

*New Oceania: Modernisms and Modernities in the Pacific* Ed.

Matthew Hayward and Maebh Long

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Archipelagos are fascinating. Clusters of islands, atolls, reefs, and islets connected subaqueously, they invite us to think in terms of land and sea as integrated, as geographies of varying states of matter that are not distinct from one another, but interwoven. They are also inherently risky for navigation. Depending on the tides, a channel safe for vessel passage may be open or closed, calm or blasting with current, safe for passage or mortally dangerous. They are also a means by which to understand what editors, Matthew Hayward and Maebh Long, have undertaken in this volume.

*New Oceania: Modernisms and Modernities in the Pacific* charts the archipelago of literary, political, and artistic responses to Albert Wendt's 1982 clarion call in "Towards a New Oceania." Sounding depths, charting passages, and marking out reefs and shoals, Hayward and Long's contributors pilot us carefully through not just Pacific modernisms and modernities since 1982, but their invisible currents, tides, and tidepools as well. Though the contributors' approaches and subjects vary, they confidently guide us with aplomb and élan, blending close reading with attention to historical, artistic, and literary contexts. The result is enlightening on each score, and the volume acts as a prism that glints anew with each shift in perspective.

The wandering rocks that make this endeavour both exhilarating and perilous are, as the volume's title indicates, modernism(s) and modernity(ies). Long and Hayward's introductory effort to link Oceanian studies to modernist studies captures some of the push-pull the other contributors elaborate. First, they write, "[i]nterested in rupture, retention, and change, and interpolation and indigenisation, modernist studies presents another way of reading the aesthetic and political, local and transnational, traditional and transitional elements of Oceanian texts" (4). And yet, they allow, "however well-intentioned its global aspirations, [modernist studies] remains implicated in the colonial legacies Pacific studies has worked so hard to contest" (4). They invite us to ask whether it is even possible to use a term like 'modernism' to describe local artistic practices without dragging in Euro-centric, colonialist evaluative contexts.

For Susan Stanford Friedman, the answer is yes: cultural production responding to conditions of modernity *is* modernism. Modernity is sweeping change across a wide range of cultural, social, political, economic, and material conditions. It occurs throughout history and across cultures; hence, modernisms likewise occur

throughout history and across cultures. Long appears to concur in both her and Hayward's introduction and in her chapter on little magazines. So does Stanley Orr, whose reading of a teleplay by John Kneubuhl approaches local productions through conventional definitions of modernism.

Others are less sure, insisting instead on a reciprocal or appropriative approach. Paul Sharrad describes "a 'vernacular' modernism owing much of its art to Indigenous Pacific traditions and not to the high Modernist canon" (71) in his treatment of Hone Tuwhare's verse, even as he argues that "the inclusion of 'premodern' elements in writing, and in literary writing in English in particular, can be a modernist device in the context of Māori culture [. . .] the Bible is a modern technology when seen in terms of Māori history" (73). Alice Te Punga Somerville concurs, asking us to change our question from "what does Māori modernism tell us about modernism?" to "what does Māori modernism tell us about Māori?" (166).

Bonnie Etherington shifts the focus to the problem of knowing what counts as modernity, writing that Craig Santos Perez's "conception or map of modernity in [his] poems is not one that is derived from the imperial centre, but is something imagined as inherently Chamorro, while also connected to other Oceanian modernities" (114). Juniper Ellis follows suit, noting that for Sia Figiel "the creative agency of modernity is Indigenous, decolonial, and provocative in every way" (210). The emphasis on locality, specificity, and identity is strong throughout the volume, as these contributors endeavor to use the term 'modernism' without importing its normative connotations while insisting on the local as affected by imperialism and yet not determined by it in the final instance.

Others in the volume are less sure of the value of trying to stretch the terms 'modernism' and 'modernity' to cover Pacific cultural production. Hayward cautions strongly in his piece on James Joyce's influence on Albert Wendt:

to believe in modernist studies as a master discourse that can somehow transcend its discursive premises is at best utopian, and can at worst be seen to repeat the act of imperial overwriting that Pacific writers have worked so hard to resist. The drive towards inclusivity is important. But there is a painful and enduring history of classificatory imposition in the Pacific region, and it is well to remember that outside identifications may be as alienating as they are inviting in a region where people still live with the effects of colonial disenfranchisements, and still fight for the validity and sovereignty of their 'own identity.' (97)

In what is perhaps the highlight of the volume, Julia Boyd's chapter on women writers' resistance to post-war nuclear testing likewise cautions against the drive to label all cultural productions of modernity as modernist. She notes

the tension between Pacific revisionings of the American and European canon, on the one hand, and the flexible definitions offered by global modernist scholars such as Jessica Berman and Susan Stanford Friedman, on the other. At the juncture between Pacific and modernist studies, women's anti-nuclear writing suggests that all 'cultural engagements with modernity' are not necessarily modernisms (although they may be)—they can also be calls for accountability that transcend Eurocentric categorisation in their appeals for readers to take action. (55)

Along the same lines, Sudesh Mishra and John O'Carroll (writing about Mishra) take the most time and space to consider and define modernism and modernity. Like Boyd, Mishra takes direct issue with Friedman's claim that modernities and modernisms may appear throughout history and around the world: "It would be anachronistic, however, to concur with Susan Stanford Friedman's claim that modernity (and modernism) flourished in non-European contexts (Kabir's India and Du Fu's China, for instance) during periods predating the emergence of the object-forming category" (20). As O'Carroll notes, Mishra is thinking in big terms—place and time—to challenge the linear-historical and rational-spatial logics of the Western episteme: logics that are inextricable from modernity and modernism as concepts, and from global imperialism as a material reality.

The argument over modernism and modernity subtends the entire volume, giving purchase and breadth to the more specific readings the contributors advance. And yet, like the submerged links between islands and atolls, it is not as important as the relations among those who live on the land, travel the sea, and voyage beyond the horizons. We need good charts and accurate routes to follow if we are to engage safely and respectfully with the cultures, aesthetics, and politics of the Pacific. The essays gathered here provide such tools and invite further exploration.