

Emplaced Myth: Space, Narrative, and Knowledge in Aboriginal Australia and Papua New Guinea, edited by Alan Rumsey and James F Weiner. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001. ISBN 0-8248-2389-3; vii + 281 pages, maps, tables, figures, photographs, bibliography, index. US\$27.95.

The papers in this collection (and a forthcoming companion volume) were originally presented at an Australian National University conference on the effects of industrial mining on the cultures of indigenous peoples. This, the first volume, specifically concerns the confrontation between traditional indigenous cosmologies of self and place and the forces of change, historicization, and modernity. The papers are focused particularly around issues of cosmological geography, especially those landscapes commonly found in Australia and New Guinea that were believed to be created by wandering mythological beings or ancestors whose movements and deeds created or gave form to the countryside. The pairing of Australia and New Guinea in relation to these founder-journeying myths is intended to reveal the two-way relationship between knowledge of places and emplacement of knowledge in ways that allow comparison between the two regions. While the papers follow this format in a general way they have widely divergent agendas. Among these, we may discern four main ones.

The first is the scholarly use of ethnographic material to contest or reconfigure some theoretical issue of importance in anthropology. Rumsey, for example, draws on Aboriginal and

Melanesian modes of constructing landscape to critique Deleuze and Guattari's contrast between arborescent and rhizomatic models for thought.

Wagner, in a highly speculative paper, argues for the existence of primal myths. Instead of considering the process of knowledge whereby "the world's geography is folded into myth" and the process of diffusion whereby "myth is moved across the world," he takes the perspective that the world is diffused across the myth. Thus if mythic content is grafted onto features of the terrain and defines the terrain, as myths diffuse across the world the resulting cosmological landscape can be seen as shaping itself to the primal myth and diffusing through it.

Redmond critiques the widespread view that Aboriginal people inhabit an unchanging cosmological landscape. Arguing that space and place have meaning only in relation to the positioned, mobile, intentional human body, he pictures Aboriginal relations to landscape as a constant product of imaginative encounter wherein people work out central cultural issues and concerns *through* landscape in a way that slowly alters both over time.

Lattas applies a loosely Marxist approach to a New Britain cargo cult in which the members run a moderately successful copra production company by making capitalism into a kind of religion.

Another set of papers in the collection focuses on the issue of secret knowledge. Weiner argues that what is kept secret is less interesting than the *fact* that something is kept secret. Thus, to understand what secret knowledge is really about, the focus of investigation must fall not so much on

its content as on the social construction of the regime of communicative practice.

Wassman does this for Iatmul knowledge of secret names linked to myths that govern access to social and political entitlements. To assert or defend these entitlements, senior men are compelled to reveal some of their knowledge of the names, thus dissipating their power over them. Wassman contends that this process will never result in the final dissipation of all secret knowledge because it is bound up with a practice of formal debating so complex that new secret names may be invented and introduced into the system by any debater sufficiently skilled in convincing others of their validity.

Two papers are strongly comparative in focus. Stewart and Strathern argue for a distinction between myths concerned with “origins” (seen as original events that lay down once-for-all a permanent state of affairs) and stories that deal with “creations” (events considered to initiate a new state of affairs in an existing [mytho]-historical context). They broadly identify Aboriginal cosmological landscapes with “origin” schemes and those of Melanesia (Highlands Papua New Guinea) with “creation” ones. After a carefully considered comparative analysis of Australian and Melanesian examples, however, they conclude that even origin schemes change historically and creation schemes have enough elements of “once-for-all-time” to conclude that at the highest level of generality the two are much the same.

Rose examines the relation between self and landscape among Victoria River Aboriginals and the Melanesian

Kaulong. Renouncing Cartesian distinctions such as culture vs nature or concept vs reality, she pictures the relations between people and cosmological landscape in terms of a mutual ontological/ecological embeddedness. From this perspective, Aboriginal people and their natural (cosmological) environment exist in a moral relationship of mutual care and nurturance with their environment. By contrast, the Melanesian Kaulong see themselves as inhabiting a world where they must carve out a human space in which to live. These different forms of embeddedness have quite different implications for moral relations between the human and nonhuman world.

Identity politics is a final issue running through many papers in this volume. Silverman and Bolton each take it as a central focus. Silverman examines the debate about whether commodification of Aboriginal art negates Aboriginal identity or, on the contrary, lends voice to Aboriginal concerns and values in the larger discourse of modernity. He argues for the latter position, rather than seeing both as representing different processes that work dialectically to engender an incorporation of Aboriginal identity into modernity and vice versa.

Bolton carries forward the discussion by examining Aboriginal and Melanesian practices of museum presentations of their own cultures. Aboriginal people use museums as a forum for asserting identity rights against white Australian society. Melanesians, for the most part politically self-governing, are more interested in furthering their living culture in ways that are best celebrated in arts

festivals. Museums play their part in this arena by actively supporting what might be called “heritage” (exhibiting historical photographs more than artifacts and collecting tape recordings of stories and oral history). They also become involved in campaigns to preserve local sacred sites and ritual practices dispersed across ethnic groups.

Weiner, in a concluding afterword, summarizes the basic themes of the book and reflects on the difficulties indigenous people have in nurturing and retaining the creative vitality of their traditions without having them appear contrived on the one hand or keeping traditions so inflexible that they become ossified and require artificial support on the other.

The comparative intent of this book is present through most of the papers, and this, together with the wide range of Aboriginal and Melanesian groups discussed and the multiple concerns of the authors with issues of change and historicity, provides a rich mixture of material to provoke vigorous seminar discussions both of traditional ethnographic issues, and the problems of encounter with modernity.

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Love 3 Times. Play written by Vilsoni Hereniko. Directed by Megan Evans. Kumu Kahua Theater, Honolulu, Hawai'i, 17 May to 17 June 2001.

Playwright Vilsoni Hereniko generally allows himself more aesthetic distance than he does in *Love 3 Times*, performed in May–June 2001 at Kumu Kahua Theater in Honolulu under

the capable direction of Megan Evans. Like Hereniko, the play's central character is a forty-something Rotuman playwright-professor in Honolulu who is increasingly drawn toward cinema (a trajectory with multiple implications). The trials of Tomasi Amanako therefore feel like a “counter-life” through whom, with forthrightness and wry self-consciousness, Hereniko dramatizes a range of issues. These center around the complexities of inhabiting western institutions without betraying Pacific roots, and the obstacles to intimacy with those who do not share those roots.

Such concerns inform the play's opening scene, where Tomasi's wife Cindy videotapes him, his sister La, and his fourteen-year-old son from a previous marriage, Duncan, as they pay respects to his departed father, Hapati. The camera records Tomasi instructing his son Duncan in commemorative customs, and carrying the heavy tombstone for his father's grave. (As with many works that begin with funerals, such as Witi Ihimaera's *Tangi*, the burying of an elder relative suggests the passing away of something larger.) The delayed return to Rotuma for the ceremony, twenty years after Hapati's death, provides an occasion for Tomasi to come to terms with the three central “loves” in his life. These loves are both personal and representative of values and temporalities: Hapati, who in a sense represents Rotuman tradition; Cindy, a film producer who suggests at one level the bustling presentism of the film world; and the child Duncan, whose upbringing in materialistic London sets him in a situation common to the next generation of diasporic Islanders of mixed