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Book reviews

Beck, U. and Willms, J. **Conversations With Ulrich Beck** Cambridge: Polity 2004 240 pp. £55.00 (hardback) £17.99 (paperback)

Ulrich Beck is one of the most prominent sociologists working today, and one of an increasingly rare breed: a meta-theorist attempting to wed an overarching social analysis to concrete political projects. In the conversational format employed here, Beck's analysis is imbued with a sense of dialogue which generates numerous access points to his thinking and serves as an excellent, accessible introduction to the ideas which have populated his work since the publication of *Risk Society* (1992).

Much of Beck's analysis rests on his distinction between first and second modernity, which, he argues sociology has largely failed to capture. To begin to make sense of second modernity emerging in the late twentieth century, we must abandon the 'zombie concepts' of classical sociology and begin afresh. Two such concepts are that territory necessarily forms the basis for society and that collective categories are the basis for individual identity. The former revolved around the primacy of the nation-state, the latter around notions of class, and worked perfectly well in grasping the structure of first modernity. However, the move to second modernity, characterized by radical changes in technology and communications, renders these concepts obsolete, however tenaciously sociology clings to them, and all who look to sociology 'need a reasonable picture of meta-change that they can use to orient themselves' (p. 25). Beck grasps this challenge, attempting to construct the conceptual elements necessary to initiate a 'new sociology'. Two such elements discussed here are *globality* and *individualization*, respective solutions to the conundrum of lived experience short-changed by the aforementioned zombie concepts.

Globality refers to the increasingly transnational origin and texture of experience. The routines of everyday life are increasingly defined by cultural eclecticism, and our identity is increasingly shaped by a 'banal cosmopolitanism', reflected in the experience of risk. Whether we like it or not, the risks of second modernity are more pervasive than in the past. Events such as Chernobyl and the BSE crisis make a mockery of nation-state boundaries and exemplify how transnational phenomena encroach upon our identity. More positively, Beck discusses increasingly eclectic approaches to food consumption in everyday life to illustrate how we draw banally and pre-reflexively on global cultures. Individualization refers to a closely related process. Individual agency takes centre stage in second modernity; the exercise of choice has become vital to who we are, and the basic glue of our social structure, replacing class, the nation-state, the household and similar zombie concepts

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which once provided fixed navigational points for identity. Once displaced, we are all propelled into an experimental process of individualization.

These are no longer novel ideas in Beck's own theorizing or in sociology more generally, but in this book, his analysis is sharpened by a more visible critical dimension. He is pointedly ambivalent about both globality and individualization, partly as an explicit attempt to answer critics who have accused him of one-sided optimism. His ambivalence is exemplified in his critical distinction between glob*ality* and global*ism*. The latter refers to neo-liberal ideology, which basically asserts the legitimate hegemony of the world market, which Beck is consistently critical of. Risk too, is claimed here to be less democratic than Beck's infamous soundbite – 'poverty is hierarchical, smog is democratic' – originally suggested. He acknowledges the danger of overstatement when 'environmental risks are clearly distributed along the contour map of poverty' (p. 130). Individualization is also ambivalent when disconnected individuals can find themselves at the mercy of the 'flexible' labour market and subjected to subtle forms of social control encouraging self-exploitation in the guise of individual responsibility and choice.

Beck remains positive in considering possibilities for positive social change however. To take just one example, he suggests that there is an urgent requirement to separate material and ontological security from employment, in order to encourage more positive forms of globality and individualization. He argues that work was 'the central engine of social control' (p. 157) and the securer of identity in first modernity. In second modernity, work identity becomes 'flexible', risk-saturated, and increasingly meaningless, fracturing 'the arc of individual biographies' (p. 155). Beck's solution is the provision of a basic 'citizen wage' disconnected from employment, which he views as a viable political project. It would allow a focus on activities such as childcare, community and creative projects which already 'run like back alleys through everyday life' (p. 167), and have the potential to enrich identities, overcome some of the isolation inherent in individualization, and provide the basis structural basis for new collectives.

While there is a growing acknowledgement of ambivalence at the heart of Beck's analysis, here he is still open to the criticism that his general, carefully optimistic theorizing sometimes fails to consider the ramifications of such uncertainty. In asserting that globality is highly differentiated as a qualitative experience 'depending on where you live' (p. 36) for example, territory, however defined, is far from being an epiphenomenal concept for making sense of society. Similarly his belief that neo-liberalism may be a passing 'fashion' on its way out, does not do enough justice to its grip upon the life-chances of millions across the globe, mentioned elsewhere, or to new forms of power that have stepped into the breech left by the dissolution of 'labour society'; just as it fails to recognize those who have never even enjoyed its ambivalent fruits before it is cheered into obsolescence. Other accounts, such as Bauman's *Wasted Lives* (Zygment Bauman 2004 *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts*, Cambridge: Polity) place such experience at the heart of their analysis more convincingly.

What is surprising, in what amounts to an overview, is how explicit an attempt Beck's social analysis is to build a new meta-theory, and how coherent it is, in a field still largely in hasty retreat from such grand theorizing. Beck's account is convincing, mainly because his analysis acknowledges ambivalence and ambiguity, if problematically, yet still asserts that we must, as sociologists, offer potential solutions and ways forward. In fact Beck's greatest scorn is reserved for the 'conceptual prisons' and 'fat armchairs' of postmodern theory passed off as critical thinking, when in fact it amounts to a retreat from an engagement with the problems facing us today.

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Borchert Jens and Zeiss Jürgen, **The Political Class in Advanced Democracies** Oxford, University Press 200 425 pp. $99.00 (hardback)

This book – previously published in a German edition – aims to study comparatively the development of a 'political class'. Drawing on previous work by Borchert and Golsch (Die politische Klass' in W. Röhrich (ed.) 1995 *Demokratische Elitenherrschaft*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft), the notion of political class is taken as involving two key distinctions: from Marx, a distinction between a 'class in itself' and a 'class for itself'; and from Weber, a distinction between 'living for politics' and 'living off politics'. For the editors, a political class (as opposed to a political elite, ruling class or professional politicians) must be a 'class for itself, living off politics': that is to say there must be a collective class self-interest, and the political class must be capable of acting as a single agent.

In an attempt to examine the development of a political class across the developed world, the book devotes a chapter to every advanced industrial country, with the exception of Greece and Austria, with twenty years of continuous democracy and a population of over a million. In retrospect, this seems overambitious. With twenty countries to cover, a great deal of space is taken up by an introduction to each state's political institutional arrangements, curtailing the scope for thematic discussion. The criteria for inclusion necessarily skews the book towards Western Europe (fourteen countries), and Anglo-Saxon legislatures (five, including the UK). Only Israel and Japan do not fall into one or other camp and the concentration on nation-states unfortunately excludes European Union institutions. It is the cultural outliers, however, like Israel and Japan, and to a certain extent Switzerland, that provide the most stimulating discussions of political class.

The volume is presented as a handbook (the countries in turn appear in alphabetical order), with a common format for each chapter. The material is further shoehorned into fixed headings: political professionalization in historical perspective; institutional context; the political class (size and composition; political recruitment and political careers; and living off politics); and the political class and institutional reform. Potentially the most interesting of these, political recruitment and political careers, tends to fall back into a discussion on electoral law, the party system and incumbency.

While the editors argue for extending analysis beyond either legislative or party research, this is undermined by the book's taking national legislatures as the ' "central committee" of the political class'. Although numerous contributors stress the extra-legislative elements of the political class – party workers, elected officials, political appointees, possibly even judges and journalists – they ultimately all concentrate on parliamentary careers. Typical of this is Borchert and Gary Copeland's chapter on the USA, which notes that there are over a half a million elected offices in the USA before retreating into a discussion of state and federal legislators.

Consequently, the 'class for itself'/'living off politics' analysis collapses into two proxy discussions – the rewards of public office, in particular formal provisions relating to the payment of legislators; and the attitudes of MPs towards institutional reform. Moreover, the assumption that opposition to institutional reform reflects some sort of political class consciousness is flawed, ascribing agency to the class, rather than its various members who – as beneficiaries of the *status quo* – share a common interest in maintaining it. Indeed, Borchert's own reference to a 'cartel of incumbents' seems to point at such an unholy alliance.

These problems could have been cured by one or more thematic discussions following the country chapters. However, the book lacks even a conclusion, again, possibly because of the scale of the survey. There is no attempt, for instance, to draw cross-national comparisons, even where factors such as gender and the background of MPs

recur more or less throughout the chapters. To a political scientist this might be an interesting handbook, not least for each chapter's introductions to that country's political system. Readers hoping to learn about the sociology of political elites, however, are likely to be disappointed.

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Fraser, Sandy, Lewis, Vicky, Ding, Sharon, Kellett, Mary, and Robinson, Chris (eds) **Doing Research With Children and Young People** Sage Publications 2004 294 pp. £19.99 (paperback)

Lewis, Vicky, Kellett, Mary, Robinson, Chris, Fraser, Sandy, and Ding, Sharon (eds) **The Reality of Research With Children and Young People** Sage Publications 2004 306 pp. £19.99 (paperback)

How to improve the life experiences of present and future generations of children and young people is of central concern for a range of professional arenas. As societies throughout the world have become more aware of the many contributory factors to underlying problems including poverty, massive social inequalities and failures to recognize children's rights and needs, the imperative to conduct active research has become urgent for policy makers, service providers and practitioners.

However, undertaking research in this area is not an easy exercise as the authors of the many papers in these books demonstrate. The many inhibitors include obtaining access, willingness to give consent and ethical issues relating to the rights of children and young people to confidentiality and protection. There are questions about their competence to form valid opinions and their relative powerlessness when research about them is conducted by adults. These two books of edited essays promote strongly the belief that there should be a shift in emphasis from research *on* children and young people to research *with* children and young people, thus recognizing that a very different picture of childhood affairs may be obtained by encouraging their participation and active engagement in the research process. The contributors to both books sustain this theme providing examples of their projects and reflections on their work.

The first book is topic focused. Contributors are from many disciplines and favour a range of different methodological approaches. Their task is not to provide a text book on research methods with instructions about how to overcome some of the problems identified above. Instead their task is to reflect on their chosen topic from their experiences as active researchers. This book proves to be a most stimulating collection of views spanning a range of areas including international perspectives, differences of age, race, ethnicity and gender. Health, education and social policy issues are debated in relation to implementing change as the result of research findings.

The companion volume of contributions has as its focus the reality of doing research. This is successfully achieved by the presentation of 13 research 'stories', carried out in different countries, involving children and young people of varying ages and using a range of different research tools. In addition to these accounts the contributors have each provided fascinating insights into their experiences of undertaking the research through a personal research commentary highlighting some of the dilemmas they encountered. It is interesting that these echo some of the issues explored in the first volume, and also that they go a long way towards reassuring less experienced researchers about the factors inherent in the research about childhood issues.

These books are designed for students on the Open University Course, Research with Children and Young People. However, they are more than course texts in that they deserve a much wider readership. Increasingly the validity of action research by practitioners working directly with children and young people is being recognized so that the dilemmas and discussions included in these books should prove invaluable. Similarly,

policy makers and agency providers throughout the world would benefit from engaging in these debates, which are presented in stimulating and accessible chapters, organized into coherent themes, with the benefit of thoughtful introductory sections and extensive references. These books are valuable additions to the literature in an important and hitherto poorly understood research area.

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Anthony Elliott **Critical Visions: New Directions in Social Theory** Rowman and Littlefield: Oxford 2003. 221 pp. $79.00 (hardback) $26.95 (paperback)

'Critical Visions' brings together a number of previously published essays by Elliott. Complementing these essays is an introductory chapter that contextualizes the essays by outlining what Elliott takes to be the four key problems facing sociology. The first problem is that the discipline has lost what he refers to as its 'traditional audience' of policy makers. The second point is that what Elliott refers to as modernist objectivist social science is a product of its time. Whilst the search for ordering principles may have been the intellectual inheritance bequeathed to twentieth century sociology by classical sociology, such a project is to be rejected for taking a deterministic approach to agents. The third point is that the social world has changed radically, and so the conceptual resources used by sociologists need to change. As Elliott puts it, 'the precepts of twentieth-century social science are simply unable to comprehend the networks, flows, fluidities, and representations of contemporary social processes' (2003: 2). The forth point is that much of the interdisciplinary turn to Theory has failed to provide useful conceptual resources and has, instead, become what Elliott, following Turner and Rojek, refers to as 'decorative sociology' (2003: 4). What this means is that much interdisciplinary theory is good for pretentious citing of fashionable terms but useless for understanding the social world.

The task Elliott sets himself is one of drawing upon interdisciplinary conceptual resources to escape from 'modernist social science', without producing yet more merely 'decorative sociology'. For Elliott this means exploring the link between selfhood and the social, by drawing upon psychoanalysis and postmodernism. Psychoanalysis provides the conceptual resources to theorize the creative and disruptive aspects of selfhood, and postmodernism is taken to provide the conceptual resources to theorise difference, instability and change.

The essays in the first section of the book deal with a variety of thinkers whom Elliott regards as germane for this conceptual re-tooling of sociology, including Beck, Giddens, Lacan and Castoriadis. These essays may be described as critically appreciative of the authors discussed. The essays in the second section of the book deal with the themes of: sexualities, citizenship, political science and social theory, and ethics. In the thematic essays Elliott seeks to show the limitations of modernist social science and the benefits of taking a postmodern approach, with postmodernism being described, following Bauman, as 'modernity without illusions' (2003: 180).

Elliott's work on the self and the social avoids being decorative sociology because it is an attempt to engage with the social world, rather than being theoretical work that is pretentious sophistry. Nevertheless, to make a stronger case more had to be said about other non-decorative approaches to the meta-theoretical issues raised about defining the social, disciplinary identity, and the relationship of philosophy to sociology.

In the final chapter on ethics Elliott places the emphasis on creative selves trying to understand difference. Elliott notes that whilst this may be seen as rather removed from the routines of some people's everyday lives, it is a 'dissident cultural form' (2003: 195) that may, it is implied, help change the social if social theorists' emphasis on difference, creativity, and responsibility become part of lay-discourse, and the discourse of

political scientists, once they moved away from a focus on bureaucratic order and formal procedural rules. The critique of political science, coupled with a rejection of the postmodern 'death of ethics', is not sufficient though to support Elliott's case for 'ethics as individualization'. Without any sense of how ethics as individualization could actually operate the argument seems to be more about outmanoeuvring theoretical opponents than creating an argument that could help instigate social change. In which case Elliott seems to be giving us a decorative ethics.

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Grover, Chris and Stewart, John **The Work Connection: The Role of Social Security in British Economic Regulation** 2002 Palgrave: Basingstoke 248 pp. £50 (hardback)

The interface between the welfare system and the labour market has, for centuries, been a site of restless policy development, institutional stress and political struggle. For all their rhetorical deference to the market, neo-liberal governments have been no less active in this area; in many ways they have been more deeply engaged than their 'interventionist' predecessors. For example, the Thatcher era was associated with a massive proliferation of labour-market 'schemes' aimed at young people and the adult unemployed, while the Blair governments have made 'welfare to work' one of their signature endeavours. The rationales for these interventions have varied over time – tackling social exclusion, adjusting reservation wages, instilling work ethics, dismantling dependency cultures, waging war on Want – but, as Grover and Stewart point out in this wide-ranging analysis, they all resonate with an underlying set of tensions concerning, inter alia, the manipulation of appropriate 'incentives' to work, mobilization and socialization for wage labour, and the maintenance of economic and social order. Grover and Stewart's central argument, invoking a variant of regulation theory, is that while the capitalist state performs continuous roles in the constitution and management of wage labour, institutional manifestations of this fraught and contradictory process reflect not only the vagaries of politics but also the historically-specific 'requirements' of different regimes of accumulation. The authors straightforwardly state that, 'social security policy has little to do with meeting human needs and everything to do with meeting the transitory requirements of capital accumulation' (p. 149). In service of this general argument, most of the book is given over to the close institutional-cum-political analysis of particular episodes in social-security policy-making – such as the debate around the Speenhamland system, the establishment of family allowances after the Second World War, the strict benefit regime of the Thatcher era, the shifting rationales for lone parents' benefits, the Blair government's New Deal programme, and so forth.

The authors rather disarmingly state that the book was written in such a way that, 'after reading the introduction, readers should be able to engage with individual chapters as stand-alone essays on various aspects of social security policy' (p. 14), which in a sense speaks to the book's primary limitation. The rather static and functionalist version of regulation theory that is sketched out in the first chapter provides little more than a backdrop for the subsequent discussions of specific policy domains, which in turn are pitched at a considerably lower level of abstraction than most regulationist work. There is little evidence in the book of mid-level theorizing, or of the development of intermediate concepts, that might help bridge the gap between the close policy commentaries on, for example, child benefits or workfare programming and relatively abstract formulations like the 'neo-liberal social mode of economic regulation' (p. 38). Moreover, there are only occasional glimpses of the actual economic shifts that are afforded such

explanatory power, since for the most part the book is concerned with discussions of the twists and turns of the policy process. In this latter respect, the policy commentaries are thorough and well documented. And it is difficult to argue with the authors' substantive conclusion that – in a world of growing economic *insecurity* – what we know as social-security policies 'will increasingly involve the mass subsidization of low wages, with a gradual movement away from the relief of non-employment . . . in the name of economic efficiency' (p. 18). In this sense, the underlying processes of economic determination that Grover and Stewart draw attention to here seem again to be bubbling to the surface.

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Harris, Colette **Control and Subversion: Gender Relations in Tajikistan** London and Virginia: Pluto Press 2004 216 pp. £16.99 (paperback)

Academic interest in the experiences of Central Asian women increased dramatically after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and there have since appeared numerous accounts of gendered oppression in these societies. However, with a few exceptions, this work has until recently tended to be descriptive and anti-theoretical. *Control and Subversion*, a theoretically grounded, ethnographic study of the relationship between masculinities, femininities and social control in Tajikistan, is a refreshing departure from this trend. While it paints an uncompromisingly bleak picture of the everyday lives of women and men in Tajikistan, it also introduces theoretical insights into their everyday gender practices and contributes to feminist interpretations of masculinities, femininities and power in certain segments of Central Asian society.

The initial premise of the book is straightforward: women and women in Tajikistan live in worlds that are severely proscribed by traditional conventions of gender, age and ethnicity, which, as a constellation of power relations, form the foundation for social control within the society. However, it is the nuances that Harris brings to this argument, illustrated through the use of narrative life histories, which make it particularly interesting. First, she explores how both masculinities and femininities are constructed and contested within the context of everyday life in Tajikistan. Second, she demonstrates how multiple subjectivities of gender, age, class, ethnicity and personality intersect to create or inhibit possibilities for individual choice within the society. Third, she interprets her ethnographic data through lenses of feminist and post-structuralist theory, focusing in particular on the relationship between power and sexuality. By borrowing Judith Butler's concept of 'gender performance', Harris deconstructs submissive behaviour which is often taken at face value to suggest that, far from being a demonstration of conformity, it is actually a form of strategic agency or subversion to restrictive social hierarchies. Michel Foucault's theories of micro-power, on the other hand, enable her to explore the fluidity and multiplicity of power relations within the society, particularly as they are manifested in conventions of family, love and sexuality. Finally, in her attempt to familiarize the exotic, Harris' frequent comparisons between gender and social control in Tajikistan and 'western' societies offer ample opportunity for readers to reflect critically on our own constructions of 'the other'.

Control and Subversion is organized to address these issues across a wide spectrum of social institutions, from the macro-level of the nation to the micro-relations of the marriage bed. Harris first provides an overview of her theoretical framework and a cursory history of politics, Islam, women and family in Tajikistan. The second chapter offers an introduction to women's lives in pre-Soviet Tajik society, the Russian colonization of Central Asia, controversial Soviet gender policies such as the *hujum* ('attack') on the traditional veiling and seclusion of women

during the 1920s, and the relationship between the entrenchment of traditional gender identities and resistance to Russification. Chapter Three focuses more specifically on community forms of control, particularly honour and shame as understood in popular Islam, and demonstrates how compliance with gender norms for both men and women is enforced through constant surveillance and self-surveillance within the community. Chapter Four narrows the discussion to the level of the family and looks at how obedience is maintained through intergenerational power relations, including relationships between parents and children, elders and younger family members, and mother and *kelin* (daughter-in-law or bride). It also gives a brief introduction to the issue of love and loveless marriages, focusing particularly on how marriage partners are often selected by parents according to familial, not individual, criteria. Chapter Five is an exploration of the discrepancies between outward behaviour and internal desires, particularly as these are mediated through gender performances. In this chapter, Harris argues that Tajik men and women assert agency over their own lives by donning different 'gender masks' which expand their possibilities for choice in particular relationships. The last substantive chapter is concerned with sexuality, desire, passion and love within heterosexual relationships, and ends with the assertion that conformity to stereotypical gender norms is a key factor in the failure of intimate relationships between men and women in Tajikistan.

Many of the claims made in *Control and Subversion* remain matters of debate. However, this gives the book particular value as it offers new ethnographic evidence that raises a number of important questions about gender in Tajikistan which, until now, have been under-researched. To what extent are gender performances, including those which perpetuate hierarchical relations, examples of genuine human agency? How compatible are local understandings of agency and control with the theories of self and society that are employed to interpret gender relations in Central Asian societies? What are the possibilities for social change in a society so structured by internalized power relations of gender and generation? Harris makes an important contribution to the debate on these and other questions. In addition, she gives powerful voices to a small cast of complex characters who, under other circumstances, are often silenced. The combination of this humanist approach, theoretical interpretation and systematic investigation of the issues above make it an excellent resource for those interested in both gender and Central Asian studies.

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Holden, Andrew **Jehovah's Witnesses: Portrait of a Contemporary Religious Movement** London: Routledge 2002 206 pp. £55.00 (hardback) £16.99 (paperback)

Of all the non-mainstream Christian sects, the Jehovah's Witnesses (along with the Mormons) are the most familiar to us, from their door-knocking. Of how many other religions could so many non-members name their evangelistic magazines? We might not want them, we may not ever have read them, but we've all seen copies of *The Watchtower* and *Awake!* And many people are aware of the JWs' policy on blood transfusion, and even perhaps that they won't vote, or fight in wars.

But how much do we know about their beliefs, about how their lives are different from ours, and about how they manage to fit into a very JW-unfriendly world? This last, in particular, is a sociological question; in Roy Wallis's terminology, the Jehovah's Witnesses are very much a world-rejecting religion. Much of Andrew Holden's book seeks to answer this question.

He spends less than a chapter on the history, doctrines and structure of the religion. Although the first two can be found in many books on Christian sects, it would have been useful, in his later discussion of how certain beliefs and practices of the Witnesses

affect their lives and their social interaction with the rest of the world, if he had given us more detail on their doctrines, both their origins and development, and the logic behind them – and how they differ from mainstream Christian teachings. Too many sociologists are shy of discussing beliefs, as being outside their remit. But without having a clear understanding of what religions believe, and why, our understanding of their social groupings and movements is seriously incomplete.

Holden spends some time on modernity theory and its application to the JWs; probably his most relevant reference is that the non-mystical, rational religion of Jehovah's Witnesses is a bulwark against 'the terror of chaos' (Peter Berger, *Facing up to Modernity*, 1977), in that its absolutism 'eradicates risk and ambiguity' for members. He also points up the contradiction that the religion makes full use of the benefits of 'rationalism, liberal democracy and advanced technology' which it condemns.

The most interesting part of Holden's book, and its most valuable contribution to our understanding of the JWs, is his discussion of the problems Witnesses have with their families and friends, and in employment. Several chapters, based on in-depth interviews, explore these difficulties. What is it like, for example, to be a child growing up in a home that doesn't celebrate Christmas? Or not being allowed to take part in school sports or other extra-curricular activities? Or facing the normal problems of being a teenager, such as discovering and exploring their sexuality? Like many new religions, the JWs have a strict moral code – homosexuality and pre-marital sex are condemned – and they produce literature for their teenage members, reinforcing these teachings.

There are other problems, common to all religions. What if one partner in a marriage is a member, and the other isn't? From the evidence Holden presents, it seems that in these cases more usually the wife is a member, and the husband not. (Why this should be, he doesn't say.) One might think that for a very patriarchal religion, which teaches submission of the wife to the husband, this would create real problems, but the impression is that in most cases couples muddle through, finding compromises that work for them – maybe they will have Christmas decorations just in one room of their home, or the JW wife will treat the Christmas dinner as just a nice meal. On an individual basis, such doublethink appears to be both a necessary and an acceptable practice.

This is obviously anecdotal qualitative sociology, almost social reportage. Holden presents a series of snapshots within a framework. Other sociologists doing a similar study under different circumstances, at a different time, perhaps in a different country, might get different findings. As he says in a brief discussion of his methodological approach, 'It is only by understanding the natives' worldview that ethnographers are able to make sense of an individual act, but these interpretations can only be partial and must be subjected to continual revision.'

But the worldview depends on the doctrine, and as mentioned, the book is weak here. It touches only in passing on one of the greatest problems of authoritarian millenarian religions, how their members cope with *changes* in doctrine and practice imposed (usually without any explanation) from above. The failure of Christ to return in 1975 (and previously in 1918 and various other times) should have created classic cognitive dissonance. (Incidentally, Holden is incorrect in saying that in post-1975 JW literature 'there has been no mention of these prophecies'; in fact, they are explained away as individual over-enthusiasm.) The numerous books by former JWs often mention, for example, the JW insistence (but only since 1937) that Christ died on a stake, not a cross, and the frequent changes in attitude to organ transplants, and to fraternizing with non-members. A rather more detailed reference to such ex-member accounts would have provided a useful balance to the information from Holden's own interviews.

Holden has largely succeeded in what he set out to do, and as an ethnographic study this book has some value. For any readers

with a reasonable knowledge of the Jehovah's Witnesses, it doesn't add a great deal, though the personal stories provide a very human illumination.

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Jackson, Phil **Inside Clubbing: Sensual Experiments in the Art of Being Human** Oxford: Berg 2004 189 pp. £43.64 (hardback) £14.16 (paperback)

Welcome to the pleasure dome? With his first book, *Inside Clubbing: Sensual Experiments in the Art of Being Human*, Phil Jackson provides us with a provocative account of a contemporary club scene in Britain. In the introduction, Jackson sums up his approach and style: 'This book is about dancing, smiling, drugging, flirting, fucking, friendship and having a ball'.

His book is based on an ethnographic investigation of the independent, non-mainstream club scene in London. Jackson is particularly well placed to undertake a study of this kind because he has been 'clubbing it up' in the capital since the early 1980s. One of the key strengths of the study is that Jackson had excellent access to his sample, most of them 'dedicated party people' aged between twenty-five and fifty-five. Jackson conducted interviews and participant observation in a variety of club settings, including sex and fetish clubs, and he makes no excuse of the fact that he went 'native'. Unfortunately, he does not provide us with any details of the practicalities of carrying out his ethnography or how he went about analysing the data. For instance, I wanted to know how he managed field relations with respondents who were his friends. I also wanted to know how he went about recording data in the club setting whilst under the influence of drugs like LSD. More serious perhaps, is Jackson's failure to consider the ethical and political issues embedded within this ethnography.

The first part of this book is split into seven short chapters and the author takes us through the hedonistic world that is clubland. He formulates his argument by drawing on Bourdieu's theory of *habitus* and Nietzche's notion of the Dionysian body and applies them to what Jackson views as the key elements of clubbing; dancing, music, sex, clothes, drugs and the vibe. A chapter is devoted to each of these themes. The argument Jackson attempts to thread throughout this book, and he discusses in detail in the second part of the book, is that clubbing is subversive and emancipatory because it provides a sanctuary where people are free to unleash the shackles that preserve everyday moral and social sensibilities. The sociality found in clubs, he argues, offers an alternative collective social order where people are granted access to explore sensual indulgences. Outside of the club space, this experiential knowledge is carried over into the everyday worlds of those who participate. Accordingly, he proposes that clubbing, and 'the drugging' that comes with this leisure option, has contributed to 'a radical shift in the sensual fabric of this country'.

Like others interested in British club culture, Jackson has focused exclusively on the London scene, a point he does not make explicit. This omission is serious given the claims he makes about the social meaning attached to clubbing. The scene in the capital is unique; the number of non-mainstream club nights on offer in Greater London is vast and the majority of venues are small and independent. His account fails to consider the club scene in provincial towns and cities where choice of venues and music genre is limited and increasingly being dictated by major leisure corporations offering a standardized product. He paints a utopian and subversive picture of night life and clubland, which in my view masks the mundane reality of night time leisure in British towns and cities.

Jackson provides us with an overly-romanticized view of a specialist club scene that entirely misses the mainstream clubbing

experience. It's a good piece of exploratory journalism but this book does not engage with contemporary debates about British nightlife and night time economies.

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Oliver, P. **Writing Your Thesis** Sage Publications 2004 197 pp. £16.99 (paperback)

This book aims to give postgraduate students engaged in masters or doctoral research 'practical advice' on successful thesis writing and to show the positive aspects of the writing process. It is divided into two parts, the first focusing on the process of academic writing and the second on writing the thesis and its various chapters, publications, and the viva.

The author writes in a style that is readable and accessible. The layout of the book is particularly good: it is well structured, easy to read and easy to navigate. Each chapter begins with a brief description of its contents, and ends with a list of 'study strategies' to encourage the reader to put some of the advice into action. The chapters are divided into numerous sections and subsections and contain boxed summaries of key points.

As someone who has recently completed a Ph.D. and supervized masters' students dissertations I could see the value of this informative book in both cases. For students engaged in masters research this is a 'how to' guide, a useful reference book which will cover most of what they need to know about the process of dissertation writing, and in some instances more. It could be kept throughout the course and dipped into again and again. For Ph.D. students this would be most useful in the early stages, as an orientation to the field and a guide to the different issues they should be thinking about (but are likely to want to explore in greater depth elsewhere). It will primarily serve as an introductory text, although they might want to return to particular chapters at a later stage, for example when writing the thesis conclusion or preparing for the viva.

Students sometimes think of the process of thesis writing as a series of disconnected components and only think about each stage as it arises. So, for example, data analysis is not considered until after data collection, 'writing up' until after data analysis and the viva until the day it is scheduled! The real strength of this book is that it helps students to view thesis writing as a process and to think about how different stages are linked and how decisions made at one stage might affect another. This holistic approach is particularly helpful in encouraging students to look beyond the next hurdle and to think about the way in which their work evolves as something other than linear. A book such as this is also particularly useful in the current climate: as deadlines for completion become stricter students need to find their feet more quickly and use their first year efficiently.

In targeting a broad audience – all postgraduate students – the book faces the difficulty of trying to be all things to all people, and in places it does sacrifice depth for breadth. Some sections can only be aimed at masters students – even early stage Ph.D. students are unlikely to need an explanation of the difference between survey and qualitative data (pp. 22–4) or the difference between positivism and interpretivism (p. 28). Developing a coherent argument in the thesis is only briefly considered (pp. 34–5) and the chapter on 'the data analysis chapters' is rather basic. I would have liked to have seen more on different ways of organizing the core of the thesis, expressing ideas, and developing the craft of writing, which are considered in some depth in a similar text which is aimed only at doctoral students (P. Dunleavy 2003 *Authoring a PhD: How to Plan, Draft, Write and Finish a Doctoral Thesis or Dissertation* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan). Suggestions for further reading are fairly limited and are buried in the text – clearer recommendations, perhaps summarized at the end of the book, would be useful.

Overall, however, this is a well-organized and effective text that touches on a wide range of issues. I would have benefited from reading this book in the early stages of my doctoral studies and I will be recommending this book to future masters and doctoral students.

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Oudshoorn, Nelly and *Pinch, Trevor* (eds) **How Users Matter: The Co-construction of Users and Technologies** MIT Press 2003 340 pp. £25.95 (hardback)

Use stands, from many angles, as a privileged object for sociological inquiry. It is in use that people characterize their relationship to objects and attribute values to them. Use is also something that we teach and are taught about, something that we may impose or contest. But, in order to cope with this prevalence, social research has to avoid a recurrent mistake, that of reducing use to an encounter between two already formed and essentially independent entities – namely, the user and the object of use. The contributors to this volume carefully avoid this error. Their detailed empirical studies aim at making explicit the entanglement of users and technologies. It is not only a matter of pointing out the fact that users are taken into account in the design of technology, or that they may have their word to say. It is about showing how both users and technologies are mutually shaped.

The contributors to this volume cover a wide range of cases – from telephones to vaccines, from contraceptive techniques to personal computers. The balance between this empirical variety and the coherence of the overall approach is among the many points that make this volume stand out for its originality. Although different research methods and intellectual backgrounds are visible through the contributions, notions such as 'technological script' or 'user configuration' play a major role in federating them into an STS (science and technology studies) discussion framework.

One of the main results of this collective endeavour is to show that many versions of what a user is are at stake in technological innovation. The notion of 'user' explodes into a myriad of collective agencies, of diverse scope and scale, fighting to be considered as legitimate spokespersons. For instance, some contributions study the role of advocacy groups while others focus on how the State may stand as the user of a particular technology. Users also have bodies that might be projected in various ways in the design phase of a technology, and manipulated in its test phase or its implementation phase. As many contributions convincingly show, the definition of users as gendered bodies is never stable and can be at the origin of important political controversies. The authors also devote particular attention to recalcitrant voices in technological innovation: not using a technology, or refusing to use it in the prescribed way, can indeed be a way to frame it.

Users also have a widespread economically-oriented version: consumers. Consequently, as a number of contributions explicitly point out, much of what can be said about the co-construction of technology and users can apply to the co-construction of 'supply' and 'demand', i.e. to the formation of markets and to the crucial role that mediators play in it. Finally, although some of the contributions focus largely on social representations, the work presented in Oudshoorn and Pinch's volume does not limit itself to the realm of symbolic projections of users into technology (or of technology into users). The materiality of the relevant practices is emphasized, which allows the authors to take into account the several kinds of trials in which users and technologies are put to the test.

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Saks, Mike **Orthodox and Alternative Medicine: Politics, Professionalization and Health Care** London: Sage 2003 194 pp. £19.99 (paperback)

Mike Saks's account of the fundamental aim of his new book is '[T]o provide a rounded social scientific account of the historical, contemporary and possible future development of health care in the Anglo–American context, which recognizes that orthodox and alternative medicine are two seamlessly interrelated sides of the same coin' (p. 162).

Saks's approach is resolutely neo-Weberian, emphasizing the interplay of competing occupational group interests. Successful occupations secure their income, status and power in the marketplace by socially excluding their competitors. In this framework, orthodox medicine is defined as those forms of health care that are to a significant extent formally underwritten by the state – which, in the current Anglo–American context, means biomedicine and its heavy reliance on the use of drugs and surgery. Alternative medicine, conversely, is defined by its political marginality, as evidenced by its lack of funding from official sources, its exclusion from or at best marginalization within the medical curriculum, its typically unfavourable presentation in mainstream medical journals, and the legal restrictions imposed on its practitioners.

Clearly, orthodox and alternative medicine are socially constructed. The triumph of biomedicine in the West does not prove its epistemological or practical superiority over alternative systems. Western science, Saks emphasizes, is not a neutral and epistemologically privileged activity compared to alternative ways of understanding the world. It follows that there is not an inevitable link between the biomedical paradigm and medical orthodoxy; conceivably, in future, other paradigms may capture the field, or at least secure a firmer footing within it if they succeed in pursuing a project of professionalization.

If orthodoxy can change, so too can alternative medicine. This is why Saks prefers the term 'alternative': in his neo-Weberian approach, it has to be defined in relation to a prevailing orthodoxy (and *orthopractice*) that has marginalized it. There is no essence of alternative medicine. Not all alternative medicine is 'traditional': for example, biofeedback is an innovative technology. Nor is alternative medicine necessarily 'holistic': Saks refers to the mechanistic way in which osteopaths treat back pain. The term 'complementary medicine' has the advantage of being relative, but not all alternative medicine presents itself as complementing the mainstream; thus homoeopathy, although socially respectable, is founded on principles that imply a rejection of biomedical orthodoxy and its allopathic approach.

Saks provides a fascinating account of the fluctuating relationships between biomedical orthodoxy and the host of alternatives to it. In both Britain and the USA, the ascent of biomedicine meant that alternative medicine was marginalized until the 1950s. Within the neo-Weberian framework, this is interpreted as a successful strategy by doctors to maintain their income, power and prestige. It is, contentiously, a story of professional self-interest, not altruistic concern to protect the public.

From the 1950s onwards, alternative medicine has begun to establish footholds within the mainstream. An oppositional medical counterculture developed, fuelled not only by New Age ideals but also by consumerism, the principles of self-help and, not least, pragmatic responses to the inadequacies and costs of orthodox treatments. Out of this grew projects to professionalize alternative medicine, some of which, including homoeopathy, osteopathy, chiropractic and acupuncture, have enjoyed a considerable measure of success.

The author's style is dispassionate and clinical, though he does occasionally permit himself humour, as in his discussion of Ward's pill, which was promoted as a cure-all, and Graham's electromagnetic Celestial Bed for treating impotence and infertility. Saks drily comments that neither 'could be fully justified in terms of the available evidence'.

Saks is a clear-minded guide to a wide-ranging literature. His book can be

wholeheartedly recommended to students, researchers and practitioners alike.

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Spulber, Nicolas **Russia's Economic Transition: From Late Tsarism to the New Millennium** Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press 2003 404 pp. £55.00 (hardback)

Dickson, Bruce J. **Red Capitalists in China: The Party, Private Entrepreneurs, and Prospects for Political Change** New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003 183 pp. £45.00 (hardback)

The fall of the USSR and the Peoples' Republics and Socialist States of Eastern Europe leaves only four self-defined Marxist-Leninist states (North Korea, China, Cuba and Vietnam). These two books focus on the historical transformations of Russia/USSR, currently in transition from state socialism, and China, undergoing radical reform, but still clinging to its socialist identity.

Nicolas Spulber seeks to further understanding of economic transition by comparing three significant periods of economic change: the rise of capitalism in Tsarist Russia, the industrialization drive in the USSR, and the transformation since 1991 to market capitalism in the Russian Federation. The book is heavy on empirical economic data and description. The main agents of change in the Tsarist period, he contents, were the state, the railway system and foreign capital and expertise. The post-Tsarist period Spulber defines as a transition to a 'state capitalist economy' based on 'the absolute power of the General Secretary of the Communist Party' organized on 'war economy methods' (p. 281). The thrust of the argument, in explicit support of von Mises, is that state ownership and the absence of a market precluded rational economic calculation. Soviet 'state capitalism' therefore led to misallocation and waste. While the different periods (New Economic Policy, early economic planning) are discussed, we have no conceptually significant periodization of economic and social change in the Soviet period. Hence the earlier periods of Soviet planning (e.g. 1928 to 1940) witnessed significant and positive economic transformation, whereas the period of perestroika under Gorbachev followed one of decline and itself exacerbated the coordination of production. Many of his policies (the introduction of market relationships, the growth of enterprise autonomy) should be conceptualized as part of the transition from state socialism rather than as remedying deficiencies of the planning system.

The 'third transition' began after the collapse of the USSR, and the author charts the major steps of destatization, privatization and marketization. Severe economic decline, increasing inequalities, corruption and lawlessness make this the most impaired of the three transitions. A major feature accounting for the failure of a transition to capitalism, it is contended, is the continuation of the former nomenklatura which perpetuated many of the Soviet patterns thereby circumventing the construction of a modern capitalist system. The account ignores the sequencing and process of the Yeltsin reforms, the inadequacy of policy to build institutions before the introduction of markets and the privatization of assets.

Spulber's attempts to generalize about the three transitions amount to the selection of empirical aspects of change (role of the state, catching up with the West). The idea that 'state capitalism' characterized the Soviet period ignores that many of the criteria entailed by the concept – i.e. corporate ownership of productive assets subject to market forces – were absent in the USSR. As the 'nomenklatura' was composed of as many as three million executive and administrative personnel, it is not surprising that many of them came to power in post-Soviet conditions. However, this was not a unitary group and more importantly, different elites had disparate interests with respect to private property and the market. Moreover,

after the collapse, the post-Soviet elites were acting in quite a different institutional setting, in a world market economy, and were subject to Western political pressures, which also determined their behaviour. It is not credible to claim, as does Spulber, that Yelstin and Putin are reconstructing the old Soviet regime; the market and private property has led to something different, may be even less desirable, in its place.

The book would have been more appealing to sociologists if it had referred to current debates in the transformation/transition literature. It is useful as a source on economic change in the three periods defined, but will be less valuable on general courses on transition politics and society. The editing could have been improved: we have Russian measures (*dessiatinas* and *poods*), and references to the French edition of Engels on Russia. There are useful footnoted references to guide further research but no systematic bibliography.

China presents a different perspective on the combination of state socialism with markets and property. The Communist Party has presided over the successful introduction of privatization and marketization. In his analysis of the transformation process, Bruce J. Dickson focuses on two major themes: the extent to which the Chinese 'Leninist regime' may adapt to privatization and marketization; and the effect of economic change on the political order. This is a well organized, interesting book which should feature in courses on transition from state socialism and modern China. The work employs an American political science approach to the exploration of possibilities of incremental and system change, which is substantiated by 230 interviews with government officials and 524 entrepreneurs.

Dickson brings out the theoretical incompatibility between what the Party has stood for and its embeddedness in the Chinese economy, and the logic of autonomy required for a privatized market economy to operate effectively. Both the Left in the Party and Western advocates of regime change believe that the logic of development will lead to capitalism and democracy: the former with harmful and the latter with benign effects. Dickson, however, sides (though not unambiguously) with the revisionist line of communist reformers. The new entrepreneurial class, he argues, is essentially a 'non-critical' component of civil society and does not seek a politically autonomous role. He envisages the entrepreneurial class as a component in a corporatist constellation of political forces. Party policy of the inclusion of these strata will further their integration into the political system maintaining the hegemony of the Party. Hence a 'transformation' of Chinese society will be successfully completed without collapse.

The author's analysis may be correct in the short-run. But it remains questionable whether such a regime could any longer be meaningfully defined as 'Leninist'. As he concedes, 'the evolutionary forces . . . will serve to undermine the foundations of [a Leninist political] system . . .' (p. 164). He also notes the growing weakness in some areas of party organizations and the loss of control to 'traditional clans, triads and . . . newly established Christian churches' (p. 48). The analysis would have been more complete if the reader was shown how types of ownership vary by economic sectors. The relative weight of state ownership, interlocking companies in the non-financial and financial sectors as well as details on the extent, form and density of foreign ownership would have made the account more convincing and would have contributed to the speculation on the stability of the supposed new corporatist order.

The effects of growing inequality, unemployment, corruption and 'environmental degradation' (all noted by Dickson) may well lead to a political backlash. Unlike the former central and eastern European countries, which had fairly stable political systems, China has been a country of political turmoil, which may again surprise Western observers. Western interests might prove ineffective in maintaining the desired

'regime change' in China. A reversion to an autarchic state socialism seems most unlikely, but the country, as it loses the binding forces generated by Marxism-Leninism, may, like the former Soviet Union, disintegrate into separate states.

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