

Remembering Greg Dening

Greg Dening, historian and ethnographer of Oceania, passed away on 13 March 2008 while on a visit to Tasmania. The effects of his scholarship on the histories and ethnographies of the region are profound. Many of us, however, grieve the loss of not only a world-renowned scholar but also a generous colleague, encouraging mentor, and close friend. Greg touched lives everywhere, including here in Hawai'i. We would like to think that Hawai'i was one of his special places. Donna Merwick, Greg's wife and an acclaimed historian of colonial New York, wrote in a recent letter that Honolulu was an intellectual home for him, "a place of stimulation, challenge, and always welcome" (see figure 1). After completing his doctoral studies at Harvard University in 1967 under Douglas Oliver, Greg took up his first academic appointment at the University of Hawai'i, Mānoa, where he taught for both the history and anthropology departments. Accounts of Greg's efforts to teach cultural history in Hawai'i can be found in his 1997 article, "Empowering Imaginations," for *The Contemporary Pacific* and also in his more recent book, *Beach Crossings*. He returned numerous times over the years, including a six-month visit as the John A Burns Distinguished Visiting Professor of History for the spring 1981 semester. Greg's support for *The Contemporary Pacific* was early and steadfast. He advocated for the journal's founding, wrote for its inaugural issue, served as a regular contributor and reviewer, and provided the words of endorsement that long graced our promotional brochure.

There already exist scholarly analyses of Greg's work; the years to come will undoubtedly witness the publication of many more. The essays presented in this collection are by those who encountered Greg either while he was at UH Mānoa or later, through Greg's connections with others here. They are written by Greg's peers and students, and offer varied reflec-



FIGURE 1 Donna Merwick and Greg Dening during the “Challenges to Perform” seminar at the Australian National University, 2004.
Photo by Greg Dvorak.

tions over disciplinary and generational boundaries. They tell of common causes, collegial exchanges, scholarly guidance, and inspiration that could at times be spiritual. Ben Finney shares an early story about the professional intimidation that he and Greg were subjected to, for challenging the then-reigning belief that Polynesians could not have purposefully explored and settled the Pacific Islands. Marshall Sahlins writes of the adoption of Greg’s “Melbourne Method” at the University of Chicago and of their mutually enriching conversations about Native and Stranger that hybridized their respective anthropologies.

Greg’s time in Hawai‘i and the effects of his personal and intellectual presence on Pacific studies at Mānoa are the subject of David Hanlon’s essay. Vince Diaz underscores the contribution of Greg’s scholarship to the doing of Native histories; he recounts too the critical rigor and encouragement with which Greg read his soon-to-be published work on colonialism, Catholicism, and indigeneity in Guam. Greg’s commitment to Native

scholarship and the efficacy of his “bound-together” history on the more recent Hawaiian past would have been the focus of Kanalu Young’s writing; Kanalu emphasized the importance of Greg’s work to the doing of Hawaiian history from his bed at the Queen’s Hospital in early August 2008. Tragically, the deep sense of loss engendered by Greg’s death here in Hawai’i has been compounded by Kanalu’s own untimely passing.

In the latter years of his career, Greg emphasized the role of performance in the presentation of knowledge about the past; he exhorted his students to be bold, imaginative, and experimental in the histories that they crafted. Katerina Teaiwa and Greg Dvorak provide highly personal accounts of their participation in the “Challenges to Perform” seminar that Greg and Donna offered regularly through the Australian National University’s Centre for Cross-Cultural Research. Teaiwa reflects on writing as an embodied process that proved particularly painful during the initial drafting of her dissertation; she found wonderfully liberating Greg’s emphasis on performance and his suggestion that she combine dance with scholarship. Dvorak too was moved by Greg’s invitation “to dance” and to include history in the repertoire of interdisciplinary skills that he brought to his multilayered study of Japanese and American colonialisms on Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands. In a poetic touch, the title of Dvorak’s reflection evokes his first encounter with Greg through the reading of The Death of William Gooch on the beach at Waimea on the island of O’ahu.

So ends this prologue. These essays represent a collective effort to pay tribute to an inspiring scholar and wonderful gentleman to whom so many of us owe so much. In their distinctive, insightful, and eclectic ways, these writings provide a measure of Greg’s contributions to the field of Pacific studies, a contribution that was as personally gracious as it was intellectually enriching.

DAVID HANLON
for the editorial board of
The Contemporary Pacific

THE ORDER OF THE FADED BLUE AEROGRAMME

BEN FINNEY

In 1967 Harry Maude asked me if I would be interested in becoming a Research Fellow in the Australian National University’s Department of Pacific History. At the time I had been taking a break from canoe voyag-

ing experiments in Hawai'i to research indigenous entrepreneurs in the nascent coffee industry of the Papua New Guinea Highlands, and was looking for a good place to write up the results. "But," I objected, "I'm an anthropologist, not a historian." Actually, that was Harry's point. He felt that the department's initially daring strategy to go beyond imperial history to produce island-centered histories was bogging down, and thought that an anthropologist imbedded amid the historians might help nudge them toward becoming more Islander-centered. I took the job, but my analysis of emergent "bikfela man blong bisnis" didn't seem to impress the historians much, based as it was primarily on fieldwork among the entrepreneurs, their coffee plantations, and other enterprises rather than on the few documents written by or about them.

What I didn't realize at the time was that Greg Denning, a brilliant young Australian Jesuit priest and historian, was making an end run around the issue of how to do history in colonized Island societies by taking a PhD in anthropology under Doug Oliver at Harvard, and then combining lessons learned with his historical training gained earlier in Australia to develop his *Islands and Beaches* approach to colonial encounters at Fenua'enata (literally "Land of People"; aka the Marquesas). Greg honed his book while serving as Professor of History at Melbourne University, a daring appointment for a young scholar who had earned his doctorate in anthropology, not history. When the book came out in 1980, it was a hit among young historians and anthropologists for the way it applied a variety of historical sources—including the narratives of beachcombers who during the late 1700s and early 1800s had lived in Fenua'enata, became fluent in the language, and participated vigorously in the society—to describe the plight of the "people" during this tumultuous era.

In a sense, beachcombers such as Crook, the would-be preacher who strayed across the beach, Robarts, the enterprising ship's cook who married a chieftain's daughter, and Cabri, the French sailor-turned-tattooed warrior, had done Denning's fieldwork for him. Greg's genius was to locate and mine their memoirs (and other accounts written by visitors from information beachcombers had given them) so that he could empathetically portray what was happening on the 'Enata side of the beach as foreign explorers, merchants, missionaries, and colonial officers came and went.

Nonetheless, after having been trained in the anthropological ideal of extended fieldwork conducted in the native language, and then making his history students do ethnography in contemporary Australian society, Greg

had to admit his own shortcomings as a field-worker who had spent little time in Fenua‘enata, and while there had communicated mostly in French. He remained a historian devoted to following the paper trail, and confessed that, at Nukuhiva, “I retreated to the mission archives with some relief. Archives are my life. I love their cool and quiet. Meeting the dead in archives is less traumatic than meeting the living on the beach.” Yet this shy archivist’s work is widely praised as a model for a deeply humanistic approach to understanding what happens when peoples collide.

One evening several years ago, Greg spoke about doing Pacific history anthropologically at my university’s Kamakakūokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies. During the mid-1800s proportionally more Hawaiians were said to be literate in Hawaiian than Americans were in English. Numerous Hawaiian scholars were then publishing about their history and culture in the many Hawaiian-language newspapers of that era. However, these initiatives faded with the American takeover of the islands. When post-graduate studies started up at the University of Hawai‘i in the 1950s and 1960s, distressingly few Hawaiians initially enrolled to study history and especially anthropology. Among other things, they didn’t appreciate how many of the foreign scholars in those fields had been analyzing Hawaiian culture and history. However, when *Islands and Beaches* came out they had a more culturally informed and empathetic model. So when historian Lilikalā Kame‘eleihiwa introduced Greg that evening, she lauded him for helping to show the way for a new wave of Hawaiian scholarship.

In *Beach Crossings*, Greg’s archly reflexive summing up of his life’s work, the anthropological historian tells about one rainy Melbourne day in 1958 when he began research at the Victorian State Library on early Polynesia and interisland canoe voyaging, an effort that would occupy him for several years and earn him an MA in history. At the time, Andrew Sharp had just published *Ancient Voyagers of the Pacific*, declaring that Polynesians had been so nautically incompetent that they could only have accidentally been driven to their islands. Greg coolly marshaled a wide variety of historical sources to refute Sharp’s thesis in an essay that was to be his first academic publication.

I had to chuckle when I read how Sharp had stingingly rebuked the young historian in a faded blue aerogramme, which Greg proudly kept as “a sort of scout’s badge of adversarial academia.” That’s because in 1958, as a new MA student in anthropology at the University of Hawai‘i, I too had wrestled with Sharp’s thesis, which I decided to challenge by build-

ing and sailing double canoes to actively investigate Polynesian seafaring. After my Hawaiian colleagues and I had conducted sea trials with the double canoe *Nālehia*, and rumors were flying about our plans to build *Hōkūleʻa* to sail to Tahiti and return by traditional navigation methods, Sharp sent me my own merit badge of the Order of the Faded Blue Aero-gramme—with the warning that I was in “grave jeopardy” for sticking to my views about Polynesian navigation and voyaging.

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MY REAL-MAGICAL YEAR WITH GREG DENING

MARSHALL SAHLINS

I was at almost all of Greg’s lectures on “Native and Stranger” at UH Mānoa during the spring semester of 1981. Sometimes when I came a bit early I would see him sitting alone near the front, preparing. He was in a zone, something like a football player getting his game face on. Or perhaps more like an actor, getting into his part. He studied performances, he wrote about performances, and he gave performances. By the end of the lecture we, the audience, were all in that zone.

Someone once described Greg as a “truly magical-realist” scholar. True perhaps in the sense that his realism was magical, even when it was hard-headed, even when he was doing something like the prosopography of eighteenth-century seamen. But then, were not the encounters he wrote about on the beaches of the Marquesas, or the European flag-raising ceremonies of taking possession at Tahiti and elsewhere, or the death of William Gooch in O‘ahu—weren’t these great acts of magical realism?

That may be a reason we hit it off so well, since I was then in the midst of thinking of Captain Cook’s death as a tale of the marvelous. Greg helped a lot. We had a sort of division of labor in our conversations, since he knew all about the Strangers and I was working more on the “Natives.” Our anthropologies got hybridized that way.

That year, Greg and Donna passed some pleasant evenings with my wife Barbara and me, once or twice as I remember, on the lanai of the house we rented above Honolulu harbor. I was the one who was smoking the cigar, but otherwise, with Greg speaking in that soft, sure voice, it was like sitting on the deck of a yacht in a Conrad novel listening to Marlowe talking story to old friends. Far into the Honolulu night.

Maybe he learned this in his Jesuit days, but one thing he passed on to

me that year, how to teach a seminar, became rather famous at the University of Chicago and elsewhere as the “Melbourne Method.” It entailed breaking the class down into three groups, and after you had lectured for the first couple of sessions, Group A posed three questions on the reading for the next week to Group B. The next week Group B answered the questions, their answers being critiqued by Group C, who also posed three questions on the following week’s reading to Group A. The following week, Group A answered the questions, and their answers were critiqued by Group B, who also posed three questions on the following week’s reading to be answered by Group C—and so on, for the rest of the term. This is a foolproof seminar method. The main problem is how to stop the students from going on for hours. Once when I was late for a class, I came in to find it had started very well without me, thank you. There are many grand scholarly things for which Greg will forever be remembered by historians and anthropologists. But he is also the ancestor of a large pedagogical lineage of university teachers who, thanks to him, finally found a way to keep a seminar going.

The night has passed. The cigar has gone out. But the Greg stories are endless and the memories, inscribed in our lives and in our knowledge, are immortal.

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“GOFORS” SOMETIMES NEED TO BE GOT FOR, TOO

DAVID HANLON

I have hanging in my office a framed poster announcing the series of lectures Greg Dening gave as the John A Burns Distinguished Visiting Professor of History at the Mānoa campus of the University of Hawai‘i during the spring 1981 semester. The series was entitled “Native and Stranger: The Bound-together History of *Kama‘aina* and *Haole* in Polynesia.” Those who know Greg’s work will not be surprised that each of his lectures addressed some aspect of intercultural change. I held a teaching assistantship in the Department of History at that time. Given that the Pacific was my area of concentration, the department chair asked me to serve as Greg’s gofer that semester. My tasks included the taping of those twelve lectures. The originals are housed today in Sinclair Library’s Wong Audiovisual Center on the Mānoa campus. I am sorry to confess that the department decided to have those lectures recorded on used tapes. As a

result, two of the tapes are inaudible, and the others are of varying clarity. There is little else, however, that is inaudible or unclear about the work of this superb scholar and wonderful human being.

That spring semester proved a momentous one for Pacific studies at Mānoa. The Department of Anthropology was hosting Marshall Sahlins for the entire 1980–1981 academic year. Marshall attended a number of Greg's lectures and Greg, in turn, contributed regularly to a graduate seminar in Polynesian chieftainship that Marshall was teaching. *Islands and Beaches* came out in late 1980; *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities* followed in 1981. Structures of conjuncture encountered signs and symbols in ways that rocked both history and anthropology in and beyond Oceania. There were about eight of us who took Greg's seminar entitled "World History," including Hawaiian scholar Davianna Pomai-ka'i McGregor and University of Hawai'i librarians Nancy Morris and Karen Peacock. We spent the first part of the semester reading widely on historiography and in the social sciences; the latter part focused on our individual research projects into assigned crewmembers of the HMS *Bounty*. I drew Midshipman Peter Heywood and, in the process, learned something about the issues of class and power as they played out aboard ship, in a naval court of law, and across beaches.

The most memorable moment in that seminar came in February when Greg gifted each of us with a copy of *Islands and Beaches*. I'd never before received a book from its author. For me, it remains the singularly most important, influential, and inspiring text on the practice of history in the Pacific. Its pages offer up something different and insightful each time I read them. And there is too Greg's inscription in the copy that he gave me: "Gofors' [*sic*] sometimes need to be got for, too." He taught about history and its making in ways that were as encouraging and generous as they were demanding and rigorous. He reminded us of the importance of knowing ourselves as a necessary preface to knowing something about others. He would later say that all discourse is autobiographical. I smile each time I look at the front cover of the dust jacket for *Mr. Bligh's Bad Language*. Give the portrait of William Bligh a haircut and pair of black-rimmed glasses, and it looks to me like Greg. I once asked him in a letter if he saw the resemblance, but he gave no reply, then or later.

I joined the UH History Department as a faculty member in 1983 and stayed in touch with Greg and his wife and colleague, Donna Merwick. The two of them would often stop in Hawai'i during their travels, and were always willing to give public talks or meet with graduate students.

While on sabbatical leave in Australia in 1995, I spent a wonderful July weekend with Greg and Donna at their home on Stirling Street in the Kew section of Melbourne. I envied them their sense of place and their strong institutional attachments. We visited the University of Melbourne campus and Xavier College, walked along the banks of the Yarra River, took in an Australian Rules rugby game between Carleton and Essendon, and laughed together at episodes of the BBC comedy series, *Yes, Prime Minister*. I remember marveling at Donna's garden and being truly impressed by Greg's backyard study, which reassembled the bow of a ship. He would sit there, face front as captain within its glass-enclosed walls, making his histories amid mementos, ship models, and shelves of books.

In 1996, the organizing committee of which I was a part invited Greg to give the closing address for the Pacific History Association's conference at the University of Hawai'i, Hilo. Greg's connections to Hawai'i, his founding role with the association, and the conference's concern for the triadic relationship involving history, culture, and power made the choice of Greg as speaker a natural one. His talk, "Empowering Imaginations," was later published in volume 9, issue 2, of *The Contemporary Pacific*. It contains a history of his ties to Hawai'i.

In 2000, I was asked to comment on a presentation Greg gave at Kama-kakūokalani, the Center for Hawaiian Studies on the Mānoa campus. The invitation came from Lilikalā Kame'eiehiwa, then director of the center, who also gave a response. Greg titled his talk "The Colonial Eye and Native Realities." It was an appropriate topic for a land whose Native people struggle to reassert their sovereignty and their own ways of making history. In my response to Greg's words, I commented on how liberating I found his subversion of history's conventional methodology. I liked the way the way he disturbed so profoundly presumptions of objectivity or of a single and simple truth. I found liberating too his recognition of a chant, a petroglyph, or a hand gesture in a dance as history. I agreed with his assertion about the link between past and present, and about how the politics of our present are in our renderings of the past. Like Greg, I admitted to the complexity, even messiness of life, and to the fact that the seemingly obvious oppositions aren't always as neat, clear, or stark as we might like. "Polarities are frauds," he had declared four years earlier in Hilo, to the dismay of some. I said then, and I still believe now, that one of Greg's greatest contributions is to help us to understand the strangeness of the Stranger, and how that strangeness shows itself in constructions of the Native.

Greg's imprint on Pacific studies here at Mānoa remains large, and through the Native and Stranger scholars that his work has inspired and encouraged. His influence on this journal, *The Contemporary Pacific*, is particularly strong. Words he wrote back in late 1994 about the journal's volume 6, number 1, graced our promotional flyer for many years: "It has been a long time since I picked up a scholarly journal and read it from cover to cover. I did with this one." The contributions in that issue by Vicente Diaz, Vilsoni Hereniko, Epeli Hau'ofa, and Teresia Teaiwa heralded the emergence of powerful Native scholars in the field of Pacific studies, an emergence that Greg both applauded and supported as he very much believed in the creativity and durability of Nativeness.

Greg was one of the contributors to the journal's inaugural issue in 1989. In his dialogue piece entitled "History 'in' the Pacific," Greg noted that roughly twenty-two years earlier he had contributed to the first issue of the *Journal of Pacific History*. As he reflected back on that earlier effort, he wrote of his strong conviction that he would not be around twenty-two years later to reflect on this contribution. Reading those words then was sad; rereading them now is much sadder by far. There was a similar sense of mortality expressed in his keynote address before the Pacific History Association conference in July 1996 in Hilo. Toward the end of that address, he expressed doubt that he would ever have the opportunity to speak to the association members again in assembly and wondered whether or not he would ever return to Hawai'i. The truth of the matter is that he has never left Hawai'i and that all of us, Pacific History Association members or not, are in conversation with him through a scholarly legacy that continues to enrich the practice of history in the Pacific. Thank you for that, Greg, and for so much more.

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HISTORIOGRAPHY ALIVE: GREG DENING AND THE INVIGORATION OF INDIGENOUS PACIFIC HISTORY

VICENTE M DIAZ

The main title of this tribute comes from Professor Dening's last book, *Church Alive!*—a deeply passionate (auto)historical biography and ethnography of a Catholic parish and its ordinary parishioners in North Sydney. Having just completed my own cultural and historical study of Church and lay Catholicism in Guam, and in preparation for a favor I was about to ask him (which was to read my manuscript, as both a historian and an

ex-priest), I had read *Church Alive!* and was moved by the exuberance he found in both the parish and parishioners about which he wrote, and the vitality of his own narrative. Dening built a career of breathing life into his subjects and topics—elite and ordinary Islanders and aboriginals, officers and sailors, missionaries, the laity, theory, “bad” language—precisely by zooming in on and studying the tensions, contradictions, anomalies, afflictions, essentially the human messiness, contained in available records.

In fact it was Dening’s reflexive and poetic writing about the messiness of a colonial and precolonial history of encounter in the Marquesas that first brought history alive for me as a graduate student in the early 1980s. Dening had by the time of my graduate studies already distinguished himself as one of the field’s leaders, and definitely its most imaginative, eloquent, and poetic writer. Following his vita from afar in articles and books, and in his lectures when we overlapped at conferences, I came to realize that Dening was also the first person to perform and model most effectively the critical idea that Native histories were profoundly entangled with historical and contemporary relations of power that also interpellated in equally profound ways the researcher and writer of these histories. He also taught us that these histories, alas, did not automatically and straightforwardly divulge their truths, nor did they reveal unmitigated, unmediated, uninnocent standards by which we could assess the validity or veracity of our claims.

It wasn’t merely that history was contained in historiography—a process every bit as troubled and as blessed as the past itself—but that indigenous history just does not simply present itself in its full glory if we only do exhaustive archival research and full ethnographic fieldwork, and write clearly and impartially. In other words, the Native cultural and political past does not speak uniformly or unproblematically, but must be coaxed into (our?) consciousness through performative acts.

One sobering truth that came from this, at least for this Native historian, is that even our indigenous genealogy does not automatically furnish us with a privileged vantage point from which to witness or deploy the definitive truth(s) of our indigenous pasts. Not that this meant for him, or for us, that anything goes, or, God forbid, that nothing matters. Dening’s students, indeed any reader of any of his books or articles, will attest to the imperative for good cultural historical scholarship to involve painstaking research, language competence, and superior writing and analytical skills. We need not read all of Dening’s books to appreciate as well what even-tempered partiality, keen sensitivity, championship for the Native, and,

undoubtedly, a talent for the well-crafted and well-placed turn of phrase, can do in coaxing us as readers into accepting the viability of his representations, his narrative resurrections, of the past. How one approaches and represents the past determines the liveliness of that past. After graduate school and throughout my career so far, I have come to believe that Dening was our region's champion in the tasks of filling in, filling out, and filling up what Hayden White has identified as the "content" of the form.

On the eve of the submission for publication of my own book, titled provocatively *Repositioning the Missionary* (which is a critical study of the cultural and political stakes involved in the historical and contemporary effort to canonize the controversial Padre Diego Luis de San Vitores, the seventeenth-century Spanish Jesuit who was assassinated while laboring to establish the Catholic mission among the Chamorros of the Marianas), I shuddered to think of how folks back home, particularly members of the Church, would react to a book whose writing consciously sought, a la Dening, to stay true to the fact of human messiness, both in its subject matter and in the form of its writing. It was important for me to seek Dening's blessing, for reasons beyond the important fact that he was a trained Jesuit and could correct any technical errors; I thought he could also guide me through the dangerous reefs and shoals latent in the seas of my upcoming encounters.

In response to my request, and as a preface to Dening's typically long and generous commentary and criticism (which included lines like, "think long about the book's formatting . . . its blank and white spaces . . . insist on conversing with the book designer"), Dening wrote: "You ask me to correct misunderstandings or theological errors. You know me! What's an error? Do I think you have made a fool of yourself at any 'theological' moment? No, I don't. I thought, perhaps, that your 'theology'—say on saints, communion of saints—a little too much of a dictionary and encyclopaedia quality." He also found "the textual debate you indulge in on the beatification process a bit boring and unnecessary." I thought to myself, if in Dening's eyes these were the book's most serious flaws, I'm in good shape. For a monograph that also needed to pass muster for tenure purposes, sounding boring and a little too much like a dictionary or encyclopedia surely couldn't hurt. But alas, he wasn't done, and the strongest and most compelling criticism (coming from him in particular) was the most unnerving: with regard to the historical discourse of sainthood, or what he called "its evolving process," my textual treatment provided what he lamented was too "little sense of a living discourse . . . too stilled in

time and place.” This is bad, I thought. If my representation of the cultural and political stakes of a resurrected canonization process fails to capture the living discourse of the endeavor, if it is too stilled in time and place, does my manuscript in fact fail in its overall objective? Worse yet, is my book, at best, just another boring academic monograph?

In follow-up correspondence, Dening would assure me that his sentiments did not pertain to the entire manuscript but only to my literature review of the discourses of saints, and to the book’s opening section, which offers a close read of the terms of the beatification in Church proceedings. He said that “things pick up significantly” thereafter. He even “loved” the sexual metaphor in the book’s title, and its use across the pages (although he pointed to areas where it became tiring, which I promptly corrected), and, best of all, he appreciated the tension I was trying to navigate, between transgression and opposition, in relation to the official Church proceedings. His was the last advice I sought before sending the book forth for copyediting. As it would turn out, it was also among the last he gave while still on this earthly plane. In fact, I did not get to work with him anywhere near as much as so many other friends and colleagues did. Nonetheless, I believe that Greg Dening will continue to inhabit, and hopefully invigorate, every form of historical writing I seek to perform.

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CHALLENGES TO DANCE

KATERINA MARTINA TEAIWA

In the foreword to Greg Dening’s *Readings/Writings*, Tom Griffiths wrote:

Here we approach the experience of his students, forever compelled to stretch beyond what they might have thought achievable. . . . His teaching strategy . . . is to expose his students to exciting and sometimes bewildering freedoms: freedom from the overlay of other’s interpretations, freedom to ransack insights from other disciplines, freedom to experiment and fail.

I first met Greg Dening and Donna Merwick in Honolulu at the University of Hawai‘i, Mānoa, in 1998. I followed Greg and another inspiring scholar, Margaret Jolly, to the Australian National University in Canberra where I pursued a PhD in anthropology. Greg and Donna ran a visiting scholars program, “Challenges to Perform: Explorations in the Presentation of Knowledge” at the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research, in which I

participated in 1999. This program consisted of a month of colloquia and workshops that explored the research product as artifact of the imagination. The students came from disciplines as diverse as entomology, art history, and political science, and we all had to “perform” our current work. I was the only student who danced.

It had never occurred to me before that dance might be combined with scholarship. My years of performance in Fiji, Santa Clara, and Honolulu were strictly in the realm of tourism, entertainment, and formal dance programs. “Challenges to Perform” shattered many of the boundaries I perceived to be associated with the space of dance, the PhD process, research, and indeed life. The practices of reading, writing, imagining, and performing all dissolved into the possibility of having a real, human relationship with history and knowledge. With the support of my thesis committee, Greg, Margaret, and ethnographic filmmaker Gary Kildea, I proceeded to take major risks in my research, including both a visual and dance focus in what had started out as a project on “the political economy of pity” and Banaban history.

This turn resulted in a liberation of the academic experience. I danced at conferences, I danced my papers, and after finishing my PhD at ANU and taking up a position at UH Mānoa, I sometimes made students dance. This was usually risky, with a high potential for failure. Another dancer and I were once publicly critiqued and humiliated in front of a distinguished academic audience at New York University. In response, I coordinated the first Pacific dance studies conference in Wellington.

In my teaching I attempted to ground knowledge of Pacific histories and societies in the physical bodies that inhabited and traveled between islands, constructing phenomena across time and space. We spent one graduate class, “The Body and Pacific Studies,” watching people as they surfed, sunbathed, and paraded down Kalākaua Avenue in Waikīkī, imagining the past bodies that had cared for and inhabited that very place. The introduction to the course stated:

For centuries and especially prior to the arrival of the written word, people in the Pacific survived creatively in and through their bodies and oral traditions. Throughout the region human bodies are intimately connected to place, landscape, plant and animal life, and the spiritual realms. Bodies and their movements are also reflections of history, social, political, and cultural orders and are vehicles for the expression of identity and creativity. In Pacific studies, where decolonization and indigenous epistemologies are central, it is cru-

cial that we incorporate the body as both corporeal and literary device in our approaches to learning Oceania.

Greg's poetic "challenge to perform" was something I took quite literally in both my teaching and research because I had the embodied literacy to do so. Greg reinforced my interpretation of the challenge by constantly encouraging me to "keep dancing." The 1999 workshop led me to the writing of Susan Leigh Foster and her edited collection *Choreographing History*, which challenged the reader to imagine the past as a fully inhabited, corporeal space. The reader was asked to conceive of every bone, muscle, sinew, and tendon in the bodies of both minor and major historical characters, as well as live and breathe their respective environments. Inspired by this and Sally Ann Ness's *Body, Movement, and Culture*, I began to imagine history along just those lines. Characters and images, whether in photographs or paintings, came to life. I could see them working in phosphate mining fields, relaxing under coconut trees, gulping down saltwater, suffering and sometimes dying from the now common cold. The treatment of historical characters as fully human subjects is a powerful attribute of Greg's work, particularly in *The Death of William Gooch*.

Greg had given me the possibility of exploring fully the corporeal nature of history, but it wasn't until 2006 that I realized the profoundly spiritual consequences of imagining the past in this manner. That year I decided to go on a prayer retreat at the Newman Center, the Catholic center at the University of Hawai'i, where I was teaching Pacific Islands studies. It is well known that Christianity has been indigenized in the Pacific, but I haven't always been able to reconcile this with the decolonization agenda. The Newman Center program was called "a busy person's retreat," designed for the working and stressed-out professional. It involved five days of prayer in the morning and evening, using a method developed by St Ignatius, founder of the Jesuits. This approach requires participants to project themselves into a biblical scene by way of their imaginations.

I returned to the Australian National University in 2007 to take up a new job, and got back in touch with Greg and Donna, mindful that I had never sent Greg a final, bound copy of my dissertation. He had just finished a book on the living history of three Jesuit parishes on the North Shore of Sydney Harbor. I began to realize that there were things in the prayer retreat that reminded me of Greg's method of engaging the past. It seemed to me that the incredibly integrated and profound way in which

Greg communicated—in which if you listened openly you felt like the universe, his words, and that moment all dissolved into one—had something to do with his faith and training as a Jesuit. I never told Greg about my prayer retreat experience but when he passed I wished I had.

In his work, Greg approaches the past with a synesthetic and poetic reverence for each moment that requires both writer and reader to imagine inhabiting and participating in the theater of history. His method is deeply empathetic, which is also the key to both successfully experiencing the Ignatian method of prayer, and learning and inhabiting new dance forms or movement vocabularies. Griffiths wrote that Greg was as much admired as he was critiqued, particularly by his contemporaries, for his reflexivity and disregard for the barriers between fiction and nonfiction. Many inspirational and generous scholars are subjected to similar criticism. Reading the last book he gave me (*Church Alive!*), I am convinced that Greg's faith was at the core of his scholarly method and his loving and bighearted relationship with friends, students, and colleagues alike.

Writing is an embodied process. Office walls are often plastered with images of the right way to sit—"Don't let your posture cost you!" scolds one occupational health and safety brochure—adding, "[type with] forearms parallel with floor or angled slightly downwards; the angle between forearm and upper arm at, or slightly greater than, 90 degrees." I'd like to imagine that, one day, sitting—for the most part in isolation—upright with forearms at ninety degrees to upper arms and with the tendons and muscles of the lower arm working constantly, repetitively, for hours at a time, do not constitute the primary bodily requirements of scholarship in the social sciences or humanities. I'd like to imagine that one day it will be possible to dance, sing, or carve knowledge of a profoundly historical, political, practical, and spiritual nature in the humanities and social sciences. Indeed, our ancestors did so for thousands of years.

As I was finishing this piece I found my copy of *Beach Crossings*, in which Greg had written:

To Katerina,

With love and the hope that she will dance on this beach of mine.

Greg Dening

July 2004

* * *

THREE BEACHES: THE DEATH OF GREG DENING

GREG DVORAK

I've always been attracted by the "in between" spaces in society and culture. In between disciplines, in between racial peoples. I once wrote that I'd love to have an inscription on my grave saying "he was in between." I have a feeling that life itself is always in between. There aren't so many before and afters.

GREG DENING *interview with Tim Dymond, 2001*

Waimea

It feels most appropriate to begin my reflection on the beach where I met Greg Dening and the beach where I remember him today. I met him here, on the beach at Waimea on the island of O'ahu in the Hawaiian chain on 30 November 2003. I sat high up on the beach reading *History's Anthropology: The Death of William Gooch*, Greg's masterpiece, a book that had been assigned to me by David Hanlon for my Pacific history seminar.

To read this assignment, I wanted to go to the actual beach where, in 1792, the young astronomer William Gooch and his captain had been killed as a result of their fateful encounter with Hawaiians. Like all of Greg's histories, the book was a yarn hewn from specific moments of encounter, of little bits of information that other historians would have found completely trivial and irrelevant. It was Proustian in its attention to sensuous detail, evocative of Sahlins and Geertz in its ethnographic sensitivity, scrupulously historical in its rigorous use of archives, and all the while performative and enthralling as the most compelling Shakespearean theater. Yet it was honest, graceful, and respectful toward each and every individual whose precious life was tenderly remembered. It was filled with tension, wonder, awe, and humility. Reading *The Death of William Gooch*, I felt immediately implicated in the story, and *The Beach*, in all its ramifications, made perfect sense to me.

On that afternoon, through that book, Greg Dening invited me to join him in his own encountering, and in so doing, we both honored the lives—and deaths—of the young Gooch, Captain Richard Hergest, the Portuguese sailor Manuel, and the countless Hawaiians who suffered the results of colonial contact and profound difference. I also felt honored, and even

a bit burdened, as a participant in the ongoing theater of the beaches of history, knowing that I too was acting out history and making sense of the many possible presents and pasts that existed in each moment. I felt excited by the liminality of the beach, thrilled by my own betweenness, and completely aware of the immense importance of being able to mediate the distance between cultures, between continents, between islands, between oceans, between times, and between people.

I returned to Waimea Beach in 2008, on Memorial Day, a day when Americans remember “the sacrifices of soldiers who fought for their freedom.” Since the time of Gooch, Hawai‘i has been subsumed into the United States. Today this is a place where the military from Schofield Barracks remember their comrades by picnicking on the sand with their families, where tourists try to get dark, and where yachties moor off the coast.

For me, this Memorial Day is a time to reflect on the sacrifices of some of the heroes in my own life who made me “free” in the truest sense. I include Greg Dening among them, for he taught me, as one of the last PhD students he ever supervised at the Australian National University, that love and knowledge are not mutually exclusive. Although I cannot begin to remember or portray him with the patience and passion with which he once remembered Gooch and made him real to me, as I sit on this beach, back in Hawai‘i after having completed my doctorate, I can at least try to evoke some of the wisdom that this great mentor imparted to me.

I never quite appreciated the importance of history before I first strolled “the beaches of the mind” with Greg Dening. History seemed distant, pointless, musty, mildewed, depressing even. History was the sort of thing that wars were fought over. It was a preoccupation with “what really happened.” Greg and those who learned from him, however, knew that history is something one does. Rather than eulogize a dead past that we insist on being other than ourselves, we can present the past through the telling of our own archival and ethnographic encounters. Such a simple, profound, and deeply spiritual idea had never occurred to me before, but from that point onward I felt compelled for the first time to get a doctorate in doing history.

Canberra

When I arrived at the Australian National University in 2004, Greg Dening welcomed me and agreed to supervise me, even though he was already in his seventies, long retired, and inundated with various scholarly engage-

ments that kept him constantly busy. The subject line of his e-mail read, “Welcome! Let’s Dance Together!”

Two months later, I had the privilege of participating in one of the last “Challenges to Perform” visiting scholars programs that Greg and his wife Donna held. This was an intense and intimate two weeks in which we doctoral candidates were invited to think of our dissertations as performances. We were told to come up with one keyword that encapsulated our work, a “perfect sentence” that expressed the essence of our projects, and then a narrative that could articulate one aspect of our writing as if it were a scene in a play.

One experience stands out in my mind. After extensive coaching from an actor, each participant was asked to leave the room and, after taking a very deep breath, to return one by one as if making a stage entrance. Standing in front of the whole room of twenty-five participants, with Greg and Donna at the center, each of us was to make eye contact with every person and then proclaim in a clear and confident voice the title of his or her dissertation, before taking a bow and making a smooth exit.

This simple exercise suddenly shattered the hubris of “knowing” that we each had brought to the workshop. Greg forced us to stand alone with the topics that we had chosen to research and face the consequences. In center stage, all was laid bare. Were we here to prove something? To compensate for some past trauma? To hide away from society? Or were we here to offer our own unique message to the world? Some of us stood sideways, slouching as we would in our desk chairs. Others were painfully shy and looked as if they wanted to shrivel into the wall. Still others were proud and loud, but awkward. When I took my turn, I found myself trembling before the scrutinizing eyes of the audience as I tried to mouth my impossibly long dissertation title. Greg was sitting in the front row calmly, his arms crossed. He asked me, very curiously, “You look like the top half of your body is out of sync with the bottom. Why is that?”

This is not the type of comment one would expect from one of Oceania’s most noted historians, let alone one’s doctoral co-supervisor. But Greg had a trick or two up his sleeve. I am convinced that this exercise was designed to make us each conscious of the relationship between ourselves and our audiences—that we were not just writing and researching in a vacuum, and each and every one of us had a very important lesson to “perform” to the world. Seize the message, refine it, and present that gift humbly to humanity—that seemed to be the ultimate theme of the workshop.

It was the same humility, compassion, creativity, playfulness, and love that guided Greg Dening's work in this world, even though he chose to impart these virtues within the typically objective and rational world of academia. Those who could not see this, perhaps, were individuals who preferred to find a singular truth rather than celebrate the multiplicity and possibility of human experience itself. Then there were the critics who ruthlessly dismissed Greg's unrelenting self-reflexivity as a form of narcissistic babble. "Love?" they might say. "What does love have to do with the search for knowledge?"

Such criticisms did not deter Greg from his underlying mission of lovingly relating the past into the present through his own experience, as master storyteller, in-betweener, and connector. When confronted, questioned, or attacked, he did not argue back angrily. He accepted the criticism and pondered it. He would ask the critic, "So what would you have me do?" He would see each critique as a doorway to expand his own mind and broaden the conversation so that everyone was somehow included.

Never satisfied with simplistic or one-sided narratives, Greg savored the little moments of encounter that meant the most. He celebrated the poetry of each sentence and the blanks on each page, so that the reader had time to process and to wonder, to draw his or her own conclusions. After all, he once told me, "large understanding comes in small steps." I am grateful to him for taking those first steps together with me, and I am committed to continue crossing these beaches, however perilous and risky those crossings may be.

Tasmania

It was on the fifth day of March in the year 2008 that the great professor, former priest, husband, friend, mentor, storyteller, began his final beach crossing in Tasmania at precisely 2:15 in the afternoon. It was not quite like the other beaches Greg so cherished, but Cradle Mountain is a sacred in-between space in its own right. Home to some of the most outstanding flora and fauna in Australia, it is the sacred aboriginal land of the people who settled there and used the area as seasonal hunting grounds after a vast glacier retreated some 10,000 years ago. On that March afternoon, Greg Dening was walking with Donna through the breathtaking wilderness of the Cradle Mountain Trek.

Recently, Donna spoke with me about how they had walked peacefully together amid the lush green of Tasmania at the height of Australian

summer, between complete primeval wilderness and civilization. Over lunch, about two hours before he suffered the massive stroke that would take his life, Greg had turned to Donna and said, “Today is yet another perfect day.”

And a perfect day it was, Donna explained, “a bright day, beautifully still, with sunshine filtered by a thin canopy over the track.” They loved the Cradle Mountain Trek and had been there before, in 2004, when they



FIGURE 2 Greg Denning, Cradle Mountain Trek, 2004.
Photo by Donna Merwick.

took this photo (figure 2), uncannily in almost the very same spot where Greg suffered his stroke four years later. Perpetually in-between, on his way between one place and another, Greg was delighted to be in his element, and no doubt he felt the same on that day he began his journey from this world.

It pleased me to know that he began his final beach crossing, his beloved soul mate at his side, on a perfect sunny day, in between one place and another. He took his leave humbly, with dignity, leaving an enormous legacy behind him, having breathed new life into the academy and created space for a new discourse of love that transcends language, nation, and time.

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