

by bringing 'the tools of performance analysis to the ethnography and anthropology of the state — the state's cultural poetics' (p.xxxii). This gives this book an important role in performance studies literature and in methodology more widely.

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#### NOTES

- 1 Pamela Wood, *Dirt: Fifth and Decay in a New World Arcadia*, Auckland, 2005.  
 2 T. Li, 'Indigeneity, Capitalism, and the Management of Dispossessions', *Current Anthropology*, 51 (2010), pp.385–414; E. Rata, 'Encircling the Commons: Neotribal Capitalism in New Zealand since 2000', *Anthropological Theory*, 11, 3 (2011), pp.327–53; P. Sutton, *The Politics of Suffering: Indigenous Australia and the End of the Liberal Consensus*, Melbourne, 2009.

*Te Hao Nui/The Great Catch: Object Stories from Te Manawa*. Edited by Fiona McKergow and Kerry Taylor. Random House New Zealand/Godwit, Auckland, 2011. 296pp. NZ price: \$65.00. ISBN: 978-1-869797-18-8.

THE SHEER COMMITMENT needed for the production of a book such as *Te Hao Nui* will be appreciated by readers. This is a book which assembles a diverse range of objects, with perspectives from over 30 different contributors. The purpose is to commemorate Te Manawa Museum's first 40 years, and it does so through 40 objects selected from about 45,000. The concept of showcasing collection objects in books is a long museum tradition and one with mixed results. It has certainly been explored for quite different purposes, resulting in educational guides, encyclopaedic catalogues and celebratory works. As a broad concept it still enjoys popularity in New Zealand, and Te Papa leads by example with *Icons Ngā Taonga* (2004), *Te Papa: Your Essential Guide* (2010) and the soon to be released *100 Amazing Tales From Aotearoa* (2012). We need to ask, however, whether *Te Hao Nui* is a great catch or just another museum popular publication destined to languish on a coffee table? Local museums now face huge financial challenges and the ominous spectre of restructuring,<sup>1</sup> raising questions about the future role of culture and heritage. The kaupapa of both *Te Hao Nui* and Te Manawa are so deeply intertwined it is difficult not to examine issues about the responsibilities of New Zealand museums currently under wider discussion in the museum profession.

*Te Hao Nui* is organised into short chapters encompassing each of the 40 objects and ordered by the year in which they were donated or loaned to Te Manawa. The final selection results in a combination of time periods, materials, aesthetics, places and people. Confronted with the first object I was admittedly dubious about the choice of a paperweight as the opening act. However, Paul Husbands demonstrates his ability to transform a seemingly ordinary object into the profound. As one of the founding objects in Te Manawa's collection, this paperweight provides a superb anchor to the commemorative goals of *Te Hao Nui* as well as drawing us into a net of connections illustrating a small museum's role in 'big picture' histories. Husbands does this by celebrating the efforts of Palmerston North women during the Second World War in sending care packages to the disenfranchised Free Polish Army, who in return gifted this object, handmade in part from used aircraft or engine parts. The journey of this object from display in the local department store, to being a possession of the city, in custody of the Public Library, until forming part of the original collection of Manawatu Museum, gives a glimpse of Te Manawa's history and collection development.

A remu marereko (fan of huia tail feathers), Mere Ngareta's kahu kiwi (kiwi feather cloak) and Puketōtara Pou, all on loan to Te Manawa, tell stories of different cultural

journeys and understandings of iwi history. They emphasise the role of museums not as owners but as kaitiaki. There are too many objects and themes to tease apart, but some contributions stand out because of the quiriness of the objects themselves or their ordinariness, that when clearly contextualised, provoke imaginings about our past. On one hand objects as diverse as moa footprints, a kerosene-box chair, a Kaypro II computer, freezing workers' singlets, Chinese inoculation certificates, a ferryman's bell, and themes surrounding the 28<sup>th</sup> Māori Battalion, dairy industry, transportation, festivals and lesser known sports, seem representative of a typical New Zealand community and museum. On the other, they firmly situate the museum within its local community both physically and culturally, casting light on regional history.

The book's organisation gives the reader the opportunity to start anywhere and the flexibility to choose objects which capture attention. This may seem to defeat the purpose of the work as a whole, but when considering the role of museums as one of recreation, fun and engagement, it facilitates an experience where the reader can cast the uninteresting aside. Mystery and intrigue is created around objects. For example, Huhana Smith quite effectively uses a conversational question-focused style in her chapter, while Jock Phillips skilfully unravels a large body of evidence to offer provenance for a window display painting in relation to the social meaning of Anzac Day. Overall this is a useful organisational technique to catch an audience by casting a wide net. The organisation and headings are handled cleverly in *Te Hao Nui* and warrant consideration. The contents page and chapter headings subtly pay respect to and acknowledge past owners, makers, users and donors of these objects, without reference to the authors.

People, brought together as current object users, breathe life into these objects. Contributions come from beyond the walls of Te Manawa. They bring diverse perspectives, some of which have resonance with the resurgence of material culture studies which draw on life history, object biography and narrative approaches to move beyond functionalist, stylistic and chronological perspectives of objects. For the most part discussions shift easily between broad contexts and small details, addressing why we have and should retain these treasures. Different perspectives are also provided through different languages, and in *Te Hao Nui* all of the taonga Māori are given a voice in Te Reo Māori after the English version. As a result I felt less academically critical of the facts presented and found myself accepting that insight is provided by *Te Hao Nui* by examining the representation of multiple perspectives. Not only does it preserve a snapshot of interpretations about objects, but it also provides a window for the public into the changing role of Te Manawa's collections and how experts think about and approach objects. In a recent review Roger Openshaw suggested that museums in New Zealand are a long way from showcasing multiple perspectives.<sup>2</sup> It is therefore worth considering that these are the positive perspectives of a history of collecting and the growth of community from experts writing to meet a commemorative purpose, as opposed to critique. Nonetheless, everyday voices can be teased out. For example, Fiona McKergow had the opportunity to examine her chosen object, Helena Harcourt's fencing outfit, with the donor and was therefore able to communicate the rationale behind the donation.

As a tool for making objects accessible to the public, *Te Hao Nui* has the benefit of moving beyond the exhibition and storage walls of Te Manawa. Adoption of a hard publication is an interesting move given the level of accessibility now possible online. Interestingly, though, Te Papa has a television series which is about to be released as a book and the British Museum has taonga Māori in an online catalogue which was recently published in printed form. Unfortunately, for museums faced with the need to obtain permissions and invest in collection upgrades and technology, a book is often simply a manageable output with a project completion date which also provides revenue. However, an assessment of public needs and expectations should not be lost in this

equation. To ensure *Te Hao Nui* is a point of difference among similar museum concepts, perhaps Te Manawa could pick up this concept in a few years and renew it as an online resource. It would be an interesting experiment to understand the role of the museum in preservation and customer experience to see whether an online interpretation survives and is perpetuated longer than a hard copy.

*Te Hao Nui* is a great catch in the context of Te Manawa's fortieth anniversary and as a strategic communication tool for a museum redevelopment. However, it is relevant because it shows how a regional museum can have a broader voice, not just about objects, but about people, museums and places. The role of museums in education, preservation, making objects accessible, as kaitiaki, and on the sharing of perspectives is aptly celebrated and noted by the former Te Manawa Museums Trust Chief Executive. The result is that *Te Hao Nui* is not just another popular publication; it is something of a history of the museum itself. With its diversity of themes, this is an angle that might have been explored fruitfully in a conclusion. If it gains a wide audience, this book will provide a point of engagement for the public and a useful reference for future kaitiaki. In our changing museum world, the message *Te Hao Nui* emphasises is that museums are about people and for people.

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#### NOTES

1 See Museums Aotearoa News and Notices 29 May 2012, 14 June 2012 and 10 July 2012, <http://blog.museumsaotearoa.org.nz/> (accessed 30 July 2012).

2 Roger Openshaw, Review of Conal McCarthy, *Museums and Māori: Heritage Professionals, Indigenous Collections, Current Practice*, *New Zealand Journal of History*, 46, 1(2012), pp. 94-97.

*Early New Zealand Photography: Images and Essays*. Edited by Angela Wanhalla and Erika Wolf. Otago University Press, Dunedin, 2011. 208pp. NZ price: \$50.00. ISBN: 978-1-877578-16-8.

FOR SOMEONE WHO USES PHOTOGRAPHS intensively in my research and who teaches a postgraduate course in visual culture studies, this book is a boon. Slim yet stylish, with lovely images reproduced well on decent paper, it achieves its aim of opening up areas for consideration and stimulating questions. I am sure the editors' and contributors' many challenges will be met by a series of postgraduate students in years to come, and they will give pause to researchers more generally when they order online yet another Turnbull or Puke Ariki image to grace their article or book. The digitisation of public collections of images has made historical photographs much more accessible, but there is still little in the way of useful critical reflections on what we as historical researchers are doing and how we are interpreting this vast treasure trove.

*Early New Zealand Photography* had its genesis in a symposium organised by the editors, who have worked hard to bring this book to the public. (And here it must be noted how energetic Otago historians have been in sponsoring conferences and publishing their findings — this is just one of a number of such ventures which are reinterpreting key areas and modes of historical research, particularly for the nineteenth century.) Essentially a collection of 'readings' of single and occasionally two images, the book is anchored by a strong introduction, an extensive bibliography and a comprehensive directory of New Zealand public photographic collections. As the editors note in their introduction, the essays offer a variety of ways of 'reading the visual'. The authors