REVIEW ESSAY

James F. Weiner, *Tree Leaf Talk: A Heideggerian Anthropology*. Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2001. Pp. 208, bibliography, index. US$95 hardback; $34.95 paperback.

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The Dialectic of Concealment and Revelation
Tree Leaf Talk: Review Essay

Introduction

If a "firebreak" is "a path cut in order to prevent the spread of fires," then "what should a literary or 'anthropological firebreak' look like?" (Weiner 2001, xi) This is a striking question that prefaces James F. Weiner's *Tree Leaf Talk: A Heideggerian Anthropology*. The title of the book is a translation of *irisae-medobora*, a term derived from the Foi language of Papua New Guinea where Weiner has carried out extensive anthropological research. Drawn from the imagery of tree leaves that hide what goes on behind them, *irisae-medobora* is a metaphorical speech that is allusive or concealing. Men of high status who are skilled in the art of dreaming and magic used this allusive talk. Dreams are revealed to men in places of solitary confinements, such as next to whirlpools along a river or beside trees that attract birds in the forest. Following appropriate ritual observations, ghosts appear to men and reveal secret names and other metaphors that men then use in magic. The German parallel to this Foi term is *Holzwege*, which means a firebreak or a path that is cut in the forest to stop the spread of fires. By analogy, an anthropological firebreak may be a kind of ethnographic writing that seeks

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to halt the contagious spread of semantic associations just like a whirlpool that halts the movement of water in a river or a tree that attracts the passing birds in a forest.

There are two critical issues that concern Weiner: one is the increasing tendency in social sciences to aestheticise social relations and the other is the uncritical support of non-Western videos and films both as ethnographic material and technique of anthropological representation. Both of these issues are intimately associated with the current theory and method of social constructionism, which is itself rooted in a deeply engrained Western metaphysics of productionism. If constructionism emphasizes the ability and tendency of humans to shape and fashion a world of meaning and relevance for themselves, then what is the point about concealment that Weiner is compelled to bring out in this book? Is the notion of concealment a theoretical firebreak; and moreover, if there is heat in such a metaphoric flame, one might want to ask whether social constructionism is a kind of discursive fire that needs to be halted?

Tree Leaf Talk reveals concealment as a fundamental phenomenological starting point for thinkers such as Marx, Freud, and Bourdieu, but it imports ideas principally from the anthropological theories of Roy Wagner and Marilyn Strathern that have sensitized the author's reading of Heidegger's ideas on concealment. The book consummates a line of thinking that has been developed by the author over a period of time and has also appeared in previous publications. The book comes in three parts with ten chapters of uneven length. While each chapter may appear to be independent, a critique of social constructionism runs through them on an ethnographic terrain whose contours are mapped out on the dialectic of concealment and revelation. In advancing a Heideggerian anthropology, Weiner enhances the dialogue between phenomenological philosophy and anthropology but submits social constructionism to an incisively blazing critique.

Weiner detects in constructionism a naïve commitment toward extolling a particular kind of subjectivity that obscures the particularities of myth, ritual, art, and social relations that resonate beyond their local context with a universal undertone. Through focusing on how concealment appears among the Foi and illuminated with philosophical and theoretical insights from Heidegger, Wagner, and Strathern, Weiner "shows how people do not have as their avowed intent the imaging of a subject" (10). Concealment provides an ethnographic and conceptual framework to desubjectivize constructionism, especially the sort that "distances itself from the sociogenic locus of meaning production and focuses on what is subjectively experienced by the individual in the conscious and deliberate act of identity management and self-definition" (10).

His criticism derives inspiration in part from Heidegger (1962) and Bourdieu (1977) who describe how the interaction between people and objects go on unreflectively in an unmediated way such that one cannot posit a relation between person and things. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger (1962) describes everyday existence as involving no subject-object relations but one that is enacted naturally without reflection. Bourdieu's version of reflexive sociology contains a similar concern to naturalize the objective conditions of objectivity. In this vein, Weiner plucks a leaf from the *Outline of a Theory of Practice* where Bourdieu asks: "What are the conditions under which the objective properties of social institutions acquire their objectivity" (5). The other part of inspiration has a twin anthropological origin. One is a Heideggerian rendition of the dialectical interplay of invention and convention as outlined in Wagner's *The Invention of Culture* (1981), which Weiner uses to illustrate a "single temporally constituted process of human symbolic articulation" (xiv). The other is a notion of aesthetics used by Heidegger concerning the revelation of form through art, which is then juxtaposed with aesthetics of form (and substance) deployed in Strathern's *Gender of the Gift* (1988), which Weiner uses to advance his notion of the limits of relationships and also to wage a critique against the aestheticization of social relations.

To return to the question about the connection between concealment and constructionism, Weiner finds in the thinkers that he considers a pervasive concern with socially engendered modes of concealment that influence "the exercise of human freedom and autonomy" (7). Thus, if one were to think of social constructionism as a kind of fire, it may be one that is enflaming a subjectivity that is inimical to the world of social relations. As Weiner observes, this appears clearly in the polemics of those who naively endorse indigenous video and film while submitting ethnographic research and theory to criticism. Through an ethnographic and theoretical exegesis on the cultural practices of concealment, Weiner attempts to illustrate how "meaning, relationship and temporality seem to move counter to human subjectivity and intention" (10).

On Heideggerian Anthropology

While Heidegger's existential and hermeneutic ontology is an attempt to reconcile the essence of being, Heidegger himself was careful to note that his was not an anthropological enquiry into human nature. Given this disclaimer, how then can one conceive of a Heideggerian anthropology? Weiner finds Heidegger to be saying that, before anthropological issues are made visible, proper ontological issues must be raised. And these include

> questions about the conditions under which the study of anthropology or anything else is possible. The latter include asking questions that are left unstated in the course of doing "normal" science such as: What kinds of assumptions about what human beings are do anthropologists make before their inquiry even starts? What are the conditions under which things on which we focus our attention. . . stand forth? (3)

What is not immediately clear is whether these sorts of foundational questions are ontological or epistemological, since they could equally be one or the other. Weiner goes on to describe ontology as if it were an archaeological excavation of the strata and layers of meaning. "Ontology then becomes an excavation of epistemology, a cataloguing of the steps that are taken and the assumptions that are made to get to a particular view of things" (3). However, while Weiner invokes the distinction Heidegger makes between the ontological and the ontical, it is not clear at which level (i.e., the ontological or the ontical) the Heideggerian anthropology is conceptualized. I will return to this question below when ethnographic details are considered. In the meantime, if the notion of social ontology is of any clue, then Weiner is calling for a descriptive and interpretational endeavour, which is as phenomenologically inclined as the hermeneutic enterprise that Heidegger envisaged.

Here, one finds an analogy between interpretation and the world of unreflective engagement between people, places, and objects. Heidegger sees interpretation not as an act of signification but in the event that something is encountered, "the thing in question already has an involvement which is disclosed in our understanding of the world, and this involvement is one which gets laid out by the interpretation" (Heidegger 1962: 190–191, cited in Weiner 2001: 5). Thus, if social constructionism exemplifies a hermeneutic theory and method, it runs into problems of conceptualizing meaning and relevance as if they were deliberate outcomes of people's intentions and purposes. It needs to be mentioned that what remains implicit throughout Weiner's explication of concealment is the Freudian notion of the repressed unconscious, which seems to appear with the status of a silent demiurge, much like the anonymous ghosts that come to Foi men in dreams.

Foi and Heidegger

Chapter 2 describes the lineaments of the Foi spatial world envisioned through a system of place and personal names, which serve not just as mnemonics of productive and social history but also of how these names imbue the landscape with purpose and meaning. The general argument, however,

is to show how place emerges "as a by-product of their focus on certain activities such as food getting, which demand movement and activity over and through a terrain" (15). Weiner observes that the "bestowing of place names constitutes Foi existential space out of a blank environment" (16). Such an observation projects the Foi territory as if it were a palimpsest that is subjected to a constant process of inscription and carries the risk of constructionism, which Weiner disavows. However, Weiner explains that it is through naming that place comes into being. These names are historically contingent in the sense that they are born out of people's life activities ranging from birth to death. The names have metaphoric qualities, which may either reveal or conceal people's thoughts and consequences of their actions.

Concealment and revelation also appears in the context of men showing their sons tracts of land, sago stumps, or bamboo stands while they are out in the forest. Weiner compares this Foi notion of "showing" (*mitina*) with Heidegger's rendition of the Greek concept of *aletheia*, which means to "unconceal." This unconcealing of land between men is done "furtively, reluctantly, privately," and the showing reveals something that has been previously hidden. Weiner then inserts a gender dimension into his interpretation and observes that while men

> reveal hidden places . . . women . . . in poetry, reveal hidden names and bring these hidden names in relation to hidden places. And this nexus is only made possible through death. Women's poetic creations thus constitute in Heidegger's terms an authentic use of names and naming, because they situate the fundamental project of death as the condition of placedness; men by keeping the productive and inscriptive relations hidden, deny the existential fact that it is through death that places move from person to person through time, just as it is through life that persons move from place to place. (25)

The relations between men become an unending process of concealment and revelation, while in their use of poetry, women "reveal language's ontological status: they reveal the nexus of space and time that is encapsulated in personal and place-names and restore the movement of life activity to language and names" (27). To further illuminate this, Weiner invokes a Heideggerian distinction between speaking and saying which characterizes language: "Speaking employs the power of language to represent things 'as if' they were factical, ontic, in-themselves . . . . Saying on the other hand, is the domain of poetic language in its most comprehensive sense: it is any discourse that reveals the ontological dimensions of the world" (27). This is where we return to the distinction between the ontic and ontological raised

above. Given that it is women who create poetic songs while men appropriate these songs, Weiner is courting the problem of ontological difference that Heidegger disavows (see also Howarth 2004: 241). Heidegger's notion of ontological difference is a methodological distinction between "ontical" and "ontological" investigations of phenomena. The ontical refers to the investigations undertaken by empirical sciences, while the ontological is specifically a philosophical or a metaphysical enquiry. In aligning the ontological with the poetic and the ontical with the representational power of words, Weiner is inadvertently using gender as a device of asserting ontological difference. It seems that gender among the Foi constitutes separate ontological worlds for men and women.

This problem of ontological difference reappears in Chapter 3, particularly in the manner by which the Foi comport themselves toward death as well as the dynamics of temporality inherent in the dialectics of rest and motion. Men are associated with rest and stillness, while women are connected with motion and movement. For instance, men would abstain from sexual intercourse, confine themselves to solitary places in the bush where they are able to dream and receive secret names from ghosts that are used in magic. Women, on the other hand, are not solitary; they associate with other women, and while they are working together such as in sago production, they compose poetic songs. These songs reveal hidden names of deceased kinsmen or spouses and are later appropriated by men who sing them publicly in their longhouse. In procreative idioms, men are thought to halt or block the flow of menstrual blood with their semen while women's secretions are "debilitating to men . . . nevertheless women are the true sources of life-sustaining motion" (45). A central argument of the chapter is the suggestion "that men and women in Foi have different ontological relations to death" (34). Weiner cautions that his description of the "social and sexual categorisation is not essential, determinate or structural, but rather interpretative, or analogical, encompassing simultaneously both a 'model of' and 'model for' the roles that the Foi see" (46). Yet he asserts that the discursive "contrast is as *much a comment upon* or *interpretation* of as it is a *normative summation of* behavioural tendencies. . . . [The Foi] *embody the contrast in the way discourse is situated with respect to the other temporal processes of the lifeworld*" (48; original emphasis).

Such a hermeneutic position is nested in a conceptual framework of contingency and historicity that treats meaning and interpretation as an open-ended matter. To embody a discursive contrast is to live that contrast in discourse. This may serve to exemplify what Weiner means by the ontological status of language. Elsewhere, Heidegger describes language as the "house of being" (see also Mimica 1993: 92), yet however apt this architectural imagery of language maybe, the critical question is on what *ground* is such a

house built (cf. Ingold 1995: 57–80)? I would insist that, if ontology is an excavation of epistemological schemes, then a Heideggerian anthropology might want to excavate the grounds by which language as the house of being is found. We shall see how Weiner considers the notion of ground.

With respect to the manner in which Weiner outlined the discursive modalities of the Foi in their comportment toward death, the following observations are in order. Weiner made it seem as though the discursive field and death are inseparable but I believe it is appropriate to keep them separate. For me at least, the discursive is located in a domain of contingency, which is variable and particular, while death is located in the province of metaphysical necessity; it is a necessary given. By this, I mean that despite all the uncertainties associated with the nature of death, one thing that humans can be assured of is the unavoidable certainty of the physical death that awaits us. Therefore, to conflate the analysis of discourses about death with death itself is to conceal and misplace the ontological gravity of death.

As we know from Heidegger, the inevitability of death is central to his metaphysics of being, and at the conceptual level, death serves as a function of individuation and totalization whereby the project of being human is liquidated and reconciled in the abyss of nothingness. From a first-person standpoint, Hoffman explains that "Heidegger attributes to death the power of both totalizing and individualizing Dasein. Death totalizes me, for due to death my identity will become complete. Death individualizes me, for it imposes upon me the one and only experience that is inescapably mine" (1993: 199). However, apart from its posture as an ontological orientation toward finality, as Heidegger (1962) contends, death seems to be serving a different kind of work among the Foi. And as Weiner describes with admirable eloquence, the Foi discourse on death summons "ontological relations" that carry a gendered inflection of the kind that is missing in Heidegger's conceptualization. In light of such an understanding of death, one wonders whether Foi men and women are ontologically different outside of their genders. I say this because, among the Iatmul with whom I did fieldwork, life and death are conceptualized as a pair of brothers (Moutu 2003; Herle and Moutu 2004). Life is the elder brother and death is the younger brother and so it follows that irrespective of life or death, we find an ontological process that is orientated toward becoming the other brother much like Mimica's notion of being-toward-the-beginning (see Mimica 1993: 88; Weiner 2001: 55–57).

Weiner does not fully address these ontological processes of being and becoming; instead, in Chapter 4, he defers to a discussion about the fourfold: the oneness of earth, sky, gods, and mortals. The Foi pearl shell is interpreted in the way Heidegger thinks about the sacramental wine that brings together the earth, sky, man, and deity. Because they appear to share "a sense of

topology of meaning, of how language is anchored by the three dimensional kinaesthetic imagination" (60), Weiner juxtaposes Wagner's theory of obviation and Heidegger's notion of *techne* in order to bring out the place of the uncanny and the oblivion. Weiner returns to the imagery of the pearl shells, which sit at a complex web of meaning among the Foi. They are used as bridewealth, compensation payments, and adornment; they idiomatize birds-of-paradise, manifest spirits of the dead, and serve as metonyms of those who make and use them. However, the pearl shell is not reducible to any one function and semantic association. Given this evident complexity, Weiner (2001: 60) observes that this

> Man/pearlshell/bird/spirit is a space, a region wherein the Foi situate the human world between the earth and sky and between the world of the living and the world of the dead. Pearl shell is above else a spatial image, and the four points it tethers delimit a topos. . . within which everyday Foi subjectivity and discursivity unfold.

Against such a background, Weiner argues that a "Heideggerian anthropology of the body must . . . contend simultaneously with the issues of the divine, the human body in its sexual configuration, and the poeticising and self-poeticising of the world, . . . a world that must include both what is human and what measures or interprets the limits of such humanness" (64). Weiner is advocating an anthropological approach that can encompass that which is beyond the limits of human relations yet kept within the precincts of this world of immanent humanity.

Limits of Social Relations

The discussion about the human and the nonhuman anticipates how Weiner wants to illustrate the limit of relationships. To advance his argument, Weiner recapitulates on the myth of the Sky Village, which talks about a man who in his attempt to trap marsupials ended up trapping a maiden who then took him to her sky village where they were married and had a son. But the man was forbidden to have relationships with his kin because the appearance of the Sky Village deceived him into believing he could. Weiner uses the myth to raise a string of interrelated questions about how anthropologists conceptualize social relations. These questions include: "How can a human being have a relationship with a woman who herself is the medium through which relationships are made visible? How can relationship be one and the same time the mode of elicitation and the thing elicited" (76)? From the basis of this mythological account, Weiner argues that "because social relations are

the prefigured end-product of anthropological analysis, they model both our subject-matter and our procedures for making them visible .... [W]e continue to model our procedures and theories on the assumption of relationships .... We confuse a mode of eliciting with the thing elicited" (73).

Weiner juxtaposes M. Strathern's pronouncement of the obsolescence of the concept of "society" and Heidegger's assertion that Western metaphysics has come to an end. He sees such pronouncements as pointing to an internal limit on social theories such that their collapse is something that is already prefigured much like the way death is internally constitutive of a person. Given the fact that "anthropologists starting and ending points are the elucidation of social relationships, what then is our task? What kinds of propositions are given to us to solve against this grounding position? ... And what epistemological limits will such a mode of questioning eventually run up" (71)? Weiner sees Strathern's *Gender of the Gift* (1988) as an enquiry into the contrastive ways in which social relations are elicited or made visible, a theory reminiscent of Heidegger's enquiry into the "truth of being." Weiner finds a parallel between Strathern's unmediated exchange and Heidegger's notion of "ready-to-hand," which refers to the sense in which people's interaction with tools, for instance, is such that there is no boundary between them because of the unreflective engagement between people and things. Weiner then proposes a research program that is oriented toward a "form of sociality that is not mediated, that is not directly articulated, that is only made visible when one's attention is directed elsewhere" (77).

To suggest a way in which social relationships are poised against that which demarcates their limits, Weiner enrols the Heideggerian notion of "they" or "the One" as articulated by Hubert Dreyfus (1992), Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* and a Melanesian sense of the "All," all of which refer to the manner in which social relations are made to appear in a particular form. While Heidegger explains that his notion of "the they" was not meant to be of a sociological nature, the 'relation' that he conceives, "remains concealed beneath the dominance of subjectivity that presents itself as the public realm" (Heidegger 1977: 197–198, cited in Weiner 2001: 80–81) Weiner takes this sense of subjectivity to be a "gloss on the anthropological assumption of relationality" (81). "Under the terms of that assumption, humans unconceal or make visible such subjectivity through their relations with others who are also subjects" (Weiner 2001).

Aestheticization of Social Relations

Weiner also sees a parallel between M. Strathern's notion of the elicitation of social relations and Heidegger's notion of *techne* as a form of poesis which

summon or brings forth things into being. The aestheticization of social relations stems from the fact that, since anthropologists elicit social relations in order to study social relations, these "social relations . . . are made visible through an appropriate aesthetic form, then our enquiry is similarly aesthetic" (87–88). The term aesthetic refers to the manner in which phenomena are made to appear. The substance of Weiner's criticism is that the aestheticization of social relations is rooted in a Western productionist bias. To substantiate his argument, Weiner draws on ethnographic material from the Trobriand and the Yolngu whose art forms revolve around "the work of concealment and restriction of meaning rather than its opposite" (88). The Trobriand material comes from John Kasaipwalova's attempt to establish the Sopi Arts Centre on the main island of Kiriwina (Kasaipwalova 1975). This school was to center around two principals: *kwegivaleyu* and *sopi*. Kwegivaleyu is an artist impression of the sounds of the wind and the sea reproduced aurally as well as in carvings; it is drawn from individual aspirations. Sopi is associated with a world of historically derived meanings. The Yolngu material is drawn from Morphy's discussion of two types of representational styles, which the Yolngu use in their art. One of which is figurative representation that depicts objects of the human and natural environment, and the other is geometric whereby elements in a drawing, such as a circle can represent a waterhole, camp site, etc. The difference between these two representational schemes is that figurative art does not have multiple significations, while multivalency is integral to geometric art forms. In sum, Weiner sees in these art forms something comparable to the contemporary notions of structure and agency as well as invention and convention. He argues that these "examples show that there is always a counter-invented world that emerges along with the intended objects of our conscious efforts, but that remains concealed or unknown. This world is created as an unintended by-product of the focusedness of people's perception, and make itself felt as a resistance to those efforts" (98).

Forms such as Foi poetry and Yolngu painting expose the limits of relationality through working "against the conventions of normative sociality and achieve their interpretational effects through this external positioning" (105). Chapter 7 resumes the critique against the aestheticization of social relations and demonstrates the limits of representational strategies in anthropology. Weiner treats community as a work of art, and, to illuminate his rendition of the Manambu material on the masculine ethos of violence and warfare, comparative material is drawn from Junger's description of warfare in Germany. Weiner argues that if art is opposed to convention, then the aesthetics of violence and warfare that Harrison (1993) and Junger (1992) describe is about transcending the normative and the conventional. While the Manambu men's cult represents itself as an enduring political entity or a community, it does

so through violence and hostility toward outsiders. Such a representation works "by depicting something in terms of its opposite or negation" (109). Because Manambu warriors preserve convention through opposing it, Weiner interprets this as artistic. Ontologically, the Manambu, much like other Melanesian people, "accept interrelationship as innate, prior and taken for granted. What is problematic for them is to accept the range of social relationality. Thus . . . an independent polity is an entity needing constantly to be achieved by counteracting its external ties and dependencies" (Harrison 1993: 14, cited in Weiner 2001: 107). In light of this, Weiner argues that, since the Manambu take for granted the relational and since "its production and representation are not the realm of the convention, then their acts of aesthetic, mythopoietic rupture through warfare . . . will always serve to make the social visible" (111).

For Weiner the problem that aestheticization of social relations is entangled in is twofold. One is that, since social relations are the medium and object of anthropological analysis, anthropologists tend to be not concerned with examining the very foundation of the discipline itself. Second, aestheticization of social relations stems from a productionist bias: the view that people do things deliberately to achieve particular ends and outcomes. Therefore, what Weiner attempts to show through ethnographic examples from the Foi, Trobriand, Yolngu, and the Manambu is the opposite view, that social relations, meaning, and value are unintended outcomes of what people do.

Chapter 8 focuses on the Foi longhouses and discusses the kinds of sounds and visions one encounters in such a house when ceremonial songs are performed inside the house. The chapter recapitulates on the argument about the limit of relationships and of human knowledge. While groups of men sing and dance inside the longhouse, women sit outside in their domestic houses, and the sound of their voices appear disembodied when heard from the interior of the longhouse. The interior of the house is dimly lit with the occasional flickering of fires or with kerosene lamps. Weiner uses this imagery of a cacophony of voices and the opacity of vision to pose questions about the transposibility of sight and sound and of interpretation in general. If we comprehend other people's experience by degrees, Weiner asks: "Can we not argue by the same appeal to the limits of perception and interpretational strategies that our sight cannot convey what our worlds tell us, and our language cannot put into words what our sight encompasses" (119)? Here, Weiner is concerned with questions of how things are made visible through language and vision. He observes that, for the Foi, vision is a matter of revealed interiors and not a thing of surfaces. Another particular example is drawn from Losche's account of Abelam initiation ritual where novices are

brought into the "spirit house" and are submitted to a ritualized ordeal organized along a sequence of revelation and concealment, visibility, and invisibility. Given such a dialectic, Weiner observes that "The creation of invisibility, of limits to the social consequences of sight, are just as important as the conscious attempt to channel and control visibilities" (121).

The issue of language and vision anticipate a discussion about the politics of representation and aesthetics which appear in Chapter 9. Weiner discharges a fiery criticism against Ginsburg (1991) and others concerning their views on videos produced by indigenous and minority groups of people in non-Western countries such as among the Inuits and aboriginal Australians. He also considers the effects that film and video might have on indigenous forms of visualization, revelation, and concealment. Ginsburg and others fail to describe indigenous forms of representation in light of Western forms of signification. Weiner takes issue with several observations made by those within the field of televisual anthropology including (a) the view that indigenously produced video and film is a necessary corrective to ethnographic theorization; (b) the argument that video projects a greater sense of realism, a view that privileges the visual over discursive and textual forms of representation; (c) indigenous video is a useful and powerful instrument of representation because it serves as a guarantor of the subjectivity and autonomy of the film maker; and (d) indigenously produced video offers a scope for complexity of perspectives about local culture. Weiner finds that the exponents of indigenous videos and films take for granted a whole host of issues and do not examine the role of how such televisual media serve as both tools of ethnographic research and as objects of ethnographic scrutiny. One of the failures of Ginsburg and others that Weiner identifies is their failure to "distinguish between the *representation of relations* and a *relation to representative praxis*" (136, original emphasis). This is exemplified in a statement from a Kayapo Indian who observes that the sheer fact of him holding a camera doesn't mean he is not a Kayapo. But Weiner counters this by asking whether the holding of a camera made the Kayapo a film maker (136)?

Weiner also finds that Ginsburg and others posit representation as a basic feature of relationality, and, in so doing, they not only conflate aesthetics and politics but also obliterate cultural differences that define the discipline of anthropology. When such differences are expunged, analysis is bound to deny the place of the uncanny, oblivion, and the inexplicable. Finally, Weiner returns to how a sense of totality has shaped ethnographic data and theory. Such a sense of totality cannot be achieved through exalting the subjectivity of any one member of a particular society (which appears to be the case with indigenous videos) or others including anthropologists and indigenous experts. Anthropological knowledge necessarily requires the intervention of an outsider to enter into social relations in order to document, theorize and

make visible a particular world of social relations. The general point Weiner makes is to avoid the productionist bias of aestheticizing social relations and to be mindful of the limits of relationships.

In Chapter 10, Weiner returns to how Ginsburg talked about ritual and videos and argues that Ginsburg ignores the scale in which rituals are organized. This problem of scale allows Weiner to further his critique against social constructionism. Weiner observes that, in many societies such as those in Australia and Papua New Guinea, there is an "attempt to fashion some gigantic version of human action and life, wherein the actions of beings had cosmological and geomorphic consequences of a permanent and vast nature, and to thus precipitate human community and sociality as some smaller version, component or effect of it" (161–162). Weiner argues that, in filmic representations, it is the technological relations of video production that appear gigantic, while the video themselves are small, and this results in representing ritual as small in scale, while technology becomes big and powerful. Secondl ritual is often considered to have sociological, economic, and ecological implications beyond its symbolic dimension, but none of this comes out in filmic representations of ritual.

Weiner then expands on ecological relations associated with myth and ritual to illuminate the sense of gigantic he has in mind as well as to reveal the grounds of human life in Papua New Guinea and beyond. To do so, he employs Heidegger's (1962) notion of the "gigantic" and "grounds" as well as Wagner's "contrast between the domain of human action, intention . . . and that which is outside this domain" (163). The notion of gigantic is used to account for that which lie beyond human life but still has influence on human life and experience. The gigantic is exemplified in numerous ethnographic accounts of cosmological heroes such as Nugurendi who went about creating the cosmological landscape in parts of South Australia. Weiner wants to account for the way in which the nonhuman, as represented in accounts of the gigantic, emerges in human consciousness not as a matter of symbolic construction. Through a focus on concealment, this nonconstructed human world is revealed.

For Weiner, ultimately, it is the nature of human being to conceal its own "ground" of being. While Heidegger thinks of Earth as the ground of human existence (163), Weiner discusses the notion of "ground" both in the Leibnizian sense of cause and principle as well as the literal earth itself. Weiner carries through the Heideggerian notion of the Earth as the ground of being and argues that Papua New Guinean sociality cannot be alienated from the earth because it is fundamentally the ground of their being as well "as a spatial record of human life-span, a track consisting of a linked series of inhabited spaces" (166). This ground is often concealed and revealed

momentarily through furtive encounters such as when a father shows a plot of land to cultivate or a sago stand to harvest.

This discussion about the ground of being is where I find Weiner to be inconsistent. In Chapter 5, he observed that the way in which pearl shells are displayed reveal a *mode of being* where "people like the Melpa and the Foi affirm to themselves *relationship* as the ground upon which human action proceeds" (75, my emphasis), a point that Wagner (1977: 397) also made once. But at the end of the book, we encounter the earth as the ground of being. Initially we see Weiner describing the Foi spatial world as a blank environmental *tabul rasa*, which is imbued with the human inscription of meaning and intentionality. While we see Foi people going about doing their hunting, gardening, dreaming, singing, etc., we do not see clearly how the Earth emerges with a causally generative capacity. Perhaps we require a rigorous demonstration of how one could ontologize the Earth as the ground of being from which "the non-historical, spontaneous, self-generating aspect of things against which the humanly-made World stood as figure, but which it did not precede ontologically" (163).

If Weiner finds Strathern's *Gender of the Gift* as revealing contrastive modes of being, then despite its productionist bias, I find her conceptualization of "relations" as having a particular causally generative capacity so that "relations" appear as a second-order trope internally endowed with its own contours of figure-ground (Strathern 1988: 172–173; 2000: 24–25). A clarification of whether "relationship" or the Earth is the ground of being would be helpful unless Weiner is alluding to a permutation of form. While Weiner raises important ontological questions about the relational premises of anthropology, his ontologization of the Earth as the fundament of being stems from his particular Heideggerian view of language that misplaces the ontological status of relations.

Conclusion and Summary

This essay examines the Heideggerian anthropology as put forward by Weiner (2001). The book itself is saturated with dense philosophical and theoretical ideas that require patience to follow through. It is also a book that assumes that readers are already familiar with phenomenological hermeneutics and social theory that emanates from the anthropology of Wagner (1977) and Strathern (1988, 2000). Yet through his focus on the dialectic of revelation and concealment, Weiner enhances the dialogue between phenomenological philosophy and anthropology in a creatively original way. My queries relate to how gender appears to be imported into the problem of ontological difference and the nature of death among the Foi as compared to Heidegger.

And finally in raising the ontological questions about the relational premises of anthropology, Weiner does not offer an ontological theory of relations but instead uses concealment as a strategy to ontologize the Earth as the ground of being.

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