UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL: ON PERIPHERAL PERSPECTIVES AND THE PRODUCTION OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE

Edited by

Cris Shore and Suzanna Trnka

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Reviewed by

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This book is unusual in so far as Cris Shore and Suzanna Trnka are not only editors but, in the real sense of the word, producers of the chapters of this volume. They interviewed twelve well-known anthropologists with a set of questions designed to elicit reflection on their positions in anthropology, their personal paths into and inside their discipline, their individual styles of doing anthropology and, finally, their visions of the collective endeavour and the future of anthropology.

These interviews were carefully edited, checked by the anthropologist interviewees and formed into chapters supplemented by a photographic portrait and short curriculum vitae. All of the anthropologists included have lived and worked within the paradigm of British anthropology and most have done fieldwork in the Southern Hemisphere or were born and raised there. The result is a book offering twelve very personal and highly reflexive accounts of what it means to be an anthropologist in the 20th and 21st centuries. These accounts cover the importance of upbringing, academic mentors and friends in the formation of an academic career, as well as serendipitous encounters, accidents, mistakes and the lack or availability of research funding.

I found myself most drawn to the chapters by anthropologists born in New Zealand and Australia as it is here that the term 'periphery' seems most strongly to resonate. Cris Shore (a British anthropologist) and Suzanna Trnka (a US anthropologist) set out to offer a perspective from the South; both live and work in Auckland, and they chose to interview four New Zealanders and one

Australian in their sample, asking 'what distinguishes anthropology as a way of seeing and engaging with the world; how anthropology's self-understanding and professional identity is changing…' (p.1). It is fascinating, then, to read about what happens 'once it was exported to the colonies … and the intellectual contributions that peripheries can make to challenging and rethinking the established normative orders and assumptions that emanate from the centre' (p.4). Perhaps they can ask such questions only because they themselves have moved from the centre into the periphery, becoming the strangers who may stay and have to interrogate and reflect upon their new position.

The authors formulate four questions that are at the centre of their project: What exactly is it that distinguishes anthropology as a professional practice and as a way of seeing and knowing the world? How has the discipline changed in the last 40 years, and does the geographical location of its practitioners affect the way anthropology is practised? What are the most exciting innovations and directions that are reshaping anthropology today, and where have these ideas come from? How do anthropologists engage with the urgent problems facing societies around the world, and how do they understand that engagement?

Although I enjoyed all of the chapters, I shall focus principally on the four New Zealand-born anthropologists. All of them grew up in rural New Zealand and have vivid childhood memories of a certain separation and marginalisation of Māori neighbours or classmates and Māori as somehow placed on the outer of white New Zealand's small-town communities. As Michael Jackson phrases it, 'it wasn't 'apartheid' but in the bourgeois imagination there was an unspoken assumption that these people were not respectable enough to be true companions or neighbours' (p.38). All four felt an uncomfortable tension resulting from having 'the other' right there as children and carried it into their tertiary education. Gillian Cowlishaw described it as an ongoing feeling of uneasiness when doing fieldwork accompanied by the feeling of somehow intruding into spheres where one does not belong. She wonders if 'maybe feeling a sense of discomfort is an important part of the practice of anthropology' (p.97).

The four interviews seem to suggest that growing up in the South or in the colonies makes a difference to the way an anthropologist comes to view the world. Joan Metge and Anne Salmond describe it succinctly by both stating that their home is their field, that the two are inseparable. Indeed for Anne Salmond going to Cambridge was the only time in her life when she truly left the field – was out of the field. Cambridge, she remembers, was a fieldwork experience for the New Zealand academic (p 67). That perspective seems to bring with it a strong emphasis on lived reality, of embodied field experience

of simply knowing the Pākehā perspective – an embodied peripheral vision. Michael Jacksons still feels uneasy when returning to Taranaki (he grew up in Inglewood) as he cannot claim the right to belong there: 'it haunted me, this sense that my grandparents had migrated to this place and never mentioned the fact that their migration had involved a brutal displacement of an indigenous people' (p.39). Anne Salmond invokes an Alice-in-Wonderland feeling as she slowly became aware that to every place in New Zealand there belong at least two histories, two names and two world views. There was always her familiar landscape but knowing about an indigenous world view changed that familiarity into wonder and fascination and it would henceforth refer to an entirely different cosmos.

All four anthropologists became, in their own way, committed not simply to researching indigenous topics and fields but also to trying to change the world a little bit for the better, to meddle in politics, to take risks. For Michael Jackson, this had strong theoretical implications; he felt that he 'wanted to study the structure of consciousness not the unconscious' (p.45). Gillian Cowlishaw takes it further, saying that 'Anthropology's strength is its being wedded to *fieldwork*, which enables direct engagement with the conditions among indigenous people and how these are experienced and interpreted by those who live these conditions … anthropologists can, potentially at least, achieve a more complex understanding from a position outside that of the liberal good citizen' (p.102). For Joan Metge and Anne Salmond, anthropology's research outcomes should also be applied to solve problems, to understand disputes, to live as an anthropologist in New Zealand, to work and live as an anthropologist with Māori. For them, it is more a vocation, a calling than a career, international or otherwise. It is truly based in the Antipodes, in the field. In their eyes, the place of the anthropologist is not the campus, it is also always the field in a much more demanding sense. Both have actively taken part in Waitangi Tribunal hearings and are as much activists as they are academics.

Being a non-New Zealander, I found it fascinating to read how influential the undergraduate years at Auckland University were for these eminent anthropologists. All spoke highly of Ralph Piddington and other much admired lecturers and of fellow students, and all of them seemed to be well-prepared for their PhDs abroad. Living and, especially, growing up in a settler society seems to give anthropologists a certain edge – a permanent comparative perspective – that might well be of advantage when travelling from the periphery into the centre. The twelve academics interviewed for this book are all academic migrants; all were, or still are, highly mobile academics yet very grounded in their commitment to fieldwork.

All of the anthropologists in this book were asked how they see anthropology in the future or what they view as the challenges that anthropology will have to face. The answers varied but, again, Joan Metge and Anne Salmond showed how important and vital the antipodean perspective is for our discipline. Both of their responses were important statements for a future anthropology. For Joan Metge the essence of anthropology is 'that it's people to people, or as Maori put it, *kanohi ki kanohi* – face to face … I'm glad to see that kind of very personal and close interaction is still happening in anthropology today' (p. 87–88). Anne Salmond takes this notion of shared and collegial anthropology further, pointing to the necessity not only of a paradigm change but also of a change towards equally valued ontologies and knowledge systems: 'The role I see for anthropology, and indeed for all of the humanities, is to encompass humanity itself. The humanities can't just be Western in orientation… [otherwise] their work runs the danger of being provincial' (p. 69).

Finally, it is fascinating to read Marilyn Strathern's interview (the last in this book) and discover the extent to which her anthropology is so much more strongly grounded in the metropolitan, theoretical world of British anthropology. She mentions that she was challenged for her too-theoretical take on her discipline; she responds very strongly, however, that it should not matter whether fieldwork or theory or both are favoured most by anthropologists, as 'we have a job to do and that job is to understand the world to the very best of our ability. That actually is a major task. It is not something trivial. Moreover it's a collective task. We belong to a discipline' (p. 243).

As will be obvious by now, the book clearly keeps its promises and goes a long way towards answering the initial set of questions. Through reading the interviews, supported by a very good introduction and conclusion, we start seeing patterns of antipodean involvement and a clear conversation and shared pathways of influence travelling back and forth between Britain and its former southern-most outposts Anthropology needs to have it both ways, and can: there are clear historical and present linkages and academics in both hemispheres are profiting from them.

This book is a good and lively read, constructed so as to draw the readers into the discussion, to make us reach our own conclusions and also to do what most of us like best: to listen carefully and to draw conclusions from the stories told to us and for us.

TRANSNATIONAL FILM CULTURE IN NEW ZEALAND

by Simon Sigley

Bristol, UK/Chicago: Intellect, 2013. 281 pp.
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Reviewed by
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In 1934 a cultural commentator attended a screening of *School for Scandal* (UK, 1930) held by the Christchurch Film Society. Subsequently denouncing the film in the press, he revealed that he had been to the pictures precisely three times in the previous decade (through mistake or being dragged along), and that following this latest experience he was determined not to return to the cinema 'this side of the grave.' That this observer (Frederick Sinclaire) was no backblocks fuddy-duddy but a distinguished professor of English literature, an outspoken leftwing intellectual, and one of the editors of the progressive new journal *Tomorrow* graphically illustrates the obstacles that had to be overcome if film were to be taken seriously as an art form in New Zealand.

Sinclaire's attitude towards the cinema, highlighting 'the kind of problems a morally earnest highbrow critic had in coming to terms with modern popular culture,' is tellingly analysed in Simon Sigley's fascinating history of what he terms 'transnational film culture' in this country. Sigley persuasively argues that given New Zealand's small population, isolation, and neocolonial under-development, recognition of cinema's artistic qualities could come only from viewing films and absorbing critical influences from abroad. His study is not concerned with the growth of local film production; rather, his subject matter is film societies, film criticism, arthouse film distribution and exhibition, film festivals, and film education, together with such institutions as the National Film Library and the New Zealand Film Archive.

What is eye-opening about Sigley's account is just how pervasive resistance to the new medium was. Sinclaire was not alone in his views. Puritanical moral-ism joined forces with anti-Americanism to produce deep suspicion of cinema amongst intellectuals involved in education and the arts. To take another of Sigley's examples, adult education pioneer F.L. Combs decried (in 1946) film's 'prostitution of art:' it 'serves in a manner more or less specious and synthetic' he declared, 'to give the 'lie in the heart' a factitious vitality, and to interpose its silver screen between our civilisation and the living truth. The harm it does can scarcely be exaggerated.'

A key factor in breaking down such attitudes was the exhibition of foreign-language films which could be viewed as having artistic credentials absent from the Hollywood or Elstree product. It is the struggle to obtain and screen such films by the film societies, independent cinema proprietors and film festivals with which *Transnational Film Culture* is largely concerned, and here Sigley's detailed history, based on much original research, is a treasure trove of information. The book is also strong in outlining the tentative steps towards in-depth film criticism made in the journal *Tomorrow* and by pioneers including Gordon Mirams and John O'Shea. A remarkable development which Sigley also deals with is the 1937 government conference called 'to discuss the quality of films available to the public', which led eventually to the creation of the National Film Library. Government intervention was not always benign, however, and Sigley valuably recounts struggles against censorship undertaken in the 1930s (when the Wellington Film Society was prosecuted for showing the Soviet *Road to Life*) and the 1970s.

The book is, for the most part, clearly written, with a lively appreciation of the interaction of institutions and individuals that makes for the growth of a culture. A significant problem, however, is its unclear time span. The coverage of film criticism stops around 1970, and of film education about 1980. Yet the discussion of festivals goes on past 2000, while there is a whole chapter on the NZ Film Archive which was not established until 1981. (It is questionable, in fact, whether the archive belongs in the book at all, given that it is very much a national rather than transnational institution.) The differing timelines mean that the analysis of interactivity breaks down. The uncertainty over time periods also tends to infiltrate individual sections, with Chapter 2, for example, having something of a jumbled chronology.

Sigley makes comparisons with France, drawing on his personal experience. This is useful for picturing the sharp distinction between the centre and periphery of film culture across the globe. But it might also have been valuable to make comparisons closer to home, pointing out, for instance, that New Zealand never had an equivalent of the *Australian Journal of Screen Theory* (founded 1976), or the Australian Screen Studies Association, and that for conferences our film academics have had to hitch a ride on Australian organisations. The coverage of university education in the book is actually comparatively weak, making a dubious claim for 'dramatic developments' (p. 216) in the field in the 1970s-80s. Here Sigley ignores the entrenched bias in academia against film study and the prolonged battles lecturers like Dr Roger Horrocks had to fight to get the subject recognised. As late as the mid-1980s there were only 1.5 university positions in film studies in the entire country.

Although the book is generally well researched and accurate in its detail, a few errors have crept in. The English film reviewer is Caroline, not Christine Lejeune (p.59). The 'Miss Harvie' of the Film Society in London (incorrectly referred to as the 'London Film Society', p.64) is the same person as the (correctly spelt) J.M. Harvey (p 65) and she is female (p.66). Film Society Ltd. was the legal parent body, not the forerunner, of the Film Society, and did not go out of business in 1926 (p.65). Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* is not, of course, about the Olympic Games (p.68). On p.73, 'heterosexual' is presumably not what is meant. The Red Federation of Labour was formed in Greymouth, not Christchurch (p.101). William Pember Reeves was editor of the *Lyttelton Times* in 1889–91, not the 'early 1900s' (p.101). Claiming that the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council was established in 1947 (p.133) is an astonishing blunder (it was actually 1963). A film course was first taught at Victoria University of Wellington in 1972, not 1974 (p.219). It cannot be true that with festivals no longer having to ship 35mm prints, 'the substantial freight charges have not diminished in any significant sense with the advent of digital projection' (p.230).

Despite these slips, and the more serious conceptual flaw in its timespan structure, *Transnational Film Culture* is an insightful and invaluable contribution to New Zealand cultural studies. It is ironic that the campaign Sigley describes, the long-drawn-out battle in this country for recognition of film as art, was scarcely won before the specificity of cinema began to dissolve in a myriad of media practices, a process accelerating as the digital era advances.

TRANSFORMING LAW AND INSTITUTION: INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, THE UNITED NATIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

by Rhiannon Morgan

Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011. 162 pp.
ISBN 9780754674450

Reviewed by
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This is an excellent book about the *Global Indigenous Movement* (GIM) which first emerged in the 1970s from the plethora of local indigenous movements and its key political strategy of choosing to take a *human rights approach* – in particular to assert the right to *self-determination* – in international law through the United Nations. Largely through the great success of this political

campaign, which reached its apotheosis with the ratification of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007 after 25 years of negotiations, indigenous peoples have now proven themselves to be a major new force not at just at the local level but in world politics. Morgan, a political sociologist, observes that the success of the global indigenous movement both 'speaks to the justice of the indigenous cause' and underscores 'the virtues of its strategic approach which has involved movement activists in a discursive undertaking aimed at challenging entrenched understandings, particularly surrounding the right of self-determination, and developing new, more nuanced meanings capable of embracing the claims of indigenous peoples' (p. 2).

The author provides a detailed description of the emergence, history, and organisation of the global indigenous movement, the strategies they have employed at the UN, and the impact they have had on international law. She takes a multi-sited ethnography approach and her core research was based on a combination of fieldwork at various UN meetings and conferences dealing with indigenous issues at a range of 'de-territorialised' venues around the world; informal and formal interviews with state representatives, indigenous delegates, representatives of non-indigenous advocacy and support organisations; and extensive documentary research.

Chapter 1 identifies the main UN developments with regard to indigenous peoples' rights; Chapter 2 presents the analytical perspective employed, mainly a combination of human rights and social movements theory; Chapter 3 deals with the participants, organisations, and structures of the global indigenous movement; Chapter 4 describes the movement's methods, claims, and campaigns; Chapter 5 deals with the strategic level, presenting the movement as primarily engaged in 'discursive forms of activism appropriate to a context of international law-making' (p. 3); and Chapter 6 concludes with an assessment of the movement's impact and the prospects for the future in this political arena.

In general, the book presents a comprehensive analysis of the GIM and the relationship between indigenous peoples and the UN. It is timely not only because the movement has now established itself as a major power in the contemporary world but also because the passage of indigenous rights into law marks a significant change in the nature of state sovereignty and its territorial borders which highlights the growth of legal pluralism and claims for self-determination on a global scale. Finally, the book includes figures useful for teaching purposes such as Main UN Initiatives, Key Events in the Emergence of the GIM, Types of Indigenous Organisations, and Non-Indigenous Advocacy

and Support Organisations, and should be of interest to scholars in indigenous and social movement studies, international relations, and the sociology of law.