REVIEWS

William W. Donner and James G. Flanagan, eds., *Social Organization and Cultural Aesthetics: Essays in Honor of William H. Davenport.* New York: University Press of America, 1997. Pp. v, 151, illus., bib. US$56.50 cloth; $30.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Stuart Kirsch, University of Michigan

Like Smoke from the Pines

THE RUGGED HIGHLANDS of Santa Cruz in the Solomon Islands were once dominated by a broad and pure stand of kauri pines, with trees soaring to more than one hundred feet in height, the tallest on the island. Kauri, a member of the genus *Agathis,* once grew extensively throughout New Zealand; the Maori used the trees for building canoes. As a soft pine, it was also in demand for European shipbuilding at the turn of the century and was exported to Australia in great volume. When supplies of the wood in New Zealand were exhausted, the last remaining stands of notable size were in the mountains of Santa Cruz and nearby Vanikoro.

William Davenport, now professor emeritus at the University of Pennsylvania, tells a story about the kauri pines of Santa Cruz that illustrates his approach to ethnographic problems, a fitting way to introduce this fine collection of essays executed in his honor by his former students. While surveying the deserted western side of the bay on Santa Cruz, Davenport counted at least fifty former village sites. Although he was unable to determine how many of these villages had been inhabited simultaneously, information needed to calculate the population size, the evidence clearly indicated that the aban-

doned villages resulted from the large-scale depopulation associated with early contact. The case of Santa Cruz was cited by W. H. R. Rivers in his studies of depopulation in Melanesia, which he ascribed to a "sickness of the soul." When Davenport inquired among the villagers along the east bay as to the fate of their neighbors, they told him that their ancestors, using sorcery, were responsible for their demise. Davenport wanted to know the technique involved and they explained that it had been done with kauri smoke. Apparently one burned a piece of kauri gum or resin and the smoke drifted across the bay, killing the people there.

Kauri pines produce copious quantities of resin, which the people of Santa Cruz used for illumination before kerosene became available on their island. Even when Davenport visited the island in the 1950s, people still collected and burned kauri gum when their supplies of kerosene dwindled. Davenport was therefore puzzled by the apparent contradiction, that kauri smoke was considered harmful to people living across the bay but safe to use in their own homes, although no local explanation was forthcoming. After the stands of kauri on Vanikoro were harvested by an Australian timber company, the people of Santa Cruz gave the firm permission to cut down the trees on their own mountains. They were afraid of the place, which was cold, wet, and miserable. It was associated with ghosts and considered evil. At the end of a day's labor in the mountains of Santa Cruz, one of the workers reported to Davenport an observation about the kauri: Wherever the pine grows, it kills all of the neighboring plants and trees. Nothing else can grow there.

Davenport immediately grasped the significance of this remark; it was the exclusive colonization of the mountain top by kauri pines that led the people of Santa Cruz to identify the tree as the source of the "black magic" responsible for the depopulation of the west bay. From the perspective of the tropics, the phenomenon of a stand of trees composed of a single species is most unusual, if not unnatural. The trees are thought to poison their neighbors, creating an environment in which only they can survive. Thus kauri pines are an apt metaphor for the early colonial period on Santa Cruz, during which only the communities of the east bay survived the epidemics of contact. The example provides insight into a tropical view of biodiversity, in which homogeneity is regarded as unnatural and trees are cast as agents in the elimination of other tree species. (From a temperate perspective, stands of a single tree species are relatively common, from the pine barrens in New Jersey to the redwoods of northern California.) These understandings were implicated in the way that people from Santa Cruz accounted for local changes in social diversity during the early colonial period.

This explanation failed to satisfy Davenport entirely. Why was the smoke regarded as harmless in one context, yet dangerous in another? Obviously

the smoke was not efficacious in and of itself; what was needed was a catalyst to activate its negative properties. Davenport subsequently found an informant who provided the missing information: Ignited kauri resin was taken outside where the smoke was bespelled, whereby it acquired its deadly power as it moved across the bay. The resulting theory of magic suggests that the properties of an object, in this case the power of the kauri to kill neighboring trees, are transferred from one domain to another—from trees to people—by means of a spell. The case also shows how the powers of agency are extended to the nonhuman world, an assumption that is common throughout Melanesia. Finally, the case suggests the inappropriateness of the nature/culture dichotomy, for the Santa Cruz understanding of the kauri pine as a predator against its neighbors, while an observation about environmental conditions, is no less a cultural construct than their views on sorcery.

This anecdote illustrates Davenport's careful attention to ethnographic detail and concern for the material conditions of life. It suggests that local knowledge of the environment may provide the vocabulary for indigenous analysis of events, in this case their interpretation of the postcontact population decline. It implies that we may encounter alternative understandings of scientific principles like biodiversity when seen from a tropical rather than a temperate point of view. Finally, Davenport's investigations on Santa Cruz demonstrate that the answers to ethnographic queries may be found in the most unlikely of places, like smoke from the pines.

* * * * *

At the annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association in 1992, a group of William Davenport's students gathered to present papers on kinship and art, the major themes of his research. An introduction by the editors of the resulting volume, *Social Organization and Cultural Aesthetics: Essays in Honor of William H. Davenport*, describes his remarkably rich career, which has included research in Jamaica, Hawai'i, the Solomon Islands, and Sarawak (Malaysia). Davenport is a member of the last generation of anthropologists to be authorities in all of the subfields of the discipline and has published in archaeology and linguistics in addition to social and cultural anthropology. His major contributions include the application of game theory to Jamaican fishing practices, a pioneering analysis of nonunilinear descent groups, an influential account of red-feather money in Santa Cruz, historical research on kinship and the "culture revolution" in Hawai'i, and studies of Hawaiian sculpture and the art of the Pacific and Southeast Asia. He was also the curator of numerous museum exhibitions on the material culture of these regions. This slim but elegant volume addresses many of the themes that have preoccu-

pied Davenport throughout his career, revealing his influence on a generation of students working in Hawai'i (Modell), the Solomon Islands (Donner), Papua New Guinea (Flanagan, Kahn, Zimmer-Tamakoshi), Indonesia (Just), and in museums (Kahn and Welsh).

Several of the chapters take up issues of gender and transformation. In an innovative comparison of early nineteen-century missionaries and contemporary social workers in Hawai'i, Judith Modell describes the persistence of a style of female sexuality in which a marked category of difference has become a mode of resistance. She concludes that while female social workers and their historical predecessors, missionary women, possess radically different ideas about gender roles, they share the common agenda of transforming women as a means to change Hawaiian society.

Writing about the Gende of the Highlands of Papua New Guinea, Laura Zimmer-Tamakoshi examines how women, through their repayment of their brideprice and participation in other forms of exchange, may accumulate power and respect during their life course. Her essay is one of the clearest accounts of the relatively widespread pattern in which women gain influence with maturity, countering stereotypes of Highlands women perpetuated by scholarship on male beliefs about pollution, the threat posed to residential groups by in-marrying women, and the patrilineal bias of these societies. Flanagan writes about the Wovan, a Highlands fringe society, and their practices of sister (or brother-sister) exchange marriage. While primarily concerned with the male point of view, he observes that women hold veto power over their own and consequently their brothers' marriages, maintaining the balance of power in a system that otherwise favors men. Like Annette Weiner, who was also influenced by Davenport, Flanagan emphasizes the importance of brother-sister relations for patrilineal as well as matrilineal societies.

William Donner is also interested in questions of social organization, and in particular the decline of research and debate on the subject within anthropology during the last two decades. He observes that earlier studies of kinship were hobbled by their lack of attention to history, agency, power, and gender, all primary concerns of the discipline today. Donner also suggests that this research suffered from a surfeit of reflexivity, which emerged in lengthy, quarrelsome, and overly complex terminological debates, concluding, "Like troublesome cars which are easier to junk than fix, many anthropologists found it easier to abandon studying kinship and social organization rather than try to fix them" (p. 79). Donner encourages anthropologists to revisit kinship and social organization, particularly the integration of smaller, face-to-face societies within the larger world system, illustrating the significance of this work with reference to transformations and continuities of identity and practice on Sikaiana, a Polynesian outlier in the Solomon Islands, and in Sikaiana communities located in the outskirts of the capital city of Honiara.

Peter Just addresses issues of change among the Dou Donggo of Sumbawa, in eastern Indonesia, with similar soul-searching. His essay examines wedding receptions in which both guests and hosts dress in Western attire, with the bride in whiteface and makeup and the groom in sunglasses (otherwise worn only by soldiers and police). The entire community is subjected to a prolonged harangue about self-discipline by a schoolteacher speaking in Bahasa Indonesia, which fewer than a quarter of the guests understand, and gifts of money are central to the affair. Just's initial discomfort with this display of the worst of what the West has to offer eventually gives way to a powerful analysis of historical transformation, in which he suggests that the new elements of Dou Donggo wedding ritual acknowledge as well as critique the group's position in an expanding field of social action, which has been prompted by their increasing population size, inability to maintain self-sufficiency in food production, and increasing participation in, and identification with, the state.

Finally, both Miriam Kahn and Peter Welsh address issues of representation in museums. Kahn, writing about carved aqueduct figures from Wamira, in southeastern Papua New Guinea, argues convincingly that the *kokoitau* carvings act as temporary chiefs. The figures briefly unite otherwise fragmented communities during intervals in which they must cooperate in the irrigation of new land, giving their fields precious fallow time. She also makes the point that objects like the *kokoitau,* when displayed in museums, are cut off from their social context and are thus rendered relatively powerless. Welsh also raises questions about the audience response to objects displayed in museums. Reviewing the recent literature on ethnographic representation in museums, he rejects assumptions about the purely didactic influence of museums, arguing that museum professionals should embrace the various paradoxes associated with the display of ethnographic objects that have been removed from their context, a perspective consistent with Kahn's treatment of the *kokoitau,* as well as the social and affective experiences of museum visitors.

The ethnographic range of these essays, from eastern Polynesia through Melanesia and Southeast Asia, reflects the geographic breadth of Davenport's career. The subject matter follows his longstanding interest in social organization, gender, aesthetics, and museum practices. Finally, the essays exhibit, both implicitly and explicitly, Davenport's influence on the contributors' scholarship, including their shared attention to detailed ethnographic knowledge and the material conditions of life.

As the contributors to this volume make abundantly clear, Bill Davenport was a gifted teacher and a generous mentor. As one of his last students prior to his retirement, I would like to close this review with a personal remembrance to complement the account of his ethnographic inquiries on Santa Cruz. I remember sitting in a lecture hall one afternoon with my fellow students, a full hour after the class should have ended. Through Davenport's

lecture, we had been able to see the taro grow, watch canoes being made, and view initiates as they decorated themselves in ritual attire. Finally, he noticed that the sun had set and chastised us for not interrupting him. We all smiled sheepishly, for none of us wanted to travel back to the streets of Philadelphia from Oceania, where we had magically been transported. I would like to thank Bill on behalf of all of his students for leading us on a journey from which we have never really returned.