Andrew Strathern and Pamela J. Stewart, *Arrow Talk: Transaction, Transition, and Contradiction in New Guinea Highlands History.* Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2000. Pp. 216, illus., bib., index. US$19 paperback.

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Spanning from the precolonial to the postcolonial, from exchange competitions to inflated compensations, Andrew Strathern and Pamela Stewart's journey through the labyrinths of New Guinea Highlands history is a welcome addition to an emerging historical anthropology of the Pacific. *Arrow Talk: Transaction, Transition, and Contradiction in New Guinea Highlands History* is part of a flurry of Strathern and Stewart publications that has included no less than eighteen papers, six monographs (with three more promised shortly), and three edited volumes, all within the span of four years since they began publishing together in 1997. Those who are familiar with their work will recognize some familiar faces, most notably the master of *moka,* Ongka. *Moka,* the famous Highlands exchange competition, made both Ongka's and Strathern's respective careers as it flourished in the Highlands of New Guinea as well as in the halls of academia from the 1960s through the 1980s. Here *moka* takes center stage again, but perhaps for its final curtain call, for this is the story of its flourishing and ultimate fall from 1964 to 1998—roughly spanning the period of fieldwork by Strathern, one of New Guinea's best and most enduring ethnographers.

The cast of characters is vast—from *kiaps* and councils to MPs and *raskols,* local venture capitalists to mega-multinationals—all playing their parts alongside the ubiquitous anthropologists. The scenes are ever-changing, as the last quarter of the twentieth century ushers in a world of guns, gangs, lagers, loggers, converts, convicts, school classes, and social classes. It is clear that this is not the type of history in which one event after another unfolds in simple straightforward fashion. As the imagery of the title suggests, this story is sharp, moving, and complicated.

The story begins as the penetrating triad of forces identified as capitalism, democracy, and the state stumbled into the Highlands in the form of Australian colonialism. In these early days of colonialism, "law" and "government" simply meant pacification. *Moka,* symbolically modeled on compensation payments for killings, flourished as an alternative to violence and was nourished by the tremendous stock of shell valuables Australian colonials so effortlessly inserted into the local economy. Ironically, it is compensation payments for killings that have flourished in the 1990s, and the practice that once modeled the *moka* has now outmoded it. The payments are not inflat-

ing, but claims are, suggesting that victims are now commoditized, their values tallied in actuarial fashion. Claims are no longer limited to clans but are now made upon "superclans" like those of teachers, the government, and multinationals.

Center stage in all of this are anthropological theories of exchange and personhood that are asked to be refashioned to account for such changes. Tracing theoretical developments from a 1960s brand of transactionalism and methodological individualism to the "interpretive turn" that challenged the most basic assumptions of these earlier theories, Strathern and Stewart set for themselves the worthy goal of recovering what was worthwhile from the earlier perspective to consider alongside contemporary views. To do so, they must penetrate beyond that great tome by Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift* (1988)—the book that literally engulfed the transactionalism of the past with its trenchant and expansive analysis of Melanesian understandings of exchange practices, ultimately reshaping anthropological understandings of Melanesian personhood as dividual (or "relational") rather than individual.

Through examples from their work in Hagen, Strathern and Stewart argue that while people may think and speak of themselves in relational terms, there is still an individual agent making decisions to advance his or her own interests. They do not mean to deny relational systems of meaning, but rather to simply add back into the analysis the dimension of the individual pursuing individual interests. To mark this they suggest a new term, the "relational-individual."

Such a term may seem to have an immediate value when seen as part of the broad-based challenge to essentializing and othering "West and the Rest" dualism, but the authors are not making a plea for political correctness, and the value of their term must be judged by its utility in anthropological analysis.

With penetrating common sense, the term reminds us that although the idioms and rhetoric of New Guinea Highlanders may emphasize relationality, they are still individuals, devising their own intentions, making their own decisions, and acting on their own interests. This dissolves the rigidity of the dividual-individual dichotomy and asks us to explore the ways individuals in pursuit of their own interests negotiate relational contexts and ideologies.

However, the term's greatest virtue may also be its vice. By dissolving the dichotomy we are left with limited means of comparison, be it cross-cultural, intracultural, or historical. There are hints of significant differences in personhood throughout Strathern and Stewart's work—between young and old, men and women, converts and convicts, as well as historical differences that suggest an emerging commodification of social relations and new forms of

individuality. It is in these intriguing but all too brief moments of the book that the "relational-individual" loses its currency, for it does not allow us to penetrate these changes and variations, or the conflicts and contradictions that surround them.

"We expect to find relational-individuals all around the world," they affirm (p. 63), and it "is not just a modern or post-colonial phenomenon" (p. 7). If we can expect to find relational-individuals everywhere and at all times, then we must not view the term as a description. It is an assumption. In this sense, the relational-individual is not on the same playing field as the descriptive "dividual" and "individual." Instead it must be seen as the flagship term of a revised transactionalism—what we might call "methodological relational-individualism."

What ties this revised form of transactionalism to its earlier form is the assumption that everybody everywhere is in pursuit of interests. While Stewart and Strathern are careful not to deny relational aspects of personhood and that people may indeed think of themselves in relational terms, they argue that everybody everywhere pursues interests. The grounds for this assumption are within our own common sense, but we must not accept our own common sense as common in cross-cultural contexts. Instead of beginning with this assumption, studies of the person might begin (and indeed have begun) with local understandings of interest and motivation—beginning from a thorough understanding of the local ethnopsychology or ethnosociology rather than imposing our own understanding of these domains. Furthermore, we might explore how the basic concepts and postulates that guide and interpret social action vary for people of different social position—young and old, men and women, converts and convicts. This could provide the groundwork for understanding the massive ontological shifts brought about by that "triad of forces that we can identify as capitalism, democracy, and the state" (p. 171) and ultimately help us to better understand why *moka* died.

"Arrow Talk," our authors tell us, "is a genre of political oratory . . . practiced at the end of political events to express how history has crystallized into a state of transactional play between participants in the exchanges that constitute the event, including a sense of the event as a transition between other events" (p. 1). Though this book is sparing with broad and penetrating conclusions, it is a bit of arrow talk itself, marking much of the territory and defining the terms in which future conclusions might be made. Those of us drawn to studies of personhood owe them a debt of gratitude for, if not pointing the way through the maze, at least marking some of its more menacing walls. It marks a great event in the development of a historical anthropology of the Pacific, while recognizing itself as merely a transition among other events, other transactions, and other contradictions.