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## REVIEWS

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Antony Hooper and Judith Huntsman, eds., *Transformations of Polynesian Culture*. Memoir no. 45. Auckland: The Polynesian Society, 1985. Pp. 226. Paper \$24.00.

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A primary agenda of this volume, intended to lend a coherence to these uniformly excellent papers, is to demonstrate the new robustness that has emerged in the anthropological tradition of work on Polynesia through the flexible application of French structuralist ideas. In the two decades that structuralism has been both in and out of fashion in Anglo-American anthropology, it has served primarily as an ideology of method that has had diverse kinds of influence on the work of individual scholars as well as on the distinct traditions of writing about different ethnographic regions of the world. In general, however, structuralist ideology has appealed primarily as a way to renew long-standing hopes in Anglo-American anthropology for building coherent, totalistic perspectives on such regions through systematic comparison and the discovery of "underlying" principles that unify diverse findings outside the contexts of individual projects of ethnography. An indication of unease about this particular theoretical agenda comes not so much from academic reviews of this volume, but rather from the pithy summary for it included in the catalogue of a bookseller that specializes in literature on the Pacific, the Cellular Book Shop of Detroit, Michigan (#422, item NS97, p. 8): "Papers individually interesting in spite of rather than because of their homage to a newest 'in' thing--'comparative studies in the structuralist mode.' Much to ponder, little to accept as not a reflection of each author's mind rather than of Polynesian social ways present or past."

Mostly concurring with this assessment, I intend to focus this review on how structuralism as an ideology of method plays out in these papers, which are indeed representative of the very best contemporary anthropological research on Polynesia. Far from these papers each reflecting the stimulation of structuralism in one way or another (as the editors claim in their attempt both to unify the volume and to celebrate a new moment of progress in Polynesian anthropology), at least one (Kaeppler's) has little to do with structuralist concerns and two (Goldsmith's and Babadzan's) are pursuing a different set of questions altogether, questions that structuralist ideology has tended to obscure rather than raise. What's more, Edmund Leach, once the leading provocateur for structuralist analysis in Anglo-American anthropology, offers concluding comments to the volume in which he now expresses a frank skepticism about the structuralist program as it is diversely manifested in the papers and celebrated in the introduction. My reading of this volume, thus, views the operation of structuralism as an ideology of method in the papers as much more of a contested ground than do the editors, and as a demonstration of the deficits as well as the indisputable value of work done according to a structuralist set of assumptions and rhetoric of claims. Before briefly considering the papers individually, I want to offer some appropriate general observations: about how Lévi-Strauss's work has settled in as an influence, or ideology of method, as I call it, among Anglo-American anthropologists, and about how this ideology has settled more specifically into anthropological research on Polynesia, which will return us to the agenda of this volume.

While Lévi-Strauss has been remarkably eclectic in the influences upon him, the development of his structuralism has been shaped by two major strains and styles of French social thought. Most prominent and explicit is Lévi-Strauss's Durkheimian heritage, that is, his commitment to a comparative science of society as society has transformed from a primitive to a modern state, and as this transformation reveals through collective representations in social expression the underlying principles, or classificatory logic, of human mentality. Bringing to bear the formalism and rigor of structural linguistics on the Durkheimian project, Lévi-Strauss revived the latter's totalizing vision and made it the explicitly programmatic side of his own work--the discovery of structures eventually decontextualized through comparisons from their particular and culturally diverse expressions. The other major but more indirect or muted influence on Lévi-Strauss is that of the French variety of radical literary modernism, pervasive between the wars and finding expression in the intersection of such frameworks as surrealism and Marxism. This

is the side of Lévi-Strauss that is very concerned with processes of textualization, interpretation, the figurative aspects of language, the multiplicity of voices alive in any context, and the problems these raise in the constitution of knowledge generally. These concerns are more embedded in his asides, some of his essays (less well known to anthropologists), and his playful literary style, that is, in the construction of his own voice enacting through a distinctive corpus of writing his structuralist program, rather than explicitly in the program itself.

The very best works of French scholarship that have developed under the influence of the explicit structuralist program have been those that have acknowledged, wrestled with, and incorporated both sides of Lévi-Strauss, that have mixed both structural linguistic and literary concerns with culture and language. I have in mind here, for example, the work of Greek classicists such as M. Detienne, P. Vidal-Naquet, and J.-P. Vernant. (Of course, what formidably qualifies a decontextualized, formal structuralism in the direction of hermeneutic concerns with texts in classical studies is the existence of a deep and sophisticated historiographical tradition that any scholar must assimilate, if not master, in entering these fields; significantly, no such tradition bars the gate as a prerequisite for structuralists who enter the field of ethnology devoted to primarily oral cultures.)

It should be noted, also, that the other primary French response to structuralism has been the reaction summarized under the label of post-structuralism, covering most prominently the writings of such figures as Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, and Michel Foucault. While incorporating, if only in critique, a number of the terms of structuralism, the starting point for many poststructuralists entailed a derailing of the structuralist program precisely on the questions and problems of language, and ultimately of knowledge, that it could not explicitly address. These writers thus brought to the fore that which in Lévi-Strauss was implicit and a reflection of French social thought between the world wars.

Unlike either one of these French responses to structuralism--which, however different, never lost the literary problematic of language and the hermeneutic concern with multiplicity of perspectives that was an embedded part of Lévi-Strauss's work--Anglo-American anthropology's appropriation and translation of structuralism have heavily emphasized the Durkheimian, explicit program of Lévi-Strauss. With very few, but notable exceptions (see Boon 1972, 1982), Anglo-American structuralism has thus remained tone-deaf to the other, literary and interpretive side of Lévi-Strauss. The resulting ideology of method in

works influenced by structuralism, such as those in this volume, concentrates on the discovery of *underlying* (a key metaphor explicitly acknowledged by several papers in this volume) logics, schemes of oppositions, and principles of transformation, all of which shape a particular kind of unified theoretical narrative. Indeed, while structuralist analysis has now encompassed historic changes, thanks especially to the recent essays of Marshall Sahlins on Polynesian materials, it has not become fully historicist in the relative lack of explicit concern it shows for problems of interpretation, complex motivations of actors, the poetic subtleties of language, and alternative or variant accounts that complexify any attempt to extract a formal cultural logic *from under* a context of action. Thus, structuralism operating as an ideology of method in Anglo-American anthropology, despite the flexibility which has recently characterized it, has tended correspondingly to elude or insufficiently attend to the following kinds of issues: the conditions by which knowledge is produced by ethnographic subjects or anthropologists themselves, a reflexivity about how data are constituted and textualized in the research process, a sensitivity to the various ways cultural experience itself is textualized--in short, a sensitivity to the dialogues, polyphony, and counter-discourses within any cultural setting. Instead, structuralism tends to rely on an *authoritative* (unconscious?) cultural logic, one that either univocally assimilates or masks other concerns in society. The papers of this volume are vulnerable to this critique, since they follow the tradition that has constituted Polynesia as an appealingly coherent culture area. In the Polynesian context, the general views of culture provided by the anthropologist in scholarly accounts wind up being coeval with the partial and particular, but encompassing, views of chiefly authority in these societies. Anthropologists' and *particular* native models have become identified. The tradition of anthropological study of Polynesia has always viewed these societies as aristocentric and heard them univocally in this timbre; the structuralist ideology of method reinforces this tradition.

In light of the preexisting dominant theoretical trend of functionalism in Anglo-American anthropology, what structuralism permitted, given the one-sidedness with which it has been imported, is a much more sophisticated kind of thematic analysis of cultural materials than developed through functionalism. Functionalism explained cultural texts such as myths in primarily sociological terms and did not allow for much exploration of the indigenous meanings of such texts; it did not allow anthropologists to get inside them, so to speak, to examine with any probity symbols and the indigenous associations made among them.

Indeed, by not taking the previously noted problems of language and context sufficiently into account, structuralism as an ideology of method fit very well and in fact completed Anglo-American functionalist concerns. That is, even the most accomplished structuralist analyses in this volume (those, say, of Valeri and Sahlins) retain the sociocentric focus of functionalist analysis. What is discovered in Polynesian cultural logics is read against a baseline of social relations that functionalists developed but could go no further in elaborating. Structuralist discussions of indigenous logics, of what is to be found in myths, turn out to give a richer, yet confirming understanding of what has long been known in Polynesian ethnology about politics, kinship, and religion. Yet, a structuralism that would wrestle explicitly with problems of constituting knowledge and interpretation might do more than “crack codes” and penetrate underlying logics that enrich and confirm notions of Polynesian social relations already outlined by conventional functionalism. For this, a more balanced and open dialectic between a privileged discourse about society (“anthropological theory”) and Polynesian discourses is necessary.

There are two characteristics of the ideology of-method in the most structuralist of these papers that prevent such an open and balanced dialectical approach. First, while based on careful scholarship and an excellent knowledge of sources, these papers do not place in the foreground concerns with genres, narratives, the conditions for the production of knowledge, or the like as being problematic. Rather such attention is developed in asides, footnotes, or hedges, which, I would argue, precisely set up material for treatment according to the particular kind of structuralist ideology that characterizes Anglo-American anthropology. Typical in this volume are Schrempf’s hedges in introducing some Maori material for comment: “I begin by summarising the basic relationships that are set out in the account of the origin of the universe. Because it is a summary of basic relationships, many details of the originals are left out. I make no reference to the ways in which the two accounts differ, and I do not claim to have captured the artistic effect of the original” (p. 21). It is precisely these sorts of excluded considerations that would be of importance for the kind of enriched structuralism that at least some of the French scholars influenced by Lévi-Strauss have produced. While it is clear that scholars like Valeri and Sahlins are absolute masters of the sources that affect their analyses, it is also clear that for them, too, problems of textualization, narrative, poetics, and the conditions that have produced our knowledge of Polynesian cultures are of peripheral concern, such as the fact, for example, noted by Leach in

his conclusion, that all our sources are European filtered through a complex history of relationships between oral and literate processes of communication. Yet it is precisely such concerns that the full-bodied structuralism of Lévi-Strauss managed to incorporate. Without acknowledging and dealing with them, structuralism in the Anglo-American tradition becomes merely the fulfillment of functionalist reconstructions of Polynesian culture, with all their virtues and flaws.

Second, the structuralist ideology of method operating in these papers insists, as a completion of the distinctive cultural logics they are defining, on a resolution of the contradictions it finds in indigenous texts. Order is restored by resolving puzzles posed by the anthropologist, yet claimed by him or her to be both indigenous puzzles and solutions. While structuralists may certainly find salient elements of opposition or conflict in indigenous texts, their imputations of resolution as indigenous moves rather than as their own are suspect precisely because, as noted in the preceding, their attention to the construction of indigenous texts, to poetics, to matters hermeneutic is either lacking, a matter of asides, or hedged. In the end, this kind of structuralist analysis fills out richly and usefully the kind of sociological problems that the tradition of anthropology (and most notably the preceding functionalist tradition) has always set. Typical is a statement of Hooper and Huntsman's commenting on Valeri's paper: "There are thus, within the Hawaiian system itself, two conceptions of power, one divine and the other humanly produced, which are finally rendered 'not incompatible' with one another by a logic of transformation" (p. 10). While Valeri is clearly working deeply inside indigenous materials here, the question is, whose logic and for what purposes? Turning to Valeri's paper itself we find that while he is scrupulous in his use of sources and explication of detail, the interpretive canon he employs to make associations--the critical element in reaching structuralist logics of transformations, resolutions of contradictions--is very much his own. For example, after a careful exegesis of Hawaiian metaphors, he imputes the following: "But the most profound basis for the analogy between menstruating woman and wild god is that both represent potentialities of human life that must be realised by men. The ritual process by which a god in tree form is developed into a god in human form is, in fact, identified with the sexual process of transforming blood flowing from a woman into a child" (p. 97). In tying these symbols together, whose logic--the critical structuralist entity--are we dealing with? In this one-sided, but sophisticated application of structuralism, it would seem that all is pulled back to the Durkheimian social without explicit attention to distinctively

Hawaiian modes of interpretation and making associations. In the absence of these, the interpretation of Polynesian symbols will always be skewed in the direction of a single Durkheimian truth of social order.

The most obvious reason for the strong association of the structuralist ideology of method with Polynesian ethnology at present is the stimulus of the work of Marshall Sahlins in giving structuralist method a historical dimension (his Polynesian demonstrations of this [1981, 1985] have had a theoretical influence far beyond Pacific studies). However, I would argue that the current fit between structuralism and the long-standing anthropological treatment of Polynesia goes further than this. We might look to contrasts between anthropological approaches to Polynesia and Melanesia respectively. Whereas the former have found structuralism appealing theoretically, the latter have not, and in fact, it seems that some contemporary work on Melanesia has an affinity for poststructuralist approaches. For example, contemporary Melanesianists have been far more explicitly concerned with the processes that produce knowledge and cultural texts, as well as the manner they have been performed, than have Polynesianists. Thus, rather than following closely the past traditional terms of Melanesian studies in anthropology, contemporary scholarship has flowered by deconstructing these terms--for example, it has turned the study of kinship into that of gender and has been more open to polyphony, alternative accounts, aporia in belief systems, poses of authenticity, and reflexivity operating in subject societies than has Polynesian scholarship. In one sense, this current difference can be mapped onto the classic contrast that Sahlins himself developed (1963): Polynesia has chiefs, Melanesia has big-men. And by further parallel, Polynesian religion has totalizing cosmologies that reflect social hierarchies; Melanesian religions (from the external perspective of anthropology) are more diverse and model their respective social orders less coherently. In Melanesian ethnography, there is more ease about letting disjunctions, aporia, and contradictions in myths and religious discourses stand than there is with like phenomena in Polynesian ethnography. The point, then, seems to be that different Polynesian and Melanesian realities display different affinities for our different kinds of theory that might frame accounts of them. But in this intellectual era--which is so questioning of the nature of social reality in terms of the mediating process of representation in language necessary for any construction of reality--we might better say that in anthropologists' traditions of representing Polynesian societies, in contrast with Melanesian ones, structuralist ideology has come to have a special affinity with this tradition of representation, rather than with Polynesian reality

plain and simple. A critique of these traditions of representation and the historic conditions that gave rise to them, including the current appeal of structuralism for the Polynesian tradition, remains to be done.

Now to offer a brief commentary on the papers in line with the preceding discussions. Gregory Schrempp's paper on Maori cosmogony develops issues that could call into question the structuralist project (e.g., he focuses on discontinuities in both the logic and the rhetoric of Maori cosmological accounts), but he remains self-consciously true to the terms of structuralist analysis. In settling upon temporality itself as a kind of metalogic for structuralist analysis in comparative Polynesian cosmologies, he wavers in his conclusion: "A genuine rethinking would imply more than a recognition of underlying forms, or even of repeating underlying forms within the span of the coming-to-be; it would mean learning to view the coming-to-be itself as form, and as potentially indistinguishable from 'ongoing social life' " (p. 33). He is almost but not quite beyond the strictures of structuralist ideology. Without turning his full attention to rhetorical, performative, poetic aspects of Maori discourse, about which he has hedged, the kind of genuine rethinking he calls for is not likely.

Alan Howard's paper on Rotuman kingship and Valerio Valeri's paper on the Hawaiian legend of 'Umi (which concerns the process by which a conqueror becomes legitimated as king) are both excellent examples of structuralist analysis in the distinctly Durkheimian mode, whereby the point of uncovering cultural logics in indigenous texts is to confirm and baroquely fill out sociological truths. In a very deft application of structuralist ideas to Rotuman myths, in which he illuminates the populist and divine sides of Polynesian chiefs, Howard shows the power of this type of analysis to advance long-standing concerns in functionalist Polynesian anthropology about the nature of political authority in these societies. Valeri explores much the same issues as does Howard, and interestingly he is as much if not more sociocentric, beginning with an interesting comparative discussion of Polynesian hierarchy and European feudalism, and generally using what is independently known about Polynesian social organization from existing ethnography as a base for his interpretation of the 'Umi legend. As suggested previously, Valeri seems to overinterpret the myths, by embellishing his very cogently argued associations in legend through what clearly seem to be his own conclusions. Instead of a discussion of the conditions, poetic, political, and historical, in which cultural texts were constructed and performed, we get the structuralist will to resolve puzzles, to see coherences and the resolution of contradiction. It is at these points that structuralist artifice is most wanting in support.



Adrienne Kaeppler's very interesting paper suggests that changes in political authority are not only indexed by changes in material culture --in this case, the neckline of Hawaiian feathered cloaks--but that objects are both the means and media of political change itself. While Kaeppler employs some structuralist surface terminology such as "transformation," her analysis is actually much more straightforward and conventional: the hegemony of the Kamehameha dynasty froze the flexibility of the preexisting status system in Hawaii, and these changes can be richly understood in terms of the differences between the objects collected during Cook's visits and those of slightly later vintage. Being a museum professional, Kaeppler is more sensitive than most of the authors in this volume to the contexts in which objects are collected and interpreted, and her paper includes interesting observations on how, under the Kamehameha dynasty, "classic" culture was invented through changes and reinterpretations of material culture. It is precisely these sorts of concern that would complexify the structuralist ideology of method, if it were more at issue in this paper.

Huntsman and Hooper's short paper on changes in Tokelauan social organization and cultural categories attendant upon contact with Europeans, and especially in the aftermath of missionization and the deprivations of slavers, is perhaps the most impressive demonstration of the use of structuralist ideas in the volume. It recalls, in a condensed way, Sahlins's similar and influential treatment of change in Hawaii during the immediate decades following Cook's death there (the third chapter of his 1981 essay). What Huntsman and Hooper show is that structuralist ideas in fact have little to do with the discovery of indigenous frameworks of explanation. Rather, applying these ideas revolutionizes anthropologists' models and the puzzles they are designed to solve through Huntsman and Hooper's very sensitive readings of early European accounts and their elicitation of contemporary Tokelauan commentaries on them.

The papers by Michael Goldsmith and Alain Babadzan seem to be operating clearly outside the structuralist project altogether and instead are involved centrally with issues of cultural hermeneutics. A secondary agenda of Goldsmith's excellent paper on the significance of the meetinghouse in the construction of contemporary Tuvaluan culture is indeed to critique the structuralist ideology of method for precisely some of the issues that I have characterized it as eluding. Goldsmith investigates what might be called a "re-invention of tradition" problem (see Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). The meetinghouse is central to Tuvaluan identity and, according to contemporary Tuvaluan discourse, always has been, yet through Goldsmith's scholarship it seems to have

been a postcolonial borrowing or implantation. To sort out this kind of puzzle requires different sensitivities than those explicitly displayed in other papers in this volume. Goldsmith directly confronts the poetic and rhetorical aspects of the documentary and ethnographic sources available to him.

With Alain Babadzan's study of the ancestral registers of Rurutu, we have the only paper in the volume that bases itself on such issues as the conditions and media by which indigenous knowledge, history, and cultural texts are produced. He is very much concerned with the historical context of how an oral corpus became written. Like Goldsmith, he sees the reinvention of tradition in this process, but he places special emphasis on the historic context of resistance and dialogue across cultural boundaries. The Rurutu material cannot be understood except as having arisen in dialogue with missionary discourse in a colonial context. The logic underlying the contemporary culture of Rurutu is one of resistance and formation through involvement with other discourses and institutions imposed upon it. As Babadzan says: "We are witnessing an attempt at 'rewriting' history, an attempt which has a dual aim. Firstly, to deny contact and the reality of a conversion imposed by a foreign agent, and secondly, to 'rehabilitate' to some degree a past condemned by missionary teachings" (p. 187). With Babadzan's shift in focus from that of the other papers in the volume, he envisions a very different sort of project for anthropological research on Polynesia than the structuralist one:

We need to surmount two common misunderstandings before proceeding any further with contemporary cultural anthropology in these societies. The first concerns the importance of the phase of acculturation following the arrival of the missionaries; the second common misunderstanding is of the structure and coherence of the syncretic world-view which was gradually formulated after contact with Europeans. A thorough study of the different syncretisms which arose in this region of the Pacific should, therefore, be a major aim for anthropologists in Polynesia, rather than being a stumbling-block for them, given that these syncretisms are *in their turn* disintegrating. This is a necessary condition for the analysis of Polynesian culture, not only as it stands today but also as it was yesterday. (P. 191)

Marshall Sahlins's brilliant, and brilliantly written, comparisons of notions of hierarchy among precontact Maoris and Hawaiians deserve

penultimate place in this collection, because more than anyone else he has internalized as a matter of his own analytic and literary style the structuralist ideology of method in a way that recalls Lévi-Strauss's own mastery of it, Sahlins revives in a most stimulating and ethnographically grounded way the old project and scheme in French scholarship of comparative mythology. He, too, skews the structuralist project in the Anglo-American manner of reading Lévi-Strauss; that is, he wants to take cultural texts for themselves, to use them as vehicles for resolving comparatively long-standing puzzles about Polynesian society that derive, not from indigenous discourses, but from the tradition of constituting at first European and then specifically academic anthropological knowledge about this region of the world. In this great project, indigenous voices and discourses are traces to be reconstructed by discovering their logics. The sheer mastery of sources and sparkle of insight in Sahlins's writing make one almost forget that there could be any other way to understand or know these societies before or since contact.

In his concluding remarks, Edmund Leach equivocates. On the one hand, his comments are characteristically skeptical and curmudgeonly, but what is striking about them is that he no longer argues for structuralism in its Anglo-American form, which he pioneered, but instead advocates a cultural hermeneutics that challenges it. It was in a 1972 volume, *The Interpretation of Ritual*, that Leach, as structuralist, took on Polynesian materials--in that case, an alternative analysis of Tongan kava ritual following a psychoanalytic treatment of the same material by Elizabeth Bott--and quite confidently interpreted them without any particular scholarly knowledge of Polynesia of his own (Leach and Bott 1972). Now, in the first part of his remarks, it can be said that Leach provides a poststructuralist critique. As he notes, structuralist ideology has not really altered the grounding assumptions and characteristics of the narrative that has defined the anthropological tradition of Polynesian studies. In fact, it has reinforced it. Leach critiques the reconstructionist bias of this narrative (or imagery, as he calls this metaframework). He now understands theoretical models as representations, and, in effect, sees that the only structures worth commenting on are in these representations. Like a poststructuralist, he critiques the tendency in Polynesian ethnology, including its recent structuralist form, to construct through comparisons an entity "Polynesian Culture," and he reminds anthropologists that "Pacific Island ethnography, as it now exists, no matter whether it derives from 'explorers' or sea-captains or missionaries or colonial administrators, or Western-educated Pacific Islanders, or even professional anthropologists, represents cultural his-

tory filtered and distorted through the use of European categories of thought" (p. 222). On the other hand, in a few short concluding paragraphs Leach seems to veer back toward an ur-structuralist position that denies the specificity of cultures, but his comments here are too telegraphic to be clearly understood. In a self-conscious effort to end constructively, he does note that the kind of studies in this volume, which deal mostly with the transformation of Polynesian societies in history at the point of early European and nineteenth-century contact, has been successful in breaking with patently European understandings of these societies, and that while structuralists cannot evade a culture-bound framework for constructing indigenous histories, it is important that they attempt this task because "the future inhabitants of Polynesia will need a history which is not only dignified but credible. It is the anthropologists (and the archaeologists) who can potentially provide such a history. That is the goal towards which we should direct our endeavors and towards which some of the contributors to this symposium are already directing theirs" (p. 222). Thus, here is the new purpose and burden of an anthropology--but of a purely Euro-American anthropology as in the past, or one that includes contemporary Polynesian peoples themselves who have never stopped developing their own histories? The unself-conscious crosscurrents in Leach's rambling but, as always, fascinating remarks are a fitting conclusion to a volume that can be read as also sharing these ambivalences about the structuralist ideology of method that dominates it.

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