

Water: Abundance, Scarcity, and Security in the Age of Humanity. By Jeremy J. Schmidt. (New York: New York University Press, 2017. xii, 308 pp. \$35.00.)

Several decades ago the sociologist Murray Davis proposed a new field—the sociology of the interesting—based on a proposition: interesting theories deny the assumptions of their audience (“That’s Interesting!,” *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, Dec. 1971, pp. 309–44). Noninteresting theories, by contrast, affirm audience assumptions. To make his case, Davis reviewed influential social theories and identified twelve categories of interesting propositions. One of those concerned organization: “What seems to be a disorganized (unstructured) phenomenon is in reality an organized (structured) phenomenon” (p. 313).

So it is with water management, argues the geographer Jeremy J. Schmidt in his ambitious, deeply researched, and thoughtful work of interdisciplinary scholarship. The book’s argument and structure turn on a proposition about water management that Davis would likely have found interesting. Schmidt argues that contemporary global water management is not, as experts often assert, a disorganized (unstructured) phenomenon—a “haphazard bricolage” (p. 7) of ideas—but rather, a common way of thinking shaped by an underlying philosophy that leads to problematic outcomes. That philosophy, “normal water,” is the book’s main subject.

Normal water, for Schmidt, is a program that brings “water’s social and evolutionary possibilities into the service of liberal forms of life” (p. 6). It also, crucially, leads us to treat water as a resource. The book excavates the history of how this way of thinking became an unspoken consensus with an eye to imagining alternatives. This is a genealogy of a global philosophy with provincial roots. Part 1 of the book locates those roots in the overlapping worlds of intellectual life and state bureaucracy in the late nineteenth-century United States, specifically a line of evolutionary thought that linked geology and the social sciences. Part 2 explores how American water management ideas (especially multipurpose river-basin planning modeled on the Tennessee Valley Authority) traveled via the postwar interna-

tional development apparatus. Part 3 traces how water managers came to think about water in terms of security—a universal proposition that came into tension with other cultural ways of understanding water. Part 4 concludes that contemporary water problems are linked to the nineteenth-century philosophy of normal water and that social scientific responses should be aimed at disrupting that project.

There is much to admire in Schmidt’s genealogy of normal water. He establishes fascinating connections between seeming dead ends in American intellectual history and today’s global socioenvironmental concerns. As such, Schmidt’s arguments should stimulate discussion in history, anthropology, geography, and environmental studies. The book also highlights a challenge in interdisciplinary writing. Assuming that interesting theories deny an audience’s assumptions, as Davis argued, how should the author proceed when writing for multiple audiences with different baseline assumptions? As noted above, the book begins by denying an assumption about water management (it is an incoherent bricolage of ideas) that I did not share and, consequently, thought deserved more empirical support. Others may experience a similar response elsewhere—perhaps during the book’s wide-ranging and fast-moving discussions of social theory. But, ultimately, these challenges are a symptom of the book’s success as an interdisciplinary work. Historians and other scholars will all find something of interest here.

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American Jewry: Transcending the European Experience? Ed. by Christian Wiese and Cornelia Wilhelm. (London: Bloomsbury, 2017. xii, 379 pp. \$39.95.)

The “transnational turn” has been a prevalent theme in recent historical writing. The field of Jewish history is particularly suited to transnational approaches, given the dynamic migration process that defined the modern period. Yet, until recently, most scholarship in