

## BOOK REVIEWS

SALAZAR, JUAN FRANCISCO, SARAH PINK, ANDREW IRVING AND JOHANNES SJÖBERG (eds). 2017. *Anthropologies and Futures: Researching Emerging and Uncertain Worlds*. London: Bloomsbury Academic. 2017. Pp. 280. ISBN 978-1474264907.

This is not a straightforward book to review. It is just over 250 pages long and features over 40 black-and-white photographs. Its typeface is not very reader-friendly. The back cover describes it as game-changing. It opens with the two-page 'Future anthropologies manifesto' by the European Association of Social Anthropology's Future anthropologies research network. It has 14 chapters in total, plus an afterword by Paul Stoller, which turns out to be quite a helpful guide to the book. To quote:

The papers in *Anthropologies and Futures: Researching Emerging and Uncertain Worlds* are strong, imaginative, diverse and prescient. They offer anthropologists and other social scientists concrete and innovative methods to unlock the imagination to wonder, ponder, anticipate and speculate about what might come to pass in the future. (p. 244)

Stoller also describes the book as 'wonderfully eclectic', which it is. From the myriad arguments and observations woven into the chapters, he also picks out a list of five 'themes' that might help readers, and anthropology more generally, as we feel our way along this uncertain pathway, into the future of anthropology and the future more generally: 1) the future is contingent; 2) the future requires humility; 3) the future requires risk; 4) the future requires negative capability (the ability to tolerate the existential

contradictions of life); 5) the future requires public anthropology. This is a very reasonable summation. However, it is not a summary—that would be impossible.

The volume's first full chapter, by Sarah Pink and Juan Francisco Salazar, sets an agenda for a future-focused approach to understanding the present that would be aligned with 'critical anthropological ethnography' (p. 3). The Future anthropologies manifesto and this introductory chapter self-consciously offer controversy and encourage anthropologists (and others) to take risks in their work. There is much shaking up to do, in order to dislodge problematic traces of the apparent fixities of modern intellectual life across academia, and particularly in anthropology with its particularistic culture concept. Salazar and Pink do not (alas for this reader) spell out in much detail any history or genealogy of a future-focussed anthropology. Rather, they sketch out their view of how anthropology is currently positioned among other intellectual efforts that explore futures. Concerned that the discipline has not responded adequately to the future—or futures—they advocate a renewed anthropology encompassing theoretical, methodological, and political (their word is interventional) dimensions, but they give few illustrations of what they mean. Informed by experience of interdisciplinary and/or unconventional work of their own, possibly also by an anthropology of the contemporary in the style of George Marcus, which is marked by efforts to adapt

ethnography to engagements with competing or parallel forms of expertise, they embrace the idea that anthropologists are never expert. The unexpectedly constructive inference they draw is that in 'futures research this means creating generative forms of *not knowing* with others' (p. 16).

In tone, some of the chapters could be said to add to an ascendant genre of academic writing that contextualises itself in relation to experiments being taken with Earth systems as much as with systems of government (whether conceived as such or not). If such risky projects necessarily impact upon shared future horizons, and if their costs are unequally carried (processes that should concern contemporary anthropology), one response from researchers has been to be 'experimental' and 'critical' in their work. The aim is often to explicitly dismantle key criteria of value and validity as recognised in academia today, perhaps building on feminist or decolonising research practice. This book, in all its variety, engages with such debates in various ways.

With a definite emphasis on methodology, the book encompasses multimodal anthropology, with considerable use made of film and digital methods, and of conceptual tools from artistic and interdisciplinary research. Many authors also draw constructively on cognate fields like information studies and design. They lean on philosophical coordinates, old and new, that open up avenues for narrating phenomena that resist representation, are in-the-making, hesitant, or fleeting, as well as often anxiety-provoking. Though claims to novelty and radicalism are scattered throughout, much of the book nevertheless builds on some valued methodological principles that have stamped a good proportion of anthropological work for decades, for example, respectful listening and partial perspective. In places, both the empirical

and conceptual coordinates for the chapters are also rather partial, but an interested reader can learn many things about the strange and wonderful ways of humans facing uncertain futures today: about queering disability (Faye Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp), rewinding Europe (Tony Knight), hacking smart technologies (Débora Lanzeni and Elisenda Ardévol), or, in a beautiful chapter about people encountering tragedy through digital technologies (among other things) by Karen Waltrip. Important dimensions of systemic crisis situations are picked up in chapters on British youth (Johannes Sjöberg) and on illegal migrants arriving in Italy (Alexandra d'Onofrio), for instance. Annette N. Markham's proposal for adapting the metaphor of the 'remix' to future-oriented anthropology elaborates, in delightfully clear prose, on how existing intellectual and other resources in and around the discipline can help enhance understandings of how anthropology could and should develop a future interventionist stance. Her remarks on the conditions of academic work and how these both devalue and call for qualitative methods, are also relevant and significant for many readers of this journal.

Understandably, the topical themes of time and temporality also make frequent appearances through the book, with many authors highlighting how global communications have led to increasing complexity and multiplicity in experiences of time. Some authors draw from older anthropological insights into the abundant variety the ways that human groups have always arranged and abstracted their relationship to shared existential conditions—to new life, death, continuity, and change—that for others may appear old-fashioned. Although generalising is difficult, some readers may find that the texts produce slightly caricatured images of the present or the modern in their moves to lean into, inhabit, or even simply explicate, futures.

Others will find the turn to the sensory, the affective, internal, and imagination-based aspects of being human, to be persuasive as well as inspiring ways into uncertain tomorrows.

There is a strong sense of message and urgency in much of the book. Overall, however, the editors' apparent preference for an ecumenical approach to the subject matter will make it quite hard going for many readers. It is probably a question of taste whether the

volume's eclecticism and experimental ethos will appeal, but anyone engaged in developing anthropology's methodologies and pedagogies should be aware of it.

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