

BOOK REVIEWS

Prendergast, David and Chiara Garattini (eds.). 2015. *Aging and the Digital Life Course*. Oxford, New York: Berghahn Books. ix + 289 pp. Hb.: \$120.00/£75.00. ISBN: 9781782386919.

This book is rather unusual within the growing literature on aging. On the one hand, there are studies that portray the elderly as vulnerable, ill, as declining, and as in need of help but, on the other, there are sophisticated theory-building efforts that challenge vulnerability and reveal how diverse aging is. People of the same cohort do not necessarily age the same way, especially due to different lifestyles and class positioning. Geographically, aging is even more diverse; as a result, aging is a relation category, a process that is highly malleable, and highly influenced by cultural and social contexts. This book neither emphasises vulnerabilities nor, at least in my reading, pushes forward theory complexities. This is a rather practical book, and its value lies in shedding light on issues that are crucially important in everyday life but have very often been neglected because old age has been placed on the margins of contemporary capitalist societies.

The main argument underpinning this volume is that the vulnerabilities of old age should not be romanticised and overlooked; however, there are enormous untapped resources that can enable people to live longer, healthier, and happier lives with the wise introduction of technologies in their daily lives.

This edited volume begins with an introduction in which aging, in relation to technology advancements, have been critically reviewed in accessible language. The introduction is the only theoretical section here. All other chapters' focuses much more on empirical findings and practical solutions regarding how to fill the gap we currently experience in terms of aging realities, especially, when physical and mental health issues are present. Science and technology studies indeed could do much to build theoretical platforms from which more nuanced and helpful human-technology mechanisms can be developed to improve lives in older age.

The volume has three main parts. The first is devoted to connections and interactions that people can and, importantly, want to achieve with the help of technologies. Accordingly, the authors investigate how social media can create and maintain age-friendly communities in which people can discuss and access knowledge of issues that matter to them. The studies here are empirical and demonstrate how community activism, for instance, when teaching language to migrant people, can improve lives for both elderly and those who are just settling into a new society. Moreover, this book portrays very practical and specific needs: older people can benefit greatly from co-payment platforms for home services and transport that enable mobility, identify and coordinate trusted service providers.

The second part of the book is devoted to health and wellbeing. Technologies can support organising daily chores, increase safety in using everyday household technologies and overall peace of mind about safety in a house. Deteriorating physical and/or mental health and poorer memory need not be ultimate sacrifice of independence. The research shows how learning styles when people are coping and living with health condition open space for more nuanced, much more useful improvements for everyday technologies. Cooking, washing, cleaning can be safer, more enjoyable and, most important – in cases of chronic illness – do-able and empowering if learning and coping styles are incorporated

in the improvements of technologies meant for older people. Dementia – a “margin” of human existence par excellence – can be tackled, controlled and, after all, humanised, if we know more about how people actually cope and learn to live their daily lives with such mental conditions.

Finally, the third part is devoted to life-course transitions. Not all people want to retire; for many, “forced” retirement is a negative, life-triggering event, and mobile technologies form “life-lines” enabling people to stay in touch and be useful and socially active. As such, this book is also a subtle reminder that fundamental policy work needs to be advocated to bring the older age back into the centre of human existence. This part of the book goes beyond Western-centric ideas and includes fascinating materials of digital storytelling among older Japanese adults, caregiving in the digital era, and leisure activities with digital games. Finally, the last chapter discusses a dystopian reality created in the digital era – who owns our digital lifespans and in what manner?

On the note of shortcomings, I felt that the different parts of this volume were rather layered and did not fully hold together. However, even in this partly scattered way, this book gives a powerful takeaway thought for future research in the aging field: ‘People want to focus on what they can do. Nobody of any age likes to feel they are a burden’ (pp. 11–12). Technology indeed is a part of a broader landscape of our everyday lives, and far more practical and action-related research is needed to understand how people learn throughout their lives and how technology can become a daily safety net, empower and support people in their older age.

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Ferguson, James. 2015. *Give a Man a Fish: Reflections on the New Politics of Distribution*. Durham, London: Duke University Press. xv+264 pp. Pb.: \$24.95. ISBN: 9780822358862.

Anthropologists have traditionally struggled to explain the fact that most developing projects in many underdeveloped countries fail. James Ferguson's book, based on the Lewis Henry Morgan Lecture, which he delivered at the University of Rochester in October 2009, presents a formidable study of the rise of social welfare programs in Southern Africa. Contrary to popular belief, Ferguson demonstrates how the "cash flow" through the "basic income grants" (BIG) serves both to alleviate poverty, and to dramatically influence the changes in the local communities across the region.

The concept of these grants is not new: it can be traced at least to 1795 and one of the "founding fathers" of the United States, Thomas Paine. It was discussed by the British philosopher and human rights advocate Sir Bertrand Russell as far back as in 1918 (p. 53), and contemporary advocates include media celebrities Mark Zuckerberg (founder of Facebook) and Elon Musk (inventor and one of the richest people in the world), as well as Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town (and Nobel Peace Prize laureate) Desmond Tutu. Among the left-wing critics of this scheme, some point that its origin might even lay in the 'negative income tax' concept suggested by the famous economist Milton Friedman (p. 30). The basic idea is that people with low income should receive basic grants (small amounts of cash), instead of some other form of social welfare benefit. Although the concept has been tried in many underdeveloped countries of the world (and it might take off in some of the most developed ones, like Finland), it is the Southern African model that is in the focus of Ferguson's attention – a model that might prove to have some interesting implications for the study of development.

In the Introduction, Ferguson sets out the general idea of basic income grants, taking into account wider historical and political circumstances, including the end of apartheid, and the subsequent rise in inequality in South Africa. Ideological purity aside, the strange mixture of ideas that resulted in small income grants proved to be surprisingly successful in South Africa, as well as in Namibia (although he notes that the Namibian case is not as well studied). The first chapter (*Give a Man a Fish: From Patriarchal Productionism to the Revalorization of Distribution*) provides a discussion of the relationship between dependency and distribution, with references to political economy. James Ferguson argues that, with this new scheme, 'We are dealing, then, with an emergent politics – one full of dangers, it is true, but also of possibilities' (p. 61).

The second chapter (*What Comes after the Social: Historicizing the Future of Social Protection in Africa*) presents the specificities of the "African" ways of "constructing the social." One might even argue that a "total social fact" that the state provides is shaping new historical realities.

The third chapter, *Distributed Livelihoods: Dependence and the Labor of Distribution in the Lives of the Southern African Poor (And Not-So-Poor)*, revisits the concept of distribution. State assistance is inserted 'into a world in which distribution is already both a pervasive process and a concrete set of activities' (p. 117).

The fourth chapter (*The Social Life of Cash Payments: Money, Markets, and*

the Mutualities of Poverty) provides the context that shows how the lives of the Southern African poor are affected by different social benefits. Ferguson cites Brazil's *Bolsa Familia* program as an example of a successful welfare program in Latin America. Ferguson seeks to dispense with the "traditional Left's suspicion of 'cash payment'" as something that comes from the Left's general suspicion of the markets, but he takes Mauss's view that markets are integral instruments for social cohesion.

The fifth chapter (*Declarations of Dependence: Labor, Personhood, and Welfare in Southern Africa*) sets a historical backdrop for different ideas of dependency. 'Declarations of dependency are a challenge to liberal common sense [...] they present us with the theoretical and political challenge of a form of agency that seeks its own submission. [...] But however uncomfortable it may make us, an ethnographically informed approach to the political challenges of the present will need to take such forms of agency seriously' (p. 162).

The sixth chapter (*A Rightful Share: Distribution beyond Gift and Market*) deals with the ideological roots of distributive policies, and Ferguson focuses in particular on populist assertions of the highly controversial (to put it mildly) South African politician Julius Malema. Contrary to the opinion of most contemporary economists (and certainly in contrast to one of the examples that he cites earlier in the book, Tanzania), Ferguson seems to approve of Malema's idea that national ownership of all resources is the key to the successful (and just) distribution of them (pp. 170–171). He seems to be firmly in favour of new political forms of organisation that might provide for more justice and equality: 'New kinds of welfare states, that is, may open up the possibility of imagining new kinds of politics – perhaps even new kinds of socialism' (p. 189).

In the Conclusion (*What Next for Distributive Politics?*), the author seeks to expand the idea of a "radical politics" of distribution that would be more globally applicable. Citing examples from Marx, via Kropotkin, to Žižek, the idea that anthropologists should use ethnography to inform and influence the ways in which their societies are organised and in which the wealth is distributed. 'To say as much is to invoke a politics yet to be invented, it is true' (p. 216). It is a pity that James Ferguson does not really address the issue of how the political systems that have so thus been organised on the lines suggested by Marx (and, to a lesser extent, by Kropotkin and Žižek) have failed. Perhaps this is a topic for another book.

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Horvath, Agnes, Bjørn Thomassen and Harald Wydra (eds.). 2015. *Breaking Boundaries. Varieties of Liminality*. Oxford, New York: Berghahn Books. vi + 255 pp. Hb.: \$110.00/£68.00. ISBN: 9781782387664.

The contributions collected in this book are all attempts to apply the notion of “liminality” to various situations in time and space. Forged by Arnold van Gennep at the turn of the 20th century, developed by Victor Turner half a century later, the notion of liminality is once again gaining interest among anthropologists and beyond. It is understood here as a ‘fundamental human experience’ (p. 3): according to the editors, ‘liminality captures in-between situations and conditions characterized by the dislocation of established structures, the reversal of hierarchies, and uncertainty about the continuity of tradition and future outcomes’ (p. 2). The goal of the editors and authors is then to show that this notion, derived from the analysis of the rites of passage, can become an analytical tool for disciplines other than anthropology and allow to interpret and explain a whole range of other situations, particularly in the political sphere. The volume is, in this sense, an updated version of an issue of *International Political Anthropology* published in 2009: eight of the twelve contributions are elaborated versions of articles previously published in this issue.

The case studies are mainly located in Europe, with an incursion into the United States (Mennell) and one into Egypt (Peterson), and mainly cover the modern and contemporary periods (from the reign of Louis XIV until today, with an exception for ancient and medieval alchemy (Horvath)).

The volume is organised into three parts. The first contains two articles aimed at returning the notion of liminality to its theoretical context: Arpad Szokolczai is interested in liminality and related notions in philosophy and sociology, while Bjorn Thomassen looks back on its origins in anthropology. Both articles provide a useful introduction to the history of the notion of liminality and to related theoretical issues.

The second part explores how liminality can be applied to “social processes”: a purpose which may seem rather vague. Indeed, the articles that compose it form a rather eclectic ensemble: Bernd Giesen wonders about the “in-between”, that is to say, the third term which is always inserted between the terms of binary structuralist oppositions but which, according to him, is often excluded from the analysis. He proposes a “sociology of ambivalence” that he applies to four objects: garbage, monsters, victims, and seduction. Agnes Horvath proposes to interpret alchemy, as a forerunner of metallurgy, as an implementation of liminality: she introduces the idea of ‘forced liminality,’ conceived as a manipulation to change matters or objects from one state to another, and extends it to the political domain by speaking of ‘political alchemy,’ meaning ‘the way artificially induced liminal situations can facilitate the technological shaping of identities’ (p. 88). Michel Dobry proposes analysing crisis situations (especially political crises), not as moments requiring a suspension of the tools used for the analysis of normal situations, which he calls “methodological exceptionalism”, but as to be thought within the “hypothesis of continuity”. He then puts forward, in order to give an account of these situations, the idea of a fluidity or plasticity of structures and that of the ‘desectorization of the social space’ (p. 101). If one feels a certain proximity of these ideas with the notion of liminality pre-

sented in the other texts of the volume, one can regret that this proximity is not directly discussed by the author.

Stephen Mennell, meanwhile, applies the notion of liminality to the American “frontier”, the one that, in the course of the 19th century, moved the limit between civilisation and barbarism towards the West. Inspired by Norbert Elias, he observes the extent to which individuals develop particular skills in the context of the “frontier” and attempts to articulate liminality with the notion of the “civilizing process”. Particularly stimulating, this rapprochement is however not pushed enough. The same could be said of Peter Burke’s article on the passage between the private and the public at the court of Louis XIV, which is inspired by Erving Goffman’s writings on the presentation of self and which offers very interesting reflections on the way in which liminality makes it possible to rethink the notion of metamorphosis or the opposition between artificiality and naturalness, and which introduces the notion of “liminal person” applied to huissiers and servants: the six small short pages of the article are not sufficient to develop these stimulating proposals. (What, for example, of the relationship between the “liminal person” and the trickster discussed by Szokolczai in the first part of the volume?).

The third part deals more directly with the field of politics, already largely present in the texts of the second. Its composition is more coherent and seems to indicate that the field of politics lends itself particularly well to analyses using the notion of liminality. Two texts first offer a rereading of revolutionary events in terms of liminality: Camil Francisc Roman focuses on the execution of Louis XVI in January 1793 by showing how liminality can restore its significance, as well as of the trial from which it derives, whereas it is generally presented as a marginal aspect in the historiography of the French Revolution. Mark Allen Peterson interprets the Egyptian revolution of 2011 relying on the notions of “*communitas*” and “social drama” borrowed from Victor Turner. The next two articles focus on liminal periods rather than moments of crisis in themselves: Harald Wydra analyses the transition from monarchy to democracy as a liminal moment: more precisely, it is the vacuum of power which constitutes the liminal conditions in which the idea of democracy, as a tendency to subvert hierarchies and established structures, emerges. Drawing on the work of Claude Lefort on the “empty place of power”, he develops analyses that shed light on the role of ritual, violence, sacrifice and the figure of the victim in democratic regimes. Richard Sakwa sees the end of the communist era as opening a liminal period that characterises the 21st century: not only does the end of communist regimes not lead to a stable new order, neither economic nor political, but it marks the end of eschatological visions of the future. To a liminality of transformation, which involves the passage from one state to another, he opposes a liminality of change, ‘without meaning, purpose or direction’ (p. 211). His approach to liminality in relation to temporality is particularly stimulating. Finally, Maria Mälksoo questions in a very relevant way the possibility of applying the notion of liminality to the theory of international relations by showing how such an approach can renew this disciplinary field.

The editors of the volume defend themselves from wanting to impose a homogeneous and normative vision of liminality and, indeed, what emerges from the volume as a whole is the “variety” of the uses of the notion, so much so that we come to regret

the absence of a conclusion or an afterword that would attempt nevertheless to identify some common directions or divergences of all the texts. The book remains however highly recommendable for its theoretical perspectives and for offering a rich dialogue between anthropology and other social sciences.

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Brković, Čarna (2017). *Managing Ambiguity: How Clientelism, Citizenship, and Power Shape Personhood in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn. 208 pp. Hb.: \$120.00/£85. ISBN: 9781785334146.

The content of this book revolves around two central concepts in the everyday life in a Bosnian and Herzegovinian (BiH) border town: *veze* and *štele*, as they are called in the local grassroots terminology. *Veze* and *štele* could be interpreted and presented as a form of clientelism. As the author, Čarna Brković, states: they are nothing new for anybody who has lived and worked in BiH (p. 2). However, there are many new and insightful issues discussed in this book. Brković approaches these forms of clientelism as a part of transnational and globalised processes, not as some kind of illness located in a particular country trapped in this “predemocratic” phenomenon (p. 5). She argues that *veze* and *štele* became relevant for welfare for three related reasons: 1) they offer people a way to reproduce personhood, 2) they are the result of the global tendencies in which the boundaries between state and the society are blurred, 3) they have a role in the reproduction of power relations.

The author goes far beyond the strict context of not just her field of research but BiH as political, social and economic contexts. She argues well that *štele* and *veze* are not *oikotypes* from BiH but are a reality of most contemporary countries: they just use them under different terms. Moreover, as the author very convincingly demonstrates from the emic point of view: friendship, personhood, and goodness are easily labelled as corruption and *veze* from etic point of view. We could conclude that it is more important who interprets some actions than who is performing them and why. I am not trying to interpret Brković’s book as favourable to *veze* and *štele*, but I want to emphasise how she manages to make this problematic topic very ambiguous (to use the word from her title), and present these practices that we all easily criticise, in a different light. With this well-argued and thick ethnography, she made a black-and-white topic show its “fifty shades of grey” and question our *a priori*-framed “we know everything about it” knowledge.

The book brilliantly presents the illogic of contemporary Bosnian and Herzegovinian society, which I have also encountered too many times: on one side Brković’s interlocutors openly condemn *veze/štele*, while on the other they are highly engaged in them. Their main rationale behind this is that “everybody” is doing it, so if I do it, it makes me equal to others and not in a favourable position.

Reading this book, I had a problem with the author’s level of protection of the field site and her interlocutors, which I understand are necessary; however, I do think that local contextualisation is needed. The author clearly states that her work is done in Republic of Srpska (one of the BiH entities) in one of the border towns. She even calls the location the “Town” trying attempting to protect her interlocutors and her field site. Moreover, she attempts to go above and beyond interlocutors’ religious and national identification, except when it is crucial for the story. I perfectly understand her position and the sensitivity of the topic, but for experts on BiH this causes a problem. Perhaps for most of the colleagues the exact location is not an issue, and they will be happy to learn something, use Brković’s interpretation in their work, and reference her work. However, for someone who has in-depth interested in BiH society the exact location of the field work and positionality of the interlocutors (meaning their national, political and religious condition) is highly relevant

since (at least I think so) these issues directly influence the outcomes of some scenarios and consequently their interpretation. I do not know how to solve this problem.

My experience of conducting research in the city of Novi Travnik with similarly delicate topic resulted in critiques from both academic and interlocutor perspectives. We did protect the identities of the interlocutors, but the location, historical context, political situation, contemporary events (everything that influences the topics we are researching and trying to interpret) are clearly stated for others to use and test our results. Brković argues that nationality is not/was not the most important “power vector”, and that her interlocutors are people shaped by multiple vectors or power (p. 29), which I could agree with, but she also shows that *komšiluk* (good neighbourhood relations regardless of the ethnonational and religious differences) is no longer an important factor for her interlocutors of the Town. The explanation of this is the fact that the structure of the population has drastically changed, and that people don’t know each other by “locating” others in their world and “knowing you by sight”. This is backed up with numbers and then we realise that population of the Town has changed from 60 per cent of Serbian in 1991 to 85 percent Serbian in 2013. Perhaps this also is a factor in the entire story of the Town? The position of the Bosniak (declared or not) cannot be the same as the Serb (declared or not) in this Town. In everyday life, it could be, but in the context of people’s social personhood it could be a significant part.

With her ethnographic material, Brković shows how without political background, and even with it, it is very hard to “manage” employment, healthcare, and sometimes even existence. In the city dominated by one group and located in the political framework dominated by the same group, who has the political power? If we add a new context that Brković well detects – the ambiguous boundary between public and private roles of individuals where people on power positions help others through public institutions and money and in that way gain more power and become “benefactors” while actually (ab)using their positions – we have a highly insightful image of contemporary BiH society. This part is what I like about this book; it shows the complexity of Bosnian and Herzegovinian society and huge differences in top-down and bottom-up perspectives, between native points of view and outsiders points of view, on the same matters.

Brković argues that neoliberalism converged and merged with these particular forms of clientelism in this very specific post-war and post-socialist context and that this has produced particular ways of gathering power (p. 10). The author also makes the point at the end of the book concluding that her interlocutors are not just suffering people who needed help in this post-socialist and post-war society, but are, in fact, active subjects who are working on changing the terms of their suffering (p. 166), using even those methods that they personally criticise and condemn: *veze* and *štele*.

Brković’s book is one of those that adds another piece to the puzzle that recent anthropological research on BiH is creating (see, for example, Halilovich 2013; Jansen 2015; Jašarević 2017; Hromadžić and Kurtović 2017, etc.). But here let me add that *Managing Ambiguity* is an essential piece to the puzzle since it deals with the topic not easy to research, to understand, and to present. My opinion is that Čarna Brković has done a great job and anyone who wants to understand this aspect of Bosnian society must read this book.

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Nahm, Sheena and Cortney Hughes Rinker (eds.) 2016. *Applied Anthropology: Unexpected Spaces, Topics, and Methods*. London, New York: Routledge. 180 pp. Pb.: £26.99. ISBN: 9781138914520

Where can I find a job with a degree in anthropology? This is a common question among graduates who are already familiar with the fact that even a Ph.D. degree does not assure them a job in academia. As explained in the introductory chapter of *Applied Anthropology*, edited by Sheena Nahm and Cortney Hughes Rinker, academic jobs have become rare in the last decades. In the 1970s, for example, three quarters of anthropologists in the US who completed their doctoral degree gained employment in academia. By the 1990s, the situation was quite different. The percentage of graduates taking academic jobs dropped to slightly more than one third. However, today anthropology is not in decline. On the contrary, projections show that by 2022 the employment field for anthropologists will increase by 19 per cent, which is, as the introductory chapter explains, faster than the average projection of other occupations. Moreover, the expectations of some experts are even greater. In 2014, the Irish newspaper *Independent* published an article by Sarah Starck about the top fifty jobs of the future – and anthropology was in the second place. ‘The study of people can take you into almost any career path, anywhere in the world, including education, healthcare, museum curation, social work, international development, government, organisational psychology, non-profit management, marketing, publishing and forensics,’ (2014) she explains. This edited volume opens the door to fields outside academia, as mentioned in the article, and provides an excellent overview of various unexpected opportunities, possibilities, activities, and jobs in which anthropologists can find their place.

The book is divided into three clusters of chapters, which present new and unexpected ways of thinking about spaces, topics, and methods. The first cluster explores unusual spaces where anthropologists might not traditionally expect to find a job. Jo Aiken, who has worked with the NASA space agency, focuses her chapter on “otherworldly anthropology” and presents findings of ethnographic research which attempted to explore, among other topics, perceptions of privacy among astronauts living and working in space during their long-duration missions. What does anthropology have to do with space missions? As explained by Aiken, it can provide relevant resources for collecting findings about being human in outer space. The author argues that ethnography is especially important and a useful tool for obtaining ‘an insider’s perspective and holistic viewpoint on the life of the space explorer’ (p. 18). Due to new space missions headed to Mars and other planets, this kind of study could offer a wealth of opportunities in the future. Deborah A. Murphy presents a different kind of unexpected space – one of military service members in rehabilitation. Her work is based on the perception that abilities and disabilities of people in special medical centres are socio-culturally constructed and environmentally influenced. She studies the narratives of people spending time in these facilities and explains how they interpret their illnesses and injuries.

The second cluster of chapters presents unusual topics that could raise the question of what anthropology even is. Chelsey Dyer presents her first-person story about a job hunt in the non-profit industry after graduation. Through her journey in two non-profit organisations, she describes what the use of a degree in anthropology is and how an anthropologist can

use her knowledge and skills outside “traditional” settings. The chapter provides brilliant guidance for young graduates who have to build a new career and frame their own mission within non-academic institutions. As advised by Dyer, the main advantage of anthropologists outside academia could be creative and analytical thinking, which can contribute to developing innovative solutions. In the next chapter, Michael Scroggins presents his involvement in FAIR Money, a collective with a mission ‘to find effective ethical alternatives to crippling consumer debt’ (p. 66). As explained by Scroggins, the participation of anthropologists can be instrumental in such institutions due to their ability to provide fresh and deep insights. Jonathan L. Zilberg focuses on serendipity in the research field and, more specifically, within his own personal and professional life in Indonesia. Even though anthropologists often have a clear goal in front of them, the “wind of change” can lead them to new and unexpected territories in their own careers and unexpected outcomes of their studies, which can be beneficial from professional and personal perspectives. In the following two chapters of this section, Lauren Miller Griffith shows how her anthropological training has helped solve educational problems. She highlights the fact that the anthropological approach can be instrumental in bridging the gap between different groups in an educational institution. In addition, the chapter successfully dispels the myth that some people are born teachers, and others are not. As explained, teaching is a skill like any other and can be refined by practice – and application. The final chapter of this section, written by Cortney Hughes Rinker, delves into end-of-life care in Muslim communities. It shows how Islamic beliefs work with the prevailing end-of-life approaches, which often put technologies and medicine at the front and human beliefs at the back. The chapter clearly shows there is, in fact, “no one-size-fits-all” way of providing an appropriate end-of-life care. Therefore, anthropological approaches focused on understanding individuals within socio-culturally complex systems can be useful for providing culture-specific and people-centred solutions to important ethical and medical questions.

The third part of the book reveals some unexpected methods that can be used by anthropologists in applied frameworks. Sheena Nahm examines how an exploration of alternative forms of ethnography can appear in practice. She draws from her own experience in non-profit organisations and presents how ‘time converges with the unexpected to create productive ways of integrating an anthropological approach’ (p. 125). Allison E. Fish attempts to bring together anthropology and yoga and explains how intellectual property claims about traditional types of yoga can be researched and understood through anthropological lenses.

In the final part of the book, we first read a practically oriented chapter, appropriately titled *Surviving Academia 2.0*, in which both editors of the volume reflect on their own “hybrid” careers between the academic and applied worlds. The chapter provides useful tips and suggestions for people who remain “betwixt and between” for a longer time and gives advice on how to straddle the liminal status. Finally, we get to a more theoretical conclusion, prepared by Susan Trencher, who reflects on the volume through her own academic career and non-academic experience. She explains that, at present, when university knowledge is (unfortunately) being turned into an economic commodity, we should prepare for a new future of anthropology and help defend and strengthen its “classical” meaning and social relevance outside academia.

This book is, at first glance, a diverse collection of different authors, themes, and approaches, which does not promise to be ground breaking or enlightening. However, a more detailed reading shows that the book, in fact, manages to present in a coherent and innovative way the contemporary relevance of anthropology in the profit and non-profit sectors and provides a fresh perspective on the value of anthropological methods outside academia and “traditional” research institutions. It can be especially useful for students and graduates who have to face the reality that academic institutions are overcrowded and will have to carve their own path in the industry, governmental sector, NGOs – or in some other, often unexpected spaces and contexts.

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Gerritsen, Anne, Giorgio Riello (eds.). 2015. *Writing Material Culture History (Writing History Series)*. London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic. xiv + 338 pp. Pb.: \$29.95. ISBN: 9781472518569.

Recent years have seen the advent of material culture as a field of study in and of itself. While relying on traditionally material-focused academic fields, such as anthropology and archaeology, material cultures studies draw, in a truly interdisciplinary nature, from historians, artists, designers, creators, and product innovators. In editing this volume, Gerritsen and Riello aim to bring about a discussion of how to approach writing the history of things.

Archaeologists and anthropologists have long written about material culture, but it was only recently that historians have engaged material culture as a credible source of information about the past. In doing so, they also disposed of the bias that material culture only meant objects from the distant past. In its current framework, objects of any era, even modern decades, could be engaged as sources evidence and insights on society, culture, and historical events.

Objects present a somewhat confusing, cyclical relationship with culture. Objects are created by culture, but these objects in turn create culture. Unpacking this, and many other conundrums of the things around us present challenges to those writing material culture history. However, the effort is wholly worth it. Gerritsen and Riello note that ‘material culture has enriched history’ in three ways: it compliments and provides depth to other sources; it causes new lines of inquiry; and it helps academics find new themes in history (p. 3).

One of the core strengths of this volume, and there are many, is its unassuming premises. The editors hold that there is not one accepted path to engage with material culture and, as such, there is no single methodology suggestable for its study (p. 5). They also highlight, and this is a strength of the book as born out in the variety of its contents, the need to expand the geographic context for material culture beyond the Western world (p. 6).

The book is divided into three sections: *The Disciplines of Material Culture*, *The Histories of Material Culture*, and *The Presentation of Material Culture*. Each section is built out of exquisite blocks of academic writing and research that tackle a wide variety of subjects. The chapters in this volume cover such diverse subjects as a Qing imperial porcelain, Lycra®, sleep, a hand bell, wallpaper, Islamic carpets, and object curation. Each presents a case study of how each author approached writing material culture history. In a way, the chapters form a toolbox of sorts that present different yet equally valid approaches to writing material culture history. Each piece conforms to the overall tenets of the editors that there is no single path to studying material culture nor is there a universal methodology.

So much of human history and existence is recorded in the things we create. Unlike traditional historical records, these objects provide a personal connection to the past. This is particularly evident in the chapter *Objects of Emotion: The London Foundling Hospital Tokens, 1741-60* by John Styles. This article examines the objects, often just scraps of cloth, that were left with or collected from abandoned infants left at the facility. Mothers

leaving their children were asked to leave a token so that in the future, if the mother wished, she might be able to be reunited with her child. The tokens left were the only connection left between mother and child. Each chapter, while dealing with different subjects, tells similarly compelling stories of the stuff around us. What did we discard? What was so important that we mended it, time and time again? These are just some of the questions posed by our life with things.

Gerritsen and Riello have done an excellent job constructing this volume, and it serves as an excellent guide to help students and academics alike engage with material culture. Furthermore, it is through this engagement that they will no doubt create their own approaches to writing material culture history. This book should be on the shelf of every student of material culture.

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