

BOOK REVIEWS¹

CHRISTOPH ANTWEILER, *Our common denominator: human universals revisited* (transl. Diane Kerns), New York and Oxford: Berghahn 2016, xii, 350 pp. ISBN 978-1-785-33093-3.

In *Our common denominator*, Antweiler argues that, in the wake of legitimate criticisms directed against problematic generalizations that are prevalent in the discipline, anthropology has overcorrected by coming to place too great an emphasis on the differences between cultures, obscuring their many important commonalities. Still, he maintains, the affirmation of such commonalities is implicit in most anthropological work (having once been explicit in ethnology, for instance), the use of such concepts as ‘kinship’ or ‘ritual’ from one ethnography to the next being an acknowledgment of their cross-cultural validity. Commonalities of particular interest Antweiler dubs ‘universals’, though the choice of word is somewhat misleading; while, according to his terminology, ‘absolute’ or ‘true’ universals occur in all known human cultures, ‘near’ universals (occurring in almost all cultures), ‘conditional’ universals (where the presence of attribute A in a given culture implies the presence of attribute B in that same culture) and even ‘statistical’ universals (where a certain attribute appears with greater frequency than expected across many cultures) also fall under this category. Among academic disciplines, anthropology is held to be particularly well positioned to conduct a reliable analysis of universals in so far as it consistently casts the widest net with regard to its objects of analysis, and is especially vigilant against hasty simplifications.

Antweiler conceives his book as merely a preliminary exercise, setting the stage for the future heavy lifting of direct and substantive research into universals themselves. Such research is not what Antweiler himself has to offer; instead he provides a synthesis of existing work on universals, whether implicit or explicit, not only from anthropology but also from evolutionary biology, cross-cultural psychology, sociology, and so on. To that end, the bibliography of more than seventy pages (one-fifth of the total page count) is

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a valuable resource for those interested in further exploration of the subject. Antweiler repeatedly reminds us that his universals are operative not at the level of individuals but at the level of entire cultures or societies – thus, for the sake of argument, to say that religion is universal is not to say that every individual human being is religious, but that every culture has a religious component. He carefully challenges the notion that such universals must have a biological or genetic basis, with differences arising only from cultures ‘superimposed’ on a shared natural substrate. Rather, in a rejection of the extremes of both biological determinism and social constructivism, universals may be the product of cultural diffusion, adaptation, or acculturation, biological or genetic factors, as well as a mixture of both biological and cultural causes. Antweiler identifies universals in the realms of art, narrative, literature, visual culture, music, social structure, kinship, social stratification, conflict, ethnicity, world views, spatiotemporal concepts, ritual, religion, classification, language, emotion, violence, gender, sex, love and life stages, among others. These universals can be further organized using various taxonomies (distinguishing between etic/emic, micro/macro, substantive/classificatory) or different temporalities (continuous, periodic, episodic or temporary).

Antweiler is keen to assure us that universality is not the same as uniformity and therefore that the identification of universals is compatible with the recognition of both intercultural and intracultural difference. The latter raises questions for the universal project itself: what level of prevalence must a given attribute have within a culture for it to count as a universal? More fundamentally, how are different cultures or societies to be delimited for the purposes of finding such universals? The very existence of universals fitting his definition is dependent on the possibility of rigorously performing such delimitation, a non-trivial claim.

The ultimate justification for Antweiler’s programme rests on its supposed scientificity. Whereas many past attempts to identify universals may in fact have been ethnocentric projections of cultural particularities on to others, as Antweiler grants, he assures us that a truly scientific approach to universals would not suffer from such problems. We are left wondering as to the universality, or lack thereof, of his conception of science itself. If science is not universal, then any claims to identify the universals it may reveal would themselves be cultural particularities. Yet the alternative, namely the

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prospect of science universally verifying its own universality, seems to be trapped in a form of circular reasoning. Preempting the charge that the absence of a word for ‘art’, for example, from the vocabulary of many cultures implies that those cultures do not possess anything that could rightly be called art, and that any attempt to force the category of ‘art’ on those cultures would therefore be ethnocentric, Antweiler retorts that the limits of languages are not coextensive with the limits of corresponding worlds. Once more it is an appeal to science that legitimizes the application of etic categories – yet we might wonder why science so regularly has recourse to Western categories above all others. Notwithstanding these reservations, as a clarion call to expand our anthropological minds to include more cultural commonalities, as well as for greater intellectual exchange between not only anthropologists working in disparate areas but also anthropologists and practitioners of other disciplines, Antweiler’s endeavour succeeds skillfully.

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JEANNE FAVRET-SAADA, *The anti-witch* (transl. Matthew Carey), Chicago: HAU Books 2015, xv, 115 pp.

The anti-witch, the English version of Jeanne Favret-Saada’s third book on witchcraft, *Désorceler* (2009), builds on her notable previous publications, *Les mots, la mort, les sorts* (1977) and *Corps pour corps* (Favret-Saada and Contreras 1981). It does not fundamentally revise or clarify the underlying theory of witchcraft she produced from her fieldwork in a region of rural north-west France she called the Bocage from 1969 to 1972. It does, however, expand her earlier accounts by asserting the link between witchcraft and psychotherapy more forcefully.

The anti-witch serves as a helpful précis of numerous intersecting methodological debates and does a particularly good job of laying bare the tension between observation and participation, affect and epistemology, in a format that seasoned readers of

ethnography will appreciate for its evocative prose and broad coverage of numerous areas of thematic interest.

Readers should note that Favret-Saada's primary focus is the family. Her investigation of more particularly individualistic concerns and personalities, as with her attention to broader socio-economic factors, works best to extend that analysis. She writes, 'the data collected during my stay led us to conclude that the de-witcher's work is primarily one of collective family therapy for the labor force of a farm' (p. 10). As such, *The Anti-Witch* works across various registers, without dwelling on any one sphere of power relations, psychological processes, semiotics, or social functionalism. Favret-Saada thus covers a significant amount of theoretical ground despite the 'thinness' of the explicitly theoretical discussion.

The idea that witchcraft functions as a kind of multivalent therapy is not new to the *The anti-witch*; a more systematic presentation of the theory appeared previously in Favret-Saada's *Corps pour corps* (1981), co-authored with Josée Contreras. The idea has deeper roots in anthropology, too – robust discussion of witchcraft and its 'therapeutic effects' appears, as Favret-Saada points out, as far back as Lévi-Strauss's famous text on symbolic efficacy (1949). In *The anti-witch*, Favret-Saada maintains that her work is less concerned with developing a cogent theory of witchcraft as therapy, insisting rather that future analyses will benefit from addressing the parallels with talk or psychotherapy more explicitly.

Indeed, part of what makes *The anti-witch* so appealing is its presentation of ethnographic content as told through the experience of being both complicit and personally affected, or, as she writes, "'caught up" (*prise*) in the chains of bewitchment, variously occupying different positions within the system' (p. 30), in and by the de-witching itself. This approach forms the basis of Favret-Saada's insistence on the impossible mutuality inherent in 'participant observation', evoking numerous methodological debates. For instance, she writes:

The entire period I had worked alongside Madame Flora, I had been under a sort of spell, a combination of fascination and naïveté, concerning her activities ... I had failed to develop the slightest understanding of her practice or cover any intellectual ground over the course of the de-witching. (p. 4)

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The disjuncture between high-minded theory and more immediate, enrapturing emotional experiences will be familiar to any ethnographer. Favret-Saada's resolution to reflect on her own experience in the Bocage through the lens of psychotherapy enables her to demonstrate the productive incomprehensibility of the ethnographic encounter without becoming unmanageably esoteric.

Her assertion that spiritual practices cannot satisfactorily be examined through epistemological inquiry is not new. However, by narrating this negotiated positionality through the explicit language of psychotherapy, Favret-Saada effectively brings her own transformation to light in a way that at once acknowledges the self-work she must do to make sense of de-witching without shifting the focus of the narrative away from its rightful subjects. As she writes, 'for several weeks, I tried to avoid doing so, until I accepted that de-witching required the same commitment as psychoanalysis' (p. 2). Her personal and emotional investment in de-witching is a welcome departure from the well-trodden path of 'discovery and acceptance narratives'. Offering a more affecting – and thus more effective – presentation of the parallel, mutually constituting processes of de-witching, Favret-Saada offers a model for both fieldwork ethos and post-fieldwork analysis. As a result, *The anti-witch* retains not only theoretical but also methodological salience, despite the age of the source material.

At the level of pertinent detail, Favret-Saada's use of textual analysis in tarot reading allows her to produce a set of exhortatory narratives that not only reappear, but spontaneously reconfigure central symbols and figures. Methodologically speaking, this has two advantages: it enables her to see patterns (and aberrations) in the responses of her key interlocutor Madame Flora, but also allows her to ground her more experimental, phenomenological analysis in the more familiar semiotics developed by precedent ethnographies of witchcraft from around the world.

Chapter V contains a fascinating overview of the domestic labour of de-witching:

many of the recommendations are strangely reminiscent of housework, with its host of minor tasks that must constantly begin anew: cutting out little pieces of red cloth and sewing them into protective sachets for the entire family; collecting the ingredients to fill the sachets; removing and reattaching the sachets each time one changes undergarments; filling one's pockets with holy salts; placing planks full of nails and bowls of holy water

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with charcoal in them under the beds to protect the family while it sleeps (as well as changing the water when it evaporates); fetching supplies of holy water from outside the parish to avoid the priest's mockery; and getting medals of Saint Benedict without rousing the monks' suspicions.(p. 85)

The domestic nature of the tasks, Favret-Saada acknowledges, often present opportunities for the otherwise less powerful, perhaps even somewhat marginalized women of the household to participate and even take the lead. The gender analysis of this labour in *The anti-witch*, its forms, those particular tasks that are more often completed by women and its impacts are intriguing, if not somewhat less robust than gender theorists might hope.

Finally, the embrace of evil, anger and violence, explored in Chapter IV, might be pushed further as a means of reconciling contemporary discourses on ethics and morality with the problems of violence. For instance, Favret-Saada presents 'violence shifting', wherein the de-witcher works to 'drive' the bewitched 'from their position of passive victimhood' (p. 27), as equating the use of violence not only with power and strength, but also, within Favret-Saada's psychotherapeutic lens, with being 'treated' or even healed. This framework thus encourages a more nuanced exploration of the moral rationalities that underline the use of physical or symbolic violence in projects of self-making and in the social cultivation of certainty – what Favret-Saada calls 'Neutralizing the anxiety-inducing field' (p. 60). Once again, the centrality of women as both de-witchers (in the case of Madame Flora) and labourers in the domestic acts of de-witching suggests a fruitful area of future inquiry.

Favret-Saada synthesizes the blend of theoretical and methodological considerations clearly in saying, 'My work on Bocage witchcraft gradually led me to reconsider the notion of affect and the importance of exploring it, both as a way of addressing a critical dimension of fieldwork (the state of being affected) and as a starting point for developing an anthropology of therapy (be it "primitive" and exotic or learned and Western)' (p. 97). Indeed, Chapter VI, in total, offers a final and convincing salvo of *The anti-witch's* primary proposition – that methods and theory cannot be easily or effectively separated. One cannot help but think that the turn toward psychotherapy in *The anti-witch* is not merely a reflection of Favret-Saada's own intellectual predilections, but also an

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acknowledgement of the fraught relationship between anthropologists and the subjects (human and otherwise) of their fieldwork – the ways in which we must subject ourselves to a constant denaturalization of our own ideas and beliefs, of defamiliarizing the familiar, in order to understand, empathize and allow ourselves to be ‘caught up’ or affected by the words and worlds of our key interlocutors. In reconstituting our own identities and realities, we engage in a form of mutual creation and construction that can be both deeply unsettling and therapeutic in equal measure. It is this parallel consideration of the theoretical and methodological that makes *The anti-witch* both an enjoyable and an enduringly useful text.

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CURTIS M. HINSLEY and DAVID R. WILCOX (eds.), *Coming of age in Chicago: the 1893 World’s Fair and the coalescence of American anthropology*, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 2016, xliii, 574 pp.

Coming of age in Chicago: the 1893 World’s Fair and the coalescence of American anthropology is an exploration of a key event in the history of American anthropology. In seven essays, numerous original documents, images and an introduction and afterword, the authors explore how various people and discourses met to redefine the nature of

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anthropological inquiry while exposing the American public to the global word of otherness.

Coming of age in Chicago effectively links the early phase of anthropology associated with amateurs, evolutionism and human displays with its modern descendant, rather than relegating the latter to a 'proto phase'. The essays paint a complex picture of the state of anthropology at the end of the nineteenth century in the USA, with the Chicago Fair forming a nexus from which to elaborate on particular themes that were prevalent at the time. The first three essays by Curtis Hinsley and David Wilcox focus on three figures in American anthropology – Frederik Putnam, David Brinton and Frank Hamilton Cushing – each revealing something about the wider state of anthropology at the time. The longest essay about Putnam expands on the direction of academic anthropology, the role of human exhibits and the various agencies at play in them, as well as commenting on the role of museums, education and commerce on the development of anthropology. Essays on Brinton and Cushing comment on the dominant discussions of anthropology at the time and the electrification of anthropology through networking, familial links and showmanship respectively.

An essay of particular interest for those concerned with visual anthropology, representation and museum anthropology is Ira Jacknis's commentary on the multiple visual representations found at the Fair, in which she focuses particularly on the negative-positive process in cast-making, photographs and mannequins and relates these to subsequent museum practices. Jacknis also situates the representational practices of the Fair among the wider changes in photographic and film technologies, thus offering a synthesis of how popular and academic practices shaped each other.

While the title of the book speaks of 'coalescence' and the dust jacket alleges that it describes a moment that 'set the foundation of anthropological inquiry', *Coming of age in Chicago* in fact tells a story of how particular networks and connections made at the Fair paved a way forward for some discourses and practitioners, while others got left behind. In his first essay, Curtis Hinsley relays how Frederik Putnam, head of the Department of Ethnology at the Fair, failed to complete his vision of anthropology. Issues with the organization of the Fair, commercial competition and financial problems all meant that the fully educational ethnographic displays did not represent the Fair's reality, and he was

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unable to steer the future of the museum that was to grow out of the ethnological displays. His chief assistant, Franz Boas, described the year of the Fair as one of ‘A rushing rat-race, great uneasiness, and unsatisfactory work’ (p. 47). Furthermore, no doors were opened to Boas in Chicago as the result of the Fair. The two chief architects of modern American anthropology were thus not propelled to disciplinary heights by the Fair, although it certainly affected the course of the anthropology they decided to pursue.

The book, although lengthy, is compelling for its historical style, which allows the reader to become enmeshed in the events of 1893 while the authors’ analyses do justice to the complex event that was the Chicago Fair. By expanding on topics such as the relationships between patrons, professionals and popularisers (Ch. 6) and the divergent paths of ‘relic hunters’ (Ch. 5), the book reveals the nuances and heterogeneity of the anthropological landscape in the USA at the end of the nineteenth century. A rich use of images and original documents augments the sense of a particular time and space and offers opportunities to question and challenge the analysis offered by the authors.

Overall, it is evident that the authors have worked on the topic for over a decade and have a thorough knowledge of the issues surrounding it. However, editorially, the essays could be more consistent in their annotation. The first and longest essay by Hinsley offers unprecedented analysis of the Fair and serves as a good introduction, but it lacks notes to explain some of the characters who may be unknown to a lay reader. In contrast, later essays by David Wilcox are richly annotated, offering guidance to those less familiar with the history of anthropology. Further, while the book is richly illustrated, the images are not always sufficiently integrated with the text, with essays referring to images far removed from the text and sometimes lacking references to their location in the book.

Coming of age in Chicago is an excellent addition to the field of the history of anthropology, reflecting the trend which traces the development of anthropology from earlier forms dating back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Sera-Shriar 2013, Vermeulen 2015). Through its close focus on one event, the authors are able to demonstrate levels of complexity, heterogeneity and multiple agencies that would be impossible in narratives of anthropology that portray a linear progression from one stage to another. The ‘dialogue between the immediate voices of the 1893 Fair and the voices

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of contemporary scholars' (p. xxxv) offers a refreshing perspective which enlivens and complicates the Fair's history.

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MICHAEL LAMBEK, *The ethical condition: essays on action, person, and value*, London and Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 2015, xxv, 361 pp. ISBN 978-0-226-29224-3 (paper).

Michael Lambek's *The ethical condition* is an immeasurably valuable collection of thirteen of his previously published articles spanning a period of thirty years. Taken together, they demonstrate the centrality and ubiquity of ethics in human social life. The first chapter is the only one written specifically for this publication and serve both as the introduction and as an overview of the central concepts that organize his current take on ethics. Along with the preface, it also functions to establish ethics as a concern in his work before it became an explicit field of engagement for him (xiii).

Throughout the book, but particularly in Chapter 1, Lambek consciously (7) uses the term ethics in multiple ways and provides a number of definitions of the ethical (7-9, 38, 215, 307). Essentially, ethics denotes evaluation pertaining to the self. This is a conceptualization alternative to that found in the Foucauldian tradition (e.g., Mahmood 2005, Faubion 2011, Laidlaw 2014), from which it is largely independent (but see 9). While the latter defines the ethical as a self-self relation and traces it through shifts of the self from one state to the other (as self-fashioning or self-cultivation), Lambek conceives

of the ethical as lying at the crossroads between evaluation and personhood (or selfhood, see below). Curiously, none of his direct definitions of ethics make this relation to personhood explicit. Instead, it is variously defined as practices of evaluating and being subject to evaluation with reference to the good, living up to the judgements this entails, as well as a wider range of related phenomena which are not at the centre of his work but which he nonetheless acknowledges as important domains (see 7f.).

At a conceptual level, this would leave the question open of what precisely makes an evaluation *ethical* as opposed to any other subtype of normativity such as aesthetic or epistemological judgements. However, his ethnographic analyses of the ethical (Chapters 2, 3, 4, 6, 7), as well as later theoretical contributions (Chapters 10, 14), strongly demonstrate that personhood – or, more accurately, selfhood (58) – is the second defining criterion of ethics. Chapters 3 and 4, for instance, are in part enquiries into the construction of selfhood, which is further theorized in later essays (especially Chapter 14). As such, his understanding of the ethical is not as far from that of those writing in a more Foucauldian tradition as his emphasis on speech act theory might otherwise suggest.

More generally, what each and every chapter demonstrates is that ethics is inherent in social life, rather than being an isolable, discrete domain of it. While attention to rules and other codified normative entities are accounted for in his catalogue definition of the ethical (9), his emphasis lies squarely on the analysis of activity itself. This prioritization is established through a change in register from facts to acts, that is, from objects (such as values, states, relations, etc.) to doing (and making) (cf. 63). He distinguishes practice and performance as two modalities of (or analytic perspectives on) action. Interrelating these two integrates Aristotle's (1976) writings on practice (as *praxis*) and Austin's (1962) and Rappaport's (1999) work on performative acts, which also draws on Austin as well as Cavell's (1976, 1999) interpretation of Wittgenstein's (1973) speech act theory.

Practice, then, is 'the relatively unmarked flow of action, [...] the doing rather than the done' (10). It is in this 'flow' that the kind of continuous evaluation takes place that he refers to as (practical) judgement or, with Aristotle, *phronesis*. Contrary to the concept of choice, judgement is an exercise in balancing (220) between incommensurable options (10; Chapter 10) and denotes virtue as much as it does a class of activity. In the absence

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of hard-and-fast rules for reaching decisions in any context, the ability to judge in accordance with an undefined good (say, justice) is a question of character (cf. Aristotle). Importantly, practical judgement occurs at any level, from the most habitual to the most reflected (13). For this reason, Lambek refuses a distinction between the moral as conventional and the ethical as reflective (14) and instead insists on the identity of the terms ‘ethics’ and ‘morality’ (including for other reasons; see x, 5-7, 306).

Performance, on the other hand, denotes discontinuous and discrete acts carrying illocutionary power (10, 34). More specifically, they establish ‘criteria’ (Chapter 11; cf. Austin 1962, Cavell 1999: 3-36, Rappaport 1999; also Lambek 2015: 308) that put social life ‘under description’ (xix, 21) and thus enable actions, acts, and characters to be judged with regard to whether or not they correspond to these criteria (264f.). Criteria, then, do not determine human behaviour but provide the moral context within which social life is evaluated (35, 265). For this reason, judgement is also always a situated exercise (xix, 111f.). Examples of performative acts abound, the most prominent of which (in this work) is ritual. Drawing on Rappaport (1999), Lambek states that rituals may be ‘public enactments of commitment’ to certain criteria and thus reinforce a normative context; or, conversely, they may transform it by instantiating a new set of criteria (22f.). This process becomes particularly evident in the construction of personhood, which Lambek tends to in his ethnographies from Madagascar and Mayotte in the form of marriage (Chapter 2), food taboos (Chapter 3), remembering (Chapter 4), spirit possession (Chapters 6 and 7) and (self-)sacrifice (Chapter 9). Chapter 14 is perhaps the most elaborate interrogation of personhood in light of his theory of practice, interrelating what he asserts to be two universal dimensions of personhood with the two modalities of action.

In having this outline of his theory of ethics precede the other chapters, which are listed in chronological order from 1983 to 2013, Lambek also weaves a *marked* concern with ethics retroactively into the works published before the early 2000s. As such, the first chapter itself may (to a degree) be read as a performative act placing the earlier essays under a certain description and thus raising the question of whether or not they live up to the conceptual configurations of his current theory of ethics. Given the fact that over thirty years have passed between the publication of the first essay included here in

1983 and that of the introductory chapter in 2015, as well as the broad spectrum of their ethnographic and topical foci represented here, it is remarkable that they do indeed do so.

Chapter 2 is an ethnographic exploration of the nexus between female agency and virgin marriage in Mayotte. The original article (1983) anticipated some of the political and methodological contributions made by Mahmood (2001, 2005) and others to feminist anthropology with respect to ‘taking seriously’ one’s hosts by taking care not to impose external, moral-political criteria in describing indigenous gender relations (40f.). In Mayotte, socially significant marriages are premised on bridal virginity and effect a transformation of the self (of both the bride and the groom). A number of socially, morally and economically important exchanges are organized around virgin marriages and thus impact not only on the construction of personhood, but also on relations within and between families (46ff.). Lambek holds that it is in fact the woman who is the central actor in her (virgin) marriage, and he highlights the relative irrelevance of the identity of the groom in this process (54). Since her sexual state establishes her as a social and economic subject rather than the object (58), and because she transitions from being a child to being a woman (48), bridal virginity is an ethical or moral condition that is indigenously linked to female autonomy (see also Chapter 11, especially 247).

While this essay attends more to subject transformation within a social context, Chapter 3 [1992] focuses on the ways in which personhood is demarcated through the use of the body, and highlights the productive effects of negation. Lambek analyses food taboos in the context of Malagasy spirit possession not as structural relations (*pace* Douglas 1966) but as rituals, illocutionary acts (59) through which individuals can, among other things, position themselves in relation to their genealogical edifice (76f.) and thus performatively fashion their own selfhood (72).

Chapter 4 [1996] is also concerned with the construction of personhood through memory, but again changes the register (cf. 63) from objects (memories) to action (remembering). He treats remembering as a *moral* act, i.e. one that is evaluative while relating to the self. This is because memories and remembering are central to the construction, cultivation and acknowledgment of the self (cf. 91). Furthermore, remembering (as well as forgetting) is premised on the evaluation, selection and rejection of contents and is thus located in a ‘moral space’ (Taylor 1989: 28, cited in Lambek

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2015: 102). Rather than being a technical, intellectual or instrumental practice (87), memory is thus a form of practical judgement in which we constantly assess our changing relationship(s) to the past (104).

Chapter 5 [2000] is a purely theoretical elaboration on the contextual performativity of morality. This is where Lambek brings together Aristotle's concept of practice with Rappaport's investigation of the performative (105, 116) to analyse the moral in a way that escapes what he suggests is an unacknowledged and faulty Platonic dichotomization of objective and mimetic 'relations to the world'. The former is the province of rational contemplation and thus 'philosophy', the latter that of 'sensuous engagement' exemplified in 'poetry' (106). He sees this as underlying a number of flaws in the anthropology of religion, among other fields (106-9). Lambek further enriches Rappaport's understanding of rituals as mostly discrete, performative interventions into the stream of practice by drawing attention to the continuous space between such acts (116). To do so, he draws on Aristotle's theory of practice. *Poiesis*, here understood as 'making', merges the material and the ideal (111), while *phronesis* as 'situated thought' (112) or 'situated reflection' (114) has a strongly contextualizing effect on the respective object of deliberation (a thought further developed in Chapter 10).

Chapter 6, originally co-authored with Jacqueline Solway [2001], explores the ethical or moral dimension of emotion in the form of ancestral anger in Botswana (135-40) and possession by angry spirits in Madagascar (140-5). Emotions, far from being 'natural' expressions, are located within a moral landscape and are highly inflected by social relations and hierarchies. Where anger is located (e.g., within or without the self) reveals in part how the self is delineated, while attention to who may voice (and, in the first place, experience) and who may receive anger – and who may not – is indicative of the social and genealogical positions of those involved. In this sense, anger and guilt always also relate to the self (both one's own and others'). In their respective ethnographic sections, Lambek and Solway elucidate the interface between the evaluative dimensions of anger and the ways in which persons are constructed and delineated through the allocation and assumption of responsibility (e.g., in the form of guilt). These two ethnographic illustrations offer one of the best empirical applications of Lambek's evolving position on ethics.

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Chapter 7 [2003] presents a biographically based discussion of the question of agency in relation to spirit possession, and thus advances an empirical case for the underdeterminacy of human actors and of social life. Its critique of the ways in which the concept of agency has been used in much of social theory, as well as the general direction of its thrust, coincides intellectually and temporally with other critiques published independently (Mahmood 2001; Faubion 2001; Laidlaw 2002; Keane 2003). It therefore deserves greater acknowledgment and should in fact be counted as belonging to this ‘turn’ of the early 2000s.

While Chapter 8 [2007] expands on the actual *performers* of performative acts, as it were, and the ways in which they themselves relate to the illocutionary dimension of their acts, Chapter 9 [2007] devotes closer attention to performativity itself or, more precisely, to the question of how precisely new criteria come into being. He interrogates this ‘problem of beginning’ through the lens of ritual and sacrifice, arguing that sacrifice and especially self-sacrifice are illocutionary acts that are not just transitive (in that they effect a transition of states), but also bring about a new state, a *beginning* in the sense of a radical cut.

Chapter 10 [2008] is one of the most ambitious and complex essays in this volume. Where in the preceding chapters Lambek’s approach to value (the good) had drawn attention from facts (‘having’) to acts (‘doing’), his concern with virtue in this chapter shifts our focus beyond performative acts to character (‘being’) (215; cf. Chapter 8). As such, he is mainly drafting a theory of ethics here that foregrounds practice rather than performance and defines ethics as ‘the relationship of value to virtue’ (215). To elucidate the nature of ethics and value, he defines ethical value by contrasting it with economic value. While economic value describes commensurable options and is therefore exemplified by the notion of choice, ethical value is often treated as an absolute, and consequentially pertains to incommensurable options. Ethical work is thus exemplified by judgement (215-17), although this does not exclude performative interventions. The difference between ethical and economic value, then, is not just that between relative and absolute values, but, more accurately, between commensurability and incommensurability. More importantly, however, since ethical practice essentially takes the form of judgement, it is a matter of character and hence virtue. Virtue is thus the

ability to render action appropriate to circumstance; in other words, ethics is the contextualization of value (cf. 220).

Lambek then deploys this thought to develop his analysis of the performativity of self-sacrifice. By transforming value into metavalue, self-sacrifice turns relative value into absolute value. As such, its destructive force brings into being a new set of criteria (238f.).

Chapter 11 is a reproduction of the first chapter from *Ordinary ethics*, the volume Lambek co-edited with Veena Das (Das and Lambek, 2010). It continues his reflections on virtue and value, this time privileging virtue over value as the unit of analysis in an anthropology of ethics that is concerned with acts and practice (judgement), rather than with objects and the description of ‘cultures’ (264). In a similar fashion, attention to judgement then also offers an alternative to the reading of ethical life as being in relation to rules, because it is criteria and not rules that generate the context of *phronesis* (even though rules are often necessary for ethical cultivation, see 6). If performative acts set these criteria, ritual is what changes them and thus the ‘moral condition’ that is the reference frame of judgement (247). Rappaport’s (1999) theory of performance may have neglected practice, but Lambek is able to harness it in his development of a theory of practice that can both avoid the drawbacks of Bourdieu’s (1977) propositions and account for the two modalities of action simultaneously, namely practice (continuous situated judgement) and performance (discontinuous illocutionary interventions) (cf. 258).

Chapter 12 [2012] deals with the ethics of research in anthropology and is an interruption in the otherwise coherent argumentative flow from Chapters 10 to 13 (its ‘insertion’ is most likely a chronological coincidence). It offers a critique of what Lambek asserts is the inadequacy and in fact unethical (as well as an-ethical) state of the current ethics regime, and as such is also the only chapter in which he assumes a morally prescriptive position (although he qualifies his stance in the course of the argument). He also outlines what the anthropology of ethics can contribute to our understanding and practice of the ethics of research (268-73).

Chapter 13 interrelates action and value and, proceeding from the previous discussion on the transvaluating effects of self-sacrifice, explores how certain kinds of activity in general generate value. Lambek has recourse here to Aristotle to distinguish

doing (as *praxis*) and making (as *poiesis*) as two types of activity (or two perspectives thereon) that generate value (286f.). Regarding the acts in question, he emphasises that he is mostly concerned with ordinary acts, by which he means everyday illocutionary occurrences such as acts of appellation, promises, apologies, and so forth (288). Explicitly excluded from his particular scope are thus ‘extraordinary’ ones such as those that take the form of political violence (288). As for value, he elaborates on the fact that value generated performatively may gain a degree of independence from the original act and thus become objectified (290).

The final chapter distinguishes between two complementary (320, 327) ‘universal and intrinsic dimensions of the person’ (304), which Lambek calls the mimetic and the forensic (cf. Locke 1975). Lambek characterizes the mimetic construct as a synchronic dimension (322 n. 37) since it refers to the culturally available repertoire (cf. *personnage*) on which one may draw, aspire to become, etc. (305). Discernible, performative acts (usually of the most ordinary sort, such as the use of names, clothing choices, etc.) are what lie at the heart of the mimetic (305). Spirit possession and other phenomena are listed as examples of what he refers to as ‘mimetic vehicles’ (316-20). The mimetic is often sensuous or embodied, and is neither conscious nor reflected (321). He contrasts this with the forensic construct, which posits the person as unique, single and diachronically continuous (304), ‘[coding] identity in the sense of self-sameness and unfolding over time’ (321). This dimension is one that mostly operates at the conscious level of practice (305).

In this sense, Lambek’s account of ethics also runs contrary to those currents within the study of ethics that juxtapose ethics and morality, with ethics denoting an eventful discontinuation of (or from) morality, and the latter being a continuous entity or dimension (e.g., Zigon 2007). Instead, ethical life as judgement consists in ‘balancing’ these two dimensions: committing to something is premised on one’s forensic identity at a future point in time, while the exercise of performative acts is always also grounded in a mimetic repertoire (306). Moreover, this understanding of practice presents an important addition to the current work on ethical agency.

Since each of these chapters represents a self-contained contribution to often different fields of enquiry, Lambek presents us with a series of excellent entry points into

a wide range of phenomena, while providing a cross-section of his own particular current in the anthropology of ethics. The set of conceptual tools developed over the course of this collection invites the reader to discover the ethical in other domains and dimensions of human social life. Among these are some which he explicitly did not elaborate, such as ‘extraordinary’ acts (however defined), as well as the ‘effects of capitalism, of technologies, human rights and animal rights, radical inequities and injustices, bioethics, humanitarianism’ (xx) and so forth. Yet another important application, in keeping with the spirit of the chapter on research ethics, would be a further engagement with anthropological writing itself, such as an analysis of the judgements and criteria at work in the theory and practice of engaged anthropology (e.g., Scheper-Hughes 1995). As for the anthropology of ethics itself, I would argue that a stronger dialogue with and integration of the Foucauldian strands of ethical theory may be one of the most promising future endeavours. For instance, Foucault’s analytics of ethics can be read as focusing, in a different and yet sufficiently similar manner, on acts (in the form of techniques of the self) and the establishment of criteria (albeit with an emphasis on their injunctive aspects, e.g. as moral codes) in relation to which individuals position themselves (Foucault 1987, 1990). These and other aspects forcefully lend themselves to being interrogated at the level of performative practice. Conversely, Lambek’s analyses are compatible with an analysis of the role of moral experts and authorities, the organization of ethical knowledge, and so forth. In sum, *The ethical condition* lives up to the high standards it sets for itself, and has gifted us with an elaborate set of very fine criteria for future work.

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SALLY FALK MOORE, *Comparing impossibilities: selected essays of Sally Falk Moore*, with a foreword by John Borneman, Chicago: HAU Books 2016, xl, 345 pp. ISBN 978-0-986-13255-1.

Lawyer-turned-anthropologist, Sally Falk Moore has had one of the most diverse careers in anthropology. Originally trained in law at Columbia University, she worked on Wall Street and attended the Nuremberg Trials as an attorney before returning to Columbia and joining the department of anthropology for what was supposed to be a one-year stint. She would go on to complete a PhD, earning an award for her thesis – an analysis of the legal system of the Inca Empire (Moore, 1958). Inspired by Max Gluckman's *Politics, law and ritual in tribal society* (1965), and drawn by her interest in the importance of descent rules in African legal systems, she then conducted several years of fieldwork among the Chagga of Mount Kilimanjaro, in Tanzania, becoming an authority in the field of East African legal anthropology. *Comparing Impossibilities* – a collection of Moore's most famous essays on law, anthropology, and Africa – celebrates the breadth and diversity of her career through two different themes: those of processual anthropology and comparative methods.

The book is judiciously divided into four parts. The first, *The anthropologist and anthropology*, serves as an introduction to Moore's life and experience in the field, as well as to the recurring themes in her work. In a first essay, 'Part of the story: a memoir', Moore recalls her path towards anthropology, her encounter with and subsequent marriage to the historian Cresap Moore, her first foray into African anthropology following her participation to the Wenner-Gren conference, and her successive academic positions up until now. A second essay, 'Comparisons: possible and impossible', highlights uncertainty as a recurring theme in her work, notably through her study of the unexpected side developments of particular 'cultures of control' (36). Here, indeed, it is processes that are compared, and not situations fixed in time: temporality is highlighted as a key issue in her work. A third essay, 'Encountering suspicion in Tanzania', closes the first part with a collection of anecdotes depicting the increasingly tense atmosphere and suspicion that Moore encountered in Tanzania, from 1968 to 1993. These also serve as a brief historical overview of the developments of this period and as a coda to the

theme of uncertainty, with which the anthropologist finds herself confronted whilst in the field.

The second and largest part, *Perspectives on Africa*, gathers some of Moore's most famous essays on customary law in Tanzania. 'From giving and lending to selling' is a reconstitution of the evolution of 'customary law' through an array of property transaction cases among the Chagga. Focusing on the external acquisition of land, as opposed to its patrilineal transmission, Moore highlights the evolution from the Chagga's initial interest in gaining power over persons and cattle through giving and lending to their preoccupation with gaining land and cash through selling – a change reflecting the land shortages and population increases of the 1930s. The illusory immutability of custom and the resulting instrumentality of 'customary law' are further demonstrated in 'History and the redefinition of custom on Kilimanjaro', where Moore compares two legal cases, moving away from a Tylorian definition of customary law as an anachronistic fragment of the past. In both cases, she underlines the strategic use of the notion of the 'traditional' or 'customary' by Chagga individuals in order to acquire land; in doing so, she goes further than Bourdieu (1977) in arguing that these strategies not only reproduce the distinction between two parallel legal theories – customary law on one side, colonial/government law on the other – but also that their existence reveals which parts of 'the old [customary law]' (117) have been chosen for preservation by the colonial authorities. 'Treating law as knowledge' continues along this trajectory, addressing the interaction between the colonial British legal system imposed in courts and the forms of 'community justice' outside the courts that continued to prevail on Mount Kilimanjaro through a 1957 *Local Government Memorandum*. Moore's analysis of this document reveals an inherently contradictory agenda at the heart of local courts: run by Tanzanians and applying 'customary law', they also followed British legal principles and colonial directives. Echoing the previous chapter, two kinds of legal knowledge find themselves juxtaposed in courts once again, allowing the anthropologist to examine their premises. Temporality emerges as a central theme in this setting, where the contemporary application of 'customary' law is revealed to be intricately linked to anterior, British colonial influences. Moving away from observations on the duality of Chagga courts, 'Individual interests and organisational structures' is a detailed analysis of a 1968 dispute

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between two WaChagga, heard twice – once at the level of neighbourhood aggregation and once at court – as a case-study for the implications of differences in the organisational structure and the kinds of rules and interests brought into play at two separate hearings. Finally, ‘Explaining the present: theoretical dilemmas in processual ethnography’ goes back to the themes of process and temporality by offering broader insights on the significance of fieldwork when accounting for both the progressive formation of a post-colonial state and the existence of local resistance to it. Through two anecdotes, Moore demonstrates the manifestation of state power, before confirming its limits in a discussion of the strategy employed by a politician to circumvent the Tanzanian national ban on landlords by using a poor, landless man as a proxy landholder.

The third part, *Excursions into mythology*, briefly touches upon the theme of contradictions in myths, which Moore turned to following the ‘symbolic turn’ of the mid-1970s (influenced notably by Lévi-Strauss’ *The savage mind*, 1966, and Needham’s *Right & left*, 1973). ‘Descent and symbolic filiation’ is a short chapter that serves as an overview of the association between descent systems and incest myths amongst dozens of societies. Observing the prevalence of brother–sister incest in myths, Moore articulates its structural importance in symbolic filiation in kin-based societies. She pursues a similar task in ‘The secret of the men’, where she argues that the Chagga myth of the ‘stitched anus’ – a male-only initiation rite – lies at the heart of Chagga dual symbolic classification, where an open body is associated with femaleness (women give birth and menstruate), a closed one with maleness. A stitched anus is not only a ritualistic, bounding secret turning boys into men; as it prevents the impregnation of a male by another male – a situation intrinsically linked to death (as men have no ‘opening’, they cannot give birth) – it is also a symbol of life. In Chagga society, then, virility and life are intrinsically linked and located in men being figuratively ‘closed’ to other men. The dichotomies of male/female and life/death are thus reflected upon as fundamental dualities in cosmological systems.

The final part of the book, *Social fields and their politics*, links together law, politics and social change, thus offering broader insights into the contributions of legal anthropology to policy-making, as well as into Moore’s position on legal reforms in East Africa. ‘Law and social change: the semi-autonomous social field as an appropriate

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subject of study' introduces the concept of the 'semi-autonomous social field' as the small field of a complex society which both generates rules and coerces or induces compliance with them, as well as being vulnerable to other forces emanating from the world that surrounds it (252). Comparing the dress industry in New York City and the lineage-neighbourhood nexus of the Chagga on Mount Kilimanjaro, she argues that the processes that make internally generated rules effective are the same forces that dictate one social field's attitude to state-generated law. In 'Political meetings and the simulation of unanimity', Moore turns to collective ceremonies, analysing a citizens' political meeting in Tanzania in 1973 as a 'secular ritual'. Echoing Turner's discussion of liminality (Turner 1967: 93-110), Moore highlights the non-negotiability, unquestionability and sacredness of certain official interpretations of social life – such as the authority of Party officials or public understandings of religion – whilst also making it clear that certain social contexts, such as dissent among local Chagga farmers, introduce an element of indeterminacy and unease in otherwise clearly-defined, ritualistic assemblies. Finally, 'Changing African land tenure: reflections on the incapacities of the state' is a sceptical commentary on the idea of legal change as a strategy to improve societies in Africa and on its implied proposition that laws are easily put into place and implemented. By offering an overview of the history of property relations in East Africa, as well as a reflection on the proposed land policies for West Africa in the late 1990s, this chapter provides insights into the possible applications of social anthropology to society at large, thus bringing together Moore's scholarship, her knowledge of East Africa and the discipline of anthropology in a welcome epilogue for this collection of essays.

Overall, *Comparing impossibilities* is a remarkable overview of Sally Falk Moore's career and contribution to the field of anthropology at large, with a specific focus on her work in Tanzania and in legal anthropology – and especially regarding the transfer of land rights. The importance of accounting for temporality and change through processual anthropology, as well as the instrumentality and evolution of 'customary law', both serve as conducting threads throughout all these various essays. However, the book suffers at times from a lack of focus: although its third part, on symbolism, gives a glimpse of the versatility and adaptability of Moore as an academic, it also strays away from the guiding themes of time, change and law that are present throughout the rest of the book.

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Nonetheless, *Comparing impossibilities* remains a brilliant demonstration of the ways in which anthropologists can mediate the tension between the ambition to account for situations in process, and the temporal ‘impossibilities’ that arise from the need to do so through their comparison.

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LIDIA DINA SCIAMA (ed.), *Humour, comedy and laughter: obscenities, paradoxes, insights and the renewal of life*, Oxford & New York: Berghahn 2016, viii, 209 pp. ISBN 978-0-857-45074-6.

There is no doubt that Lidia Dina Sciama’s edited volume, *Humour, comedy and laughter*, is an impressive, ambitious and timely volume. The subheading, *Obscenities, paradoxes, insights and the renewal of life* seems a tall order for two hundred pages, but in their own ways, the editor and contributors have responded admirably to the challenge. While grounded in the field of social anthropology, this volume is also notable for its interdisciplinarity. Several chapters could be equally comfortable in the fields of psychology, child development, literary criticism, history and film studies, demonstrating how engagement with these disciplines can profit anthropology.

Sciama’s introduction to the topic is a clear, readable and concise overview of the subject at hand. She nicely synthesizes previous literature, from Radcliffe-Brown (1968) on joking

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relationships to Bateson (1952) on humour as paradoxical communication that requires interdisciplinary study (the source of this volume's approach). Overall, humour can be narrowed down to an experience of the familiar juxtaposed with the impossible or unfamiliar, often connected to 'keen social realities' (8). Sciama skilfully links the performance of carnival and similar comic festivities in Europe to the tensions inherent in both the annual cycle and the human life-cycle. Yet on the negative side, humour and laughter are also a source of ridicule and expression of divisions, for instance, in ethnic jokes.

Based more in the realm of psychology, Ian Wilkie and Matthew Saxton's contribution is well-placed as the first chapter in arguing that 'many of the elements of adult humour are witnessed from the very start in adult-child interaction' (36), thus implying that humour is innate in human interactions since early life. Following Sciama's introduction, this provides an excellent foundation from which to approach the following chapters.

As expected in a volume dealing with humour, there are moments to make the reader smile. One is Evans-Pritchard's experience of 'Nuerosis' on arrival in Nuerland. This anecdote forms part of an interesting discussion in Sciama's introduction, where the essence of a joke (to invert the familiar) is paralleled with the experience of a new anthropologist in the field. In agreement with Maybury Lewis (1974), Sciama makes the salient point that anthropologists should give more detailed descriptions of their fieldwork experiences. This may illuminate the role of humour in the societies that anthropologists study and their own role within it. In her chapter, Judith Okely demonstrates the variety of contexts in which the anthropologist-host culture relationship can be a source of amusement, from both her own experiences and those of others. There are moments when these very personal insights, in particular from Okely's own ethnographic experience and private life, can seem too personal. However, this disclosure is exactly what is needed today in anthropology to allow better understanding of the conditions of data collection, and to teach students ethnography (such is the concern with this matter that it was the subject of a special issue in *JASO* in March 2015).

There are three further chapters of a clearly anthropological bent. Fiona Moore's chapter on humour in a German bank in the City of London is an excellent and well-written contribution to the burgeoning anthropology of financial institutions. It also demonstrates how humour renegotiates areas of potential tension (office power relations) and ethnic conflict (the world wars). She also makes some useful suggestions for future research (the only contributor to do so),

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such as viewing jokes as ‘cultural objects’ that ‘indicate long-term developments in society’ (109). Shirley Ardener’s chapter on the English Christmas Pantomime brought the reader back to the role of carnival and the topsy-turvy in English society. Gender and identity take on central roles here, as male pantomime dames and female principal boys bend the nature of what it means to be ‘male’ or ‘female’. Yet the panto also has a social justification: like Bakhtin’s Rabelaisian carnival, ‘when we laugh at panto’s ludicrous distortions...perhaps we more clearly perceive, and become more contented with, the charms of our daily lives’ (155).

Sciama’s own chapter on humour amongst Venetian islanders is an admirable blend of ethnography and literary criticism. She demonstrates how the street life and inhabitants of Venice’s smaller islanders were a source of humour in Venetian drama due to their behaviour, dialect and isolation. Innovatively returning these works to context, she analyses how islanders have navigated these unflattering depictions in light of social change, from ignoring them out of shame to embracing them as a symbol of a past that has lost its negative associations. Continuing with a focus on literary analysis, Elizabeth Hsu’s chapter is a masterful review of medieval, modernist and anthropological attitudes to humour, combined with her analysis of an ancient Chinese medical text. Through formulaic structures, this text has the potential to poke fun at power structures, while also hinting at deeper issues such as royal fecundity, responsibility and regeneration. Moving onto more modern media, Dolores P. Martinez’s analysis of science fiction films shows similar preoccupations with social stresses. Through comedy in these films, ‘very modern fears and myths are burlesqued for all they are worth’ (129), thus providing an outlet for viewers to laugh at unspoken tensions in their society. Like Ardener’s chapter, as well as Ian Rakoff’s (below), these concern notions of gender, masculinities and technology.

It must be said that, despite the high standard of this volume, I was dissatisfied with the chapters by Ian Rakoff and Flauco Sanga. Rakoff’s chapter starts off well, but is confused and confusing. The author rarely takes the time to fully explain his statements, or the contexts of his assertions. For instance, he states that the essential motivation behind a comic strip from 1910 was a boxing champion coming out of retirement, which apparently explained why ‘ethnicity entered and left the frame often puzzling and questioning racism’ (79). What are examples of this, and where does boxing come in? It is only in the course of the next few paragraphs that the reader gleans that this was a bi-racial boxing match. In his summing up, he also claims that Little Orphan Annie, a comic strip he has not mentioned previously, could be ‘the great American

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novel' (95), with no further reasoning being offered as to why. Simply put, Rakoff expects too much knowledge from the reader.

Likewise, in Sanga's chapter on the function of satire in Italian popular song, more guidance would have been helpful. There is not much introduction to speak of, and no conclusion. After a cursory explanation of these songs' purpose as critique of difference and social tensions, he jumps straight into brief explanations of several pages of quotes. Like Rakoff's chapter, there is much of interest here, but there needs to be more context. What part of Italy do these songs come from? Which era(s) do they describe? Who writes them? These are questions that need to be answered to make a really worthwhile discussion of these songs. Also disappointing is the fact that the book itself has no concluding chapter or epilogue. This does not deflect from the overall enjoyment of the book or the excellence of most of its contributions. Still, a synthesis of oft-recurring themes like gender, power, social tension and identity would not have gone amiss.

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