

Rezensionen

Akama, Yoko, Sarah Pink, and Shanti Sumartojo: *Uncertainty and Possibility. New Approaches to Future Making in Design Anthropology.* London: Bloomsbury, 2018. 147 pp. ISBN 978-1-350-00271-5. Price: £ 24.99

In the past decade, the field of design anthropology has come of age as a distinct way of practicing anthropology. In response to the latter's conventional focus on description and analysis, based on ethnographic studies of the present (and, to some extent, the recent past), researchers and practitioners in design anthropology draw inspiration from methods and practices of design that are essentially interventionist and future-oriented. A key ambition in this fairly new field of research and practice is thus to bring together aspects of both design and anthropology in the attempt to develop a disciplinary hybrid that constructively combines open-ended anthropological explorations and designerly articulations of new possibilities.

This new book is a welcome contribution to this disciplinary hybrid. Whereas a handful of books have previously been preoccupied with outlining and establishing the defining characteristics of design anthropology in general, Akama, Pink, and Sumartojo take this development a step further by contributing a much more specific exploration of only one of these characteristics. As a truly collaborative endeavour and outcome of the *Design+Ethnography+Futures* research programme at RMIT University, Australia, the book explores the prevalent issue of uncertainty that underlies virtually everything that has to do with the future, not least the design of novel things, services, processes, etc. While uncertainty is, according to the authors, commonly perceived and approached as an unwelcome condition of being that should be controlled, mitigated, or overcome, the central argument of the book is that new possibilities may come about if uncertainty is faced straight on, so to speak; that is, if it is harnessed as a generative technology for imagining and creating new potentials and futures. Indeed, this is a thought-provoking idea that essentially turns the commonplace search for certainty – in design as well as beyond – upside-down in that *uncertainty* is intentionally embraced and refigured as a distinct way of exploring and producing what is yet to be seen and yet to be done.

Grounding this argument in a discussion of the contemporary world as inherently emergent and uncertain, the main bulk of the book unfolds and discusses the workshop as a particular design anthropological device

for taking advantage of uncertainty. In this respect, the concept of technology is applied in a broad sense to designate objects and practices that afford and generate imaginings which are hardly random but nonetheless fundamentally unpredictable. The key point is that uncertainty may serve as precisely such a technology, which is demonstrated in three chapters that describe different ways and purposes of putting the workshop methodology into practice. Thus, the authors take the reader to a number of workshops focused on themes such as spaces of innovation, lunch-making, creative writing, and much more, all of which reveal how uncertainty can be deliberately mobilised to create disruption (i. e., to unsettle deep-rooted assumptions and practices), surrender (i. e., to let go of preconceptions and certainties), and moving beyond (i. e., to engage the possible and the future). All of these, the argument goes, are examples of how uncertainty may be productively harnessed and, as such, bring about new possibilities and futures.

Underlying this argument is an openly declared hope and optimism, or an activist spirit even. While interventions such as workshops may represent sources of knowledge production in themselves, the agenda of the book is clearly to contribute to and advance a more interventionist and future-oriented anthropology; that is, an anthropology which dares to engage with the world, because, as the authors emphasise, “we are tasked (or pressured) with creating ‘better’ futures together” (2). As an inescapable element of contemporary human lives, uncertainty provides, in this respect, an opportunity to take on this task in an ethically grounded and collaborative way. It is a key point in the book that embracing and harnessing uncertainty must entail serious ethical considerations and include groups of people to participate in it. In this sense, future-making is essentially approached as a collective and interdisciplinary endeavour, combining principles from co-design, anthropology, and creative practice.

It should be emphasised that if one is looking for a model or template on how to do all this, one will surely be disappointed. Of course, a book on uncertainty can hardly provide clear guidelines and make confident promises. Moreover, nor should one expect a fully-fledged argument in that the book is first and foremost an outline of a thought-provoking idea that seeks to push design anthropologists in new and, indeed, uncertain directions. Thus, as a reader, one could at times

wish for more thorough discussions of some of the key arguments, not least of the somewhat hasty juxtaposition, or conflation, of what is claimed to be an inherent and general uncertainty of everyday life and what is a more organised and intentional uncertainty of workshops. Although the core message of the book is stressed repeatedly (a bit too often, actually), the focus is predominantly on describing the various workshops whose open and unpredictable character leaves the reader constantly pondering what is in fact going on. In this way, the form of the book, and hence the experience of reading it, mirrors to some extent its main argument, in that it provokes a kind of uncertainty that the reader needs to embrace in order to explore the possibilities that the book may generate for the future of design anthropology. Indeed, if this is intended, the book succeeds. And it is, I believe, its key strength.

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Bendix, Regina F.: *Culture and Value. Tourism, Heritage, and Property.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018. 279 pp. ISBN 978-0-253-03566-0. Price: \$ 40.00

Regina Bendix is one of the most well established German-speaking contributors to the cultural anthropology of heritage and tourism. This collection of essays traces the development of her original thinking over the course of nearly four decades of scholarship. Bendix began to critically engage with material and immaterial heritage and tourism ways before the concept of *critical heritage studies* became popular. Her writing is influenced by both the German and US-American traditions of cultural anthropology and folklore studies in the sense that it does not naively cross from academic into popular discourse but examines tourism, heritage, and related regimes of value based on thorough ethnographic engagement.

The collection of essays “Culture and Value. Tourism, Heritage, and Property” presents a concise overview of Regina Bendix’s work. In it, the author positions her own development as a researcher and academic within the history of tourism and heritage studies. It is extremely thought-provoking to follow her self-reflexive analysis of how her work has spoken to but also departed from important historical, new, and recurrent themes in these entangled scholarly domains. The advantages of reading Bendix herself reflecting on her career, rather than anyone else, are obvious: Who would prefer to attend the concert of a tribute band if there is a chance to listen to the original?

Regina Bendix’s analysis sets out from a self-critical note stating that only in the past 15 years she has begun to realise the full impact of questions of value on heritage and tourism development (1). She explains that the articles compiled in this volume are thus framed along the lines of changing scholarly attention and attitude towards value regimes, in the different domains of cultural anthropology and folklore studies. In what follows,

Bendix presents a historical *tour de force* of the disciplines of tourism and heritage studies that spans from the interrelation of folklore and nationalism that motivated much thinking in the 1970s, via invented traditions and imagined communities (1980s), to tourist realisms of the early 2000s and her own monograph “In Search of Authenticity” (Madison 1997), before ending with contemporary concerns about the commodification of culture and the ideological misuse of folklore.

Individual articles are grouped into three sections that address the overlapping fields of (1) tourism, (2) heritage, and (3) value-making. Two of the four articles on tourism (Section 1) engage with questions of tourist encounter and are inspired by the works of influential anthropologists of tourism like Nelson Graburn and Edward Bruner, among others. The other two articles address questions of narration in and for tourist experiences, and the ways in which these put culture on display. Drawing on such diverse authors as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Walter Benjamin, Bendix suggests that tourists’ constant demand for new and extraordinary experiences might as a consequence see travel and tourism, “contain the quintessential and oh-so-rare manifestation of authenticity” (79). This, what she calls, “aura of the touristic experience” (81) is expressed in narrations with corrective potential, since accounts of tourists about positive and negative experiences generate feedback loops with an ability to transform the industry. This is seen, for example, in the demand for more sustainable tourism products and a related growth in the ecotourism and Indigenous tourism sectors that cater for it (87ff.).

The following four articles on heritage (Section 2) set out from the UNESCO 1972 declaration to quickly engage with heritage in more encompassing terms, and again drawing on foundational works of scholars like David Lowenthal and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. Bendix shows how over the past three decades heritage scholarship has moved away from an overemphasis on the potential loss of important material and immaterial assets to questions of diversification, and the inextricable linkages of heritage with other cultural domains. Here, she points out how internationally sanctioned heritage regimes like those manifested in the UNESCO heritage conventions, “limit and channel creative agency” (147). They separate our understanding of heritage from the very processes and consequences of “inheritance” (150ff.), since the relationship between particular social actors (dead and alive) that is maintained through the latter is replaced in global heritage discourse by a, “moral obligation of ‘all’ to generate programs ensuring the preservation and protection of chosen aspects of cultural pasts” (155).

The final four articles on values and value-making (Section 3) continue in this line of thought and suggest what might be done to overcome this discrepancy between inheritance as a social phenomenon and heritage as an institutionalised concept. Bendix begins with an acknowledgement of the relevance of cultural anthro-