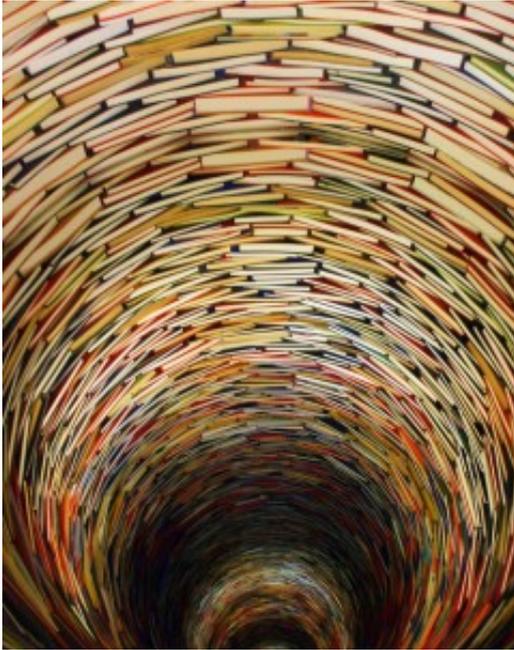


<http://somatosphere.net/2013/02/top-of-the-heap-1.html>

Top of the heap: Janelle Taylor and Hannah Landecker

2013-02-11 09:44:42

By Maria Cecilia Dedios



Matej Kren "Idiom," (detail), Prague Municipal Library

This is the first post in a new series we're calling "[Top of the heap](#)". Following the lead of *Cultural Anthropology* (see their "[Playlists](#)" feature) and others, we've asked scholars whose work we enjoy reading to tell us a little about what they're reading or planning to read. In this first installment, **Janelle Taylor** and **Hannah Landecker** let us know what's at the top of their book heaps.

[Janelle Taylor](#)

Laura Stark, [Behind Closed Doors: IRBs and the Making of Ethical Research](#) (University of Chicago Press, 2011)

This ethnographic study of the workings of institutional review boards is at the very top of my “to read” list!

Paul Brodwin, [Everyday Ethics: Voices from the Front Line of Community Psychiatry](#) (University of California Press, 2013)

Also high on my “to read” list is this book, highlighting the ethical dilemmas and the ethical reflections of front-line workers in the field of community psychiatry.

Charles L. Bosk, [What Would You Do? Juggling Bioethics and Ethnography](#) (University of Chicago Press, 2008)

Can ethnographers ever realistically promise anonymity to the subjects about whom they write? What if someone you have described under a pseudonym publicly “outs” himself (and, in consequence, everyone else)? I can’t wait to get deeper into this collection of essays by Charles Bosk, who has been inhabiting the borderland of ethnography and ethics for decades, and here reflects (insightfully, and with an honesty that is sometimes quite anguished) on the intersections and the limitations of bioethics as a field, and ethnography as a research practice.

Mary Gabriel, [Love and Capital: Karl and Jenny Marx and the Birth of a Revolution](#) (Little, Brown and Company, 2011)

This is a biography that situates Karl Marx’s writings in context of his family life. The book does not delve in great detail into the substance of Marx’s writings, but by painting a very vivid portrait of the conditions of life and the key relationships (with Jenny, Engels, and the Marx children) out of which those writings emerged, it can offer new perspectives on them nonetheless. Though the *New York Times* review of this book complains of “flagrantly purple throbbings,” I found it an informative and very engaging read.

Patrick Wilcken [Claude Levi-Strauss: The Father of Modern Anthropology](#)
(Penguin 2010)

This is an intellectual biography that traces in considerable depth and detail Levi-Strauss's work and ideas, and their development over the course of his long life, while setting them in context of his life, education, travels, relationships, and career. I might quibble with the subtitle of this book (is Levi-Strauss more a "father" to us anthropologists than Boas? and what about our "mothers"?) but I really enjoyed reading it. Wilcken writes about his famous subject with an admirable combination of empathy and critique.

China Mieville, [Embassytown](#) (Del Rey 2012)

I read fiction because I love it, basically — but I do also find it useful for thinking about the world. Like any great science fiction, Mieville's novels offer ways of reflecting on the world around us, by drawing us in to an extended thought-experiment about "what if" certain key premises were different. *Embassytown* is one of his very best books, in my view. Read it as an extended reflection on language and truth, or read it as a mind-blowing retelling of the legend of the Fall — you'll be glad that you did.

Tana French, [Broken Harbor](#) (Viking 2012)

This murder mystery, set in contemporary Ireland, could also be considered as a literary portrait of the Great Recession. A man and his two young children are found murdered in their home in one of the half-built, now-empty housing estates that now litter Ireland (hauntingly documented in this photoessay <http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/08/22/in-ireland-ghosts-of-towns-that-never-were/>). With an ethnographer's eye and a psychiatrist's insight, French gradually unfolds a portrait of people falling apart under the crushing pressure of a failed economy.

[Janelle Taylor](#) is on faculty in, and currently chair of, the Department of

*Anthropology at the University of Washington. A medical anthropologist trained in sociocultural anthropology, she has researched and written about a variety of topics relating to medical technology, medical education, and medical practice. Her publications include *The Public Life of the Fetal Sonogram: Technology, Consumption, and the Politics of Reproduction* (Rutgers 2008), and *Consuming Motherhood* (Rutgers 2004), as well as numerous articles and chapters.*

Hannah Landecker

Read recently:

Julie Guthman, [Weighing In: Obesity, Food Justice, and the Limits of Capitalism](#) (University of California Press 2012), and **Suzanne Collins**, [The Hunger Games \(Book 1\)](#), (Scholastic Press, 2010)

I highly recommend reading these two vastly different works at the same time: provides a delicious image of a set of young people dropped into a competition arena, plied with highly processed foods, and actively prevented from moving too much. The competitors strive mightily to be the last to perish from metabolic disease brought on by the overload of endocrine disrupting obesogens, pesticides, heavy metals, sugars, and epigenetically disruptive industrialized fruits of capitalism they are forced to ingest.

Stefan Müller-Wille and Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, [A Cultural History of Heredity](#). (University of Chicago Press, 2012)

An effort to do a *longue durée* version of the history of science. I particularly enjoyed the eras before biological heredity took hold. Also interesting as an example of collaborative scholarship, too rare in the monograph of the humanities world - the book is the result of a long-running series of workshops and edited volumes committed exactly to getting a sense of the cultural history of heredity over the long run. Therefore, this book contains many people's scholarship, and is thus a good all-in-one-place resource.

Catherine Malabou, [What Should We Do with Our Brain?](#) (Fordham University Press, 2008)

A good question. See below.

Read again recently:

Elizabeth Wilson, [Psychosomatic: Feminism and the Neurological Body](#) (Duke University Press, 2004)

Still strikingly original. And a model for a short book. I reread this because I was trying to think about the attempt from some parts of medicine to rethink Alzheimer's disease as Type 3 diabetes. Also, with the rise in interest in the microbiome – the bacteria that live in the human body – the idea of the brain in the gut gets even more complicated than the version elaborated here, but the book still provides a good framework for thinking about what to do with interesting biology. Did you know that commensal human gut microbes produce serotonin and catecholamines and other neurotransmitters? (making it unclear that “neurotransmitter” is the right word for the substance). I am not sure I believe in the brain anymore.

May read in the not too distant future:

Georges Canguilhem, [Writings on Medicine](#) (Fordham UP, 2012).

More new translations of Canguilhem from Stefanos Geroulanos and Todd Meyers.

David Hughes, Jacques Brodeur, and Frederic Thomas, [Host Manipulation by Parasites](#) (Oxford University Press, 2012)

A collection of papers about different parasites that change the behavior of their hosts – making rats seek out cats, for example. It appears to have an interesting structure, with essays by parasitologists and commentaries by behavioral ecologists who do

not work on parasites. I haven't read it yet – have only enjoyed having it prominently on display during office hours. As I said, I am not sure I believe in the brain anymore.

[Hannah Landecker](#) is an associate professor in the life sciences and the social sciences at UCLA, holding a joint appointment in Sociology and the Institute for Society and Genetics. Her work focuses on the social and historical study of biotechnology and life science, from 1900 to now. She is currently working on a book called "American Metabolism," which looks at transformations to the metabolic sciences wrought by the rise of epigenetics, microbiomics, cell signaling and hormone biology. A related project concerns the history of metabolic hormones after 1960 and the rise of the cellular "signal" as a central category of thought and practice in the life sciences.

This post was compiled by Maria Cecilia Dedios, currently a graduate student at the University of Chicago where she is doing a master's program in the Social Sciences with concentration in Comparative Human Development. She obtained her degree as Clinical Psychologist from the Pontificia Universidad Catolica del Peru, and has carried out research in immigration, acculturation and mental health outcomes in Peru and in the U.S. Currently, her research is focused on culture and psychosocial development under conditions of political violence among young adults in Colombia.

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