

ETHNOGRAPHIC FRONTIERS: OF THINGS, PLACES, AND  
ANIMALS

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*Books Reviewed:*

MY LIFE WITH THINGS: THE CONSUMER DIARIES

By Elizabeth Chin

Durham, NC, USA: Duke University Press, 2016, 248 pp.

ISBN 978-0-8223-6118-3 (cloth); ISBN 978-0-8223-6136-7 (paperback)

ETHNOGRAPHY AFTER HUMANISM: POWER, POLITICS,  
AND METHODS IN MULTI-SPECIES RESEARCH

By Lindsay Hamilton and Nik Taylor

London, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017, 201 pp.

ISBN 978-1-137-53933-5 (ebook); ISBN 978-1-137-53932-8 (hardback)

PLACING OUTER SPACE: AN EARTHLY ETHNOGRAPHY OF  
OTHER WORLDS (EXPERIMENTAL FUTURES SERIES)

By Lisa Messeri

Durham, NC, USA: Duke University Press, 2016, 248 pp.

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If you keep doing only the things you can handle, you will not be able to push the borders of impossibilities! Try to do the things which are beyond your powers; change your frontiers, create new ones! And then attack the new frontiers! (Mehmet Murat Ildan)

The frontier, in Western imaginations, is the paradoxical space of both romantic conquest and unbridled dangers. It serves to showcase both the potentialities of futures that can be created and also the inherent dangers present in those spaces that are yet to be conquered. The frontier is uncharted territory for some,

and relinquished territory for others. The frontier marks movement – forward and backward – for differentially positioned peoples. The frontier is never static but rather a constantly moving space, in both a figurative and literal sense, that invites us to participate in its making and unmaking.

This essay reviews three books: Elizabeth Chin's *My Life with Things: The Consumer Diaries*; Lindsay Hamilton and Nik Taylor's *Ethnography After Humanism: Power, Politics, and Methods in Multi-Species Research*; and Lisa Messeri's *Placing Outer Space: An Earthly Ethnography of Other Worlds*. In reviewing these three books, I draw on the concept of ethnographic frontiers which was triggered by the recent 2018 Special Issue of *SITES*, on anthropological frontiers.

Ethnography, the instrument of anthropological inquiry, has always been about *going* to new places and creating 'thick descriptions' about new discovered spaces and peoples. While ethnographic writing describes cultures, it also participates in an erasure with inscriptions of particular cultural practices onto people. Never uncomplicated, ethnographers' relationships with frontier spaces and crossing boundaries (Narayan 1993; Sheoran 2012) has been the foundation of all anthropological inquiry. The three books under review are the latest addition to this tradition of boundary crossing and exploring new ethnographic frontiers of research with animals, things, and of space exploration. These books create valuable conversations on the current state of ethnography and the frontiers it approaches – by way of their stylistic dynamism, their interdisciplinary engagements, and their topical locations.

Elizabeth Chin's *My Life with Things: The Consumer Diaries* is an auto-ethnographic engagement on the conditions of relationships between people and their commodities. Here, through short essays and diary entries, Chin takes us on a personal journey where she unpacks the complex relationalities that develop between her and her commodities. The book is an honest exploration of how she, an academic from a working-class background, comes to terms with her middle-class academic consumer life.

Lindsay Hamilton and Nik Taylor's *Ethnography After Humanism: Power, Politics, and Methods in Multi-Species Research* is an accessible text which is not a monograph, but rather a conversation about ethnographic methods in the field of human-animal research. It is a vital conversation as anthropologists (and other researchers) think about new ethnographic frontiers – of research beyond the anthropocentric focus to include animals' perspectives in research. The authors are critical of the turn to multispecies research in anthropology which they describe as another research paradigm designed to understand the

human in animal-human intersection as opposed to a truly innovative research space to understand another species. This text is not about research *on* or *for* animals, but rather reads as a manifesto for research which is shaped through animal engagements.

Lisa Messeri's *Placing Outer Space: An Earthly Ethnography of Other Worlds* examines the next human frontier: outer space. Indeed, it takes on outer space as a *space* that is created, visualised, articulated by research scientists here on Earth. Of the three books, this is the most 'traditional' monograph in that it is an anthropologist doing ethnographic research in particular locations – a multi-sited ethnography.

Chin's auto-ethnography, written as journal entries, is a deeply personal accounting of an academic coming to terms with her life – and in particular her interaction with things. She calls these entries 'consumer diaries' and they read like love letters to objects – from beautifully made rugs to inherited bracelets. An honest accounting of desire of things is visible in each page, just as her anger at failing to be the imagined middle-class academic that lives her life in perfect unison with her academic critique of capitalism.

At one point she writes; 'I think capitalism sucks, while simultaneously pouring huge amounts of psychic energy into choosing paint colors for rooms in my home' (p.11). She critiques capitalism and its conditions, even as the desiring subject she crafts beautiful prose to the complex pleasure that things and privilege provide. The book, which is divided into four sections, opens with an introduction that is Chin's outline of the academic project the book holds and the traditions she draws from as an anthropologist and a cultural studies scholar. She outlines the literatures to which her work speaks, in particular to consumption studies, with an ode to the writings of Karl Marx, Dick Hebdige, Theodore Adorno, and Bruno Latour. The introduction attempts to prepare the reader for the entries that follow in the second section, with a stylistic scholarly engagement on the very complicated material of materiality.

The second section, which makes up the majority of the book, is labelled 'The Entries'. Each journal entry is about a commodity (e.g. 'Entry – I love your nail polish'), an emotion (e.g. 'Entry – Capitalism makes me sick'), or a relationship (e.g. 'Entry – Turning the Tables'). Each entry offers us a glimpse into Chin's interior life. For example, in 'Turning the Tables', she talks about how a relationship with Daniela (the daughter of a friend of hers) breaks down when Daniela comes to live with Chin in California. The honesty with which Chin lets us see her failings (as an American host) alongside Daniela's (an Haitian

interlocutor who comes to *our*, the anthropologist's home) is perfectly drawn. Discomforting, yet scrupulous, the entry shows us the complexity of difference in anthropologists' relationships – in the field when we are the guests, and at home, when we are the hosts. Chin writes:

I'm sure she thought I was a selfish bitch, a slob of unbearable proportions, unkind, and so many other things. I certainly didn't like much of what I saw about her during that time. Still, I mourn the loss of that friendship and, along with it the friendship of her mother. We have never spoken since. If I should ever run into any of them, here or in Haiti, I'm sure it will be all politeness and correctness. Yet as we turn away from each other, we will think to ourselves, 'I know who you really are.' (p.176)

It is these honest confession-like entries that make this auto-ethnographic text so deeply enriching. It places the academic smack dab in centre of contemporary life – laying bare the tensions, be they with *our* things, emotions, or people.

Each entry is emotive, providing an uncomfortable but essential reading of contemporary consumer life. From discussions about growing up poor with rich friends from school in New Haven, Connecticut to the sense of uncomfortable privilege she feels as a well-paid academic; from the desire to eschew consumer goods because of their exploitative labour practices to the deep desire to have a plush rug in her home; from critiquing the self-selling in online dating sites to confessing that she met her husband online, the contradictions are Chin holding up the mirror to many of us – as (for example) scholars, anthropologists, academics, consumers and feminists, etcetera. Her ability to weave the extraordinary analysis subtly (and sometimes suddenly) into mundane everyday practices, is what makes this auto-ethnographic analysis mandatory reading for anthropology and cultural studies scholars.

The third section of the book is a note on academic writing in general and auto-ethnographic writing in particular. Chin outlines her own process for writing fieldnotes and also the anthropological text that emerges from those fieldnotes. While an embodied process, auto-ethnography is also an 'ethnographic investigation that takes auto-reflective perceptions of the world as the starting point for generalization and theorizations about the cultural, the social, and the political' (Lancaster 2011).

It is from this point that Chin starts and elaborates outwards. In sharing the extremely personal, she creates spaces for a nuanced political-economic analy-

sis. Further, as this chapter serves as a note on methods, it is noteworthy that each of the entries were written in one sitting as opposed to Chin revising and revisiting the same note constantly. It is in the fact that each entry is self-contained, extremely personal, but also outward looking to everyday practices that Chin pushes the boundaries of auto-ethnography.

While it is clear she knows that in auto-ethnographic writing the ‘proper subject is the social world around the writer, as evinced in the writer’s experiences (and sometimes beliefs), not the writer himself’ (Lancaster 2011, 253), she manages to convey this concept while never glossing over the very personal parts which show the complexities of being an academic in a consumer world. While this section could have been folded into the introduction, it is also nice to have it placed *after* the entries as it allows us to visit the process after experiencing the evocative journal entries.

This section is followed by a short fourth section, in which Chin experiments with fiction writing: a short story about a woman who is a hoarder. While I enjoyed this experimental bit of writing, and it reminded me of James Hynes’ (1998, 2002) fiction, it left me wanting more of the fieldnotes/journal entries. I had to go back and read a few of the entries to get back into savouring the flavour of the entire book again.

Overall, the book is a treat to read, even if some of the entries did not directly contribute to the conversation on consumption. However, on reading the third, methodological section, the reader can assume that perhaps this is intentional. The jarring and jumbled nature of some of the entries, for example on dealing with a miscarriage in the parking lot, was both gut wrenching and overwhelming. I read it, felt gutted by it, and wanted to see how it fit into the argument, but I could not. I could not go back and re-read that entry and excavate it for an argument, but perhaps that is what makes this an important contribution to anthropological engagements. Sometimes, life happens (in the field) and we need to account for it, but will not always be able to fit it into an argument/schema for our writing.

The book is a vital contribution to contemporary anthropology and should be essential reading for graduate students – as they start writing up their research. Reading this book, I was also reminded of Paul Rabinow’s (2007) *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* and often thought that Chin’s work is a present-day reflection of everyday life, i.e. life for anthropologists *after* fieldwork and the continued complexities therein.

Similarly, for Hamilton and Taylor, it is *after* their fieldwork and research with animals, culminating in a joint monograph *Animals at Work* (2013), that their inquiry turned to the question of how ethnographic research with animals can be more animal-centric, as opposed to always viewing animal life through human experience.

*Ethnography after Humanism: Power, Politics, and Methods in Multi-Species Research* is a book about ethnographic research methods. The book challenges research communities, particularly those working with animals, to think about projects that allow for the human in human-animal interaction to be placed secondary to the animal. They describe this task as extremely challenging, given that it is the human that transcribes and writes the ethnographic details of any interaction. However, they look at the history of anthropological research with non-English speaking communities (i.e. the colonial past of anthropology serves as an example of how to improve things) to outline how we can imagine a new ethnographic frontier – where we write of our interactions with animals from the perspective of the animals.

This is a valuable pushing of anthropological boundaries, while acknowledging that it is ethnography as a method that allows for this boundary pushing given its history to constantly reconfigure itself as a method. The book, divided into two main sections, works on forwarding this argument. In the first section, they take on the history and methodology of ethnography and how this offers us a chance to use ethnographic methods for listening and recording voices of animals – from their perspectives. In the second section, they take on individual ethnographic methods like visual or sensory ethnography, to outline ways animal-centric ethnographic research could be made possible.

Early in the book, the authors focus on the power of language and the necessity to acknowledge this in order to allow for animal-centric writing. In this book they are writing against the simplistic uptake within anthropology of multi-species research. They write:

Our reservation about labelling human-animal research as multi-species ethnography (even though it is an emergent paradigm) is that it may become yet another novel way to understand *the human*, and so perhaps, inadvertently, reinscribe the very human-animal binaries it purports to deconstruct. (p.7)

It is the awareness of trying to decentre the human in ethnographic research with/for/on animals that drives this book. It is an attempt to push ethnographic

boundaries, where the researcher writes accounts from the animal's perspective. They simultaneously challenge and critique ethnographers (themselves included) as they think about future research projects in which animals should not feature as part of the background, but rather as active agents in ethnographic projects.

To this end, the book is rather well organised into two distinct parts, with 'Foundations' making up the first part and 'Field-work' the second part. The three chapters that make up the first part of the book are detailed mappings of the various turns in ethnographic practice and theory and the implications of this for animal-centric ethnographic research. The first chapter of this section, 'Why Ethnography?' takes seriously the question of why this method is best suited for animal-centric research – by tracing the powerful impact of critical ethnographies, the linguistic turn to interpretation, science and technology studies (particularly vis-à-vis actor network theory), and finally the post-humanist turn. In outlining these moves, the authors argue that the innovative and boundary pushing nature of ethnographic research allows us to imagine this method as best suited for animal centric research.

The next chapter unpacks how ethnographers are attuned to power dynamics in the field, and it is this trained sensitivity that allows for voices of animals to be heard and foregrounded in ethnographies. They write:

The central problem does not necessarily require us to add more animals into existing modes of research, to begin peppering our ethnographic account with more species in arbitrary fashion. Rather, it demands a philosophical commitment: that we recognize and reflect upon the social power of being human at a fundamental and challenging level within the ethnographic process. (p. 57)

It is in reordering the research dynamic between the human and the animal that power hierarchies in research can be rethought – something ethnographers have attempted to do over the past few decades.

In this section's final chapter, 'What Can Ethnography Be?', the authors set forth an emancipatory agenda which imagines the potential of ethnographic futures that do not a priori situate the human as central, but rather create new outlines for post-humanist research. While a short chapter, it takes on the very pragmatic side of doing ethnographic research and how the complexities may compound when the research paradigm includes animals. While they unpack each possible technique of research (i.e. audio-visual studies and ethnodrama

to list just two), they also highlight how the frontier space of such ethnographic work also creates new concerns. Of particular note are the issues of interdisciplinary research (a much-needed skill set for innovative research design centring animals) and negotiating with grant-giving bureaucratic organisations (within or beyond the university).

They point out that interdisciplinary engagements require researchers reading and becoming familiar with a wide range of scholarship, while juggling limited time within bureaucratic university jobs. They also point out universities are tethered to grant-giving organisations and business interests, which may not be interested in innovative research that troubles the status quo of animal-human hierarchies in research. The final point they make, which is critical for appreciating the nuance of this work, is that ethnography is written by humans ('people writing' as they call it), and is thus inherently dependent on the human to write the animal. In massaging out the complexities of frontier work in animal-centric research, the authors simultaneously infuse the readers with caution and the potentially enriching research that can emerge from this new paradigm.

The second section of the book fleshes out these new potential research paradigms. The section is titled, 'Field-work', with some of the earlier chapters detailing analysis of innovative ethnographic methods including visual methods, sensory methods, arts-based methods, and the potential of hybridity of methods. They provide detailed examples of work that uses each (or multiple) of these methods for innovative research with humans and animals. Each of these methods are politically engaged with challenging power dynamics inherent in older ethnographic engagements. Chapters five through eight, while outlining research projects, are also important 'how to' guides for articulating animal centric research projects. In chapter eight, when writing of hybrid methods, they write:

While mindful of the human politics of knowledge, *the kinds of social worlds we want to make more real*, we think that hybrid methods – resting upon strong and positive communication between differing disciplines – could make a real impact on our everyday lives with animals. (p.164, author's emphasis)

Each of these 'fieldwork' chapters are an engagement with the interdisciplinary spaces that need to be addressed by ethnographers as they combine with 'traditional' methods and develop research agendas – particularly when attempting to re-write research spaces centring animal experiences.



Each of the methods described, such as visual ethnography or sensory ethnography, is an important intervention as it allows us to use new and innovative methods. If we wish to create a new and innovative research paradigm where animals are centred in the animal-human intersection, then these innovative ethnographic methods are the way forward. For example, when writing about sensory methods for animal-human research, they write:

[...] because animals inhabit a deeply sensory world where language is less significant, tuning into our own senses equips us better for the sort of posthuman, species-inclusive ethnography we advocate. Secondly, prioritizing disembodied, 'sense-less', research works to maintain normative assumptions about rationality located in mind/body dualisms. Given that much work with other animals rests upon challenging such assumptions, it seems hypocritical to continue using methods that signal an unreflexive acceptance of them. (p.112)

To give *voice* to animals, we have to think of new ways to hear, see, sense, and write their voices in ethnographic texts. Further, each act of writing, given that it is the human doing the writing, should then also attempt to be advocacy work for the animals (critical animal studies) while creating ethnographies that centre the animal.

While I wholeheartedly support the aim of the book, which challenges research to include animal-centric perspectives in research with and for animals (alongside advocacy for animals), I do worry about their focus on ethnography singularly as the emancipatory method. They write:

In charting some of the key moments or 'turns' in its [ethnographic research's] history, we highlight two of its key strengths: its critical and emancipatory agenda on the one hand, and the literary potential for documenting nuanced social scenarios on the other. (p.14)

They claim that ethnography, from its colonial stance of speaking for 'the other', has 'progressed' to a place where 'the other' is heard and speaks for itself. While this is not their intention, the assumption that animals can speak alongside the primitive/non-English speaking humans and women appears to place these 'exotic other humans' on the same plane as animals. This is a dangerous proposition, as it misrecognises the emancipatory potential as attached always to the researcher, but in reality it is often the researched communities who pushed back against their narrativisation. Humans, particularly the kind othered in anthropology, had more in common with the ethnographers (i.e. same species)

than animals do with ethnographers.

Unless carefully examined and deliberately unpacked, there is a problematic slippage between the assumption that ethnography became emancipatory as it recognised the voices of the 'exotic' humans and ethnography can continue to be so and recognise the voices of animals. Humans, however exotic, are not on the same plane as animals.

While I accept that this is not the intent of the authors, it is an easy misreading to undertake, as it creates ethnography on a continuum – and on that continuum our progressive experiences with the human 'other' lay the groundwork with progressive work with animals. While in other parts of the book they recognise that it will be very difficult to actually write ethnographies from the animal perspective, I wish they had outlined a chapter (or even a section) on why ethnography is simultaneously limiting as a method with animals – because it cannot serve as a model for something that has never been done before.

My critique of this slippage in the book should not take away from my overall positive impression of it and its intended aim to challenge the hierarchies inherent in research with animals. I, like the authors, look forward to a time when an animal perspective ethnography is written that allows us to re-think both ethnographic practice and animal centric research.

While they struggle to create ethnographic monographs that make visible the world(s) and lives of animals, Lisa Messeri in the third book under review takes us on another journey where an unknown world is being rendered visible and knowable through scientific practices and language. In *Placing Outer Space: An Earthy Ethnography of Other Worlds*, Messeri undertakes multi-sited fieldwork with planetary scientists, computer scientists, mapmakers, geologists, and astronomers to outline the various ways that we humans on Earth are constructing worlds and places out of raw data and basic photographs.

In this book, Messeri highlights the various ways worlds are made visible and accessible through place-making practices, with the aim of making alive and approachable alien unknown planets beyond our solar system. She outlines the various ways both a known planet (Mars) and unknown spaces (exoplanets) are imagined and articulated here on Earth, with an implicit scientific desire for frontier exploration and inhabitation. Drawing on scholarship in anthropology, science and technology studies, and philosophy, she deftly crafts an ethnographic narrative that is both accessible and engaging beyond academia. She writes:

Through interviews, involvement in research projects, conference attendance, chats over beers and pisco sours, and email exchange, I traced how planets are changeable objects, made more meaningful and relatable with each new data set, scientific paper, and conversation. The work of creating planetary place is similar to the anthropologist's own desire to make the strange and alien familiar. (p.5)

This anthropological engagement conceptually threads the book, as she unpacks the various ways new unknown worlds are made places and knowable, all the while providing a subtle critique of exploration and new frontiers – particularly as they employ colonialist tropes and imagery.

To this end, the book is divided into four chapters buttressed with an introduction and conclusion. Each of the chapters unpacks a particular aspect of place-making in different spaces here on Earth – Narrating, Mapping, Visualising, Inhabiting, and in the conclusion, Navigating. Place-making, through these various ways of making approachable, accessible, and tangible the unknown spaces in question (Mars and exoplanets) is simultaneously a political and pragmatic move from the scientific community. She writes:

Place, I argue is not just a passive canvas on which action occurs but an active way of knowing worlds. Even when place is not self-evident, as perhaps with invisible exoplanets, it is nonetheless invoked and created in order to generate scientific knowledge. Place breathes meaning into alien worlds because it makes these worlds familiar, and moreover, familiar as something that is physically explorable. (p.190)

For scientists, the excitement can then be articulated as being dual – to be able to explore new places, but also to make those places as possible sites for exploration to others (including funding agencies). And therein lies the paradox that Messeri makes visible to us, without undercutting the views and aspirations of researchers she works with throughout the book. She shows how even in these cutting-edge and innovative frontier spaces of exoplanet research and computer planetary mapping, the knowledge production process is limited and rudimentary in its ability to imagine new spaces – where the absolute frontier of the unknown must be conservatively imagined by drawing on our situated everyday knowledge here on Earth. Even innovative imagining is grounded and limited to the place we know and our own troubling histories and pasts – colonialism being just one such example.

In chapter one, this is particularly visible, as Messeri unpacks the experience of being and working with researchers at the Mars Desert Research Station (MDRS) in Utah, where ideas of life and landscape on Mars are imbued with ideas drawn on from *Earthly* science fiction and their own cultural values. She writes of frontier spaces and cowboys conquering and taming the land and space – an image deeply rooted in the colonial expansion into the United States and eradicating its romanticism via the annexation of native lands.

In chapter two, she is working with teams at NASA Ames in Silicon Valley who produce maps of Mars for the scientific community and the everyday public. While she examines the work of mapmakers as something they see as democratising data, making dynamic and three-dimensional knowledge; she also shows how this view of space being made into an accessible local is limiting. She writes:

With the Mapmaker's digital maps, users can re-create these emplaced perspectives. The Mars that most people encounter today is not from the perspective of the global. Rather, as I have discussed, the planetary is produced (by both NASA and map users) in reference to the local. (p.108)

The politics of mapping space, from our Earthly and further local (Euro-American) context, is limiting in several ways – as it represents erasures of the colonial past and erasures of a potential liberatory future not grounded in problematic local realities.

In chapter three, titled 'Visualising the alien world' students at MIT create and aim to standardise ways of 'seeing' places that do not have visual images available yet. Using computer programmes, students in the lab represent data abstractly, seeking patterns in the abstraction. The scientists working in the lab, Messeri writes, use visualisation as a tool to convince the academic community – not only for grant support or personal and professional recognition, but to create new frontiers as 'places' that are knowable. She writes:

In pushing the boundaries of what can be visually represented, exoplanet astronomers are forging a new visual culture, in Bruno Latour's sense that current practice 'redefines both what it is to see, and what there is to see' (1990, 30). (p.119)

While chapter three is about visualising outer space as place, in chapter four she makes visible for us what scientific places look and feel like – even as that space

becomes redundant because of technological developments. In what could be termed 'lab study' in Science and Technology parlance, Messeri spends time with astronomers as they live, work, and socialise in a mountaintop observatory. The particular irony of astronomers making place out of outer space, while their 'place' (the observatory) is not the 'space' where this new mapping and visualising happens was not lost on me as a reader. The beauty of how place works to socialise and socialise within is important for us to think through, particularly given that certain modes of sociality are imagined possible in outer space – while others are ignored.

Messeri, in a very nuanced text that applies to a wide audience, has made available a narrative of the next human frontier all the while making us reflect on the politics of erasure enabled by historical frontiers and explorations. The text is a deeply reflective engagement with colonial tropes being reconfigured for space exploration, and the limitations of this for humanity on Earth now and humanity on space in the future. She makes us see how easy it is to keep replicating problematic projects under the guise of explorations and futures, all the while participating in active erasures. In my own work on stem cell research and therapies in India (Appleton and Bharadwaj 2017a, 2017b), I utilise the imagery of the frontier to articulate the complexity and constructiveness of the *frontier* as a space in the global south that offers us the opportunity to re-examine our biases about science and proper science as articulated in the global north. New frontiers in space are articulated and 'made' visible in the contemporary moment, which itself is dealing with very earthly new frontiers in erstwhile colonial spaces. Through Messeri's complex engagement, we can not only see how place is made and space rendered visible, but the critical analysis opens up a new frontier – where space exploration and scientific futures should start to look for articulations that emerge from new spaces that require us to cross the Euro-American scientific and academic rubicon.

In each of these three texts, the frontier is academic engagements – be they auto-ethnographic, otherworldly, or animalistic. Anna Tsing, when discussing resource frontiers, wrote:

A frontier is an edge of space and time: a zone of not yet – not yet mapped, 'not yet' regulated. It is a zone of unmapping: even in its planning, a frontier is imagined as unplanned. Frontiers are not just discovered at the edge; they are projects in making geographical and temporal experiences. Their 'wildness' is made of visions and vines and violence; it is both material and imaginative. (2003, 5100)

I view each of the books reviewed, not necessarily as discovering new sites on the edge, but rather ‘projects in making geographical and temporary experiences’ for their readers and the next generation of anthropologists from sites that may be imagined as everyday – either in our academic homes (Chin), in computational mapmaking (Messeri), or the field of animal studies (Hamilton and Taylor). These books are innovative interjections, marking new ethnographic frontiers for contemporary anthropology – be it in writing, analysis, or spaces of analysis. In each of these three books there is a deliberate engagement with a research and writing style that allows the next generation of ethnographers to envision writing as an art form – not just an opportunity to convey information, but to write cultures anew. These books are simultaneously an ode to anthropological forefathers who published *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986), but also a refutation of the earlier colonial legacies of anthropology visible in ethnographic writing (both Messeri and Chin address this explicitly, while Hamilton and Taylor do so implicitly).

Further, each of these books proudly engages with interdisciplinary scholarship. Messeri draws and contributes to conversations in Science and Technology Studies (STS), Chin bears her cultural studies and media studies label as a badge of honour in the text, and Hamilton and Taylor explicitly engage with the field of animal and veterinary studies. While anthropologists are indeed indebted to scholarship in these other fields, there is often a caution around writing too much of a non-anthropological text. Not in these books. Here, the ethnographic is explicitly enriched by these interdisciplinary engagements and the authors claim this interdisciplinarity.

Writing this review for *SITES* (an interdisciplinary journal) and as an interdisciplinary scholar myself (while trained as an anthropologist, my degree is in cultural studies), it was enriching to see this (re)claiming in these books. It was also a reminder that for anthropology and ethnography’s continued relevance as a decolonial and non-racist field, it will have to be willing to look beyond its fortified cannons. An example of this is when Chin’s father (a writer), who was included in *Writing Culture*, was informed of Chin’s choice to get a degree in anthropology, he wrote Chin a letter where:

he [Chin’s father] informed me [Chin] in one of his twenty page letters that anthropology is a racist, colonialist discipline and I had chosen to join the racists. When I dared to defend my choice in a twenty page letter of my own, he was enraged. We did not speak for two years. (Chin 2016, 193)

In these books, through their brilliant ability to draw from diverse academic traditions seamlessly, it is easy to see the subtle ways in which contemporary anthropology distances itself from its colonial legacy – even though on page 195 Chin confesses that after spending three decades as an anthropologist, she sees anthropology as racist. In these books, the interdisciplinary engagement reads as one (more) step towards writing against the colonial tradition. While these three books are not alone or first in anthropology to engage with interdisciplinary scholarship, they do show clearly this interdisciplinary engagement as a trend – dare I say, mapping a new frontier of anthropology.

In addition to the writing style and interdisciplinary engagements, the topical locations of all three books is also ethnographically noteworthy. Chin's auto-ethnography is set in her home and her everyday life, turning the anthropological gaze inwards. It is part of the anthropological turn where 'studying up' (Gusterson 1997) and studying parallel at home is a political project to upend the fascination with exotic people and places 'over there'. It is an attempt to reverse the historical trends of analysing, making, and unmaking the western 'other', all the while never imagining the Western scholar as a potential site of analysis. Chin, in looking at her personal life as an academic (and an anthropologist) bravely charts this frontier.

Similarly, Messeri takes on the task of 'studying up' by doing fieldwork with some of the leading, most well educated, scientists in America. Planetary scientists, computer designers and coders, and leading science scholars are part of the elite scientific world that makes up space exploration. In gaining access to and analysing their behaviours and attempts to render outer space knowable, Messeri joins other scholars who have studied scientists in their places of work (Dumit 2004; Gusterson 1998; Rabinow 1996; Traweek 1988). However, her work with exoplanet scientists is the first ethnography with scientists in this still evolving field.

Finally, Hamilton and Taylor, in asking for ethnographic methods to go beyond traditional humanistic positionality ask us to imagine a new topical engagement with animal centric research. This last book is not an ethnography, but rather a treatise on the potential space for future ethnographies.

These three books offer up for examination new topical locations – both intellectually and materially – that make for engaging reading. They are a testament to new ethnographic frontiers and will make for important reading for anthropologists – both those in training and also the well-seasoned.

‘Of Things, Places, and Animals,’ the title of this essay, is also the name of a game I like to play with my young nieces and nephews. The game requires each of us to draw lines on a piece of paper to create four columns, titled: Name, Place, Animal, Thing. The aim is to write in each column, within a minute as the timer clicks down, as many names, places, animals, and things you can think of that start with a particular letter of the alphabet. That letter is randomly selected by my younger niece who cannot yet write. Each entry only counts if it is unique – i.e. if a name is repeated by any other player, it does not count towards the final tally of points.

Once, when we were all scribbling on our individual pieces of paper as the clock counted down, I looked up to see scrunched up children’s faces thinking up unique names of places, animals, and things. It is this quest for the unique, new, something not thought of, that gives the winning player the edge over the others.

This advantage is often remarked on by one of the other players as, ‘Oh, I wish I had thought of that’, or, ‘Oh, I didn’t even think of that’. The three books reviewed here, in offering up new unique spaces for ethnographic engagements offer the chance for readers to marvel at the new ethnographic frontiers – something we didn’t even think needed exploring. Each of these authors has mapped a new space for us to read about, explore, and learn from as we think about our own future ethnographic frontiers.

#### NOTE

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