Interspersed between the chapters making up this book are narratives about the death of Lena Kura in 1935 and the life histories of six key figures in the movement. These people all acted as channels for Te Karere’s messages and were also committed to the movement and its aim of maintaining a Māori identity in a European world. In the narratives of their lives the continuing strength and vitality of Māori knowledge and ritual is demonstrated, which illustrates that sometimes biography and history may reinforce each other: history is encompassed in biography, while biography in this case is characterized by a battle against dramatic cultural changes.

The narratives included in this book are extremely detailed accounts of the lives of individuals and their perspectives on the significance of the Māramatanga movement over time. The fact that they make up almost a third of the entire book must be understood in light of the fact that the author was more or less requested by the leaders of the movement to write this book some time after she had completed her doctoral dissertation. She spent considerable time with the movement over the years and was given full access to the notebooks containing messages from Te Karere, and records of chants, speeches, songs, and significant events in the history of the movement. This background may also explain the documentary character of the book, which in my view is primarily of interest for New Zealand specialists. The author does situate her account of the movement within contemporary debates about colonial history, postcolonial identity, and the interplay between religion and politics in counter-colonial discourses, but these debates only mark the contours of the ethnohistorical analysis. Ethnographically, it is interesting that the book has been written in the third person, which makes one wonder whether the author has capitalized on her ethnographic experiences. The appeal of the book could perhaps have been enriched by a little more attention to the personal experience of the meaning of the Māramatanga movement in the lives of the people with whom the author became so close. However, these remarks are not intended to detract from the author’s remarkable achievement in producing a valuable book for and about a group of people who have lived mostly in isolation and were therefore largely unknown in the wider world.

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The chapters in this volume are revised versions of papers presented at a workshop in Aarhus, Denmark, in 1999. Ethnographically, Melanesia, especially Papua New Guinea, receives the most attention, but chapters also focus on Indonesia, Fiji, and Australia. The critiques advanced or discussed in the volume are of several kinds: critiques of the term “cargo cult”; discussions of the phenomena
described as cargo cults as themselves critiques of western or capitalist culture; and the various authors’ critiques of each others’ positions. If the latter were aired at the Aarhus conference with the same vehemence with which some are stated in these papers, it must have been a lively event. The interest and value of this volume certainly rest on the variety of and tension among the views of the contributors.

For example, regarding the idea of cargo cults themselves as critique, some contributors accept the thesis that cargo cults as millenarian movements are by definition critical, a view stated most succinctly by Joel Robbins. But Nils Bubant warns strenuously against easy acceptance of interpretations of “cargo cults or other exotic phenomena as critiques of . . . bourgeois consumerism” (110).

Critique of the notion of cargo cult itself receives the most attention. Lamont Lindstrom is highly skeptical of the ethnographic accuracy of reports of the material goods adherents of cargo cults hope to receive, and Douglas Dalton states that anthropologists have “most thoroughly shown” the desire for money and material wealth attributed to cargo cults “to be erroneous, because the individualistic materialistic motives that are so central to Western bourgeois culture are simply not present in Papua New Guinea” (191). Stephen Leavitt agrees fully with the need to appreciate local meanings but concludes: “the fact remains that cargo is the central and most powerful concept” in the social phenomenon in question (174). Discussing cargo cults in what is now Papua New Guinea’s Manus Province, Ton Otto stresses that “notions of cargo played a central role in these original cults” (222), and he cites a memorable dictum from the work of Theodore Schwartz: “I repeat, it’s the cargo” (“The Cargo Cult,” 1976, 177).

Martha Kaplan argues that “cults and movements” exist, but “not necessarily as Pacific or non-Western phenomena, but rather as a category in Western culture and colonial practice” (65). Both Leavitt and Robbins, however, caution that criticism of the cargo cult concept that goes so far as to discredit the topic can lead to neglecting the deep and genuine concerns of Melanesians. Karl-Heinz Kohl sees cargo cults as projections of westerners’ own “hopes, desires, and fears” (90), and Elfriede Hermann approvingly cites Pem Buck’s contention that “cargo cults’ as objects of analysis exclusively result from Europeans imagining ‘cargo’ elements” (54). But Leavitt and Robbins argue strongly against the projection thesis, and Holger Jebens, Jaap Timmer, and Robert Tonkinson, among other contributors, use the cargo cult concept in constructive ways without taking on all its potential baggage. Tonkinson’s comparison of millenarianism in Melanesia with its comparative absence in indigenous Australia is a particularly strong indication that, as Jebens puts it in his introduction, “there might in fact be a correspondence between the term [cargo cult] and the Melanesian ethnographic reality” (8).

Several of the contributors to the volume regard scholarly interest in cargo cults as the fruit of anthropologists’ own cultural obsessions (eg, Lindstrom, 34), or their own percep-
tions of phenomena as “bizarre and exotic” (Kohl, 90) or “strange” and “disconcerting” (Dalton, 206). My own experience in Melanesia, however, suggests that Robbins is quite right that “things that resemble cargo cults . . . have clearly continued to be important to Melanesians themselves” (245). I heard plenty about cargo cults before first going to Melanesia, but my deeper interest grew out of listening to what Melanesians had to say for themselves, with unsolicited persistence and passion.

Of course, criticisms of the cargo cult concept must be kept in view, and those who use it must do so with scientific care. But I find serious problems in some of the chapters in this book most critical of the idea of cargo cults. In particular, some authors display an apparently theoretical disinclination to distinguish between empirical questions and questions of analysis or interpretation. Lindstrom, for example, treats questions of empirical accuracy—for example, the accuracy of reports of cargo goods desired—as no different from questions of the adequacy of interpretations of cargo phenomena. Hermann rejects some descriptions of cargo cults in part because she finds them politically distasteful. “By constructing ‘cargo cultists’ as ‘irrational’ and ‘economically unmotivated’ figures,” she writes, “anthropological discourses also produced knowledge conducive to ruling over and colonizing others so characterized” (52). Granted, groping through our own preconceptions and interests toward sound empirical observations is the fundamental and never-ending challenge of anthropology and all science. Sloppy or simplis-

tic generalizations will never do. But the potential political implications of an observation do not decide its validity.

The contributors to this volume suggest several directions for continuing study. A number would lead us through cargo cults to deeper considerations of the categories of Self and Other. Vincent Crapanzano registers “a plea: to consider the role of hope in cargoism” (228). Lindstrom notes with approval Otto’s call for a “comparative genealogy of desire” (33). Robbins suggests that “the anthropology of cargo cults and other forms of millenarianism might well be reconfigured as a part of a comparative anthropology of critical practice” (243). Leavitt calls for increased attention to the “personal narratives of individual actors” and appreciation of the “deeply religious convictions” to be found there (185, 186). In his able and evenhanded introduction, Jebens strikes a similar note. He writes: “Instead of despairing and banning ‘cargo’ from our vocabulary . . . we should, rather, attempt to look and listen more closely” (10). In the volume’s final selection, Robbins places the study of cargo cults within a larger critical and humanistic agenda: “to explore which kinds of human arrangements seem to work and which kinds do not, which kinds of change bring much misery and which redeem at least a tiny part of the millenarian promise of a better life” (258). This requires, of course, remembering that millenarianism can have a very dark side and recognizing that “cargo cultists have fashioned their views of the good life on the basis of very limited information
about human possibilities” (Robbins, 258).

An endorsement on the book’s back cover says: “Anyone involved in the Pacific will be interested in this volume.” I would not recommend it, however, to anyone unfamiliar with the cargo cult literature. It is written by scholars, for other scholars. While a number of contributors write clear, straightforward, even eloquent prose, there is also the usual quota of awkward academic styles and off-putting scholarly conceits. A fine example of the latter is Hermann’s twenty-four-line discourse on a practice borrowed from Jacques Derrida called writing “under erasure” (sous rature) (243). In writing “under erasure,” a term that is deemed “inaccurate” or “inadequate,” but which is hard to avoid, is written, and then crossed out. In her figure 3.1, Hermann provides a picture of what this looks like applied to cargo cult. But, since the printed page is not congenial to actually doing this consistently, Hermann asks the reader to imagine the term cargo cult as “under erasure” whenever encountered. As a scholar, I found this unnecessary. As a reader, I found it painful and a poor example for anthropologists who care about conversing with a wider world.

Nevertheless, scholars thinking about cargo cults should be familiar with this volume, and they will read it with interest, as I did. And, whatever their leanings, they all will find opportunities to scribble both approbation and expletives in the margins.

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This edited volume provides a useful comparative discussion of landscapes, combining ethnographic and historical narratives with aesthetic and biographical accounts. Theoretically, contributors favor process over textual analysis, viewing landscapes as sites of contested meanings and negotiations. The volume’s strength is in its combinations of pertinent historical analysis with nuanced ethnography. A fairly broad array of regions is represented, including Australia (Lane, Strang); Ireland (McLean, Smith); Jamaica (Carrier); Madagascar (Harper); Papua New Guinea (O’Hanlon and Frankland, Stewart and Strathern); Scotland (Gray, Strathern and Stewart); and the Solomon Islands (Guo). Geography also provides two unexamined themes. First, with the possible exception of Australia, the volume is an excellent foray into what one might call Island studies. Second, and more importantly, they are all (with the exception of Madagascar) former British colonies. While this history figures prominently in only a few of the articles (Gray, McLean, O’Hanlon and Frankland, and Smith), it is a theme that could productively be read into the volume as a whole, making it quite suitable