no longer constrained by Western conventions. They exhibit, dance, paint, act when and where they please.

In addressing and challenging the troubled histories of Pacific peoples in relation to New Zealand, Tangata o le Moana not only fulfils its purpose, it also acts as a vehicle that contains invaluable images, histories, memories, artefacts and knowledge for future generations, in particular Pacific peoples.


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According to Cris Shore and Susanna Trnka, anthropology is “arguably the most reflexive (some would say neurotically so) discipline in the social sciences” (p. 14). They might have added that anthropological reflexivity is closely related to anthropologists’ interest in their discipline’s history. Indeed, anthropology is also, “arguably”, the only one of the social sciences (history included!) that takes its disciplinary history seriously as a source of critical perspective on current theoretical and methodological issues. And an important source for the history of anthropology is, it goes without saying, interviews with the elders. Interviewing the elders is something about which anthropologists are *not* particularly neurotic; to the contrary, we rather enjoy it. One certainly has the sense that Shore and Trnka enjoyed bringing into being the 12 interviews collected in this volume, material that will be a boon for future historians of anthropology.

The interviewees (some less elder than others) were Gillian Cowlishaw, Nelson Graburn, Michael Jackson, Joan Metge, Howard Morphy, Nicolas Peterson, Christopher Pinney, Nigel Rapport, Anne Salmond, Marilyn Strathern, David Trigger and Susan Wright. Because the editors were looking for more than “unmediated autobiographical musings”, they led these subjects “through a set of semi-structured questions… to tease out the connections between personal history, intellectual influences and disciplinary formation” (p. 3). While the questions for each interview are not identical—the interviewers followed the contour of each particular conversation—Shore and Trnka asked everyone (among other questions) how they discovered anthropology, how their writings have grown out of various kinds of fieldwork encounters and how their professional work led them to involvement in wider social issues. Their ultimate “rationale” they tell us, was “to examine the relationship between knowledge production and anthropological location”, with particular attention to the question of how the anthropology produced in the peripheral nation-states of Australia and New Zealand “differs from its counterparts in Britain’s mainstream metropolitan centres” (p. 4). The resultant interviews are wonderfully lucid and informative, though it is not clear that one can produce a general answer to such a question from the stories collected here.
For one thing, this is hardly a “peripheral” group of scholars; most anthropologists, wherever located, will know the work of at least some of these people. For another thing, these anthropologists, like many of us, work in multiple settings and countries, as, indeed, Shore and Trnka note. Thus it is not clear, perhaps, how to connect the “knowledge production” of any one of these practitioners, or of anthropologists generally, with singular places in our biographies. Still, the obvious starting point (as the editors and many interviewees note) is the place of indigenous peoples in post-colonial settler societies and, in particular, the difference—to anthropology, to global human rights—that the past half century of struggles over land claims and cultural appropriations in Australia and New Zealand has made. As Shore and Trnka note in their concluding remarks, compared to Canada and the United States, these “peripheral” nation-states have taken major strides “towards recognition of the responsibilities of contemporary governments for the damage and suffering inflicted by the laws and policies of their predecessors” (p. 249). And many of the interviewees have interesting stories to tell about their participation in this world-historical process.

Some of those stories concern working with indigenous people to gather materials they can use both for legal claims and for community education; others concern particular individuals and incidents. One instructive type of story tells of anthropologists’ critics and even enemies in the communities where they were working. In some of these stories, community members defended the anthropologists; in others, the latter had to retreat or make do as best they could, having learned something, along the way, about how arguments are conducted in the worlds they were studying. Another type of story that several interviewees tell concerns how to work with bureaucratic organisations like courts of law, museums, government commissions and, of course, universities. Here the peripheral locations of some of the interviewees (during some phases of their careers) shed light on “the increasingly intrusive… normative ordering associated with neoliberal forms of governance” (p. 248). As some of these interviews remind us, the working conditions of anthropologists both inside and beyond the academy are changing rapidly, and we need all the guidance we can get as to how to survive and prosper.

There is much guidance, amusement and pleasure to be had from these dozen interviews. Each of them is, in its own way, a “good read”. As I think the editors must have hoped for at the outset, the results of their project have transcended the conceptual framework (about knowledge production) the volume as a whole seeks to articulate, while nonetheless speaking tellingly to the editors’ central concerns.

Twenty five years ago, I undertook an interview with David Schneider, with the intention of publishing it as an article in a scholarly journal. Four years and more than a dozen interviews later, the project appeared as a book, Schneider on Schneider: The Conversion of the Jews and Other Anthropological Stories (Schneider 1995, transcribed, edited and with an introduction by R. Handler). Many of Schneider’s students have since told me they not only hear their teacher’s voice in the interviews, they also find them to be among his most illuminating writings. Enterprising young anthropologists take note: the interviews published in Up Close and Personal are only the beginning; follow-up interviews are in order.