

Review of *Anthropology in the Meantime: experimental ethnography, theory, and method for the Twenty-First Century* (Duke UP, 2018) by Michael M.J Fischer

“The future can be scary when thought about as sudden mutational change on a large scale, but not scary perhaps *with time*.” Reading Michael Fischer’s collection of essays on the role of future anthropologies, right in the midst of the Covid-19 epidemic, poignantly highlights the relevance and necessity of anthropological thought and its emerging ethnographic practices to the momentous changes in our world society as it progresses from the Anthropocene to the Aquacene. The book’s title, “In the Meantime, in the wake of the future”, refers to the “third space”, the time in-between art and science, great events and grounding truths, the “time of constant experimentation” through which ethnographies emerge in collaborative interdisciplinary plateaus. This timely collection of essays, written between 2014 to 2017, gives an insight into Fischer’s latest play with experimental ethnographies and their emerging relations with theory and method, following the wider turn to subjectivity in the Humanities and his own pivotal work on the dynamics of “culture” in anthropology, expanding from *Anthropology as a Cultural Critique* (1986, with Marcus) to *Anthropological Futures* (2009) and a more recent contribution to the anthropology of science, technology and society (STS).

Starting from 1986 as the reference year for the birth of cultural anthropology as a critique, beyond the “Malinowskian *mise-en-scene*” in Marcus’s terms, Fischer’s chapters gradually unfold towards the future via a variety of grounded ethnographies, readings, and a series of utopian and dystopian scenarios carrying their own eco-ethical awareness and reflections of the past. This journey includes a variety of texts and places cited in the book in a variety of forms (essays, fieldwork notes, cantos, zen exercises, filmic sketches, a dialogic play, anthropogeographies of cosmopolitan places), set in a wider “conversation”, i.e. in a dialectical meditative composition with each other. The references expand from classic anthropology, psychoanalysis, and Kantian philosophy, to contemporary ethnographies and dissertations from the anthropology of science, interweaved with fictional texts, life stories, myths, paintings, films, anime, musical and art installations from across Asia. The aim of the author is to show how such “pieces of the world interact” as they emerge through a series of world issues, ranging from health inequality and bioethics in India, state oppression and resistance in China and Iran, global threats such as global warming and urban pollution, nuclear disasters and epidemics, to positivist potentialities opened by biotechnological and biomechanical innovations -as envisioned in science fiction and ambitious projects such as the colonization of Mars.

The author’s final message takes cue from Buddhist philosophy, offering a much-needed beam of hope in this time of world health crisis and social upheaval. It is a message coming all the way from Fukushima, Japan: “The best way to overcome disaster is to accept disasters happen.” This can only happen through collaboration and solidarity. It can also happen through new technologies which redefine our contact and conduct in the world. This is the third space in which ethnography emerges. With a strongly ethical belief in human determination and self-awareness, a new understanding of Humanity emerging through the biotechnological evolutionary changes taking place inside and outside our bodies, Fischer argues that “Anthropology in the meantime will be a critical tool for responsive robustness both for when things go *wrong* and to make things go *right* more often.” This is a wonderful and well-research collection of essays on third ethnographic spaces, offering a positive and pragmatic vision for Humanity in the Kantian spirit of world society. A *must* read indeed in a time of rapid change.

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The author argues that ...

Strong ethical sentiment/ new technologies emerging along with solidarity and collaboration, self-responsibility and elf-awareness

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Solidarity and collaboration

The author's citation of fellow anthropologist Nicholas I. Sternsdoff-Cisterna sums the strong ethical Kantian backbone of the entire collection: "Safety is a more than laboratory tests; safety is also a social relationship".

One of the advantages of the fragmented structure of the book is that it allows the reader to engage with each chapter as an autonomous text and/or in a dialectical relation to another chapter from a different section, read it backwards or in parts, or simply enjoy reading through it in its entirety. It requires the engagement of the reader in a playful way.

Despite the imaginative experimental nature and easiness of the multi-referential texts, my only reservation would be the question of ethics raised by Fischer himself in one of his texts, citing Edmund Leach's admission that "In my own society I am radical [...] I find it difficult to make judgements about other societies." At times, the way Fischer contextualizes fictional texts and films within certain wider political movements may be seem problematic by some circles as a kind of an outsider's critique of those regimes. In any case