**Vannini, P., and Williams, J. P. (Eds.) 2009. *Authenticity in Culture, Self, and Society*, Surrey, UK: Ashgate. 276 pages, ISBN 978-0-7546-7516-7.**

The concept of authenticity lies, often unrecognized, at the heart of a good deal of cultural research and is a crucial ingredient of sociality. It is also a concept apparently straightforwardly undermined by simplistic barbs, centred on its supposed limited applicability to varieties of subculture research. Perhaps more tellingly, its' sociological utility and relevance is largely seen to have collapsed in the wake of the cultural and postmodern turn; as in the perennial rhetorical seminar question, 'what is authentic nowadays, anyway'? Such a query of course begs many more questions that it satisfactorily answers and suggests the need for a serious theoretical and empirical treatment of the topic. In their introductory chapter Vannini and Williams make it clear that their approach to this collection seeks to advance a social constructionist theory of authenticity. For them, and their collaborating authors, authenticity is something tacitly organized, performed and ultimately agreed upon by members within particular cultural settings and scenes. All this is not exactly new for cultural sociologists, but it is in the empirical and conceptual details where innovations and discoveries are made, and in the championing of the authentic as a viable and indeed central conceptual dimension of any account of social life. Such a task is attempted in the first third of the collection, which succeeds in establishing the conceptual and theoretical bases of authenticity and contains some particularly instructive and erudite contributions which situate the philosophical and theoretical bases of the concept in imaginative ways.

The collection convincingly demonstrates the need for a theory of authenticity to be at the centre of cultural theory. The frames of symbolic interactionism, constructionism and performance theory are emphasized to give the book intellectual direction, while questions of practices, emotion work, the self and reflexivity provide the dominant threads for interpreting the theoretical and empirical minutiae. Some of the empirical sites for exploring authenticity such as touristic practices, punk subcultures and pop culture are obviously not new sites for exploring the authentic; in fact, they are perennials in the field. This is not to single out these particular chapters, however, as Vannini and Williams have done an admirable job maintaining the quality and relevance of each paper within the collection, obviously encouraging their authors to critically advance discussions in the broader field as well as to provide instructive case studies.

Richard Peterson's study of the manufacture of authenticity in the country music industry is an obvious point of inspiration for the editors. Highlighting his work as an exemplar, they suggest that in challenging realist approaches, studies must take into account the boundary-marking work involved in negotiating the authentic, and understand its' basis as a flexible, powerful scheme of evaluation having direct implications for shaping in and out group processes. As well as negotiating this relatively familiar territory, this collection attempts to go further in two interesting directions. The first is to show how authenticity is a resource for individuals to reflexively think themselves into the social – notions of the authentic become an

essential resource for monitoring the self and an ideal which directs the chronic discovery of a true self. The middle third of the collection is devoted to this theme, through chapters considering lay understandings of authenticity, and notions of the authentic in contexts such as work, gender performance and relations with popular culture. The other direction of interest, which the final third of the book deals with, is to expand discussions of the authentic to consider how it is produced, exchanged and consumed within society, focusing on a variety of contexts, events, objects and processes using interpretive and ethnographic methods.

In terms of delivering both a serious treatment of the concept and being a collection of readings useful for the classroom, Vannini and Williams' collection is satisfying on a number of levels. It clarifies the dimensions and meanings of the concept of authenticity and explores how it is manifested and maintained in a range of social settings. In doing so, it may offer new material for scholars already interested in authenticity. It may also encourage culture researchers to think about their own work in ways which more explicitly engages the concept of authenticity. Given the range and quality of material and the book's clear division into theoretical, conceptual and empirical components, the collection may also provide helpful material for teaching in undergraduate courses related to identity and the self, cultural production and consumption studies.

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