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### Book review of 'Experimental practice: Technoscience, alterontologies, and more-than-social movements' by Dimitris Papadopoulos

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# Experimental practice: technoscience, alterontologies, and more-than-social movements

Orlando Woods

## BOOK REVIEW

**Experimental practice: technoscience, alterontologies, and more-than-social movements**, by Dimitris Papadopoulos, Durham, North Carolina, Duke University Press, 2018, 337 pp., \$27.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-4780-0084-6; \$104.95 (hardcover), ISBN 978-1-4780-0065-5

*Experimental Practice* is one of the latest incarnations of Duke University Press's 36-part 'Experimental Futures' book series; a series that intends to question, to provoke, and to provide an innovative theoretical starting point for a radical reimagination of the contemporary world and its unfolding futures. From the outset, then, *Experimental Practice* is positioned as a challenge to preconceived ideas of social, political and economic structures and justices. Materiality and matter provide the theoretical groundings from which this challenge is launched. Through them, Papadopoulos articulates a new understanding of the interdependencies of the human and nonhuman worlds. Through them, he also develops an understanding of 'alternative ontologies'; or, as he puts it, 'alterontologies', of everyday life. These alterontologies guide his critical exploration of normative techniques of knowledge production, and of everyday socio-political practices. Perhaps as a stylistic rejection of such normativity, *Experimental Practice* is a self-professed work of 'social science fiction' that switches between the poetic and the scholarly in a coherent and evocative way. An example of this can be found in the closing two sentences of the Introduction (p. 10), which state:

Something else, something existential is at stake here: alterontological politics is a possible way to survive a world that is disintegrating through human action. Alterontologies may be a way to escape humanity.

The book comprises eight chapters, the latter seven of which are divided into three parts: movements, history remix, and alterontologies. The first chapter provides a theoretical introduction and overview of the book and makes the argument that a decolonial politics of matter must provide a starting point and guidance when addressing questions of social justice. This involves fundamentally rethinking the material composition of life in ways that overthrow normative Western epistemologies. Following that, the book moves into part one – movements – which comprises two chapters addressing ideas of 'biofinancialization' and 'ontological organization,' respectively. The first of these chapters makes the case that a culture of valuation that took root in the 1980s has since become a guiding principle not just for financial markets, but for everyday life. This has, Papadopoulos argues, contributed to an 'assetization of life' and a 'financialization of bios' that have come to form the governing logics of society. The second of the two chapters offers a counterpoint to these logics and argues that social movements have changed the ways in which they try to effect change. Specifically, the example of contemporary migration flows is used to show how the mundane practices of daily life can be used as an indirect form of political influencing; or, an alternative ontological organisation.

Part two of the book – history remix – comprises two more chapters that address ideas of 'activist materialism' and 'insurgent posthumanism'. Essentially, the aim of part two is to search for historical antecedents to contemporary understandings of posthumanism and technoscience; to 'remix' history. To this end, the first of these chapters explores the

inter-relationships between materialism and political activism, whilst the second uses these ideas to explore alternative material conditions of existence that are explained through three 'experimental practices' that link social movements to technoscience. Part three – alterontologies – takes these ideas and applies them to the present day. The first two chapters concern 'brain matter' and 'compositional technoscience', which, respectively, explore the ways in which humans relate to their brains can influence (and, indeed, limit) the resolution of justice, and how a change in everyday material conditions can enable new modalities of existence, and new engagements with justice. The final chapter of the book, 'crafting ontologies', changes tack, using the case study of the maker and hacker culture in the British East Midlands to argue that innovation in technoscience has become an increasingly distributed, and democratic, process. The integration of diverse materials and processes is shown to change both the conditions of knowledge production and the ontological constitution of life.

Whilst the book is resolutely interdisciplinary in approach, it engages with a number of ideas – such as posthumanism, more-than-social movements, and technoscience more generally – that underpin some of the most innovative developments in contemporary geographical scholarship. The range of case studies that is presented – from AIDS activism, to HSBC advertising campaigns, to the Struggle for Calais – helps to ground Papadopoulos's theoretical arguments, and to moderate some of the creative licence that comes from his writing of 'social science fiction'. Some of the ideas presented here are outstanding in their originality, yet so too are some obfuscated by linguistic complexity. This does not, however, detract from the strength of the core narrative, which consistently and provocatively argues for a reimagination of socio-political organisation and justice in/and the world.

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