

## Reviews in brief: Virtual migration: the programming of globalization / Mediating nature: environmentalism and modern culture

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# Reviews in brief

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**Virtual migration: the programming of globalization.** By A. Aneesh. London: Duke University Press. 2006. 194 pp. \$74.95 cloth. ISBN 0 8223 3681 2.

In *Virtual migration: the programming of globalization*, A. Aneesh highlights how technological developments, such as high-speed satellites, cable links, and/or online services, have dramatically altered the way in which labor negotiates national borders. Using the familiar example of Indian-staffed (and located) call centers providing customer service for American consumers, Aneesh cites the growing 'invisible and disembodied processes of labor' (p. 3) that challenge our conventional understanding of labor migration. He further argues that these invisible and disembodied processes constitute an entirely unique, if not new, phenomenon which he calls 'virtual migration'. The term 'virtual migration' speaks to the migration of labor, skills, and data, but not bodies. Aneesh seeks to 'free the discussion of labor mobility from the confines of the body' (p. 3), in order to address the dynamic and complex relationships upon which globalization depends. To demonstrate how 'transnational virtual space' is both theoretically and practically an emerging space within which to tease out the complexities of globalization, Aneesh begins by situating the concept of virtual migration within wider debates concerning globalization. In doing so, he successfully employs a wide range of relevant literature, from Marx and Weber to Anderson and Harvey. However, Aneesh's discussion and treatment of the concept of 'territoriality' is quite weak and could have used the work of geographers, such as Agnew, Amin, Sack, Thrift, Tuan, or others, to strengthen his understanding and application of 'territoriality' as it relates to virtual migration and globalization. In order for readers to understand the ways in which virtual migration is a distinct phenomenon, Aneesh devotes the third chapter to discussion of the more familiar, and more researched, phenomenon of 'body-shopping'. Body-shopping refers to the practice in which programmers (and other highly-specialized laborers) migrate to the United States, typically on H-1B visas. In Aneesh's cases, the focus is on Indian programmers who have been 'body-shopped' to high-tech firms in New Jersey. Aneesh successfully demystifies the complexities of US immigration, particularly H-1B visas, in order to convey the benefits, costs, and implications of such migrations on the various actors involved. Through several well-situated interview excerpts, Chapter Three effectively sets the stage for understanding both *why* virtual migration became necessary and *how* virtual migration may contrast with body-shopping in such a way that it can legitimately constitute a new space of inquiry into globalization. The remaining chapters of the book delve deeper into characterizing what virtual migration is, how it functions in a globalized system, and, perhaps more importantly, how it is programmed or governed. Aneesh provides an interesting and compelling argument for the emergence of what he terms 'algotocracy' in which 'authority is increasingly embedded in the technology itself, or more

specifically the underlying code' (p. 110). Aneesh's arguments are well-organized and effectively communicate the often jargon-ridden world of complex technologies for those who have yet to go virtual themselves. He makes important contributions that both demonstrate the successful application of diverse social theories to real world practicalities and challenge our conventional understandings of what it means to migrate. *Virtual migration* itself opens up a very real (as opposed to virtual) space for discussing new forms of migration, governance, and globalization in which geographic perspectives and voices still have much to contribute.

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**Mediating nature: environmentalism and modern culture.** By Nils Lindahl Elliot. London: Routledge. 2006. 284 pp. \$46.95 paperback. ISBN 0 415 39325 6.

*Mediating nature* opens with the statement that it 'offers a history of the present nature of mass mediation' (p. 1). The use of such an ambiguous declaration as a first gambit is a deliberate ploy to open up a space to discuss and disrupt commonplace conceptions of cultural concepts such as 'nature', 'mass mediation' and 'history of the present'. While the nature of 'nature' has been given considerable attention in the academic sphere in recent years it is by engaging with this literature alongside more critical understandings of mass mediation as a historical process that the book carves out its niche. Attention to mass mediation, which is defined more expansively as 'the historical process involving a panoply of pedagogies of massification' (p. 4), is usefully extended beyond what is commonly referred to as the mass media. In this sense the arena of interest for *Mediating nature* includes not only media coverage of nature through television programmes, the print media or films but also experiences of (and in) parks, zoos and museums. What is most refreshing about the text is its attempt to build bridges between non-representational and non-non-representational theories, a new conceptual divide within geography. The propaedeutic approach adopted (an approach that provides introductory instruction) is also a useful device in the light of the envisaged readership of the book. Students particularly will appreciate the reiteration of debates on the nature of nature and processes of observation and communication. A minor quibble is the relegation to an appendix of attention to the social semiotic problematization framework adopted in the text. This is a shame as the material could have usefully, with some modification, have been incorporated into the introductory section of the book. Another slight disappointment, and this may be only personal predilection, is the inclusion of an epilogue in place of a more consolidating chapter at the end of the book. The concern here is that rather than reflecting carefully on the vast, rich and fascinating material that is presented in the main body of the text the final chapter actually introduces new cases and issues. Hopefully, and in the best tradition of contemporary mass media, the opportunity for reflection and consolidation will come in the form of a sequel to the important early steps taken in *Mediating nature*.

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