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How would you like to pay: how technology is changing the future of money

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How would you like to pay: how technology is changing the future of money, by Bill Maurer, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2015, 163 pp., \$19.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-8223-5999-9

It is not quite true that “This book aims to spur innovative thinking in anyone interested in the future of money.” It might be more accurate to rephrase this first sentence of the introduction: “This book aims to spur an interest in the future of money in anyone inclined towards innovative thinking.” Anyone who has given any thought to what money *is* – past, present, or future – is likely to already be familiar with most of the book’s contents. But for someone who has not yet considered the nature of money and the multiple forms it has taken, is taking, and might take, it is a useful introduction, readily accessible to a non-specialist.

The book covers a lot of territory in relatively few pages, not to mention that these pages include an abundance of photographs. Its content ranges from a brief introduction to the origins and the economic functions of money to an overview of money’s psychology and sociology. Most of the book, however, is a whirlwind tour through current payment systems innovations (e.g. the simplified credit card acceptance device Square, iPhone/watch-mediated Apple Pay, the mobile phone-based crypto currency M-Pesa) and alternative stores of value (e.g. gift cards, loyalty cards, transit fare cards, mobile phone airtime, Bitcoin).

In such limited space, none of these topics can be covered in any depth. But presenting them all together in one broad overview certainly has the potential to pique the interest of someone who never imagined the numerous manifestations and implications of money that everyone confronts daily. And the book has a fine annotated bibliography pointing out the way towards greater information on any topic. While this volume is not an exploration of uncharted intellectual territory, it is a well-illustrated, provocative travel brochure that might convince someone to undertake the journey.

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