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**ENCHANTING BOOKS, REDEEMING FETISHISM:
THEORY AND PRACTICE IN RELATION TO THE LIFE OF
BOOKS**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Social Anthropology
at Massey University**

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2003

ABSTRACT

ENCHANTING BOOKS, REDEEMING FETISHISM

This thesis is a study of books which seeks to understand them and their place in our life world not in terms of their role as a medium of communication but as enchanted and sacred objects which are active agents in that life world. I show how they work as totemic operators or caste marks (by the way they act to distinguish groups of people), enshrined objects (by the ways in which they are literally handled) and ritual instruments (by the way they act as the focus of the new ritual practices of book reading groups). The thesis seeks, simultaneously, to advance a theory of culture which allows us to take a more generous approach to animism and fetishism and it also advances new methodologies for doing ethnographic research in our own life world. To achieve this it draws on and extends the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, the work of the anthropologist Tim Ingold and the philosopher Susan Oyama. The thesis argues that anthropology, in relation to the “Western” (in New Zealand “Pakeha”) life world, should practice forms of re-enchanting synthesis rather than the reductive, disenchanting forms of analysis characteristic of some anthropological work. The study is based on data collected in a large community survey, on interviews with members of book reading groups, and on ethnographic materials “given” by the world we live in. The location of the field research is a provincial city in New Zealand but materials from further afield in the “Western” world are drawn on as well.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a large number of debts, both personal and intellectual, to many people who have assisted me in many different ways over the years. Let me begin with those individuals who gave their time and shared their experiences about books, both in survey and interview situations. Their observations have become the basis for such understanding of books and their lives that I have. Because these individuals have to remain anonymous does not mean that I have forgotten how essential they have been to the outcome of this project. I owe a debt, too, to the members of my book group for tolerating the presence of an anthropologist in their midst. I hope the account I give of what occurs at meetings such as ours gives them some sense of how important that experience has been for me, even if I have not been a particularly “good” member of the group!

Anthony Lewis, the City Librarian of Palmerston North (and also an anthropologist), very generously allowed my research interests to piggy back on his survey which was conducted to meet his more pressing practical need to find out about the place of books in the life of the community his institution serves. His staff were also brilliantly helpful. I also thank the parents of St. James’s School who acted as interviewers with such care and professionalism and the coders who carried out an onerous task with cheerfulness and generosity. I would also like to thank Massey University for funding some parts of the research through its Research Fund.

A number of people have read and commented on various bits and pieces of this thesis as it has merged over time - Susan Abasa, Noeline Arnott, David Butts, Claudia Gross, Mary Murray, Edie Turner, Sita Venkateswar: I am deeply indebted to their interest, engagement and encouragement. They have helped me more than they might imagine.

I owe debts to my supervisors. Professor Richard Harker has been a friend, colleague, mentor over many years and, in the end, also a superb, meticulous and vigilant editor. He has helped me in numerous ways and it would be invidious to

single out any particular form his help has taken, though our common engagement with the work of Pierre Bourdieu has been at the heart of what we have shared and I have benefited hugely from both his knowledge and enthusiasm for this subject. Professor Jeff Sissons has contributed as both supervisor and colleague. We are, both, deeply interested in rethinking the concept of culture and his observations and comments over the years on this issue have been food for thought.

For helping to make the thesis production process less painful I am truly grateful to the generous friendship, intellectual and personal, of Susan Abasa, Robyn Andrews, Noeline Arnott, David Butts and Liz Mackay. I could not have done without their constant encouragement and support. Mandy Rudge gave me materials at a crucial moment of the research. She will, I hope, appreciate the use I have made of it.

Members of my school are animists too: they christened my thesis “Fatima”. I have wondered if they did not instinctively know how recognising the life in this “thing” would be such an encouragement to me to nurture its growth towards independence and to allow it to make its own way in the world.

The final stages of the thesis process can be very difficult. I would like to thank all those who have made it easier. Susan Abasa for generously exploring the possibilities of making the spirit of the work incarnate in its physical form. Her knowledge of, and sensitivity towards, the “material” world have been an inspiration. I am truly grateful to those who helped with the final editing of the thesis: Pam Mayo, David Butts, and Fay Butts.

I would like to thank my *whanau*. My wife, Di, accompanied and lived with me at all my field sites. Without her company the work would have been intolerable. She carefully proofed the thesis, assisted in the onerous tasks that mark the final stages of its production, and has “been there” for me in many different ways. My children have had to put up with a lot whilst I have laboured over this work. My in-laws have also been a support in their own quiet way.

Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my mother. Her presence marks the beginning and the end of the argument.

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