A second strength of Antweiler's volume is his set of proposals concerning temporality in universals. In addition to integrating distinctions among continuous, periodical, occasional, and temporary features in certain universals, he emphasizes the limits of continuity. At some point in time, human skills in handling fire, or, for that matter, in maintaining a minimum of architectural techniques, indeed became universal, but there were periods before that when they were not dominant. The image of planet earth as a globe in space never was common, but has (almost) become so in the twenty-first century via electronic media. In contrast, some universals have ceased to be prevalent today.

A third strength is that Antweiler productively engages with the Geertzian argument that the only true universal in sociocultural terms is diversity. This he contradicts: diversity never occurs in a pure manner, but always as an unavoidable combination with wider features, some of which are universal, and among these some of which are non-biotic or not entirely biotic.

In the end, a few major weaknesses in this volume have to be addressed, regardless of any reader's basic scepticism about universals-related anthropological research per se. First, Antweiler's willingness to recognize and absorb interdisciplinary and anthropological gender studies is partial and somewhat out of date. A tiny bouquet of references, most of them from two decades ago and concentrating on Sherry Ortner and Human Relations Area Files specialist Alice Schlegel, is far too narrow. In turn, this imposes limitations on many aspects of what Antweiler tries to say about possible universals in the fields of sexuality, kinship, or family. In contrast, his forte appears to lie in sub-fields such as technology, social complexity, cognition, and art. Their treatment, however, again remains somewhat curbed by a second major weakness: the neglect of mainly UK-based research from recent decades in some of the very same fields with which Antweiler is engaging. Henrietta Moore, Maurice Bloch, Rita Astuti, and Tim Ingold are merely referred to in passing, and Marilyn Strathern's *Partial connections* (2005) is entirely ignored. A much more substantial inclusion of these and other works from the United Kingdom might in fact have supported and strengthened Antweiler's overall orientation towards solidifying and increasing wider respect for anthropological research into universals.

Nevertheless, what makes this book worth reading and consulting, beyond its merits as a good roadmap and overview through some parts of these debates, are its fair and accessible dialogical style; its clarity concerning basic concepts and methodological issues; and, last but not least, its respect for ethnography and for particular contexts. All of this is certainly helpful for anthropological reconsiderations and new explorations of universals.

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Oring, Elliott. *Joking asides: the theory, analysis, and aesthetics of humor*. xiii, 282 pp., tables, figs, illus., bibliogr. Boulder, Colo.: Utah State Univ. Press, Univ. Press of Colorado, 2016. £20.99 (paper)

Elliott Oring has long explored the phenomenon of humour, with a close focus on the practice of joke making. This latest collection of essays is an invitation to conversations about the complexities of humour as a cognitive and conscious process, as well as an expansion of his previous publications exploring the nature of humour in general and jokes in particular (*The jokes of Sigmund Freud*, 1984; *Jokes and their relations*, 1992; *Engaging humor*, 2003). Oring examines the art of joke making, or 'joke work' in his words, as he explores the structure and process of humour. Questioning universal analytical models in his assessment of joking techniques, Oring argues that while language is present in every joke, the essence of the verbal joke lies in specific categories of knowledge resources. In his view, 'jokes are semantic affairs', a form of play with sound, grammar, meaning, imagery, relations, and logic, which are realized in their underlying structure. Thus for Oring, humour depends upon perception and a conflation of incongruous words or behaviour. Consequently, then, what matters in 'joke work' is the semantic structure of meanings, based on shared knowledge.

In his focus on how a joke is structured to produce humour, Oring draws from a Lévi-Straussian tradition of binary oppositions. A joke, then, is formed by double register, a dilemma embodied in the conflicted nature of a joke. On one hand, from an anthropology and folklore point of view, a joke could be examined from a discursive and semiotic perspective in an oppositional analytical framework that has the potential to reveal cultural meaning. Sometimes, as Oring states, to understand how a joke works, it has to be subjected to detailed linguistic scrutiny which shows how it originates from a written or oral text (p. 31).

In a broad sense he defines the characteristics of humour and jokes as arising from the

perception of *an appropriate incongruity*: that is, 'the perception of an appropriate interrelationship of elements from domains that are generally regarded as incongruous' (p. 16). Applying the concept of appropriate incongruity, he discusses multiple theoretical frameworks, cognitive and emotional properties, different joking practices, narrative strategies of joke telling, and joking aesthetics as these are historically and culturally contextualized.

Joking asides is an important book for a number of reasons. The author's challenging of narrow theoretical adaptations of humour analysis allows for a nuanced account of how humour's complexities and specificities evolve. Oring's overview of well-established theoretical models of inquiry into humour raises important new questions which are insightful contributions to further understanding of the complex nature of humour, laughter, and joking. In his reflection on Freud's analysis of jokes, he makes a significant distinction between the sociability of joke and dream as an inherently asocial mental product (p. 15). Oring's emphasis is on the social and intentional dimensions of humour as distinct properties of joking techniques. In his view, humour emerges from conscious, cognitive processes and yet is expressed in diverse forms – myths, tales, songs, art, and rituals. All jokes depend upon inquiry, according to Oring. While the cognitive linguistic structure of jokes is central to his theses, he discusses in great depth the significance of the relational properties of joke work across all chapters.

In the final chapters, Oring explores the illusionary art of humour. For him: 'Art is the apprehension of extraordinary arrangements, gestures, sounds, colors, forms, textures, or ideas in relation to some ordinary unmarked background' (p. 199). In the aesthetics of traditional verbal art, as Oring tells us, there is no script or score, only performance evaluation by participating partners: it is an act of communication. Considering jokes to be a folk art, Oring claims that his analysis of humorous folklore in film and on the Internet brings attention to an interesting question about a broader understanding of how humour is employed in contemporary media.

An additional strength of the book is Oring's ability to incorporate various complex and significant elements of the human condition. This book will appeal to a broad academic audience because of its multidisciplinary perspective and its theoretical and methodological approach. It is an excellent book for cross-disciplinary teaching for undergraduate and graduate classes. In his accounts, Oring provides captivating and provocative examples from the existing literature across such diverse fields as folklore, anthropology, sociology, linguistics, and psychology.

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Piette, Albert. *Separate humans: anthropology, ontology, existence*. 87 pp., bibliogr. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2016. £8.00 (paper)

The ontological turn has been a major intellectual wave in recent years, involving philosophy, social sciences, and the humanities. Generally speaking, it builds on a critique of postmodernism's granting of an 'excessive power . . . to language to determine what is real' (K. Barad, 'Posthuman performativity: toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* **28: 3**, 2003, p. 802). There are some, like the philosopher Maurizio Ferraris (*Introduction to new realism,* 2014), who just plead for a return to conventional forms of realism. In most cases, however, the turn to ontology builds on a contestation of the foundational binaries of Western thinking (mind/body, subject/object, matter/language, etc.), and a conception of reality as a contingent assemblage of entities in which the 'gathering' takes precedence over what is 'gathered'. In anthropology, this has entailed a growing interest in non-Western ontologies, precisely for their extraneousness to Western naturalism (e.g. E. Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal metaphysics*, 2014).

The subtitle of Albert Piette's *Separate humans* appears to indicate an addition to this burgeoning literature, yet the title itself suggests otherwise. Indeed, the book represents a brave challenge to current received wisdom. For Piette, 'ontology' is not a matter of cultural perspectives, but a call for tackling the concrete singularity of humans, whose main evolutionary feature is a strong individualization, a capacity to decontextualize, to de-functionalize behaviour, to enact distance, separation, passivity, and solitude. His actual target, as becomes increasingly clear along the way, is anthropology's focus on relations rather than on embodied individuals, or, as he puts it, on 'volumes of being' (pp. 20 ff.), provided with a unique identity as they persist through time, before and beyond any relation. The primacy given to relations – both as a focus of inquiry and as constitutive of individuality – and the downplaying of individuals in their actual presence indicates how the ontological turn, with all its alleged novelty, remains anchored in