

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Marc Augé** and **Jean-Paul Colleyn**, *The World of the Anthropologist*, Oxford and New York: Berg 2006, vi, 134 pp.

As its title suggests, this compact but dense volume undertakes the admirable and ambitious task of portraying the ‘world’ of the social anthropologist, providing an overview of some of the fundamental concepts, themes, debates, key thinkers, theoretical perspectives, historical developments and ongoing questions that characterise the anthropological endeavour. In this sense, the aim of the book is to equip the non-anthropologist lay reader with a sense of the conceptual tools that anthropologists use to understand the world, and to encourage an understanding of how anthropology has developed and changed from its classical beginnings to the present day.

By the authors’ own admission, providing a comprehensive and holistic description of the ‘world’ of anthropology is a near-impossible task, particularly in a volume of only 131 stocky, tightly-packed pages. As such, and in the spirit of the anthropology that they describe, the book is an attempt to provide more general intellectual and conceptual tools for a better understanding of the diversity of culture that exists in the world, rather than presenting an essential portrait of the anthropological landscape in its entirety. Also, by the authors’ own admission this necessarily involves a selective view of the ‘world’ of the anthropologist, in which figures from the French tradition of sociology and social anthropology are understandably (and rightfully) privileged.

The book is structured into six chapters, the first of which provides a clarification of the terms by which different kinds of anthropological endeavours are defined (including ethnography), as well as an overview of the cultural contexts within which contemporary anthropology is undertaken. Here, as in the rest of the volume, the authors do the important work of distinguishing between the kind of essentializing studies that characterised the work of some earlier anthropologists (while still recognising the merits of these works), and the more complex, overlapping, fluid nature of social life as it is constructed by anthropologists in the present. This first section also provides an overarching answer to the question, ‘What do anthropologists do?’ in terms of the process of conducting ethnographic research, reading, and writing up or disseminating the findings of research.

The second chapter continues in this vein, providing further clarification of terms from both within and outside anthropology, while also moving on to explore some of the mainstays of anthropological inquiry. This begins with an overview of kinship, followed by a panoply of other anthropological themes: economics, environment, ecology, political anthropology, alliance and

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descent, kingship, violence, ethnicity, religion, ritual, the anthropology of performance, visual anthropology, ethnographic film, applied anthropology, and the anthropology of science all receive a brief treatment in this somewhat meandering chapter. As this discussion of key themes develops, the reader is also introduced to a number of anthropology's great ancestors (Malinowski, Lévi-Strauss, and so on), as well as their equally well-known ethnographic subjects.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 develop more methodically to describe the nuts and bolts of how anthropology is done, firstly through a description of fieldwork and the epistemological arguments supporting the enterprise of extended ethnographic research. Here the authors make the important and extremely valuable point of highlighting the precarious and uncertain nature of ethnography, not only in terms of the experience of doing fieldwork, but also in relation to the kinds of narratives and 'truths' that can be claimed from ethnographic research. This point is developed further in sections dedicated to reading (and re-reading) anthropology, how anthropology is written, and the increasingly broad range of anthropological texts that are now available.

The final chapter, entitled 'Avoiding Blind Alleys' provides another useful set of examples to illustrate the importance of developing theoretical frameworks for understanding the world while remaining critical and cautious of the lure of grand theories that do not account for their own deconstruction. As in the first chapter, here the authors successfully marry a discussion of the practice of anthropology with a critique of the fundamental tools that define the anthropological perspective – that is, they point to the importance of looking anthropologically at the 'world' of the anthropologist in order to understand it better.

While the book certainly achieves this goal throughout, often through an engaging approach, it is at the same time hindered by the immensity of the undertaking, and by a complexity of theoretical content and language that presupposes considerable prior knowledge on the part of the 'intelligent lay audience' at which it is presumably directed. How, for example, does the non-anthropologist know that the Nuer are 'that canonical example of a society without a state' (p. 22) if they have not been introduced a) to the Nuer and b) to the issues explored within political anthropology? Indeed, what might the 'ordinary public' make of terms such as 'social construction', 'structuralism' or 'functionalism' if these have not been explicitly defined? The assumption of this level of specialist knowledge leads occasionally to the reinforcement, rather than the deconstruction, of the popular notion of anthropology as an obscure and confusing area of intellectual concern: the 'world' of the anthropologist is clearly portrayed as a complex place that is difficult for the non-anthropologist to understand, despite its relevance to the everyday lives of normal people. In this respect the book, while highly interesting and engaging, is also indicative of the difficulties and tensions that underpin the enterprise of presenting the complexity of social

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anthropology in a way that is accessible to a popular audience. In this case the authors' have successfully avoided a populist reduction, but at the cost of popular accessibility.

PATRICK ALEXANDER

**Alberto Corsín Jiménez** (ed.), *Culture and well-being: anthropological approaches to freedom and political ethics*, London: Pluto Press 2008, vii, 207 pp.

*Culture and well-being* brings together anthropologically informed perspectives on the notion of well-being, thus expanding, challenging and redefining the concept through cross-culturally nuanced engagement. The ascent of 'well-being' as a buzzword in academic, professional and everyday parlance has given rise to a medley of definitions that frequently relate to assessments of 'the quality of life' and conceptions of what constitutes a 'good life'. The collection is based on a conference held at the University of Manchester in late 2004 and marks one of the first explicit contributions to an anthropological enquiry into well-being. This volume not only explores definitions of well-being through a comparative framework, but also investigates how anthropologists engage with the world through academic analysis.

Despite the amorphous status of well-being as an anthropological concept, Corsín Jiménez's introduction brings together the contributions of the volume through a critical analysis of social theory that focuses the discussion of well-being on systems of values and sociological, political and ethical imaginations that are based on scalar shifts entailing differences in both size and substance. Corsín Jiménez's stated goal of joining social analysis to a theory of human ethics through a model of proportion may be very ambitious, but he convincingly argues that society, politics and ethics can become proportionate forms of one another by dividing themselves up for distribution and displacement. Furthermore, he analyses how these relational proportions tie into conceptions of personhood, ethical assumptions and discourses of freedom. Following the narrative structure of his introduction, the volume is divided into three parts entitled respectively 'Distributive values', 'Persons' and 'Proportionalities', although all these concerns frequently appear in the chapters throughout the book in relation to questions of how to value and scale well-being.

Ian Harper and Bryan Maddox examine health and literacy programmes in Nepal to show how well-being comes to be constructed through a 'view from the clinic' as a depoliticizing trope that

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sustains Nepal's 'need' for medical and educational intervention. Eric Hirsch's historical analysis of the scale and distributional logic of law and wealth in a Fuyuge mining community in Papua New Guinea reveals how the moral valuation of 'good ways' ties into reciprocal relations that are being violated by current mining resource allocation.

Wendy James contrasts mass welfare provision financed by public funding with recent shifts towards the pursuit of individual well-being, and warns about the possibility of individual well-being eclipsing the genuine need for social welfare provision, particularly in contexts of political instability and moral uncertainty. Griet Scheldeman explores how three teenagers in Scotland grapple with the use of insulin pumps as they assume a discourse that values empowerment in respect of their identity and self over health as the paramount aspect of well-being. Nigel Rapport focuses on the rhythms and movement of hospital porters as they negotiate a fragile balance between roles and states that allow them to feel well within, through and beyond their employment at a Scottish hospital.

Michael Lambek considers the ethical implications of well-being as a domain of anthropological enquiry by comparing C.B. Macpherson's political philosophy with Amartya Sen's development theory and tackling the question of how to make qualitatively distinct valuations of well-being commensurable by taking the social and relational dynamic of well-being into account. Neil Thin embeds the silencing of well-being and happiness with underlying tendencies in the history of twentieth-century anthropology and the social sciences and suggests how these inclinations may be overcome by awakening an interest in positive emotional experiences such as happiness. James Laidlaw stretches the notion of well-being to analyze the world-renouncing logic of Jain soteriology and compares this asceticism with the recent world-affirming practices of ecological Jain reformists, thus tracing how the extension of well-being beyond conventional ideas of human flourishing alters its intentions and meaning. In his concluding chapter, Corsín Jiménez returns to his opening exploration of a proportional model of sociality as a way to investigate the location and size of well-being while re-thinking anthropology's analytic of 'social relationships'.

As an import into anthropology, the definitional problem of well-being looms large in this volume and remains open and multiple throughout. The anthropological perspectives in this collection tend to view well-being through a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures that enmesh value with distribution, and notions of personhood with larger social goals, thereby forging complex links between what is and what is not commensurable. Although the contributors'

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theoretical perspectives frequently draw on moral and political philosophy, economics, government policy and development theory, only a few authors fully address how issues of well-being and commensurability in anthropological enquiry may be used for advocacy purposes.

Theoretically, Corsín Jiménez explicitly places this volume within the political, economic and philosophical domain, rather than addressing the medical and psychological dimensions of well-being. However, three of the nine substantive chapters are located within clinical contexts, where medical anthropologists have long addressed subjective perspectives on well-being and their relation to social values. Although the political, economic and philosophical perspective may be a novel viewpoint from which anthropologists address well-being, the gaps opened up by this perspective, particularly in regard to the subjective and individualist bent of the discourse of well-being, are noticeable in some of the more theoretical contributions.

As an overall goal of the volume, it remains unclear whether contributors are developing an entirely new field of anthropological enquiry with a novel approach or drawing out themes that have long been implicitly present in anthropology. The notion of well-being in this volume spans a complex assemblage of many of anthropology's canonical debates, including questions of agency and the relationship between persons and social totalities. In addition, the collection opens up a cross-disciplinary discussion about the location and value of well-being that encompasses both theoretical reflection and ethnographic encounters. As such, it will be of interest not only to anthropologists, but also to other scholars working in the fields of politics, development and moral philosophy, as well as medicine and psychology.

CHARLOTTE BRUCKERMANN

**Jeanette Edwards, Penny Harvey and Peter Wade** (eds.), *Anthropology and science: epistemologies in practice*, Oxford and New York: Berg 2007, ix, 208 pp. (ASA Monographs 43).

The chapters that compose *Anthropology and Science* (hereafter *A&S*) were drawn from the Fifth Decennial Conference of the Association of Social Anthropologists in 2003, which was convened by the book's editors. Edwards et al. bookend their introduction with paragraphs attempting to vindicate the theme of this conference – which shares the title of the book reviewed here – for it came under fire for being too cramped an analytical domain to accommodate the wide range of interests that a conference of its scale should, in principle, encourage. In their defence, the editors

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are quick to note their use of the loose conjunction ‘and’ as opposed to the more restrictive prepositions ‘as’ or ‘of.’

Edwards et al. assert that they utilize the open relations of ‘and’ to ‘refuse the domain specificity that “science” quite frequently attempts to invoke’ (p. 1). Yet, this framing begs the question of whether an analysis of the coexistence of anthropology and science can simultaneously ‘interrogate scientific orthodoxy’ and refuse to address the orthodox remit. In other words, can the demarcations of ‘science’ be rendered pliable by way of a direct application of analytical heat within the same textual act as giving ‘science’ the silent treatment by avoiding its traditional boundaries and focusing on its correlates? Can it both forcibly tear and eschew contact?

The task of subverting ‘science’ is semantically tricky. The editors begin by materializing the self-bracketing of the orthodox domain of ‘science’ by placing science within quotation marks, and I have followed suit in this review. *A&S* is writing against an analytical focus on ‘science’ as opposed to, say, the way science is deployed to garner legitimacy, or how its promissory rhetoric can be infused with national identity. Unfortunately, Edwards et al. state: ‘all [of the chapters] engage with “science” anthropologically’ (p. 1), thereby conflating the broad science of the book’s theme with the orthodox ‘science’ that *A&S* seeks to retool. This theoretical, or perhaps grammatical, misstep does not bode well for the dual project of this book, nor does it reflect the content of its chapters, several of which do not grapple with the natural sciences at all but rather sift through the techniques of knowledge valuation, administration and acquisition.

Although this volume is teeming with insights into the anthropology of natural science and its immediate associates (most notably the chapters by Gibbon and Battaglia), what makes *A&S* unique, and what gives it a critical stance in form as well as content, are the chapters that do not cater to the theoretically problematic interface of society and science. Social constructivists have been chipping away at this interface between the ostensibly distinct modes of lay and scientific thinking for more than thirty years, highlighting cultural aspects within ‘science’. *A&S* bucks the thorny grammatical crown of ‘science’ by not just taking notice of the reciprocally constitutive traffic between ‘science’ and lay, but also by rupturing the sealed membrane of ‘science’ by hooking it into networks of association that do not rely on the meeting of systems. This flooding of ‘science’ to render it science has been called ‘bringing society into science.’

A controlled eclecticism, which maintains a central focus on the uses of epistemological valuations, is this monograph’s technique of inundating science (studies) with society. *A&S* takes on the difficult task of balancing between defining its field of inquiry too tightly so as to reinforce age-old dualisms, and constituting its analysis too loosely, risking a nebulous arena without critical clout. Unfortunately, the book’s innovation in form outshines that of its content, for the majority of

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chapters suffer from dehydration. By this I mean that much of the analytical nuance that gives ethnography its bite has been squeezed out to fit the short chapter size of less than fifteen pages. Nevertheless, the conceptual retooling of ‘science’/science is no small matter, and the meta-work of this collection is unparalleled. Furthermore, the short chapters do pack punches and lend themselves to readability. Despite the intrigues of practised epistemologies, a major element lacking in this collection is the interrelation of knowledge and ontology as a means of paralleling the diverse work of epistemologies with diverse lived realities. As E. Viveiros de Castro stated in his after-dinner speech at the ASA conference from which this book emerged, ‘the native’s discourse speaks about something else besides just the native, that is, his society or mind: it speaks about the world. [... A]ll thought is inseparable from a reality which corresponds to its exterior.’

NICHOLAS SHAPIRO

**Richard Fardon**, *Lela in Bali: History through Ceremony in Cameroon*, New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006, xiii, 162 pp. (Cameroon Studies 7).

Richard Fardon’s latest addition to his extensive corpus of work on the Chamba-speaking and related societies of Nigeria and Cameroon is a detailed work of historical reconstruction, taking as its text the Lela ceremony of the Bali-Nyonga kingdom in the Grassfields of Cameroon’s north-west. Lela, the principal annual festival of the Bali peoples, is a major public event in its own right, and like Bali’s other (but more private and secretive) Voma ritual complex, it is a historical import from the Chamba-speaking Adamawa region to the north, from where the Bali originated before their dispersal as raiding parties under the pressure of Fulani jihads from the north. Lela is a ceremony of renewal, of re-legitimation, of state, of kingship and of militancy, and is very much a public event which, throughout its history, has been explicitly mobilised for political purposes and its impact on its audiences. Fardon uses those audiences – especially the European ethnographers and missionaries of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – to reveal the lived realities and changing priorities of the Bali-Nyonga world view.

The structure is a little non-linear: the first chapter introduces Lela and sketches out Bali-Nyonga history, while Chapters 2 and 3 contain detailed coverage and considerable detective work on photographic and textual early colonial sources. Chapter 4 looks first at the nineteenth century before the coming of German colonial penetration, and then at the ways in which early German soldiers and administrators and Bali-Nyonga’s king used each other to further their own ends, as

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particularly enacted through and visible in public ceremony. In the process, the chapter represents an informative re-insertion of African agency into early colonial history, as (King) Fonyonga II collaborates with Germany's extension of power to have himself and his kingdom recognised as the 'traditional' paramount head of 31 other tribes, most of whom were previously at most very loosely and tenuously tributary vassals or occasional victims of raids. The consensus arrangement goes into decline even before Britain's invasion in World War I, and the subsequent relationship with the colonial state is not dealt with in as much detail. Instead, Chapter 5 deals with the ways in which Bali tradition was incorporated into, and by, the very different cultural complexes of the Grassfields cultures into which it was transplanted. Particularly helpful here is the author's fluency in material culture and his ability to integrate an understanding of it into the social-cultural-political whole – the 'straight referential' sculpture of the Grassfields, versus the 'evocative surplus' of eastern Middle-Belt abstract styles, for example, says important things about the way power is understood and performed.

Chapter 6 provides the counterpoint in looking at Lela precedents 'beyond and before' the Grassfields, a comparative exercise for which Fardon deploys his lifetime's detailed knowledge of the Chamba societies which developed further west in Nigeria's Benue valley, and traces both branches of the family's roots through cultural complexes derived from Adamawa to the north. He draws out Lela's capacity for incorporation – of Grassfield styles, European objects, Fulani performances – in tandem with the essentially incorporative nature of Bali Nyonga itself, a social unit composed of a Ba'ni core of chiefly lineages today known as 'Sama', which accumulated adherents, allies, clients and minions (and a new language) in the process of raiding, settlement, state formation and consolidation, a dynamic which continues within the postcolonial state. It is also revealing about modes of power – for instance, the licensing of theft by certain groups during Bali – by which this formation and the pedigree of its current relationships is imagined.

Fardon's precise prose is especially good at outlining and reconstructing specific indigenous forms of sociality whilst avoiding unhelpful external misclassifications. A lifetime's tacit knowledge of the cultural context allows him to avoid repeating simplistic mistakes from his sources. For instance, he draws a distinction between the (implicitly non-legitimate) faking of ritual objects and their culturally legitimate *renovation*. Tantalisingly only partially present, however, is the issue of meaning: although the pedigree and etymology of Lela elements are explored, as is their trajectory as something like memes of ceremony, a little more exegesis of the semiotics – or the perception of meanings by audiences – might contribute to a clearer understanding of how Lela communicates its power (though Fardon also shows that meaning cannot always be seen as fixed). An alternative reading of this material with a more explicit focus on such symbolic issues would see



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this work speak directly to other historical anthropologies of ritual such as Maurice Bloch's *From Blessing to Violence*. As it is, this specialist-oriented volume is a rich contribution to the literature on this region. Notably it seems directed as much toward the ongoing historiographical conversation in Bali itself as it is toward external scholars.

OLIVER OWEN

**Paloma Gay y Blasco and Huon Wardle**, *How to read ethnography*, London and New York: Routledge 2007, viii, 214 pp.

How would someone unfamiliar with the methodology and applicability of ethnography begin to understand and utilize it? How would they navigate the dense and jargon-filled textual archive that is ethnography? What framework is necessary to draw out information if one is not an experienced reader? These are the questions that Paloma Gay y Blasco and Huon Wardle ask with their book *How to Read Ethnography*. The idea that as anthropologists we need to learn to read ethnography is at the least vaguely insulting, but this book is targeted almost exclusively at neophyte undergraduates. For those already familiar with ethnography, this book's merits are found in its obvious direction towards students and those uninitiated in ethnographic reading. The didactic but engaging nature of the text will find its most active proponents among teachers of introductory classes, perhaps with reluctant students. However, this book also extends its use to interested academic readers from other disciplinary backgrounds.

At its core, this book is an argument for ethnography as a creative and provocative display of anthropological knowledge. It is divided into eight chapters, including 'Comparison: the ethnographic outlook', 'Narrating the immediate', and 'Positioning the author'. These sections are bracketed by an introduction and conclusion which discuss many of the concerns and distinctiveness of ethnography. Each section has summary points throughout, and while they feel obvious when read within the text, their usefulness is found primarily in revision and reference. This slim book also contains a glossary of terms for those unfamiliar with the jargon of anthropology, though there is a concerted effort to render ideas and concepts in easily accessible terms. The utility of this book for teaching is paramount, and to that end each of the major chapters contains activities to assure readers of their competence in relation to each theme. These contain large excerpts of ethnography and provide five thoughtful questions relating to the theme.

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One of the best features of this book is the sheer depth and breadth of ethnography cited. Drawing on both contemporary anthropology and classic texts, the juxtapositioning of both provides a cursory but broad look at the ideas, subjects and people to which anthropology applies itself. Evans-Pritchard, Mead, Bateson, Firth and Fortune are placed next to Scheper-Hughes, Fardon, Abu-Lughod, Geertz, Marcus and Clifford. What this does, interestingly, is partially replicate the way ethnographies cohere over time by building upon previous ethnographers' work. This is unlikely to be noticed by the student to whom the text is given, but the sense of ethnography as a large body of interrelated material is accessible enough. The subjects of these included texts span the gamut of anthropological inquiry from séances and economics to Bedouin poetry and the Kachin of Highland Burma, simultaneously promoting the exoticized contact of the anthropological past and the contemporary attention to our own cultures. The thoughtful combination of contemporary and classic ethnography endorses anthropology's relevance both currently and through time.

Where issue can be taken, however, is perhaps in relation to other texts of this type. Paul Willis would no doubt argue that their analysis and breakdown of the sometimes admittedly impenetrable ethnographic literature does not include the eponymous aspect of methodology discussed in his book, the *Ethnographic Imagination* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2000). The necessity of being in the field to detect, interpret and theorize the non-verbal meanings attached to the social activity of the field site is articulated with the sociological imagination created of the knowledge and experience of previous ethnographers' work. Gay y Blasco and Wardle can perhaps be forgiven for this since their analysis and deconstruction is targeted more at the general reader than the methodological fieldworker.

Gay y Blasco and Wardle remind us, especially in the conclusion, of the varying functions of ethnography that often remain implicit to our own understanding of ethnography as the knowledge base of anthropology. The authors adroitly tackle the complex nature of ethnographic creation and its conventions, delivering a book that is both accessible and relevant, if sometimes repetitious. It is definitely a book for new students of anthropology or those who are unfamiliar with the position and utility of ethnography as a systematic production of anthropological inquiry and require a brief introduction to it. Since ethnographic field methods are often rendered as difficult and are not easily redacted, a further concise and ultimately lucid contribution to an aspect of ethnographic production that has the capacity to incite interest in students is to be welcomed.

IAIN PERDUE

**K. David Harrison**, *When languages die: the extinction of the world's languages and the erosion of human knowledge*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007 (paperback 2008), xi, 292 pp.

Does thought affect language, or does language predetermine cognition? The controversial Sapir-Whorf hypothesis – that the language one speaks explicitly forms and delimits the thoughts one is capable of producing – has been a bugbear for generations of linguists and linguistic anthropologists.

The topic figures centrally (though not explicitly so) in K. David Harrison's book *When Languages Die*, which deals with the relationship between language, conceptual processes and the 'packaging of knowledge'. Harrison's concern is that many of the world's less commonly spoken languages are dying and in so doing depriving humanity of specific and unique modes of seeing and understanding that world. As the book's subtitle might suggest, the author is a self-professed champion of recording, documenting, classifying and preserving the many endangered languages throughout the world. With years of fieldwork in Siberia, South and Southeast Asia and the Americas, the passion he evinces for this subject throughout his work is inspiring, though at times this engagement seems to colour his otherwise scientific thinking.

The book's chapters cover a range of functions and applications of language, including object typology (Chapter 2), time reckoning (Chapter 3), space and landscape (Chapter 4), oral tradition (Chapter 5) and number and counting systems (Chapter 6). To support these themes, the author presents a number of compelling ethnographic examples of endangered and extinct languages that exhibit either unique linguistic constructions or particularly interesting systems of thought and categorisation. Harrison writes that it is necessary to find 'the oddest, quirkiest, and most unusual languages and words to test our theoretical models'. It is these case studies supporting his arguments that comprise the most engaging aspect of his work.

But, compelling as many of them are to read, the author's examples do not always effectively prove his points. He cites the Ainu, for example, whose word for 'eleven' (*shine ikashima wa*) is a complex term that, when broken apart, literally means 'one added to ten'. For Harrison, 'by simply learning the word, an Ainu speaker is exposed to the notion of addition,' getting 'extra math knowledge essentially for free'. Does such thinking not ignore the notion that many native speakers often remain decidedly oblivious to the etymological make up of words in their own language? As he correctly observes, this is the case for 'opaque' words, that is, non-descriptive words which cannot etymologically be broken down into meaningful parts. But it also the case for words whose derivation might be immediately obvious only to non-native speakers learning the language through

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second-language acquisition.

There are other questionable assertions as well. The author suggests, for instance, that were it not for the presence of languages with 'O-V-S' (Object-Verb-Subject) word order, scientists 'would be free to hypothesize – falsely – that O-V-S word order was cognitively impossible, that the human brain could not process it'. This reviewer wonders whether any accomplished academic linguist would rule the human brain incapable of producing a simple grammatical construction merely because her or his own purview lacks evidence of such a construction.

Harrison also is given to peppering his prose with lofty, occasionally over-the-top statements such as 'The loss of even one language may forever close the door to a full understanding of human cognitive capacity'. Endangered languages are, to be sure, important to science for the cultural knowledge they may contain, to say nothing of their importance to the few people left who still speak them. But, as Harrison hints, language degradation and death is often emblematic of larger social processes – colonialism, generational change, modernisation, advances in communication technology and 'progress', among others – that affect a disruption in the transfer of traditional knowledge across generations.

Harrison's own language is engaging enough to read, though the linguistic pedants among us could be forgiven for taking issue with questionable formations such as 'vanishingly rare', 'gaze at it for awhile' and 'No matter what...'. On occasion, his style vacillates between the academic and the popular – on its own is nothing to be overly concerned about, of course, though it does call into question exactly whom the book is aimed at. Even the overleaf of the OUP paperback, for example, tells us that Swarthmore College Professor 'David Harrison's work on endangered languages is featured in the documentary film *The Linguists* and on the Comedy Central series *The Colbert Report*'. More importantly, however, once inside the reader does wonder at times whether the way in which Harrison positions himself – something of a voice for those who do not have one, so to speak – may contribute to him romanticizing his subjects. This is a concern that arises despite the author's explicit disclaimer that scientists must strive to avoid sentimentality with what they study.

These relatively minor inconsistencies notwithstanding, Harrison's book does thankfully present a credible challenge the Chomskian bent of many 'grammarians' linguists, who are given to treating individual languages as acontextual 'laboratory specimens', looking at, say, sentence structure in clinical isolation from the rest of a language. His work focuses decidedly on language as content and as context within a world of great linguistic hegemony and increasing homogeneity. He does not explicitly question Sapir-Whorfism – Harrison's particular anthropology of language presumes that when we lose language we lose thought – for this title is implicitly about the preservation of traditional ways. As he puts it, 'If people feel their knowledge is worth keeping,

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they will do so. If they are told, or come to believe, that it is useless in the modern world, they may well abandon it.' This is not a frivolous statement, nor is it one without distinctly political overtones. But it suggests a necessary campaign, and these days, especially at a time when much linguistic anthropology has gone the way of folklore studies, Harrison's voice is an emphatic and indispensable one to listen to.

ROGER NORUM

**Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development**, *The state of the native nations: conditions under U.S. policies of self-determination*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008, xxii, 394 pp.

Public Law 93-638 was signed and implemented in the United States in 1975. This law formally changed the US government's policy towards Native American nations from one of 'Termination' to what has been called 'Self-determination'. This was a turning point in the US government's policy because it ostensibly rejected any formal attempts to assimilate native nations and began to allow more native input into programmes, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, governing and law. The changes, economically, socially and individually, for Native Americans and the changes and frictions that developed between the states and the federal government because of this law should not be underestimated. The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development produced *The State of the Native Nations* in an attempt to assess how the situation has changed in various respects in the just over thirty years since this law was signed.

The *State of the Native Nations* has its ambitious goal encapsulated within its very title. The authors have attempted to produce a current view of Indian Country from the broad perspectives of nation-building, economics, social development and culture, arts and media. This compendium of information has been created by an interdisciplinary methodology that is evident in the text itself. This is truly a collaborative effort, and the material presented has broad applications and utility for scholars, officials and the general public. Indeed, its accessibility to a general audience is as important as its use to academics. Considering that its primary interest is in economics, it is not surprising that the most detail appears in the first two sections of 'Tribes as Nations' and 'Assets and Economy'. Almost all the chapters end with an essay by a Native American of relevance to the chapter. This voicing is appropriate and in keeping with the spirit of cooperation that the book seems to have established with some communities in Indian Country, though the editorial hand may have been heavy, as the tone and diction of the pieces are strikingly similar. Interestingly, certain

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chapters of paramount current interest, such as Native Casinos and Native Lands, contain no essays at their terminus, a somewhat remarkable omission.

One cannot castigate the authors too much for the paucity of ethnographic material presented, given the interdisciplinary nature of the work. However, the use of more ethnographic support would have been ideal, and social scientists may find the attention to empirical data and statistics to be useful only as supplementary reference. It is by overreaching the scope of any possible book to incorporate all the necessary and relevant material that we can see where more work is needed. In the third section, entitled 'Social Development', little is discussed about the importance of religion to Indian Country, a topic that receives only two pages in the entire book. Similarly the significance of powwows as a form of cultural expression that helps urban Indians identify, cohere and maintain contact, as well as one of the few native controlled sites for encounters with the wider American population, are mentioned only in passing. Certain crucial aspects of self-determination are discussed parsimoniously throughout, because, one suspects, of their economic basis. The deployment of increased economic power and legal standing has led to federal court cases like *Cobell v. Norton*, in which the US government was sued for malfeasance and mismanagement of Individual Indian Monies since the Dawes Act of 1887, which very successfully disenfranchised many native peoples by removing their land from collective ownership and making it individually heritable. Also notably absent are references to the American Indian Movement (AIM) which embodies another difficult problem within the text, namely that while attention is paid to individuals and their efforts at policy change and structures, often the implication is that these changes occurred to native people rather than as a result of some of their actions. This tension creates a profound ambivalence about native agency.

These criticisms should not, however, overshadow the rest of the book, which does a thorough job of what it intended to do. Many sections contain clear and lucid arguments and descriptions of many issues facing Indian Country, including racist mascots, international relations, high levels of poverty, tribal jurisdictions and the continuing difficulties with both federal and state governments. One of the strengths of this work is its portrayal of the progress being made and the areas (e.g. education, housing, health) where native communities are still well below the American mean. The assessment is neither too rosy nor too pessimistic; instead, a nuanced and balanced account is presented to the reader. Indeed for all its omissions, its breadth suffices to introduce a relevant starting point for scholars and general readers with an interest in Indian Country today, which consists of 560 self-governing nations, with more attempting to gain recognition and perpetuate themselves over the vast North American continent.

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**Sherry B. Ortner.** *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject*, London: Duke University Press, 2006, 188 pp.

In this compilation of theoretical and ethnographic essays, Sherry Ortner makes a case for according human agency a greater role in the determination of social processes and changes, and for incorporating a higher degree of subjectivity in the concept of culture. She takes variants of practice theory as her starting point and supplements them as she develops her arguments and proposes concepts such as ‘serious games’. While her book offers no groundbreaking theoretical insights, it provides readers with a comprehensive survey of anthropological theory, albeit with an underlying bent towards concerns with agency, action, power and practice.

The Introductory Essay provides a comprehensive history of the emergence and development of practice theory. In the 1970s, practice theory began to supplant existing ‘theories of constraint’ for their emphasis on the role of external social and cultural forces in shaping human behaviour, to the exclusion of human agency (p. 1). Practice theory, as exemplified in the works of Pierre Bourdieu (1978), Anthony Giddens (1979) and Marshall Sahlins (1981), addressed the structure–agency opposition anew by positing a *dialectical* rather than an *oppositional* relationship between practice and structure. The turn to practice theory restored the actor to social processes and allowed for discussions of power and inequality.

Ortner describes how she adopted the premises of practice theory for her own work with some tweaking, complementing practice theory with themes from ‘the power shift’, ‘the historic turn’ and ‘the reinterpretation of culture’ with the ultimate aim of ‘injecting more power into a practice approach’ (p. 7). When discussing power theories she focuses on Michel Foucault, James Scott and Raymond Williams, and concludes, counterintuitively, that their power theories are really *versions* of practice theory. It would be more apt to view these power theories as supplements or alternatives to practice theory. The historic turn is brought out most clearly in her discussion of the emergence of the idea (and public representations) of Generation X in Chapter Four. She devotes the remaining bulk of the introductory essay to analysing the concept of culture vis-à-vis questions of practice to establish the importance of culture to practice theory.

Tracing the origins of the concept of culture, Ortner describes it as a corrective to the earlier notion of race, except that culture too soon came to be associated with stereotyping and the ‘problem of essentialism’. This would account for some anthropologists’ aversion to the culture concept. She employs the classic notion of culture by viewing it as both enabling and constraining but *embeds* it in different and new contexts of power and inequality. For instance, she embeds Generation X culture in a narrative of capitalism to gain insights into the construction and

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experience of class in the United States. The ethnographic accounts of the lives of lower and upper middle class Gen Xers illustrate that public culture is not just something that exists independently of reality but is actively constructed by actors on the ground.

In 'Reading America: Class and Culture', her starting point is the observation that hegemonic American culture is marked by an absence of a discourse on class. Class is subsumed within gender and sexuality, 'classing' these two phenomena and also subjecting them to 'surplus antagonism' (p. 20). While local discourse does not recognize the salience of class, Ortner argues that class is nonetheless a real structure. She argues for the reality of class on the basis of the existence of differential relations to the means of production, the power of some over others and the pain of class oppression in American society (p. 24). The absence of a class discourse is attributable to the ideology of the American system, which glorifies opportunity, class mobility and individual achievement, while concomitantly undermining class constraints (p. 25). Furthermore, the individualism characteristic of American social thought militates against the open recognition of class dynamics since class is a social category. Ortner's position on American ideology is that, 'because hegemonic American culture takes both the ideology of mobility and the ideology of individualism seriously, explanations for nonmobility ... focus on the failure of individuals'. This, however, is not unique to American culture – such statements would stand any state authority in good stead in absolving itself of the responsibility (in terms of basic welfare provisions) it owed to its citizens.

Ortner's analysis of class is extremely insightful. She begins by describing Marxist and bourgeois theorist definitions of class, but the real value of her analysis lies in her discussion of intra-class relations, of how 'each class contains the other(s) within itself', and of the flexibility of 'class' as it comes to be construed in terms of 'respectable' and 'nonrespectable' lifestyles (p. 27). Ortner greatly enriches merely objective understandings of class by describing, for instance, the middle class in terms of its 'terror of downward mobility' and the working class in terms of its 'ambivalence of upward mobility' (p. 31). The case for culture defined more subjectively is at its strongest in this discussion.

She makes interesting use of public texts such as novels to illustrate the treatment of class in American culture. Her analysis of Portnoy's conversations (in Philip Roth's novel) with his psychiatrist is revealing of how women are seen as tools – but Ortner does not emphasize this aspect. She sees the attitude expressed in the conversation as being indicative of the class underpinnings of gender, instead of highlighting the instrumentalization of gender. The fact that women are markers of other realities such as class and ethnicity and are *used* in settling class scores



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such as the one between Portnoy and his father's boss does not constitute the primary focus of Ortner's discussion (p. 40).

In 'Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal', Ortner introduces the concept of 'ethnographic refusal' by defining it as a refusal of thickness (in the Geertzian sense). Just as in the previous chapter, where she enriches the discussion of class, here she treats resistance in a similar manner, taking into account the subjective ambivalence of acts of resistance. In discussing textual resistance, Ortner argues that 'absolute fictionality' and 'absolute silencing' in ethnographic texts are not possible – to suggest otherwise is to vest excessive agency in the authors of the texts. In reality, 'the final text is a product of our pushing and their (those being written about) pushing back' – she thus challenges the Saidian assertion of the insurmountable problems inherent in representing 'others' (p. 61). While her argument is significant in that it attributes an unprecedented degree of agency to the 'subaltern', she may be overstating the case for agency. One need only think of the tenacity with which stereotypes persist to recognise that one side's push is inevitably stronger.

In 'Identities: The Hidden Life of Class', Ortner addresses the relationship between race/ethnicity and class (p. 64). Here again she first provides the reader with an overview of existing theoretical work on class and notes how these theories treat class as an economic category divorced from cultural and natural phenomena. Ortner departs from existing scholarship in treating 'class as an identity' rather than in just an objectivist sense.

Her definition of subjectivity is novel in that it encompasses not only the inner states of actors, but also the objective social and cultural conditions they operate within (and often against) (p. 107). As in other chapters, she first outlines existing theory on the subject. From Straussian antihumanism, her account shifts to varieties of practice theory of which Anthony Giddens's and William Sewell's stand out for emphasizing human agency. While Bourdieu's subjects unknowingly and unthinkingly internalize the *habitus*, Giddens's and Sewell's subjects possess greater awareness. Ultimately, however, Ortner concludes that practice theorists fail to take seriously the issue of subjectivity.

While Ortner argues for a greater emphasis on subjectivity, she defines it as 'specifically cultural and historical consciousness' (p. 110). She recognises subjectivity as having two dimensions – a more psychological one, and a large-scale cultural one. Regrettably, the psychological sense finds expression (once) as the 'Freudian unconscious', after which it is more or less dismissed in favour of a more structural/cultural reading of subjectivity. This reflects the unfortunate fact of the short shrift given to psychological explanations in anthropology; it also reflects the splintering of the social sciences – a text dealing primarily with issues of human

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practice, agency, sentiments and actions such as this one has little room for inputs from psychology. It makes for an interesting exercise to juxtapose Ortner's text with the psychologist Steven Pinker's *The Blank Slate* (2002), which reveals the benefits anthropology could gain from engaging with psychology. Pinker's cogent advocacy of the role of human nature in determining action and behaviour invites readers to question what has come to assume the status of accepted anthropological wisdom – that 'to acknowledge human nature ... is to endorse racism, sexism, war, greed, genocide, nihilism, reactionary politics, and neglect of children and the disadvantaged. Any claim that the mind has an innate organization strikes people not as a hypothesis that might be incorrect but as a thought it is immoral to think' (Pinker, p. viii).

In the concluding essay, Ortner introduces the concept of 'serious games' – larger social formations are constituted by serious games which are premised on the social embeddedness and complex subjectivities of actors. The serious games perspective brings to light the two dimensions of agency – the agency of power (the domination of some by others), and the agency of projects (the pursuit of specific goals) – but stresses points already raised in the book. These pertain to the dialectical relationship between individual actors and social forces and the role of intentionality in agency (pp. 133, 136).

Ortner's aim in this collection of essays can be seen as an attempt to enrich existing theories. Viewed less positively, her work may come across as mere tinkering with existing theoretical paradigms. That said, the book provides readers with an excellent overview, analysis and evaluation of existing theory. More specifically, it constitutes a strong defence of the concept of culture and simultaneously enriches it.

MAIRA HYATT

**Dustin M. Wax** (ed.), *Anthropology at the dawn of the Cold War: the influence of foundations, McCarthyism and the CIA*, London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press 2008, vi, 185 pp.

*Anthropology at the Dawn of the Cold War* is an extremely timely volume offering specific examples of historical processes and people at the confluence of institutions, ideologies and political agendas in anthropology from the end of WWII to the initial build-up of the Vietnam War in the United States. The issues of ethics and the ramifications of anthropologists performing government work are being revived in a renewed and vigorous debate in the American Anthropological Association on this very subject. The debate arises from social and political circumstances extremely similar to those presented in this book, and this does not go unremarked

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by its contributors. In the introduction to this volume, Wax comments that its *raison d'être* is simply that no such book has yet existed that considers the historical context of the discipline during these extremely productive years. This volume certainly makes a solid contribution towards this deficit.

The chapters can broadly be divided into two types, those that take as their starting point specific people, and those that focus more readily on institutions. In this first category, the most intriguing is David Price's study of Karl Wittfogel, who was able to publish papers with almost blatant materialist theory, openly citing Marx and Engels, because of his enthusiastic cooperation with the FBI and the International Security Subcommittee. Price traces Wittfogel's early communist participation in Germany to his eventual incarceration as a political opponent of the Nazis in several concentration camps, his emigration, and his eventual marriage to Esther Goldfrank, herself a staunchly anti-communist anthropologist. Price recontextualizes Wittfogel's work, actively placing it within the political context in which it should be understood. Marc Pinkoski then follows with an analysis of Julian Steward's service to the state through the Bureau of Indian Affairs, where he actively promoted assimilationist policies that combined with the US government's policy of 'termination' and had deleterious impacts on thousands of Native Americans. He uses Julian Steward to illustrate the emergence of the connection between the rise of 'scientific anthropology' and colonialism. Steward, through his work at the US Department of Justice, actively fused his theories and their political application in using ostensibly objective science to hasten the assimilation of native peoples.

Susan Sperling investigates the other end of the spectrum and reinvigorates the contributions to anthropology of Ashley Montagu, the first chair of anthropology at Rutgers. He was a student of Franz Boas and a seminal theoretician on race. Sperling effectively argues that, because of his challenges to racial and sexual politics in the pre-civil rights era, he was forced out of his career in academia and has been subsequently removed from the literature and readings of anthropology students. As the first chapter, Sperling introduces one of the key arguments of this book, that the historiography of Anthropology is worthwhile because the ascholarly effects of the purges of Marxist academics and the accrual of power by state-funded research centres such as Yale and Cornell have had self-replicating effects across the discipline from who gets hired by whom and where, to publication in scholarly journals, grant recipients, acceptance of PhD students, and so on.

The other chapters deal more directly with the creation and maintenance of institutional forms of power and transmission. Dustin Wax argues for Sol Tax's contribution to anthropology not as a theorist, but as an institution builder. Tax's logistical work in convening conferences and seminars and in distilling their scholarly products into edited volumes, launching *Current Anthropology* and devising new mechanisms to make it relevant to the field, as well as shaping anthropological

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knowledge for the demands of the future, all functioned to professionalize anthropology as a discipline. Through his institutional impact on knowledge production, Wax avers that Tax is second only to Boas in his contributions to the field. William Peace expands the idea of academic networking in his analysis of the Mundial Upheaval Society, the noted Colombia graduate student association which fostered relationships and schisms that profoundly affected its members, which included some of the most famous American anthropologists. Its roots can be found in the division of theory and scholarly focus between Julian Steward and Ruth Benedict. It provides an interesting history of gender and of theoretical and political divisions at Colombia, supplemented by the inability of those who recall it to agree adequately over their memories of everything from the frequency of meetings to who in fact belonged to the society.

In the last chapter the historiography of anthropology is considered, and Robert Hancock effectively ties the issues discussed in the book back to the present moment, thus preventing the collection from being statically located in the Cold War era and reminding the reader that these issues are once again present and contentious for the discipline. Though slim, this densely packed book attempts to add to the historiography of anthropology and provide context in place of paucity.

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