "They mention two researchers who collaborated in an autoethnographic piece. . ." (p. 67). Yet far less jargon than scholars tend to use.

Just one unforgivable item: a 48-line paragraph on page 14. Optimal length for a paragraph is 10-15 lines *maximum*; the best length for understanding *and* remembering.

The authors do finally make an irresistible case for using creative writing in social research (p. 4):

"What is known in prose might be known differently in poetry."

"Reaching larger and more diverse audiences than conventional research writing."

Reaching readers emotionally . . . in ways that formal academic writing cannot."

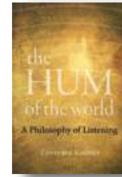
"Of course, the road to discovering often starts with definitions. "Reaching," here can mean many things, such as understanding or remembering, and not least: *enjoyment*.

Steven Darian

Steven's most recent books are *Technique in Nonfiction: The Tools of the Trade* (2019); *The Wanderer: Travels & Adventures Beyond the Pale* (2020); and *The Heretic's Book of Death & Laughter: The Role of Religion in Just About Everything* (due out late 2021).

The Hum of the World: A Philosophy of Listening

Lawrence Kramer. University of California Press. [ISBN 978-0-520-38299-2. 244 pages, including index. US$22.95 (softcover).]



Lawrence Kramer's *The Hum of the World: A Philosophy of Listening* contends that the "rise of digital technology" (p. 13) has so intensified the power of the visual that it obscures the central role of sound in how we know things. The visual both reduces "complex ideas . . . to cliché" (p. 13) and separates the observer from the observed, resulting in an alienated, superficial relationship to reality that can be resolved by reconnecting knowledge with sound.

Sound is experienced as the audible, what we physically hear, but arises within a context Kramer dubs the "audiable"—the inserted "a" signifying what can be heard potentially rather than. In language, we sense the audiable when we know what we think, but cannot yet put into words. This audiable "pause" is also sensed through music, and simultaneously discloses "what we know about music" and "what music enables us to know" (p. 18).

The audiable reveals itself through a "sympathetic resonance" between the body and sound that "dissolves the distinction between subject and object" (p. 20), so that the "spirit becomes an object of sense" (p. 20) and reveals "the presence of a material body with spiritual resonance" (p. 176), but without relapsing into the ideological or religious dogma represented by the traditional "fatal alternatives of blind faith or blind empiricism" (p. 23).

Sympathetic resonance and awareness of the audiable occur because the body, like life itself, is primarily defined not only by how it looks, but also by how it sounds. "To be alive, the organs must be non-silent," and must "therefore harbor the potentiality of resonance independent of any actual resonance. . .organs resound from the place of the audiable" (p. 200). A stethoscope reveals the "body as speaker" by amplifying "the body's own voice, which is not its speaking voice" (p. 200), but rather the sounds of a beating heart, breathing lungs, and flowing blood.

A traditional metaphor for describing the audiable is the Aeolian harp, which produces sounds and tones when wind blows through its strings. The body is like an Aeolian harp. It resonates with the flow of potential sound carried by the wind and reconnects the listener's body and consciousness with the audiable, or the