Thomas Scheff has undertaken an ambitious task: to outline ‘a new approach to research in the human sciences’ (p. 1). His goal ‘is to describe an approach to all human research that allows the interpenetration of theory, method and data in such a way that each equally casts light on the other, generating a theory that is based directly on observations of actual human behavior, both inner experience and outer conduct’ (p. 1). To accomplish this worthy and monumental task, Scheff borrows from botany the notion of part/whole morphology in which the least parts – micro-examples – are linked to the greatest wholes – macro-examples. Extended to the human sciences, such a paradigm, Scheff argues, would connect the internal experience of emotion as expressed in conversation or literature to the external structures of society as expressed in social theory. Scheff believes, moreover, that just as hermeneutics and science can sometimes be integrated in extraordinary works of literary imagination so they can be in extraordinary works in the human sciences. In the end, Scheff believes that his part/whole analysis will provide scholars with a framework that would enable them to restore human reality to the human sciences.

Scheff’s Proustian quest is a noble one and one must admire his intellectual courage and daring. It is indeed quite stimulating to read this text, for it is not every season that a book advocates a potential solution to the fundamental epistemological divide in the human sciences – that of interpretation (humanities) verses prediction (science). Is Scheff’s argument convincing? It may well be to social scientists who continue to dream about an ever-elusive epistemological integration in the human sciences. Scholars of the human sciences, however, may wonder how Scheff, a sociologist seeking to integrate the subtleties of human interaction to the systematics of social structures, can be so blissfully ignorant of what has transpired in anthropology and philosophy during this century. One could argue that A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, who, like Scheff, borrowed a concept from the biological sciences to construct the theory of structural-functionalism, was concerned with part/whole analysis. His parts were social structures built up from the field investigations of non-western societies, which could then be compared – the gist of his comparative sociology – in order to construct laws of ‘social statics’. More significant than the highly questionable philosophical foundation of Radcliffe-Brown’s comparative sociology is the fundamental epistemological problem of Malinowskian ethnography: can the solitary ethnographer working in one village use her or his village specific data (parts) to write about a total society (whole)? In the 1980s this problem sparked a ferocious debate about the philosophical foundation of ethnographic representation. Can an ethnographer portray any culture – past or present – as an homogenous totality? And what can one do when contemporary social hybridity, perhaps the most important social phenomenon for human scientists to confront in globalised social universes, threatens to overwhelm any semblance of social uniformity or predictability in the human sciences? Scheff does not address these important issues.

What’s more, he seems to be unaware of the interminable anthropological penchant for debating rationality, which began long ago in the work of E. E. Evans-Pritchard and has continued today in debates among Dan Sperber, Clifford Geertz, Robin Horton, Claude Levi-Strauss, Stanley Tambiah, Ernest Gellner, Gananath Obeysekere and Marshall Sahlins – to name just some of the major protagonists. In the end, these are fundamentally part/whole discussions in
which several commentators, like Scheff, seek to integrate rationalism and relativism, or, put another way, etic and emic, another version of the anthropological part/whole discussion that Scheff overlooks.

Even though Scheff’s mission to integrate the human sciences is laudable, his philosophical myopia is disappointing. Part/whole analysis dates to the beginnings of Greek philosophy, the legacy of which has compelled a more than 2,500 year search to find the one in the many, or in Scheff’s language, to link parts and wholes. Although the works of Richard Rorty, especially his monumental Philosophy and the mirror of nature, have cast considerable doubt on the viability of integrative epistemological endeavours, phenomenologists are more sanguine. For them what links parts and wholes is not so much the competing discourses of the human sciences, but the notion that intersubjectivity is the central facet of social life, which is, above all, about negotiating and renegotiating such distinctions as the one and the many, self and other, and, alas parts (particulars) and wholes (universals). Michael Jackson has perspicaciously termed this ongoing process of negotiation the social dialectic.

To be fair, Scheff makes some compelling points in Emotions, the social bond and human reality. His plea to restore the long lost emotions to theoretical rumination in the human sciences is felicitous. His critique of disciplinary specialisation and how it constrains creativity in the human sciences is noteworthy. And yet his own tunnel vision makes one wonder if the goal of integrating the human sciences is more a theoretical dream than a social reality.

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This work represents a trilogy in a triple sense. It is a sequel to the author’s two previous monographs on Iceland (Culture and history in medieval Iceland and Nature and policy in Iceland 1400–1800). It focuses on three field sites (an academic institute, a fishing village and a farming community) and is divided into three major parts (keys, orchestration and themes). Georges Dumézil, who forcefully argued that westerners tended to think in tripartite schemes, would have been amused. Given the preoccupation in many of Hastrup’s earlier works with classification, cognitive schemes and Lévi-Straussian methods, this structural neatness need not be surprising. The formal appearance however is deceptive, for with this volume Hastrup seems to have radically revised her concept of anthropology and Icelandic ethnography.

For one thing, while in her earlier works she tended to present the subjects of her study as prisoners of language and culture, as victims of hegemonic cognitive schemes beyond their making and control, in the work under discussion she generally emphasises the importance of understanding ‘how people, and here Icelanders, contribute to history through their daily practices’ (p. 141). Hastrup is rarely open or explicit about this important shift in perspective from structure to agency. The following statement (p. 11), however, is fairly unambiguous:

Painters may change their style of painting; what at one time were the preferred strokes of the brush may be subverted by others, just as the shades of colour and the favourite kind of light will naturally shift in the course of time. Concurrently with changes in anthropology in general, my own emphasis in the study of the world of the Icelanders has shifted from an implicit idea of representation to an explicit view of theory as a practice which cannot represent, only to seek to understand. Like speaking, understanding is an active engagement with the world, not a passive reception.

Perhaps this change in approach has taken Hastrup with some surprise. At least, she is not always consistent on this score. At one point she suggests that Icelandic society has ‘run wild’ (p. 161), in the sense that practice and discourse (and, presumably, categories) go in opposite directions, and it is difficult to see how this can be the case if one takes
seriously Hastrup’s argument that categories are ‘summaries of action’ (p. 159). Nevertheless, the people Hastrup writes about seem, finally to have been granted the property of agency.

Another interesting sign of change in perspective, which seems to resonate with the new emphasis on agency, engagement and embeddedness, is represented by the way in which Hastrup deals with ethnographic disagreement and the challenges of her critics, particularly ‘native’ anthropologists. In some of her earlier works, Hastrup tended to take on the role of the privileged observer operating outside, or in the absence of, any discursive community. Native ethnographers, she argued, were by definition mystified by the cognitive schemes of their culture. As a result, their arguments could not possibly challenge her analyses. Their view simply represented further examples of mystification, supplying the detached observer with additional data. Hastrup’s image of the heroic ethnographer was very much in the spirit of the ‘independent’ peasant, Bjartur, in one of Halldór Laxness’s novels; a person who thinks of himself as an island who is accountable only to himself. Significantly, perhaps, Hastrup entitled one of her collections of essays Island of anthropology. In the present work, on the other hand, she argues that ‘there simply is no single truth where the interpretation of human life is concerned, and any idea of a privileged path to understanding therefore is based on false assumptions’ (p. 73). And she manages to respond rather sensibly to many of the points of her critics.

Moreover, and this follows from what has just been said, Hastrup presents her volume as ‘an offering to the conversational communities to whom it matters – for those who take an interest’ (p. 20). Again, however, she occasionally lapses into an earlier discursive mode. There is no attempt, for instance, to understand differences in ‘native’ criticism. And, strangely enough, Hastrup ignores much non-native anthropology of Iceland, including the critique of Brydon and Durrenberger, as if only ‘the natives’ speak back (p. 52). The discursive community seems to rigidly separate inside and outside, natives and non-natives. And yet Hastrup suggests that ‘(e)ven if the distinction between culture and wilderness, or between inside and outside, has some relevance for the understanding of the Icelandic world, it must not be reified in anthropological discourse’ (p. 191).

Thematically, the book is a complex terrain. Hastrup reflects on her own relationship to the field, situating her ethnographic accounts in the academic institute in the capital where she spent most of her time and the rural communities she visited: a fishing village in west Iceland and a farming community in the south-east. She discusses the role of tradition and ideology, the ‘imagining’ of the Icelandic community, and she analyses the Icelanders’ sense of history, gender, language and landscape. I found her analyses of the following issues particularly interesting. First, she convincingly argues that much of her material suggests that Icelanders have traditionally refused to separate myth and history, pointing out that such a position is summarised in the concept of saga. Second, the chapter on landscape (ch. 5) provides an excellent analysis of the phenomenology of spatial relations and Icelanders’ attachment to both land and sea. Finally, Hastrup’s portrayal of the food ritual called porrablót as a kind of ‘Babette’s feast’ is both entertaining and perceptive.

As the author herself makes quite clear, this book is not a monograph in any conventional sense. It mixes theory, ethnography and cultural comparison all the time, moving back and forth between the three field-sites discussed, and between the present and past. The book opens with long citations from the poetry of W. H. Auden and Louis MacNeice from the 1930s which refers to their journey to Iceland. Hastrup frequently employs the analogy of music to illustrate her theoretical points, and indeed that analogy is often a useful one to underline the constraints of time and the nature of embedded practice. Along the way she repeatedly refers to native phrases and terminology. Occasionally she makes minor and innocent mistakes (for instance, situr (sits) is reproduced as sitjur (p. 151)), but generally her text demonstrates detailed knowledge of the native language, written Icelandic sources and the historical context.

This book has much to offer to students of Iceland, ethnographic practice and anthropological theory. A place apart is, in
my view, the best volume in Hastrup’s trilogy on Iceland and anthropology. Her theorising is not only more mature, coherent and humanistic than in her earlier volumes, it is blended with perceptive ethnographic observations and analyses in language that is generally clear and accessible. Perhaps more importantly, Hastrup finally seriously engages with critics of her earlier works, with a fair amount of fairness, ease and style, underlining the importance of the discursive community in framing and settling issues of ethnographic disagreement. Nevertheless, and somewhat disappointingly, she concludes her book as if she were to finish the conversation once and for all: ‘I too must now fall silent’ (p. 208).

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Jean La Fontaine has written a remarkable book, one of the best and possibly most controversial examples of ‘applied’ anthropology in recent years. I use that term with caution, because all I mean by it is that her work has had real world consequences which have been significant and powerful.

In the early 1990s La Fontaine set out to explore the explosion of claims about satanic abuse. By the late 1980s newspapers had begun to carry stories about children who were being sexually abused and even murdered by satanic cults. The details of these cult activities were horrifying: altars of naked female bodies, black hooded men, gruesome sacrifices by knife, women (‘breeders’) who gave birth within the magical circle and were forced to behead and eat the infant. Common themes include Satan-representatives, human and animal sacrifice, cannibalism, sex, drinking blood, pentagrams, candles, masks, robes and so forth. These cults were perceived as so successfully deviant that the failure to produce any evidence of the bloody murders was seen as proof of satanic malevolence.

Despite the bizarre details, the allegations were taken seriously by many people. At an international conference in 1998 one participant asserted that in Britain alone 4,000 children were sacrificed each year.

Between 1987 and 1992 there were nearly 80 cases of alleged satanic child abuse in Britain. Social workers removed children from homes to rescue them from cults. Adult women also began to appear in therapists’ offices as victims and unwilling participants in these rites, although this phenomenon was far more important in the States. Many therapists believed adult women clients who claimed to be escaping from the cults – at this point, therapists argued that believing the women’s memories was part of their cure – and some therapists developed projective tests for satanic abuse, treatment protocols for cult victims and in some cases encouraged the legal prosecution of cult members. In the United States at least one man was jailed for years for participating in such groups.

But the ritual abuse (as it came to be called) never took place, or at least it was never proven. La Fontaine is not the first to provide evidence for the non-occurrence of satanic ritual, at least as described in these settings. (There were teenagers who dabbled in a sometimes lethal mixture of drugs, hard rock and satanic imagery.) Neither Scotland Yard nor the FBI were able to substantiate the claims, even after thorough investigation. La Fontaine does seriously and soberly pursue the various options to explain the allegations, but she concludes that these have no basis in reality.

So how to explain this remarkable phenomenon? La Fontaine points out that allegations of satanic abuse are effectively equivalent to witchcraft accusations in early modern England and in many rural non-European societies. They have, after all, the classic features of the those accusations: sexual inversion, cannibalism, moral evil, bad power. They have also the unique feature of witchcraft accusations in a Christian context – association with Satan and inversion of the Christian mass. What sets these accusations apart from the others is the theme of child sexual abuse. It is sexual abuse, La Fontaine argues, not a black mass, which is presented as the deep evil of these late-twentieth-century tales. That, La
Fontaine remarks, tells us something about our society’s perception of the greatest of all evils: sex with children.

But she points out that ritual abuse accusations are an instance of a general phenomenon – belief in a mystical evil practised by members of your own society – which anthropologists have studied in many parts of the world. Usually, anthropologists call this belief witchcraft or sorcery (although it is true that the social workers and therapists did not worry about the mystical evil, but the sexual abuse). Almost always, La Fontaine continues, anthropologists contrast these beliefs in mystical evil with the rationalism of the west. Witchcraft accusations (as compared to the gentle practice of neopagan witches) happen elsewhere: in Europe’s past, in the non-European present. Clearly that comfortable generalisation is false. The satanic ritual abuse phenomenon was widespread and taken seriously by many professionals with real-world consequences in contemporary America and England.

Why did it happen? As with the explanation of any witchcraft craze, it isn’t entirely clear, and how the craze happened and who was involved is easier to explain than why it emerged in the time and place that it did. La Fontaine suggests that child protective services and social workers have dangerous jobs with low pay, and the pursuit of satanic evil rather than deadbeat dads may have dramatised the danger and made the job seem morally heroic. She discovered that the claims tended to cluster in particular social service departments where there seems to have been some conflict in the group, and the accusations may have externalised the conflict. The accusations tended to be directed at families living in poverty, who in being poor were not mainstream and also legally defenceless. (In the States, the tide began to turn when some upper-middle-class women accused their fathers of ritual and sexual abuse, and their fathers took their therapists to court and won.) La Fontaine also points out that particular people became authorities on cult-spotting, and travelled around the country, offering their help and fuelling the panic. Once a social service department began to find more than one case, it too became ‘expert’ and was likely to find many. Nearly a third of British cases came out of one social service department. Finally, the scare seems to have been set off by a popular book, published in North America in 1980, about a woman tortured by satanic cults, and by Christian fundamentalists, many of them involved in the social services, who believed in the presence of Satan and were willing to seek for his influence.

So, as anthropologists have demonstrated again and again in their ethnographic studies of witchcraft accusation, social conflict and distress play a role in activating accusations, those targeted were marginal members of society, and experts emerged and intensified the anxiety. Why now? Like the witchcraze, the idea of satanic ritual abuse somehow ‘got loose’. The idea became present, it somehow became relevant, people were rewarded for identifying and prosecuting evil doers, and the hunt was on.

La Fontaine decided not to explore the American side of the phenomenon, and while that was in many ways was a sensible decision, I think she could have sharpened her account if she had. It is true that La Fontaine’s study was extremely detailed and thorough, and incorporating the vast American material with the same careful scrutiny would have been difficult. But the American craze took root earlier than the British one, and it was driven not by child protective services – though the fear that terrible things happened in daycare was not irrelevant – but by women who came in for therapy claiming to have been sexually abused, satanically abused, and eventually abducted by aliens. What made their claims so compelling was, first, that some of the claims were plausible and probably accurate, and second that the women believed them and were believably convinced of their rightness. At least part of the story here is dissociation, a psychological phenomenon involved in possession and trance in which someone loses a sense of the boundary between fantasy and reality. It has now become apparent that some people, when repeatedly traumatised, particularly as children, dissociate into fantasy states in order to escape from the experience of the trauma. Later, as adults, they may find themselves slipping in and out of fantasy states uncontrollably. In such states people are
highly suggestible and may not be able to distinguish the reality of the trauma from the fantasy of the escape. During the 1980s, thousands of American women came to believe that they had not only been sexually abused, but abused in more dramatic ways, following the story outlined in the 1980 memoir of Satanic abuse, *Michelle remembers*.

At least one observer (Joan Acocella) argues that the women involved were those whom the feminist movement left behind in the lower middle class. As victims, they got attention and caring and were able to express their distress – another anthropological observation about possession cults, but not linked to witchcraft *per se* except through the work of an American historian, Elizabeth Karlsen. And such claims, after all, displaced the distress from father or brother to anonymous, hooded outsiders. In any event, the women were emotionally believable. Therapists who felt that they could distinguish lies from honest emotion repeatedly said that they believed them. The existence of such vivid evidence became a powerful incentive to take the possibility of such cults seriously. From this perspective, the craze occurred when it did because it followed the cultural success of feminism for middle class women. La Fontaine raises these points, but does not discuss them in depth because of the focus of her material. They are, however, important pieces of the puzzle.

That aside, I have an enormous admiration for La Fontaine’s work. While the public probably now agrees with her conclusions, at the time she was researching the book, many did not. It required courage and dogged effort to maintain her scepticism in the face of the belief of many. She tells a frightening story. Children have been separated from parents and adults have been jailed and forced to defend themselves at great legal cost on the basis of a fantastic charge. It is a relief to know that anthropology can play a role in restoring sanity.

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The choice between a baby or decorating the house was one way of looking at infertility treatment before undergoing it in late 1980s Britain, Sarah Franklin explains in *Embodied progress*. It is easy to imagine contemplating that trade-off in a consultant’s waiting room whilst staring distractedly at a reproduction of Matisse’s *Goldfish* (Franklin’s cover). Four fish are swimming inside a glass jar, their reflections partially refracted through the double lens of glass and water. In stark contrast to the orange, watery uncertainties inside the jar, its surroundings are unmistakably domestic. Between the desire for a baby on the part of an infertile couple, and ‘achieving’ one through *in vitro* fertilisation (IVF) lies a gruelling obstacle course replete with uncertainties. The IVF procedure is extremely costly physically, psychologically and financially – especially if the result is nothing, as it often is. What could motivate people to go through such an ordeal, get on to such a treadmill, when they know their chances of success are slim?

Franklin poses this dilemma in a highly original fashion, connecting the lived experience of IVF with the disenfranchisement that childlessness meant in British (Thatcherite) ‘enterprise culture’ of the 1980s and 1990s. The hopes attached to the goldfish of the infertile make them, even when success eludes them, sacrificial devotions upon the altar of progress. The sense of contributing to something greater – the scientific project of progress – sustains those who try, even unsuccessfully, to hook their little goldfish and transform them into one or several babies. People become ‘desperate’ when they discover how inconclusive the IVF procedure can be. Knowing when to draw a line under ‘having a try’ can prove immensely difficult when failure to conceive is unexplained (as it often is), so that next time might always have been a success.

Franklin argues that IVF is also a way of unsettling the ‘facts of life’ which have served as a ground for anthropological kinship theory. David Schneider saw heterosexual intercourse as the means of establishing
conjugality and procreativity through the ability of the ‘natural facts’ to act as a legitimating and sustaining symbol of the essence of kinship and marriage. However, the instability of this dominant cultural logic is exposed in the context of achieved conception: the pursuit of conception through highly artificial means ‘can function equally well as a unifying goal’ (p. 166).

Anthropologists have assumed that genealogy reflects the biological ‘facts of life’ by means of which they could compare different cultural/social interpretations after these facts. The genealogical grid became the standard representation for assumed biological relationships which could nonetheless be culturally elaborated in different ways. However, if the genealogical grid no longer holds even for the people to whom it was assumed to belong, then we will need to rethink kinship ‘after technology’. We do not know what makes conception: egg + sperm do not always result in baby. If we suspend our belief, where does that leave us as social scientists (still) with inordinate respect for biology?

Franklin’s reply is that we are in the realms of ‘postmodern genealogy’ where not only conception but also the transmission of heredity from generation to generation is ‘assisted’. Technology and nature become substitutable for one another. ‘I am suggesting that “genealogy”, in the form of life’s continuity, or life’s progression, not only does service for models of kinship, but for models of knowledge’ (p. 199). We have, she argues, to face up to changed standards. Franklin does not spell out explicitly what we are to conclude from her study. Literalising the ‘facts of life’ certainly destabilises the notion of fertilisation as a ‘natural’ procedure. However, the (American) ‘facts of life’ included ‘ties of consanguinity and/or affinity’. What has happened to affinity in Franklin’s account? Male voices are rarely heard and, as Franklin herself says, she mainly refers to ‘women’ and ‘couples’. The cases mainly concern women’s ordeals. However laudable, the absence of literalised account of men’s (presumably marginal?) role in assisted conception is intriguing. What techniques are applied to ‘assist’ men in their ‘performance’ of conception? If little or no technological intervention is implied, do men remain obstinately ‘before nature’?

More fundamentally, there has always been, and remains, an enormous amount of uncertainty concerning conception, the process of bringing a pregnancy to successful term, and what follows. This remains a risky, contingent business: part of Stephen Jay Gould’s lottery effect, which technology clearly does not alter. Perhaps it was/is the contrast between the uncertainty surrounding coming into being, and being (in the form of a new born baby) which gave successful reproduction its ‘factual’ status. The ‘facts of life’ only become ‘factual’ when ‘successful’. Only then, retrospectively, can we activate our myth that egg + sperm = baby. These ‘facts’ are embodied in the baby’s parents after the event and, through them, in the tracery of kinship. We should perhaps beware of projecting fictive certainty on to retrospective theories about the successful outcome of a highly uncertain process. We have never been certain. Early anthropological kinship theory based itself not on certainty about the ‘facts of life’ (qua conception), but on the facts of human lives: in other words, on existing people or people who have existed, from whose existence a mother and a father could be extrapolated.

If Franklin’s redefinition of kinship as ‘the study of vital signs’ (p. 214) means including the ‘conceivable’, whether or not it turns out to be ‘bearable’, then it raises a critical question. If the ‘conceivable’ turns out to be ‘unbearable’, never mind ‘raisable’, how will that qualify whatever standard we inevitably use in the on-going study of kinship? What kinds of graphic representation could accommodate this?

Franklin is, of course, right to consider the effects of enterprising up (why not down?) biology. Even ‘normal’ conceptions depend upon a veritable army of agents to bring them into the world. It is not so surprising that she discovers uncertainty in place of the marketed certainties. Selling dreams of all kinds – from holidays, through interior decoration to babies, involves manipulating all kinds of information and images which do not necessarily correspond with lived realities. And this brings us back to Matisse’s goldfish, and to the original dilemma: the decorating or the baby? Assisted conception reaffirms what some popularisers of science already knew: ‘biology’s most profound insight into human
nature, status and potential lies in the simple phrase, the embodiment of contingency’ (Gould 1989: 320). But Franklin denies the need to abandon belief in progress, nature or scientific authority, recommending instead the acquisition of ‘an additional layer of doubt concerning their effectivity’ (p. 213). I cannot help thinking that Embodied contingency would have captured Franklin’s challenging line of analysis more accurately. Lucidly written and cogently argued, this is a book which compels us, in any case, to rethink the scope of kinship studies.

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The dust jacket introduction to this book describes it as an analysis of the construction of identity in Australian art. It is, in fact, much more, being an erudite, dense and detailed portrayal of the development of notions of Australia and Australianness.

The initial chapters trace the historical origins of the idea of a land opposite to our (European) feet, i.e. the antipodes. In the writings of the Ancient Greeks this was a fabulous place. This ‘other’ place came to be seen as a paradise, and place of redemption. Here, therefore, is the essential contradiction in Australian identity: being European, yet also other; their identity is always constructed in opposition to things European, and is ‘perpetually becoming’. To maintain a European identity, the first Australians created a ‘wild interior’ from which to be ‘other’, and thereby shifted the status of ‘otherness’ to the inhabitants of the unforgiving bush: the Aborigines. This was expressed in the art of the first years of the colony, in the presentation of the grotesque: the inversion of nature. Not only was the presentation of Aborigines part of this inversion, but their treatment at the hands of whites was similarly grotesque in terms of extreme cruelty and terror.

With the arrival of the free settlers, art turned away from the grotesque and embraced the picturesque: the triumph of civilisation. However, the Australian bush refused to conform to the conventions of English landscape painting, and we find that Aborigines haunt the paintings of this period, as ghosts of the land rather than owners of it. McLean argues that this was an appropriation of (Aboriginal) history for the ‘new’ country, and gave the white settlers an indigenous identity: the white Aborigines of the title. The ghostly Aborigines in paintings were assumed soon to become a reality by the early years of this century: it was the firm belief of anthropologists that Aborigines were a dying race. They were perceived as native, primitive, original forms of all societies; therefore the forebears of white, European society, and as such Aborigines and white Australians became conflated and a new non-European identity was forged.

In the later chapters, McLean analyses the development of Aboriginal art, and he continues with his chronological presentation so that developments may be seen in historical context. In the inter-war period there was a surge in the presentation of nationhood in Australia. Aborigines were seen to be unique emblems of Australianness, and their symbols were appropriated. Previously disregarded as ‘childish’, Aboriginal art came to be recognised as ‘no longer the artefact of an anachronistic culture, but a modern art’. However, even as late as the 1980s it was still subject to controversy: it was argued that modern materials like acrylic should not be used, but that Aboriginal art should be ‘authentically primitive’.

McClean explores this contradictory attitude towards Aboriginality in his discussions of the work of the artists Albert Namatjira and Gordon Bennett. Namatjira had a facility with western art traditions, and so was accused of neglecting his Aboriginal roots and of being unoriginal. Yet through his work, non-Aborigines saw a way for Aborigines to become white; and with postmodern attitudes, for whites to become Aboriginal. By the late 1970s, cynicism with western values and the rise of Aboriginal land rights meant re-emergence of indigenous identities, and non-Aboriginal artists started to explore the primitive and mystical in their art.

Postmodernism appropriated
Aboriginality, stating that it was ‘no longer the exclusive domain of “black” Aborigines’. Whereas previously there were two worlds within Australia: the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, the focus came to be on reconciliation, as exemplified in the work of Gordon Bennett. An urban Aborigine who appropriates symbols from both white and Aboriginal art traditions, he does not fit the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal distinction, but moves between the two. His work therefore announces the possibility of reconciliation.

Though heralded as a book about art, McLean draws on many more sources. Particularly interesting are the journal entries from explorers, the first fleet and early governors of the colony. Highly eclectic, he introduces a history of transportation and punishment, Renaissance notions of melancholy, and the development of the ‘Ripping Yarn’ to illustrate and develop his arguments. His writing is dense and tightly argued, drawing and juxtaposing ideas from Greek philosophers, semioticians, Jung, Freud, Kristeva, Renaissance astrologists, anthropologists and novelists. This book is fascinating, but it is not an easy read.

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Central to this most remarkable book is the question of how ethnicity is constructed through historical processes and by different actors in the Upper West Region of northwestern Ghana. Taking a closer look at this question provides the thread to a fascinating, multivocal and extremely well investigated microanalysis. Chronologically, starting with the time shortly before the colonial conquest of the northern part of today’s Ghana, Lentz compares and interprets archival sources, seminal ethnographic accounts and her own extensive research material, and thus presents a detailed and exciting study of the area’s political development from 1870 to 1990.

Approaching her main theme, ethnicity, via regional definitions of an area where ethnic boundaries only took shape in connection with new colonial political-administrative borders rather than demarcating an ethnic group, ‘the Dàgàrà people’, a priori as the unit of research, seems, as the author points out, most appropriate. Lentz thus places herself into the research tradition of ‘invented tribes’ popularised by Terence Ranger (1983), whose particular interest concerns the power-securing functions of invented traditions, which he elucidated in relation to the actions of colonial officers, African chiefs and elders. By focusing on the construction rather than the invention of ethnicity, Lentz stresses that different layers of historical development each add up to the various conceptions of ethnicity which exist today. Writing a diachronical account of the area’s history and development rather than synchronically describing the relevance of ‘ethnicity’ for different key actors as she first planned to do, reflects not least the existential interest of her Ghanaian interlocutors on the issue of ‘history’, as Lentz mentions in her introduction.

The first part of the book focuses on the 1930s, the period in which the course was set for local politics in the then Northern Territories of the Gold Coast colony. Here Lentz discusses the complex dynamics of the ‘production of history’ by first following colonial officers’ viewpoints about the assumed history and potential development of their administrative districts. Their inception of chieftaincy positions fundamentally changed the local political scene. At the same time she considers today’s local actors’ opinions about, for example, village foundation mythologies and considers also the early Catholic missionaries’ endeavours to create a Christian community. Thus, she presents a range of different voices beyond only those of the colonial officers: alternative interpretations are suggested which demonstrate ‘that the [colonial] District Commissioner was one of several actors and, from a local perspective, not even necessarily the most important one’ (p. 37, my translation).

The second part of the book focuses on the local adoption and revision of colonial constructions of ethnicity since the end of the 1940s. Here the region’s educated elite is
in the spotlight of Lentz’s analysis – their ‘ethnicising’ school experiences, their networks and relations to the chiefs, their different groups and interests in local political developments, their associations and cultural politics. In the analysis one place is rendered prominent: the ‘paramountcy’ of Nandom. With much love for sometimes curious details, conflicts about land-rights and succession to chieftaincy, quests for administrative reforms and, again, the different actors’ opinions and capacities to act and enter into liabilities are presented and carefully interpreted. The fact that this detailed account never becomes tiring is not only due to the obviously vivacious character of the chiefs of Nandom, but even more to Lentz’s ability to write in a distinct way that lets her own fascination with the topics she covers always shine through.

As is most often the case, the strong point about Carola Lentz’s book, namely its distinctness and richness in detail, also has another side to it. The interwoven topics of the book, approached by a variety of sources, could suffice for a number of different books. The first could be the analysis of British administrative officers’ accounts and their fantasies about ‘ideal states’ and ‘real history’ of their African colonies. The second would be a comparative interpretation of migrants’ strategies at their work place and at home, focusing on their new consciousness of ‘ethnicity’. The conflictual rise of chieftaincy in connection with land right struggles and administrative reforms with their implications for local politics might be the third one. And the fourth book could deal with rural–urban relations, starting with the development and consequences of missionary and governmental school education, including the conflicts arising from social differentiation. Here the elite’s strategies in relation to “grass-root” politics would be explored. These are possibilities which Lentz has partly realised by publishing several articles on these issues since 1993.

But coming back to the present book, Lentz in my opinion succeeds in situating all these issues in a complex net of relations, tensions and historical developments, making this a unique monograph that clarifies why, when, how and by whom Dàgàrà ‘ethnicity’ is constructed. Lentz weaves in citations from interviews and archival files, statutes and articles of associations, speeches and biographies, and at the same time never forgets to equip the reader with detailed comments enabling him or her to follow her thoughts. I very much hope that this book will soon be available in English translation, making it accessible to a wider range of readers.

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Dispossession by degrees is an excellent and informative book about the history of the praying town of Natick, Massachusetts founded by John Eliot in the mid seventeenth century. This book is part of an emerging genre of work since the 1980s (Simmons 1986; Bragdon 1996; Grumet 1996; Campisi 1991, Hauptman and Wherry 1990, Frazier 1992, among many others) which has examined particular native communities and/or native leaders and their determination to preserve their cultures despite enormous odds. Like many of these works, the issue of land is of key importance. What happened to the Indian lands in Natick is not unlike what happened to Indian lands elsewhere in New England.

O’Brien’s book is quite ambitious and she sets a tough agenda: ‘In seeking to tell the intricate history of Natick as an Indian place, I use narrative about how it was bounded as a missionary experiment and pull together the traces Natick Indians left in vital records, probate documents, commonwealth proceedings, and especially hundreds of land deeds and other documents regarding Indian land ownership as well as the frustratingly few records Indians produced themselves’. Much of her book is focused on ‘fixing’ Indians in space within the bounds of Natick. This concept implies different views of the ‘social order’ (kinship, land tenure, identity, religion, politics, etc.) which O’Brien examines for information about why
the various Indian groups (the Massachusett, Pawtucket and Nipmuck) settled in Natick and how and why colonists were able to usurp their lands. She notes that the native peoples had pragmatic reasons for settling Natick – they could preserve their traditional ways via English Calvinism. Natick could become a safe community, away from the tide of encroaching English settlement.

After examining the founding of Natick, O’Brien goes on to discuss the ambiguous role the Indians played during such conflicts as the King Philip’s War. ‘Friend Indians’ could easily transgress and become enemy Indians, consequently, a variety of restrictions were always placed on the Natick groups. Her history then follows the Indians through the eighteenth century and the dispossession of Indian lands. Communal property based upon usufruct became transformed into individual property based upon the English proprietary system. She looks at the reasons why Indians were forced to alienate land. Not surprisingly, many sold off lands to pay debts – an issue I noted in my own work on the Wampanoag Indians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Weinstein 1986).

O’Brien’s book concludes with both a ‘micro’ and a ‘macro’ view of native life during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: one chapter is devoted to valuable life histories of individual Natick Indians. These case studies provide a real glimpse of life in Natick from the native perspective. The last two concluding chapters frame Natick within the context of Indian survival amidst English expansion. As lands were sold away, many Natick Indians, like New England Indians in general, became ‘wanderers’, indentured servants, soldiers and sailors. Some took African American spouses too. Indian identities tended to get blurred as native populations were ‘dispossessed by degrees’ of their lands.

I would highly recommend this book as a valuable addition to New England native history.

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