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Book Reviews

Ruth M. Van Dyke, ed. *Practicing Materiality* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2015, 224pp., 23 b/w figs, 2 tables, pbk, ISBN 978-0-8165-3127-1)

Practicing Materiality can be described as an in-house book from the anthropology department at Binghamton University, The State University of New York (SUNY). It was edited by anthropology professor Ruth Van Dyke and, with the exception of Van Dyke's introduction (Ch. 1) and Chapter 9 by Mark W. Hauser, was written by seven PhD students from that university. The book can be seen as a statement of defence for anthropocentrism and be described as a reaction against the recent calls in archaeology and anthropology for less anthropocentric studies (e.g. symmetrical archaeology, vibrant materialism, new materialism, etc.). These theories or ideas, where attention is paid in equal parts to both human and non-human agents, are described as taking an 'extreme position' (p. 19). While I am in disagreement with the presentation and description in this part of the introductory chapter, I am most sympathetic to one of the other aims of the book, which is to explore and understand how theory can be operationalized or put into practice (p. 6). This is certainly a task that all archaeologists and anthropologists should take to heart. Far too often theory stands on its own, and is not applied, or indeed applicable, to the archaeological or anthropological material of study.

In Chapter 1, Van Dyke starts off with a brief overview of post-humanist/post-Cartesian or materialist thought within the humanities and social sciences. It ends with the subchapter 'In Defense of Anthropocentrism'. Here Van Dyke leaves her writing in first person singular in favour of a first person plural, thus making it clear that all of the authors of the book share the views put forward. These include the following:

'we disagree that it is productive or necessary to shift our attention away from people; in fact, we see it as quite dangerous' (p. 19); 'If "things are us", then humans must also be considered things [...] a stance that would allow and even encourage us to think of humans as commodities' (p. 19); 'Objects cannot suffer, whereas humans can and do.' (p. 19); 'we are anthropologists ultimately interested in the relevance of our work for human beings, not for objects' (p. 20).

Thus to Van Dyke and the other authors, symmetrical archaeology and neomaterialism, for instance, imply that humans could be threatened, forgotten, or even turned into commodities; that it would entail an interest in the non-human at the expense of potentially suffering human beings and, further, would mean that research would be done for objects, not for humans.

To suggest that strands of post-humanist, materialist, post-Cartesian, etc. theories entail the above is to simplify the works of a number of distinguished scholars. If things are so much part of humans' everyday life, as written indeed by Van Dyke herself in the first part of the introduction, why should we, as researchers, not pay a great deal of attention to things in our analyses of the lives of human beings? Further, if new materialism, materialist thought, etc., were so misanthropic and disinterested in power

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relations and hierarchies as Van Dyke and the other authors suggest, why would a number of feminists embrace these thoughts? Van Dyke mentions Karen Barad and Donna Haraway *en passant*, leaving out Rosi Braidotti, who already in the 1990s termed the concept of new materialism (independently of and at the same time as Manuel DeLanda—Dolphijn & van Tuin, 2012: Ch. 5). Along with other researchers, they have realized and emphasized that not all humans are included in what is coined as 'human'. Hence, an equal interest in the non-human may, as painful as it may sound and be, result in the inclusion of not only things, but also humans that are treated as things. It is therefore ironic that the last review chapter of the book, written by the only non-Binghamton University student and also discussing slavery, serves as an excellent example of exactly this. Hauser's contribution, which is commented on further below, discusses how humans have been cruelly transformed into commodities in the form of slaves that could be bought and sold. Instead, Van Dyke (p. 24) describes this work as 'a poignant reminder of the potential risks in conflating people and objects' (sic!), as if this was not already the case. Hence, Van Dyke is stuck in a dualist mode of thinking, and fails to see the emancipatory potential offered by monist thinking (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012), flat ontology, or whatever way you choose to label these strands of post-Cartesian thoughts.

So what do Van Dyke et al. propose instead? As the book title suggests, it is to practise materiality. To practise materiality means giving 'materials the front-and-center roles that they actually play in human lives' (p. 20). Since an emphasis on the non-human was just declared as taking an extreme position and quite dangerous, this statement may come as a surprise. But what is meant here, and by practising materiality, is it not to think of objects as active players in human life, instead of passive symbols (p. 20), the latter being an idea that has been used and elaborated since the 1980s/90s? Mark Hauser explains it in a better way in the last chapter of the book when he declares that the authors insist on 'a privileging of human agency in human systems' (p. 204).

Practising materiality is also referred to as having an ambition to 'think in new ways about the relationships among the social, bodily, and material dimensions of our world' (p. 25). Of particular interest to the authors have been Gell's concept of secondary agency and Keane's bundling along with phenomenological approaches. I will comment very briefly on this, before providing shorter descriptions of each chapter. It is not clear from the texts that the authors engage with the concept of bundling as developed by Keane (e.g. 2003: 414). For instance, the implication of bundling's connection to Peirce's work on semiotics, particularly qualisigns, which could have been useful in some of the case studies, is missing throughout the book. Bundling seems in most cases only to mean that humans and things were together, thus missing out on further depths of the concept. It is perhaps in this sense symptomatic that Peircean semiotics is only mentioned explicitly by Van Dyke in the introduction. Further, bundling seems to be mostly something that is only fixed, not something that is *attempted* to be fixed, or indeed as something that could have shifting meanings. Equally, more in-depth discussions on the concept of materiality would have been helpful and fruitful (Hauser's last chapter in the book with the promising title 'Materiality as Problem Space' is far too short), not least since this concept figures in the title of the book.

Three chapters (Chs 4–6) are devoted to discussions of ceramics. Tanya Chiykowski (Ch. 4) discusses ceramics from the

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viewpoint of the biography of plainware pots from the American Southwest. By using ethnographic analogies, she argues that across the greater Southwest the clay from which both ritual and plainware goods were made was considered animate. The animate qualities came from the properties of the clay. I agree with Chiykowski that it is much needed for anthropologists and archaeologists to pay greater attention to not only the finished product (a pot or a vessel) but also consider all the steps from raw materials to the object's finalization, use, and possible discard. Rui Gomes Coelho (Ch. 5) instead discusses ceramics from the Portuguese kingdom in early modern times (through the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries). He suggests that it is possible to understand the rise of modernity through 'the production, circulation, and consumption of […] ceramics' (p. 101). The suggestion is mainly made from a detailed analysis of an archaeological site, in actuality an excavation of a building in the town of Setúbal in Portugal. The result of the excavation of this building, with particular focus on the ceramics, is complemented by interpretations of texts from the same centuries. Britanny Fullen (Ch. 6), on the other hand, discusses ceramics from the Andean past in the form of Middle Horizon (AD 600–1000) Huamanga ceramics. She fruitfully highlights how the spread of ceramic style can relate to how an empire expands.

It is fun to read Halona Young-Wolfe's contribution (Ch. 7) since she suggests that the emergence of monumental architecture in the North Central Coast of Peru in the Late Archaic period does not have to be experienced as something that is totally new, resulting in the eternal and somewhat tiring suggestion that we are dealing with a new political power. Instead it is refreshingly argued that this architecture can be seen as connecting to traditions of the past. Jessica Santos López (Ch. 8) makes an important contribution by her discussion of undocumented Others in the article 'From Banned Bodies to Political Subjects: Immigrants in Protest Bundles'. Protest bundles are collective and public performances and they enable the participation of not only documented bodies, but also Other bodies (i.e. immigrants) that do not have the same legal—and human—status as the documented ones. Erina Gruner (Ch. 3) focuses on ritual paraphernalia in Ancient Pueblo societies in the American Southwest. She analyses the importance and effects of the movement of Chacoan ritual paraphernalia beyond the Chaco world, and how the paraphernalia enchained people, practices, and objects, while their obliteration resulted in the reverse. Şule Can's (Ch. 2) contribution deals with memory and material agency in the Arab Alawite (Islamic) community in southern Turkey. It departs from an analysis of rituals within this community that are performed at sanctuaries called *zyaras*, and shows how identities and memories are an inevitable part of people's experience and interaction with the material world. Hauser's 'Materiality as Problem Space' concludes briefly and offers cursory comments on the chapters of the book. However, it also discusses the concept of materiality as 'problem space' with special regard to thorny and important questions on slavery. 'Problem space' has been defined by David Scott (2004) and it takes an interest in 'not only the particular problems that get posed as problems as such (the problem of "race", say), but the particular questions that seem worth asking and the kinds of answers that seem worth having' (Hauser, p. 208). Due to constraints of space, Hauser cannot analyse and utilize the concept further in his contribution, but expresses the view that he sees great promise in it (p. 209).

To sum up, I think all authors of the book present case studies that are

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interesting and well worth reading. My reservations lie in the book's presentation of certain strands of post-humanist theories, and also in the fact that the theories or concepts utilized (e.g. Web Keane's bundling) could have been explored in greater depth. Certain strands of post-humanist theories are accused of and criticized for not paying attention to power relations and hierarchies. While the book tries to grapple with these issues, they are not reflected or commented upon regarding the very making of the book itself. It is commendable that a professor joins forces with the department's PhD students and puts together an ambitious volume. But how did the consensus regarding the proposed anthropocentrism, the book's statement, come about? Which students were invited to write in the book? Finally, I would like to emphasize that I agree with the authors in that we as scholars must continuously test both methods and theories by putting them into practice. Only then will we know if and how they work, and how they can be improved and developed. But this must be done regardless of what *-isms* we say we adhere to or use at the moment. We all need to keep practising.

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Alexandre Chevalier, Elena Marinova and Leonor Peña-Chocarro, eds. *Plants and People: Choices and Diversity through Time* (Earth 1– Early Agricultural Remnants and Technical Heritage: 8000 Years of Resilience and Innovation. Oxford & Philadelphia: Oxbow Books, 2014, xxi and 501pp., 170 colour and 71 b/w illustr., hbk, ISBN 978-1-84217-514-9)

The domestication of plants and the development and spread of agriculture around the world have been transformative key events in ecological and human history. This question can be considered one of the most attractive and challenging for archaeological research. Present archaeobotanical data show that, beginning around 11,000–10,000 BP, plant cultivation and domestication developed independently in at least seven to eight regions, spreading into others shortly thereafter. Understanding agricultural origins through archaeological enquiry is of fundamental importance for a variety of scholarly disciplines in addition to anthropology, including genetics, agronomy, biogeography, linguistic, and environmental history. This attractive co-edited book responds perfectly to this approach by taking an interdisciplinary look at European pre-industrial agriculture, including its origins and its diffusion outside Europe, which provides a documentary and empirical basis of great value. This book amply meets the proposed objectives, finding a new common ground for integrating different approaches, and viewing agriculture from the standpoint of the human actors involved. The volume, an homage to Irmeli Vuorela's life as an archaeobotanist, is the

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