

BOOK REVIEWS

BRYANT, REBECCA AND DANIEL M. KNIGHT 2019. *The Anthropology of the Future*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 275 p. ISBN: 9781108378277.

The Anthropology of the Future, written by Rebecca Bryant and Daniel M. Knight, presents a particularly revealing account of possible ways to conceive the future anthropologically. Drawing on multiple strands of both anthropological and philosophical thinking, the book presents a fresh epistemological perspective on what the authors call ‘teleoaffective structures of daily life’, exploring communal expressions of different futural orientations.

Outlining the existing context of the anthropology of the future, the authors suggest their own way of approaching it, which constitutes the whole structure of the book. They select various temporal orientations of different depth, pace, and urgency, dedicating a chapter to each of them: anticipation, expectation, speculation, potentiality, hope, and destiny.

If conceived of at face value, the attempt at strict systematisation seems to be doomed to fail, as the real lifeworlds would necessarily upset this skilfully made conceptual edifice. That is why it should be treated differently, as an exercise in classification, aimed not at presenting an all-explaining model of possible temporal orientations towards the future, but at enriching our conceptual and epistemological repertoires of speaking of it; and indeed, soundly succeeding in this. Each chapter presents a complex analysis of philosophical scholarship that lays the foundation for a rather speculative selection of the temporal orientations in question, further instantiated with ethnographic examples. It is precisely the connection between

philosophical thinking and ethnographic cases what makes the book so interesting.

Through the notion of orientations, the authors engage with ways of navigating the quotidian towards various ends, so as to break from the notion of the linear time, and, eventually, make anthropology substantially more attentive to the teleologies of the mundane (p. 17–18).

The first two orientations the authors select are *anticipation* and *expectation*. Whilst anticipation, broadly defined, is a way of futural positioning that slims the present, actively pulling it into the future, expectation presents a conservative teleology, grounded in experiences of the past. These two futural orientations, the authors argue, are somewhat contrasted as appertaining to either ‘the Time of War’ or ‘the Time of Peace’, or otherwise defined collective visions of anticipated turbulence or expected stability. Indeed, it is through ethnographically unravelled collective notions of ‘Times’ that the teleoaffective structures of daily life reveal themselves.

Speculation, in turn, flourishes in the gap that has emerged from shattered expectations, an inability to anticipate and a lack of historical anchors providing people with the capacity to expect (p. 79). The notion of the immanent strangeness of things, that the authors borrow from scholarship on object-oriented ontology, is the metaphysical foundation for speculation, as it is when familiarity is shattered that speculation as a specific futural orientation

takes place, being particularly ripe for trickster figures (p. 92)

Whilst each of the selected temporal orientation is defined in its relations to others, the aforementioned three constitute a sort of a triad as compared to the next ones: potentiality, hope, and destiny.

Potentiality is the future's capacity to become the future. Similarly to anticipation, potentiality permeates the everyday; yet while the former is an orientation of imminence—of the present pressing itself into the future—potentiality is one of immanence, of what is always there but yet to come. As the authors emphasise, the sinews that hold a social site together as a teleoaffective structure rely specifically on potentiality: what can happen must precede what could, should, or must happen (p.115–117) And precisely from such not-yet-realised potentials, collective *hope* emerges, being the most overtly political orientation and often relying on a snowball momentum, encouraging people to actually project into the future and dream. Very often, it is expressed in political rhetoric and by technologies of imagination, as it mobilises people by visions of change, offered promises, and 'tasters' of the future.

The last one of six, *destiny*, is the ultimate potentiality. Being an orientation towards the future beyond the horizon, destiny is the one that is somewhat beyond temporal and thus immanent to the present (p. 160). Analysing various ideologies of exceptionalism and their implied dialectics of agency and predestination—as destiny is always present, but never revealed until accomplished—the authors arrive at an important epistemological conclusion, as this chapter, while preceding the actual conclusion, summarises various threads of reasoning that have been developed throughout the book. Bringing together their takes on

Heideggerian phenomenology, Koselleck's epistemology of history, Schatzki's practice theory, speculative realism, and object-oriented ontology, the authors come up with several meta-historical observations, all aimed against the causal fetishism that thrives in modern European thought. What Aristotle called 'the efficient cause', the one grounded in the past, has cannibalised all others (material, formal and final causes). Hence, such causal fetishism has occluded, as the authors argue, understanding of cause indebted to the effect, thus occluding the future from establishing its place in studies of time (p. 166, 173, 190)

Hence, the conclusion of the book suggests considering the future as a method, thus departing from the aforementioned causal fetishism of Western modernity, whilst preserving the importance of the teleologies as permeating daily lives. The authors emphasise the importance of the future as a way of examining the present, inviting a further examination of futural orientations as something that lends texture to the present (p. 193) Drawing attention to the ways how indeterminate teleologies of the future are lived on the mundane plain of the present—such ways are conceptualised as 'vernacular timespaces', following Schatzki—is what the authors call the academia to do.

Importantly, this somewhat abstract description should not deceive the potential reader, as ethnographic examples – both ones explored by the authors themselves and those suggested by other scholars—abound in the book. Anticipations of conflict on the divided island of Cyprus, and hopes for the possibility to have expectations therein, speculations in the UK on the eve of Brexit, potentialities of oil explorations in the Eastern Mediterranean, hopes for reconciliation of various conflicts all across the globe, as much as visions of

collective destiny from diverse ideologies of exceptionalism—this is what constitutes the empirical foundation of this work, together with the vast body of philosophical scholarship.

A meticulous reader could perhaps come up with various criticisms, such as the somewhat unclear logic according to which precisely these orientations were selected, or their ambiguous capacity to encompass all the ways people orient themselves towards the future—as the authors themselves acknowledge elsewhere (Bryant and Knight 2019). Or, indeed, a doubt about whether etymologies can lend any meaning to the concepts—a move often used by the authors throughout the book, even if vastly reproducing the very causal fetishism they expose in their work.

Such objections should not obscure the importance of the authors' contribution. Whilst the main aim of the book is not to suggest any political interventions (unlike some other recent works concerning the future and anthropology; see Salazar et al. 2017), it offers—even if in the

most modest of ways—a true epistemological diversion against the normative modern visions of agency, causation, and temporality, claiming the importance of thinking in terms of the future awakening the present and, to follow that line, the effect engendering the cause.

REFERENCES

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