

***Things in Motion: Object Itineraries in Anthropological Practice.* Rosemary A. Joyce and Susan D. Gillespie, eds. 2015. Santa Fe: SAR Press, 284 pp.\***

Reviewed by Catherine A. Nichols

In their introduction to the volume, Rosemary Joyce and Susan Gillespie evaluate the object biography framework that has seen robust application and development in anthropology and material culture studies since the 1980s. Cultural anthropologists often associate this framework with Arjun Appadurai and Igor Kopytoff's contributions to *The Social Life of Things* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), but the authors broadly contextualize it within the broader intellectual tradition of archaeological theory. Their critique of the biography framework is partially rooted in archaeological methodology: moving in a linear sequence, objects are “born” as they are constructed and they “die” upon internment into what become archaeological sites. After excavation, objects acquire “afterlives” when deposited into a museum. How does the biography concept account for the continued or punctuated movements of objects being taken apart, dispersed, or reproduced in media? They propose the concept of itinerary, which seeks to alleviate the awkwardness of using a human life course metaphor to discuss the circulation and movement of things. As Joyce notes, this is not simply a linguistic shift (37): the itinerary framework is rooted in deep engagement with anthropological and feminist theory, material culture studies, and science and technology studies. The authors first discuss the theoretical advances of the biography framework, emphasizing how it has fruitfully reoriented analyses to consider subject-object relationships, the mutual transformations of people and things, and the social agency of objects. The itinerary concept seeks to encompass these socially oriented analyses, while expanding notions of object movement, in part through an engagement with thing theory. “Itineraries of objects as things” engage with sites and temporal movements while also considering routes—pathways traversed by multiple objects (5). Another productive rendering of the itinerary concept questions the distinction between things and their representations, explored in the chapters by Neill Wallis and Gillespie. Particularly in the digital arena—an area of growing interest in museum practice—representations have the potential to travel quickly and far afield, and consideration of how these representations are positioned extends the analysis of object movement in innovative ways.

The itinerary approach has particular relevance to how anthropological methodologies and assumptions impact how the museum and anthropological practice in the museum is theorized. Are museums assumed to be places that function primarily as repositories for archaeological materials in their “afterlife,” or are they places where social and material relationships continue to unfold? The latter is increasingly explored terrain, particularly for ethnographic collections. But how do the various spaces and technologies of the museum intersect with archaeological materials? As Joyce argues,

A most useful aspect of thinking of objects as having itineraries is that it allows and even encourages considering the contemporary engagements of things with researchers and publics as part of things' lives, rather than as a somewhat hazy

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afterlife following a sharp break between an absolutely distant past and completely divorced present. [31]

Though many archaeologists are focused on using excavated materials to construct past societies and cultural contexts, Joyce and Gillespie emphasize the semiotic and agential possibilities archaeological and historic materials have as they continue to move past their “end of life” contexts of archaeological deposition. The itinerary approach also holds ideas for those working with ethnographic collections, such as consideration of where an object’s raw materials were sourced (Andrew Roddick’s chapter), a relationist ontology that involves human actors, landscapes, ecosystems, and non-human animals.

Excluding the introduction to this edited volume, ten individually authored chapters contribute to theorization of the itinerary concept. Case studies are mostly archaeological, spanning sites across the globe. The chapters by Gillespie, Jonathan Walz, Alexander Bauer, and Heather Law Pezzarossi all explicitly consider the museum context—emphasizing the continued movement of objects in museum spaces and their intersections with museum technologies and representational practices. Bauer’s chapter may be of particular interest to museum anthropologists, as they seek to understand how museum policy and practice such as long-term loans can address the colonial underpinnings of the universal museum concept.

This text is written for theoretically engaged, museum-based and material culture-oriented anthropologists. Though many of the cases analyze archaeological materials, its emphasis on movement can be used to invigorate approaches to museum collections documentation and research, and collaborative practice in how objects—particularly those in museums—continue to be mobilized over time by anthropologists, source communities, and publics.

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