

*New Oceania: Modernisms and Modernity in the Pacific*

Edited by Matthew Hayward and Maebh Long. Routledge, New York, 2019.

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Reviewed by Emma Powell

In the final essay (or coda) of Matthew Hayward and Maebh Long's collection of essays *New Oceania: Modernism and Modernities in the Pacific*, scholar Susan Standford Friedman aptly summarises the volume as an exposure of the "prevailing metropolitan and continentalist assumptions about modernity" in the Pacific (245). Such assumptions are concerned with the so-called infancy of Pacific writing in comparison with older print and publishing traditions from the global north. In this volume, modernist, literary and Pacific studies are used to prise open this seeming binary, and to sketch understandings of modernism and modernity from Oceanian writers across the region. Excitingly, the volume offers extension to this assumed dialectic via various critical and disciplinary gazes from its contributors.

The volume contains 14 essays, inclusive of the editor's introduction. Contributions cover a wide range of national and regional contexts, with discussion of various literary forms, modes and oeuvres. In their introduction, the editors highlight key accents across the essays included; a tracing of how Pacific writers respond and adopt style and approach from other global modernisms and; the development of a new Oceanian modernism in correspondence with, and in spite of, those same canons. These essays are acutely aware of the colonial, industrial and neoliberal projects that formed European modernism in the early twentieth century. However, the constitution of modernism and modernity in the region does not take place in distant locations exclusively. What is refreshing about these writings is the way contributors describe correspondence and deviation from those same projects by Pacific writers.

The essays in the first half of the book engage directly with mimetic assumptions about Pacific writing. The notion that Pacific literature and modernity has been constituted by and continues to mimic modernisms emanating from metropolitan, European and North American centres, is thoroughly unpacked in this volume. Julia A Boyd's essay on Pacific women writers - Jilly Makini, Vanessa Griffen and Cita Morei, specifically – and their resistance to (nuclear) modernity is a stand-out for me. Paul Sharrad and Matthew Hayward argue respectively for an intertextual reading of Albert Wendt and Hone Tuwhare's work and the modernist canon, simultaneously suggesting their status as first-wave Oceanian modernists. Along with Epeli Hau'ofa, their names are reiterated throughout the volume and while I do not disagree with their place in an Oceanian modernist canon, Boyd's underscoring of Makini, Griffen and Morei as an addition to this vanguard is welcome. Boyd's reminder that these womens' writings were produced from resistance to encroaching modernising projects from the global north, also catalysed the beginning of first-wave Pacific literature. As Maebh Long explores in her essay on the "little magazine", this burgeoning of literary intelligentsia and resistance is often considered the milestone from which we begin to understand a literary modernism in the region.

Paul Sharrad, Matthew Hayward and Bonnie Ethertington's respective analyses of work from Tuwhare, Wendt and Craig Santos Perez suggest generative reframings of the assumptions between Oceania and the global north by arguing for what Hayward called an "Indigenisation of Influence". While I struggled to be moved by the intertextual presence of James Joyce, Ezra Pound and others of the traditional modernist canon in the works of Oceanian modernists, I was struck by the potential comparative light and shadow cast by these discussions. As

Ethertington has highlighted in Perez's deliberate dialogue with his modernist North American counterparts, there is a distinct genealogising being induced by these Pacific writers. In resisting mimetic assumptions, these authors convincingly show how intertextual resonances with the global north need not be oppressive or unidirectional. This is also explored by David O'Donnell in his discussion of Nina Nawalowalo's work with theatre company *The Conch*, and Stanely Orr's conscientious treatment of John Kneubuhl's life and oeuvre. While the artistry and style of Nawalowalo and Kneubuhl do partly emerge from Eurocentric modernism, and modernist training and professional experience, their Pacific subjectivities and inherited story-telling practices persist across their work. Their requisition of modernist techniques suggests a juncture in their intellectual and artistic genealogies. This is not direct descendance from a traditional modernist canon, as argued by the editors in their introduction, or correspondence per se, but an adoption of kinship in the Oceanian sense.

This is one of the exciting spaces this volume provides: an impetus to shift our gaze from a north-south dialectic, to one that is omnidirectional or even centripetal. In this, Paul Lyons' essay "African Calls, Pasifika Responses" offers a novel perspective. Through discussion of Russel Soaba's (PNG) writing, Lyons suggests an alternative dialectic between Pacific and African literary production beginning in the 1960s. This productively marginalises European and North American modernist influence on Oceanian literature and, as Lyons argues, prompts the writer and critic to consider parallel experiences of modernism and the undeniable influence of other modernist literary traditions that did not stem from colonial and imperial centres. Lyons refers to this recalibration of the critical gaze as "...an Oceanian modernist attempt to reset cultural expression on Oceanian time and archipelagic space" (119) and for me prompts the most stimulating take away from this volume: the idea that an Oceanian modernism does not use Eurocentric modernisms or external modernising projects as the primary reference point for itself, and that the temporal and spatial scales required for an Oceanian modernism come from our own *Pacific* literary and story-telling traditions.

In this, Alice Te Punga Somerville's description of the cyclical return of Te Ao Hou (a new world or, as she also explains, a magazine from 1952-1975) through the poetic work of Henare Dewes, recentres the temporal and spatial scales at work in Oceanian life and writing and leads the reader back to a critical point: time, for Pacific people, is neither linear nor serial and so, how might we understand Pacific writing knowing that the newness of modernism and modernising projects is not a cumulative jump beyond traditionalism for the Pacific writer? Moreover, the thought-provoking questions asked by Te Punga Somerville in her closing remarks encourage contemplation of why a specifically Māori (or Oceanian) modernism might be useful to modernist studies and its discourses, "Rather than asking, 'what does Māori modernism tell us about modernism?' we might ask, 'what does Māori modernism tell us about Māori?'" (166). As an example, and a further stand-out for me, is Juniper Ellis' essay on Sia Figiel's (Samoa) *Freelove*. Ellis argues for an "Oceanian sensorium or universe" in Figiel's work, through which we are able to view a Samoan, if not Oceanian, modernism at work. A novel easily read as decolonial, Ellis makes a convincing argument for Figiel's Samoan ontological and epistemological mode. This allows Figiel's main characters, Sia and Iaoge, to decolonise the classroom and Christian doctrines of sexuality when they fall in love and pursue a sexual relationship (breaking the sacred relationship between spiritual siblings). The characters' commitment to scientific pursuits within and beyond Samoa also illustrates a modernist condition that feels familiar and sovereign to Pacific readers.

This collection makes spirited attempts to understand and identify Oceanian modernism and modernity and to contemplate the influence and/or significance of modernisms from elsewhere. I have highlighted only a few parts of the discussion in this volume that felt particularly pertinent and excitingly new in literary criticism. From Sharrad and Friedman's invocation of archipelagic time, the iteration of Hau'ofa and Wendt's seminal essays and oeuvres, to the indigenising influence and genealogising of modernist canons and other global modernisms – *New Oceania* fittingly ponders Oceanian modernism that is, and has always been, nascent.

But for its richness, it deserves careful reading. In its entirety the volume can feel overwhelming with its diverse contexts and analyses, and for some, its multidisciplinary approach may feel disorientating. When reflecting on my reading of this collection, I found the deliberate bookending of Sudesh Mishra's opening essay and John O'Carroll's penultimate contribution on Mishra's oeuvre, strong points of orientation (a heads up for those coming to modernist studies and Pacific literature fresh). Mishra's erudite reflections signal early the ability of an Oceanian register to move our critique out of the seriality within which these concepts and traditions often sit and O'Carroll's essay punctuates that entry - but also return. O'Carroll's focus on Mishra's argument of the temporal as located, reminds us that modernism always happens at some time and always somewhere (239). Thus, these contributions show an Oceanian modernism unfurling from regional locales and outward, climbing on waves, and on currents, and lapping at dynamic extremities of time and of space. Mishra's inclusion in the Pacific literary canon here also reminds readers and scholars alike that Pacific literature comprises not only influences located distantly, but also kinships that have emerged from modernising projects like diaspora and migration, exposing an Oceanian modernist discourse that, like Pacific people, is always on the move.

Finally, I wonder whether some of the analyses in this volume may have been better served by a more dedicated consideration of what the discipline of Pacific studies can offer. Though archipelagic and island studies are diligently engaged by Friedman in her coda, the discipline of Pacific studies that the editors refer to in their introduction by way of Teresia Teaiwa, Terence Wesley-Smith and Graeme Whimp, has a particular genealogy. Key tenets of comparativity, Indigenous ways of knowing, and interdisciplinarity in this particular genealogy of Pacific studies, provide further room for the points I have reflected on here, and allows critical engagement with Oceanian modernism and modernities to begin, as a matter of course, from Oceanian ontologies and literary tradition. Moreover, comparative practice may have helped to bring reflexivity, subjectivity and power asymmetries further into relief, without the iterative *response* or even correspondence to the monolithic global north. On this, I look forward to seeing forthcoming work from Pacific scholars and writers who I know are currently continuing conversations about Oceanian modernism and producing writing that continues to come from and reflect Oceania's modernities.