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# Haunted Pacific

Anthropologists Investigate Spectral  
Apparitions across Oceania

*Edited by Roger Ivar Lohmann*



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*About the Cover*

“What a Tree Knows,” by Katie Glaskin  
107 × 92 cm, acrylic and gesso on canvas

*This painting of Wilson’s Inlet, Denmark, Western Australia, imagines a young thylacine standing on the rock, maybe looking for fish. It evokes a time long ago when this marsupial was extant on the Australian mainland, or perhaps envisages that it remains a secret, unknown presence. It is part of a series of paintings focusing on the thylacine to explore themes of loss, endangerment, and extinction. One effect of extinctions is a kind of haunting through absent presence in which traces of memory and imagination arise in place. —Katie Glaskin*

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## Series Editors' Preface

Hauntings in Place: Compressions of Time,  
Space, and Memory

*Andrew Strathern and Pamela J. Stewart\**

Stories of haunting are found world-wide. Sooner or later, field-working anthropologists encounter these stories, recounted by their friends and interlocutors. At times, perhaps quite often, they themselves have experiences of seeming to encounter spirit presences in landscapes that have become well-known to them, saturated with an awareness of such encounters and lived in with the emplacement of memories. Classic in such experiences is their particularity, their connection with dreams and dreaming, and the emotional character of the encounter itself. Quite frequently the spirit encounter is with the dead, either remembered dead kinsfolk or unrelated persons whose spirits are thought to inhabit the landscape. The dead form a category easy to call up or imagine, or experience, because they are remembered integrally from the time that they were alive. The present collection of stories draws on these rich traditions in Pacific societies, always situating them in time and place and denying the finality of the events of physical death.

Such a denial is never the mere assertion that spirits exist. Ghost stories are about unfinished business. The ghost wants, people say, to come back and influence the living, perhaps by demanding a sacrifice to expiate a killing. Kinsfolk are involved in providing such sacrificial offerings because they are co-implicated in the “trouble case” leading up to the haunting.

A ghost or spirit requires a place in which to do its haunting; a place to which the spirit has an existential tie. It may be a place where the person died or suffered misfortune. Haunting implies that negative emotions are involved. The spirit remembers its former life and its place of death, or its former home area provides the opening between the spirit world and the world of the living through which it can travel in order to make its presence known to its kin. If its needs can be met, the ghost may be enabled to pass over definitively into the world of the dead. A hungry ghost in Chinese folk narratives is one that has not been given a proper funeral and so has no place to be in (see, for example, Szonyi, 187: 2007). Offerings of commemorative food for the dead will include food set out for such a ghost or will be made on sacrificial altars to named and honored dead kin and distributed among the living quickly before hungry ghosts can arrive, uninvited. People's accounts of these kinds of things convey vividly the experience of the immanent reality of ghostly presences with their emotional residues in the memory of the living.

The narratives in this absorbing collection engage deeply with experiences of this kind. The field worker is always co-present with the phenomena, either observing what people say and do, or perhaps involved in the experiences themselves, or attempting to find a sort of science-based explanation of them. The anthropologist is here at the intersection of different cultural worlds. What for the people studied belongs to an expected and understandable universe of experience may be regarded as irrational or impossible to an anthropologist reared in a world of different ideas and presuppositions.

Something particularly interesting here is that anthropologists may experience things that are completely real for them while running counter to their own settled ideas about the world. The secular-minded anthropologist is here at a disadvantage compared to the people for whom the impingement of spirits on the living is expectable and results from the "unfinished business" schema. An experience felt by one of us (AJS) in Hagen, Papua New Guinea, illustrates the contingencies involved. He was sleeping in a small side room of a field-house with walls made out of woven mats of grass. It was just before dawn when he was suddenly woken up by a distinct knock on the wall a few inches away from his bed. A youthful voice that was familiar to him addressed him with the words "Kang Andru, na ond" ("Young Andrew, I am coming"). This was a surprise because AJS had

recently seen him and others of his clan far away in the capital city of Port Moresby where he was working. AJS then went out just as it was getting light. He looked up to the nearby road, and he saw a long-wheelbase Land Rover vehicle belonging to the local Lutheran Mission hospital was drawn up there and the body of the young clansman had just been carried down the slope past AJS's field house. AJS had no idea that his friend was ill prior to the arrival of the body. It seemed that the dead man's spirit had announced his arrival just as the body was unloaded from the hospital vehicle, and it had spoken with the voice that AJS recognized. It is hard to give any further explanation of this happening. Friends in the field area found the anecdote unsurprising. A spirit is thought to stay near to its body until its burial and mourning rituals are completed. The spirit, friends said, would think it impolite to be passing right before the field house and so had informed AJS it was coming through.

Anecdotes of this kind are reasonably common and are opaque to explanation in secular terms, while making perfect anthropological sense to people of the relevant culture or groups with a comparable cosmological orientation. Indeed, such narratives are easier to grasp in relation to persons who had been known and had died unexpectedly than in relation to miraculous appearances of sacred figures in Christian narratives—which religious persons may be prepared to accept.

The paper in the present volume that productively sparked comment among the contributors is by Christiane Falck, and we offer the story above as a contribution to debate. Indeed, Falck describes how among the Iatmul people where she conducted fieldwork, villagers have combined indigenous ideas with introduced ones belonging to the control of charismatic Catholicism (see also Telban 2009). They say spirits of the dead get into people's bodies in Christian prayer meetings and carry out healings or pass on messages from dead relatives to living kin. They also say dead spirits get into visitors, including anthropologists such as Falck herself, and that the dead go to places of the white people. Prayers to the dead may also bring wealth to the living, so when the Nyaura group thought Falck was their dead relative, they also thought she could bring wealth to them (similar ideas circulated in the Red Box Money Cult in Mount Hagen in 1968–72). The people also thought that Falck's presence among them was the result of the activities of a charismatic prayer group, who had requested she should come to their village. The whole scenario became problematic when ru-

mors circulated that a container of body lotion Falck had given a friend was interpreted as powerful “holy oil” enabling people to see the dead. Cognitive identifications turned into dangerous political processes.

The “haunting” involved here was the effect of interpretive rumors in the context of millenarian ideas. In this case the haunting had some negative results, but the basic cognitive processes were similar to those documented in other chapters of the book: features of landscapes identified with people, connections of the living and the dead, the ambivalent effects of magical power shown in sorcery fears, ideas of sin and retributive punishment, a vortex of conjoined indigenous and adopted Christian ideas in contexts of social relations.

“Haunted” is a good way to conceptualize these circumstances. First, the circumstances are ambiguous, both in their causes and in their effects. Ambiguity entails a continued unfinished engagement with phenomena, which persists and is not easily disposed of. Second, haunting implies absence of something, which is also, however, its presence, an otherworldly voice or sense of things which will not let go of the past. Landscapes are haunted because they are the sites of memories, fleeting but insistent, caught in the materialities of land and water and the movements of people over time and space.

This deeply researched and eloquently experienced set of studies by long-term experienced fieldworkers will itself become an important record for our profession and will introduce readers to the complex worlds created by anthropologists in their ethnographic work.

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\* Pamela J. Stewart (Strathern) and Andrew J. Strathern are a wife-and-husband research team who are based in the Department of Anthropology, University of Pittsburgh and co-direct the Cromie Burn Research Unit. They are frequently invited international lecturers and have worked with a number of museums to assist them with their collections. Stewart and Strathern have published over 50 books and over 200 articles, book chapters, and essays on their research in the Pacific, mainly Papua New Guinea (Hagen, Duna, and Wiru areas primarily) and the South-West Pacific region (e.g., Samoa, Cook Islands, and Fiji); Asia (mainly Taiwan, and also including Mainland China and Japan); Europe (primarily Scotland, Ireland, Germany, and the European Union countries in general); and New Zealand and Australia. Their most recent co-authored books include *Witchcraft, Sorcery, Rumors, and Gossip* (Cambridge University Press, 2004); *Kinship in Action: Self and Group* (Prentice Hall, 2011); *Peace-Making and the Imagination: Papua New Guinea Perspectives* (University of Queensland Press with Penguin Australia, 2011); *Ritual: Key Concepts in Religion* (Bloomsbury Academic Publications, 2014); *Working in the Field: Anthropological Experiences Across the World* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); *Breaking the Frames: Anthropological Conundrums* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); *Sacred Revenge in Oceania* (Cambridge University Press, 2019). Their recent co-edited books include *Research Companion to Anthropology* (Routledge Publishing, 2016, originally published in 2015); *Exchange and Sacrifice* (Carolina Academic Press, 2008) and *Religious and Ritual Change: Cosmologies and Histories* (Carolina Academic Press, 2009), including the Updated and Revised Chinese version (Taipei, Taiwan: Linking Publishing, 2010). Stewart and Strathern's current research includes the topics of Cosmological Landscapes; Ritual Studies; Political Peace-making; Comparative Anthropological Studies of Disasters and Climatic Change; Language, Culture and Cognitive Science; and Scottish and Irish Studies. For many years they served as Associate Editor and General Editor (respectively) for the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania book series and they are Co-Series Editors for the Anthropology and Cultural History in Asia and the Indo-Pacific book series. They also serve as Co-Editors for four book series: Ritual Studies, Medical Anthropology, European Anthropology, and Disaster Anthropology, and they are the long-standing Co-Editors of the *Journal of Ritual Studies* (on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/ritualstudies](http://www.facebook.com/ritualstudies)). Their webpages, listing publications and other scholarly activities, are: <http://www.pitt.edu/~strather/> and <http://www.StewartStrathern.pitt.edu/>.

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