

BOOK REVIEWS: Constana Vintilă-Ghițulescu, *Patimă și desfătare. Despre lucrurile mărunte ale vieții cotidiene în societatea românească, 1750-1860* (*Passion and Delight. On Small Things of Daily Life in Romanian society, 1750-1860*), Humanitas, București, 2015; The Patching Zone (Editor Anne Nigten), *Real Projects for Real People*, vol.4, Rotterdam, Tripiti, 2015.



Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu, *Patimă și desfătare. Despre lucrurile mărunte ale vieții cotidiene în societatea românească, 1750-1860* (*Passion and Delight. On Small Things of Daily Life in Romanian society, 1750-1860*), Humanitas, București, 2015, 484 p. ISBN 9789735049553

Ioana Baci, PhD student, “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University, Iași

Following a series of two other studies dedicated to the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries in the Romanian Principalities (one about the reglementation of sexual mores, marriage and divorce by the Church, the other about the hierarchies of social strata in the age), Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu now approaches the “passions and delights” of Romanians of all classes from two hundred years ago. Her latest book lends itself to “the small things of daily life in Romanian society” – it is a history of the everyday in the eighteenth century as the phanariote rule and its orientalised customs give way to the modernising and Westernizing revolutionary impetus of the 1830s and 40s. A historian through and through, with studies in Bucharest in Paris, and a researcher at the “Nicolae Iorga” Institute in the Romanian capital, the

author is as gifted a writer as she is a scholar – which is precisely what makes her work appealing to both the general public and fellow academics. Impressive in erudition but effortless in its communication, the book is a living, breathing slice of the past, reminding one, as the third cover blurb aptly phrases it, that “history is, above all, a successful narrative”.

Combining contemporary cooking show savvy with the wiles of a clever Scheherazade in the age of instant gratification, the author summons the universal appeal of food in its many shapes or forms. The deliciousness of the read is cleverly augmented by the subject matter of the first chapter. Rather belied by the austere “daily bread” of the title, the reader works up an appetite for the future delights of the book feasting on the descriptions of boyar meals, as the text unravels a parade of dishes as rich in exotic fruits and spices as it is in archaisms: lemons, oranges, pomegranates, cinnamon, saffron, pine seeds, turmeric, pepper, cloves, pistachios, bay leaves, almonds, nutmeg, allspice saturate the dishes, already rich enough through the excessive use of butter. The heavy meats and sugar-laden pastries of the rich – with leisure, money and servants on their hands – are a disproportionate *apéritif* to the meager victuals of the peasantry.

The sources the author pries open for this glimpse into the pantries, cellars and kitchens of the rich and poor are merchants’ supply lists, cellarer’s inventories, cookbooks, are but sparse at the beginning of the analysed period and mostly drawn up for personal or household use. As French fashions gain in popularity and the Oriental dress code is replaced with the Western one (the “German” clothes so difficult to adapt to), traveller’s journals and manner codes are published, adding a foreign perspective to the way in which these exotic parts are perceived by the rest of the world. Self-awareness about the “savage” and “rude” ways of the dwellers in these parts pushes them to reform – it is a reform initiated by the alphabetized upper classes, but usually strongly resisted by the lower social strata. Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu’s account abounds in such instances of peasant stubbornness, the more daunting as it does not limit itself to manners or other things that, in the presence of “polite” society, commoners see no use for. The introduction of the potato in the nineteenth century meets a lengthy resistance of the people,

who, in these time where famine is a constant occurrence, would rather perish than eat what they perceived as “food for the pigs”. New customs are introduced by the state in its institutions, where there is little room for negotiations – schools, prisons and hospitals – and it is the well-travelled class of the soldiers who help the novelties penetrate in the simple folk’s lives.

These oriental savages, as they appear in the eyes of Westerners, swept here by political reasons or employed by the rich (the cooks) are often critiqued for their lack of manners. *Ypolipsis* is a Greek word used by the aristocracy for a pleasant and considerate behaviour before the introduction of “politeia” or *civilité* borrowed later. The use of the fork – a rare occurrence at boyar meals is an event in itself, elementary notions about behaving in public (not scratching, coughing, yawning, preventing one’s personal stench from bothering others, the use of handkerchiefs) are close to none-existent, underwear as we know it today is but a distant dream, hygiene is precarious and the source of many ills and illnesses. Out of these, hygiene is the greatest of the authorities’ problems. Most of the time, these are well-meaning, but lack the authority and the resources to enforce the law. What remains are cities struggling with filth, accustomed with disease and a reticence for water and soap, the former still believed to carry diseases. The filth is disguised by the rich with perfumes and make-up, which are all supposed to fit the standards of beauty of the age, which mostly apply to women – robustness, porcelain-white skin and dark hair are still in fashion at a time when, in the West, the grace of the tiny waist is appreciated.

The celebration of life that food entailed in the first chapter seemed to have opened a precious treasure into the past. The window is soberingly open wider to reveal the less pleasant parts of life in the eighteenth century. The vermin, piles of pestilential garbage, illnesses of these poorly-fed and definitely unwashed masses, the running bodily fluids make for a disgusting portrayal of the times. When they interfere, doctors advocate cleanliness, but not to excessive extent, as changing one’s clothes is thought to be as good as washing. Authorities, in turn, introduce rules that are supposed to keep the “rotten air” emanating from the rubbish-filled streets, but these are mostly ignored. Quack doctors, especially dentists, make their money off the poor and suffering,

to the extent that a law is passed to reduce their soaring numbers. This should not be as surprising, though, since water is a payed-for commodity: there is a specific name for the water-seller, and the wood and coal burned in houses for light and warmth stain everything with a fine layer of soot.

That how time is kept and perceived differs greatly from our cultural norms today would be a truism. The peasant, who keep time based on the seasons, are limited to the use of natural light for they daily work, while the aristocracy prolongs the illusion of daylight by using candles. This is not, all, though. These filthy Orientals (although the author cannot help noticing that, despite the endemic dirt of much more civilised places such as London and Paris, the traveller seems to have a keener eye for the local filth of the Principalities) function on an Eastern schedule. Not only do the rich, with leisure on their hands, build their lives around the abundant meals, but the habit of the siesta, where coffee is served and tobacco is puffed after lunch or dinner as the company lie down on a divan, is undoubtedly puzzling for the foreigner. So is having to sit with one's legs folded underneath – a design for which the modern, Western clothes are not suited for. These trance-like moments of tranquillity are often enhanced by opium-based drugs, which complete the stereotypical picture of Oriental laziness. Entertainment in the Principalities is not without its vivacious side, too, however – balls or garden parties in the presence of gypsy fiddlers, with alcohol running free, are just as representative.

As the book progresses organically from the life-giving joys of food to the state of the people's health, disease triggers death, with its arrays of rituals and superstitions. Impending death sometimes draws one closer to the Church, while the recent death of a spouse (particularly a male one) can be a long-awaited opportunity for the new widow to recover some of her dowery. Death strikes swiftly in an age where epidemics and political instability are rampant and simple people don't make long-term plans. The miscellany of sources is spun by the author into a coherent tale which renders the modern term "cultural history", despite its uncontested accuracy, slightly too technical for so smoothly-written a tome. A work of great scholarship of the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu book is a fascinating

read relevant to our prejudices today. The Orient is a cultural construct of the West, and some of the biases relating the East that originate then might still be operating now.



The Patching Zone (Editor Anne Nigten), *Real Projects for Real People*, vol.4, Rotterdam, Tripiti, 2015
ISBN/EAN 978-90-817051-3-4

Simona Modreanu, professor at the “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași

First of all, there is the Patching Zone, a trans-disciplinary R&D media laboratory in Rotterdam, having as starting point the PhD thesis of its founder and director, dr. Anne Nigten. She believes that the “processpatching” approach is likely to be the most important method for creative research and development. In the Patching Zone, professionals work together with students and researchers, all very keen on making the distinction between trans- and multi-disciplinarity, terms that are too often confused. Here, the project participants all cross the frontiers of their discipline, in a transgressive adventure that leads them beyond their usual professional frameworks, thus creating an astonishing, sometimes unorthodox stream of ideas, by combining and transforming different disciplines in order to reach original interpretations and better deal with the complex questions of our time in an innovative way.

The Patching Zone staff have degrees in New Media, Arts and Culture, science, education, business or care sectors and they work with an international team on social and cultural projects, working for educational institutions, organizations with social interests, local and

national politics as well as for the business sector. The Patching Zone is specialized in various creative trajectories, making use of the new technologies, but without worshipping them as such, always concerned by the contents above all.

The concept of “innovation” has been overused and uttered so many times that it came to mean everything and nothing. But in the Patching Zone, theoretical knowledge, dynamic methods and skillful practice really meet to provide innovative answers to the various assignments, the task being achieved by a deep and close collaboration with the clients, who thus become partners in the fulfillment of their needs. In this respect, intensive seminars, meetings, workshops and even individual coaching are organized, in a trans-disciplinary spirit and, what is extremely important for the team, once knowledge and skills have been shared, participants immediately apply them in real, complex situations.

Disciplines are not neglected as such, but their concepts and methods are used in different combinations, generating interfaces, enhancing each other and making use of technology in a creative way, fully integrating it in the work process. The flexibility and the accuracy of processpatching allow precise analyses of a certain project at any given time, so that strategy and perspectives can be adjusted without blocking the mechanism or having to start it all over again.

This fourth volume that presents the Patching Zone’s most relevant results over the past three years succeeds in proving that this kind of approach leads to new business models, to a new profiling and reassessment of an institution or business, to the embedding of innovative thinking in different organizations and institutions, thus helping to develop a creative way of working and attractive new training trajectories for the employees and, of course, to a significantly increased number of contacts and networks for all the persons and institutions involved. The volume is focused on a very important question for the creative industry, that of *creative innovation as a solution for complex issues*, revisited from a practical perspective. The authors invite the reader on a journey inside the strategy makers fields of action, that can be a research laboratory, a classroom, a street of Toronto or Rotterdam, a place where they meet their clients, their audience in order to answer to the complex assignments or the so called “wicked problems”.

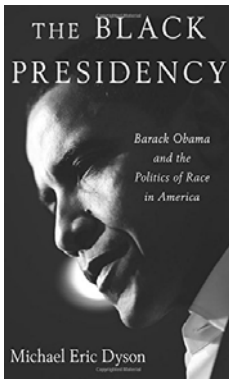
The essays and articles in this volume cover the Patching Zone's activity from November 2013 until mid-2015, and they are built around three main projects: Mediawharf, the innovation workspace for Zadkine, a secondary technical vocational school in Rotterdam, the development of Points of Departure, three installations for the public space at the Wilhelminapier in Rotterdam, the Crisp Intelligent Play Environments project (i-PE) research project and the international Live Transmission project; the research and development of mobile citizens video journalism. The papers in Real Projects for Real People, volume 4, are signed by: Kristina Andersen (DK/NL), Javier Lloret (ES/NL), Marjolein van der Meer (NL), Sebastien Seynaeve (BE/NL), Max Dovey (UK), Anne Nigten (NL), Erwin Niedeveld, educational leader, Mark Schipperus and Rico Schreudergy (NL) from Zadkine, Ju Row Farr, Blast Theory (UK), Tapio Mäkelä, Translocal (FI), Tom Barker, OCAD University (CA), Linda de Valk, Pepijn Rijnbout, Mark de Graaf and Tilde Bekker, Eindhoven University of Technology (NL).

BOOK PRESENTATIONS

Peter Frankopan, *The Silk Roads. A New History of the World*. Bloomsbury, 2015, 656 p., ISBN 978-1408839973



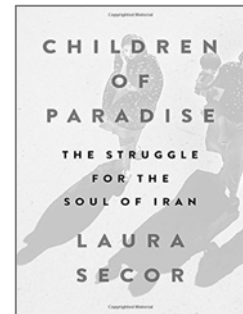
Peter Frankopan is Senior Research Fellow and Faculty Fellow at Worcester College, University of Oxford. Too often, books on world history take a Western-centric perspective, but this one tries to do it differently, and does so with charm and intelligence. This is a well written, grand sweep of history from a different perspective: from that of the silk roads that stretched from China to the Mediterranean. These ancient trading routes covered vast swathes of Earth's surface and there the author gives us remarkable insight into events from the past. Brilliant and fearless despite the complexity of the material, Frankopan marches briskly through the centuries, disguising his erudition with an enviable lightness of touch, enlivening his narrative with a beautifully constructed web of anecdotes and insights, backed up by an impressively wide-ranging scholarly apparatus of footnotes drawing on works in multiple languages.



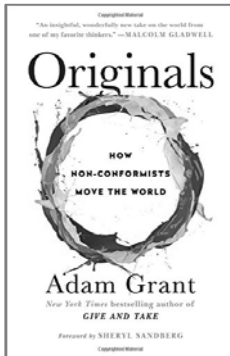
Michael Eric Dyson, *The Black Presidency: Barack Obama and the Politics of Race in America*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016, 368 p. ISBN 978-0544387669

Michael Eric Dyson is a *New York Times* contributor, a Georgetown University professor, an MSNBC political analyst, and best-selling author of seventeen books. *The Black Presidency* is a brilliant and searing analysis of what it means to be African-American in the Age of Obama. Prophetic and scholarly, profound and colloquial, luscious and rigorous, empathic and critical, tough and fair, Dyson meticulously captures the tension between the immense burden of expectation and record of achievement of the Obama presidency. His portrait of a legacy still in utero captivates with an uncanny prescience and sometimes-critical eye. The book is a provocative and lively deep dive into the meaning of America's first black presidency, from "one of the most graceful and lucid intellectuals writing on race and politics today" (*Vanity Fair*).

Laura Secor, *Children of Paradise. The Struggle for the Soul of Iran*, Riverhead Books, 2016, 528 p. ISBN 978-1594487101



Laura Secor has written about Iran for *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Foreign Affairs*, *The New Republic*, and other publications, and has worked at *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*, *The American Prospect*, and *Lingua Franca*, and has taught journalism at NYU and Princeton. *Children of Paradise* is a deeply moving, intimate collection of personal stories, through extensive interviews with Iranians in the country and in exile. Secor's portraits of journalists, dissidents, reformers and student activists who have fought bravely for their ideals in a country where voicing one's beliefs has often led to imprisonment, torture and death create an impressionistic montage of Iranian life during the last 37 years, which is hugely valuable in helping us understand Iran's complex back story. Transcending the political clichés that are often offered as new insights on Iran, this book provides a glimpse into what Secor calls the "soul of the matter".

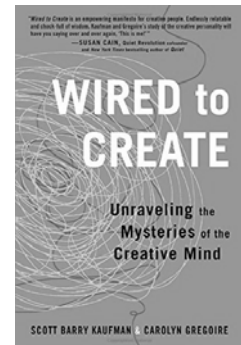


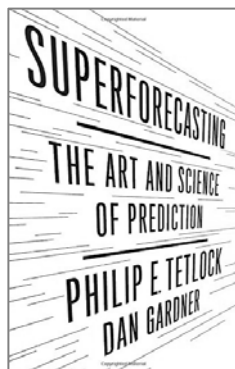
Adam Grant, *Originals. How Non-Conformists Move the World*, Viking, 2016, 336 p. ISBN 978-0525429562

Adam Grant is Wharton’s top-rated teacher. He has been recognized as one of HR’s most influential international thinkers, *BusinessWeek*’s favorite professors, the world’s 40 best business professors under 40, and Malcolm Gladwell’s favorite social science writers. *Originals* is a fascinating, eye-opening read that will help us not just recognize our own unique gifts, but find the strength to challenge conventional wisdom to bring them to life. Using surprising studies and riveting stories, Adam Grant brilliantly shows us how to champion new ideas, bust persistent myths that hold us back and change our lives. By debunking success stories, challenging long-held beliefs of process, and finding commonality among those who are agents of profound change, Adam Grant offers a powerful new perspective on not just our place in the world, but our potential to shake it up entirely.

Scott Barry Kaufmann and Carolyn Gregoire, *Wired to Create: Unraveling the Mysteries of the Creative Mind*, TarcherPerigee, 2015, 288 p. ISBN 978-0399174100

Scott Barry Kaufman is scientific director of the Imagination Institute and investigates the measurement and development of imagination, creativity and well-being in the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania. Carolyn Gregoire is a senior writer at the *Huffington Post*, where she reports on psychology, mental health, and neuroscience. This book brings a very fresh perspective to a field that has, inexplicably, been struggling to “create” new ideas for several decades. With scientifically based research on imagination, daydreaming, intuition, and mindfulness, it opens up new avenues of thinking about this critical human capacity. *Wired to Create* offers a glimpse inside the “messy minds” of highly creative people. Revealing the latest findings in neuroscience and psychology, along with engaging examples of artists and innovators throughout history, the book shines a light on the practices and habits of mind that promote creative thinking.





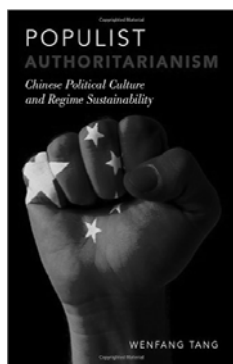
Philip E. Tetlock and Dan Gardner, *Superforecasting: The Art and Science of Prediction*, Crown, 2015, 352p. ISBN 978-0804136693

Philip E. Tetlock is the Annenberg University Professor at the University of Pennsylvania and holds appointments in the psychology and political science departments and the Wharton School of Business. Dan Gardner is a journalist and the author of *Risk* and *Future Babble: Why Pundit are Hedgehogs and Foxes Know Best*. Philip. In his brilliant *Superforecasting*, both scholarly and engaging, Tetlock offers a hopeful message, based on his own ground-breaking research. The best way to know if an idea is right is to see if it predicts the future. But which ideas, which methods, which people have a track record of non-obvious predictions vindicated by the course of events? In this book, full of great stories and simple statistics, Tetlock and Gardner give us a new way of thinking about the complexity of the world and the limitations of our minds.

Klaus Schwab, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*, Geneva, World Economic Forum, 198 p., 2016 ISBN978-1944835002

Professor Klaus Schwab is the Founder and Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum, the International Organization for Public Private Cooperation headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland. Schwab uniquely combines the experience of being an academic, an entrepreneur and a statesman. He has been at the centre of global affairs for over 45 years. This book is very interesting from at least three points of view. First, the author presents a complete catalogue of all the changes that have started that will change society. Second for each change he points out the potential benefit and dangers that are of equal magnitude. Third, he poses the questions that need to be answered to avoid disasters, and instead, gain benefits. At the end of the book he recommends how to find the right answers and implement them. *The Fourth Industrial Revolution* is perhaps the most salient and accessible analysis of our changing world, and the consequences of explosive, ceaseless technological innovation.





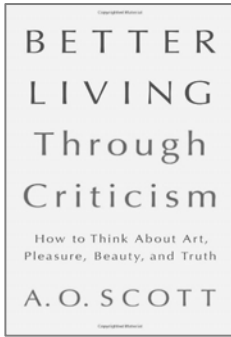
Wenfang Tang, *Populist Authoritarianism: Chinese Political Culture and Regime Sustainability*, Oxford University Press, 2016, 240 p. ISBN-13: 978-0190205799

Wenfang Tang is Professor of Political Science, Chair of Chinese Culture and Institutions, and Director of Undergraduate Studies at the University of Iowa. *Populist Authoritarianism* focuses on the Chinese Communist Party, which governs the world's largest population in a single-party authoritarian state. Wenfang Tang attempts to explain the seemingly contradictory trends of the increasing number of protests on the one hand, and the results of public opinion surveys that consistently show strong government support on the other hand. The text points to the continuity from the CCP's revolutionary experiences to its current governing style, even though China has changed in many ways on the surface in the post-Mao era, and proposes a theoretical framework of Populist Authoritarianism with six key elements, including the Mass Line ideology, accumulation of social capital, public political activism and contentious politics, a hyper-responsive government, weak political and civil institutions, and a high level of regime trust.

Alain Badiou, *Notre mal vient de plus loin. Penser les tueries du 13 novembre*, Paris, Fayard, 2016, 72 p. ISBN-13: 978-2213700991

Prominent French philosopher Alain Badiou, in his new book about the terrorist attacks of November 13 in Paris, recalls the pressing need of offering the world's youth, who are highly frustrated by capitalism that does not honour its promises, an ideological alternative. It is a groundbreaking analysis of terrorism in the context of global capitalism and the loss of alternatives. The author tries to shed light upon the enigmatic death impulse that drives the jihadists to kill people indiscriminately. It is popularly argued that a type of radicalization, which builds upon the social and religious causes, yields unprecedented violence. Badiou, however, sees these attacks through different lenses; for him, they are symptomatic carnages of our time where there is no limit to global capitalism.





A. O. Scott, *Better Living Through Criticism: How to Think About Art, Pleasure, Beauty and Truth*, Penguin Press, 2016, 288 p. ISBN 978-1594204838

A.O. Scott is a film critic, a Sunday book reviewer for *Nesday* and a frequent contributor to *Slate*, *The New York Review of Books*, and has served on the editorial staffs of *Lingua Franca* and *The New York Review of Books*. A.O. Scott shows in *Better Living Through Criticism* that we are, in fact, all critics: because critical thinking informs almost every aspect of artistic creation, of civil action, of interpersonal life. With penetrating insight and warm humor, Scott shows that while individual critics - himself included - can make mistakes and find flaws where they shouldn't, criticism as a discipline is one of the noblest, most creative, and urgent activities of modern existence. Scott lays out a taxonomy of meaningful thought, displaying disciplined reasoning, impressive erudition, and deep commitment to his art in a provocative and elegantly articulated text.

Steven Shaviro, *Discognition*, London, Watkins Media, 2016. ISBN 978-1910924068

Steven Shaviro is DeRoy Professor of English at Wayne State University and a cultural critic. In his latest book he starts from a few relevant questions: What is consciousness? How does subjective experience occur? Which entities are conscious? What is it like to be a dog, a robot, or a tree? How do we explain the very fact of being aware? What does it really mean to be conscious, to think, to feel, to know? They seem to be ordinary questions with obvious answers, but still today, there is no consensus upon any of these topics, neither among scientists and philosophers, nor among the general public. In *Discognition*, Steven Shaviro looks at science fiction novels and stories that explore the extreme possibilities of human and alien sentience.





Michael Guillen, *Amazing Truths: How Science and the Bible Agree*, Zondervan, 2016, 208 p. ISBN 978-0310343752

Dr. Michael Guillen is a former ABC News Science Editor and Harvard physics instructor, host of the History Channel's *Where Did It Come From?* In this book he starts from the evidence that an entire generation is being swept up in a false narrative that the Bible and science are incompatible. Too many today, both young and old, believe that faith in the Bible has been discredited by the new religion of science. In *Amazing Truths*, the brilliant physicist Michael Guillen dismantles those myths, presenting hard evidence and sound reason to cause skeptics to reevaluate their own belief system and believers to have renewed confidence in the Bible. Dr. Guillen explains that faith is not some outdated way of thinking. Faith is a necessary part of science, Christianity, and any intelligent, comprehensive, coherent worldview – vastly more powerful than even logic.
