

and also offer a number of interesting insights into modern Filipino society and the processes of state formation. For the student of Philippine history, in particular, there are some very interesting insights into the continuing relationship of land owner/land tenants. Unfortunately, however, some of the theoretical promise of this first section never seems to materialize, and much of the subsequent argument in Part 2 feels like a fairly conventional history.

The second part of the book, "The World of Negros Sugar after 1855," is, I believe, less interesting to the anthropologist, if only because the theoretical aspect of Aguilar's argument tends to get lost amid the avalanche of historical detail, statistics, and figures. Although Aguilar continues to suggest how the local worldview of spiritual forces and personal *dungan* plays into the formation of a capitalist hegemony in Negros sugar plantations, the arguments feel forced at times. For example, in chapter 6, Aguilar presents an interesting discussion of a particular planter, Araneta (whose family is still one of the most influential in the country), and his role in transforming plantation hegemony, but many of the more interesting dynamics of culture and economy get lost in the historical detail. Certainly for those particularly interested in this era of the Spanish American War or Philippine colonial history, such detail proves to be interesting in and of itself, but it tends to obscure the objective of giving "voice to different categories of social actors as they have played their parts in the social game and sought to alter the rules by which such games are played in history" (p. 7).

This book is Aguilar's dissertation, which was obviously well-funded, as he was able to draw on archival research from London, Singapore, Manila, Madrid, Chicago, Washington, D.C., and elsewhere, in addition to original ethnographic research from the Philippines. This extensive research, the relative historical proximity (as compared to something such as Sahlins's work on the Hawaiian Islands), and the wealth of documentation existing from and about his subject (as opposed to the "subaltern studies" of Iletto) undoubtedly provided the kind of minute detail he was able to supply about sugar yields and world prices, local economic fluctuation, immigration, and so forth. Although he strives to connect the events and personalities of the emerging sugar industry to the cultural and social context of Negros throughout his work, the writing sometimes swings abruptly between the two facets of his study, leaving the reader feeling less than convinced of the importance of the connection. (See, for example, chapter 4, page 117 where Aguilar seems to force the theoretically driven discussion of *dungan* and *swerte* into his statistical analysis of land ownership and capital encroachment.)

Theoretically, there are a number of parallels in Aguilar's work to anthropological theory involving the interaction of colonial power and local cultural context (e.g., Sahlins, Comaroff). Curiously, he does not cite or allude to much of this literature. For example, Aguilar introduces an interesting (though brief) discussion of "imitative magic" as he develops the relationship between "Friar Power" (i.e., the power of Spanish colonialism insinuated through the Catholic church) and native shamans and magico-religious practitioners (p. 170). One immediately thinks of Taussig's concept of *mimesis* as well as some of the literature on so-called cargo cults of Melanesia. Although Aguilar referred to Taussig's work on commodity capitalism earlier, he misses the chance to develop his ideas more

fully here by bringing in some comparative theoretical and ethnographic perspective. I believe he might have produced a theoretically richer study had he drawn on a wider selection of such literature.

Overall, the book does not seem to live up to the initial promise of its first chapters, at least in terms of the theoretical argument advanced. But certainly this is a welcome addition to the literature on colonialism in the Philippines, which, as Aguilar rightly points out, is dominated by a far more event and personality driven literature than his, whatever its shortcomings. For anthropologists, I believe this work will be of value to those whose own interests fall within the realm of social history and colonialism. Furthermore, the Philippines remains somewhat underrepresented in the ethnographic and historical literature typically cited in U.S. academia, particularly when compared with the voluminous literature on the rest of insular Southeast Asia. For that reason, many anthropologists may find this a fresh take on the familiar case of the colonial encounter, local response, power, resistance, and capitalist hegemony. ♦♦

An Anthropology for Contemporaneous Worlds. Marc Augé. Translated by Amy Jacobs. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999. 144 pp.

JOHN D. STUDSTILL
Columbus State University

Marc Augé is a well-published, leading French social anthropologist based in Paris. He describes this book as a manifesto summarizing his views about how to create an anthropology capable of dealing with radically new, supermodern (not postmodern) worlds. The plural "worlds" is intentional and becomes his replacement for "cultures" and "societies" despite the fact, as he admits, that "world" is a problematic concept that "has not been thought about as systematically as 'society' and 'culture' have" (p. 90). True, too true, especially when he speaks of the "world of finance" or the "world of sport" (p. 90). He often, however, falls back on the term *society*, perhaps out of habit, perhaps because it is indispensable (e.g., pp. 8, 118).

An Anthropology for Contemporaneous Worlds is in the tradition of the French *philosophes*, a genre often closer to philosophy and literature than to social science. Augé grapples with the serious problems of describing and defining the nature of today's world (or *worlds* as he insists), and of founding an anthropology adequate to the task. But the suggestions provided often seem provocative rather than convincing, more literary than scientific, interpretive but not explanatory; there appears to be more style than substance here. As a great admirer of French social science (such as Durkheim, Griaule, and Lévi-Strauss), this despite its tendencies toward the idealist pole of theory and its fascination with the symbolic aspects of culture, I remain hopeful for an Augé breakaway. He is certainly addressing the big questions. For example, in his own view of what he is doing in this work he asks: "Under what conditions is anthropology possible today, when the crisis of social meaning we are experiencing—a crisis that makes it more difficult to conceive and manage our relations to the other—makes the need for anthropology appear more clearly than ever before" (p. ix)?

Unfortunately, in this simple question he already reveals tendencies (limiting, from my perspective) that define the entire book—he emphasizes “social meaning” to the exclusion of economic factors and power relations; he defines anthropology as the study of the “other” (p. 14) and the “symbolic” (p. 56) while jettisoning the culture concept (p. 36). In fact, one finds little here to convince that anthropology is more needed or apt for the task of understanding our “contemporaneous worlds” than, say, sociology, history, political science or economics.

One robust aspect of Augé’s approach is his rejection of postmodern superrelativity, in conjunction with his critique of a certain U.S. anthropology’s fascination with culture reduced to “text” (p. 37). In fact, he also claims that Lyotard, the postmodernist theorist, has been misunderstood by his U.S. interpreters. Lyotard, he claims, did not relativize all theoretical efforts. “We see that Lyotard does not identify his postmodern condition with any infinite multiplicity (his version evokes more readily the ‘consensus’ of French historians than the ‘postmodernity’ of American anthropologists) or with any corresponding unknowable universe” (p. 22). Augé thus prefers to describe the contemporary world as supermodern rather than postmodern. This recalls, favorably for me, what may be the one similarity I can identify between Augé and Marvin Harris. Harris describes as “hyperindustrial” certain modern economies that others have unconvincingly labeled “postindustrial.” For Augé then, U.S. postmodernism in anthropology “has little to do with Lyotard’s postmodern condition and seems instead an heir to cultural relativism” (p. 35). But he goes further and reproaches these same anthropologists for *not* rejecting the outmoded “conception of culture as holistic . . . a culture that their own conception singularly substantializes, reifies” (p. 37). He mentions specifically James Clifford who “seems caught in a contradiction,” because the process of reducing culture to the analysis of texts relativizes “the very notion of culture, which it takes to be merely the product of the exercise” (p. 37). Good point! But wait! Why condemn Clifford who is only guilty of “reducing” culture, whereas Augé annihilates it?

A second appealing idea is Augé’s concept of “non-places.” This is actually a set of ideas put forward in detail in his *Non-lieux: Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité* (Editions du Seuil, 1992). The concept of non-places forms one of the major touchstones of his understanding of supermodernity and also becomes the starting point for the book under review. Because we are living in a supermodern world full of new realities such as *non-lieux*, we need a new anthropology to deal with it. Contrary to what we find in traditional places, “in non-places one may decipher neither identity, relation, nor history.” These include freeways, airports, supermarkets, image-bearing screens, and cyberspace (p. ix). Other aspects of supermodernity that challenge our social scientific methods and concepts are an acceleration of change, an excess of images, a loss of traditional cosmology and belief, an isolation of the individual from meaningful social relations, a paradox of individualization coupled with uniformization and planetarization of social life (p. x).

But weren’t train stations in Paris in the 1800s also frequented by people who seemed to have little identity, relations, and history, or is it just in modern (I mean, contemporaneous) airports? While I don’t deny the “shrinking of the planet,” nor the apparently increasing levels of depersonalization, loneliness, and

anonymity that characterize much of contemporary life, this view of supermodernity does little more than recall the “lonely crowd” of David Riesman. The supermodern might better be studied by analyzing the technoeconomic transformations of recently triumphant capitalism, the worlds of virtual reality, the effects of computers, and transnational concentrations of wealth and power.

One looks in vain in this work for an empirical or ethnographic illustration of the fruits of Augé’s purported new anthropological theory and understanding. In his last chapters Augé’s analyses of myth and ritual in French politics, of life in modern cities, and of the religious creativity of West African prophets are insightful but not particularly original. Finally, in seeking a clear statement about the strengths of anthropology that will allow it to respond to the challenge of supermodernity, Augé highlights anthropology’s “self-critical reflection” (p. 125). He insists “the idea defended here is that social anthropology, by the very fact of its self-critical tradition, is fully capable of adapting itself to the accelerated change that is continuously recomposing relations between universalism and particularisms” (p. x). Anthropology must first of all note “the definitive end of the great divide between the West and the others: the time has come for an anthropology that encompasses the entire planet” (p. 125). So far so good, but what is one to make of the dual assertions that anthropology is most essentially the study of the “other” and that *death* is the “utterly other” that constantly threatens to invade us (p. 58)?

Flowery language aside, is Augé not simply stating what many have long known, that anthropology is the Queen of the social sciences because she is the broadest (no pun intended)? Has he really just discovered that anthropology is valuable in the study of industrial as well as nonindustrial societies, or even of hunters and gatherers? Is she not already known as original for her attention both to the holistic ethnographic detail of everyday life and to large-scale evolutionary change? Granted that anthropology (or anyone) can generally profit from self-critical reflection, she may well be less up to her job if she discards, as Augé does, the concept of sociocultural system that includes symbolic, social, *and* materialist dimensions. ♦♦

Brushed by Cedar, Living by the River: Coast Salish Figures of Power. *Crisca Bierwert*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999. 314 pp.

BRIAN THOM
McGill University

This is an important text that puts recent theorizing about space and place, agency, and power into practice through innovative ethnography. In *Brushed by Cedar* Bierwert takes us to two Coast Salish Native communities (Stó:lō and Lushootseed) on the Northwest Coast and explores Coast Salish ways of making sense of current moral, intellectual, political, and spiritual issues and dilemmas. She challenges visions of contemporary cultures as diaspora not necessarily connected to particular places, showing instead the views of a community that see agency in particular places, narratives, and histories. Bierwert has moved out of the ethnohistoric type of discussion that has